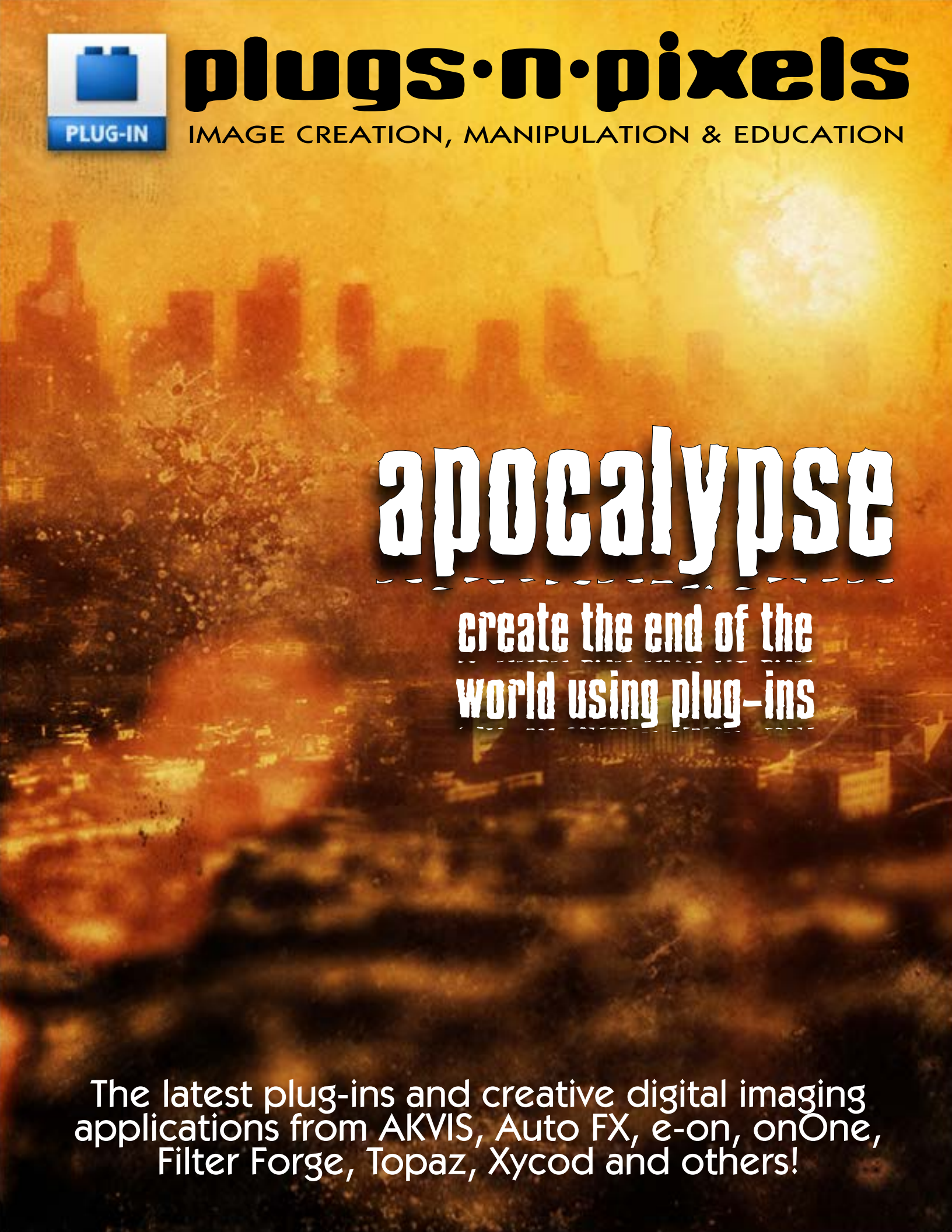
PLUG-IN
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IMAGE CREATION, MANIPULATION & EDUCATION
apocalypse
create the end of the world using plug-ins
The latest plug-ins and creative digital imaging applications from AKVIS, Auto FX, e-on, onOne, Filter Forge, Topaz, Xycod and others!

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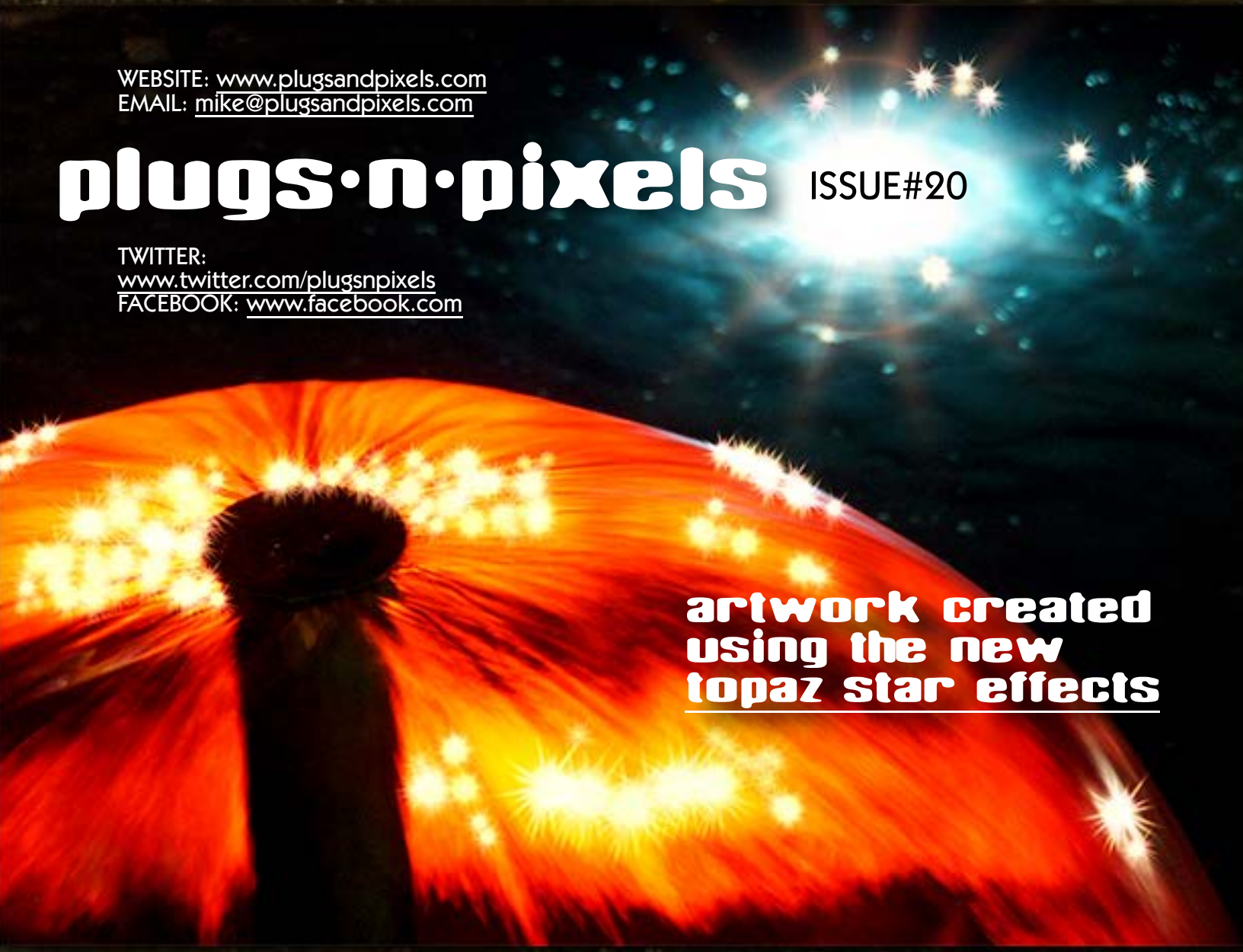

artwork created using the new topaz star effects

introduction

In this issue of Plugs 'N Pixels we will explore how to create a very dramatic piece of Photoshop artwork out of a bland touristy scenic using various plug-ins in combination with each other. You can then use this "recipe" or variations of the simple steps on any number of images you might otherwise reject as unworthy for display.

Of course there is the latest news in digital imaging software (both plug-ins and standalone packages), covering everything from straightforward post-processing in Photoshop or in the apps themselves to creating 3D objects and photorealistic terrains.

Enjoy experimenting with the possibilities!

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apocalypse

create the end of the world using plug-ins

Since Hollywood is the place where action, adventure and drama movies are made, it only seems fitting that we should create a photographic illustration showing LA on the "Day After" The Big One (earthquake), or The Bomb. We'll take a straightforward hazy and distant photo of downtown Los Angeles and turn it into a vision of the post-apocalyptic end of society as we know it. It's not hard at all, and you can use this same "recipe" on many other of your scenic images.

Starting with only a generic touristy snapshot of downtown Los Angeles as seen from the Griffith Observatory, we shall proceed to bring on the end of the world using a handful of our favorite plug-ins...

Continued >

apocalypse

Step 1: Choose & color-correct your image

When I begin my creative Photoshop projects I like to start with a color-corrected base image, such as this long-lens shot I took from Griffith Observatory looking south toward downtown Los Angeles (yes, that is the infamous smog blanket…).

The easiest way to make this color adjustment is to use the iCorrect EditLab Pro plug-in. You launch the plug-in from Photoshop and literally make one click on a neutral area in the image, and the correction is made! Of course you can make further adjustments, but often the first result is a big improvement.

It surprised me how much potential this image had once several additional affects were applied!

Step 2: The beginning of The End

With the corrected image open, I accessed the Topaz Adjust 5 plug-in and experimented with different image-enhancing effects presets until I settled on Classic Collection>Low Key II. From there I adjusted the Adaptive Exposure sliders until I got the best results, with enhanced image detail and diffusion at the same time. We can stop right here; this is not bad! At this point we have kind of a retro-1940's look, but I want things to get much worse for the City Of Angels… As I proceeded, I duplicated each effect layer for safety, and eventually to allow the use of layer effects.

Step 3: Adding foreboding colorization

My photo has a bland sky that lacks clouds (natural ones, anyway); this is very common in scenic/travel photos. So I needed something of interest to liven up that area.

Using Topaz Lens Effects, I selected the Filter – Dual Tone>Warm to Cool preset and added a graduated yellowish tint with a soft transition at its bottom. (I wonder if anyone from LA would even notice the odd color hanging over downtown?)

Continued >

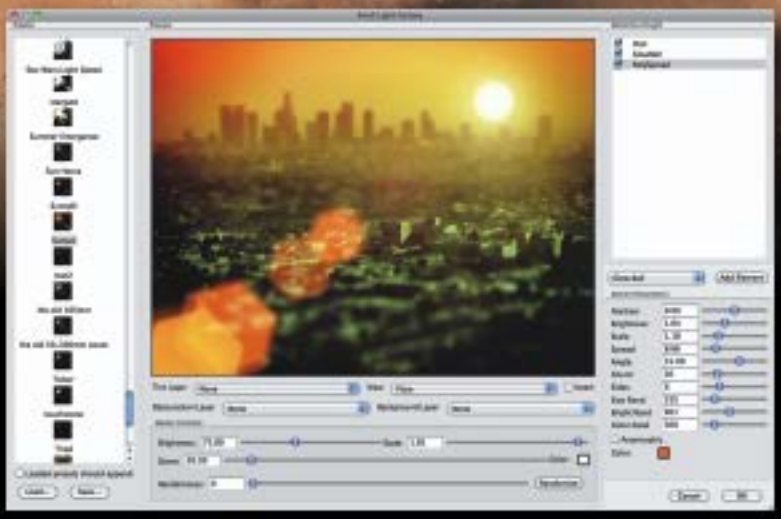
Step 4: Increasing the perception of distance

In order to increase the perception of depth and distance from the point where the photo was taken, I returned to Topaz Lens Effects and added mirror lens-type bokeh to the foreground using the Camera>Tilt & Shift preset. As with all other effects in this plug-in, the amount and positioning of the focus effect are completely customizable.

Step 5: Adding grittiness

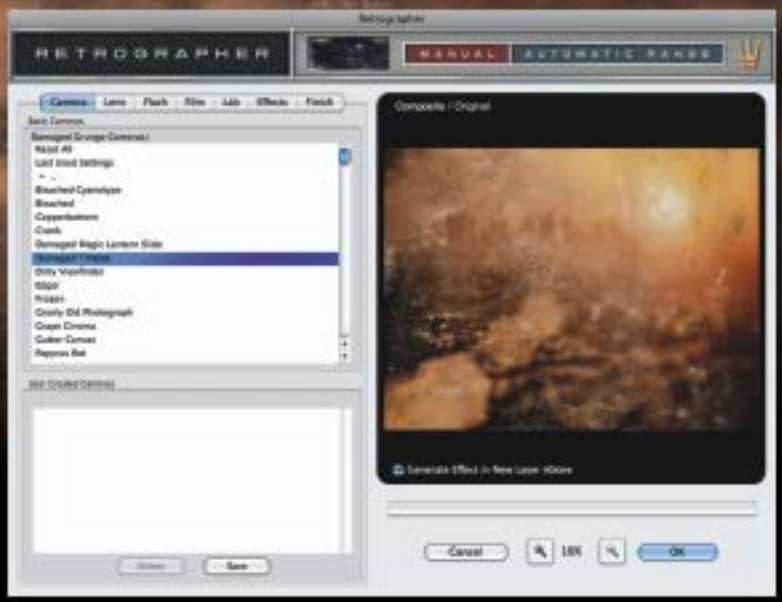
Our next-to-last application of Topaz Lens Effects involves adding a simulation of film grain to the entire image to ramp up the "grunge" factor. After all, the End Of The World won't be smooth and clean!

Continued >



Step 7: Adding a depressing sunset

Once the sun goes down, darkness will fill what remains of the city. For the surviving inhabitants, nothing is more frightening than seeing the last fading rays of the setting sun, knowing what is about to happen. In my original photo, the actual setting sun was off to the right, out of the frame, and didn't look like anything more than glare in the smog anyway. So I added my own digital sunset using the Knoll Light Factory "Sunset" preset (you will probably recognize KLF from various TV commercials, reality shows and movies). Up until this point, all preceding layers are at 100% opacity (hiding the previous layers) with no blending. This layer will be set at 50% in the finished illustration (to blend in better with the smog in the layer below it) and because the last step's effect makes the sun too bright and cheery; that's not what we're after.



Step 8: The decay sets in

No end of the world scenario is complete without grunge effects! So with the sunset layer selected, I applied Mister Retro's Retrographer (Damaged Grunge>Damaged Tintype preset) and told it to create this extremely realistic aged photographic effect in a new layer above the sunset. I then changed the blending mode of this last layer to Hard Light and reduced it to 80% opacity. This kept the effect from adding too much contrast, because it is possible to have too much doom and gloom, believe it or not.

Step 9: Bring the end of the world to other images

Consider these steps a "recipe" that you can use on many other types of images. For example, for the photo of the Hollywood sign (at the beginning of this tutorial), I followed the same recipe as above (minus the Knoll Light Factory treatment), and got a nice vintage-looking view. If it weren't for the TV towers, it might actually fool people!•

topaz b·w effects

www.plugsandpixels.com/bweffects.html

Save 15%

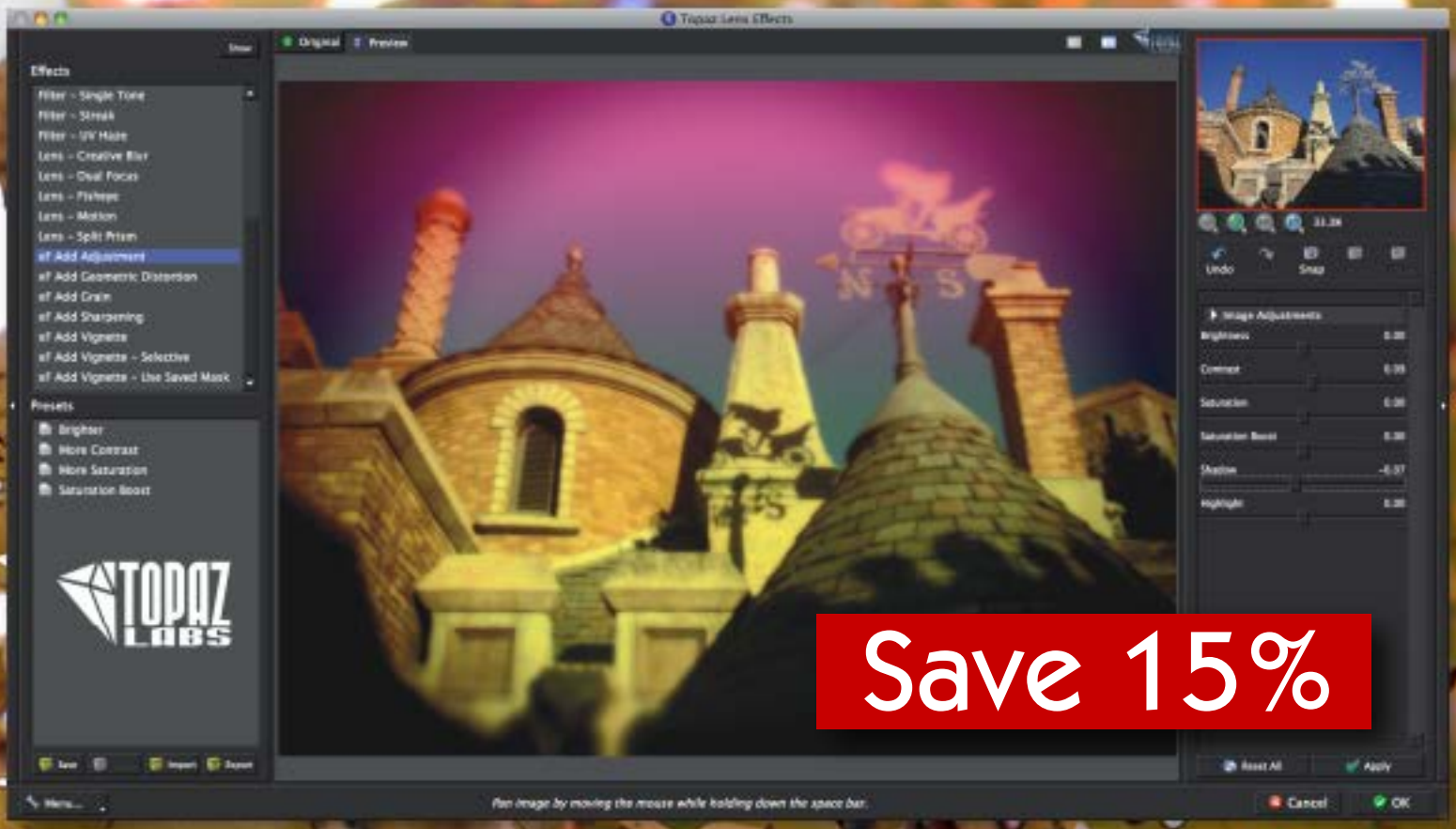
The new Topaz B&W Effects speeds the process of adding vintage effects to your images by presenting you with over 100 presets emulating historical, traditional and stylized looks, organized among seven effects collections (Traditional, Toned, Stylized, Cyanotype, Albumen, Van Dyke Brown and Opalotype). To get started, it's just as simple as choosing a collection and running your mouse vertically down the effects list (and watching the small preview window at the top change to reflect each potential result). The larger preview of your image in the center of the plug-in's window will show what it is doing (view it either full or split-screen to compare before-and-after results).

More advanced users will want to customize each preset's built-in settings. On the right of the interface you will find four areas in which to do this: First, Conversion offers controls under subsets such as Basic Exposure, Adaptive Exposure (for dynamic detail, contrast and tone, incorporating technology from Topaz' popular Adjust plug-in), plus color and curve tools. Next, under Creative Effects you can apply Topaz' Simplify plug-in technology, add diffusion, posterize the image or even add camera shake to increase the authenticity of the retro look.

Under Local Adjustments you can use the edge-aware selective brush to manually control the strength of dodge, burn, color, detail and smoothing treatments. Finally, the Finishing Touches button offers several additional effects under the categories of Sllver and Paper Tone, Quad Tone, Film Grain, Border, Edge Exposure, Vignette and Transparency.

topaz lens effects

www.plugsandpixels.com/lenseffects.html



Save 15%

Hot on the heels of its popular B&W Effects, Topaz has continued with the same redesigned interface and come up with Lens Effects. There are other plug-ins that accomplish what you would expect in the bokeh adjustment department, but Lens Effects offers quite a lot more.

If you're interested in adjusting the focus effects in your image, Lens Effects will do that. Working off of the included customizable Effects visible on the left side of the screenshot above, you can add Bokeh-specific effects such as Center Focus (exactly what you would expect: a clear center surrounded by soft focus), plus SLR Lens and Selective (depth maps created for the entire image which you can customize). Camera-specific effects are Pinhole (to simulate primitive pinhole cameras) and Tilt & Shift (to simulate the film and lens plane movements of view cameras). If that were all Lens Effects could do, you'd be completely happy and able to make all kinds of focus modifications to your photos.

A large number of filter effect presets are also included, since color and other filters were a big part of traditional film photography. These presets are Diffusion, Dual Tone, Fog, Graduated Color, Graduated Neutral Density, Polarization, Reflector, Single Tone, Streak, UV Haze and Warmth. Again, each of these Effects is completely customizable (plus each comes with several subset Presets to choose from).

MISTER RETRO

GENUINE QUALITY

Mister Retro is dedicated to reproducing the charming and quirky vintage processes, styles and techniques of the past from within the modern framework of Photoshop (and other compatible image editors). Retrographer is one of those plug-ins that is actually fun and creatively inspiring to use.

Upon launching it from within Photoshop, you are presented with an interface that is a complete digital studio for the application and control of a wide number of cool retro effects. As you move along from tab to tab you will discover a huge number of combinations of effects and treatments and I would be very surprised if you don't end up with multiple effective and usable variations of your original image, as I did with the ferris wheel photo.

www.plugsandpixels.com/retrographer.html

onOne Software
Focused On Photography®

The onOne Perfect Photo Suite 6 offers solutions for all of your post-processing needs, whether you're a portrait or wedding photographer or perhaps serve the senior portrait or fine-art markets

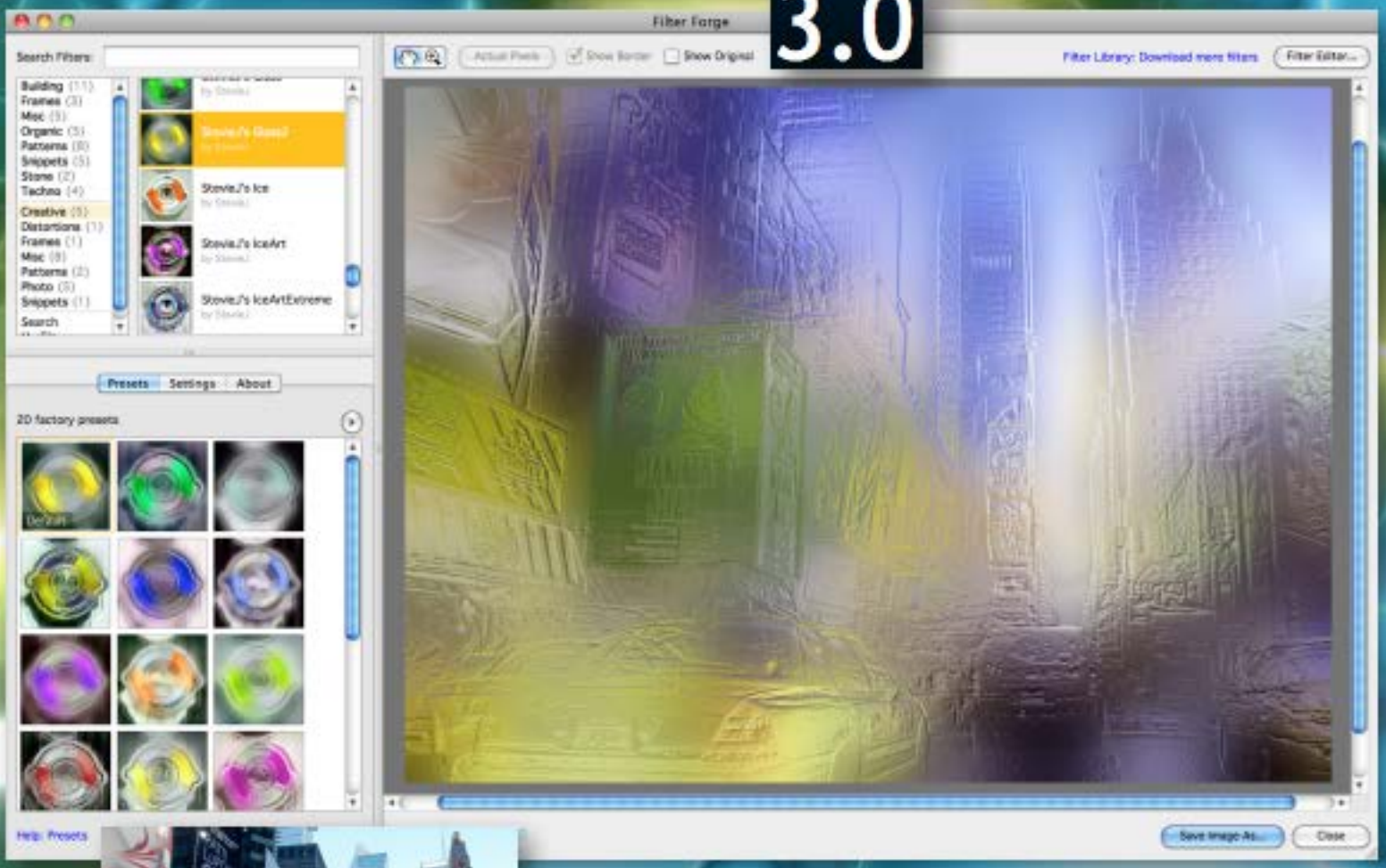
Perfect Photo Suite 6

The new onOne Perfect Photo Suite 6.1 handles all of your post-processing needs from upscaling smaller images for use at higher resolutions to masking out a subject from a busy background, from enhancing portraits through softening and blemish removal to adding any of over 300 creative effects (such as glow, borders, textures, vintage and colorization) to any image, from adding focus (bokeh) depth to flat scenes to finishing an image with any of hundreds of frames and edges. Not to mention working outside of Photoshop altogether or extending Lightroom's capability with layer effects!

The screenshot above shows Perfect Effects in action, with multiple editable effects added to the image. Choosing an effects from the preset list (complete with preview) could not be easier. The image at right was created with a combination of Perfect Photo Suite 6 plug-ins, including Perfect Effects, FocalPoint and PhotoFrame.

A 10% discount off the Suite or any individual plug-in from onOne is available through Plugs 'N Pixels (see URL above).

FILTER FORGE 3.0



www.plugsandpixels.com/filterforge.html

Version 3 of Filter Forge takes the application/plug-in to a whole new level. In addition to the existing filter editor, HDRI lighting, photorealistic lighting options, free transformations, scripting and non-seamless filters (etc.!), users can now make use of multiple source images simultaneously and enjoy progressive previews for better speed when auditioning effects. You can change the default preview image to any one of six others, adjust the interface as desired to suit your working preferences, swipe between the original and treated images, draw shapes with a Bezier Curve component and make use of the new Edge Detector.

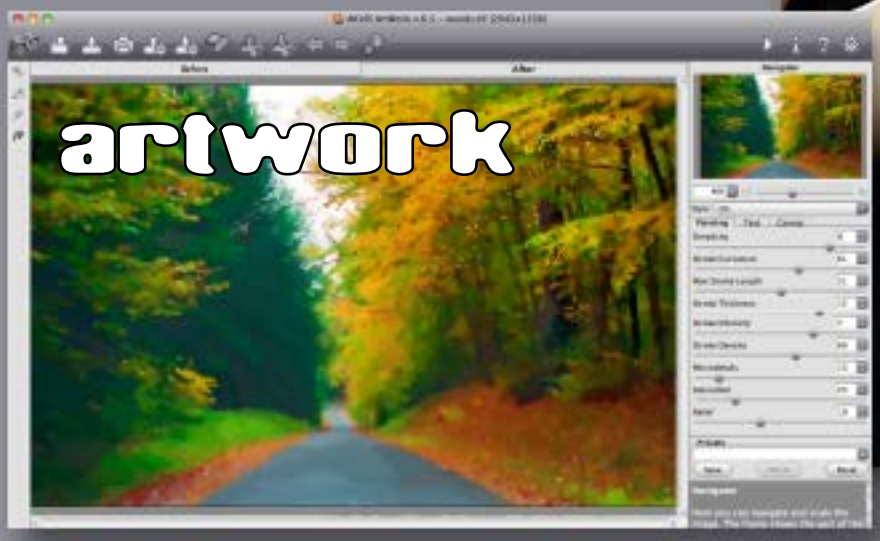
As illustrated on this page, Filter Forge can be used is two totally different ways: Apply any of over 8800 filters to your image like a super plug-in (as shown above), or create abstract backgrounds and textures for reuse in 3D work, for web pages and other uses.

AKVIS offers a total of 17 plug-ins (16 are also available as standalone apps), three of which, Enhancer, MakeUp and ArtWork are featured here. These plug-ins and apps are offered individually or in various bundles (at additional savings).

The AKVIS collection enables you to cover a wide range of image correction and enhancement tasks. For instance, you can use Enhancer to correct tonal values, Noise Buster to reduce both luminance and color noise, MakeUp to add smoothness and Artwork to emulate Oil, Watercolor, Ink and other techniques.

Colorize your photos, improve sharpness, add lighting effects, and for something completely unique and wild, check out Decorator!

See the link (below right) for more details.



www.plugsandpixels.com/akvissuite.html

Xycod POSTWORKSHOP 3

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postworkshop.html

Xycod's PostworkShop 3 is now available! PostworkShop is perhaps the easiest way to turn your photos into works of art of various styles, in addition to adding photographic effects.

PostworkShop makes it simple to choose and apply ready-made presets and styles or to create your own. The screenshot at right shows the Simple layout option with a portion of the Painting presets visible along the top (the "Brown Water Sketch" style is selected and applied to the portrait). Note the many adjustments available for customizing the style as well as pre-processing, masking and post-processing the source image and its final results.

JixiPix Software

The folks at JixiPix have created a large collection of very effective artistic apps for Mac desktop and iOS users.

These apps range from providing basic black-and-white conversion, pencil sketches, hand-tinting, watercolor, India ink and oil treatments as well as romantic dreaminess, all the way to HDR, faux snow and rain and even grunge! Not to mention my personal favorite, vintage aged photographic effects. Oh, and near-infrared too!

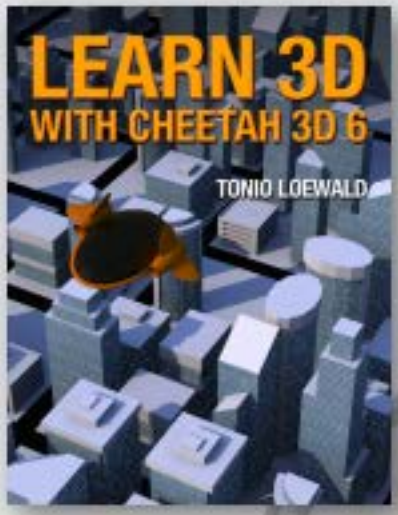
The screenshots below show examples of two of the apps, Simply HDR and Kyoobik Photo (for adding geometric grids of various shapes for something totally unique). At right is the result of yet another app, Moku Hanga, which simulates the Japanese method of wood-block printing (it's another of my top picks).

The apps are extremely easy to use (note the included presets which can be edited) and shockingly inexpensive.

www.plugsandpixels.com/jixipix.html

Cheetah3D
Model. Render. Animate.

Version 6 is out!



www.plugsandpixels.com
cheetah3d.html

http://plugsandpixels.com/
learnc3d.html

Artwork: Frank Beckmann

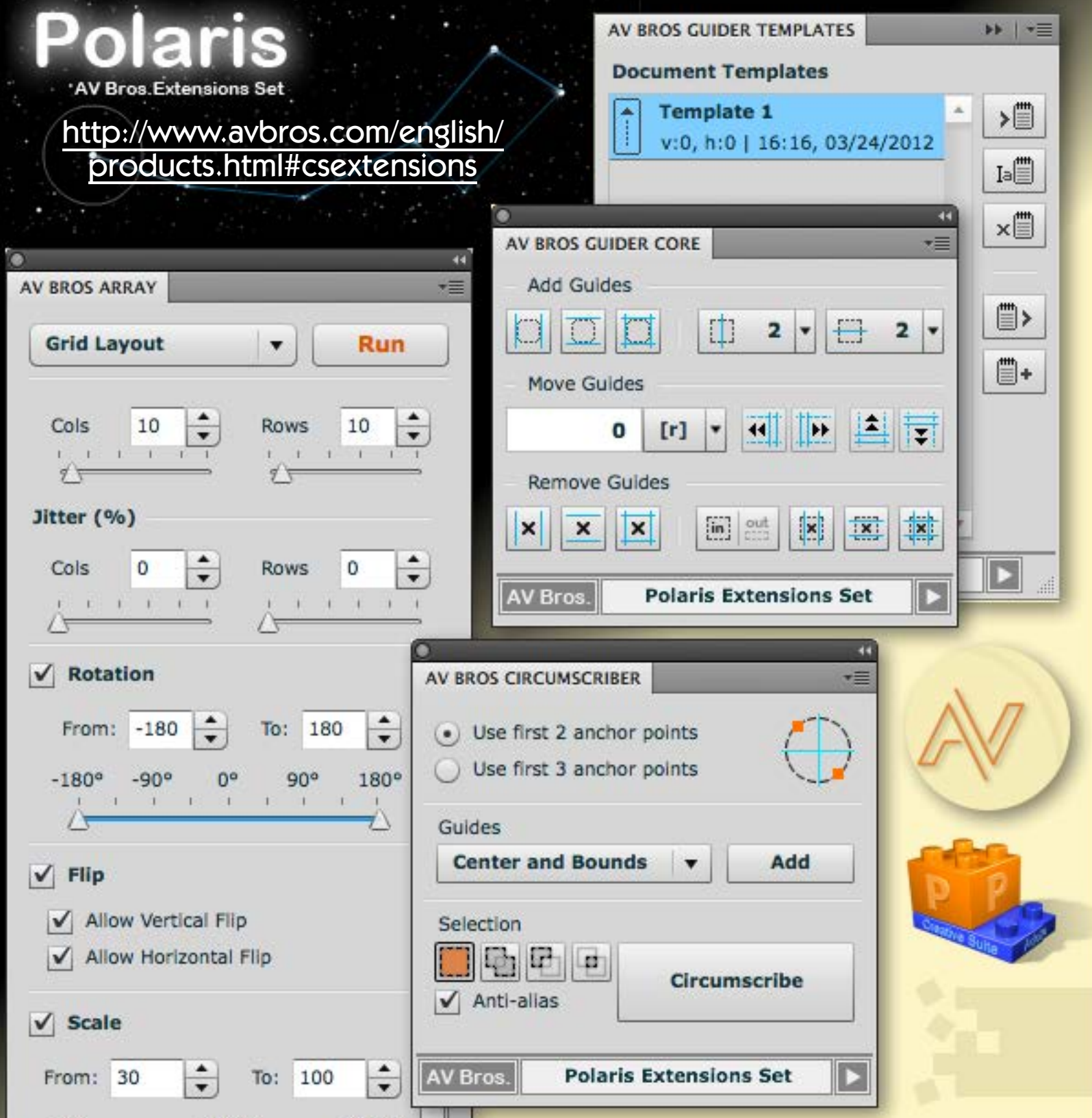
Cheetah3D 6, the latest version of a favorite modeling, animation and rendering app among Mac 3D artists, is now available! Version 6 builds upon the already impressive feature set of version 5 and is positioned to offer even more functionality in subsequent point updates including improved rigging and character animation, modeling, rendering (better interior lightning, photon mapping, light portals, better irradiance caching, higher render resolution, sub-polygon displacement mapping and motion blur), UV mapping and various UI adjustments.

The Cheetah3D user community is very active on the official forum, and one member has even written a downloadable book ("Learn 3D With Cheetah 3D 6"). See above for cover art and links for more information.

Polaris

AV Bros.Extensions Set

http://www.avbros.com/english/products.html#csextensions

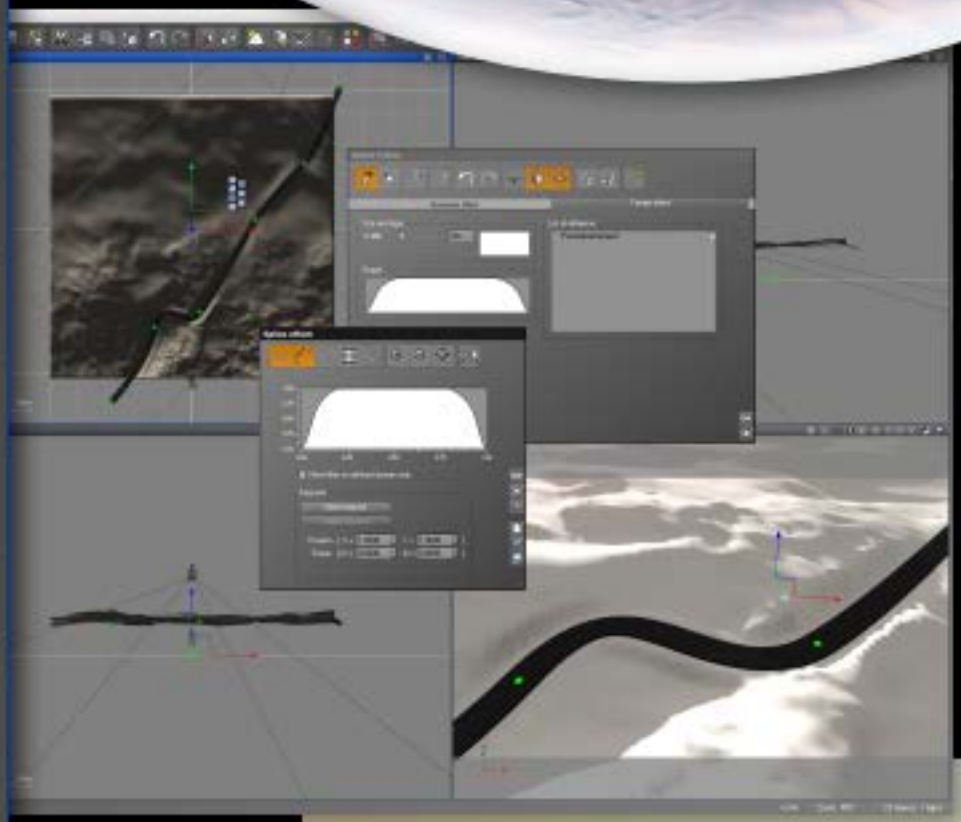


AV Bros. (developers of the popular Page Curl Pro and Puzzle Pro plug-ins) have now tackled the automation of redundant tasks in Photoshop through its new Polaris 1.1 extension set.

This set of four extensions includes Guider Core (for adding, moving and removing guides); Guider Template (for storing a practically unlimited number of layouts of guides in your Photoshop document); Array (for distributing a desired number of the layer(s) copies either randomly or in grid order, with or without transformation) and Circumscriber (for setting two or three points and then circumscribing a circle around them as a selection and adding bounding/center guides).

e-on software

beyond inspiration



The evolution of one of the top terrain-modeling apps continues with version 10 of e-on Software's Vue Infinite. Perhaps the most significant feature is the new Splines tool, which can be described as a pen tool for terrains!

The roadway pictured here was created by simply drawing a path onto the scene and adjusting its parameters until the road became part of the scene.

Ecosystems can be populated along the splines for even more realistic scenes.

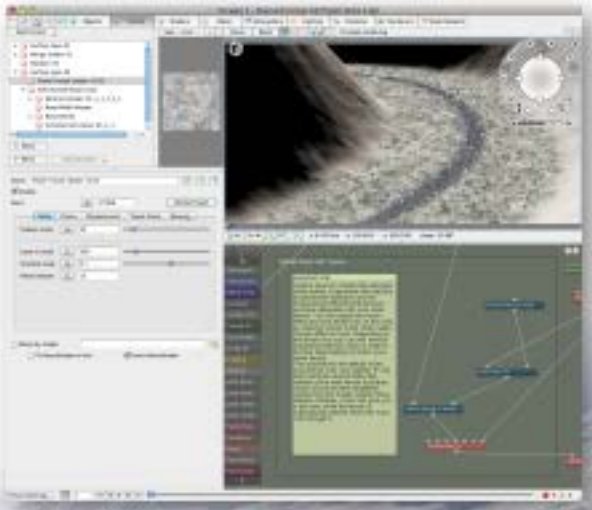
Other improvements to Vue in this version apply to the creation of rocks, water and terrains themselves. See the link below for a full list of new features.

Vue

Infinite R10

www.plugsandpixels.com/vue.html

NEW WORLD DIGITAL ART



The folks at New World Digital Art continue their quest to make using Planetside Software's Terragen 2 a much easier endeavor through their many Object and Preset packs. One of the latest offerings is the Road and Tarmac Pack, which contains a user configurable, procedural road which you can embed in your own terrains.

The screenshot at right shows the pack open in Terragen, while the renders below give some idea of the incredible realism possible with these packs.

See URL (below right) for more details.

www.plugsandpixels.com/newworldtgpacks.html

featured artist

Veronica Freschi

Tink Wig, PA

Former art teacher Veronica Freschi explains her digital workflow:

"My general creative workflow starts with a photograph that in whole or in part screams out, "Pick me! Pick me!" Now, that's the hard part. After deciding, I'll tweak it up with some levels and/or Hue/Saturation adjustment layers in PS CS5. I really enjoy the Topaz Adjust 4 filter and use it to deepen contrast or pull out greater detail (and/or color). Topaz B&W Effects is starting to grab me as well.

After that it's a bit of Dodge & Burn and then on to texture. I really enjoy seeing how just the right overall texture takes one of my images over the top. Besides creating a greater play of light, the colors are also enriched."

Veronica F.

closing artwork

Created with Topaz Adjust, Knoll Light Factory, CMYK channel blur

Photo and artwork by Mike Bedford