

# The Open Pitt



What's cooking in Linux and Open Source in Western Pennsylvania

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## Book Review: *The Artist's Guide to GIMP Effects* by Patrick Wagstrom

Author: Michael J. Hammel  
Publisher: No Starch Press  
ISBN: 1-59327-121-2  
\$44.95, 348 pages, 2007

At some point, nearly every Linux user has come across the need to edit a graphic, take a screenshot, or scan in a picture. If you're like most people, you fire up one of the staples of the Linux desktop—the GNU Image Manipulation Program, more commonly known as the GIMP. While the GIMP is extremely powerful, it's also known for its rather non-intuitive interface and for having a steep learning curve. I've often heard new users lament their inability to draw a straight line in the program or the difficulty in reproducing easy effects from Adobe Photoshop. Most GIMP experts will con-

tend that's just because GIMP is different, not inferior—unfortunately, that difference usually means there is a profound lack of documentation too. While there are hundreds of free Photoshop tutorials online, there exist comparatively few for the GIMP.

*The Artist's Guide to GIMP Effects* aims to fill this gap by providing a set of basic techniques and principles to benefit any novice GIMP user, and even provide some assistance to long-time users. The book is structured into six different sections: fundamental techniques, photographic effects, web design, advertising and special effects, type effects, and user interface design. Each section walks through several tutorials on the topic, with plenty of full-color screenshots to guide you through the process.

For a new user, the fundamental techniques section at the beginning of the book is one of the most concise introductions to GIMP I've seen. Starting out with a basic tour of the user interface, by the end of the chapter you'll be creating layers, applying effects, and doing simple image cleanup with ease. Hammel goes beyond the standard content of most tutorials and covers how to interact and touch up scanned images through the XSane GIMP plugin—a workflow that has become nearly trivial with modern distributions, yet few Linux users seem to use.

The other sections of the book vary significantly in quality and practicality. The second on photographic effects is quite good, covering how to restore photos, add reflections, and transpose colors in the image, but then closes with how to add an unrealistic lightning effect to a photo. Many of the tutorials in the web design section reminded me of early GIMP tutorials from 1997, discussing things such as gel buttons, metallic buttons, and waving flags.

See **GIMP**, p. 2

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## December/January/March Roundup

*Dec. 8 General User Meeting:* **Neal Sofge** of **RAND Corporation** talked about Bricolage, a Perl-based web content management system. He explained its strengths such as versioning, multiple content workflows, and several supported templating systems. Also covered was the interface and publishing the rendered pages to the production web site. Using the deployment of RAND's new online bookstore as an example, he described how a complex, hand-maintained site was converted over to Bricolage within budget and with modest hardware requirements.

*Jan. 12 General User Meeting:* The attributes of the Gentoo system were covered by **Ted Rodgers**. Often thought of as a Linux distribution, it is actually a meta-distribution that can

be used to build Linux or BSD systems. He went into the details of *portage*, the heart of Gentoo, and the massive flexibility it offers to customize your system. Ted also discussed typical uses and installation methods.

*Mar. 29 General User Meeting:* **Brian Seklecki** of **Collaborative Fusion** tackled two topics: OpenLDAP and two-factor authentication. After covering some of the uses of LDAP such as centralized identification and authentication of users and public-key management, he described the layout of an LDAP database. This was followed by the details of setting up OpenLDAP as a server and getting clients to use it for authentication. Brian finished with a discussion of two-factor authentication methods like grid cards and electronic tokens.

### Coming Events

**Apr. 23:** Roundtable Discussion, Topic: What Do You Get for Free? 7PM to 9PM, John Harvard's Brew House, Wilkins Township (*RSVP to bethlyneicher@gmail.com required*)

**May 18:** 7th Annual WPLUG Open Source Picnic. 1PM to 6PM, Snyder Park, Whitehall

*The public is welcome at all events*

**GIMP**, from p. 1

If you'd like your web page to look like it was designed before the first dot-com crash, these may be useful, but in general the effects look canned and unclean. Most of the font effects suffered from similar issues of making the output look very dated, or worse, unreadable. There may be cases when a design calls for a brushed metal section of text, but odds are yours doesn't need it.

That's not to say these effects aren't of any value, it's just that applying them properly without making an image look poor can be very difficult. Understanding *how* to apply the effects is one part of the problem, but understanding *when* and *where* to apply them is just as important, if not more so. I recommend reading *Universal Principles of Design* by William Lidwell, et al. for a quick introduction to some of the finer points of design. I tend to fear books like Hammel's ending up in the hands of my grandmother because of the nagging suspicion I'll receive a custom-designed Christmas card with Grandma flying a P-51 Mustang inches above a motion-blurred landscape with lightning in the background and "Merry Christmas" written in frosty text at the bottom.

As usual, No Starch Press has done a wonderful job putting together a high-quality book. The lay-flat binding of the book lets it sit open next to

you while going through the tutorials. The extra-wide format also helps make the tutorials much easier to follow. While the book is designed for GIMP 2.2, and even has some comments on changes for the new GIMP 2.4, my eyes were continually distracted by the widgets and window theme in use for the screenshots. When the Crux theme first came out with the Sawfish window manager back in 1999 it was good, but now the heavy use of gradients and high contrast of certain elements makes it a poor choice for screenshots. The use of a more modern and clean theme might have led to cleaner pictures and less distraction for the reader. Of course, like I said, many of the design effects remind me of the late 90s, so it's only appropriate that the screenshots follow the same motif.

Overall, this is one of the better practical guides to the GIMP that I've seen. If you really want a printed book tutorial, this is a good one to pick up. If you already have a basic level of knowledge of GIMP and some background with Photoshop, you can probably just as easily browse [del.icio.us](http://del.icio.us) or [digg](http://digg.com) to find links to excellent Photoshop tutorials that you can translate to function with the GIMP.

*Patrick Wagstrom is a Ph.D. candidate at Carnegie Mellon University researching communication and collaboration in Open Source development. He has been using Linux since 1994.*

**From the Editor: The Open Pitt Needs You!**

As you may have noticed, several months have passed between issues of *The Open Pitt*. Much of the fault for this can be rightly laid at my feet, as work and other responsibilities have pulled my attention away recently.

But we are also suffering from a shortage of articles, and that's where you can help.

Have you tried out a new distribution recently? Maybe installed a hot new web application? How is your company or organization using Free and Open Source software? Have you attended an interesting conference or

similar event lately?

All these subjects and more are valid topics for articles. It would be great if there's a local angle, but pretty much anything Linux or Open Source related is fair game.

Many people worry about their writing abilities—have no fear, we're more than happy to help you massage your text into a polished article. All you need is a subject and the enthusiasm to talk about it.

You can e-mail [top@wplug.org](mailto:top@wplug.org) to reach the editor. I look forward to hearing from you!

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<http://www.wplug.org/top/>

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*What is Linux?*

Linux is a *kernel*, the core of a computer operating system, created by Linus Torvalds. It is typically packaged as a *distribution*, which includes the extra programs necessary to make a computer functional and useful. Since 1991, it has grown from a one-man project which ran on one computer to one with thousands of contributors running on everything from personal organizers to million-dollar supercomputers.

*What are Open Source and Free Software?*

Open Source and Free Software provide you, the user, with the opportunity to see the source code of the programs you use. You are free to use it, share it with others, and even make changes to it if you wish. While the Free Software and Open Source communities differ in their philosophical approach, in practical terms they share nearly identical goals. Learn more at <http://www.opensource.org/> and <http://www.gnu.org/>.

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**Open Source Picnic**

WPLUG's 7th annual Open Source Picnic will be held on Sunday, May 18. As in recent years, we will be at Snyder Park in Whitehall (in the South Hills).

We call it that because just like Open Source software, it is fueled by the contributions of those involved. Please go to the WPLUG wiki <http://linode.wplug.org/> and find the link under "Upcoming Meetings" to RSVP if you plan on coming. While you're there, why not sign up to bring food, supplies, or organize an activity?

Snyder Park features a covered pavilion, playground, basketball court, and baseball field. Count on bringing the whole family for an afternoon of friends and fun!

Complete details and directions can be found on the wiki page. See you there!