

Tutorial for Lighting Touch Ups in Photoshop

On most of my images I will make a final pass on lighting in Photoshop before I call it done.

Here's what my image "Exodus" looks like after I render it in Vray.



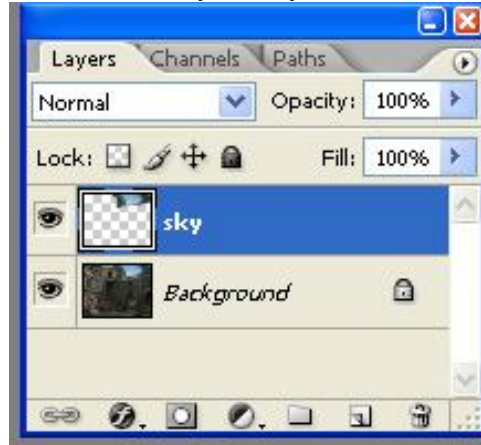
It is a little dark and flat, so to balance it out and bring about a more dramatic effect with the light I will adjust the levels in Photoshop. But before I do that I'll need to copy the sky part of the image into another layer. If I don't the sky will end up looking burned out:



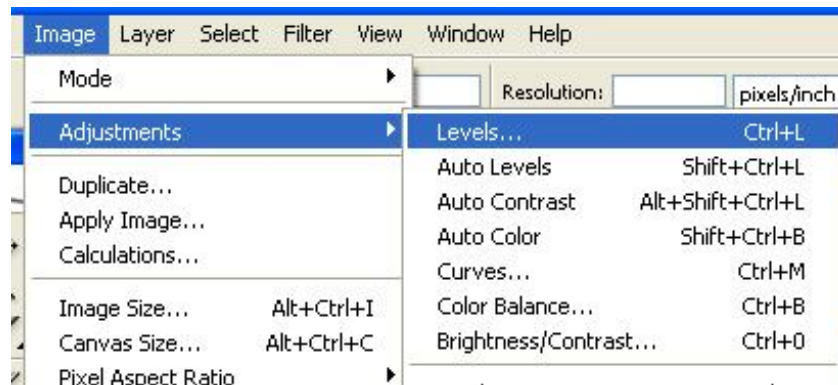
So, copy the top part of the sky and put it into another layer. I used the lasso tool for this step:

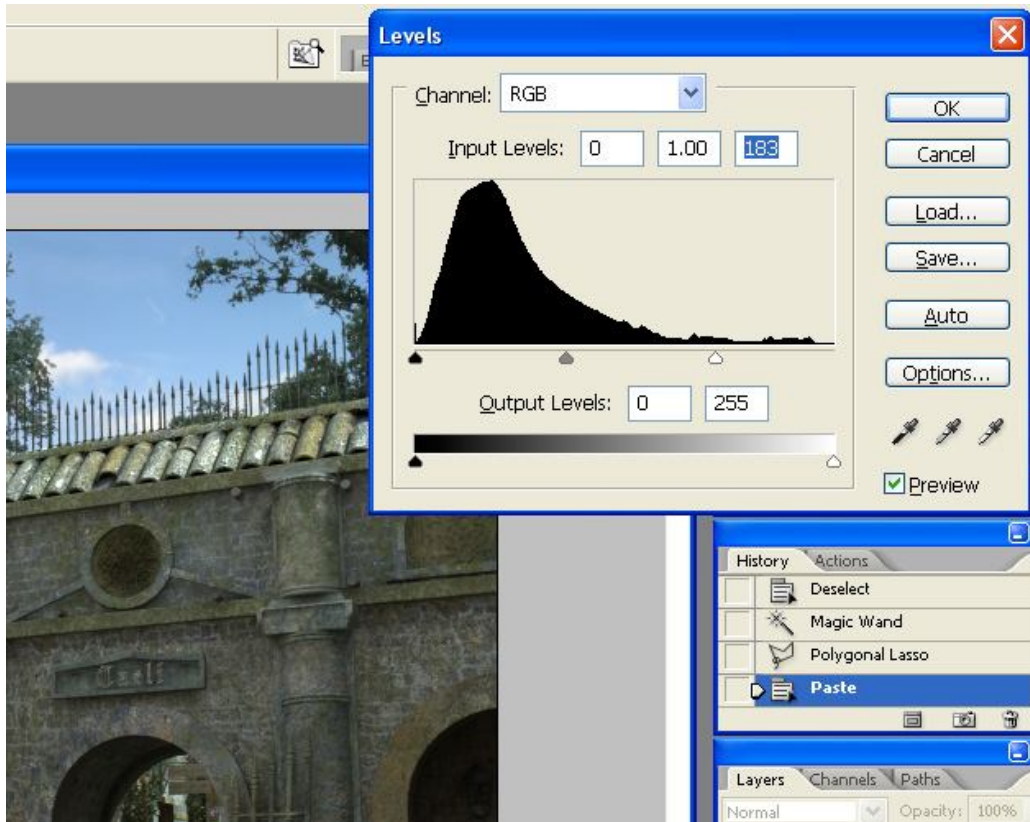


This won't get complicated, but it's still good practice to name layers so I just named this layer "sky":

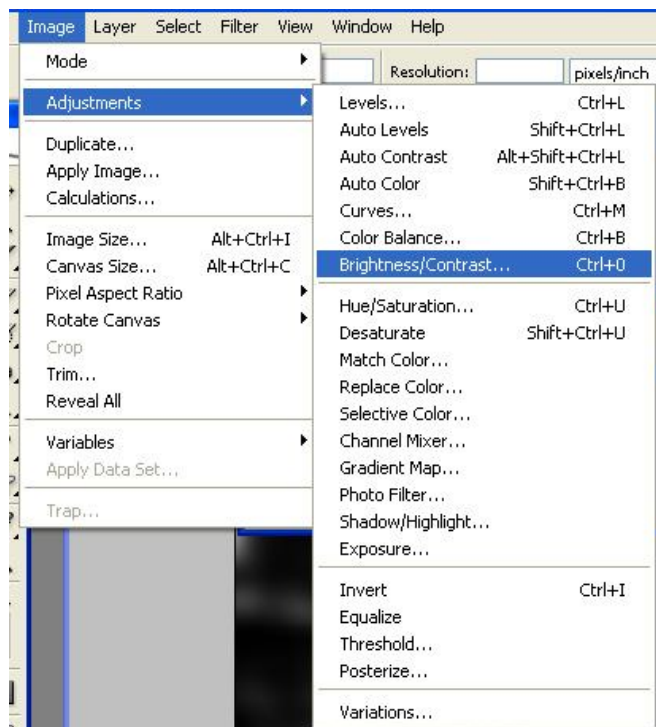


Now back to the background layer. I adjusted the right input level from 255 to about 183.

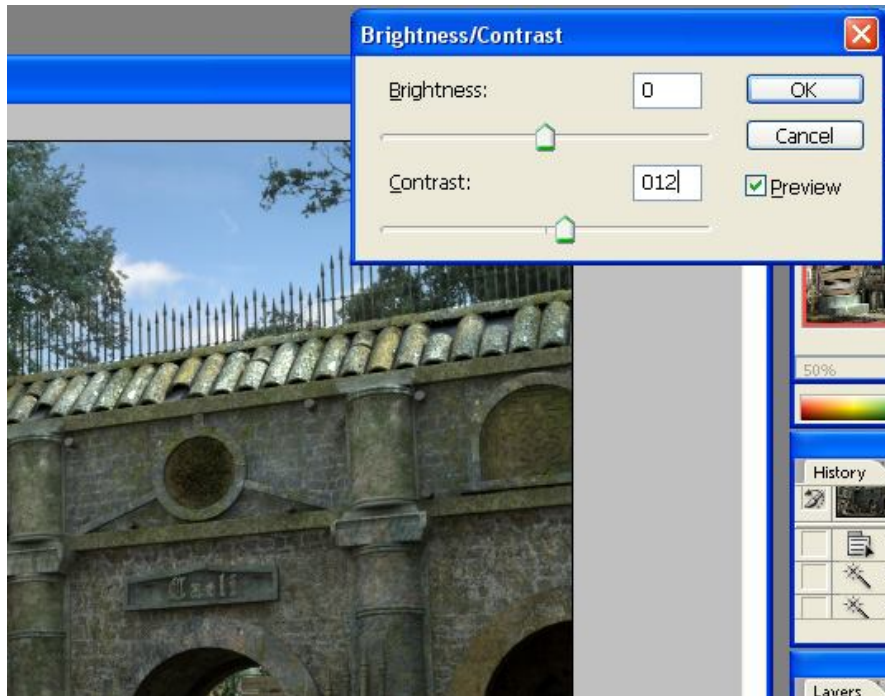




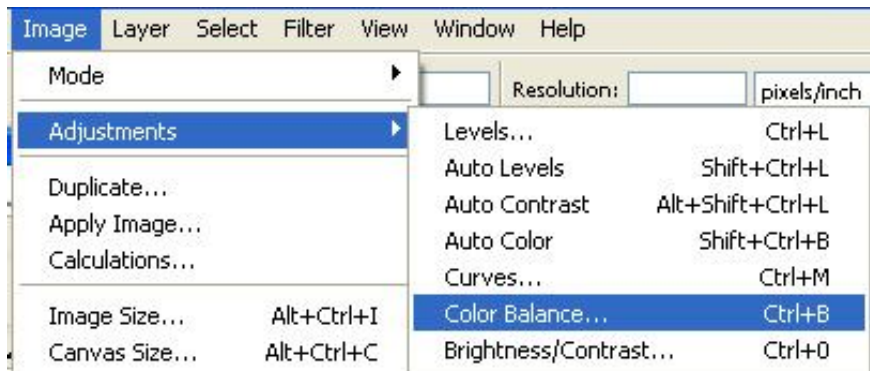
After this I usually add some contrast and adjust the color balance to add a warmer feel to the scene. It's subtle, but makes a difference. For this image I added, +12 to the contrast and -5 to the yellow midtones.

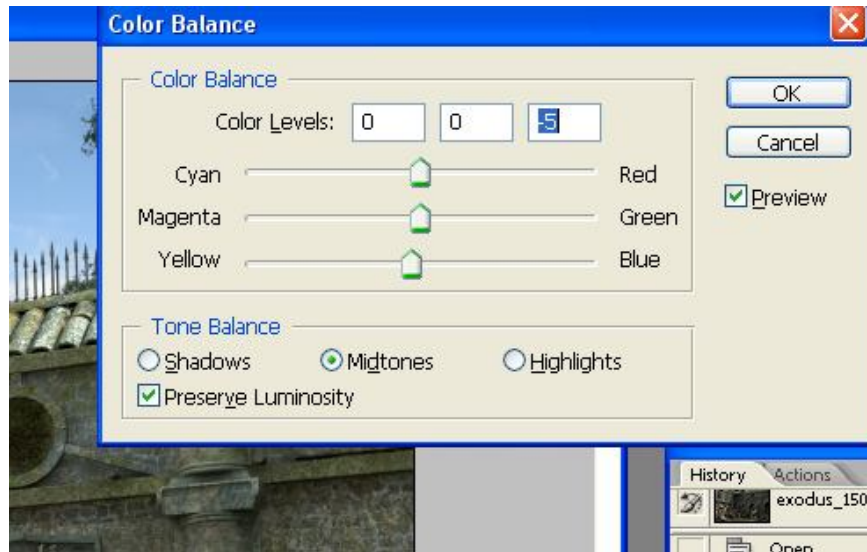


Contrast:



Color Balance:

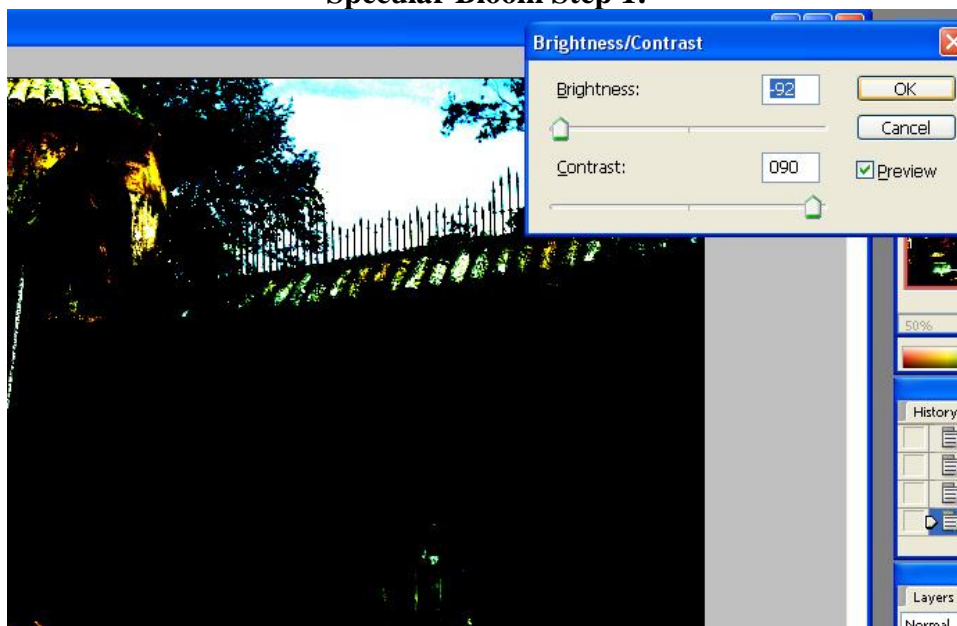




The last thing I do is use Neil Blevins' specular bloom method to add an even more dramatic effect to the lighting. The tutorial for this can be found here: http://www.neilblevins.com/cg_education/specular_bloom/specular_bloom.htm

I will outline it quickly here too. The first thing to do is to duplicate the Background Layer. Then add an extreme amount of contrast to the image and lower the brightness. For this image I raised the contrast to 90 and lowered the brightness to around -90. This will differ for each image. Basically what you see highlighted will receive the bloom effect. When your contrast and brightness values are less extreme more of the scene will receive the bloom. In some cases this may not be what is wanted since it can wash out the image overall.

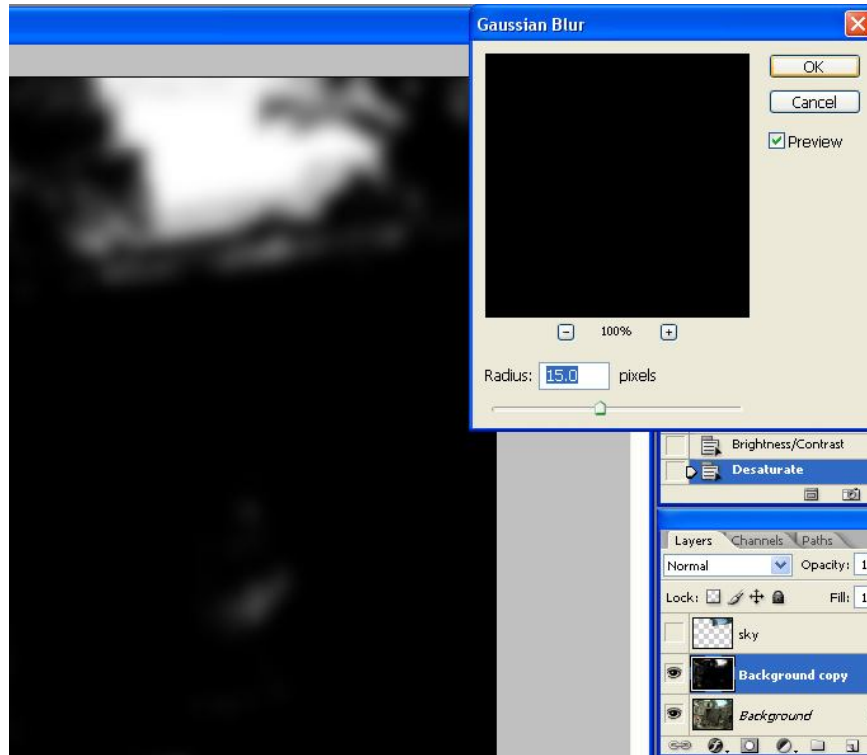
Specular Bloom Step 1:



Specular Bloom Step 2:



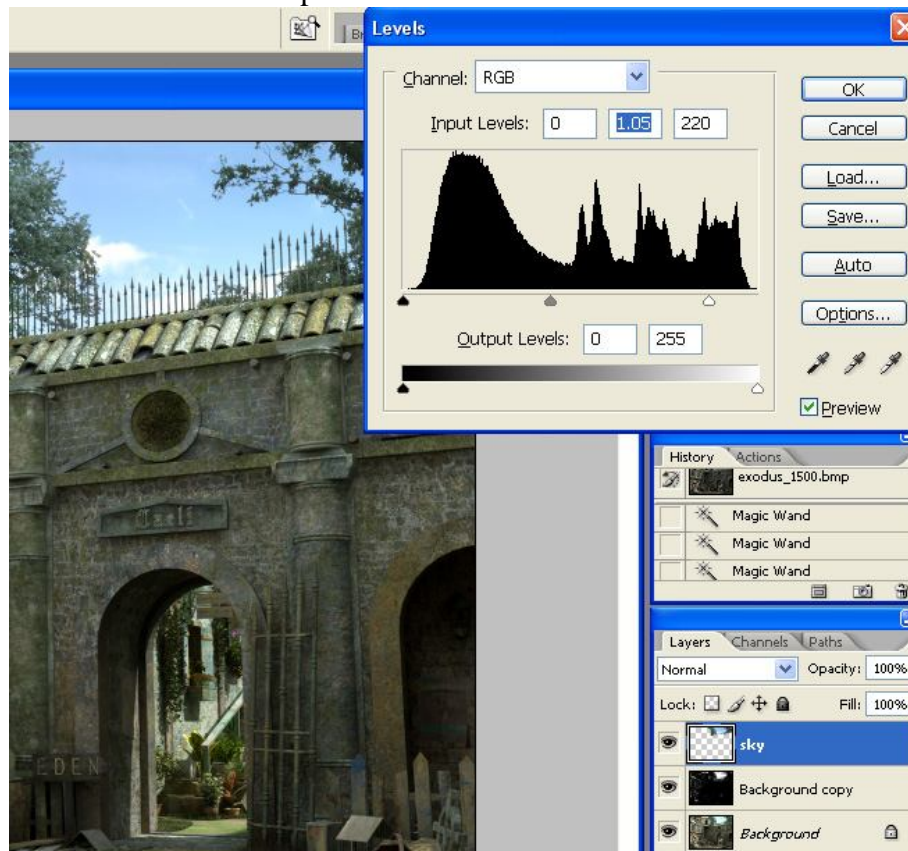
The next step is to desaturate the layer that will take on the bloom effect. Then add a Gaussian blur filter to the layer. I usually adjust the setting to around 15 pixels.



Then change the layer setting to **linear dodge**. The lighting should look blown out now so we'll need to lower the **opacity**. I usually set it around 10-15%.



Let's not forget about that sky layer. Basically we want to get the sky to match the new light adjustments as best as possible. After going through these steps I come back to the sky layer and adjust the right input level from 255 to around 220 and adjust the middle input level to be around 1.05:



And that's it! This is what it looks like after running it through these steps.



-Jason Godbey
www.jg-art.com