Konqueror and Nautilus

File Managers Deluxe

A desktop environment wouldn't deserve that title if it didn't provide its users with a high-performance file manager. Reason enough for us to take a closer look at Konqueror and Nautilus, the core components of KDE and GNOME. **BY ANDREA MÜLLER**

Figure 1: This is what happens when you launch Nautilus on KDE

Normally, choosing between *nautilus* and *konqueror* should not really be an issue, because a user who is happy with GNOME is unlikely to want to load several mega-bytes of KDE libraries, and KDE users are unlikely to be happy with *nautilus,* as you need a command line option to prevent the letter from drawing the destop. Launching *nautilus* without specifying the *--no-desktop* option is all it takes to put the KDE desktop in a completely different light (Figure 1).

But the functionality of both programs now far exceeds that of a traditional file manager. The programs are a starting point for the user, even a solution for handling nearly all of the daily chores you might think of. So the answer to the question of which of these desktops best suits you will be greatly influenced by your own style of working.

Different Tasks

One factor, common to both is the fact that they additionally take care of other tasks in the desktop environment. You will find that *nautilus* is not only -
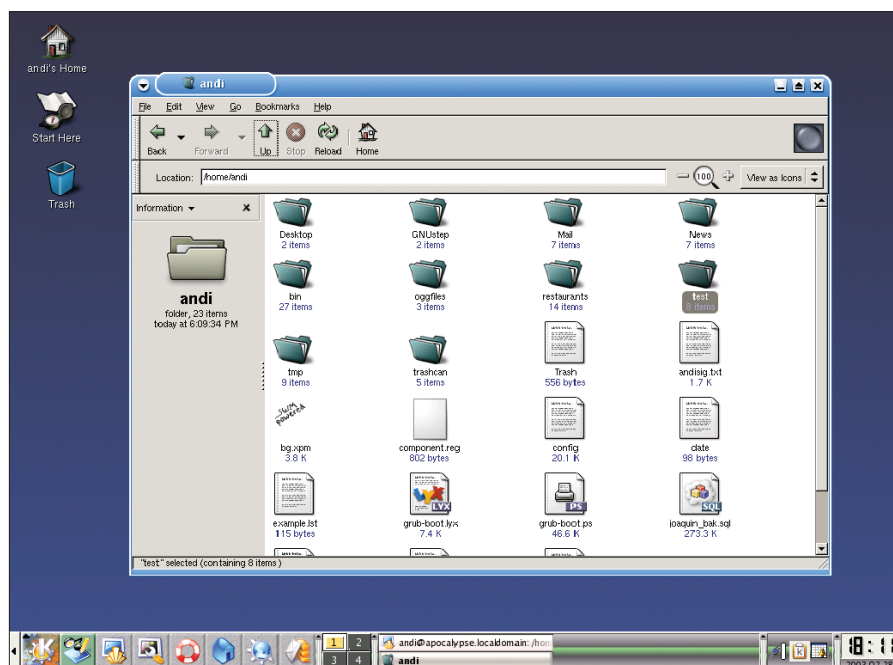
responsible for drawing the desktop, but also provides GNOME 2.2 with a control center; *konqueror* on the other hand, provides the functionality of a standard browser for KDE.

Although this article will be looking into the file manager components of both programs, the browser specific enhancements introduced to *konqueror* are well worth a short mention at this point. One of the new features is so-called tabbed browsing, which allows you to display web pages within a tab of an active window instead of opening a new window. Clicking on one of the tabs allows you to move from one page to another avoiding the usual jumble of windows.

Another point well worth mentioning is the fact that a significant proportion of

the development work put into **Safari** has been incorporated by *konqueror*, and this has led to improvements when displaying web pages that use **Java Script**.

A Question of Taste

Both programs are equally capable of performing traditional file management tasks like creating folders and copying files – which both programs do quickly and intuitively using either menus, shortcuts or drag-and-drop features.

Both programs provide configurable views, using the menu or, in the case of *konqueror*, the taskbar. The sidebar provided by *nautilus* adds a different layer of functionality, not only allowing users the choice between a tree view or info display, but also providing the option of displaying an emblem or notes window. The former is used to assign intuitive icons to files and folders – multiple emblems can be assigned to a single object. The latter is used to add notes to the selected object, which is a function that is both accessible via the sidebar, as well as being found on the *Notes* tab in the drop-down menu for any

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GLOSSARY

Safari: *A browser by Apple who decided to use KDE's HTML Render Engine. Any enhance-ments developed by the Apple programmers make their way back to the KDE team, and finally to Konqueror. The big code merge is planned for KDE 3.2.*

Java Script: *A scripting language commonly encountered in web pages which is used for menu elements and forms. As this code runs on the local browser, it makes sense only to allow trusted pages to execute, to avoid local security holes being exploited.*
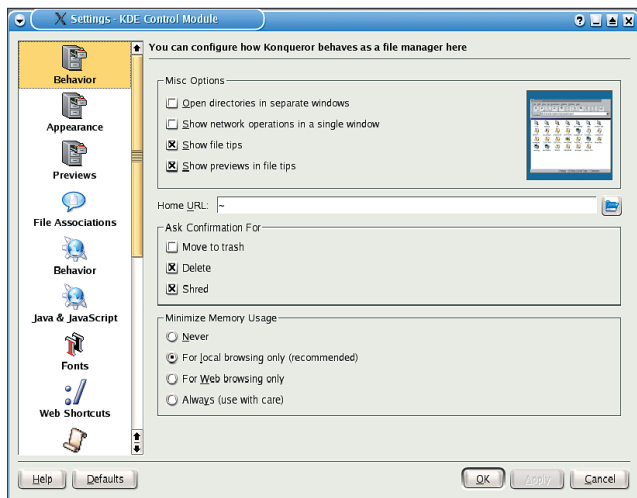
Figure 2: "Konfiguring" Konqueror

file. Both the emblems and your notes are saved as XML files in ~/.nautilus/metafiles.

The lack of a search function is one of *nautilus*' disadvantages with respect to file management. To search for a file users are still required to access an entry in the *Actions* menu of the panel. Although it is now possible to drag the files found by the search into a *nautilus* window, and thus to copy or move files, embedding the search dialog in the file manager would be a far more intuitive approach.

Both applications respect the philosophy of their desktop environments with regard to the appearance of configuration dialog boxes. *konqueror* provides a wide range of configuration options (Figure 2), if you think you are missing an option, you might like to re-check, preferences are easily overlooked due to the sheer number of them available.

Experienced *nautilus* users are in for a change however, with the file manager configuration being modified to more closely reflect GNOME's design philosophy. Dialog boxes are extremely clear-cut and handle only major options, a fact that should allow most users to quickly familiarize themselves with the application (Figure 3).

Multimedia
In our multimedia age, with hard disks discounted to such an extent that you can now afford to to store all those pictures, movies, and tracks online, users can soon lose their way – especially if they have neglected to supply intuitive names to their multimedia assets.

The ability to preview all of the common file types and to launch applications to play multimedia files directly from within *konqueror* and *nautilus* is not a new feature. However, what both had ignored up to now was the so-called metadata supplied with some files, such as **ID3 tags** which are typical for the likes of **Ogg Vorbis** and MP3 files.

As you might expect, the "two desktops, two approaches" again applies. *nautilus* introduces an additional tab, called Picture, Audio or Video depending on the file type, to the properties drop-down. And this is where you will find the metadata missing from previous versions, such as the color depth of a picture, or of the artist and title of an audio track. Pictures, even recent videos, are now displayed as thumbnails instead of normal icons.

The new *Audio View* for folders (Figure 4) is particularly new, and is selected by choosing *View / Audio View*. This menu item is not displayed by default, and this means adding it to the menu for the selected folder first, by selecting *View / Select View / Audio View / Change*. Doing so reveals an information-packed view including a playlist. This was made possible by introducing the GStreamer Multimedia Framework [1] to GNOME 2.2.

As you would expect, *konqueror* follows suit, providing a new thumbnail preview for video files and an extended dialog box for the properties of the multimedia files. The *Meta Info* tab contains additional information on the selected file and allows you to edit it where appropriate. In the case of audio files, this is restricted to editing previously existing tags. If the Ogg or MP3 file does not have any tags, the text boxes are not displayed, meaning that you will still need a third-party program like *easytag* to add a new ID3.

Audio files can be played using the embedded Media Player, which is accessible via the drop-down menu, or simple hover over the track's icon to "pre-listen", the additional advantage being that the tooltip window that then appears allows you to view the metadata for the file. The tooltip window is also available for other file types and automatically displays any metadata available for the selected file (Figure 5).

Action and Information
The metadata *konqueror* allows the user to view is not restricted to multimedia files, instead a whole range of KFile plug-ins have been added to display more-or-less important information. So now, the tooltip window provides useful information on RPM and Debian
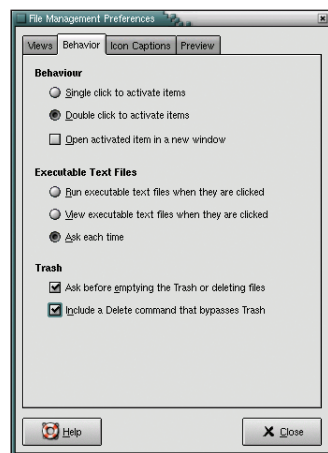

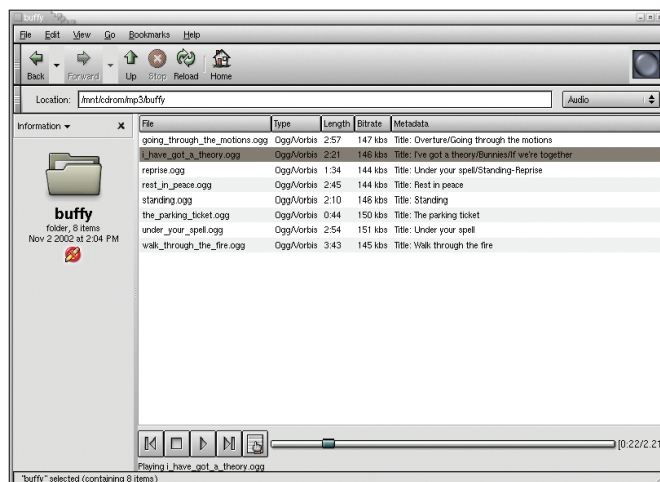**Figure 3: Clear-cut menus with Nautilus**

Figure 4: Nautilus' new Audio View

packages, such as the software versions they contain, and a short description of the packages. In the case of Debian packages, this even works on RPM based distributions without Debian's *dpkg* package manager.

HTML file titles, and a statement on whether the files comprise Java Script code is also available as meta information. Another new feature that allows you to perform searches in metadata is particularly useful and can be accessed via the *Contents* tab in the search window.

Not to be left out, *nautilus* also has new facilities to offer, such as the new drop-down menu plug-ins. These are functions provided by external programs that can be called directly from within *nautilus* depending on the current context.

For example, the drop-down menu for a compressed file may allow you to unpack the file on the sport, or choose a target directory. It is just as easy to create an archive of currently selected files by selecting Archive in the drop-down menu. These facilities are provided by the *fileroller* archiving program. As drop-down menu plug-ins were only introduced with GNOME 2.2, there are not many applications available as plug-ins at present, but you can expect this to change shortly.

Extensible

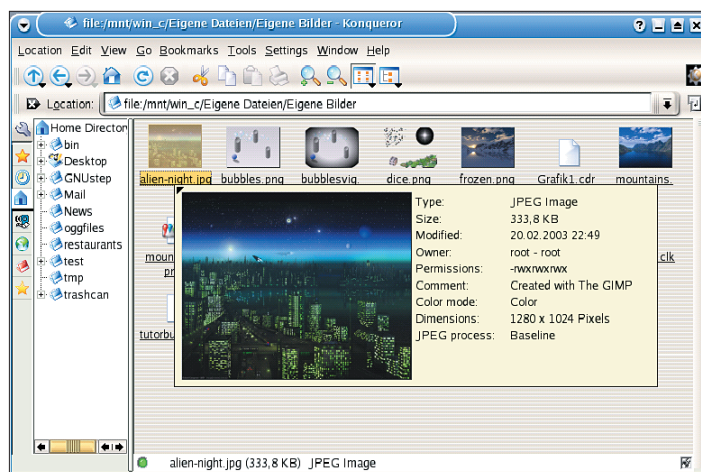The developers have even allowed for users who still want more features

Figure 5: Konqueror's tooltip window shows metadata at a glance
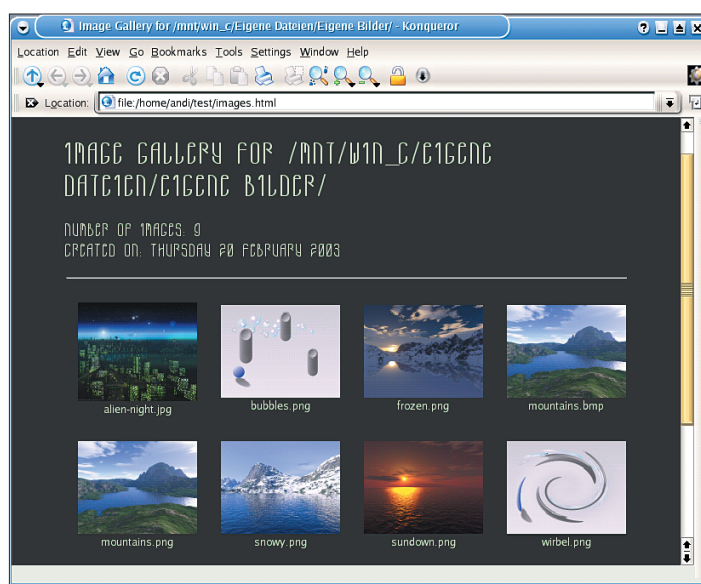

Figure 6: An Image Gallery courtesy of Konqueror

despite the glut that they already have. Konqueror can be extended using plug-ins, which are normally accessible via the *Tools* menu. This allows you to check the syntax of an HTML file via *http://validator.w3.org/check/*, or to create an image gallery for a directory full of image files. Konqueror will then create a directory for thumbnails, and an HTML file with appropriate links. This produces reasonable results without changing the defaults (Figure 6).

If your *Tools* menu is completely empty, you will probably need to install the *kdeaddons* package to provide access to an assortment of plug-ins.

nautilus follows a different approach, using scripts stored in ~/.gnome2/nautilus-scripts to provide extensibility. Fortunately, there are no stipulations on the scripting language; the *File / Scripts* menu allows you to add more or less everything to *nautilus* from simple shell scripts to GUI based Perl or Python programs. Non-programmers out there need not worry though; there are numerous sites on the Web that provide *nautilus* scripts.

[2] is a good place to start; the website not only offers a collection of scripts, but also provides links to other collections and a short guide to scripting, including tips on the environment variables automatically set by Nautilus and how to access them within a script.

And the winner is…

In fact there isn't a clear winner in this case; both *konqueror* and *nautilus* offer the kind of functionality you would expect in a file manager.

Both are stable, reliable and possess a wide range of convenient features. *konqueror* pays more attention to detail, both with regard to functionality and to design – it also has more bells and whistles than *nautilus*, although this may be purely circumstantial to your decision. The decisive factor will probably be the extent to which these applications support the tasks you perform daily.

And the best way to find that out is to try them both yourself. ■

GLOSSARY

Ogg Vorbis: *A free compression format, specifically designed for audio files, that provides better quality than MP3 files would for comparable compression rates. In contrast to the MP3 compression algorithm which was devised by the Fraunhofer Institute the Ogg is licensed under GPL.*

ID3 tag: *In addition to music, compressed audio formats can also store information at the beginning of the file, providing fields for artists and track titles. Players such as xmms evaluate this information and can display it instead of the name of the file which is being played.*

INFO
[1] *http://gstreamer.sourceforge.net/*
[2] *http://g-scripts.sourceforge.net/*