

# SECTION 4: SKY

## 4.1 Cloudy Text



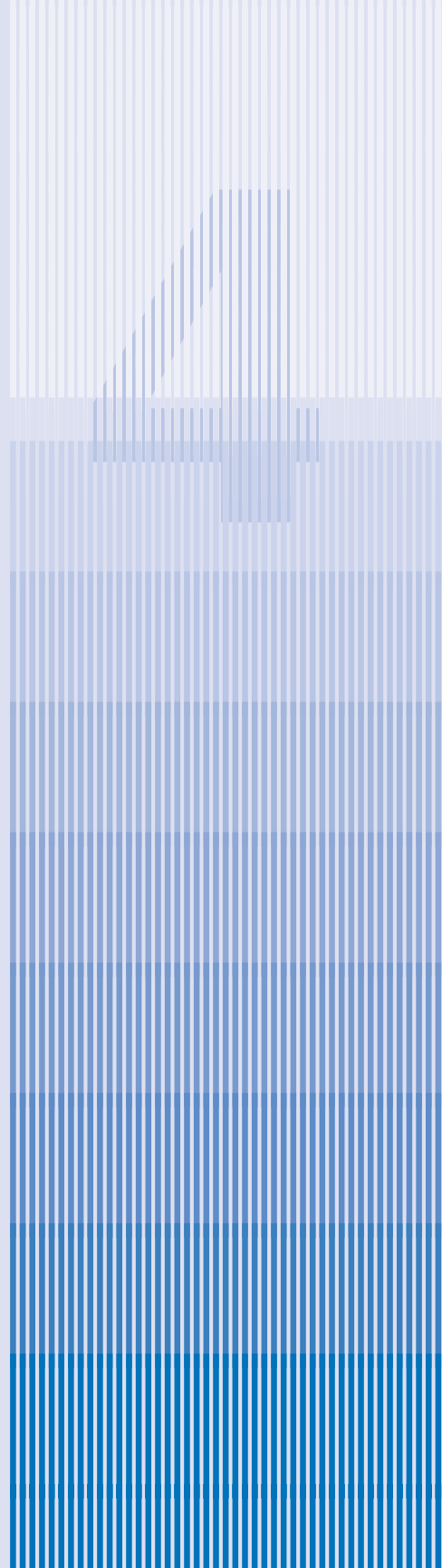
## 4.2 Sunset



## 4.3 Nebulae



## 4.4 Starfields




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### Cloudy Text

Tired of ordinary text with that flat, boring appearance? Add a unique dash of surrealism by turning your text into fluffy clouds!

#### 1 The ‘text’ layer

Press CTRL/CMD+N to create a new RGB document, 667x500 pixels, with a white background. Press SHIFT+CTRL/CMD+S to save it as `cloudtext.psd`, and CTRL/CMD+I to invert the colors (so that you have a black background).

Open the Channels palette and ALT/OPT-click the  button to create a new channel called “text”.

Press T to select the Type tool and use a sans-serif font such as Arial or Verdana to add the text “cloudy” to the center of the image. When you are happy with the shape and size of the text, click the  button in the Options bar, and press CTRL/CMD+D to drop the selection.

*The text shown here is available in the download as `cloudy.psd`.*



#### 2 Blur, Noise, and Distortion

With the ‘text’ channel active, go to Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur. Set the Radius to 3 pixels, and hit OK.

Use Filter > Artistic > Film Grain with Grain set to 8, Highlight Area to 12, and Intensity to 4. Hit OK.

Open the Filter > Distort > Ocean Ripple filter. In the filter window, select a Ripple Size of 6 and a Ripple Magnitude of 6. Hit OK to execute the filter.

*Blur the edges to soften up any sharp corners. Film Grain adds a lot of noise around the text border, while Ocean Ripple applies a heavy distortion to the edges.*



#### 3 The fluffy effect

Select Image > Adjust > Threshold, set the Threshold Level to 235, and hit OK.

Bring up Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur again, this time selecting a Radius of 2 pixels, and hit OK.

To finish off, use Filter > Artistic > Film Grain with Grain set to 0, Highlight Area set to 3, and Intensity set to 3. Click OK.

*Threshold converts the image to black-and-white, bringing us closer to the fluffy-edged effect we want. Blurring removes the jagged edges and gives the text a softer look. Film Grain then thickens the edges of the text and adds definition.*





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### 7 Adding a background

Open the file `spirals.psd` from the download folder, and press CTRL/CMD+A followed by CTRL/CMD+C to select all and copy it to the clipboard.

Now return to `cloudtext.psd` and press CTRL/CMD+V to paste in the spiral staircase image as a new layer. Drag it down the layer stack so that it's just below the 'clouds' layer.



### 8 Creating contrast

Click on the  button in the Layers palette, and select Stroke. In the Layer Style dialog, set Size to 1px, Opacity to 50%, and select a medium blue color.

*Adding a stroke to the clouds adds contrast around the edges. Notice how they are now visible, though still soft in appearance.*

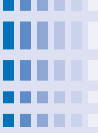


### 9 Adding shadow

With the Layer Style dialog still up enable Drop Shadow. Change the Blend Mode to Overlay, bring the Opacity down to 50%, and set Distance to 14 pixels. Hit OK.

*The Drop Shadow effect adds that final touch of depth and allows the clouds to float above the background.*





## The Finished Product



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### Sunset

Digital representations of sunsets can be almost as breathtaking as the real thing, and in Photoshop it's easy to create your own from scratch. I find these effects rather intriguing because they're based on randomly generated filter effects. So, just as you'll never see the same sunset twice, you'll never quite duplicate one of these Photoshop sunset effects.

#### 1 Creating clouds

Press CTRL/CMD+N to create a new RGB document, 500x500 pixels, with a white background. Hit OK. Press SHIFT+CTRL/CMD+S to save it as `sunset.psd`.

Press the D key to reset to the default colors, and ALT/OPT+BACKSPACE to fill the background layer with black.

Hold down the ALT/OPT key and click  on the Layers palette to create a new layer named "center clouds". With the new layer active, run Filter > Render > Clouds.

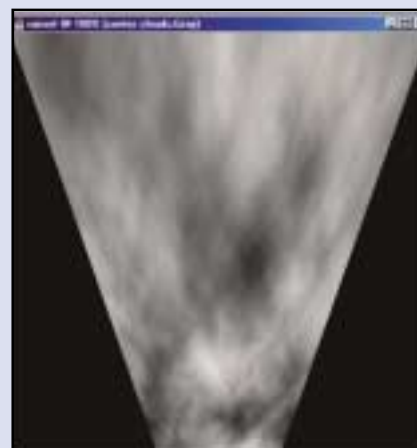
*This fills the canvas with a random cloud pattern, which will be used as the basis for the clouds visible in the sunset.*



#### 2 Adding perspective

Select Edit > Transform > Perspective and a box will appear round the image, with control points at the sides and corners. In the Options bar set W to 30% and then drag the top left control back to the top left corner of the image. Press ENTER twice to apply the transformation.

*Distort the clouds toward a "horizon" at the bottom of the image.*



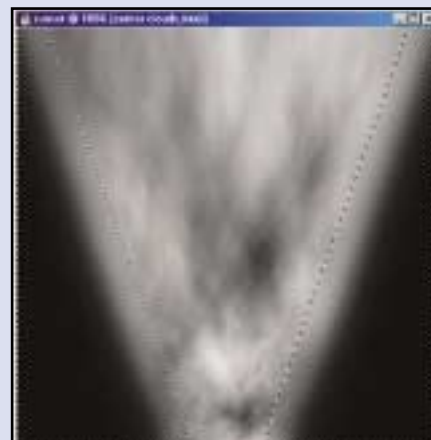
#### 3 Softening the cloud edges: feathering the selection

CTRL/CMD-click on the 'center clouds' layer to load its contents as a selection. Use Select > Modify > Contract with a value of 30 to exclude the edges of the clouds image from the selection.


Now press CTRL/CMD+ALT/OPT+D to call up the Feather dialog, and set Feather Radius to 20. Click OK to feather the selection, followed by SHIFT+CTRL/CMD+I to invert the area of the selection.

Use Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur with a Radius of 20 pixels, and then press CTRL/CMD+D to drop the selection.

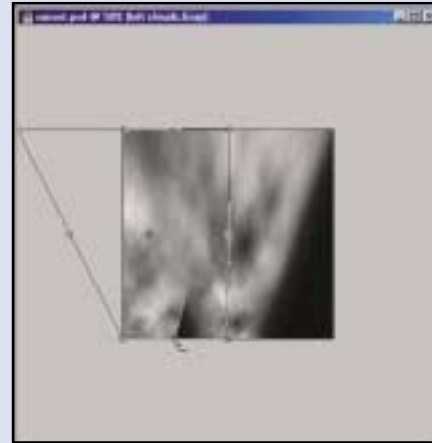
*Only the edges of the cloud image are currently selected. Blurring them will help us to blend multiple cloud images together seamlessly.*



## 4 A new clouds layer

Select the 'Background' layer and ALT/OPT-click on  to create a new layer called "left clouds" just above it. Press Z and ALT/OPT-click twice on the image to zoom out to 50%.

Apply Filter > Render > Clouds and select Edit > Transform > Perspective. In the Options bar set W to 50% and drag the top left control into the top left corner of the image. Now set X to 0, drag the bottom middle control point over to the edge of the cloud (as shown) and release. Press ENTER twice to apply the transformation.




Press Z and click twice on the image to return the zoom to 100%.

*The perspective clouds on the left side are complete.*



## 5 Balancing the clouds

ALT/OPT-click on  to create a new layer called "right clouds". Press CTRL/CMD+F to reapply the Clouds filter, and SHIFT+CTRL/CMD+T to reapply the Perspective Transform. Select Edit > Transform > Horizontal Flip and press V to select the Move tool. Now SHIFT-drag the 'right clouds' layer sideways until it snaps to the right-hand edge of the image.

*Transform a second clouds layer to add perspective and fill in the right side of the image. By filling in the edges, the clouds will soon look like they are disappearing towards the horizon.*



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### 6 Resizing the image

Press **SHIFT+CTRL/CMD+E** to merge all that's visible into a single layer. Now select **Image > Image Size**, and in the Image Size dialog, uncheck **Constrain Proportions**. Change **Height** to 250 pixels and click **OK** to resize the image.

*Stretching the image emphasizes the perspective of the clouds, giving the appearance of great depth.*




### 7 Inverting the image

Press **CTRL/CMD+I** to invert the color of the clouds – if you think the clouds don't look as good as they did before, hit **CTRL/CMD+I** again to change them back.

*The sunset will look most realistic when there are relatively distinct clouds, as opposed to a large cloud area with holes in it. The first image is my original, and the second is its inverse. I decided that the original looks best, with a large cloud in the top right corner and a slightly smaller one on the right, so I left the clouds in their original state.*



## 8 Duplicating the layer

Now press CTRL/CMD+I to invert one more time, so the image looks like the clouds you *didn't* pick. Hold down ALT/OPT and drag the background layer onto the  button to create a duplicate layer named “clouds 2”.

Open the Filter > Artistic > Film Grain window, and set Grain to 1, Highlight Area to 3, and Intensity to 3. Click OK to run the filter.

*Film Grain adds contrast to the edges of the clouds.*




## 9 Adding more depth

Change the blending mode of the ‘clouds 2’ layer to Color Dodge, and then click on the background layer. Open the Filter > Distort > Spherize window. Select the ‘Vertical only’ mode, set the Amount to 100%, and click OK.

*The Spherize filter will create some variation and depth by shifting parts of the background layer to change the way it interacts with the ‘clouds 2’ layer.*



## 10 Creating a levels adjustment layer




Re-activate the ‘clouds 2’ layer. Click the  button on the Layers palette, and choose Levels. Click the Auto button on the Levels dialog, and then click OK.

*The levels adjustment layer maximizes the contrast of the two cloud layers.*



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### 11 Adding color

Click the  button again, and create a Gradient Map adjustment layer. In the Gradient Map dialog, click the  button next to the gradient to open the list of preset gradients. Click the  button, and select Pastels.grd from the pop-out dialog. If asked whether to replace the current gradients with Pastels.grd, click OK. Double-click on the fourth gradient, “Yellow, Pink, Purple”, and then click OK.



*The Gradient Map adds dramatic colors to the sky, applying the yellow portion of the gradient to the darkest parts of the clouds, and the purple to the light areas.*

### 12 Adding another gradient

Click on the  button to create a Gradient adjustment layer (not a Gradient Map adjustment layer). In the Gradient dialog, load the Color Harmonies 2.grd presets, select “Orange, Yellow”, and click OK.




Change the blend mode of the ‘Gradient Fill 1’ adjustment layer to Soft Light.

*Notice how the sky appears slightly brighter and more yellow near the horizon.*



## 13 Creating the sun

Hold down ALT/OPT and click  on the Layers palette to create a new layer (on the top of the layer stack) named “sun”. Press ALT/OPT+BACKSPACE to fill the layer with black, and set the blend mode to Color Dodge.

Use Filter > Render > Lens Flare with Brightness set to 100%, and select the 105mm Prime Lens Type. Click in the Flare Center box to pick where the sun should appear in the image, and click OK.



## 14 Blending in the sun

Press CTRL/CMD+U to open the Hue/Saturation dialog. Turn on Colorize and set Hue to 0, Saturation to -25, and Lightness to -50. Click OK.

*Desaturating and darkening the 'sun' layer makes the effect more realistic.*



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### The Finished Product



### Variations and Applications

For some sunset variations, try changing gradients and blend modes, or adding buildings, mountains or other objects to the foreground.

*In this example, the 'clouds 2' layer was set to use Screen mode to soften the clouds, and the Gradient adjustment layer was modified to use the "Purple, Yellow" gradient.*



*Here I made the clouds very dark and foreboding by setting the 'clouds 2' layer to Darken, changing the Gradient adjustment layer to use "Yellow, Pink, Purple", and then creating another copy of the layer and setting it to Hue mode. Finally, I created a third Gradient adjustment layer to add a band of red at the horizon.*



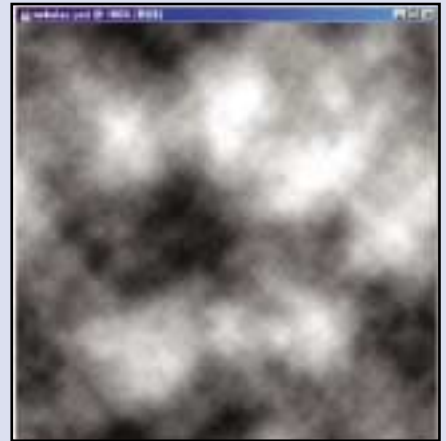
## Nebulae

Sunsets are nice to gaze at on Earth, but wouldn't it be cool to make the outer space version of a sunset? The nebulae that are produced in this section can be tiled seamlessly, and you can combine this technique with the following one ('Starfields') to make a complete universe.


### 1 Creating a cloud base

Press CTRL/CMD+N to create a new RGB document, 512x512 pixels, with a white background. Hit OK and press SHIFT+CTRL/CMD+S to save it as `nebulae.psd`. Press D to reset the default colors and run Filter > Render > Clouds. Press SHIFT+CTRL/CMD+L to run Auto Levels.

*The image dimensions are both multiples of 256, so the Clouds filter will produce a tileable pattern.*

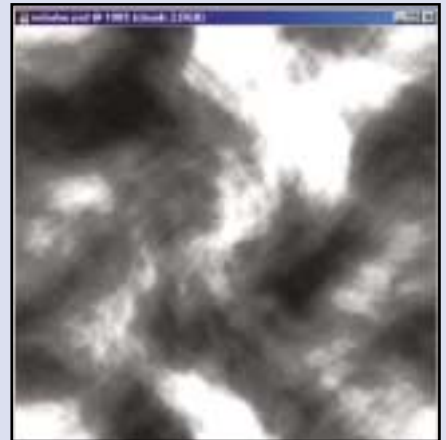


### 2 Texturing the clouds

Hold down ALT/OPT, and drag the background layer onto the  button to create a duplicate of the clouds, "clouds 2". Select Filter > Distort > Spherize and then set Amount to -50% and Mode to 'Horizontal only'. Click OK.

For some additional distortion, open the Filter > Distort > Twirl dialog. Set the Angle to 50 degrees and click OK. Now select Filter > Artistic > Film Grain. Set Grain to 1, Highlight Area to 0, Intensity to 5, and click OK.

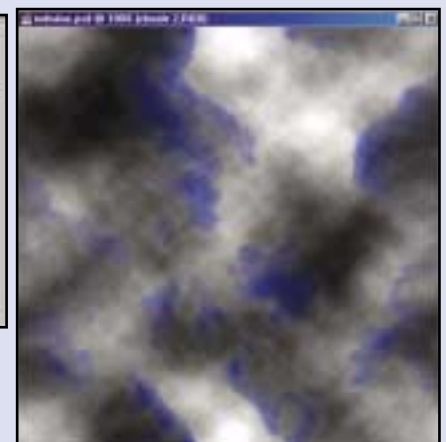
*The 'clouds 2' layer emphasizes the shape that will become the nebula. Twirling the clouds slightly adds a subtle sense of spinning. Film Grain is used in this instance to emphasize edges of the nebula's structures.*



### 3 Changing the blend


Double-click the 'clouds 2' layer in the Layers palette to open the Layer Style window. Change the blend mode to Darken, deselect the Channel B checkbox (under Advanced Blending), and click OK.

*The 'clouds 2' layer is now darkening the background, and is not blending its blue channel. This adds a nice blue glow around some of the nebula's edges.*

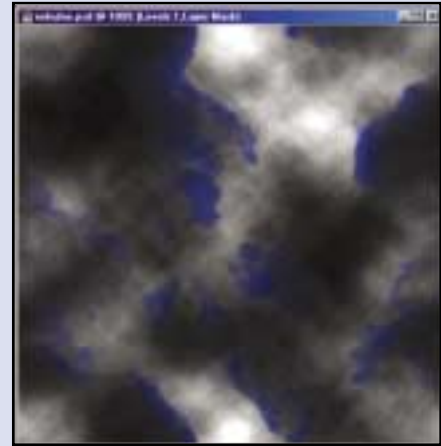


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


### 4 Reducing the size of the nebula

Click the  button on the Layers Palette, and select Levels. In the Levels dialog, click the Auto button, set the second of the Input Levels to 0.60, and click OK.

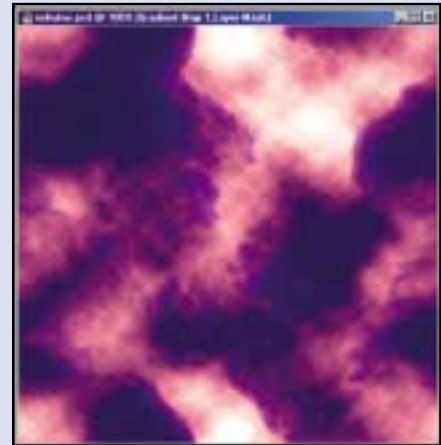
*Shifting the image's middle brightness reduces the size of the nebula and leaves more room for empty space and stars.*




### 5 Adding color

Click the  button and create a Gradient Map adjustment layer. In the Gradient Map dialog, click the  button next to the gradient to open the list of preset gradients. Click the  button, and select `Pastels.grd` from the pop-out dialog. Double-click the “Yellow, Pink, Purple” preset, and then turn on Reverse. Click OK to close the window, and change the blending mode of the Gradient Map layer to Hard Light.

*The Gradient map makes the brightest parts of the clouds yellow, and the darkest portions purple. Using Hard Light with the Gradient Map layer allows the blue areas to shine through.*

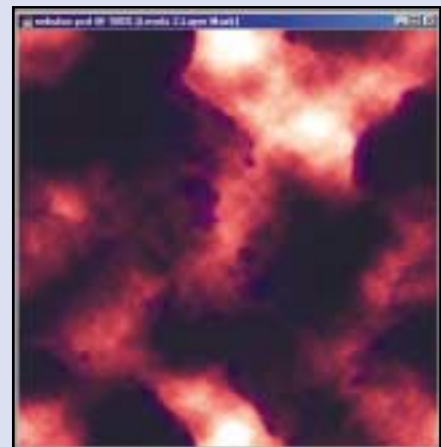


### 6 Creating a new levels adjustment layer

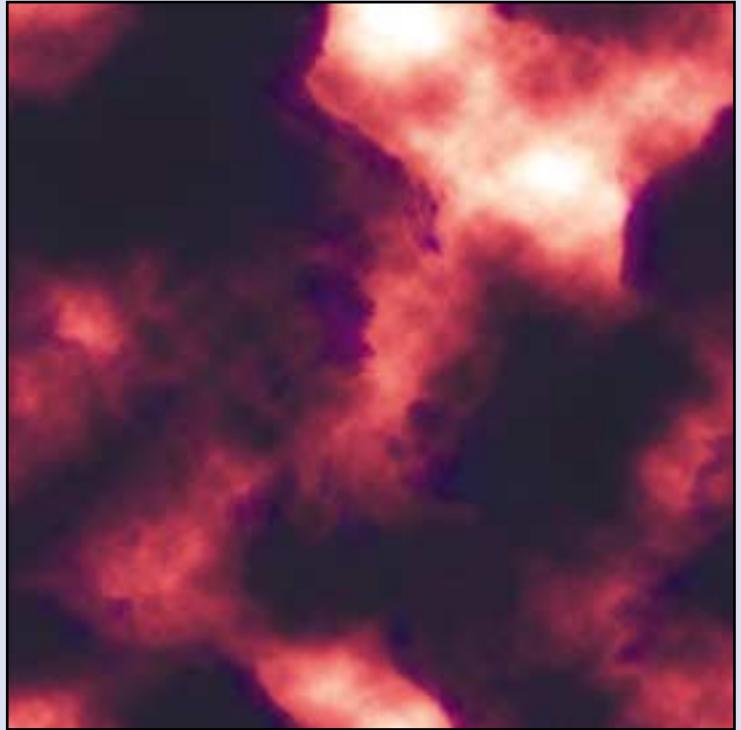
Click the  button and create another Levels adjustment layer at the top of the layer stack. In the Levels dialog, click Auto, set the middle input level to 0.50, and click OK.

Change the layer's blend mode to Multiply and its opacity to 50%.

*Moving the brightness midpoint with Levels modifies the sharpness of the nebula's edges.*

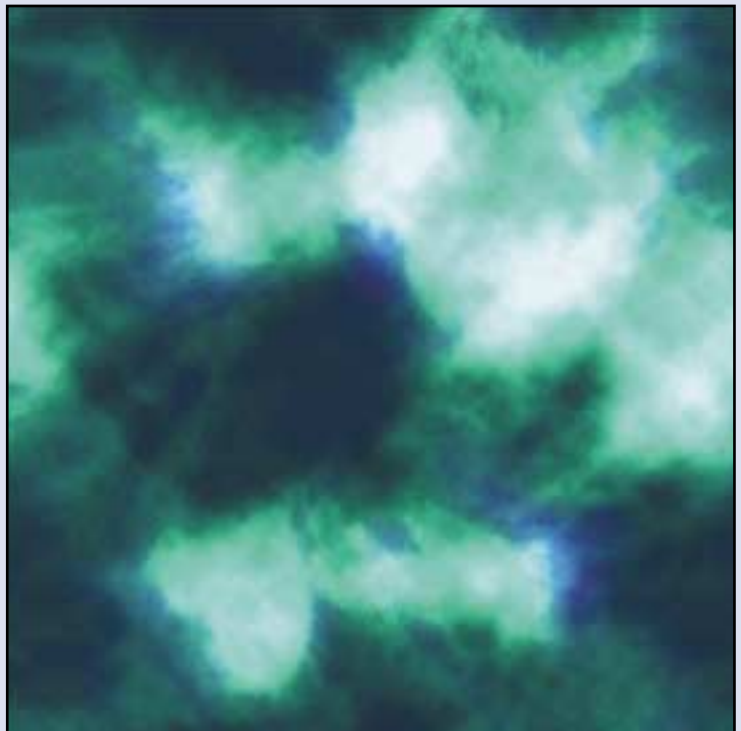


## The Finished Product



## Variations and Applications

Because many of the nebula's adjustment layers and apply mode settings remain dynamic, it's easy to make quick variations without making permanent changes to the layers.




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### Starfields

Creating a field of stars is quick and easy with Photoshop. This technique can be done on its own, or as a continuation of the Nebulae technique demonstrated in the previous section. If you just want stars, start with a new RGB document, 512x512 pixels, with a white background.

#### 1 Creating the sky

Open `nebulae.psd` and save it as `stars.psd`. Now ALT/OPT-click on  to create a new layer called “stars”. Press ALT/OPT+BACKSPACE to fill the space with black. Use Filter > Noise > Add Noise with Amount set to 30%, Gaussian distribution, and Monochromatic checked. Click OK to apply.

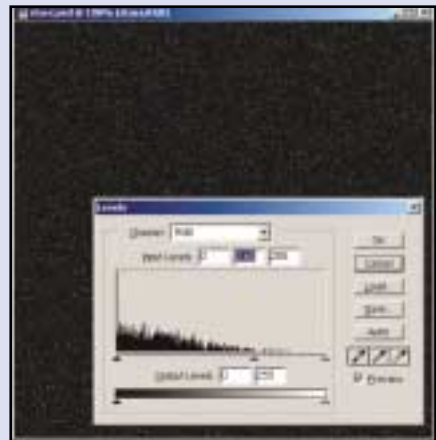
*Add Noise fills the area with randomly spaced pixel-sized dots.*




#### 2 Differentiating the stars

Press CTRL/CMD+L. Set the middle input level to 0.60 and click OK.

*The brightest dots remain bright, but others are now dimmer.*

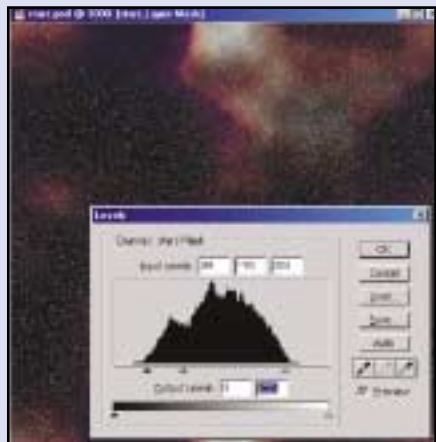


#### 3 Adding a layer mask

Click the  button on the Layers palette to create a layer mask. Press D to set the default colors and apply Filter > Render > Clouds.

Open up the Levels dialog again with CTRL/CMD+L. In the Levels dialog, press Auto, and drag the middle input level slider (the gray triangle) over to the left until the dimmer stars fill back in to a desired brightness. Click OK to close Levels.

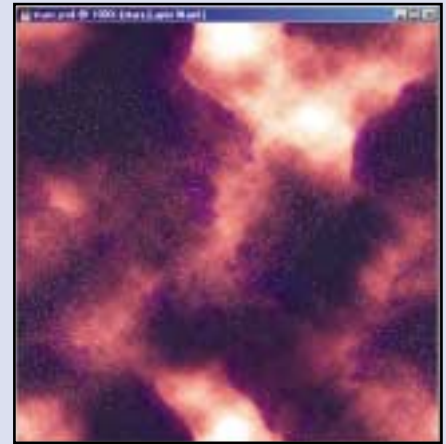
*Adjusting the levels in this way brightens the stars.*




## 4 Blending the stars

Change the blending mode of the stars layer to Screen.

*When set to Screen, the stars will be “added” to the layer underneath. If you started with the Nebulae technique, you should now see a large population of stars around the nebula.*



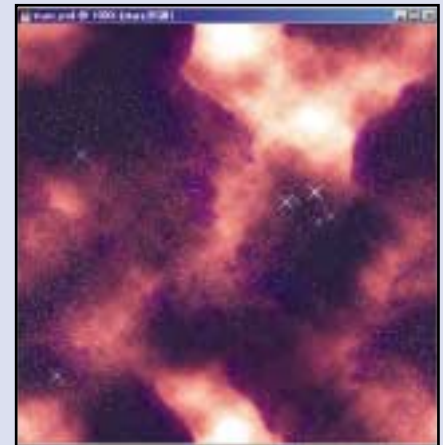
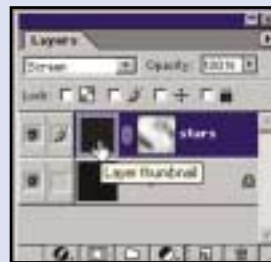
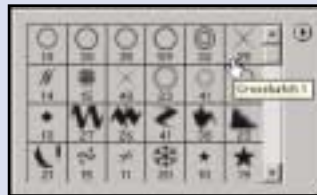
## 5 Adding brighter stars

Select the Airbrush tool by pressing J and open the drop-down Brush dialog from the Options bar. Click on the  button and select Assorted Brushes.abr from the pop-out menu. Select the ‘Crosshatch 1’ brush.

In the Layers palette, click on the ‘stars’ layer thumbnail to reactivate the layer’s contents.

Press X to change the foreground color to white, and then add stars by clicking on the canvas.

*Adjust the paintbrush’s opacity to add variation to the stars.*



## 6 Adding a sun

Create a new layer, and set its blend mode to Screen. Press CTRL/CMD+BACKSPACE to fill the layer with black. Select Filter > Render > Lens Flare, set a position for the sun, set its Brightness to 50% and Type to ‘105mm Prime’, and hit OK.

Press CTRL/CMD+L to open the Levels dialog and hit Auto. Press CTRL/CMD+1 to select the Red channel, and set the second of the Input Levels to 1.3 to simulate a red corona.





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### The Finished Product



### Variations and Applications

