How to Create PHB Style Art using GIMP

This guide will show you how to create art that looks similar to the art found in the PHB, DM, and MM using the free software, GIMP.
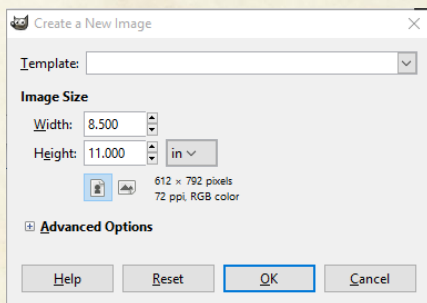
Prerequisites

You are going to need to setup a few things:
1 – GIMP, found here.
2 – You will need to download the brushes, found in /u/skybug12's guide here. What you want is in brushes folder.
3 – Install the brushes into GIMP. A good guide for this is here.

Once you have completed these three steps, you are ready to go!

Page Setup

First, you want to open a new file in GIMP, setting the page dimensions to 8.5' by 11'.
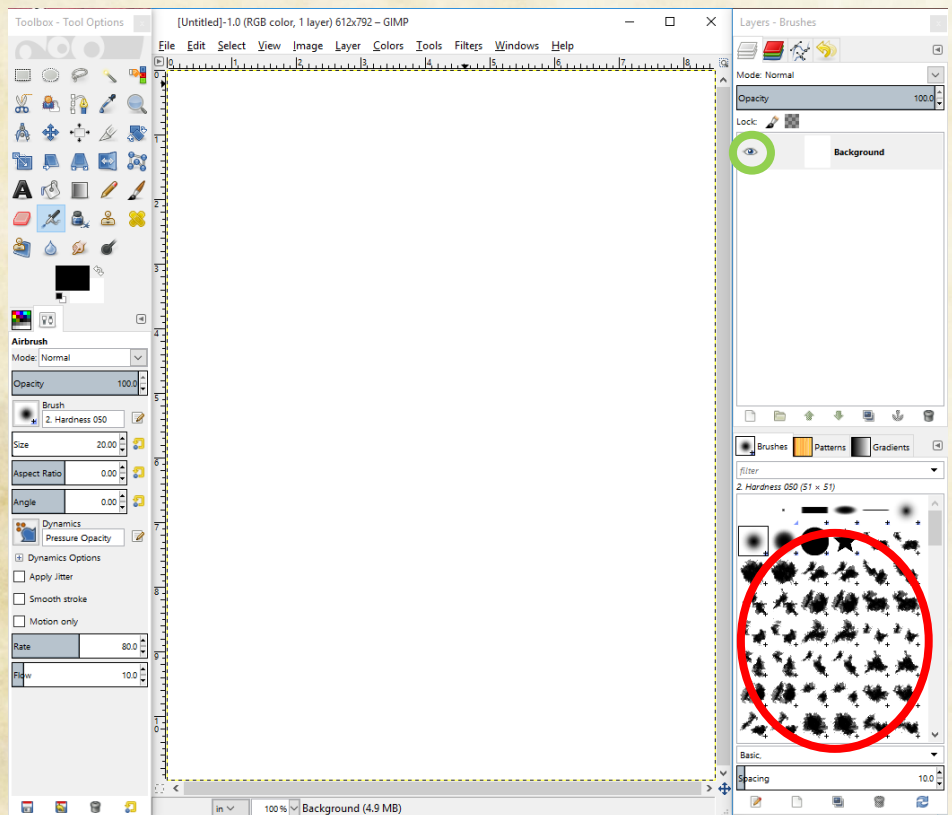

Press OK and you should see something like this:

You should be able to see the imported brushes on the bottom of the brush panel, (circled in red).

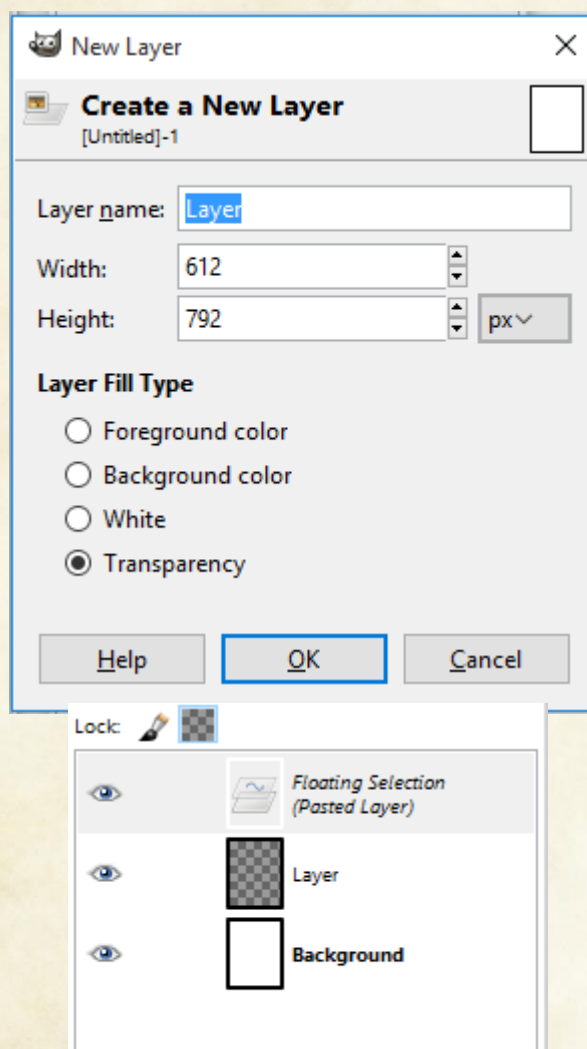Next, you want to go to **Layer > Transparency > Add Alpha Channel**.

Now, if you click the eye next to the background layer (circled in green), you should see a black and grey checkerboard. For now, leave the eye visible.

Initial Art

First thing you will want to do is add a new layer, this is where your art will go! Press **Control** + **Shift** + **N** or **Cmd** + **Shift** + **N** to make a new layer. A box will pop up like this:
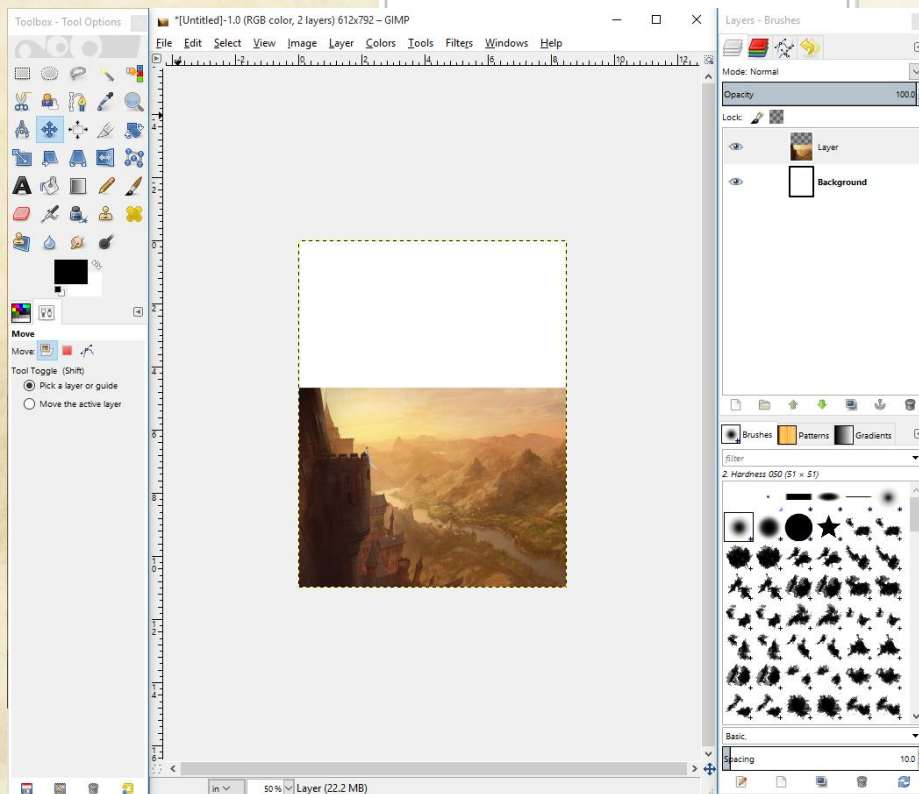
Name it whatever you want, just make sure the **Layer Fill Type** is **Transparency**.

Now that you have done that, go and find some art! For the purposes of this tutorial, I am using this piece of art by Marc Simonetti (source here). Copy and paste the art. You should see something like this in your Layer's Dialog:
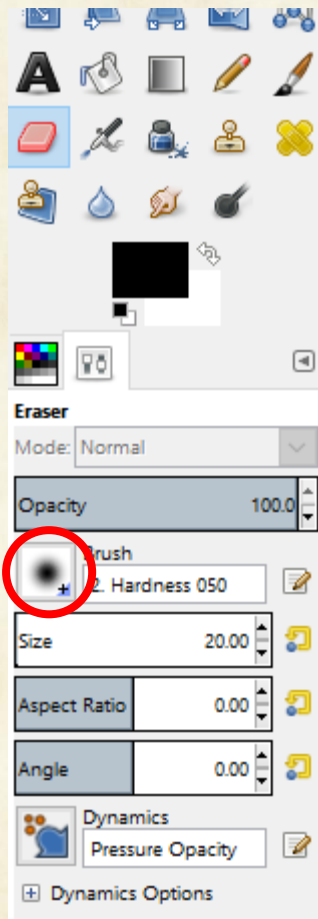
The floating layer is the art, move it around using the Move Tool (Shortcut **M**) to where you want it to show up on the final page. There are also tools to rotate and scale your image.

Once you are done moving and scaling the art, press **Enter** anywhere on the page and the art will lock to the Layer. Here is what my setup looks like so far:
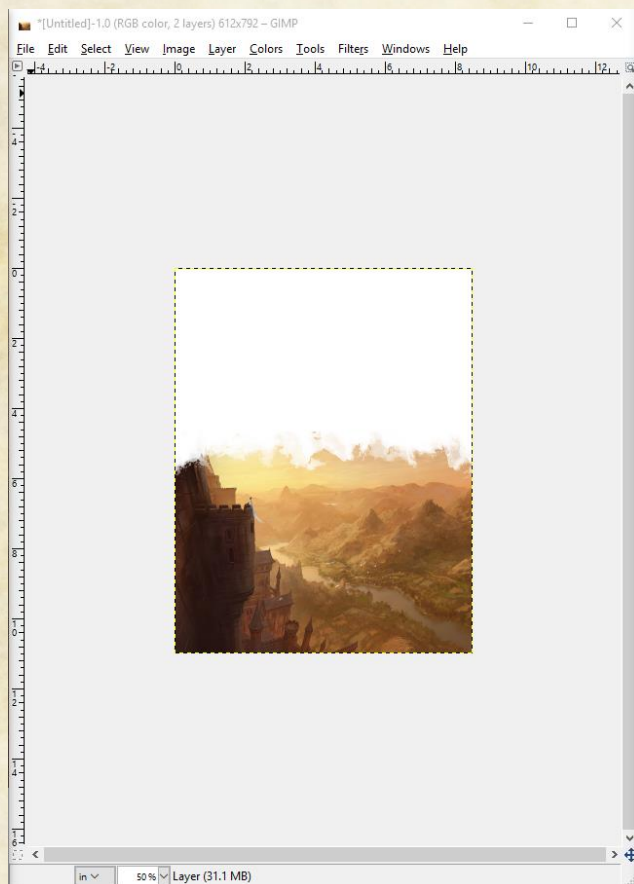
Next, you want to start removing the hard edge seperating the image from the white background. To do this, select the Erase Tool (Shortcut **Shift-E**) and select any of the brushes we installed from the brush dialog (circled in red).

Once you have selected a brush, start clicking, not dragging!, near the hard edge of the image. Do this with a few of the brushes we have installed. Make sure to change the Size and Angle of the brush so you can use all the edges!

Once you have done this, you should have something like this:
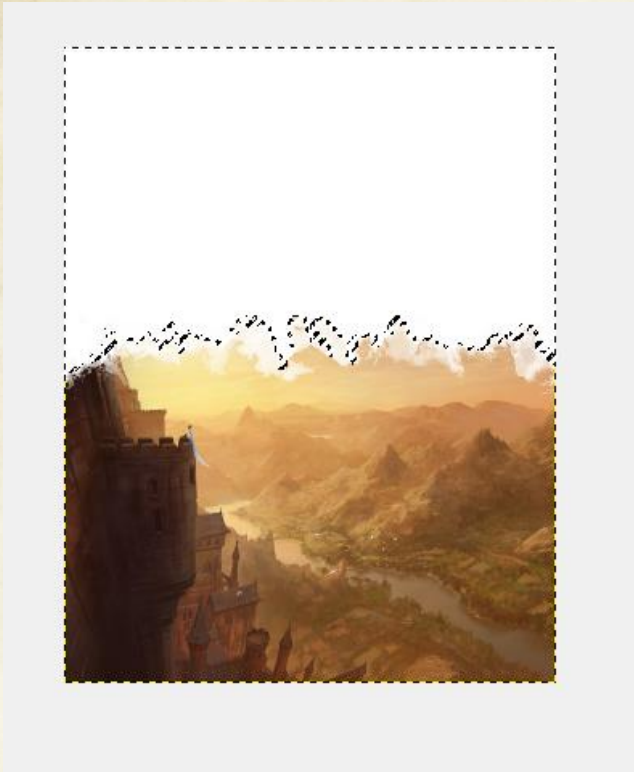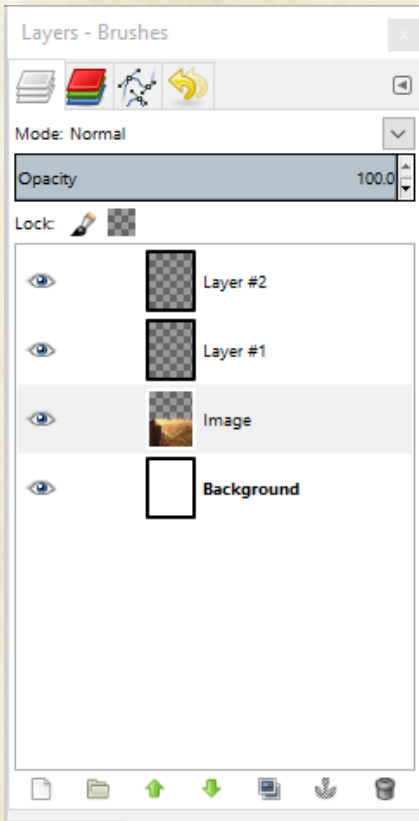
Adding Watercolor

Okay! Now that you have softened the edge of the image, the next step is to add the splotches of color that transition between the art and the background paper. These steps get a little complicated, so make sure to read them thoroughly. I am going to number the steps here and provide reference images on the following pages.
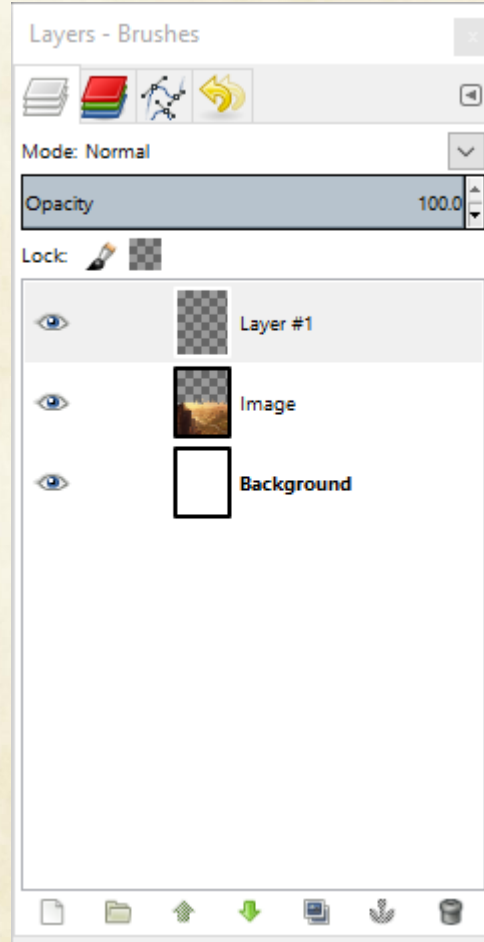
1 – Select the Fuzzy Select tool (Shortcut **U**)

2 – Click with the Fuzzy Select tool on any white spot on the page.

3 – Select the Image Layer to make it the active layer.

4 – Use the Color Picker tool (Shortcut **O**) to pick a color on the image which is close to the edge you just erased.

5 – Start a new layer (Shortcut **Ctrl** + **Shift** + **N** / **Cmd** + **Shift** + **N**)

6 – Select the Paintbrush tool (Shortcut **P**) and one of our installed brushes from the brush dialog.

7 – Use this brush (and others) to click around the edges of the image. You will notice because of Step 1-2, the brush is only leaving a mark on the white space, not on the image. Use multiple brushes and play around with how far away you get from the art.

8 – Lower the opacity of this layer to around 25%.

9 – Repeat steps 3-7, picking a new color with the Fuzzy Select tool every time. Do this two more times, so three times total. It is okay if the colors you select are similar.

10 – Deselect everything, **Select** > **None**

11 – Delete the white **Background** layer. Select the background layer and click the Trash Icon, or press **Delete**.

12 – Merge down the other layers by Right-click topmost layer > Merge Layer Down.

13 – Export the image, you're done! Export by **File** > **Export as** > **Save as a PNG.**

1 – Select the Fuzzy Select tool (Shortcut **U**)

2 – Click with the Fuzzy Select tool on any white spot on the page.
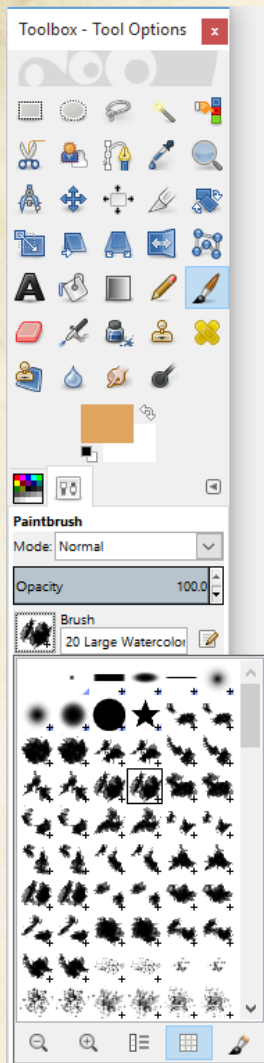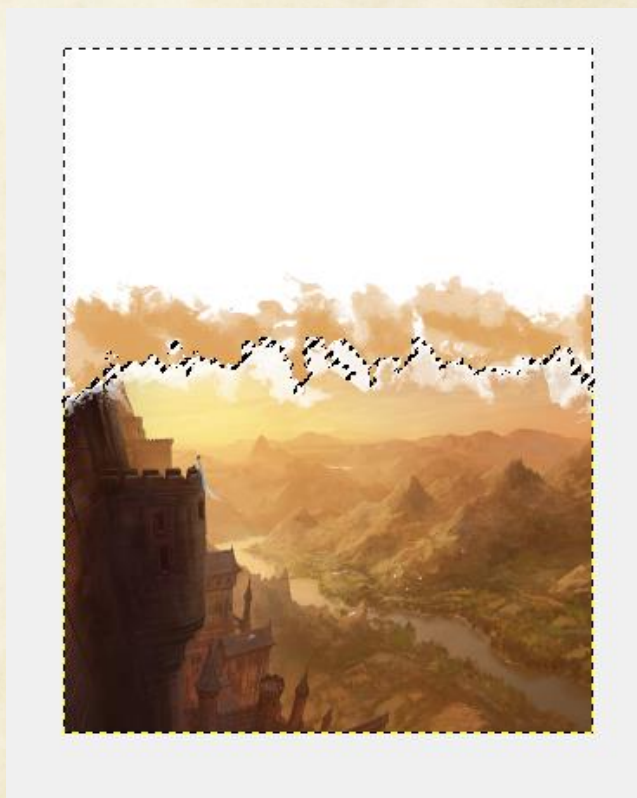
5 – Start a new layer (Shortcut **Ctrl** + **Shift** + **N** / **Cmd** + **Shift** + **N**). Make sure the new layer is active.

3 – Select the Image Layer to make it the active layer (note the gray highlight). **START REPEATING HERE.**
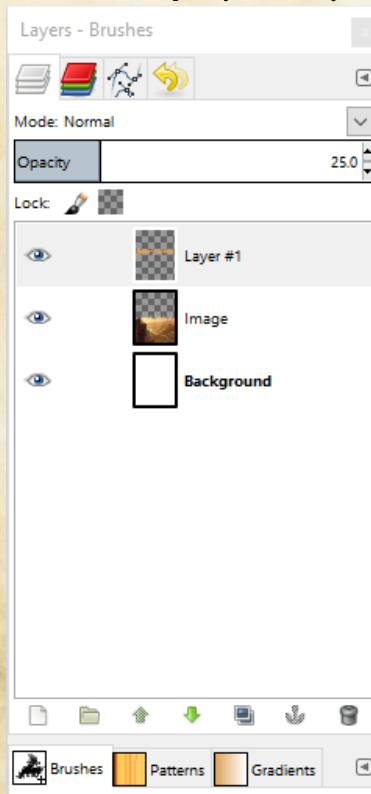
6 – Select the Paintbrush tool (Shortcut **P**) and one of our installed brushes from the brush dialog.
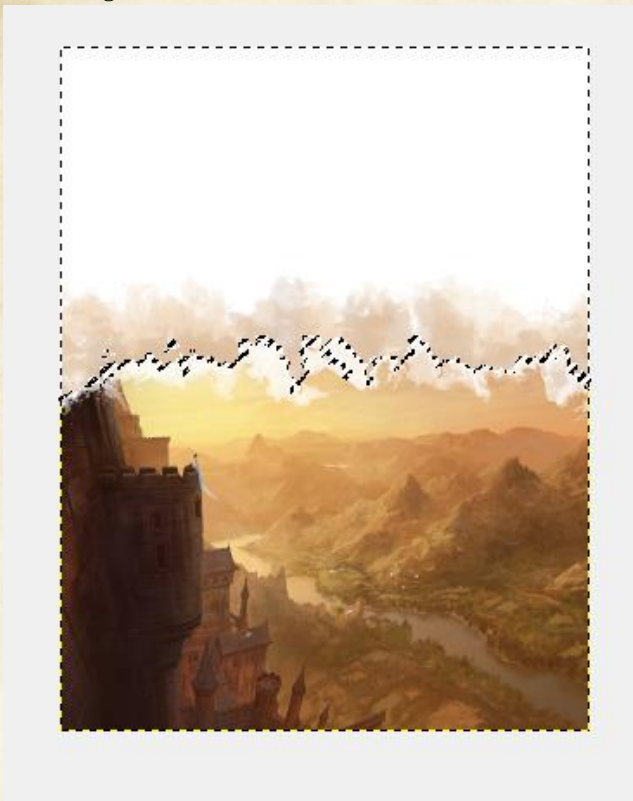

7 – Use this brush (and others) to click around the edges of the image. You will notice because of Step 1-2, the brush is only leaving a mark on the white space, not on the image. Use multiple brushes and play around with how far away you get from the art.

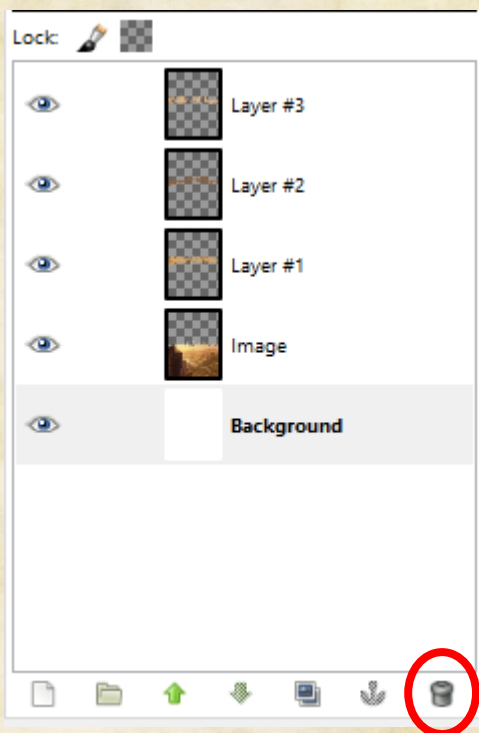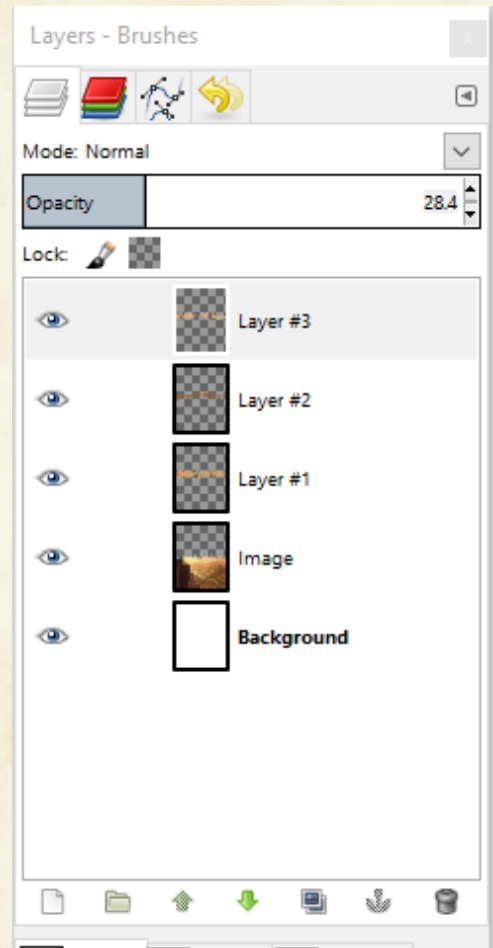8 – Lower the opacity of this layer to around 25%.

Special: After repeating the steps, you should have something like this:
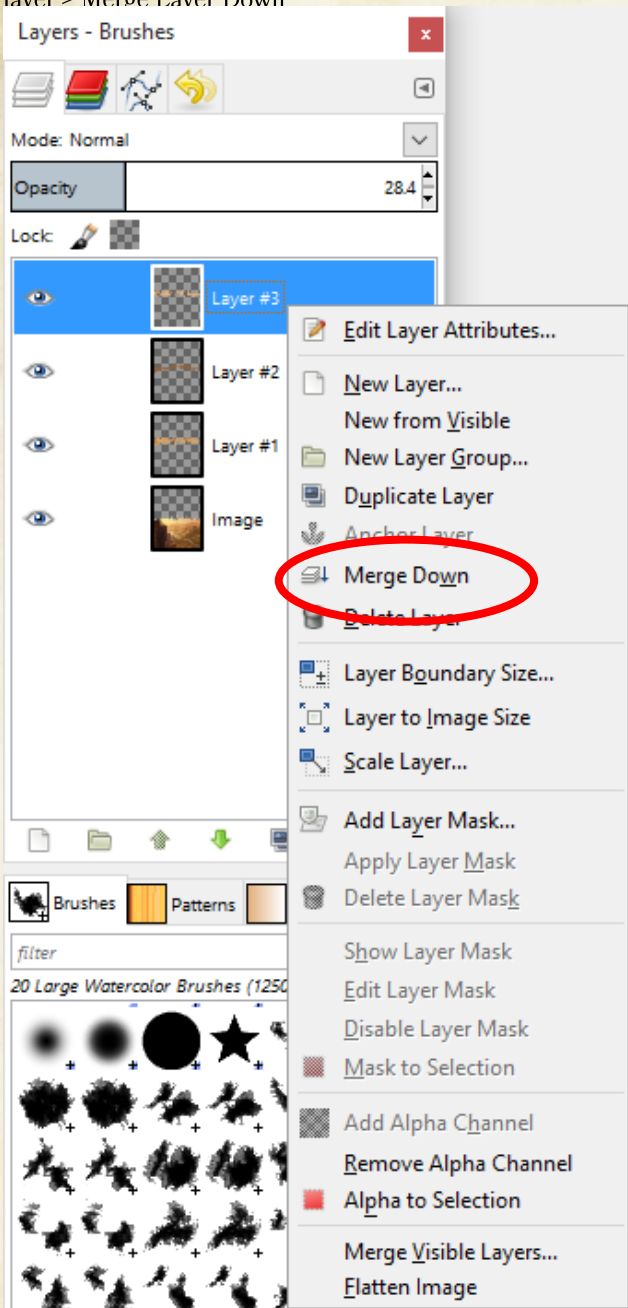

You can see there are splotches of multiple colors, even though they are of similar color.
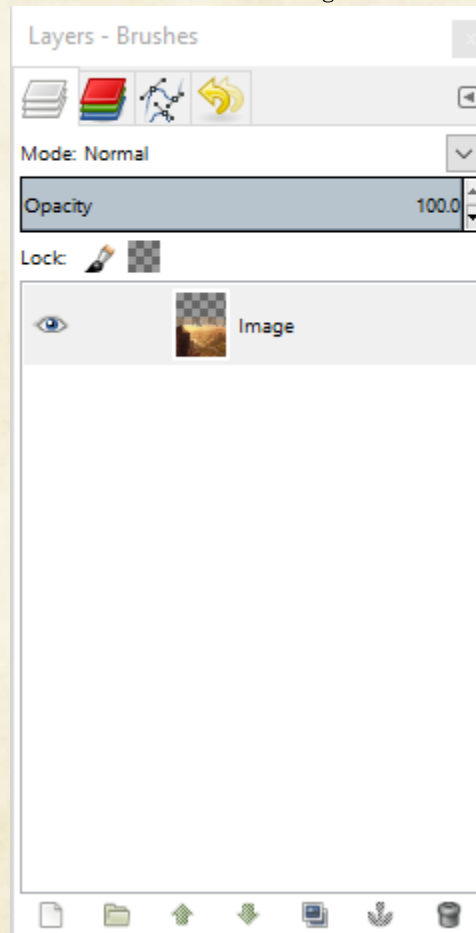
11 – Delete the white **Background** layer. Select the background layer and click the Trash Icon, or press **Delete**.

12 – Merge down the other layers by Right-click topmost layer > Merge Layer Down

Here is what it looks like merged:

Congratulations, you're done! Don't forget to save and export. See my finished version on the next page!

Please note, you are going to get some weird white stuff at the edge of the image using GIMP. If you don't mind, great! If you do, try switching to Photoshop.

* If you want to get rid of the white stuff, when you are erasing the hard border, click in the same place multiple times with the erasing brush. This will get rid of the white stuff but will give your image a hard edge. Choose which you like better!