> Free IDL ?

I'm kind of in the same situation. But not really for money. I know this is
the wrong newsgroup to say it (you guys have been nice enough to help me
many times), but I've never liked IDL very much. I've been using it on and
off for... 13 years... and I still can't make sense of it.
I mean I can program in two dozen languages, but when I need to do something
in IDL I never know where to start, probably because there are so many ways
to do one thing. I end up frustrated when I compare my code with a colleague
and his is 10+ times faster. At least in C there's no such problem: you code
the damn loop and it will be compiled in tightly optimized code. In IDL if
you don't find the proper one line construct to do the thing it will be
hellishly slow. And more often than not I can't find it. Blame me.
Anyway, the other thing I don't like in IDL are graphics. Try to do a
surface plots in less than... 40 lines. In most graphic packages it takes
one line !
So I end up coding my math stuff in C because I know exactly how to optimize
it. And I keep bitching about the graphic complications in IDL.

Here's what I would like:
a graphic library that can be used two ways: directly from a command line
system (so you can test); or as a C library where you call the functions
fast.

I've used many in the past that fit one or the other (like the dead GraphiC
or Mathematica which you can call from C), and right now I was looking into
'R' and gnuplot but don't know anything about those.

Thanks for your time and sorry I'm not contributing anything positive.
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  "The generation of random numbers is too important to be left to
nce."   - Robert R. Coveyou, Oak Ridge National Laboratory