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PRODUCT REVIEW

Exploring Linux—Part 17 *by Alan German*

Linux has native applications for just about anything, and even specific Windows' programs can often be run using Wine, but there are still a few Windows' packages that refuse to behave “properly” in the Linux world. Now, as we have seen in previous articles in this series, it is easy to set up a dual-boot Linux-Windows system, and hence have the ability to run any misbehaving programs directly under Windows. But, perhaps there is another way to bring these renegades to heel inside of Linux.

Enter VirtualBox, an open-source package overseen by Oracle Corporation, that allows virtual machines using any one of a number of operating systems, including Windows, to be setup in the Linux environment. Of course, one needs a copy of the Windows' operating system of choice (e.g. Windows XP) in order to make this happen but, after that, it's a fairly straightforward process to run Windows – and hence Windows' programs – inside Linux.

There are downloadable versions of VirtualBox available for many Linux distros; however, for Ubuntu, the simplest way to install the correct version of the software is to use Synaptic Package Manager. Just search for virtual-box, mark the open-source edition (OSE) for installation, hit the apply button and, after a few minutes, VirtualBox is ready to use.

Now, you could run VirtualBox from a terminal window but it's more conven-

ient to add a program launcher to the applications menu. Navigate to System – Preferences – Main Menu – System Tools and add the launcher to this menu item using Command = virtual-box.

Now the fun begins. Running the program brings up the VirtualBox OSE window. The first thing we need to do is to create a virtual machine by clicking on the “New” icon to launch the New Virtual Machine Wizard. The first screen prompts for a name for the virtual machine so you can enter something really esoteric such as “Windows XP”. By default, the OS type and version are set to Microsoft Windows, and Windows XP, respectively. The subsequent settings can essentially be left at their default values, so that we assign 192 MB of memory to the virtual machine, and create a new bootable hard disk, initially with 10 GB, but with dynamically expandable storage, and named Windows XP.vdi.

We are almost ready to load an operating system on our virtual machine. But, here is the first trick. We need to enable the CD/DVD drive in the virtual machine so that it will be able to read data from our master disk. We click on the “Settings” icon and then navigate to Storage – the CD icon (currently marked as Empty) – and set the CD/DVD Device to the physical host drive present on our system.

With a copy of the Windows XP distribution disk inserted into the CD drive,

we now press the “Start” icon and the virtual machine roars into life with a Windows XP installation in process. Now, it's just a matter of being patient, answering the prompts as they arise, including entering the serial number associated with your copy of Windows XP, and letting the installation reach completion. The VirtualBox window now displays a running version of Windows XP, as shown in the screenshot on [page 6](#), where both Windows Explorer and Notepad are in use on the virtual machine.

There are a few more features (and “tricks”) worthy of note with the operation of the virtual machine (VM). One such item is that the mouse and keyboard may be assigned to the host machine and/or the virtual machine, and their status is subject to somewhat confusing warning messages.

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Next Meeting: **WEDNESDAY, June 8th, 2011 (PIZZA 6:30 pm)**

June Raffle

Thanks to the folks at Diskeeper, we have three copies of **Diskeeper 2011 Pro Premier** to raffle off. Diskeeper 2011 performance software gives your home and home office PCs maximum speed and reliability by eliminating the majority of the fragmentation that causes PC slows and then invisibly eliminates the rest – automatically.

Diskeeper Pro Premier is valued at \$100. We will draw three tickets at the June meeting.

Because of the way Diskeeper does its promotional copies, winners will have to supply a valid email address which will be passed to Diskeeper. Winners will then receive an email from Diskeeper with a download link and a license key.

Tickets, as always are \$1 for one, \$2 for three, or \$5 for ten.

Coming Up...

Wednesday, June 8th, 2011

PIZZA PARTY (at 6:30 pm)

For the FOURTH straight year, the OPCUG is pleased to host a Pizza night to thank its members for their continued support. Please come early to ensure you have a choice of several popular varieties of Pizzas.

As usual, we will also supply several varieties of soft drinks, plus water and dessert.

The food will arrive, at 6:30 pm, under the big tent in the front yard of the Canada Science and Technology Museum.

Guests are welcome.

At 7:30 the regular meeting will take place (see **MEETING** notice at right).

MEETING (at 7:30 pm)

Speaker: Sylvain Dumas

Topic: Media Centers

This month Sylvain Dumas is coming from Montreal to present on Media Centers. Sylvain works with McAfee but has a personal interest in the Media Center arena. He will be updating us on all the changes and growth that have been happening over the last couple years.

This will be our last meeting before the fall. We'll see you in **September** after the summer hiatus. Consult the OPCUG website (<http://opcug.ca>) for details.

May Prize Winners

Our May Meeting of The Ottawa PC Users Group saw three lucky winners taking home a copy of the BoostSpeed 5 software suite from Auslogics.

Pretty soon **Wayne Houston, George Leir** and **Mark Merriman** are going to have computers that are cleaned up and sped up too!

John Cocklin was the winner of the door prize, a copy of the McAfee AV Software.

Congrats to all of the winners and a big thanks to Auslogics and McAfee for continuing to support the OPCUG.

2011 CALENDAR

Meetings	Date	Time and Venue
OPCUG General Meeting	Wednesday, June 8 th	7:30 p.m. Auditorium of the Canada Museum of Science and Technology , 1867 St. Laurent Blvd. http://www.sciencetech.technomuses.ca/english/index.cfm
Beginners' SIG	Wednesday, June 8 th	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
Linux / Open Source SIG	Wednesday, June 8 th	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
Beer BOF (Wing SIG East)	Wednesday, June 8 th	10:00 p.m. (after all other SIGs) at Liam Maguire's, St. Laurent Blvd. at Innes Rd.

Please note that unless otherwise noted, SIGs meet at 9:00 p.m. (immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting).

PRODUCT REVIEW

Mini-Review—PC-Decrapifier *by Alan German*

PC-Decrapifier was mentioned in Part 10 of the OPCUG Free Software Guide (Ottawa PC News; p.7; November 2009) and promises that it will "uninstall many of the common trialware software applications often installed on PC's by the big name OEM's, and will remove unnecessary items from the start-up menu."

I tried it out on an old Compaq desktop machine that had been given to a friend. Much, if not all, of the original software installed on the machine was still present. The problem was that the machine was running really slowly. Removing all the bloatware, in order to clean up the hard drive, was one of the first steps taken to try to speed things up.

PC-Decrapifier essentially runs in a wizard-like format. It first lets you check for updates and displays its licensing information. Then it warns that it is difficult to tell the difference between trialware and paid-for versions of programs so that care should be taken when selecting items for removal. The final pre-removal items are a check if the program is being run on a brand new computer or not, and the opportunity to create a restore point.

There are two main stages to the actual software removal process. First, the program identifies installed software that it considers to be trialware or otherwise undesirable. Examples present on the test system were MS Office Standard Edition 2003 (60-day trial) and AOL.lnk.

On the subsequent screen, PC-Decrapifier appears to list all of the other programs that are installed, and provides a check box to select any specific item that is to be removed. My selections included Blasterball (and several other games), Compaq Connections and Compaq Organize, Sonic Record Now! and Spy Subtract.

PC-Decrapifier then goes through the uninstallation process for each checked item in turn. Some software, such as the games, return a simple message box that the program has been removed.

Other packages go into the more usual Windows-uninstall process, and produce various dialogue boxes for confirmations and to provide progress reports.

Once the removal is complete, a final screen asks for any comments that you might have as optional feedback to the program's developer. There is also a link for you to click "if this program saved you \$5 of your time".

My guess is that the resulting web page will ask for a \$5 donation to the cause. Now, I don't want to appear ungrateful, but the program really didn't do much more than I could have done myself using the Add or Remove Programs feature in Windows. So, instead of hitting the link, I just pressed Finish, and exited gracefully, stage right.

Bottom Line

PC-Decrapifier (Freeware)

Version 2.2.5

<http://www.pcdecrapifier.com/>



PRODUCT REVIEW

HoDoKu (Bernhard Hobiger) *by Jocelyn Doire*

Sudoku is a game that plays on a 9-by-9 grid that requires putting the digits from 1 to 9 in every row, in every column and in every sub 3-by-3 grid. The rules are pretty simple but trying to solve some of those little puzzles can get terribly hard, making the game a good exercise for your mind, and a good way to pass some time with an interesting game.

The easy levels can be solved all in your mind, but for the harder levels it becomes necessary to write down all the "candidates" that a cell can have in order to solve the puzzle, and anyone who has tried to use a pen and paper knows that it gets pretty tedious to keep track of all of them. Lots of programs exist to play Sudoku, but one that I find particularly good is called HoDoKu, a free and GPL program written in Java that is available on SourceForge at <http://sourceforge.net/projects/hodoku/>.

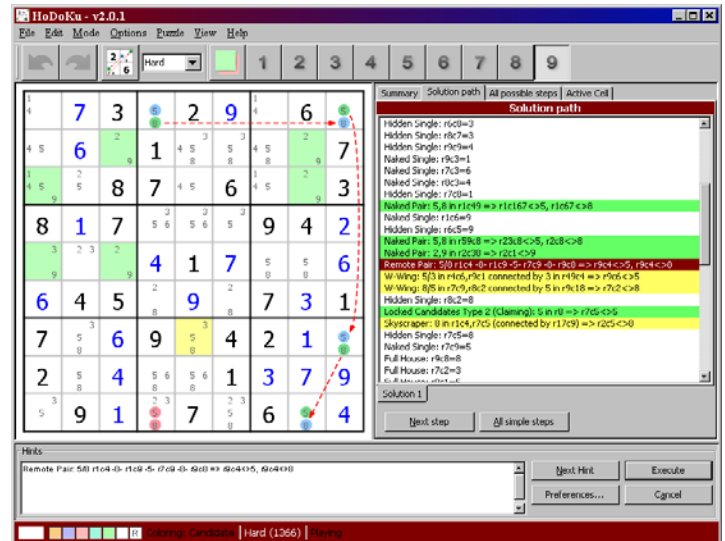
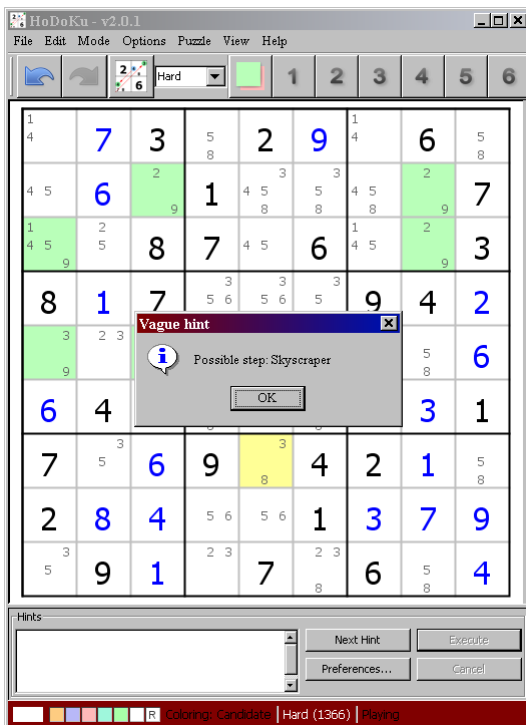
HoDoKu lets you play the game like you do on paper, select the level you wish and click on the "create a puzzle" button (with the 2/6 in a grid) to create a sudoku grid that is guaranteed to have a unique solvable

game. If desired, you have the option to have all the candidates shown in light grey in every cell, which are updated immediately whenever you add a new valid digit (in blue).

If you get stuck you can ask the program to give you a "vague hint" (Puzzle > Vague Hints...) to help you move forward without revealing everything, or click on the "Next Hint" button to show you the next possible step, with a full explanation and with all the relevant candidates highlighted (see screenshot this page, bottom left).

You can click on any of the digit filters, at the top, to highlight all the cells with that digit in green, helping you in your search for candidates that can be eliminated.

Where the program really shines is that HoDoKu can be your teacher. For example, you can view the complete path to a solution for any given puzzle, and by double clicking on any of the steps, HoDoKu fills the grid with all the previous steps, highlights all the relevant candidates, all colour coded, and even adds arrows for very complicated techniques.

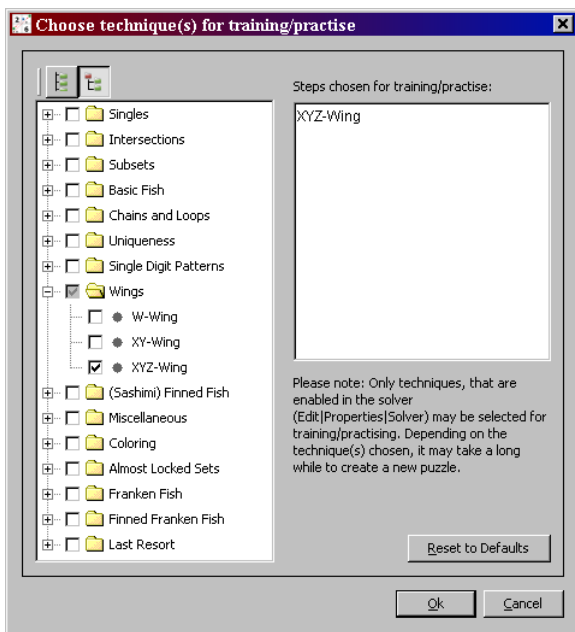


(Continued on page 5)

HoDoKu (Continued from page 4)

If that is not enough for you, you can even ask HoDoKu to calculate every single possible step to solve a grid from any configuration and to sort them all in 5 different ways, letting you study in depth the various ways a game can be solved. If you are interested in a particular technique you can select it using the configuration menu and then search for its every occurrence.

If desired, you can work on specific techniques by selecting Mode > Practising... and then select all those that you want, and when you create your next game it will include those techniques (note that it can take a while to create a game depending on the selections).



Further help is also available on the HoDoKu web site with a complete manual that explains all the features of the program in detail. The site also has an extensive list of all the techniques that HoDoKu is able to use, and believe me, that list is a lot more extensive than I could ever imagine was possible.

<http://hodoku.sourceforge.net/en/techniques.php>.

Other sites exist also on the web, but one I find particularly interesting is an equivalent to Wikipedia but dedicated only to the game: <http://sudopedia.org>. If you are looking for a guide on how to help solve Sudoku games you can check <http://www.angusj.com/sudoku/hints.php>

from the author of another program called "Simple Sudoku".

If you want to study a particular game, you can enter it manually or use the clipboard, select the analyser mode to view all the steps that are needed to solve it, move them around, and play different "what if" scenarios. You can ask the program to execute the all simple moves so that you can concentrate on the harder ones, for example.

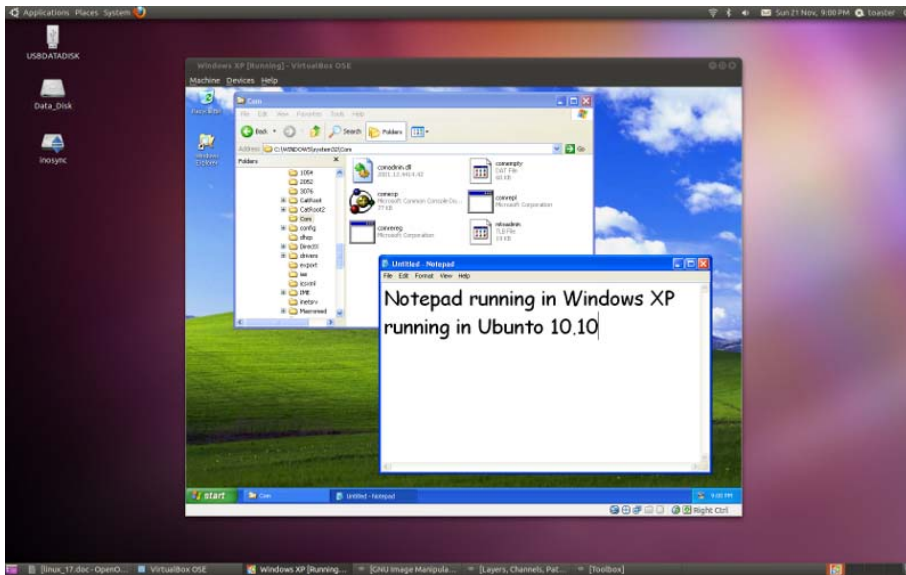
The only complaint I have about HoDoKu, and it's a minor one, is that it's a very serious program, maybe a bit too much. For example, when you complete a game there is no fireworks, no sounds, no message, just the grid with all the digits and no indication that you've won.

There is a lot more in that program than I can cover in this article, but let's just say that if you do take the time to explore everything that HoDoKu has to offer then you are going to become a much better Sudoku player.

Enjoy!



Exploring Linux—Part 17 (Continued from page 1)



When first starting the VM, a warning message indicates that the “Auto capture keyboard” option is turned on such that the VM will automatically take control of the keyboard and all keystrokes will be directed to the VM rather than to the host machine. The message further states that the mouse and keyboard status may be toggled using the “Host key” (the Ctrl button on the right side of the keyboard). However, a subsequent message indicates that the guest OS (Windows XP) supports “mouse pointer integration” that automatically “uncaptures” the mouse when it is used on the VM.

For Ubuntu users running a Windows XP VM, the above doesn't seem to be much of a concern. By default, both devices are initially operative on both machines. Pressing the host key does indeed causes the host machine (Ubuntu) to take control of the keyboard such that text can no longer be entered in applications running in Windows XP. However, toggling the host key once again, or simply clicking the mouse inside the VM's window, re-enables use of the mouse and keyboard on the VM.

A very useful feature, if you find the VM's window to be too small, is that it can be easily be resized by right-clicking on the VM's desktop and adjusting Properties – Settings – Screen resolution, just as you would on a real Windows' machine.

One final trick for use in our first exploration of VirtualBox is to enable a means to exchange files between our Ubuntu host and the virtual Windows XP machine. Now, this may seem like a bad idea given that a major benefit of using a virtual machine is that it is isolated from the real system and, once shut down, it effectively disappears from the planet. However, we will need to install those misbehaving Windows' applications, and it may not be convenient to do so by first loading them onto a CD – which is currently our only access to the virtual machine for loading operating systems – and software packages!

It may seem reasonable that such file exchange should be accomplished using the now ubiquitous USBkey; however, from information gleaned from the web, support for USB devices in VirtualBox seems to be fraught with difficulties. Another option is to set up a shared folder on the Ubuntu host that can be accessed by the VM. This process is also not all that intuitive, but a little web-based assistance proves to be very worthwhile.

In particular, there is an excellent how-to Youtube video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5f1p3fZJPc) on the subject from David Steinlage of davestechsupport.com that gives precise instructions. In effect, you need to create a folder in the Ubuntu file system, point to this folder as a shared folder in the VM, and map it as a network drive with an appropriate drive letter for use by Windows.

With the VM running, the main trick is to use the Devices – Shared Folders menu item in the VM's window, and then find the tiny icon – a folder with a plus sign – in the right side bar that is the “Add shared folder” option. Using the drop-down menu for the folder path, select “Other...” and browse for the shared Ubuntu folder. Next, be sure to check “Make Permanent” so that the shared folder will be available each time you run the VM. Checking the “Read-only” box is optional, depending on whether or not you wish the VM to be able to write (i.e. store) files to the shared folder.

Once the shared folder has been defined, the final step is to go into the virtual machine itself, select Start – My Computer – Tools – Map Network Drive, assign a drive letter (the default is drive z:), and browse for the shared folder. This will be found under something like Virtual Box Shared Folders – \\Vboxsvr\vboxshared.

Now if you wish to install a Windows' application in the VM, all you need to do download the installation file, store it in the shared folder on the Ubuntu machine, run the virtual machine, use Windows Explorer to open the mapped drive z:, and double-click on the file to start the installation process.

And that's about all you need to know to get started in order to run Windows programs in a “virtual box”!

Bottom Line

VirtualBox (Open Source)
Oracle Corporation
<http://www.virtualbox.org/>

OPCUG Free Software Guide—Part 23

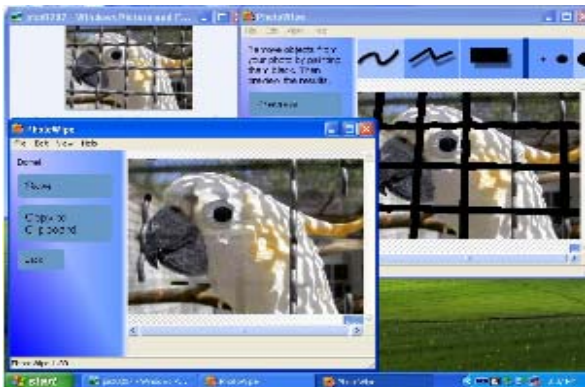
This guide features an annotated list of free computer programs. The software mentioned has not been reviewed (except where noted) nor have any tests necessarily been conducted. Consequently, no guarantees are provided that the individual programs will perform as described. Rather the list of available software is provided for the information of our members who may find one or more of the programs useful. If you try one of the listed items, you are encouraged to share your experience, good or bad, by providing a brief review of the program for a future issue of the newsletter.

PhotoWipe

Use this program to paint over an unwanted person or object in a digital photograph in black. Then, let the program reconstruct this area of the picture from the surrounding image details. Sit back and watch, as cage bars disappear from your zoo photos, or your ex fades into the wall!

Current Release: Version 1.20

Web Site: <http://www.hanovsolutions.com/?prod=PhotoWipe>



FlashGet

This download accelerator promises to increase the speed of your downloads by 6-10 times using a MHT (Multi-server Hyper-threading Transportation) technique.

Current Release: Version 3.7

Web Site: http://www.flashget.com/index_en.htm

Fresh Diagnose

Use this utility to analyze and benchmark your computer system. It can provide information on many aspects of your hardware's performance including the CPU, hard disk, video system, and motherboard..

Web Site: <http://www.freshdevices.com/freshdiag.html>

Evernote

Evernote makes it easy to remember things using your computer, phone, and the web. Type a text note. Clip a web page. Snap a photo. Grab a screenshot. Evernote will keep it all safe. Everything you capture is automatically indexed, and made searchable. You can also add tags or organize notes into different notebooks.

Current Release: Version 4.2.3.2

Web Site: <http://www.evernote.com/>



Magic Folder Icon

All of your Windows folders look the same, so how would you like to customize the icons for individual folders? Give Magic Folder Icon a try. You can extract an icon from any type of resource file (including .exe files) and apply it to a folder of your choice.

Web Site: <http://www.magictweak.com/freetil/magicfolder/magicfolder.php>

Jaangle

Jaangle is an open source music player and organizer. It will categorize your collection of audio files (mp3, ogg, wma, avi, etc.) and display them in easy-to-browse format. It has a quality audio-video player built-in, and an integrated tag editor.

Current Release: Version 0.98e.971

Web Site: <http://www.jaangle.com/>



RKill

If a malware infection ever prevents you from running executable programs on your system, you will be glad to have this utility on hand. RKill was developed at Bleeping-Computer.com. It kills inappropriate processes, imports a Registry file that removes incorrect file associations, removes and backs up proxy settings, fixes policies, and creates a log of all the processes that were terminated. Now that your system is once again functional, you can run an anti-malware program to clean things up.

Web Site: <http://www.bleepingcomputer.com/forums/topic308364.html>

OTTAWA PC NEWS

Ottawa PC News is the newsletter of the Ottawa PC Users' Group (OPCUG), and is published monthly except in July and August. The opinions expressed in this newsletter may not necessarily represent the views of the club or its members.

Member participation is encouraged. If you would like to contribute an article to Ottawa PC News, please submit it to the newsletter editor (contact info below). Deadline for submissions is three Sundays before the next General Meeting.

Group Meetings

OPCUG meets on the second Wednesday in the month, except July and August, at the Canada Museum of Science and Technology, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd, Ottawa. Meetings are 7:30–9:00 p.m. and Special Interest Groups (SIGs) go until 10 p.m.

OPCUG Membership Fees: \$25 per year
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Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Bring your old computer books, software, hardware, and paraphernalia you want to GIVE AWAY to the General Meetings, and leave them at the table near the auditorium's entrance. Please limit magazines to publication dates of less than two years old.

You may TAKE AWAY any items of use to you.

Any items left over at the end of the meeting have to be taken back home by those who brought them in.

