EndeavourOS vs. Vanilla Arch - A Timesaver for Advanced Users?

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## The Idea

After 15 years in Ubuntu, I’ve been an Arch user for a while now, so when my trusty laptop’s motherboard gave up the ghost a few weeks ago, I went ahead and made a fresh Arch install USB (mine was getting a bit old). While I was at it, I also made an EndeavourOS USB, because I’ve been curious about it. Everything that I knew about Endeavour was that it was essentially Arch with a graphical installer, a few extra utilities thrown in, and pre-themed desktop or window manager choices. The latter is not really a big deal - I have redundant backups of all my dotfiles, so customization time shouldn’t be too bad. But I also remember the time spent installing packages that I use in Arch, and inevitably in the course of the first week or so running into things I’d neglected to install or set up. I sort of wanted to be back up and running as quickly as possible, and a new laptop was on the way. Would EndeavourOS save me some initial setup time vs a Vanilla Arch install? I decided I’d check and see.

## What ArchInstall Script?

So, full disclosure, I have never tried the ArchInstall script, purely because I did all of my installs before the script was a thing. I installed Arch manually, or using the now-discontinued Arch Linux GUI tool. That was a sad loss - while much of the Arch community may sneer at me for using it, I found it to be an excellent option for installing plain old Arch, because for me, the install process is the least interesting thing about using Arch. Many users tout the educational value of manual installs, but mechanical repetition of steps in a Wiki article, or following along with a YouTube video like I did in my first install do not really teach much, in my opinion. I have learned far more from actually using Arch Linux than I ever did installing it. So, these days the idea of a simple install appeals to me. I should really write my own install script eventually, but when ALG was available, it made that unnecessary, and now there is an official install script which I really do need to try eventually. At any rate, I like to tinker, but I also like my existing configuration a lot, so I just wanted to get the new laptop up to speed as quickly as possible, and EndeavourOS seemed to offer that.

## The Dreaded Grub Issue

Not too long ago, Grub pushed out an update which [broke a number of installs](https://endeavouros.com/news/full-transparency-on-the-grub-issue/). I heard about it thanks to the Arch subreddit, which I always check before running an update. By the next day, there was still no mention of the issue on the Arch website (though they did have an (issue tracker)[https://bugs.archlinux.org/task/75701] for the issue), but EndeavourOS had taken the initiative to publish the [easy fix](https://forum.endeavouros.com/t/the-latest-grub-package-update-needs-some-manual-intervention/30689) to their official forums, and within another 24 hours, had placed (this notice)[https://endeavouros.com/news/full-transparency-on-the-grub-issue/] on their front page explaining not only how to fix the issue, but what had caused it, and what was being done to fix it. I was impressed. The Arch team did not acknowledge the issue on [their front page](https://archlinux.org/news/grub-bootloader-upgrade-and-configuration-incompatibilities/) for nearly a week. I love Arch, but I was disappointed in their team’s response to this issue, particularly compared to how well EndeavourOS handled it. This certainly influenced my decision to try EndeavourOS rather than the ArchInstall script.

## The Install

Once the laptop came, the initial install went swimmingly. It’s a pretty straightforward Calamaries installer - if you’ve done one, you know how they work. I was able to choose [i3wm](https://i3wm.org/) for my window manager at the install level, and the online installer meant that I was getting the latest versions of all base packages.

On boot, I was greeted with the EndeavourOS-themed i3 which, though very pretty, needed to be modified for my workflow. The existing configuration makes Endeavour’s default i3wm look a lot like their xfce (and, I presume other desktop environments) interface, with a muted grey bar across the bottom.

## Pre-Installed Apps

Endeavour came pre-installed with:

* NMApplet
* Yay
* Dunst for notifications
* Pipewire
* CUPS
* i3-Blocks
* rofi
* LightDM
* xfce4-terminal
* Thunar

While nice, I use Polybar instead of i3-blocks, Alacritty rather than xfce4-terminal, and PCManFM instead of Thunar. These are all fine choices, they just don’t match my dotfiles.

With a little work I was able to install my preferred tools and fonts, set up [Syncthing](https://syncthing.net/) to synchronize my dotfiles (among other shared files), and restarted i4 with my usual setup.

It was nice to have yay pre-installed, as this is my preference for an AUR helper. This was surprising, since I think most users prefer paru these days.

## “Just Works”

Everything in my EOS install “just worked” - notably my sound card. Every Arch install I have ever done except for one has had no sound at the outset, and required installing firmware packages and mucking about in alsamixer/pavucontrol/etc. to get things working. I was absolutely expecting the same here - but my sound just worked. Is it down to pipewire? I can’t say for sure, because pipewire alone did not fix my other machines’ sound issues in the past. Still, I was pretty stoked to have that done.

## The EOS Utilities

EndeavourOS comes with a few unique utilities, which can be accessed via the Welcome screen. It has handy tools to update mirrors, perform a system upgrade, browse packages, and a few other things. Other users may like these tools - for me, I am far too used to opening a terminal and typing pacman commands, so I don’t see myself using these much. For newer users, however, this is a nice addition.

## The Verdict - Worth It?

Once it’s installed and configured, EndeavourOS is basically an Arch Linux install with a different default ASCII in Neofetch (or pfetch, if you’re me). The major reason to choose it rather than vanilla Arch is for easy install and setup. Did it succeed in this regard?

Mostly yes. I’m admittedly using it as a glorified replacement for ALG, but the experience was smooth enough and my impressions of the EOS team are positive enough that I’d recommend it to other users, for sure.

The install was certainly painless, which is what I wanted. The resulting system, even with pre-installed tools, my apps installed, and my configs running, was nice and lean, idling at about 600MB of ram used - about the same as my older Arch system, and in fact a little less, probably due to being a fresh install.

The EOS utilities are probably lost on me, and while I haven’t removed them yet, Thunar, xfce4-terminal, and i3-blocks are packages I’m not going to need. There may be more things i don’t need. I do typically use LightDM, but if you’re a fan of sddm, or li, or good old fashioned startx, this may be an annoyance.

At the end of the day, after having to replace so many packages with my own preferences, I’m not sure that Endeavour saved me that much setup time post-install. A little, for sure, but maybe not a ton. The install certainly saved time (and allowed me to click “install” and walk away, which was nice as I installed on a busy day), but I don’t know how the EOS online install, which was a bit slower than an offline install for obvious reasons, would compare to the ArchInstall script, plus my own packages. I may look into it eventually.

For now, I’m glad that I installed it, and I’ll be honest - this is probably not my last EOS install. While it didn’t save me a ton of time vs an Arch install, I do love that it’s still essentially a very barebones distro at its core, easy to install, and seems to have strong hardware support (my onboard sound thanks you). I also love the EOS community, and I love that the devs seem to be transparent and proactive about informing their users of news, updates, and potential issues. The Arch community is great, too, don’t get me wrong - but considering I’m already expecting some smug posts shaming me for even wanting an easy graphical install, clearly the Arch community is not without its problems.

I’ll be unsing EOS for a while yet, and I’m curious about looking into a few other Arch spins like Archcraft. If I do, perhaps I’ll write about it.

Thanks for reading!