I'll have to think about it... My most recent experience with build systems like this is of course with portage. I've heard about nice GUI front ends for portage. Maybe that is an option (because you can actually control which patches are added, which versions of libraries, etc.) BTW, that is what motivated my comment a month or two ago about "slots" -- which would provide a mechanism to manage multiple (possibly installed) versions of the source trees.

Still scary

 EBo --