R. Scott Ireland's *Photoshop Astronomy*

A Parrot Understands...At last

For some time I have been using Adobe's Photoshop to process astronomical and other images. I knew quite a bit about the program, and was, I think, fairly successful at getting what I wanted out of it. But deep inside, I knew much of what I did was by rote and mimicry. I was a parrot who could talk Photoshop, but did not truly understand why I was doing what I did.

For instance, I had watched a presenter at an RTMC workshop, and had been told by Alson Wong, and knew that I had to use Unsharp Mask and play with the settings until the picture looked sharper, but not oversharpened. I almost knew how to make that happen. But it was trial and error. I really did not know why or how to do it efficiently. Just what was I looking for? I did not really know what each of the three "settings" meant, or how they should be set to start getting the picture to look good.

R. Scott Ireland has published a book, *Photoshop for Astrophotographers*, full of explanations and especially exercises that has done a lot to move me from my state of "parroting" towards "understanding." He explained, for instance, what each of the settings in an Unsharp Mask did, and how to set them before starting. Then what to look for as one adjusted them. All the mystery of Unsharp Masking dissolved in a few paragraphs of explanation, followed by:

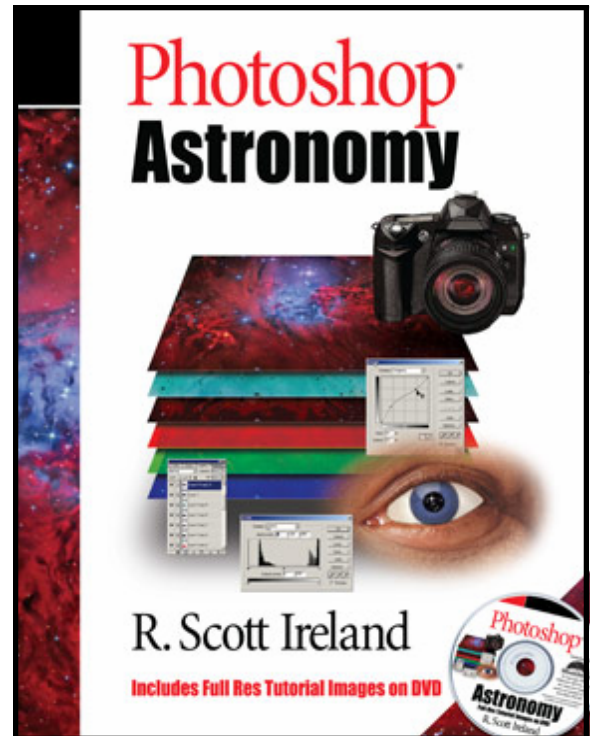> 5. Now set the Amount slider to its maximum setting of 500%; set the threshold to 0 and adjust the Radius

setting to a point where the dark sharpening halos around bright stars are just beginning to be noticeable...

At last, I knew what to look for, as well as how to get there. And of course, I was watching it happen, as I followed along with the example loaded off the accompanying CD Rom.

This book operates on several levels. It explains the theory behind Photoshop and astronomical image processing. Then it shows in numerous illustrations just how these theories are applied. Finally, working in conjunction with a large collection of sample astronomical images on the CD Rom, it has the student put into practice step-by step exercises. These exercises are amazingly well thought out and precisely explained. He does not shortcut, or assume, but holds one's hand all the way through:

> In the image window, hold down the Ctrl Key and a small magnifying glass with a "+" sign in the middle appears; this allows you to zoom in. Hold down the Alt key and the "+" changes to a "-", allowing you to zoom out.

So thorough were his instructions that every exercise worked first time, with no real backtracking or missteps. I sat at the coffee table, laptop running Photoshop CS, working through the book page by page for the better part of a week or so. (No, not full time....)

Florida Photographer R. Scott Ireland has written a book that not only explains the theory behind Photoshop and astronomical image processing, but leads the reader/user through an extensive collec-

The book limits itself to Photoshop, and even then pretty much to PS8, the CS version. It recognizes CS2, but doesn't work much with it. And it does say that the concepts are usable in Elements and a few other programs. But there is no doubt it is made for Photoshop itself. It also recognizes the limitations of Photoshop on pre-processing tasks like dark frames and stacking, and makes appropriate recommendations for programs that handle these jobs better than Photoshop.

I bought my copy over the counter at OPT a month ago for $40 or so, and found it quite useful. Now I can do more than just repeat what I think I have seen others do.