Kodi 14.0 Helix

It's new beginnings for XBMC, as **Graham Morrison** tests the first version released under its new name.

Kodi is the media player/platform that used to be know as *XBMC*. It's best run on a computer connected to a television where it can manage, serve and play movies, music, photos and more from its full screen mile-wide interface. Through a comprehensive plugin repository, it can orchestrate television recordings, play YouTube videos and enable you to catch up on BBC programmes, and many other services. It's been developed for over 10 years, and this is the second major release of the last 12 months, following on from the last XBMC release in May 2014.

For years, the overall quality of the application has been a shining example of what open source can achieve. The user interface is fast and polished, with the application always making best use of whatever environment it finds itself in. We really don't know how the development team manages to create so many regular and significant updates while maintaining the quality.

From TV to T. Rex

Part of this release is a renaming exercise, as everything from an old installation will be moved over to the new one. That may make reverting to the previous version difficult if you want to keep your settings. We first installed the latest edition of the *TVHeadEnd* plugin to test the new PVR functionality, and we experienced almost no stability problems.

There seems to be a speed increase in the way *Kodi* scans your network for media shares, as well as grabbing the programme guide. In the process of writing the OpenELEC tutorial (see page 84), we've spent quite a bit of time with the latest release,

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The *Kodi* team has had help from Intel to squash a firmware bug that caused random crashes after a period of time.
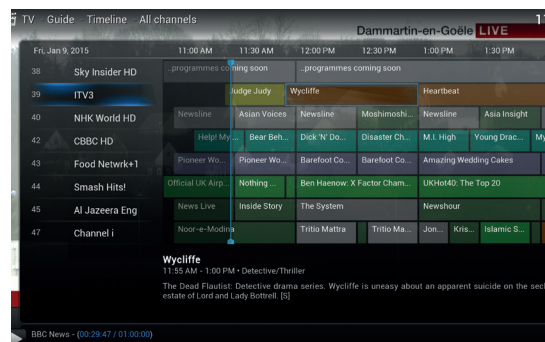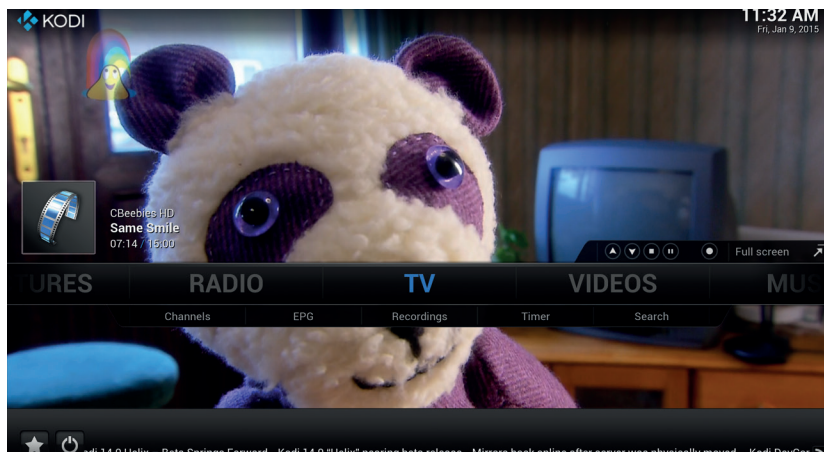
Kodi gives you a clear, intuitive interface from which to choose from the sea of rubbish clogging your telly.

installed on a PC, on a Raspberry Pi, on a quad-core ARM-based platform and a Nexus 5 Android phone. As long as the hardware can take advantage of some form of hardware acceleration, *Kodi* always performs exceptionally well, and we've noticed a significant performance upgrade with version 14, especially on those less powerful platforms. This is likely to be a result of significant library, codec and hardware acceleration upgrades for all kinds of platforms. There's cutting-edge support for the latest *FFmpeg* packages, for example, bringing compatibility with the shiny new H.265 codec, an even more efficient algorithm that promises to halve your file sizes for the same quality.

The only problem is that there's no support for hardware acceleration, which means it was only our PC (and not the smaller mcahines on which we tested we tested *Kodi*) that was able to decode a full HD movie encoded with the new codec. There's also new support for binary codecs, which may enable proprietary media playback at some point. On the plus side, decoding now defaults to being multithreaded. As usual, the more power you throw at *Kodi*, the better it will feel, and the Raspberry Pi in particular needs a lot of patience, especially if you install any of the PVR plugins.

This is one of those strong consolidation releases that shoudn't be underestimated. *Kodi* works brilliantly and looks awesome and this release only strengthens its position. Considering everything that has had to be changed to accommodate the new name, we think it's a huge success. LV

LINUX VOICE VERDICT

An unrivalled media player that begs to be installed on an embedded system underneath your television.

★★★★☆