

[Jerry Lodriguss: A Guide to Astrophotography with Digital SLR Cameras](#)

All You Need to Know in One ~~Book~~ Compact Disc

If you have never been to the "Catching the Light" website (<http://www.astropix.com/>) you are missing not only some great images, but a wealth of know-how, advice, and tutorials. On that extensive website, Boston photographer Jerry Lodriguss has for years been offering very solid and very clear advice for free.

He has now put together *A Guide to Astrophotography with Digital SLR Cameras* (ordered off the website, \$47.75 delivered). This "book" is actually published on a single CD, and we may as well begin this review commenting on this two edge sword.

Being a large collection of HTML documents, which can be read by any Web browser, the *Guide* takes advantage of what a computer and the internet can do. Throughout the text are hyperlinks that refer the reader to the original sources. But they do much more. Lodriguss can tell his story at one level, and leave it to the reader to jump to the other levels as the reader feels necessary or desirable. For instance, Lodriguss can remind the reader to guide accurately, but leave it to the reader to jump to and wade through the formulae which determine just what this means in the guiding eyepiece. Things that may make one's eyes glaze are relegated to hyperlinks. They are still easily accessible, but don't complicate the text.

The table of contents and the com-

prehensive search function of the web browser easily outclass a paper book's equivalents. Another advantage of delivering the lesson on the computer is the "mouse over." Lodriguss has many examples of pictures before and after processing. Simply move the mouse over an image and it changes from one to the other. This trick makes the processing changes much more obvious than simply putting before/after pictures next to each other on a page, or worse yet, separated on different pages.

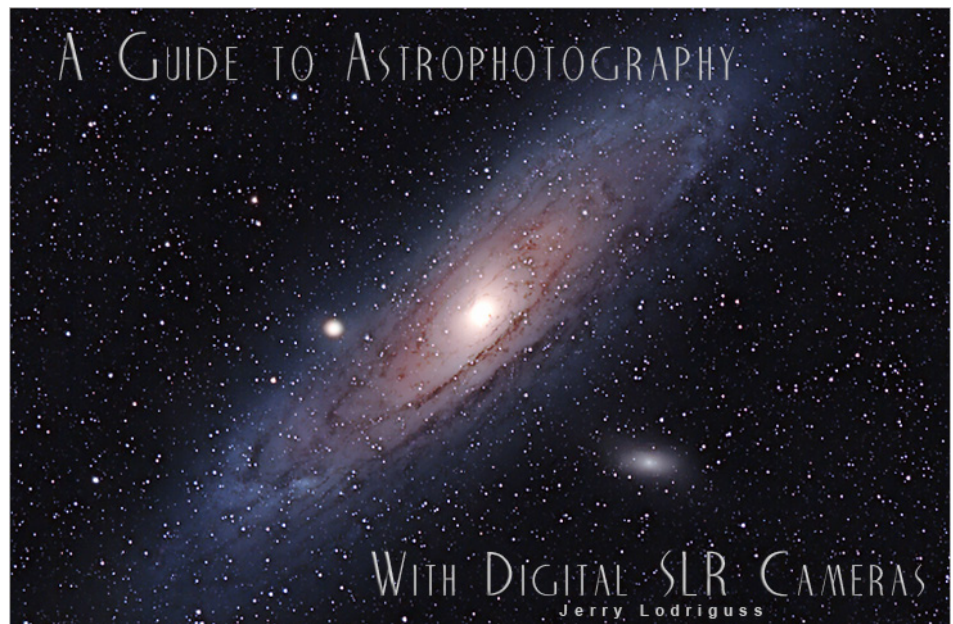
But there are some down sides to books on disc. For one thing it is relatively hard to flip back and forth to retrace a concept. It is

also harder to work through a processing example. You have to either shrink and swap windows, or use two computers to read the instructions while trying them with your own copy of Photoshop.

But what I really hate about books on CD is that you need a computer to use them. That means sitting at a table. Couch-slouching is out, and setting your laptop on your, well, lap, can be dangerous if you tend to fall asleep while reading.

But as to the content of the volume: It is a very good, comprehensive introduction to the field of astrophotography with a DSLR. It includes chapters on selection of cameras and related equipment and

Jerry Lodriguss, a professional photographer from the Boston area (and personal friend of RAS member Lou Kovacs) has written an extensive introduction to astrophotography using a Digital SLR, Adobe Photoshop, and Images Plus, as well as the World Wide Web.



software, digital imaging theory (necessary for understanding where "noise" comes from), imaging, (including several extensive checklists of what to bring, and what to do in what order), both basic and advanced image processing (using Photoshop (including CS2), Images Plus, and a few other dedicated programs and Photoshop Plug-ins), archiving and outputting. The sample images are few, but there are extensive appendices, and of course, with access to the whole world wide web, there are tons of related resources just a click away (and Lodriguss has all the links ready to hook you up).

A set of Video Tutorials, separate from the main text, leads the reader through image processing. These tutorials, which run on the Flash Reader (a free download if you don't already have it--you probably do) reminded me of Mike Unsold's video documentation from Images Plus. They are a good addition to other resources. But, in themselves are simply a modern version of watching a videotape of an RTMC presentation on processing. They aren't the best way to learn a process.

One other point that needs to be made is that, especially in the processing chapters, there is no hand-holding here. A true beginner would not really benefit from the Image Processing section, I feel. Lodriguss just assumes too much. If you were teaching your fifteen year old son to drive, you would not start with "OK, Start the truck." You would have to start with what a key is, and where to put it. (Oh, and maybe a whole

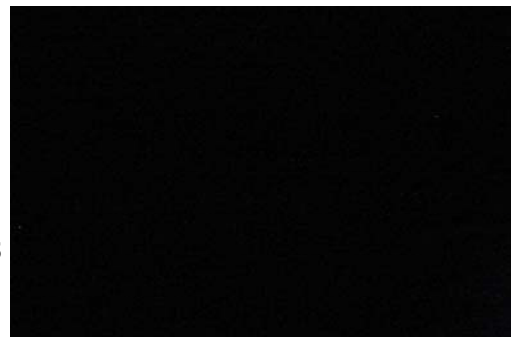
lot more--unless the kid was borrowing the truck from the age of thirteen when you weren't around. But that is another story.) Similarly, Lodriguss says things like "Use an Unsharp Mask with about 150% and a radius of 2, and a threshold of 3." Just how does one do that if one does not know where the "Unsharp Mask" lives in Photoshop?

If a beginner is interested in processing itself, then I would recommend Ireland's *Photoshop Astronomy*. (reviewed for next month). But the *Guide* covers a much broader field than Ireland. It spends quite a bit of time on equipment and image acquisition before it focuses on processing. If one is familiar enough with menus and tools in Photoshop and Images Plus already, then one does not really need Ireland. Perhaps one should read the first few chapters of Lodriguss, switch to Ireland for their introduction to image processing, and then finish off with the advanced processing of Lodriguss. In this way, the two productions really do work together well.

By the way, Lodriguss was also the author of *Photoshop for Astrophotographers*, another CD from a few years ago. This earlier effort covers much of the same territory as the last few chapters of the newer *Guide*.

Over the last ten years of trying to become an astrophotographer, I have read more than my share of books, articles, and websites, and

been to many workshops. I am sure my opinion on any new effort is colored by having read the earlier works and run into my own walls already. What would fresh eyes see in the *Guide*? I think it would be a very rewarding experience for anybody exploring photography with a digital SLR. I think that a newbie would need a little help getting through the sections on processing until they figured out some of the Photoshop conventions. But that newbie would be putting out some pretty good pictures in the meantime.



While difficult to tell the difference due to their small size. If you were to enlarge them, you could easily tell them apart. The top image is one that has had a "dark" frame removed from it. The bottom image IS the "dark" frame. As you can see, noise from the image sensor can degrade the quality of a picture. These images are greatly enhanced to show off the noise. If they were perfect pictures, they would be completely black since the lens cap was on at the time.

