HOTPICKS

Hotpicks ONEDISC

Mike Saunders A coder since Amiga times, Mike's a Linux and BSD guru.



This is the place where we get to profile some of the hottest software around.

Each month we trawl through the hundreds of open source projects that are released or updated, and select the newest, most inventive and best for your perusal. Most of the HotPicks are available for you to try out on our coverdiscs, but we've provided web links if you want to make sure you have the very latest version.

If you have any ideas for open source software that we should cover, email us at linuxformat@futurenet.co.uk.

HOTPICKS AT A GLANCE

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LOOK OUT FOR THE HOTPICKS AWARD

Everything covered in our HotPicks section is unmissable, but each month we single out one project for



PHP PROGRAMMER'SEDITOR



VERSION 0.7 WEB http://tulip.solis.coop.br/us/index.php

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A curious blend of GTK widgets and KDE Krystal icons make up Tulip's UI.

We've seen a huge number of

open-source text editors spring up over the years, many of which *LXF* has covered, but plenty have disappeared as the authors moved on to other projects. It's a problem that afflicts all software development – the initial 80% of coding is satisfying and enjoyable, but the last 20% – the polishing and bugfixing, feels infinitely more laborious. So we're chuffed to see projects like *Tulip*, a tool for coding PHP scripts, grow up, becoming highly usable apps with care paid to the small (but still important) touches.

Tulip is written in PHP, using GTK bindings for the interface. You'll also need libglade, libpq and GtkScintilla for the text editing component: kudos to the developers for providing all these in the most popular binary formats (Slack .tgz, Debian .debs and RPMs). Once extracted, running **php tulip.php** will fire up the editor without any need for installation. When started, *Tulip* pops up a splash screen in which the language and theme can be set – the latter providing various colour schemes (some more suited to a Bridget Riley work than a desktop app). KDE Krystal icons are scattered around the interface, which makes use of a resizeable split-pane layout, tooltipped toolbar and status line – it doesn't try to be overly daring, and is also a cinch to navigate. The left-hand pane is particularly well designed, saving screen space with tabs and offering quick links to files and docs.

Scintillating choice

Using Scintilla as a library for the text-editing component (you may remember it from other apps we've covered in HotPicks) is an excellent choice, offering syntax highlighting, code completion, brace matching and block collapsing. You can even opt to display linefeeds, useful for dealing with DOS-type text files. Customisable colour schemes for the syntax highlighting are also supported – you can change them via a GTK colourpicker widget and save the results in individual profiles. As the most crucial component of any coding suite, the editor must be featureful and solid, and *Scintilla* does a fine job.

Some particularly useful additions lie in the network settings and support. A sprinkling of CVS features, for instance, have been coded in and are accessible via the menu and nav panel – so you can commit changes without having to leave the editor.

Similarly, you can transfer files over FTP, and browse a *PostgreSQL* or *MySQL* database, performing queries and editing data on the fly. Having a database browser inside the editor could be seen as bloat, but as PHP and *MySQL* are commonly used together (in LAMP servers, for example), it's unquestionably a great time-saver for developers.

Other good touches include the documentation panel, built around a tree widget and used to get help on PHP and GTK functions; and the Highlight option, which generates a colourful HTML source listing of the current file. Editing multiple files is assisted by *Tulip's* saveable workspace function, whereby you can save not only the files themselves but also the way you want them laid out on screen. The documentation is fine, with only a few translation errors, and includes a PDF file bundling together various help snippets and screenshots.

In all. *Tulip* is an impressive piece of work, providing a respectable range of features while still being welcoming to newcomers. It needs a spot of polish in places ('Connection Problems' isn't the most descriptive error message when things aren't working), but Scintilla performs superbly well, and gave us no concern for its stability. Plus, with the app itself written in PHP, it's easy for developers to modify to their needs. The network additions and database browser give it a further boost - so if you're dissatisfied with your current editor, we recommend giving this a test run.

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HOTPICKS

FREE CLIP ART LIBRARY Open Clip Art

VERSION 0.10 WEB www.openclipart.org

Historically, a lot of open source

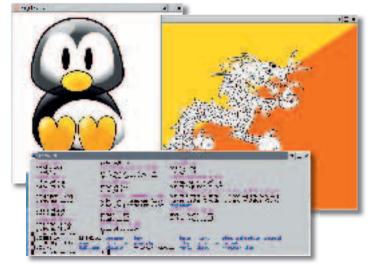
projects have suffered when it comes to visual va voom – the underlying code may be rock-solid, but many hackers don't see it as a priority to spruce up their work with slick graphics. This is changing with the growing mindshare and commercial involvement in FOSS; at the same time, top-quality free artwork is still hard to find. So we welcome *Open Clip Art*, which hopes to assemble a variety of images for use in DTP and word processing, all available for free under the Creative Commons' definition of Public Domain.

The current release weighs in at 20MB (also provided in Zip format for Windows users), uncompressing to a shade under 100 MB and containing over 3,200 images. These are categorised appropriately – animals, signs, food, computing and so forth – although the Unsorted directory is in a bad state. In general, three files are provided for each item: an SVG; a PNG file for immediate use of the item as a bitmapped image; and a mini text doc listing the author's name and relevant categories.

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So, are the images any good? With a gazillion different sources contributing, it's understandable that some are stronger than others – on the whole, though, it's a decent assortment, which (most importantly) covers a broad range of subjects. The effort put into übercomplex images like the dragon on the flag of Bhutan is hugely laudable; while the turkey entry in the food category is a dodgy job, resembling a molehill with a gearstick attached.

Organisation is now the key issue with *Open Clip Art*. Some packagers have chopped the collection up into separate categories, lightening the downloads and making items easier to



Nothing on this planet rivals the baby Tux image for sheer cuteness overload.

find, but this could still be improved. Additionally, it'd help to have a rating system – then users could select, say, the top 10% for their projects. A

clear roadmap has been set for website enhancements and software cooperation, so hopefully it'll strengthen Linux's presence in the desktop productivity arena.

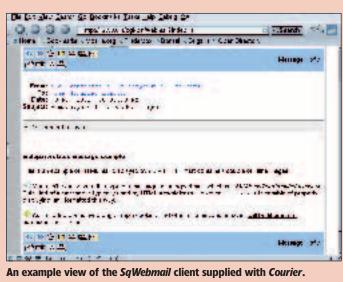
MAIL TRANSFER AGENT

VERSION 0.49.0 WEB www.courier-mta.org

Sendmail or Postfix? Exim or

Qmail? Any time the topic of mail transfer agents is brought up on Slashdot (and similar flame-prone sites), it's best to jump into asbestos overalls before chipping in with your opinion. It's not quite as famous as

the big players in the message transfer agent league, but *Courier* still has devout followers, and 0.49 arrived just as this HotPicks was being prepared. Its *Courier IMAP* mail server was in *LXF66*'s Roundup, so it's time for a proper look.



Many distros provide ready-built *Courier* packages that have been tweaked for a typical configuration. It's best to use one of these if you can, as the by-hand setup process can be alarmingly complex: so complex that the developers firmly recommend reading the entire 3,644-line **Install** file beforehand! Many sections can be skimmed over, though, and with courier-authlib already installed it's mostly painless.

Courier's main strength lies in its integration – it combines an SMTP server/relay with POP3 and IMAP, using maildir for storage (there's only limited support for *mBox*). ESMTP, SSL, SOCKS and IPv6 are all supported to varying degrees, along with a bunch of authentication methods (PAM, LDAP, *PostgreSQL* and *MySQL*) and extra filtering. For finer control, some of the components are available in separate packages – a bonus if you don't need the full suite. Special mention should go to *Courier's* web-based admin tools and mail client. Via a selection of no-frills forms, you can configure most key aspects of the server without the need to drop into a shell, and many of the options are supplied with explanatory text too. The webmail client is more than workable despite the fact that it does't have all the tools that a more specialised package might, and the additional calendar pushes it slightly into PIM/ groupware territory.

Despite its low version number, *Courier* is seeing heavy production use in various places and has proved robust. But what really makes it worth having is the extra functionality, which boosts *Courier* from being just one more mail transfer agent into a noteworthy solution. The completeness and integration is a huge time-saver, especially if you're tired of wrestling with a disparate assortment of software.

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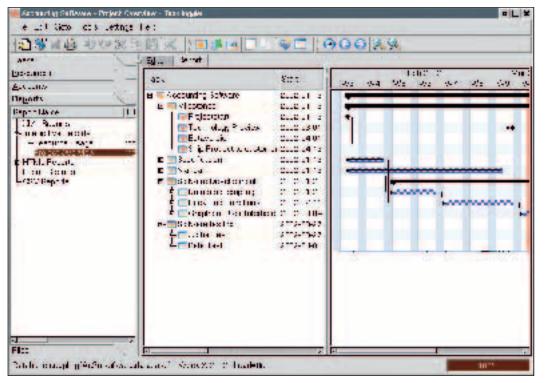
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PROJECT MANAGER Taskjuggler



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VERSION 2.1-beta1 WEB www.taskjuggler.org



The sample projects provided with TaskJuggler should give you ideas for managing your own.

In small organisations it's possible to create and update plans using basic software – but as things grow it's immensely helpful to have a dedicated solution. After all, mismanagement can turn a promising project into a scrappy, never–ending nightmare. *Imendio Planner* (formerly *MrProject* – see *LXF50*'s HotPicks) is one such solution for Linux, but *TaskJuggler* is emerging as a mature alternative. Reader Jes D asked us to give it a look.

Version 2.1-beta 1 is, as the name suggests, a snapshot before the next stable release – the last one appeared over a year ago. Compilation from source shouldn't pose any problems providing you have Qt. The standard ./configure, make and make install (as root) procedure will get it up and running – failing that, the SUSE RPMs on our coverdisc may be coerced to run on some other distros.

Unlike other project management tools, in which you design the plan via dialogs and widgets, *TaskJuggler* uses text files for converting into reports, steepening the initial learning curve but expanding the application's versatility. Thankfully, though, the file format's syntax is fairly easy to grasp (it's well documented too) and the use of comments and macros keeps things readable. Several model projects are supplied which demonstrate *Taskjuggler's* features and together serve as a useful introduction.

Creating a project file involves setting its general info (eg name, start and end dates) in a property block, where sections are defined in braces and details given in a foo="bar" format. From here, flags can be dropped in that are attached to other properties, allowing finer control of the output later on. Each keyword and attribute is explained in table format in the docs – clearly geared towards those with a coding background, but accessible to newcomers, too.

Binary or GUI?

The main *taskjuggler* binary is a command-line tool which generates various forms of reports: CSV and XML for additional work in other software, along with HTML. (Its XML output can also be used with the supplied *tjx2gantt* tool, which produces Gantt charts giving a graphical representation of a project's progress.) Although it's very plain, the HTML output makes great use of colour and tables for clarity – it's split into sections for accounting, staff, and individual task details. Certainly good enough to share

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around or place on a website.

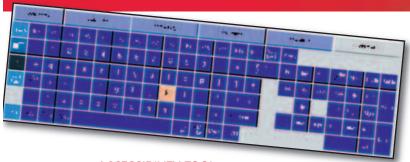
Two separate graphical front-ends are included: TaskJuggler (not to be confused with the lower-case CLI-only binary) and the less inspiringly named ktjview2. There's plenty of overlap between the two, so the developers plan to combine them at some stage for a fully-fledged app. Even though TaskJuggler is slightly stronger on the interface front, both provide a friendly and more immediate interface to the projects - clicking on an item jumps to the relevant part of the file. Handily, the TaskJuggler front-end allows new projects to be created via a readymade and thoroughly commended example project.

The wealth of features for keeping track of a project's development and report generating is outstanding. Subprojects (ie mini tasks contained within a larger job) can be imported and exported, while tasks dependent on one another are catered for with a facility for spotting resource clashes. The option to customise reports right down to the smallest detail adds superb flexibility – the HTML output, for instance, only requires a modicum of web publishing knowledge to alter.

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Other notable features include multiple time-zone support, comprehensive staff details (shifts, holidays etc) and scenarios where different outcomes can be generated if something goes belly-up. The *Kate* editing component used in the *TaskJuggler* front-end is perfectly suited to the job – it sports syntax highlighting, brace matching, code completion and auto-indentation. Great stuff.

All things considered, *TaskJuggler* isn't the kind of app you can present to a typical middle-manager; it's timeconsuming and demanding at first, requiring much careful reading of the guides. Fully interactive GUI solutions such as *Planner* are a better choice there. However, the upside is extreme versatility – you can craft complex projects and reports without the constrictions of wizards and dialogs. Although it asks for some time investment and a bit of practice, *TaskJuggler* is a wise choice if you're finding other apps too limiting.



ACCESSIBILITY TOOL

VERSION 1.0.1 WEB http://gok.ca

As Linux picks up pace on the

desktop, it's opening itself up to a whole new world of users – from newcomers being catered for with slick desktops and friendly apps, to long-time Unixers ready to delve into its underpinnings. Equally, good progress is being made to assist those with disabilities, and *GOK*, the Gnome on-screen keyboard, has just reached version 1.0.1. Thanks to regular reader Chris Holmes for suggesting that we try it out.

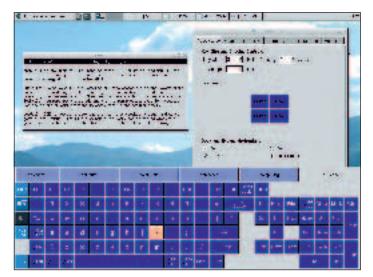
Several Gnome dependencies are required to build *GOK* from source: there shouldn't be any problem if you have Gnome release 2.6.x or newer; and you'll need at least version 1.5 of **at-spi.** The binaries on our coverdisc were prepared for Fedora Core, but it shouldn't be a problem to get them running for other distros.

GOK's goal is to make all the features of Gnome accessible in the fewest steps possible, it having been designed with a variety of input methods in mind (eye tracking, limb movements etc). Some features are missing if Gnome's assistive technology support isn't enabled, and the program provides excellent feedback for any errors or complications it encounters in the desktop setup.

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Usefully, GOK is heavily customisable in terms of feedback (visual and sound), control and layout. The panels (tunable with XML) can be docked along the screen's top or bottom, and the sharp contrasts help those with impaired vision. For the keyboard itself, *GOK* attempts to auto-complete words as they're entered; this could do with some performance work but is a tip-top idea. Mouse pointer control and the in-built launcher are equally well implemented, and the characteristically concise Sun documentation details usage and key commands with well-written guides.

Having clearly paid a lot of attention to accessibility design principles, *GOK*'s developers have done a sterling job – everything has been thought through and implemented with care. Our only gripe is with performance (it's a tad unresponsive in places and older systems may find it overly weighty), but nonetheless it's superb to see free software reaching out to a wider range of users, and knocking down another barrier to entry.



Bright colours and copious feedback all around in GOK.

De jan ge zwere jeer De jan ge zwere jeer Partie - De seenengender Algebrachen et ander ander

The KDE *Ysiz* front-end editing a file, with the Prefs box behind.

TEXT EDITOR

vis

VERSION M3 WEB www.yzis.org

Bizarrely-named text editors

abound in Unixland. The main coders behind *Yzis* had worked on *gvim* and *KVim* – graphical frontends to the ever-popular *Vim* editor – and after stumbling across too many complications and kludges, they started afresh with *Yzis*. As a result of this, *Yzis* quite clearly owes a lot of its functionality, as well as its look and feel, to to *Vi* clone *Vim*.

Yzis strives for abstraction and clean separation of the underlying engine and front-ends, which makes it ideal for embedding in other apps or desktops.

To compile the latest *Yzis* milestone from source you'll need the Lua scripting language development files, along with Qt and KDE, should you wish to use the *Kyzis* front-end. Most of these should be installed on typical desktops – the rest can be found in binary packages around the net. The back-end is provided in ***yzis.so** libraries, with an ncurses (text-based) alternative for use at the console.

Kyzis's interface is very bare. Those familiar with the more in-your-face editors will find its lack of feedback or icons slightly off-putting. Similarly, *Vi* isn't the most welcoming editor, so brushing up on its workings and keybindings beforehand is worthwhile. For regular *Vi(m)*ers, though, *Kyzis* operates without any major surprises – it inherits the modal editing approach and its commands from *Vim*. A status bar along the bottom displays the line number and current mode, while a *Konsole* terminal can be embedded directly beneath it.

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Featuring various MDI setups, window transparency, syntax highlighting, right-to-left text, macros and stacks of other goodies, *Yzis* blends the best of *Vim* with a bunch of intriguing additions. Lua, noted for its use in the *ELinks* browser (among others), provides customisation and extendibility – ideal for coders and those with more demanding requirements than the typical home user. The KDE side can be wedged into *Quanta* and KDevelop, with patches to use it in *KMail* and *Konqueror*.

So, *Vi*-philes can work in their comfy environment around various desktop apps, and it's a smart demonstration of the KParts architecture. Right now *Yzis* will be of most interest to regular *Vi* users – it's reliable and speedy even at this pre-1.0 phase, and has heaps of potential. Maybe not the finished article just yet, but it deserves keeping an eye on.

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PONG MEETS TETRIS



VERSION 1.0 WEB www.nongnu.org/tong

Take a classic puzzle game

that's massively famous. Mix in a more simplistic game – a 1970s icon. Stir them up a bit, sprinkle in some showy visuals, and serve. The result? Well, considering the outrages perpetrated by some software houses when tinkering with near-perfect formulas, you'd be forgiven for a spot of

brow-furrowage at the prospect. Yes, it's *Tetris*, and yes, it has been violated with *Pong*; not that *Pong*'s bad *per se* – but can these really work together? Owen Swerkstrom thinks so, and in the dark bowels of his Transylvanian castle (or, more likely, his home in Wisconsin), he created a monster: *Tong*.

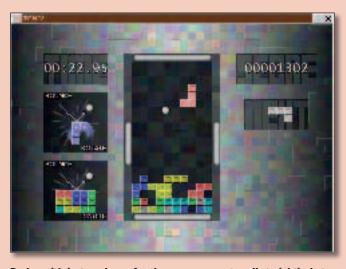
The build process isn't as mind-addling as the concept – you'll only need SDL and a few related libraries to compile from source. The vast majority of the tarball is made up of Ogg files, which could perhaps be substituted with some mods for a smaller download option, but the music itself is a lively compilation, flitting between rowdy Salsa ditties and darker electronic tracks. All generally fitting and listenable.

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Cosmetically, the smooth fonts and crisp sprites are thumbsupworthy, but *Tong*'s coder has made a disastrous choice with the scrolling background – it can be teeth-gnashingly distracting in play. Gah! You need absolute concentration, as controlling the blocks with the cursor keys while simultaneously operating the bats with the mouse is tremendously difficult. Eerily though, it all seems to make sense....

Failure to keep the ball in play leads to blocks appearing at random along the bottom, and some balls respond differently to the falling shapes. It's charmingly insane when the balls are shifting your blocks around the screen – you're battling to keep it in play and make sure the shape lands correctly. Numerous difficulty settings alter the bat size, drop speed and so on.

If you're still unconvinced, we don't blame you. It sounds completely unplayable at first, but after a while the inherent complexities become second nature, focusing the mind intensely and revitalising a brilliant but old formula. It's extreme Tetris – unimaginable if you're one of the three people in the Western World never to have played it, but refreshingly hard if you've exhausted the originals.



Perhaps it's just a scheme for the programmer to sell straightjackets.

CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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■ VERSION 1.01 ■ WEB http://cognito.sourceforge.net



Cognito's website being edited - note the simple but effective editor.

There's no shortage of open source

content management systems, and administrators can choose between some top-drawer options such as *Drupal* and *PostNuke*. At the same time, these solutions can be overkill for many scenarios; lighter choices exist for smaller sites, with less functionality but (usually) simpler and faster manageability as a result. *Cognito* is one, a PHP-driven CMS designed with ease of use in mind and constructed around a flexible template system.

Requirements for setup shouldn't pose any problems on most servers: recent versions of PHP and *MySQL*, along with a webserver (*Apache* is ideal) should be installed; and only a quick spot of fiddling at the shell prompt is necessary. Once the database has been created and config files modified accordingly, the admin can log in and begin constructing the site. All pleasingly simple, and it works pretty much out the box.

Cognito sports a nifty

semi-WYSIWYG editor for building pages. It operates in a familiar word processor-like fashion for setting font attributes, creating bulleted lists, inserting images, and so on. Altering the page designs and layout using the templates shouldn't be too taxing for anyone with prior web editing experience, and RSS feeds can be added via a (slightly kludgy) system built on *MagpieRSS*.

Most essential features for typical sites have been implemented: multiple users and groups, site searching, polls, logging/revision history to monitor changes, on-the-spot image management, and delayed publishing (ie updates from users are checked by an admin before going live). Much of the functionality is provided by the plugin system – hopefully making it a breeze to add other features when they appear – and on the whole it works well.

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For ambitious sites, it's worth giving some of the larger CMS projects a go before committing to *Cognito*, as it's not brimming with features and there are a few gaps (ideally to be filled with plugins later on). This is also its strength, though, in that personal or small business sites don't need the full works. *Cognito* provides the key functionality in a compact and approachable form.



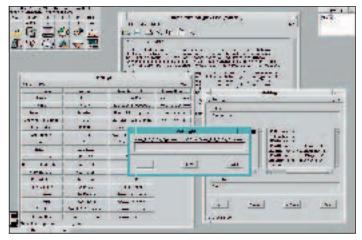
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HotPicks REVISITED

LIGHTWEIGHT DESKTOP ENVIRONMENT

AntiRight

VERSION 2.7 WEB www.nongnu.org/antiright



More integration than with a vanilla desktop environment – think of AntiRight's nanotools as the hundreds and thousands on an iced sundae.

ONLINE 3D TANK GAME

BZFlag

VERSION 2.0.0 **WEB** www.bzflag.org

Back in *LXF50*'s HottestPicks

special, we looked at version 1.7g2 of *BZFlag*, a splendiferous 3D tank romp played over the network. *BZFlag* is one of the most popular open source games, and deservedly so – it blends elements of strategy and all-out blasting into a highly addictive weaponfest. Game servers all around the world host arenas in which players can join the action, collect flags as power-ups (or downs) and accumulate points for glory.

Compilation is hassle-free; there are no obscure dependencies and it should build with the stock X11 development files and OpenGL. Pleasingly, even low-end machines get a slice of the fun, as there's a multitude of graphical tweaks to improve the frame rate. Essentially, *BZF*lag entails manoeuvring around an arena, collecting flags to boost your tank and wasting other players in the process. There are other variations too including team-based modes.

Thankfully, the designers haven't fiddled too much with the gameplay foundations, and have added some wonderful bonuses in 2.0.0: a replay facility to record bouts of play; vote-based ejection for democratic alienation of dodgy players; a wider variety of flags such as flying and

Lightweight desktops are always

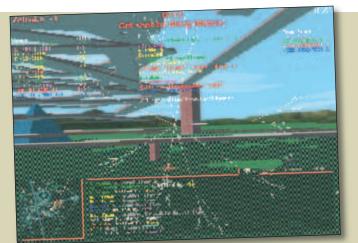
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refreshing to see, especially as Gnome and KDE target high-spec machines over older hardware. We covered this intriguing contender, AntiRight, in *LXF49*. and found that the Motif-based suite of utilities and window management tools did a fine job for very old machines. Since then it's seen plenty of work, but has retained the slimness that lifts it above the common herd.

AntiRight should compile straight away on most distros – if you encounter a build problem with library.c, comment out the **antiright_get_file_type** function (use /* and */ either side). Once in place, running AntiRight on login or X startup will launch the venerable MWM window manager, and then AntiRight's panel. Compared with today's slick GTK and Qt themes, the chunky old Motif appearance feels dated and unsightly – but this can be tweaked to make it easier on the eye. Panels provide access to the handful of supplied nanotools: a simple text editor, calculator and file manager trio, along with some admin utilities and links to external apps. Naturally, they don't approach their larger desktop counterparts in terms of features, yet still do an adequate job.

New features include reworked panels (cleaner and more attractive), the creation of a separate library to share more code, an alarm clock, updated dialogs for the utils, links to external games and apps, and many build system and interface cleanups.

There's also been an overhaul of AntiRight's foundations, making it possible to integrate other toolkits in time – it'll be interesting to see how that turns out. AntiRight is moving in a good direction, keeping things trim while adding features, and we recommend giving it a try if you need to inject new desktop life into ancient systems.



Mr "Blerg", if you're reading, I want the money for a new windscreen.

unstoppable shooting; new weather/ terrain systems including snow and water; and hundreds of minor fixes. We're also very pleased to see

more anti-cheating code (a problem with earlier releases). If you fancy some light-hearted online gaming and haven't tried *BZFlag*, give it a look – the updates and additions give it new challenges, and the breadth of arenas and servers means there's always something new to try.

ALSO RELEASED LIST New and updated software that also deserves a look.

■ Jackbeat 0.4.0 - GTK-based audio sequencer <u>www.xung.org/jackbeat</u>

KVIrc 3.2.0 – Friendly IRC client built around Qt <u>www.kvirc.net</u>

■ NuFW1.0-rc2 - Network authentication firewall suite <u>www.nufw.org</u>

Rush 2005 0.4.12c – American Football game <u>http://rush2005.sourceforge.net</u> Aegis Virus Scanner 0.1.2 - Gnome virus scanning <u>http://jodrell.net/projects/aegis</u>
 TEA for Linux 8.0 - Light but powerful

text editor http://tea.linux.kiev.ua

kpowersave 0.3.10-5 - KDE power management <u>http://sourceforge.net/</u> projects/powersave/

pucko 0.6.2 – Text-based music player www.student.hig.se/~nd02aho/pucko Pixies Desktop Search 0.1.1 – Personal search engine <u>http://merlimat.net/</u>software/pds

xchat-gnome 0.3 – Gnome HIGified X-Chat front-end <u>http://xchat-gnome.navi.cx</u>

AllTray 0.40 – Dock any app in Gnome, KDE, Xfce etc <u>http://alltraysourceforge.net</u>

PyTraffic 2.0 – Puzzle game http://alpha.luc.ac.be/Research/Algebra/ Members/pytraffic xpad 2.5 – Desktop sticky note system

with GTK http://xpad.sourceforge.net

OW2 wiki 0.5.0 – Wiki server software http://sourceforge.net/projects/ow2wiki

■ Gammu1.00.10 - Mobile phone manager www.mwiacek.com/gsm/soft/ gammu.html

■ Conary 0.50.0 – Distributed package management <u>http://wiki.specifix.com</u>

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