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'Using crafty work-arounds to achieve remarkable results, Mark Galer pushes Elements' capabilities to new levels.'

Christy Brandt, Director of Engineering, Photoshop Elements, Adobe Systems, Inc.

Adobe® Photoshop® Elements 6

Unleash the hidden performance
of Elements



Mark Galer



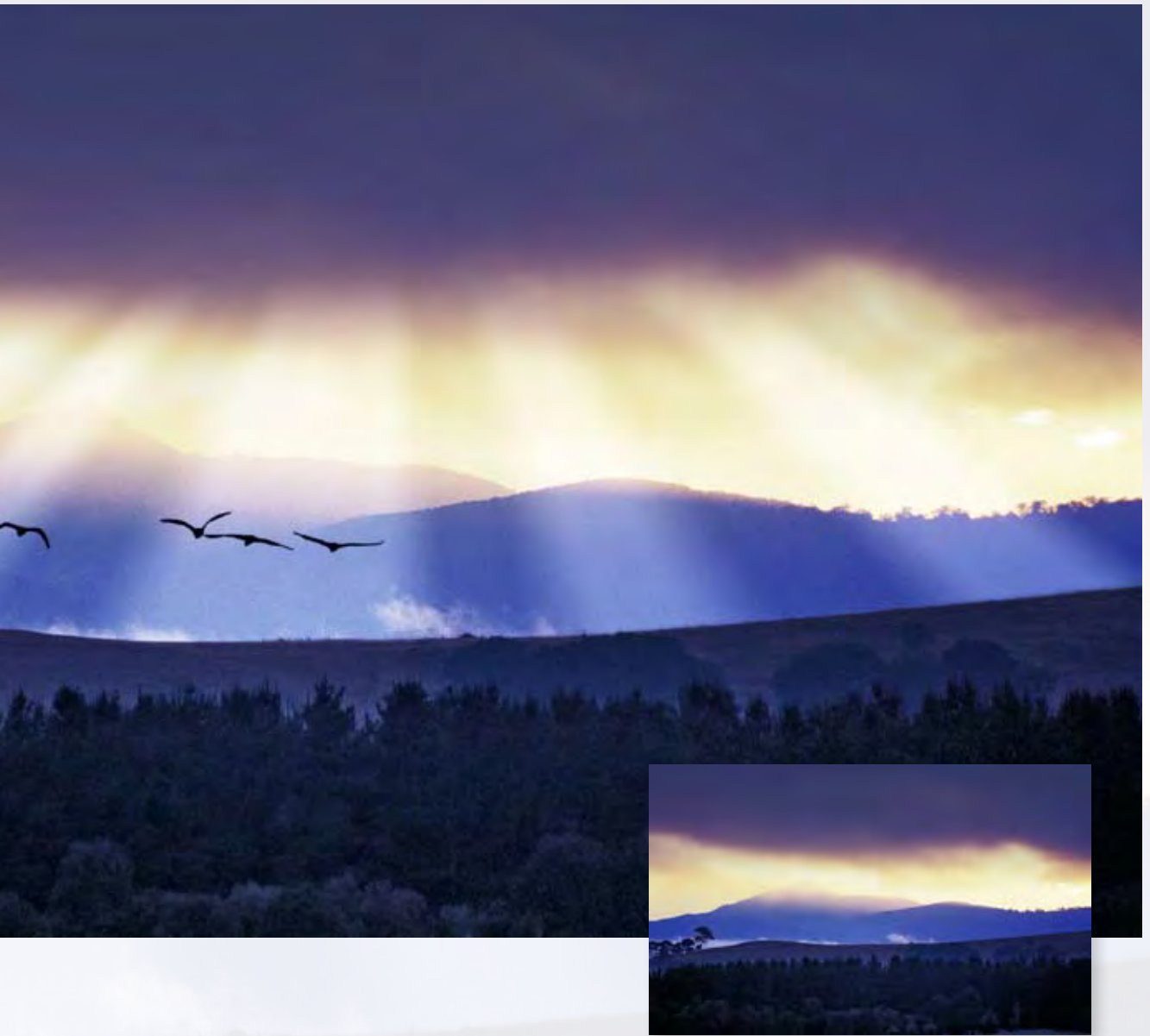
Project 2



GRADIENT PRESET ON DVD

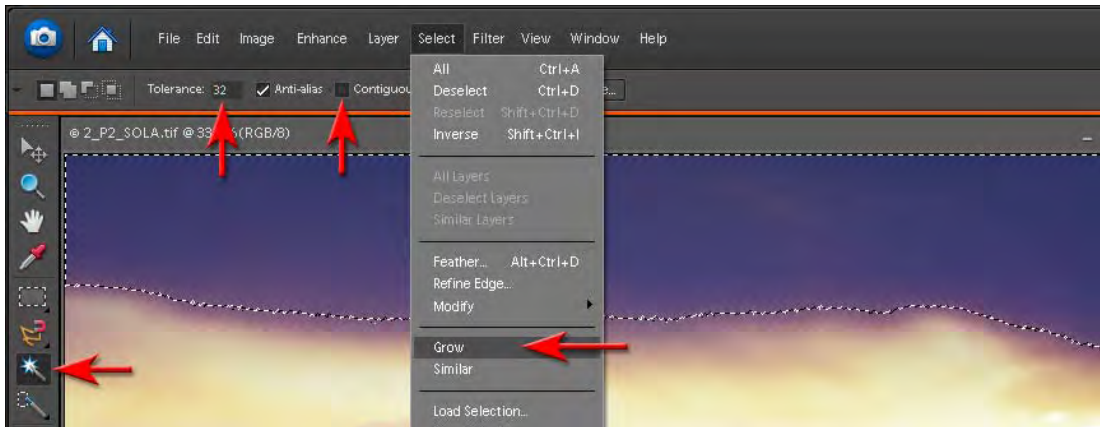
Shafts of Light

Here we explore the science of making good photographs even more memorable. Discover how to add drama to your landscape images using the 'Fingers of God' tool (aka the Gradient tool with customized settings). Creating effective landscape images is not exactly rocket science. Choose a beautiful landscape just after dawn, or just before sunset, and add dramatic natural lighting to create emotive and memorable landscape images.



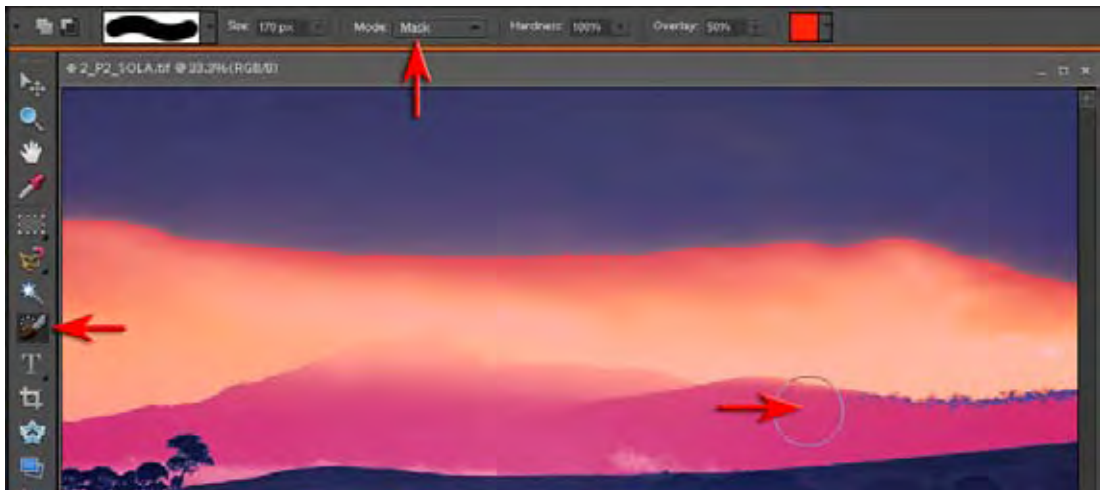
Let there be light - create dramatic lighting effects to enhance the drama of your images

Clear blue skies are great for holidays on the beach but the best natural lighting for photography is provided by broken or filtered sunlight through partial cloud cover. The most memorable of all lighting is when shafts of light break through the clouds. Finding partial cloud cover when the sun is low is relatively easy, being present when shafts of light flood your selected vista however can be an elusive and rare event. This final and quintessential ingredient requires patience, persistence and good fortune - or a good helping of post-production editing courtesy of Photoshop Elements.



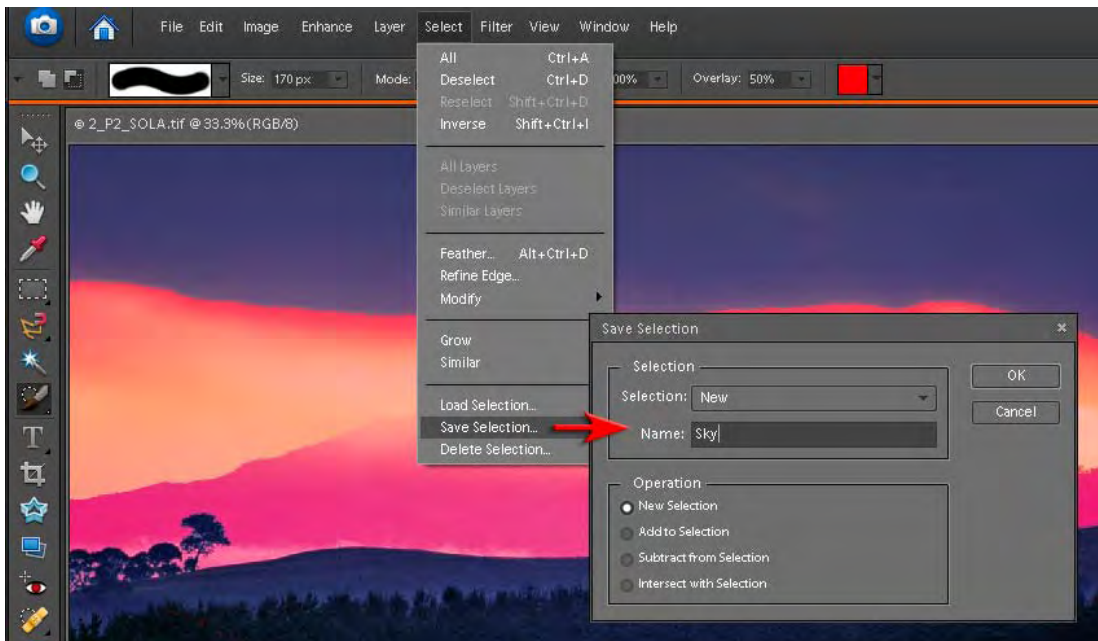
1. Choose the 'Magic Wand' in the Tools palette and deselect the 'Contiguous' option in the Options bar. Click on the dark blue sky at the top of the image to make a selection that excludes the yellow sky (this region will play host to the shafts of light). Hold down the Shift key and keep selecting areas/colors with the Magic Wand until everything except the yellow sky is selected. Selecting the Grow command from the Select menu to expand the selection may also help in making this selection.

Note > Deselecting the 'Contiguous' option will allow the Magic Wand to select all similar pixels, even if they are not adjoining the area clicked on.

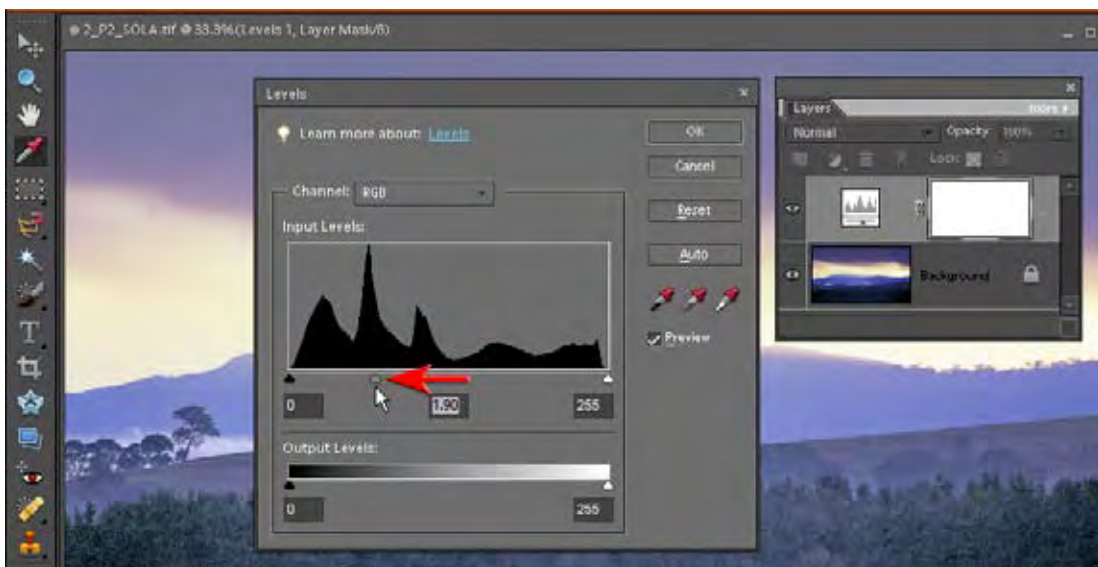


2. Choose the 'Selection Brush tool' from the Tools palette and choose the 'Mask' option from the Options bar. The 'Mask' option enables you to see your selection as a painted mask so you can easily see what areas are selected. Choose an appropriate brush size and paint to add areas of the sky missed by the Magic Wand. Hold down the Alt key as you paint to remove any areas of the mask (and resulting selection) that are not required.

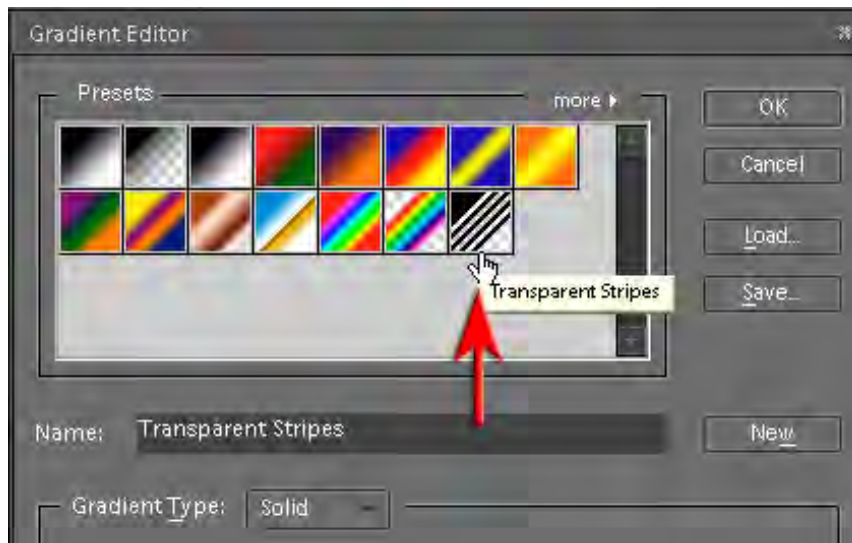
Note > You can choose an alternative color for the overlay mask and adjust the opacity in the Options bar to make the selection process easier.



3. Go to the Select menu and choose 'Save Selection'. You can give your selection a name to help you locate this for a later stage in the editing process. Choose 'Deselect' from the Select menu.



4. From the top of the Layers palette click on the Create New Fill or Adjustment Layer icon and choose 'Levels' from the menu. Drag the central Gamma slider in the dialog box to the left to substantially brighten the image. The tonality for the majority of the image will be returned to normal by creating a sophisticated layer mask for this adjustment layer in the next stages of the tutorial.

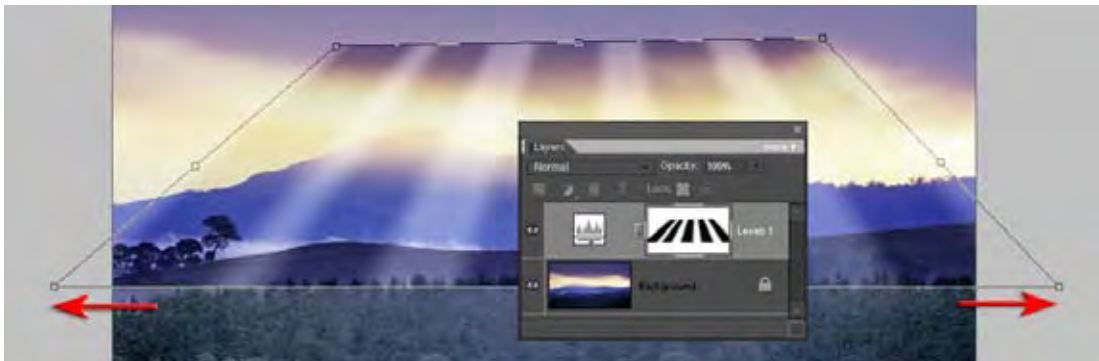
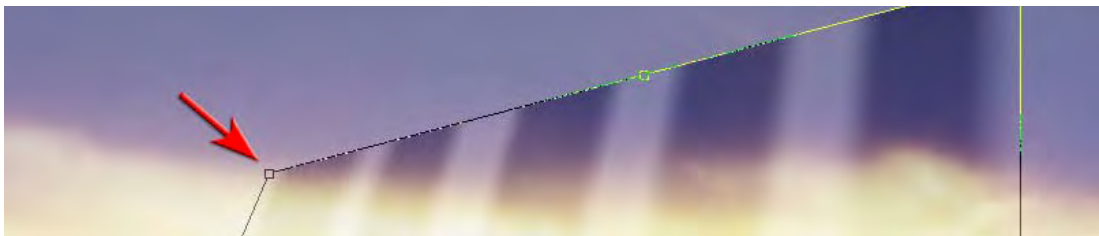


5. Select black as the Foreground color and the 'Gradient Tool' in the tools palette and then click on the Edit button in the Options bar to open the Gradient Editor. Click on the 'Transparent Stripes' gradient. Edit the gradient using the following pointers. The aim of editing the gradient is to make the stripes irregular widths with softer edges to emulate the irregular and softer nature of shafts of light. The white stops on the top of the editing ramp indicate full transparency whilst the black stops indicate full opacity of the foreground color. Click and drag the stops into groups of four. A white stop should be on either end of a grouping of four with two black stops next to each other in the middle. Moving the black stops further apart will broaden the stripe. Moving the white stop further away from the central black stops will broaden the area of transition between full opacity and full transparency. To add a stop hold down the Alt key and drag an existing stop a short distance. To remove a stop drag the stop away from the gradient ramp. To add this modified gradient to the presets click on the New button and give your shafts of light a suitable name (don't worry that the shafts are colored black for the moment). This gradient can be loaded from the Preset that is available on the DVD.

Note > A black stop can be changed to a white stop or vice-versa by clicking on the stop and then adjusting the Opacity slider in the bottom Stops section of the Gradient Editor.

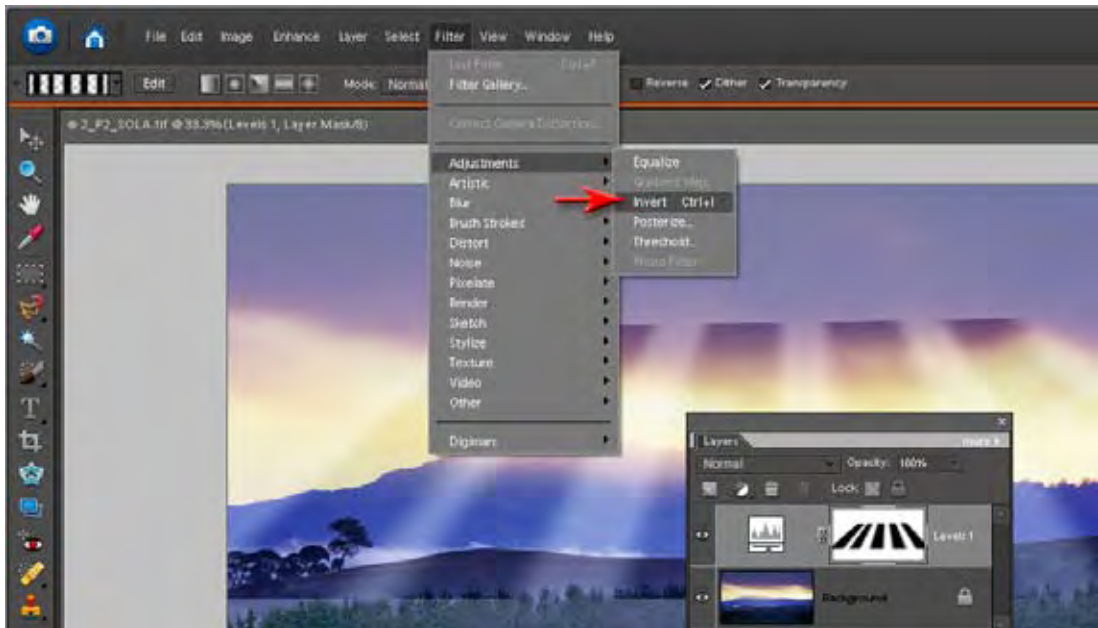


6. Make sure the 'Linear' gradient option is selected in the Options bar and set the opacity to 100% and the mode to 'Normal'. The foreground color should still be set to black. Click on the left side of the image window and drag your mouse cursor to the right side of the image window. The length of the line you draw will be the initial width of the shafts although this can be modified using the Transform command outlined in the following step.

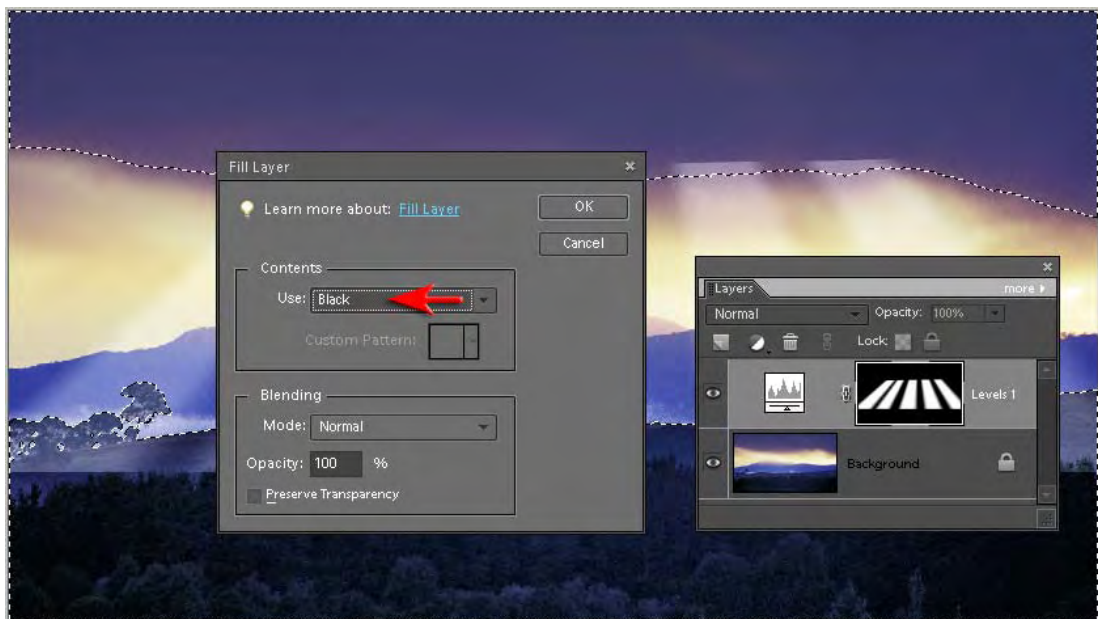


7. From the Image menu select 'Distort' from the Transform submenu. Click on each of the corner handles and drag them to fan the shafts of light. Move the cursor into the Transform bounding box, and click and drag the bounding box to reposition the shafts of light. When you're satisfied with the shape, double-click inside the distorted bounding box to accept the transformation.

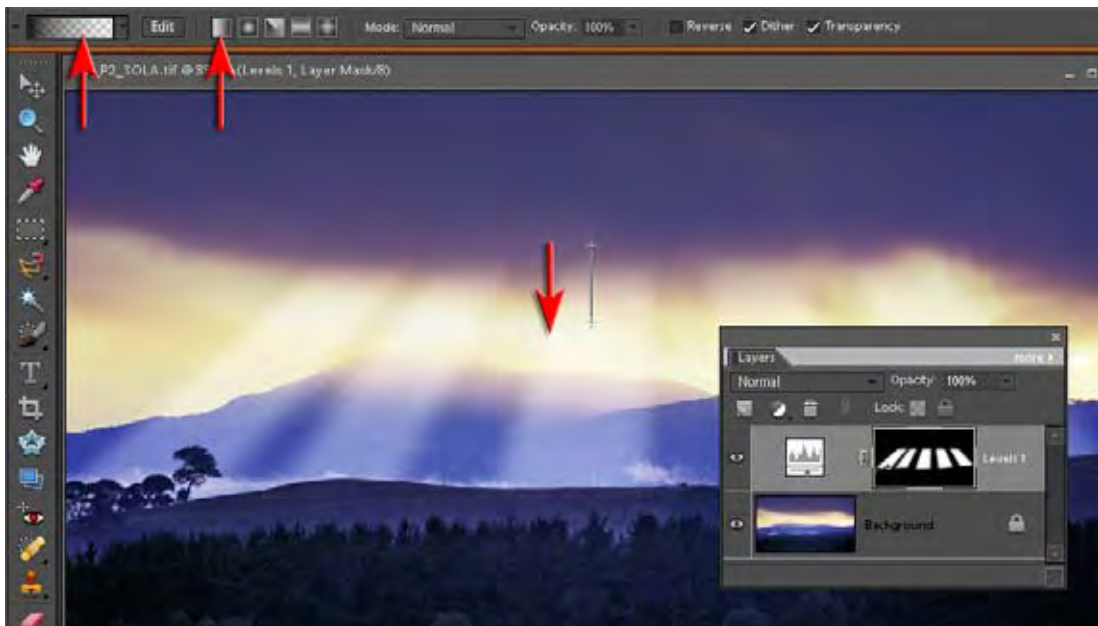
Note > You may need to extend the image window so that you can drag the corner handles to the required angle.



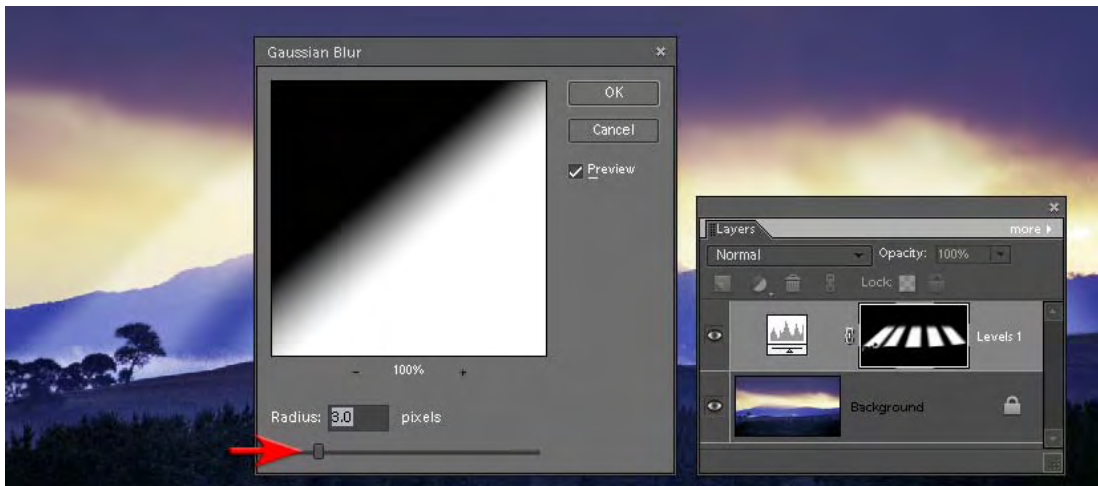
8. Go to the Filter menu and select 'Invert' from the Adjustments submenu. This will turn the black stripes to white and return the brightness level of the rest of the image to normal. The next step will aim to limit the shafts of light to the selection made at the start of the tutorial.



9. From the Select menu choose 'Load Selection' and load the selection saved at the start of the tutorial. From the Edit menu choose the 'Fill Selection' command and select 'Black' as the fill color and then select OK. This will further limit the shafts of light to the desired location.

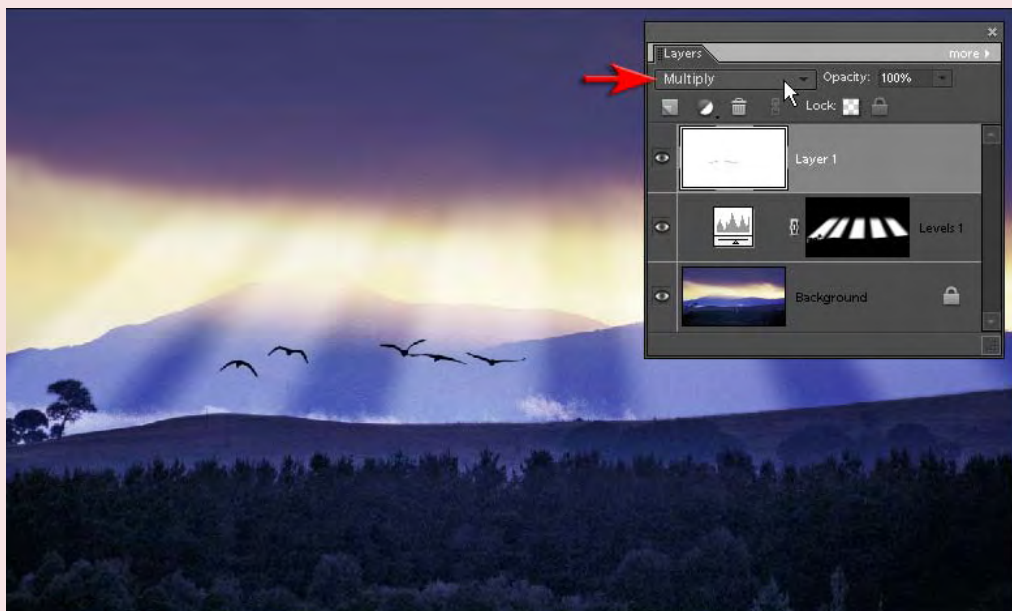
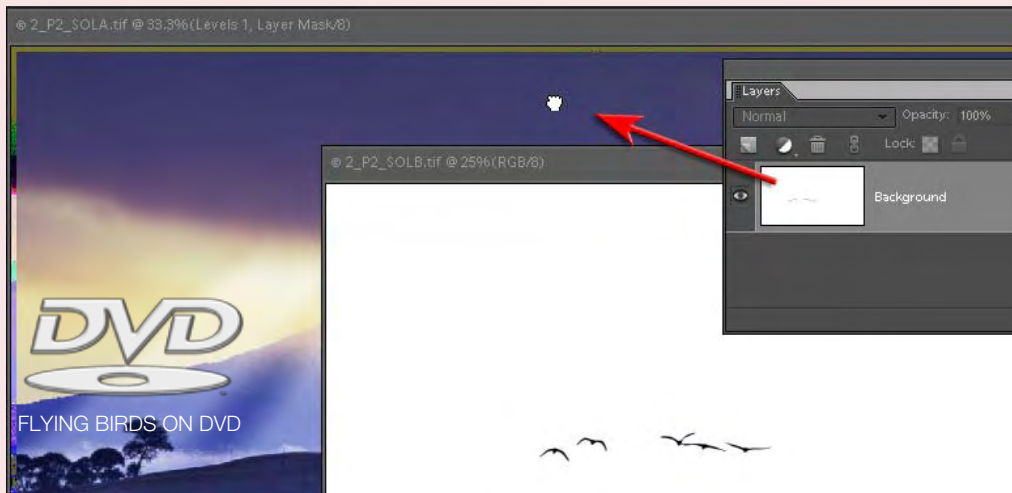


10. Select the Gradient tool and choose the 'Foreground to Transparent' gradient. Drag a short gradient from the start of the shafts of light to conceal their hard edges.



11. To soften the mask further choose Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur. Select a pixel Radius that will soften the edges of the mask so the cut-off of the lighting behind the distant hill is subtle. The only problem with this technique is that it is almost too effective and therefore tempting to sneak it into too many images in your personal folio. When this happens the cat will be well and truly out of the bag.

Note > It is possible to increase the intensity of the shafts of light by switching the blend mode of the adjustment layer to 'Screen'. Adjust the opacity to fine-tune the effect.



PERFORMANCE TIP

Create a focal point by introducing some birds that will be silhouetted against the shafts of light. Open the second image file and drag the thumbnail from the background layer (in the Layers palette) into the image window of the project. Holding down the Shift key when you let go of the file will center it in the host image. Switching the blend mode to 'Multiply' will render the white background of this layer invisible. Good just got better.



DVD

IMAGE ON DVD

The techniques used to create this image have been taken from Projects 2, 3 and 4 in this section of the book