Kubuntu Clash: Should I stay or should I go?

By *Bezdomny*
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Over the past month or so I have been dipping my big toe into the Linux pool, just testing the waters. The reason for a move to Linux isn't one based on the love of open source, free choice or free software, the reason is far more capital, the devil drives when the bills need paying, work. Anyway, over the past weeks of swimming with Linux I've had less sleep than I have in a long long while, I've been more frustrated, argumentative, pounding the keyboard and flicking the finger(s) at the screen. Is this the norm?

Having trawled the forums and google'd a lot, I came across Ubuntu, no groans please, quiet at the back, and I found it quite easy to install and use. There was but one minor problem, the buttons on dialogues wouldn't render properly and left screen poo that cleared when mouse over. On reading through a few forums and a post on ubuntuforums instantly answered, (a little knowledge is a dangerous thing), I managed to break it with ATI fglrx drivers. Goodbye Ubuntu?

Further reading led me to slackware. On Friday night after work, gym, swimming, steam and sauna, feeling energised and refreshed from a tough week and traffic jams, I starting installing the said beastie. A couple of times I had to refer back to net for info on what I was being prompted for, but in any case the install went through fine. The final reboot and up came the prompt, startx brought up the nice blue screen, tons of stuff installed. One problem, no network. The pc is a laptop with a wireless card, not a bad spec. P4 2.8ghz, 1gb ram, 60gb HD, DVD rewriter. Previous experience had taught me about ndiswrapper, so I looked on the CD for it. Nope, not there. I looked on other CDs (I've lost my USB memory key), no luck. I changed the screen res and broke it. Fiddling with xorg.conf brought it back. Still no wireless. I managed to get the ndiswrapper installed by downloading again (after much fiddling to get the modem working) and burning to CD. It was late now. Midnight had just gone. Down at the prompt I issued the appropriate commands, lspci - yep, it "knows" about the wireless card, it even says it's a Marvel chipset 802.11g wireless. If it "knows" about it there then why won't it use the bloody thing? I copied the drivers from the netgear CD to the HD, entered the directory, ndiswrapper -i WG511v2.INF, a happy report came back. Ok, ndiswrapper -m, and another happy report. Finally, modprobe ndiswrapper. The lights came on but nobody was home. The laptop locked. I came, I saw, I rebooted.

3 hours of messing around with numerous permutations of enable/disable, network settings, wireless config and still nothing. So it was 3am. Back to the study, XP on the dell dimension and a stupid thought, I wonder if Kubuntu would be any different? By this time I would be happy to put up with the screen poo under the ATI drivers of Ubuntu. I downloaded it and I once again bulldozed the laptop. The installation finished at 5.30am, it was light outside and I was starting to see double, either because I was tired or I had resorted to Jack Daniels to numb my install despair. I went to bed to a comatose wife and dreams of KDE blue and easier days of XP (I was in despair and that?s not a good place from which to send postcards, wish you were here? Wish I wasn?t!).

Later that day, after 4 hours of shuteye, back to it. Another battled ensued, me vs. KDE and the Wireless drivers (not a rap band). The card was recognised, and so was the built in wired one (can't use wired, my router is wireless only). Kubuntu refused to let me disable the built in one and chose that one as the preferred connection, totally ignoring the wireless config. It was a case of disable that, start that. So many times entering the password into the "administrator

password" box, so many times it ignored my card. During this battle of wills I had failed to notice that Kubuntu had no screen poo and had set my ATI graphics to hardware rendering. Bonus! After reading many forums and going cross-eyed over reading so much with lack of sleep plus the remnants of Jack Daniels, I managed to tweak the config files, lo and behold, wireless working. Off to the French restaurant to celebrate! (actually, spend some time with my wife; she was giving me the evil eyes for spending all this time doing what she basically sees as nothing!)

The cannard was tasty, as were the escargot starters and the chocolat fondant dessert, Provence's finest chateauneuf du pape was simply sublime. The credit points with wife were accumulated with great speed! Back home I finished installing some basics from the very easy to use Adept (similar in use to synaptic), I edited the sources.list file, adding in automatix, apt-get install automatix and it's warp factor nine Mr Sulu, fire all phasers Chekov. Firefox, streaming media, KDE update, Amsn, the full monty. My wife started to watch Aeon Flux on satellite, Charlize Theron in leather, install halted, bad movie. Eta plocha, ochen (very bad), visually stunning (movie too) but naff, naff, naff. It had to be, Johnny Lee Miller was in it and he hasn?t done anything notable since Trainspotting! (Byron was interesting though).

On Sunday I installed everything else I needed, Netbeans, eclipse, Java 1.5, Java SDK, MYSQL administrator, Evolution (I prefer to use this), I even managed to get it to sync with my HTC phone (pocketpc 2003)! Amazing! I did have to borrow some of the gnome libraries to make it work properly. Speaking of gnome, I was a fan, I liked the interface from trying Suse and Ubuntu, and I remembered KDE being very "clunky" from red hat (5.?). This surprised me, it was polished, well rounded and very good to use. Very tweakable. I left it on Sunday night (we had a birthday gathering of the Russian kind to attend, about 50 miles from home, I had to drive this time having been in bad books for a very embarrassing alcohol experience the other week, of which I remember zilch, nada, nothing, neechevo!).

Big surprise yesterday, I received a message from my wife, "I love this Kubuntu". She hated Ubuntu interface, always complained she preferred XP (no hate mail please, her words not mine). She likes the loveliness tweaking factor, colours, themes, desklets. I even managed to get it to stream MP3s from my server rather than download and cache before playing, all it took was a bit of fiddling inside KMPlayer and Xine.

There's still a long way to go in terms of learning how all these things work, not just Kubuntu but Linux in general. For now I'm just happy to have an OS that works, looks good, has the "pretty" approval from she that must be obeyed and is very quick. It flies on the laptop. The only down side is that I have no excuse not to do the work now! Also noted that the fans are not running at dyson vacuum cleaner strength. Ubuntu seemed to have them working overtime. All in all, looks like Kubuntu is on there to stay. (at least until I break it again!). Nice to be blue.

Added bit: A few days have passed since the above, and this happened:

Kubuntu: Updates Available
Me: Give me updates
Kubuntu: Installing
Me: Thank you very much
Kubuntu: All done
Me: I?ll reboot
Kubuntu: Rebooting but I?ll give you the update in exchange for your wireless Connection!
Me: Bloody small print!

Yep, the kernel update ran, as did a load of other security updates. After a reboot the wireless disappeared. Scream? Did I scream? I never knew I had such a fluent capability for profanities (well I tell a lie, I am a driver on UK roads!). I had to swap the wireless card out, the natively supported WG511V2T for the marvel based WG511v2 which meant back to ndiswrapper. The battle of discovery ensued with all guns blazing. It ended when I uninstalled everything to do with wireless and installed them again. Everything now runs fine when loaded but on boot Kubuntu hangs around the hardware init for an age (30 seconds). When it?s finally booted everything is fine and running at difference engine full steam, clackety clack.

Will Kubuntu stay? Well for now it has to, I need to get some work cleared using netbeans/eclipse and mono but after that, well we?ll see. Mepis is looking worth a prodding but I don?t know how many credits I have left with my better half and the beach in Egypt beckons next week.

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