**Harry the Raver's freeware filter set can be downloaded from
PlugIn Com HQ**

BEGINNER'S BASICS OF PSP PLUGIN FILTERS
and the basics of extracting FFL files using PicCo Plugin Commander

This tutorial will address some of the most common (basic) questions about PSP plugins.

It will also deal ONLY with how to extract the FFL filter files downloaded from the Internet for use with PSP, which is where most new users seem to come to grief.

Plugin Commander (PiCo) is a free utility created by Harald Heim (aka "Harry the Raver".) It is an essential tool for extracting the FLL files into usable filter form, but has many other features.

Pico comes with its own extensive help files, in the form of htm pages, which cover everything else the program is capable of, and Harry has several additional tutorials at Plugin Com HQ if you want to learn how to use the program to its fullest capabilities.

WHAT IS A PLUGIN FILTER?

All raster graphics creation programs come with their own built in filters, or image altering effects tools.   Plugin filters are simply third-party tools you can install to increase the number of effects available to you. Eye Candy, Blade Pro and others are examples of commercial Plugins.

One of the most popular sources of plugin filters, because so many are available free over the Internet, are those created by authors using Adobe Photoshop's Filter Factory codes. Plugin filters created using Filter Factory all work in Paintshop Pro, and are easily identified by their 8BF file extension.

In addition to his own set of 55+ free filters, Harry has a full list at Plugin HQ of links to the thousands of other available free Filter Factory filters.

FIRST THINGS FIRST -- TELL PSP WHERE YOUR FILTERS ARE!

To be able to use any 3rd-party plugins with PSP, you must tell PSP where your plugin filters are located.

So, using Windows Explorer, begin by creating a folder where you will keep and manage the filters in your plugin collection.

Contrary to a popular misconception, this can be anywhere on your hard disk. However, by default most people choose to create a subfolder within the Paintshop Pro folder tree called "Plugins."

Open Paintshop Pro, and from the File Menu choose Preferences/General Program Preferences. Select the Plugin Filters tab, and browse to locate the filter folder/s you have created.

As you can see, you can only have up to three unique folders, but you are NOT limited by this since you can have as many subfolders as you like. To have this option, make sure you check the "include subfolders" option in Plugin filter preferences.

By creating subfolders for each group of filters you install you can keep things tidy and makes locating particular filters much easier than having 5000 in one folder!

LIMITS

There are limits as to how many filters your individual system will allow you to run. Bear in mind that each time you open PSP it loads ALL the filters in the paths you have specified in your preferences.

If you become a compulsive filter collector this can be a problem. It can be easily avoided, however, if you keep the filters you hardly ever use (which will in all likelihood be most of them *G*) outside the paths you have specified in preferences.

You can do this very easily (in Windows Explorer) by dragging and dropping the subdirectories you don't want PSP to load to any location outside the specified PSP plugin filter paths.

However, if you want to disable individual filters rather than whole subdirectories, you can temporarily disable any filters by using PiCo, as explained in Harry's tutorial on the subject at Plugin HQ.

OTHER PROGRAM FILTERS

If you have other graphics programs which come with their own .8BF extension filters (such as Photoshop) you do NOT need to move those filters to be able to use them with PSP. Just tell PSP where they are in the preference path slots 2 and 3 as above.

Note : If you make changes to your filter folders, PSP will not recognise these changes until you close and reopen it.

FFL FILES

Filter Factory filters are most commonly made available as collections in a special "compressed" format known as FFLs. The text-based nature of FFL files makes them extremely small and therefore quick to download. You will need Plugin Commander to convert these files into their usable filter form.

INSTALLING PICO

To get started, download the following files from Plugin HQ :

Pico program zip file
Pico-Systemfiles zip file

You will also need copies of **plugin.dll** and **msvcrt10.dll.**

Unfortunately, plugin.dll is a copyright Adobe dll, and supposedly cannot be distributed legally so people have stopped offering it on their sites.

MSVCRT!0.dll is a Microsoft C dll and to the best of my knowledge is not copyright. It is widely available on the Internet.

When you have them, place the two dlls directly into your Windows Systems folder..

Extract the PiCo-systemfiles.zip files to a temporary folder, then run the installation program.

Extract the PiCo program files directly into a suitable folder on your hard drive. Run Pico from the Pico.exe file.

Please refer to the trouble-shooting section at Plugin HQ if you run into any unexpected difficulties with the above stages.

EXTRACTING FFL FILES WITH PICO

Extracting your FFL files is simply a matter of locating the FFL files on your hard disk, then directing Pico to the folder as to where to place the converted filters.

PiCo works from either left to right or right to left. The active source window showing the files contained in a folder is white, the inactive destination window is grey.

In the screenshot below, I have browsed to and opened both relevant folders, by double clicking on them, on my hard drive :
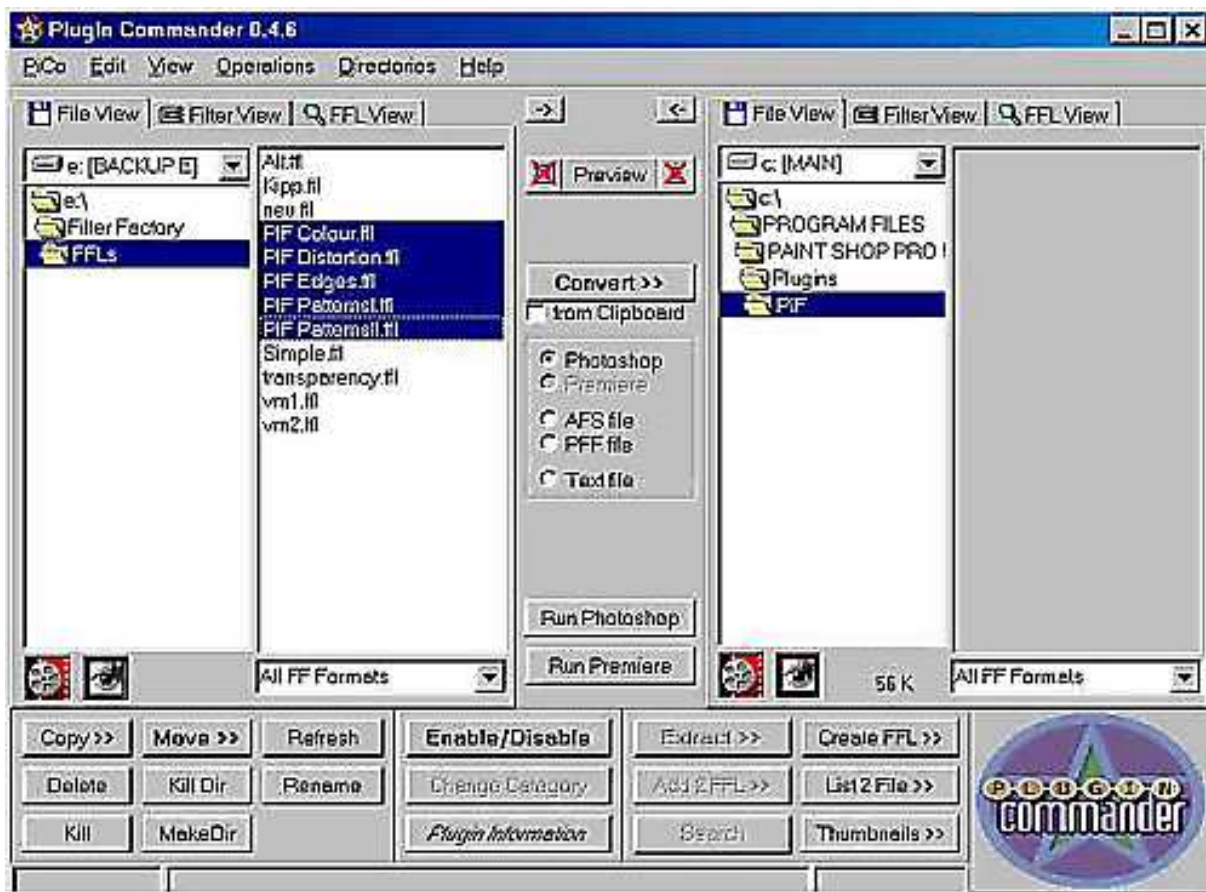
The SOURCE folder on my hard drive E: where the FFL files are.

The DESTINATION Paintshop Pro Plugin subfolder "PIF" on drive C: where I want the converted filters to go.

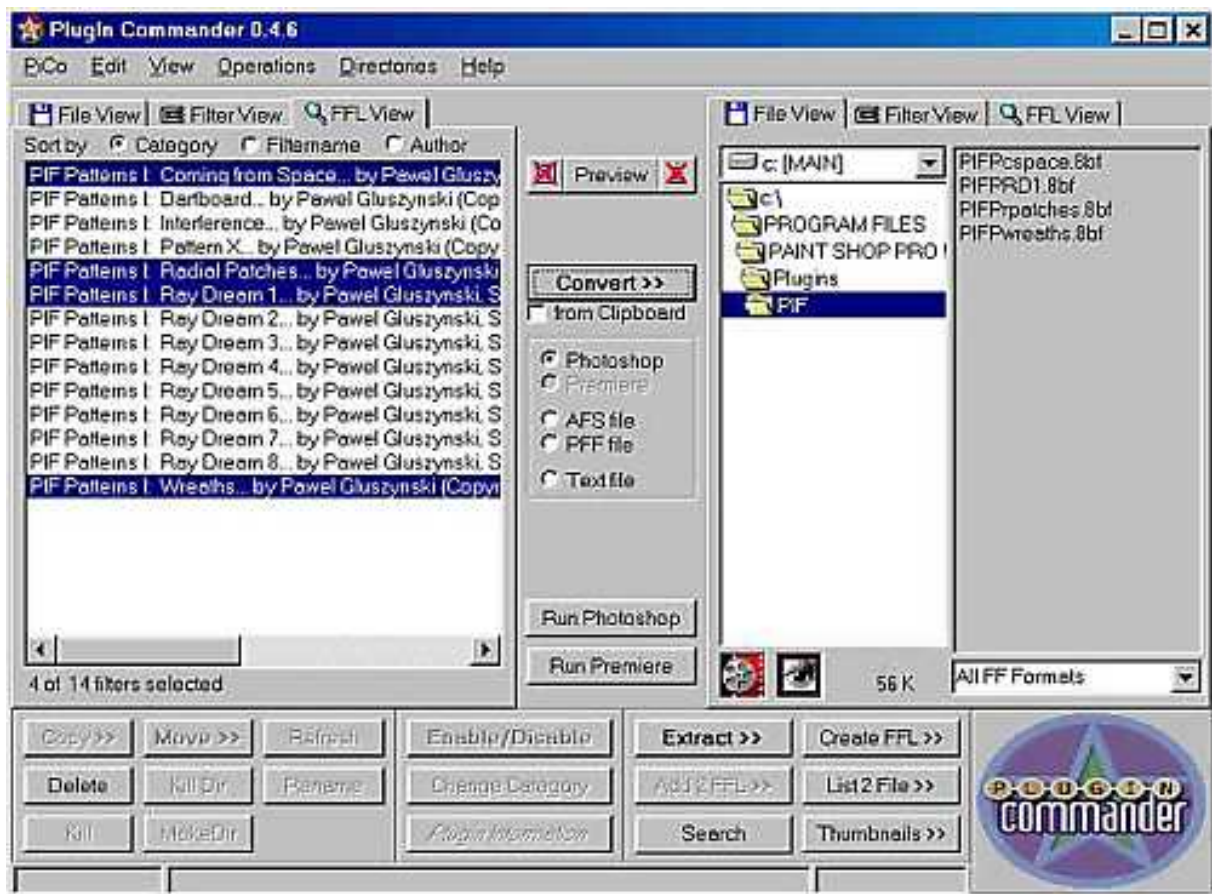I have selected four of the available FFL files.

Make sure the SOURCE is active (white) as in the shot below, then click on the Convert button between the two browser windows. A moving progress bar will appear at the bottom of your PiCo screen to tell you everything is humming along.

When you open PSP again, the filters you have just extracted will be available from your Plugin menu provided you have followed the necessary steps at the beginning of this tutorial.

As you can see at a glance on the screenshot above, you have several typical browser options available to you from within PiCo, such as making a folder (MakeDir) deleting a folder (Kill Dir) and so on. You can also select filters, using the filter or file views, and Enable/Disable them. Most things about PiCo are intuitive and self-explanatory.

The following screen shot shows that, by choosing the FFL view, you can select individual filters from within an FFL and convert them in exactly the same way.

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