The sys admin's daily grind: Deborphan

DEBIAN ORPHANAGE

Debian fans appreciate the ability to update their systems to a new release without having to reinstall. The Deborphan tool takes care of the victims of the upgrade by searching for orphaned packages on which no other packages depend. **BY CHARLY KÜHNAST**

I must admit, my conscience is troubling me slightly. As far as I can remember, I've never actually reviewed a distribution-specific software tool before today. However, a quick survey of my local LUG revealed that Deborphan is unknown even among long-standing Debian users, so here we go.

Debian systems go through various release changes in the course of their lives. If you check out the directories with the libraries in particular, you can't help noticing that many of them are long overdue for retirement. For some reason, Debian just keeps them – you never know when you might need them.

If you like to keep things tidy, or if you are simply running out of disk space, Deborphan [1] gives you the ability to remove orphaned packages.

The tool, which resides in the normal Debian repository, searches for packages on which no other packages depend. Running *deborphan* without any command-line flags gives you a list of orphaned software.

If you would like to extend the command-line scope, this is how you would do so:

```
deborphan --all-packages
```

This command tells Deborphan not to restrict the search to the *lib* directories and to check out every single package you have installed.

Keep an Orphan

If Deborphan reports an orphaned package that I would like to keep, I can use the aptly named *keep* function to do so. The command line here:

```
deborphan --add-keep
  packagename
```

tells Deborphan to ignore this package in the future.

You can pass in multiple package names at the same time, separating the names with blanks.

Closed Season

To remove a package from the keep list, you just do this:

```
deborphan --del-keep
  packagename
```

If you prefer to avoid the command line, there are two front-ends. One of the front ends is known as the Orphaner, and it gives you neat lists of orphaned packages.

You are then able to select individual packages on the list, or the whole list, and tell Deborphan to remove the packages (see Figure 1).

The other front-end is Editkeep. As the name suggests, EditKeep gives you a list of packages you tagged for keeping (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Remove packages.

Figure 2: Keep packages.

To soothe my conscience (and for those readers who aren't Debian fans), I would like to close with a note to the effect that RPM-based distributions have a similar package called Rpmorphan [2], which is a clone of the Deborphan tool. For more information, or to download the package, visit Freshmeat.net. ∎

THE AUTHOR

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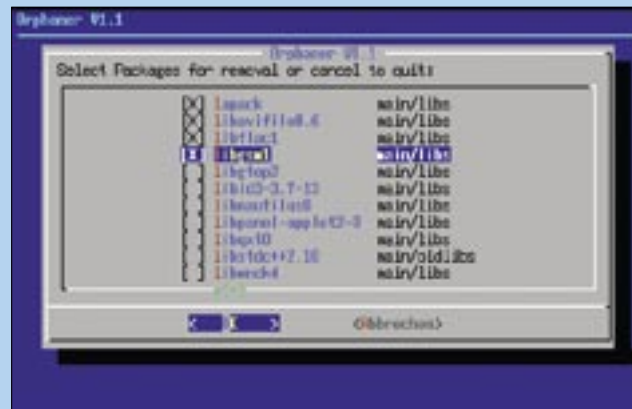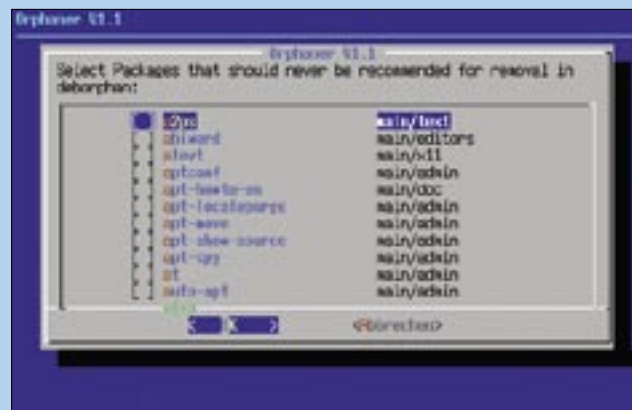
INFO

[1] Deborphan: *http://freshmeat.net/redir/deborphan/1795/url_homepage/deborphan*

[2] Rpmorphan: *http://freshmeat.net/redir/rpmorphanpl/68181/url_homepage/rpmorphan.sourceforge.net*