DIGITAL DIRECTIONS

Alien Skin: Color negative image of a soccer game. The line distracted from the main action and was to be removed.
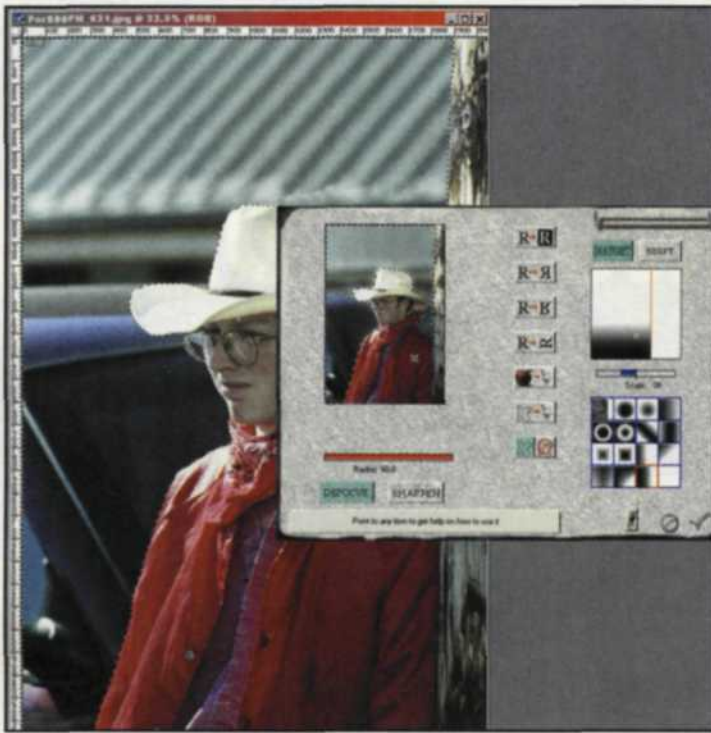
The line was selected with the magic wand and then expanded. The smart fill (right) was used to remove the line.
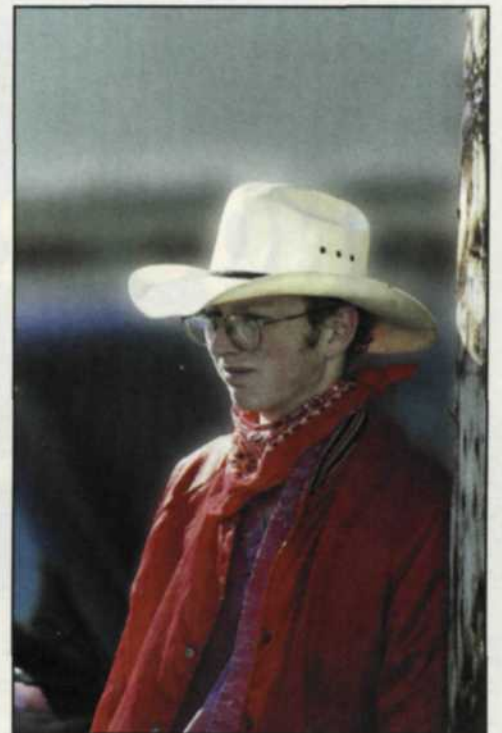
Final soccer image after the white line was removed with the smart fill filter.

Andromedia: This is a color negative shot of a cowboy taken during a parade.

The Varifocus menu (right) was used to defocuse the background on a graduated plane from the bottom of the picture to the top.

Final image after the Varifocus filter was applied to the selected background of the image.

Most photo editors will agree that Adobe Photoshop is one of the most powerful editing programs you can have in a digital darkroom. It provides an endless arsenal of editing tools, but Photoshop's truly unique power comes from its third party plug-in filters.

THESE POWERFUL additions to Photoshop have dramatically increased over the past few years, especially in the areas of photo salvage and image enhancement.

The bulk of plug-in filters that come with Adobe Photoshop and third party manufacturers are used to creatively enhance your images. There are literally hundreds of these filters that include such favorites as posterization, solarization, graduation, repeaters, rainbows, 3D rotations, fractal transformations, painting overlays, and many more. These creative filters allow you to make new images from existing photos simply by applying these plug-in filters.

Another group of plug-in filters operates a variety of hardware devices like scanners, digital cameras, monitor calibration or tablets. These plug-ins work automatically when called on by Photoshop for use in the program.

The final group is known by many different names, but essentially they are all designed to correct image flaws. They are the ones you would use when your image is scratched, you need to remove facial wrinkles or quickly clean up a busy background. Although a few come with Photoshop, the bulk of these plug-in filters come from companies other than Adobe. There are so many filters that can help in your digital darkroom, that making an educated decision is tough. Here are six companies, in alphabetical order, that offer several photo salvage plug-in filters that we use regularly.

Alien Skin: www.alienskin.com—Image Doctor from Alien Skin has four plug-in filters in its bag of tricks designed to fix some common problems. The JPEG Repair filter will reduce the JPEG effect
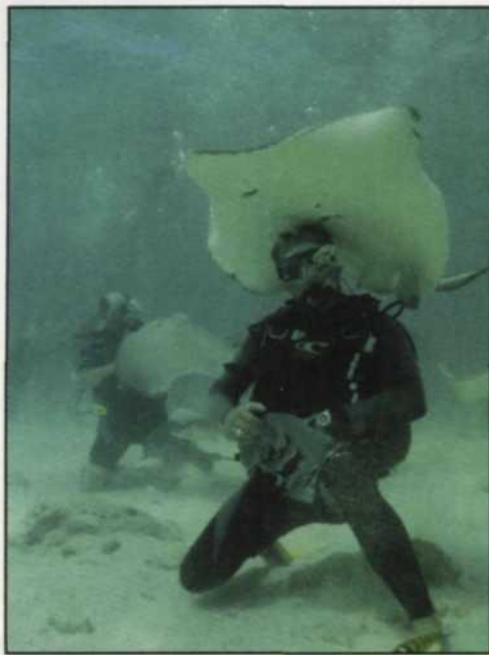
Applied Science Fiction: Digital camera image of a scuba diver in shallow water. The image has low contrast and is off color, which are often problems in underwater photography.
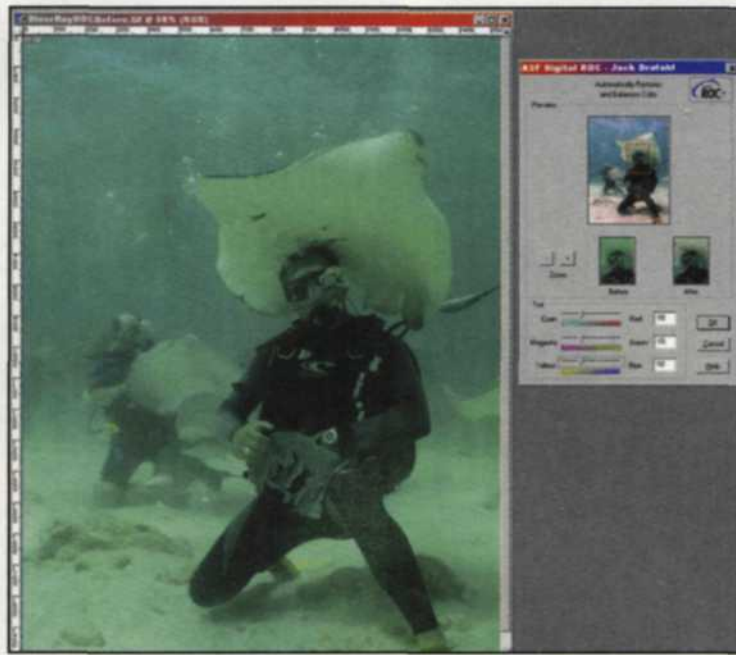
Digital ROC was used in the right menu to correct the problem.

Final Image after the Digital ROC was used to correct color balance and contrast problems.

Photo Salvage
Plug-in Filters

Jack and Sue Drafahl

caused by image compression. This is a handy filter for those highly compressed Internet images, when a higher version isn't available. With this filter you control how much of the JPEG artifacts you remove and the degree that you blur the edges. A preview window allows you to see a magnified version before the filter is finally applied to the image.

The second new filter is the Scratch Remover. The best approach when using the Scratch Remover is to repair the damage in small sections, taking your time to pick out sections with similar tones adjacent

Lizard Tech: Left image is an enlarged section of an original color negative image scan. Right image is the same section after the Genuine Fractals filter was applied at 400% enlargement.
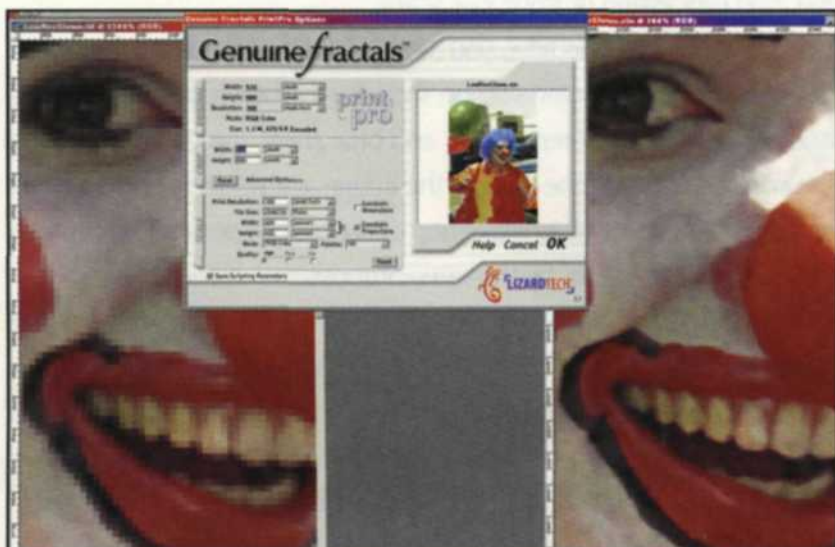
to the scratch.

This plug-in has extensive features to control the quality of your repair. For example, you can expand the selection, add additional random data, set the quality of the repair, set the texture size, and feather the final fix. When you use this filter in conjunction with the clone and healing tools of Photoshop, you have a dynamite scratch repair trio.

The Smart Fill is a strange new plug-in filter that allows you to select objects and magically make them disappear. Practice by removing an object against some foliage rather than attempting an object too near to an area you want to keep. The Smart Fill is similar to the Scratch Repair, so it basically has the same control functions and preview menu. Be aware that the Smart Fill takes some processing time with large objects, so be prepared to take a coffee break.

The Spot Lifter is yet another variation of the Scratch Repair and Smart Fill. It is designed to smooth out wrinkles and lines in portraits, especially those found under the eyes. The three main controls allow you to expand your selection, adjust the strength of the repair, and vary the amount of feathering in the final repair.

Andromedia: www.andromedia.com—Andromeda is well known for its wide assortment of plug-in photographic filters that mimic those found in a camera bag. Two filters, Lens Doc and VariFocus, are especially designed to help you with your image repair.

The Lens Doc plug-in is designed to correct problems caused by your camera lens or the way you used it. You can fix lens distortion
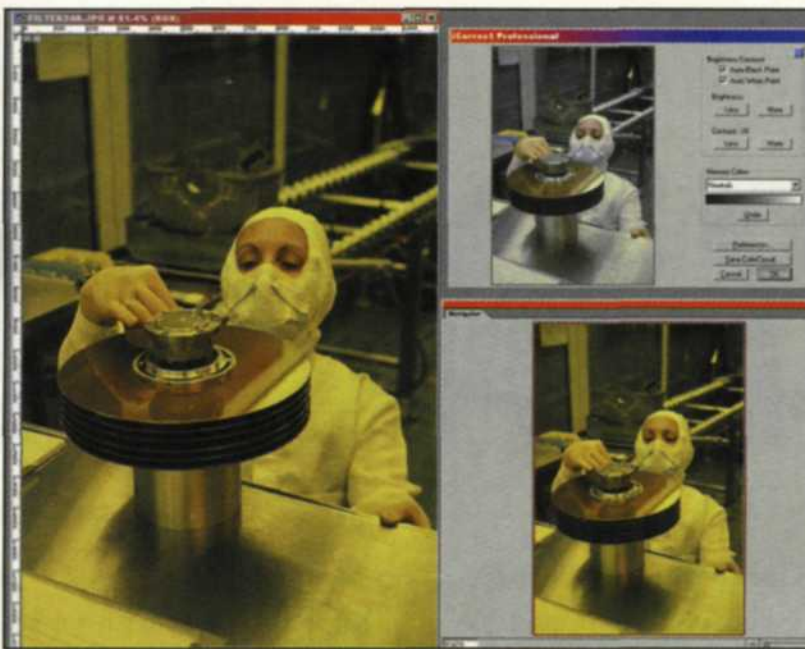
nik multimedia: The sharpen filter menu in the lower right was used to sharpen this color negative scan.

Comparison of an out of focus image (left) and the sharpened results on the right.

Pictographics: Medium format image was shot under special manufacturing lighting which created a yellow cast in the image.

The Color Correction menu (upper right) used both the Neutral Color Balance and the Skin Color Balance to provide a correct color rendition to the image.

Final Image after both Skin and Neutral Color Balance filters were applied.

problems like pincushion and barrel distortion by simply lining up dots on the two lines of distortion. You can also select a brand name lens and focal length, and the program will automatically fix problems specific to that lens.

When you photograph a tall building from a low angle, you will have a problem with perspective, which can be solved by the second half of this plug-in filter. Again you line up dots on the sloping lines and the building will magically straighten. Keep in mind that you allow space at the top of your photo or your adjusted building will extend beyond the image frame.

A second filter from Andromedia we enjoy is the VariFocus filter. It works like a Smart Blur filter except that you can vary the amount of blurring from one point to another by using a variety of build-in masks. To use it, you would select the background you want to vary the focus, and then apply the mask that will provide the best depth of field. You can select from dozens of masks, rotate them in any direction, and vary their strength of their effect with a slider control.

Applied Science Fiction: www.asf.com—Digital ROC from

Applied Science Fiction is a plug-in version of the ROC technology found in many of the film and flat bed scanners. This plug-in is designed to restore the color to images with color shifts caused by fading, bad processing or improper scans.

When you open this filter, you are presented with a small thumbnail of the image, an enlarged section showing the before and after effects, and controls to adjust red, green, and blue shifts. You can easily adjust the controls to revive the color in the image and preview your changes as you go. If you need to make any exposure adjustment, you merely change all three colors by the same amount.

Digital SHO is a fancy levels editor that uses different algorithms than Adobe to bring out the maximum shadow detail, and still maintain maximum image quality. You have the same thumbnail preview and enlarged before and after sections so you can see the applied effect. The Shadow Intensity controls the amount of detail you want in the shadows. The Color Intensity works to adjust the color saturation that may need modifying as you adjust the intensity of the shadows.

Lizard Tech: www.lizardtech.com—The Genuine Fractals

plug-in filter from Lizard Tech is part of the file import and export system. It allows you to bring in low-resolution files and increase their size for printing and image enhancement. The advantage to this process is that you can reduce the effect of JPEG compression as the image increases in size.

To use this format, load in the original file and save it as a STN format image in either the "Lossless" or "Visually Lossless" setting. You then reload the file and increase its size by adjusting either the percentage or pixel numbers. As the file loads, you can also crop the image, change the color mode, or change the printer dpi page resolution. With Genuine Fractals you can make extreme image enlargements without the effects of JPEG compression showing.

nik multimedia: www.nikmultimedia.com—nik multimedia features a wide variety of creative plug-in filters that simulate those filters used by professional photographers. The Sharpener Pro filter is a unique sharpening filter that takes all the guesswork out of deciding which level to sharpen an image for output.

When the plug-in menu opens, you are required to answer questions on image size, quality, printer resolution, final page size, and viewing distance.

Once each parameter has been addressed, the plug-in will make the appropriate sharpening adjustments for that specific output application. Be sure to save the file under a new name in case you later want to output the same file to a different output device.

Pictographics: www.picto.com—Pictographics offers a family of iCorrect products and if you have color balancing problems, then iCorrect Professional may be just what you need. This plug-in filter makes short work of adjusting almost any off-color image with its neutral balance feature. An interesting feature of iCorrect is that it has memory colors for skin tones, blue skies, or green foliage will adjust each area accordingly. So, if you have a portrait taken under blue skies, with grass in the background, you can balance the image to all those variables. They also include an auto black/white point and controls for adjusting the brightness or contrast.

These are just a few of the plug-in filters available for photo salvage. The filters mentioned in this article are just a few of the ones we use regularly in our digital lab. The key is knowing which one to use for a specific repair job. When one doesn't adequately do the job, we jump to the next one.

Most plug-in filter companies have demo versions of their plug-in, so you have a way to test them ahead of purchasing them. So what are you waiting for? Log on to the Web and give these photo salvage plug-ins a try.

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