

Create a new image. 450 x 145 px, 300 dpi.

The first thing to do will be the filler for the text. In my sig, I used stars. This can be anything though.

Background needs to be filled with black.

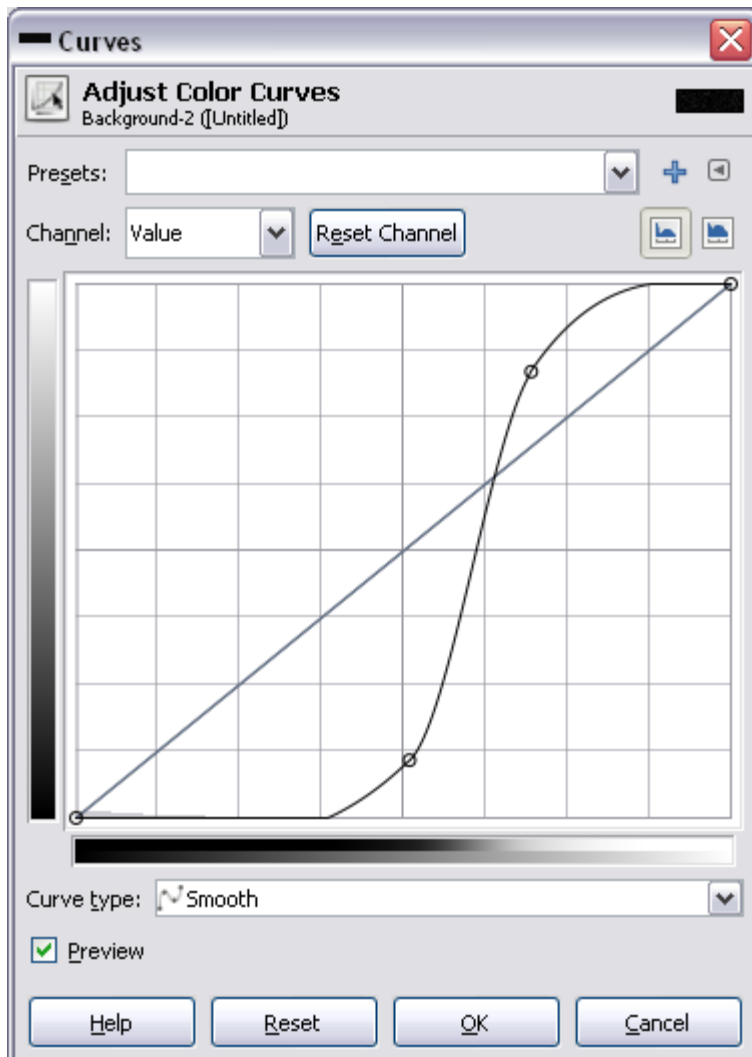
New layer, also filled with black. Filter > Noise > HSV Noise

All the sliders go all the way to the right. OK.

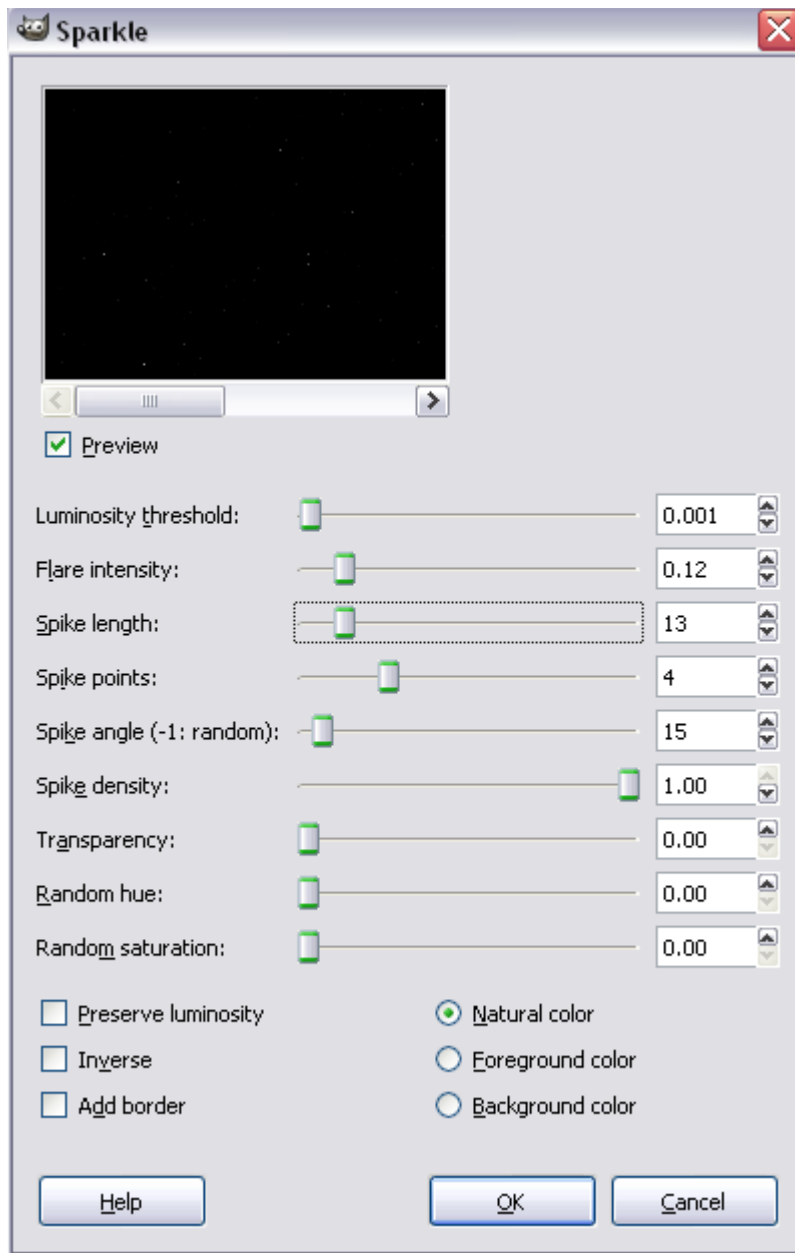
Colors > Desaturate > OK

Colors > Curves

Use these settings, or something that looks kinda like this.



Filters > Light and Shadows > Sparkle



The only two settings that need to be tweaked are Flare intensity and Spike length. Use the values from the image. Spike angle can be adjusted to 0 or left as is. In this case I left it alone.

Duplicate this layer, Gaussian Blur by 3 and set layer mode to screen. Merge it down.

That's one basic starfield unit layer. Repeat this a few times. Scale some of those layers up to enlarge the stars, and crop them with the image edge. Each additional layer should be screened onto the lower ones so you can see all the stars. Do this until you have a bunch on stars all across the image. (Can cheat and duplicate layers, flip them, screen them onto the base layer until you have sufficient star cover. If you do that, sharpen by about 30 to get rid of the fuzz that happens from scaling too much.)

Your result should look something like this. One layer of stars as your background. You might have different ways to achieve this. But this is pretty much how I do all my stars.



Now we'll do some text. Use a nice fat font, because we will need a lot of space in the center to inlay this image.

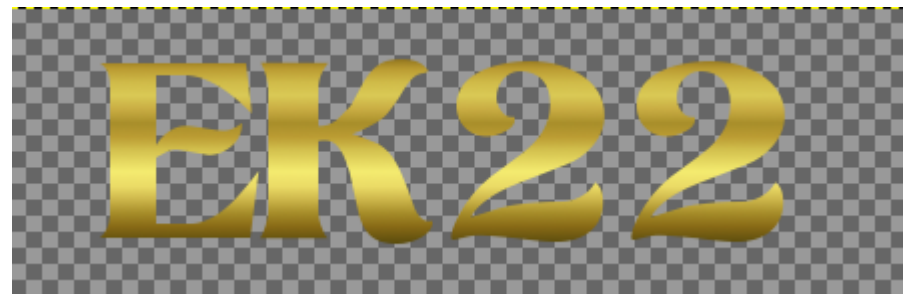
Turn off the star layer for now, we'll come back to it later.

The font I'm using here is Titania, got it from dafont.com. Color is irrelevant since we're going to use gradient to color it. Center text to look something like this.



Channel lock the text layer and stroke the Golden gradient that came with gimp over it.

Like so:

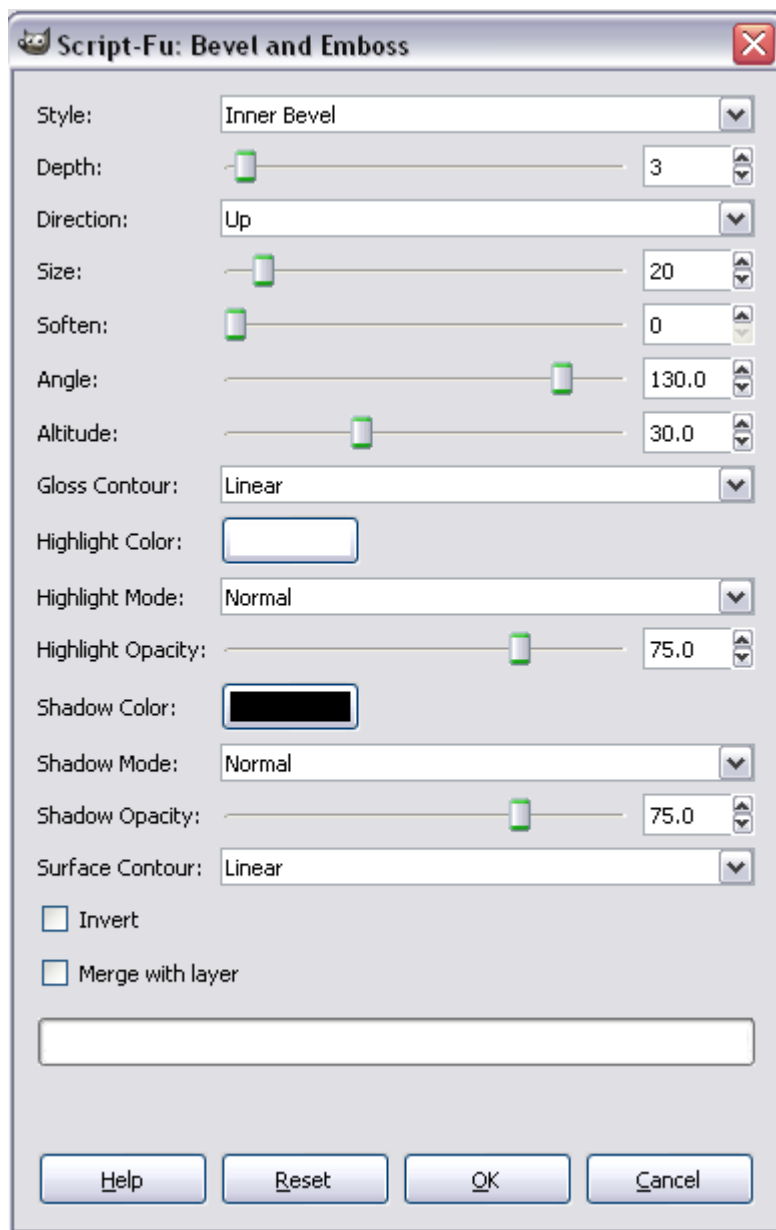


Remove channel lock and do alpha to selection.

Shrink the selection by 4 and cut. Paste the center to a new layer and stick it at the bottom somewhere for later, we'll need it as a guide.



I'm using the bevel and emboss script, but any which way you can achieve a bevel on the 'gold wire' text will be fine. We're just trying to give it substance.



That will look something like this. If the effect is too subtle, duplicate the bevel layers to taste.



Cool. We're on to the lightning part.

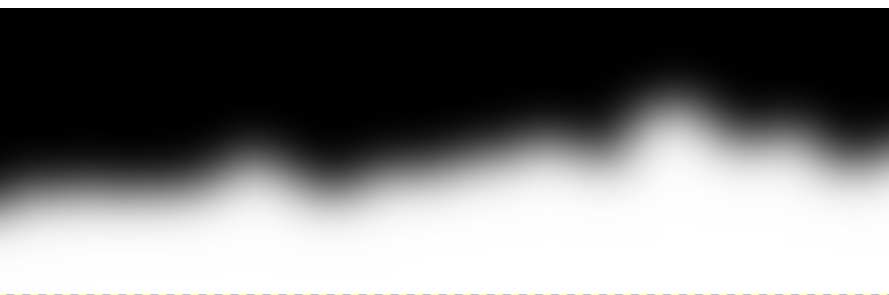
Make a new layer, and go to the pencil tool. Make the foreground color black if it isn't already. With the hard circle brush (size 4 or so), draw a jagged line, mindful of where the line will intersect with the letters. (This will matter later when we are trying to weave the lightning into the text.)



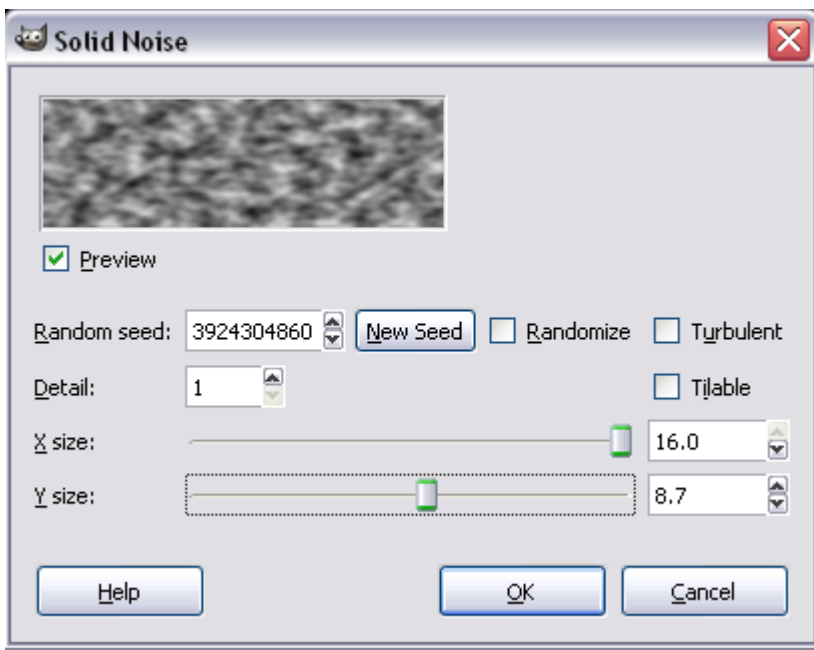
Next fill in one side of the line with black, the other side with white.



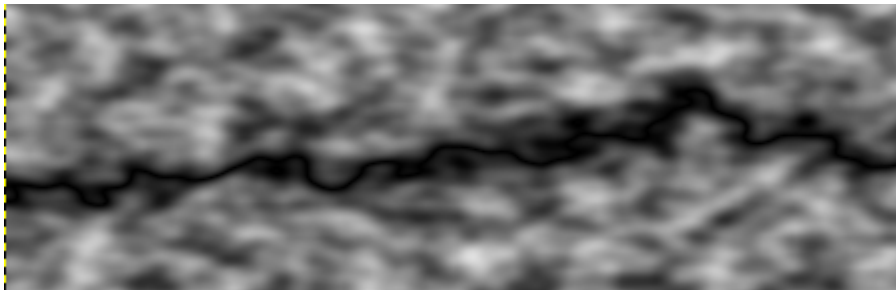
Gaussian blur at 35 – 40



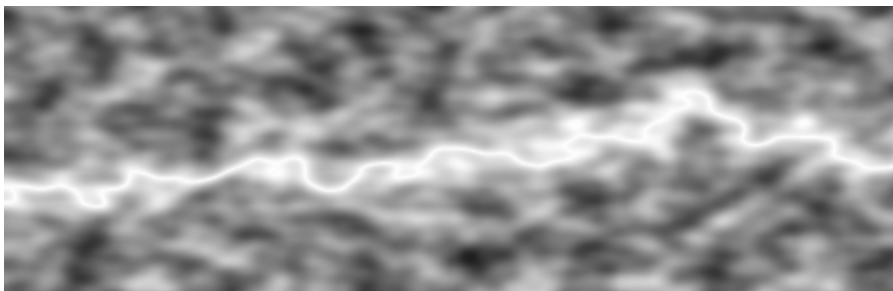
Now go to Filters > Render > Clouds > Difference Clouds



The result will look like this.

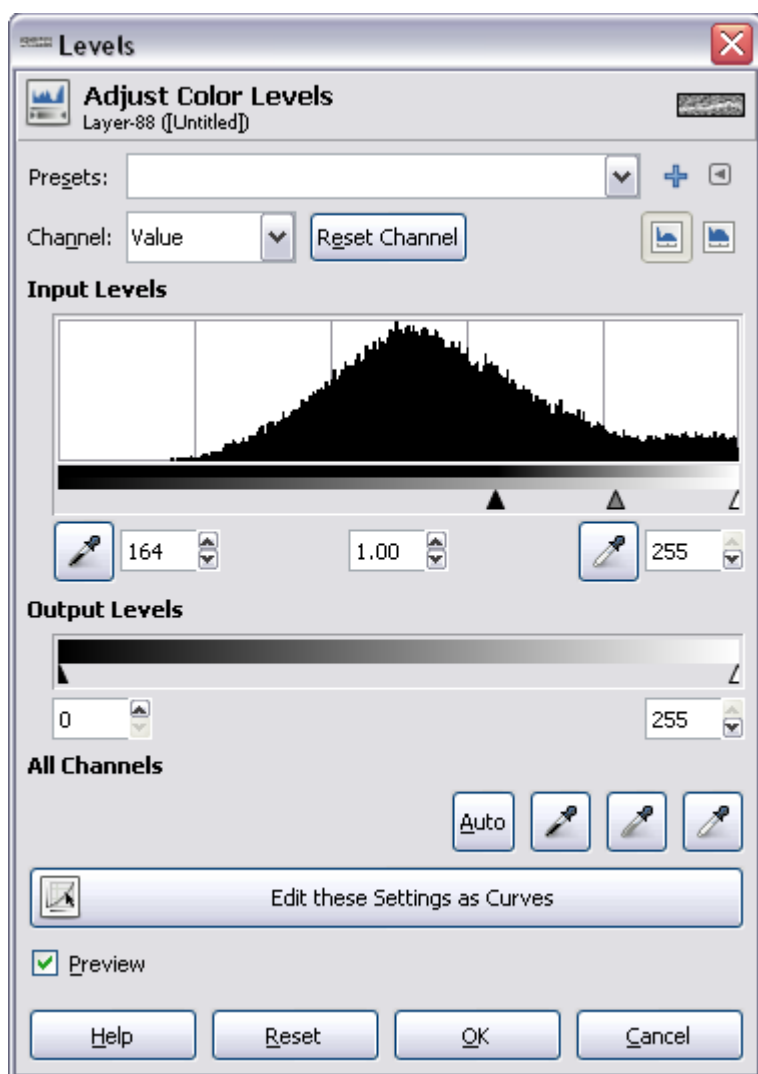


Invert the colors and the lightning becomes visible.

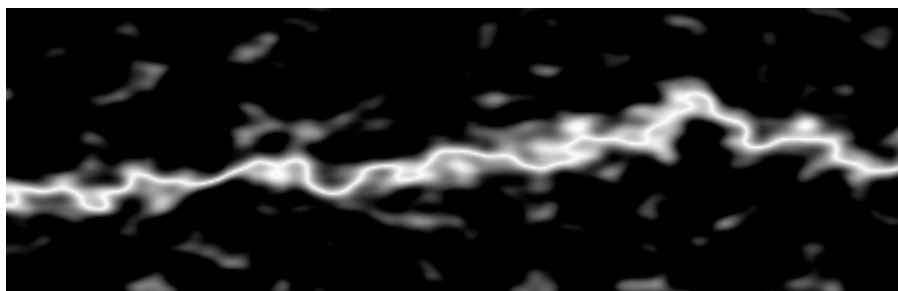


Colors > Levels

Adjust Input levels until most, if not all of the random noise turns black. (You can touch up the oddball flakes with a paintbrush after.) This is kind of intuitive, use you best judgment of what level makes the lightning look good.



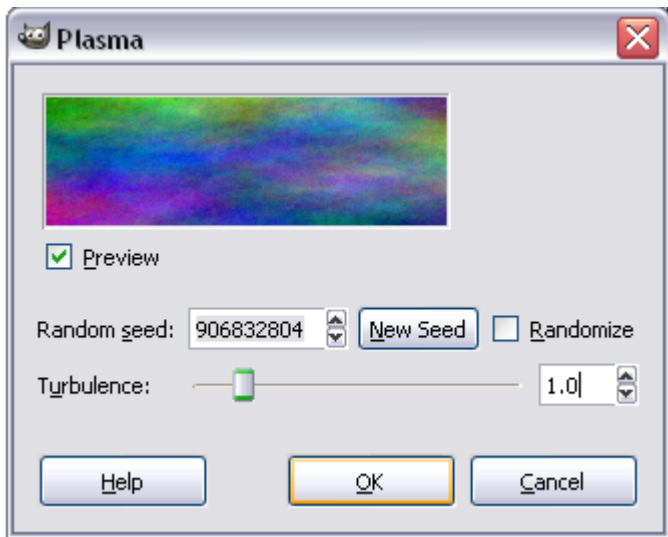
Before touching up



After touching up



Make a new layer and render a pleasant looking plasma. Turbulence not too high, we want these colors to be pretty smooth.



Set the layer mode to color and merge it down to the lightning layer.

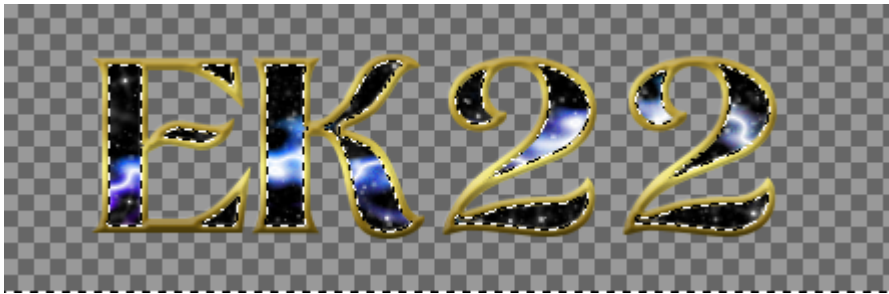
Turn on the starfield layer and text layer. Sort the lightning layer under the text layer.

On the lightning layer, color to alpha, black. Don't merge it with the stars yet, we will still need to copy from it when we weave it into the text.

Your image should look like this now.

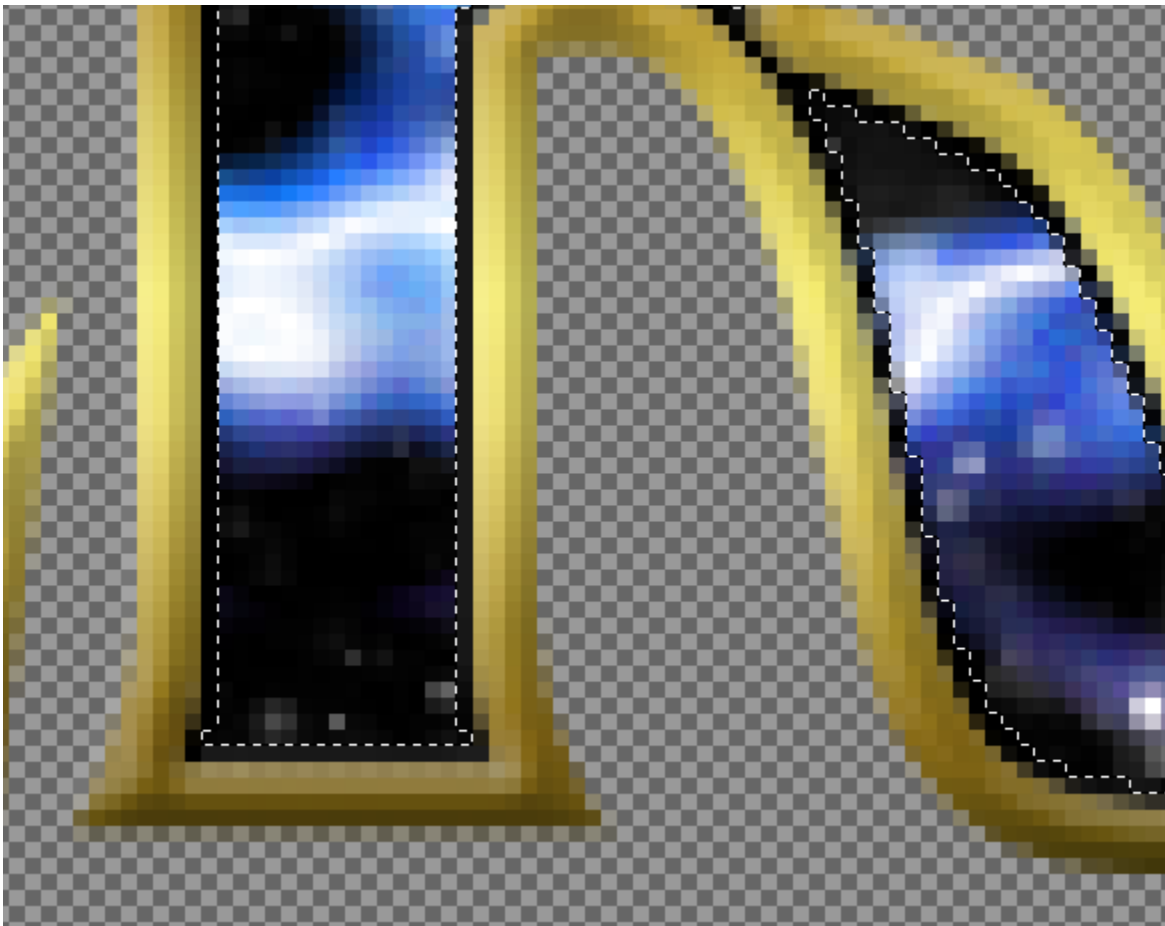


Next, we're going to the text-center layer we set aside earlier. Alpha to selection to grab the shape of the inlay. Then go to the starfield layer, invert selection and delete all the stars that aren't in the letters.



Don't worry about the lightning not showing up outside of the letters. It's still there, but since the layer is set to screen, it won't show on transparent. We're still good here. Invert the selection again. (We're now selecting the inside of the text again.)

Make a new transparent layer right over the lightning layer and fill it black. Shrink the selection by 1 and delete. This should give us a thin black line barely visible around the inner edge of the gold text.



Go back to the original text cutout layer and do alpha to selection again, then go back to the thin black line layer. This effectively selects right around the outside of that black line. Gaussian blur with a setting of 3. Duplicate it, blur with 3 again and merge down. This is our inner shadow.



The effect is intentionally subtle, but it will fool the eye into thinking there's more depth.

Deselect all now and make a new layer from visible that we'll slide to the very bottom. Make it invisible. This will be another guide for selection.

In fact, alpha to selection on this layer and make a new transparent layer at the very top of the stack. Grow selection by 1 and fill that layer in black. This will be our drop shadow for the text outside.

Deselect all, gaussian blur by about 8, give or take, depending on taste.

Scout this layer a few pixels down and right with the move tool, like any drop shadow.

Then go to the inlay template layer and alpha to selection there. Go back to the drop shadow layer and delete the inside of the shadow. It gets in the way of things otherwise. Once that's done, stack it under the gold wire frame layer.

The image will look like this now.



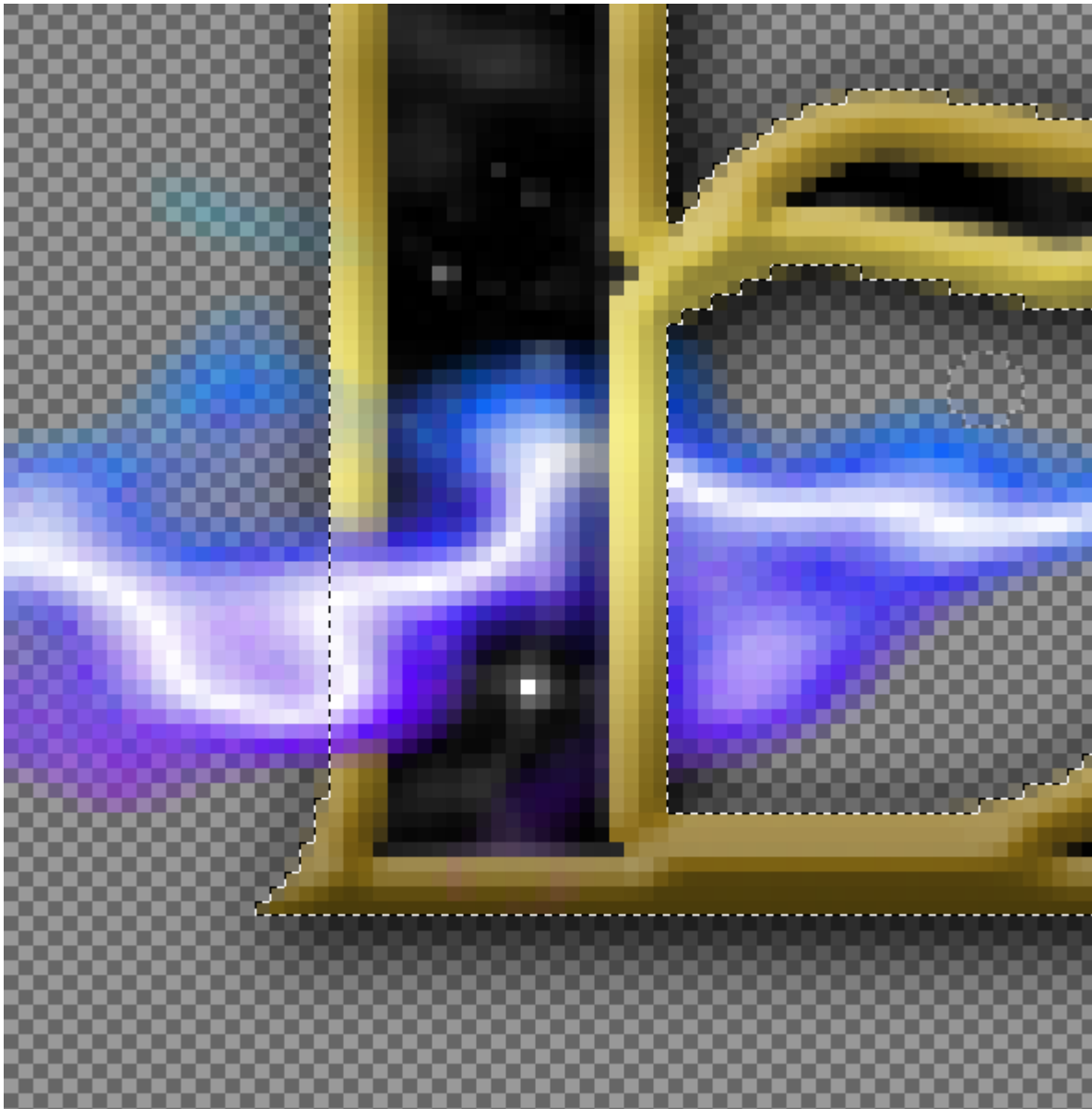
Now we'll duplicate the lightning layer. On the duplicate, set the layer mode to normal (from screen) and stack it to the very top of the image.



Here is where we decide which parts of the lightning go over, and which go under the wire frame.

Go to the 'from visible' template layer and do alpha to selection. This will select the area we're going to erase from first.

Back on our top lightning layer, carefully erase along the edges of the wire text the parts of the lightning that should go under the wire. Leave the parts that go over alone. It works best visually if you alternate over under to kind of weave it into the text.

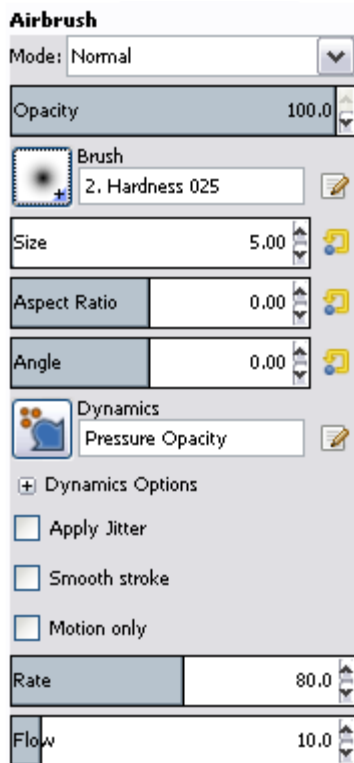


Do this with every edge you want the lightning to tuck under. Don't worry about the outside quite yet, that will be the next step. Here it's important to bring out the inner shadow and wire frame for the illusion the lightning is under the text.

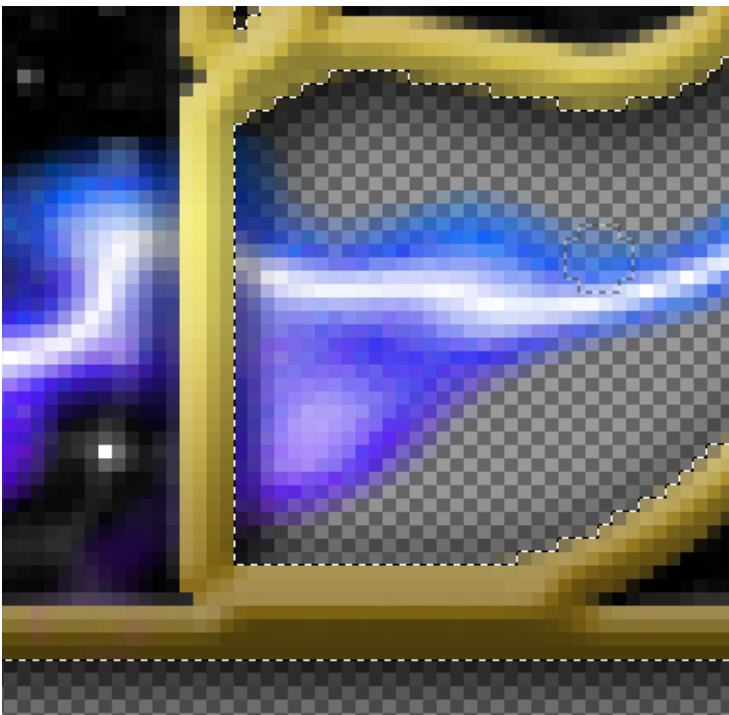
Now you should be looking at something like this.



Now we'll worry about the outside shadow. Make a new layer over the top of the lightning layer we just worked on. Invert the selection. Use the airbrush tool with these brush settings.



Now stroke shadows along the outside edges where the lightning is supposed to go under the wire text.



This is kind of intuitive, if you find you went with too much shadow, use the eraser with the same brush settings to soften the shadows until it looks right.

The end result will look like this.



We're all done now. Merge visible layers.

To clean up the edges of the sig, apply a layer mask to the visible sig layer. Make it white. Set your gradient to FG to BG and your fg color to black, bg to white. On the layer mask, stroke the gradient over the edge until the resulting transparency fade on the lightning looks right.

The layer mask will look something like this.



The resulting fade will look like this.



Apply layer mask and repeat the same process on the other end of the signature.

And that's all there is to it.

The finished result.

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