

DOWN TO THE WIRE · NICHOLAS PETRELEY

This Linux stuff works pretty well — but who's that cartoon mascot?

ALRIGHT. We've been looking at Linux, a 32-bit Unix clone for the PC, and it's been rather confusing who owns what portion of the product. I think I finally have it all sorted out. Slackware Professional Linux 2.1 is a Morse Telecommunications Inc. product based on Linux 1.1, which is otherwise available for free at various Internet sites. Morse Telecommunications is one of several organizations selling a value-added version of Linux — the value in this case being the software on compact disc, an installation program, and technical support (among other things).

Now that I'm reasonably sure I've got these details straight, I only have one more question. Who the heck is the cartoon face imprinted on the Slackware CD-ROM supposed to be? He looks like a cross between Henry Mitchell (Dennis the Menace's father) and Mark Trail. Someone said it's a religious symbol for the Church of Bob, but as the Church of Bob is outside the realm of my ecclesiastical knowledge, and no one was able to quote me a doctrinal statement for the church, I have no way of knowing if my shank is being yanked on this one.

What I find so fascinating about Linux is that it's a 32-bit, multuser, multitasking Unix clone that was started as a hobby by a fellow named Linus Torvalds — there's no AT&T or other proprietary code in Linux. It went from

being not much more than an experimental kernel in October 1991 to being a useful operating system in December 1993. That's an astounding accomplishment when you compare it to commercial efforts such as OS/2, which took IBM what? Three or four years to make useful? And how about the ever-sipping Windows 3.1 on steroids, Windows 95? My advice to IBM and Microsoft is to give this Linux guy a jingle and see if he has some productivity tips.



Born free

We haven't been able to start up X Windows on Linux yet because we haven't configured the graphics driver. The obvious method, the setup program, doesn't have an option for configuring the graphics card. In fact, the closest thing we can find to instructions on how to set up our video card is the advice that we should read about 3 million manual pages on the topic.

Not that there's any chance a simple configuration program would be able to recognize and use our video board. Consider the probabilities: The computer we're using is an HP Vectra 486/66N with the display adapter built on the motherboard. That's bad. It's based on the 33 chip. That's good. We can't figure it out by looking at the motherboard, what RAMDAC chip is being used. That's bad. We can't find any documentation for the built-in display.

That's bad.

All right, let's tally it up. Three bads, one good — three to one against. We tally up the numbers again on a Pentium machine and get slightly better odds, but it still looks grim.

There is a Superprobe utility that will try to recognize the card and give us information on it. We run it. It does understand the S3 video chip, but it looks like it doesn't have support for the RAMDAC we have on the motherboard. We'll sacrifice any high-resolution advantages, then, and treat this as straight VGA.

We call technical support. They point out that there is an undocumented utility for automating the configuration. The utility is called XF86-Config-XFree86-3.1. No, we're not kidding. You type XF86-Config-XFree86-3.1 at the command prompt to run the configuration utility. Ah, the unold benefits of support for long file names.

What's wrong with this picture?

This utility is supposed to be smarter than we are and understand the hardware better than we do. It doesn't have much competition, but it fails to live up to the expectation. It needs us to enter the specifications for our Gateway 2000 Crystal Scan monitor, for example.

We run a probe utility to get the specifications. The probe gets everything right but the vertical refresh, which it reports as null. We get the number from Gateway technical support and enter it by hand.

All we have to do now is tell it what kind of mouse we have. We specify the Microsoft mouse with a bus connection.

We're ready to try it. We run the startx command. It seems to exercise the monitor a bit,

but it complains that it can't recognize the mouse and then exits. We run the setup program again to be sure we've configured the mouse correctly. We've got it set up for a Microsoft bus mouse. Maybe we should swap mice and put a serial mouse on the system. We pull a mouse from another machine and

plug it into COM1. We run the setup program and reconfigure Linux to use a Microsoft serial mouse.

We modify the XF86Config file to recognize the serial mouse by changing the parameter /dev/mouse to /dev/tty00. We choose /dev/tty00 because that is an example given in one of the sample configuration files. We

run startx. It still can't see the mouse. We look carefully at the example for the serial mouse configuration included in the XF86Config file again, and notice that the device specification doesn't quite match what the setup configuration says the mouse is configured for. The configuration file gives the example /dev/tty00 but the setup program said /dev/tty50 when we configured the mouse. We figure the setup program is more likely to be right, so we edit the configuration file and change /dev/tty00 to /dev/tty50.

We run startx once more. Bingo — X Windows works. The mouse works. We've worked a little too hard to get there, but it's been worth it.

Susan Ryan and Steve Irvin contributed to this column. My dog wasn't available for comment. Send E-mail via the Internet at nicholas_petreley@infoworld.com, MCI Mail 527-1353, or CompuServe 71333.4261.

Windows de-installation software

CleanSweep, Remove-It clean out those hard-to-reach corners

It takes a smart utility to remove complex Windows applications, and these fit the bill

By Joe Peschel

URE, IT'S EASY enough to zap antiquated Windows programs by clicking your mouse a few times in File Manager, but behind the curtain lurks a mess that needs purging. Vagrant JNI files and entries, myriad icons and DLLs, and antediluvian fonts and drivers remain, cluttering your hard drive and choking Windows' performance. Windows users have always relied upon third-party software, primarily the deservedly popular MicroHelp Uninstaller, to clean up. But Quarterdeck Office Systems Inc. and Versitoff Systems Inc. have released new programs, CleanSweep and Remove-It, respectively, that may challenge MicroHelp's dominance in this niche.

CleanSweep and Remove-It, like Uninstaller, go beyond just removing Windows programs, their asso-

ciated minutiae, and DOS programs. Although both programs do things differently and offer a few new wrinkles, each can create and restore compressed backups and generate reports in all their modules. Each can remove duplicate files as well as Windows components

Opinion: ☺

CleanSweep

Version 1.0
Quarterdeck Office Systems Inc., Santa Monica, Calif.
(800) 354-3322 in U.S., (800) 268-5181 in Canada, (310) 392-9851; fax: (310) 314-3219.

Price: \$59.95.

Pros: Easy-to-use product includes preview feature; works over a network.

Cons: Deleting some files takes an extra step.

such as fonts, display drivers, and system drivers. Administrators can run CleanSweep over a network.

I found the installation of both utilities simple, but Remove-It's setup offers two modes — Express and Custom — one of which can take longer to install because each routine analyzes the files on the hard drive. CleanSweep, on the other hand, flies through installation and depends on a database, optionally enhanced by Super Links (which updates DLL use), for precise analyses. Remove-It goes further: Upon completing installation you'll find Watch-It (a 1KB DOS TSR and Windows start-up program that monitors how often programs are used) and Log-It (Windows only), which keeps track of the installation of new programs.

Each utility did a decent job of purging trash, with options that let

me scan for related files throughout the drives and add files or INI sections that I prefer CleanSweep's approach. You can make a trial run, a UnInstaller, of the Windows groups or programs you pick for deletion — or any of CleanSweep's other modules.

Remove-It, in all modules, offers only a preliminary report of its intentions. And because Remove-It has two more modes for de-installing programs — Express Remove and Custom Remove — I found it a necessary pain to double back to the Custom remove to pick an option. With CleanSweep, I just clicked a box in the primary display field. But the option I wanted was to delete .QAG and .QAB files in the Windows directory. Remove-It provides this option in the custom remove module; CleanSweep doesn't. You must move to another module,

Opinion: ☹

Remove-It

Version 1.0
Versitoff Systems Inc., San Francisco
(800) 466-5875, (415) 596-5999; fax: (800) 466-4719

Price: \$69.95.

Pros: Monitors, logs new programs as they are added; can create rescue disk.

Cons: Reporting is less detailed than in CleanSweep.

where only the .QAB (backup) files are detected and can be deleted.

Both applications allow you to pattern-match and to back up, a godsend if you delete the wrong file; and both programs, of course, can remove themselves.

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