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[Ark Linux Review](#)

The Ark's Evolution!

A writer is using the typewriter to create his next literature masterpiece. He knows exactly what the function of each button and every handle is and when he needs to use it. Because he is familiar with the typewriter, he is concentrating on the content of his book, thus allowing him to be creative without any concerns regarding the way equipment is used.

Similarly, computer software shouldn't be hard to use and shouldn't get into one's way while he or she uses it. What does "easy to use" mean when it is joined to the term "software"? That would mean easy to install, easy to configure, easy to learn and an easy process that helps one get the job done. Linux was, for quite some time, very hard to use and wasn't user friendly, nor the operating system that someone would wish to use on a desktop computer. As time passed, it evolved, getting support for more and more hardware; advanced desktop environments were developed and pieces of software that had a Graphical User Interface (or, the short form, GUI) were released. Nowadays, Linux has become very popular, even as a desktop computer operating system. The fact that a certain piece of software doesn't have a version for the Linux OS doesn't mean that one cannot accomplish that program's task at all, there are numerous open source software packages that accomplish the same task, and sometimes they perform better than some commercial software packages. As the 2005.2 version tag says, Ark 2005.2 is a Linux distribution based on Gentoo Linux. For those that do not know, Gentoo is one of the distributions that are called meta-distributions, which means that all or some packages that make up the distro are built from source at install time in order to achieve a greater performance and allow the creation of specialized Linux distributions. Let's see how easy to use and desktop-oriented is Ark 2005.2...**Pour some Ark onto my hard disk** Installing an operating system on a computer should be a task that's easy to perform, even for the less experienced. Even those who have never installed an operating system before should be able to do it. An individual who wants to install the OS should be taken through the installation procedure by the means of an easy step-by-step graphical installer, while offering some "advanced/expert" options for those who wish to take control over certain settings. Installing Ark on your computer is a task that's easy to fulfill, thanks to its graphical installer; those who are afraid of making the step and installing Linux can relax, it's very easy. Right after the installer has started, it asks the user to choose the language; some assumptions on some of the next settings are made based on this initial selection (e.g. if you select English (US) the installer will propose the US keyboard layout and the America/New_York Time zone), which can be easily modified before pressing the "Continue" button. The following page is very important and the user should pay a lot of attention to it; this is where you tell to the Ark installer how to take care of the installation process: System install, Express install, Parallel install and Expert mode represent ways of space allocation to the Ark Linux install, more details about each install mode can be found below.(1)System install - this mode uses all hard disks, erasing anything that might be stored on them.(e.g. : 2x60GB HDDs with another OS on one of them and a single partition on the other one, there is no unpartitioned space, the entire space is used by the existent partitions, in this mode, Ark will delete everything it might find and format both hard disks and use those partitions for itself)(2)Express install - this mode uses all available non-partitioned space on all hard disks(e.g. : 2x60 GB HDDs with another OS and 15GB of unpartitioned space, the other hard disk has 30 GB of unpartitioned space, in this mode, Ark will use the 15GB of unpartitioned space for itself and the other 30GB from the second hard disk)(3)Parallel install - this mode allows one to modify a Windows or DOS partition and

install Ark by creating its necessary partitions that use this space(e.g. : 60GB HDD with one single , large partition, 24.5GB is the free space amount; the installer will resize the Windows or DOS partition and create partitions which will occupy the storage space that was previously unpartitioned)WARNING: resizing partitions can lead to loss of data!(4) Expert mode -allows one to create partitions manually with QtParted; please use this mode only when you're sure you know what you're doing, deleting your partitions and losing all of your data can be an unhappy scenario for a beginner (remember that all of the modifications that you make to your hard disk aren't really executed until you press "commit button" and the fact that you can "undo" a step, if you made a modification that you wouldn't like to commit to the hard disk or exit without pressing "commit" and ignoring all modifications).After making a choice and pressing the corresponding button, Ark Linux is being transferred to your hard disk. Wait, there's something strange, there is a New Game, Pause Game, three text boxes that are named "Score", "Level" and Lines and a big box on the right side, yes, it's a GAME, you can play Tetrix while the packages are being installed!

Although the developers considered introducing this game into the installer, in order to prevent the user from getting bored, the install process is quite fast on modern computers and there is no need to play Tetrix to keep the user busy. I must admit, a Linux user doesn't get to see something like this everyday. After the installer does its job, the user has to choose: press "OK" and continue playing or press "I'm done" and the computer reboots and starts Ark Linux. **Desktop visions**After the install process is completed, the computer restarts, starts loading the Ark Linux kernel and a nice boot splash screen will greet the user and will clear things up: Ark Linux is loading and a progress bar is shown. After the desktop environment has started, a wizard will help the user set up the KDE interface; the way it behaves and other such preferences can be set now and modified later.What does this Ark Linux have that most Linux distributions don't? That would be the "Mission Control", a control panel that helps the user find his way through various GUI, software and hardware settings. Although such a tool is a great addition to this distro, it has limited "control", for example, it doesn't allow advanced hardware configuration, like YAST, which can be found in SuSE. The main cause is that Mission Control is, mostly, a wrapper for various configuration dialog boxes that can be found in the KDE Control Center. Mission Control helps the new Linux user find the most used settings and modify them easily, that means that you can easily configure your network adapters, change the appearance of the desktop, change the keyboard layout, change the sound volume, and other such configuration tasks without seeking them in the KDE Control Center. A person that is new to Linux won't, in some cases, enter KDE Control Center directly and even if that person runs the KDE Control Center, it might be confusing and might not realize where a certain setting is. This system configuration tool is useful, but it is quite limited, if you wish to reconfigure the X.org X11 server to allow higher resolutions than those that are detected, you have to use the console and run a configuration program, such as xorgconfig, because Mission Control doesn't allow you to set a higher resolution (e.g. my monitor was detected as a 1024x768 monitor, but, it can go up to 1600x1200). However, you can use Mission Control to setup your digital camera or your printer. I hope this kind of hardware configuration will be extended to support other types of hardware components, such as TV tuners and scanners.

I think this tool can become a lot more powerful, more robust, while maintaining its ease of use, if the developers intend to improve it further. Together with the Ark installer, Mission Control can be considered to be a greeting message for the beginners.After you have installed the system from the first disc, arklinux-2005.2.iso, you have a working Linux system with a desktop environment and a set of software packages with graphical user interface, such as the standard KDE accessories, a collection of games, some utilities for graphics and so on, including a PDF viewer. The Internet section of graphical utilities contains the tools that are required to configure an Internet connection, an IRC client, the Kopete Instant Messenger, a news reader, a download manager and many other tools. Only Konqueror is shipped with Ark Linux 2005.2, the base OS; those who wish to use

Firefox must download the package from the Kynaptic repository or install it from the extra software disc. When the "Play a DVD" test was about to start, Kaffeine complained that dvdcss libraries were missing, thus the library had to be downloaded from the Internet. Please note that Kaffeine isn't part of the Ark base (arklinux-2005.2.iso), it's part of the extra software CD. That's what makes me think that I would need to carry with me a fifth CD, if I decided to install it on a PC without an Internet connection (the other four discs are arklinux-2005.2, ark server software 2005.2, ark extra software 2005.2 and ark development suite) with some additional packages that give back to the multimedia players what the lack of libraries has taken from them. How well does this Ark Linux handle office related work? Well, it has OpenOffice.org 2.0 in the base install, KAlarm, Kontact, KOrganizer and many other office and productivity related packages on the extra software CD. The root account is locked by default and the user has to change the password in order to use it with su when root rights might be required, by entering a console in super user mode (K>System>Command Line Interpreter (super user mode)) and entering passwd and the desired password for the root account or by running Kuser from Mission Control and setting a password for root. After the installation of all the software from the "Ark Extra Software 2005.2 " disc, one has tools from many categories, multimedia, edutainment, image manipulation software, games, office tools, internet related software, text editors and others. There is also an additional languages CD that allows one to convince Ark to speak other languages.

Ark Linux, the server OS ? All those who have used at least one service on the "great network" have had something to do with at least one server. It doesn't matter if they browsed the Internet, chatted on IRC, sent an email or used a different web service, all of these are made possible by computers known under the name of "servers". New types of online services appear almost daily, a new instant messaging network, a new online RPG and so on; there's no wonder that people get to hear others saying more often than in the past "I need a server". Some want to have a web site, some want to have a small gallery of photos which can be seen by the relatives who are abroad, others want to have a blog and sometimes it can be a server for their favorite game. All of them need, in a way or another, a mean of turning this into a reality and they need a server. They can choose: pay some company to take care of this (e.g. for hosting a web page or a blog and other such services) or take care of this by using a server which they administer. There is another option, getting professional help, a paid admin; while this may represent an option for someone that earns money from the said service, it's not generally applicable, and there are persons who don't want to pay someone to do this. They need to take care of this by themselves. Ark Linux also has a "Server Software" disc which can prove to be helpful. There's a gap left unfilled between the easy installation and the ease of usage, getting all those software packages installed on the hard disk and getting Apache web server running. I wanted to start Apache web server and test the server capabilities of the server set of packages that were installed and thought that I should try to find a method that even a beginner might be able to follow and start this web server service, by using KSysV. An attempt that should lead to a running web server ended with an error from Apache: the python module was missing. As a distro that has as a main target the beginner, Ark Linux doesn't provide those tools that are meant to be front ends to server software such as Apache, an ftp server and others such software and leaves the user somewhat "floating" in the void between the easy installation of the distro and the knowledge that is required to configure these software packages. Should I add the fact that some packages got broken right after the install process of the add-on software discs and this without any additional configuration or package installation via Kynaptic? There are many alternatives; I'd say there are better server OS alternatives to Ark when it comes to server role. Some of these alternatives are a lot easier to use and a beginner might have a lot more luck at getting the job done with one of those.

Dodge the bug! When I sought a way of getting the "httpd" service (Apache web server) running without going to the console for some help, a proof of the "easy to use" concept, starting KSysV seemed to be the first step. The attempt

to get "httpd" running followed and ended with Apache complaining about the so called python module, disappointed by the error, I tried to close KSysV, that didn't work as expected, one might think that pressing a close button makes that particular piece of software exit or the window close, well, it didn't, it seemed that it wanted to stick around some more. I thought that it just got stuck this way, a bug that doesn't always manifest itself, so, I ended the task by opening a console in super user mode and doing "killall ksysv" and started it again, the same story, it would do anything, but, not going away. What followed? Another "killall ksysv" is what followed, of course!

What about the broken packages? As most people realize, having broken packages isn't a positive thing. It can "hurt" other packages, too, drag them into the "non-working packages" area and cause further problems with the system libraries. Standard packages which are "delivered" with the base distro, official packages, are expected to work in this particular set without being broken. **To Ark or not to Ark?**

Taking the bus to office, for example, doesn't mean one knows how does the bus work, how is that engine put into motion, how is that fuel able to make the engine work and make those wheels spin.

Using a proprietary system, an operating system that's developed by some company that doesn't keep the sources open means one will have to be that man who travels by bus, not a man that travels by bus and knows how this bus works. If he knew how it worked, he could have realised that something could be improved (that it could be modified to lower its fuel consumption, for example). A person that knew very well how an operating system works and many things related to it would be able to improve it or make it more suitable for the personal requirements. A proprietary system cannot be modified as much as an open source operating system.

The developers of Ark Linux have spent a lot of time to put all of this together and there's something that everyone should know. Developing an operating system which can be viewed from most angles and considered to be a complete system, a system which tends to be as bug free as it can possibly be which can satisfy beginners, advanced users and experts at the same time isn't something easy, and it's something that can be achieved by doing a lot of hard work.

Ark Linux is far from being perfect, I don't recommend it as a server operating system for the time being, nor would I say that it's the operating system that one would wish to count on when it comes to development.

Broken packages, bugs and other such minor or major problems will be fixed at some point during the development of Ark Linux. This is its current state, these are problems that might be soon fixed and these issues could go away just by doing a simple update with Kynaptic after the developers put new packages in the package repository.

It doesn't baby sit the user as much as other distros do, but that's a positive thing, from a certain point of view. Linux is powerful and a great amount of its power is revealed when a terminal emulator or the text mode is used.

A home user who wants to enter the world of Linux can consider Ark Linux as an option because it's easy to install and configure. Those who are afraid of using Linux should know that they have two friends along when installing Ark Linux: the Ark Linux installer, which brings Ark to your hard disk, and Mission Control, which gets you started with setting up and customizing your very own installation of Ark.

Distro target: Desktop computers**Supported platforms:** x86**Recommended to:** home users, Linux beginners**Operating system features:** Average**Performance:** Good

Hardware support: Good**Operating System configuration:** Good**Documentation:** Average