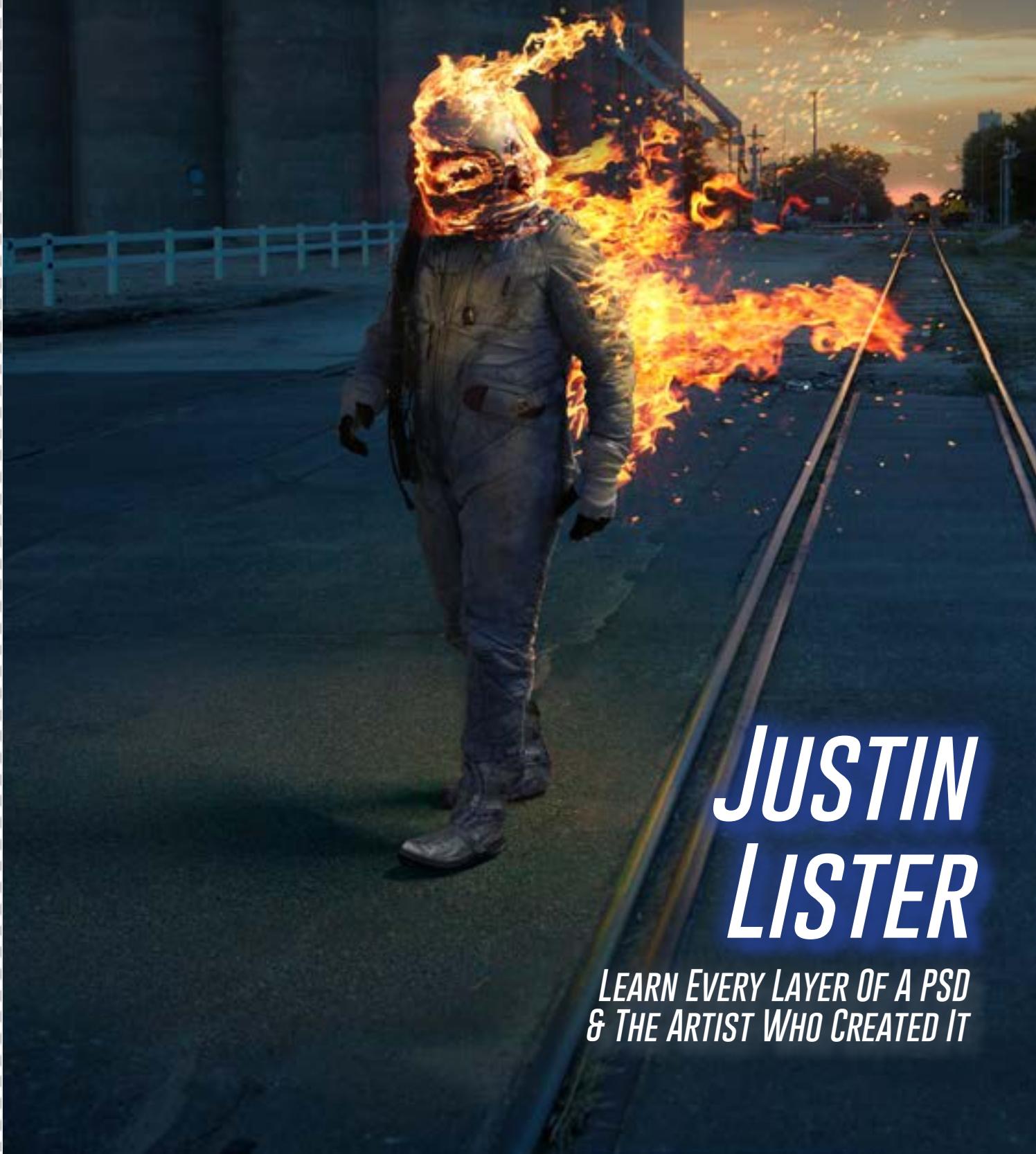


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LAYER

No / 04



JUSTIN
LISTER

LEARN EVERY LAYER OF A PSD
& THE ARTIST WHO CREATED IT



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**PRO EDU
LAYER MASK MAG**

Thanks for downloading LAYER! It's my hope that this publication can explore the anatomy of an image and the artists' who created them.

Often times I find myself wanting to see an artist' PSD and see what steps they took to get there. What organization did they have? How did they label their files? What methods and in what order did they execute them in? LAYER will explore this.

As visual artists, we are curious. We want to know how. More importantly we need to know WHY other artists are working the way they are. Welcome to LAYER!

This magazine features one artist every issue so we can see behind the curtain into their process. I hope you find value in what these artists share. If you can, make sure to go give their social media handles a like and thank them for sharing their process!

Cheers,

Gary Martin
Founder PRO EDU



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JUSTIN LISTER



Born and raised in Monterey, California, Justin Lister currently lives and works from Kansas. He was trained as an illustrator and Carpenter until he later found a passion of photography after a life changing illness made him reevaluate what he wanted from life. In 2008 he went through 1 year of chemotherapy and dialysis ending in a kidney transplant. He spent much of his recovery time teaching himself photography from books, practice, and what little resources that were available at that time on the internet. He began interweaving his love of cinema, art, carpentry, and photography together to create a cinematic style. His experience with illustration and carpentry have been

invaluable in pre-visualizing and executing his elaborate set building and capture of the images he sees in his head. "The images usually come to me at night before I fall asleep. I keep an iPad by the bed to sketch my idea before I forget. I see the images in very high detail and I have a compulsion to make them happen. I often see the meaning behind them after I see them.", Justin said. In 2016 Justin Lister won the Broncolor Gennext prize for outstanding photographers internationally. He continues to work commercially and creates award winner personal work for the fine art world. Justin is also a Pro Edu instructor, teaching others how he creates his work.





Q&A

How would you describe your style?

I describe my style with the tag line “Cinematic Portraits” which I think sums up my fine art and commercial work. Really, I would like to make images that evoke strong story and emotion in the viewer. I also want to make them eye-catching, with bold colors, usually in a darker and moodier light.

Who are your typical clients?

I actually have a pretty wide variety of clients because I operate two distinct types and styles of work. I have a separate wedding photography business which has really allowed me to make a good living while pursuing my personal, fine art, and corporate work, especially in the beginning. My other clients include, many local and regional artists/crafts-people across the United States, Regional corporations, and models/stylists from around the world during my travels.

Whose work have influenced you most in life?

The two photographers I really have to mention are Annie Leibovitz and Gregory Crewdson. I remember in high school, before I got into photography, I bought a book by Annie Leibovitz randomly after discovering it while looking at illustration books at the book store. The story, color, and emotion of the images just blew my mind. Around the same time I saw documentary “Beneath the Roses” about Gregory Crewdson’s elaborate, cinematic approach to photography. Other Artists I discovered in college that I love are Caravaggio for his moody and story telling style, and Edward Hopper for his simple and sparse style with themes of solitude.

What is the most rewarding part of being a photographer?

I would say the first would be when I successfully create the image that I pictured in my mind. For any artist that is the most basic satisfaction. Making the image is usually difficult, mundane, and tedious, but very satisfying at the end. The other most rewarding part is when others like what I have created. It is self-validating in the most basic human sense, when someone else likes what you made. My art is an expression of my experiences, what I am feeling or have felt, and how I see the world, so having that validated is amazing.

What's your advice for someone who wants to do what you do?

I would say that you have to love it so much that you can't picture yourself doing anything else because it takes a few years, most of the time, to get great at it. It must almost be an obsession and you have to have an un-quenching desire to learn more and or course practice. I would say you also need to be unique or distinctive enough to stand out. That could be from your subject matter, your style, your color, lighting, or any number of things. But simply, copying someone else in every way will not cut it. That being said, for the commercial side, if you are reasonably good at photography and lighting, and you can market yourself well, you should be able to make a living shooting commercial or wedding work.

Where do you see the industry heading?

I can only guess, but I think that motion/video will be more and more important for still photographers in the future. Many Ad agencies want someone who can setup once and get both video and stills for them, since budgets are shrinking and their content needs are expanding. I also see 3D becoming more important for the same budgetary reason. This is already happening in product photography which makes posing multiple setups of new products over time much easier to do in computer generated images.

What do you want to say with your photos and how do you get your photographs to do that?

In my fine art and personal work, I divide the projects into series that have a shared theme, style, and story that runs throughout. For example, in my "After Dark" series, I used my childhood memories and the stories of my family from multiple perspectives and generations to create a story that I know specifically, but the viewer must interpret for themselves. It will never be interpreted exactly, but the emotions and theme should. Just like Hopper and Crewdson there is a theme of solitude, loneliness, and sometimes tension in my series, Color and lighting are also ways I can express different emotions. Moody, dark lighting is almost ever present in my work and definitely in this series.





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What is your least favorite part of the job?

Marketing and social media is my least favorite. I know how important it is, but I have never been the type of person to be "look at me and look how great I am!" Because I don't feel that way. So constantly posting things and putting my work out there is really unnatural, but necessary.

What does the perfect shoot entail?

That is when tedious preparation meets serendipitous events. It's great to have a plan but when something happens that you could never have planned and it takes the image to a whole new level, its something amazing.

If there is something you could change about photoshop what would it be and why?

Cutting out people and objects quickly and naturally. Photoshop is getting much better at this but it still isn't quite there. I'm usually having to combine multiple techniques when cutting out a subject or object for a composite image. Hair is probably the most challenging and time consuming. Also if there is motion is the subject it gets very very difficult and usual means freezing the subject and adding motion blur later, which usually looks unnatural. I'm sure with AI and deep learning , Photoshop will have all this mastered in a few years

JUSTINLISTER.PSD

The Concept

My goal was to make a simple and strong surreal image for my Cosmonauts series. I knew that I wanted a cool, dusk/dawn background with a strong composition and a Cosmonaut engulfed in flames, walking or standing somewhere in frame. This posed a few challenges from the start. I knew I couldn't actually set someone on fire, obviously. I also knew that scouting a location and having a model there, in person, could result in a few failed attempts before I was able to get the sky, light, and weather I wanted. So now I know this image will be a composite shot in three separate parts, the Cosmonaut, the background, and the fire.







The Costume

It's not easy to come by an astronaut costume that can look real enough for a high resolution image, and not a cheap Halloween costume. I looked into renting a replica from a high end rental house but the price of shipping and insurance was more than my entire budget. That didn't even include the rental price. After a lot of ebay searching, I found that a Russian MiG high altitude suit would work. It was totally the incorrect color and it came with no gloves, which are pretty unique and expensive on real astronaut suits. I ended up ordering black cloth gloves, and white cloth gloves to try to make something that could pass for real. I glued in steel rings and rubber gaskets to the base of the gloves to simulate the locking mechanism of the gloves to the suit. I then got fabric spray paint in white and painted the suit. I didn't want pure white, I wanted more of a worn look. It ended up surprisingly realistic looking.

Location

I roamed the small town I lived in at the time, a few sunrises, shooting different interesting areas around town. One morning, the light was beautiful and I knew I had something interesting when shooting at a grain elevator where the train tracks ran into the loading dock. By the way, never shoot on active tracks and don't guess if they are active or not. This was a safe situation because I knew the town well, and I know these tracks that cross main street into the elevator are only used at wheat harvest in June. I used a Hasselblad H5D-60 and a 50-110mm HC lens at 50mm (35mm field of view for medium format).

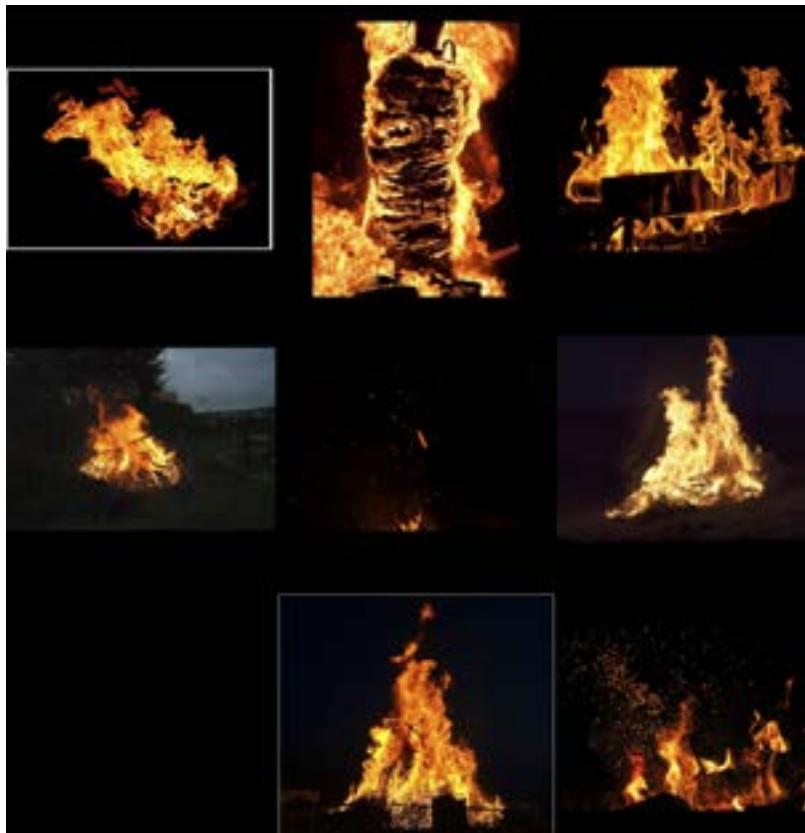
To shoot the Cosmonaut, I decided to use the street in front of my house at night for convenience. This allowed me a quite place where there was no traffic but had the same asphalt surface to the ground to make blending and reduce the need to create shadows from scratch.

Lighting

I decided to use constant lights to get the same settings on the subject photo as was on the background photo. I find this is a good method especially when shooting at night time when iso settings are higher. Using strobes at night are many times too powerful unless you have very low power flashes. I used 2 headlights from a car and 4 foot tungsten led tubes on light stands to shoot this. The tungsten temp would closer simulate the effects of fire. I didn't know exactly where the fire would be, but at the time I was thinking most of it would be on the back of the Cosmonaut because he is walking forward. If you ever have seen a stunt man on fire while walking or running, you know what I am talking about. I placed the headlights behind and one led tube on the right side and one above.

The Fire

This one is pretty easy. Light a fire in a fire ring, campsite, or fireplace and photograph it so the fire is not too bright to lose detail and is dark enough so that everywhere outside of the fire is black. You can experiment with different shutter speeds to capture motion blur or freeze motion in the fire. The trick is to shoot many, many photos and to burn different shapes of wood. These resources will be invaluable when blending into to final image. If it is not possible for you to burn something, you can go to a website like Flickr, where you can search for high res images that are available for free download with full commercial rights.





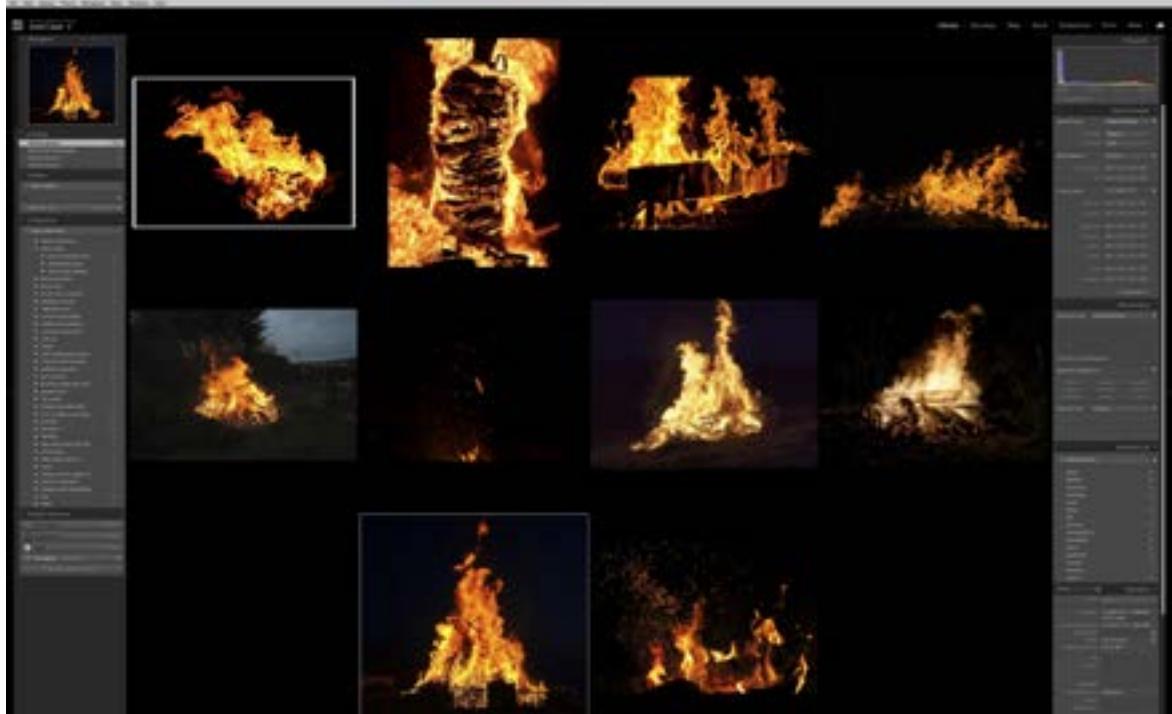
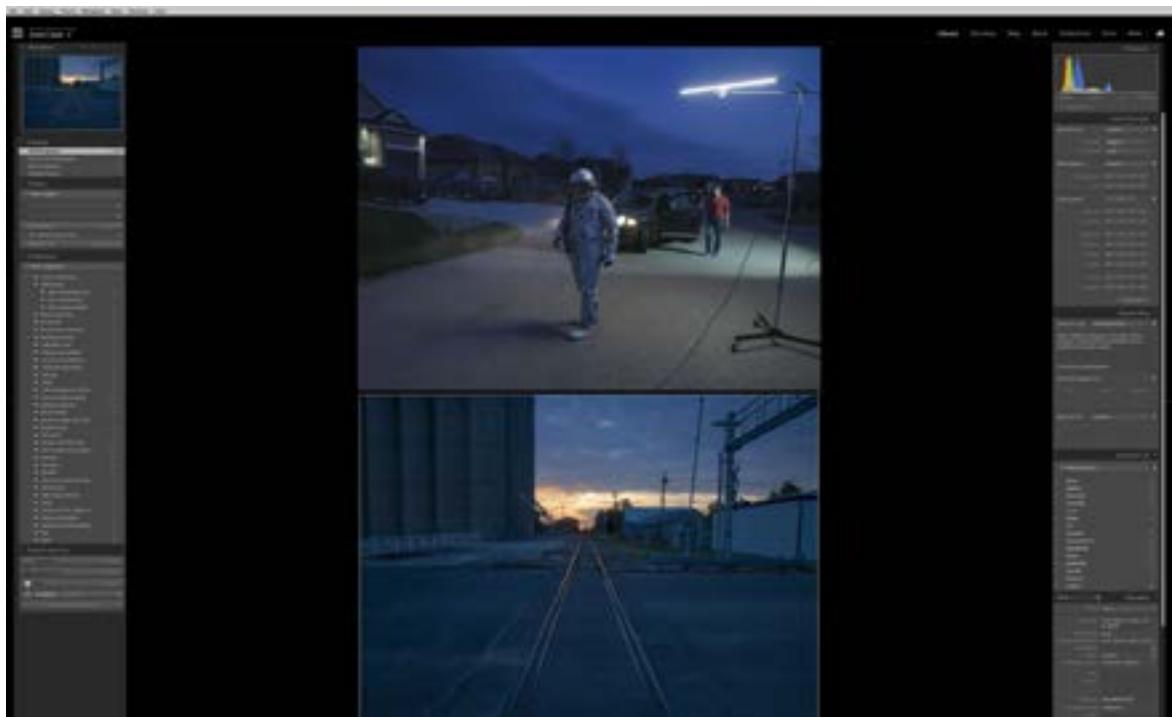
WORKFLOW

Image organization and Raw adjustments

I use Lightroom for all my culling and RAW adjustments. The first step is to quickly go through and choose my favorite backgrounds and poses. I will then go through them two more times until I have made my selections. The fire images, I will choose patterns of fire that will possibly work for different parts of the body and more than I will need, just to be safe. I'm looking for objects in the fire that are burning, that look similar in shape to an arm, or the helmet. For the fire on the back, I just wanted the top half of the fire, where there are no breaks

in the pattern of the fire. I also grabbed a couple images of sparks flying off the fire.

I made no adjustments to the fire unless I was losing details in the highlights, then I would bring them down, and crush the blacks so there is no detail anywhere else in the image. For the background, I pulled the highlights all the way down to get the sky detail back, and the shadows all the way up to get the shadow detail back. I adjusted the temperature down to my liking, making the image cooler than before. I did the same for the Cosmonaut. Slight sharpening was done before exporting all the resources as layers in Photoshop.



Cutting out and placing the subject.

I used the pen tool for a precise cutout of the Cosmonaut down to his knees, then duplicated the layer and I made a broad circle around the rest of him to include his shadow and some of the ground around him. I separated these layers so I could independently control the Cosmonaut and the ground/shadow around him. Then I did some slight scaling, making him slightly larger. It's important when placing the subject to try to shoot at the same focal length as the background image and to line up the horizon lines in both the foreground/subject image, and the background image. Every other decision on placement is a judgement call. I used a broad, soft brush, with 20% flow to blend the asphalt of the foreground into the background. At this time, I called in my wife to look to see if it looks like the subject is there. It's good to have a layperson look to see if the illusion is working before getting too far along on an image that the perspective is incorrect on from the start. I needed to add laces and soles on the costume of the Cosmonaut, so I blended pictures of boots onto the Cosmonaut, adjusting the color to match.



Placing the fire

I next took all the fire resources and changed the blending mode to Screen and clicked all of them off except one. Next I went through one at a time, moving them to different parts of the Cosmonaut, making them fit. I used

free transform and Warp Transform to fine tune each selected part. Then I made layer masks, masking out parts of the fire that weren't needed or would be covered by a part of the Cosmonaut. Next I used the same technique to add in the sparks flying behind him and up into the air.



Creating the lighting effects from the fire

This takes a bit of artistic skill, but patience and subtle changes over a few layers usually does the job. I used levels adjustments to brighten and warm up some of the areas that I would think the fire would light up. Those would be the chest, arms, ground, and reflections on the shiny train tracks. I used soft brushes with low flow to build up these effects slowly. I also used 100% flow of brushed colors, taken from the fire with the eyedropper tool, to create the correct colors illuminating the areas I made the curves adjustments to. Then I would change the blending mode of those layers to Softlight and adjust the opacity to my liking. Its good to use more than one layer in each area with some being orange, some red, and some yellow making the red the broadest, and least opacity, and the yellow the smallest and largest opacity, simulating what color does in the fire.

Last touches in Photoshop

I thought the sky was still too bright, so I used a Levels adjustment with a layer mask in the sky, to darken it some more. I wanted the fire to be the brightest part of the image to draw your eye to the subject.



Color toning in Lightroom

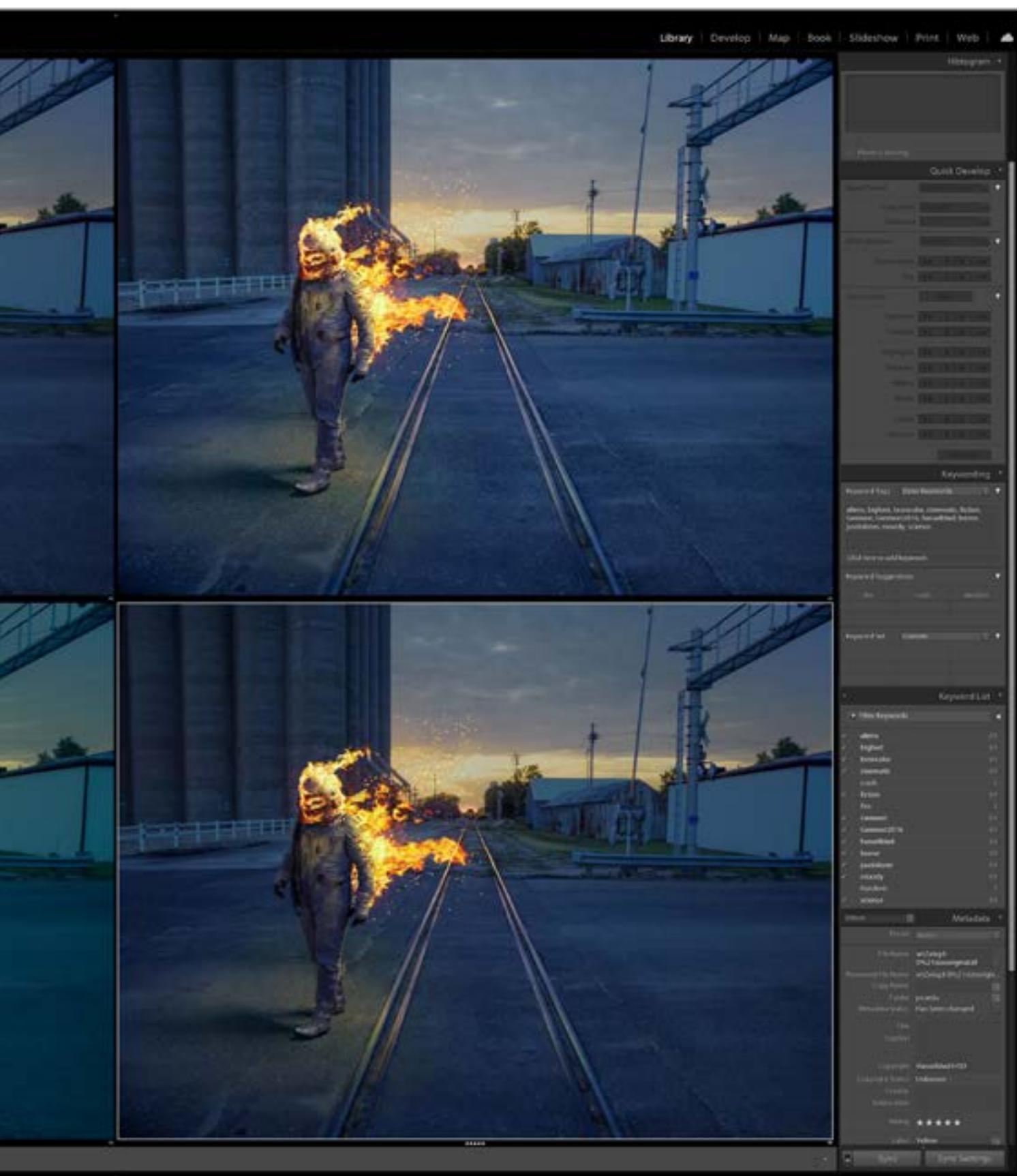
Final color adjustments I do in Lightroom. The reason I do this, is that I can quickly make many different versions of the image, using virtual copies. The advantage of this is two fold. I can see them all laid out next to each other with the hotkey "N" and compare each one to find my favorite. The other reason is that these virtual copies take thousands of times less space on your hard drive than making copies of the original in Photoshop. I used the same method as before, of choosing my favorites during three different selection rounds, eliminating images in each round, until I was left with one.

My color toning idea was simple, cool colors in the shadows and warm colors in the highlights. I experimented with different methods and color combinations. My favorite color combos are usually blue/yellow, teal/orange, blue/red, teal/yellow, cyan/red, cyan/orange. In Lightroom the best tools for this are the curves adjustment tool and my favorite, the split toning tool. This tool is especially powerful for color toning because you can adjust the opacity of each tone and the balance between them, in a simple and logical way. I also adjusted contrast with the "Basic" sliders to my liking.

Export

I export multiple versions of the final image to store on the cloud. I name each appropriately for easy access later on from my cloud service. I will make a full resolution jpeg, Tiff, and PSD. I will make a social media sized jpeg at 2048 pixels wide on the long edge, and then 12 inch wide jpeg versions at 300dpi for any magazines or fine art submissions later on. The original file is usually too big for cloud storage, as a PSB file, and will be kept on a local drive, but I will always have good a full res version to access in case of drive failure or a fire, God Forbid.





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COMING SOON IN THE NEXT ISSUE... NINO BATISTA