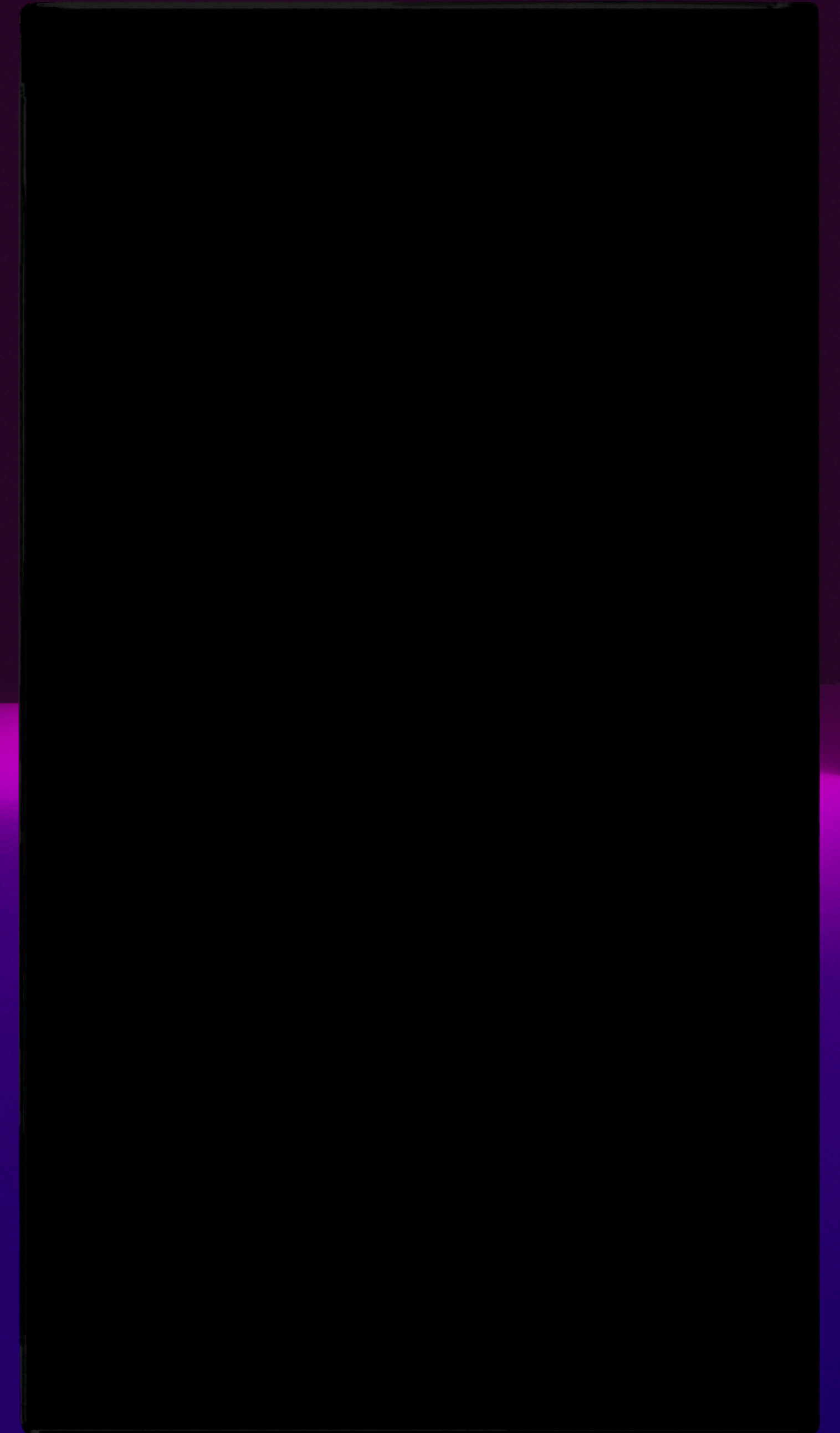# *Polishing images for Competitions*

There are many great, successful images around.

Many earn their author good money

Competitions have different criteria, and a great or

highly saleable image may not necessarily be a great

competition image

So, you've decided to give it a crack

- Are you going to win?

Better chances than Lotto, and most of have bought a ticket before

•After trialling over 3000 theories, and settling on the best, the right material needed to be found.

"Before I got through," he recalled, "I tested no fewer than 6,000 vegetable growths, and ransacked the world for the most suitable filament material."

•"The electric light has caused me the greatest amount of study and has required the most elaborate experiments," he wrote. "I was never myself discouraged, or inclined to be hopeless of success. I cannot say the same for all my associates."

•"Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration."

Thomas Alva Edison

Realistically we hope for success but realise that it's all steps on the ladder. The light bulb moments need work to produce an actual light bulb.
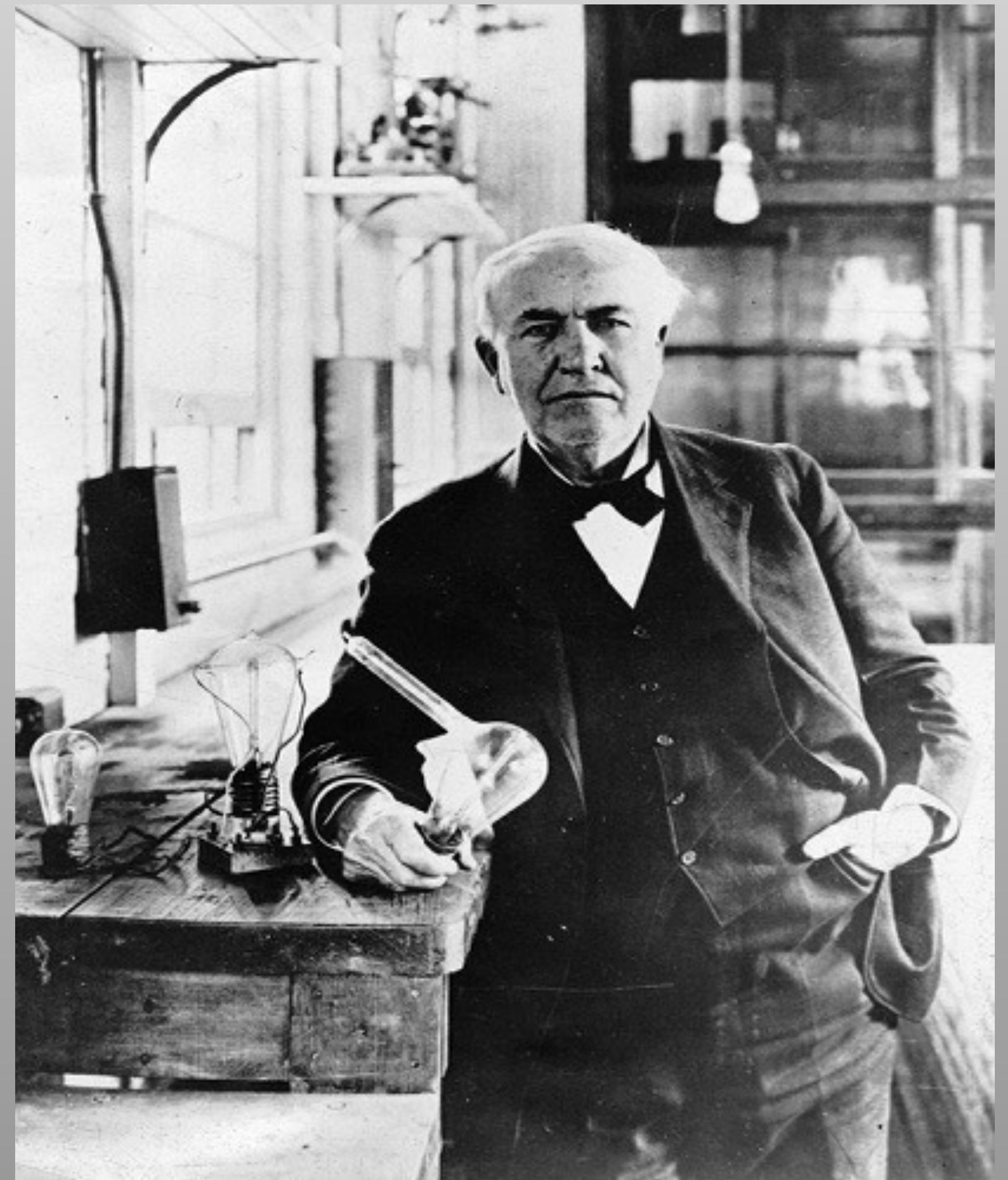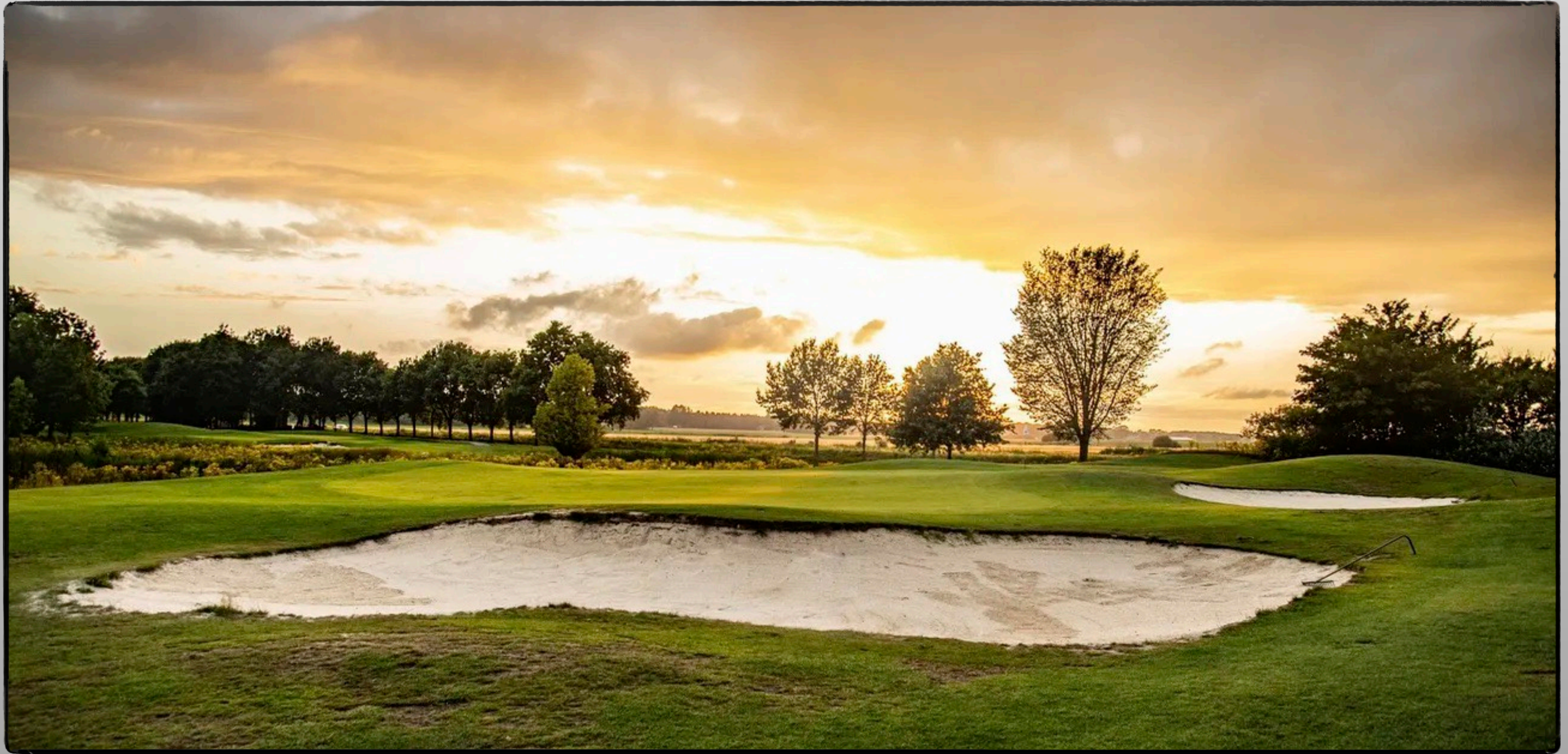
Part 1 : Pick your hat

Select your images

Fit for purpose

Check the rules for the category.
First things to get binned are the
rule breakers.

Not NH

Not Landscape

Remember also to keep an open mind for other categories that may be more suitable
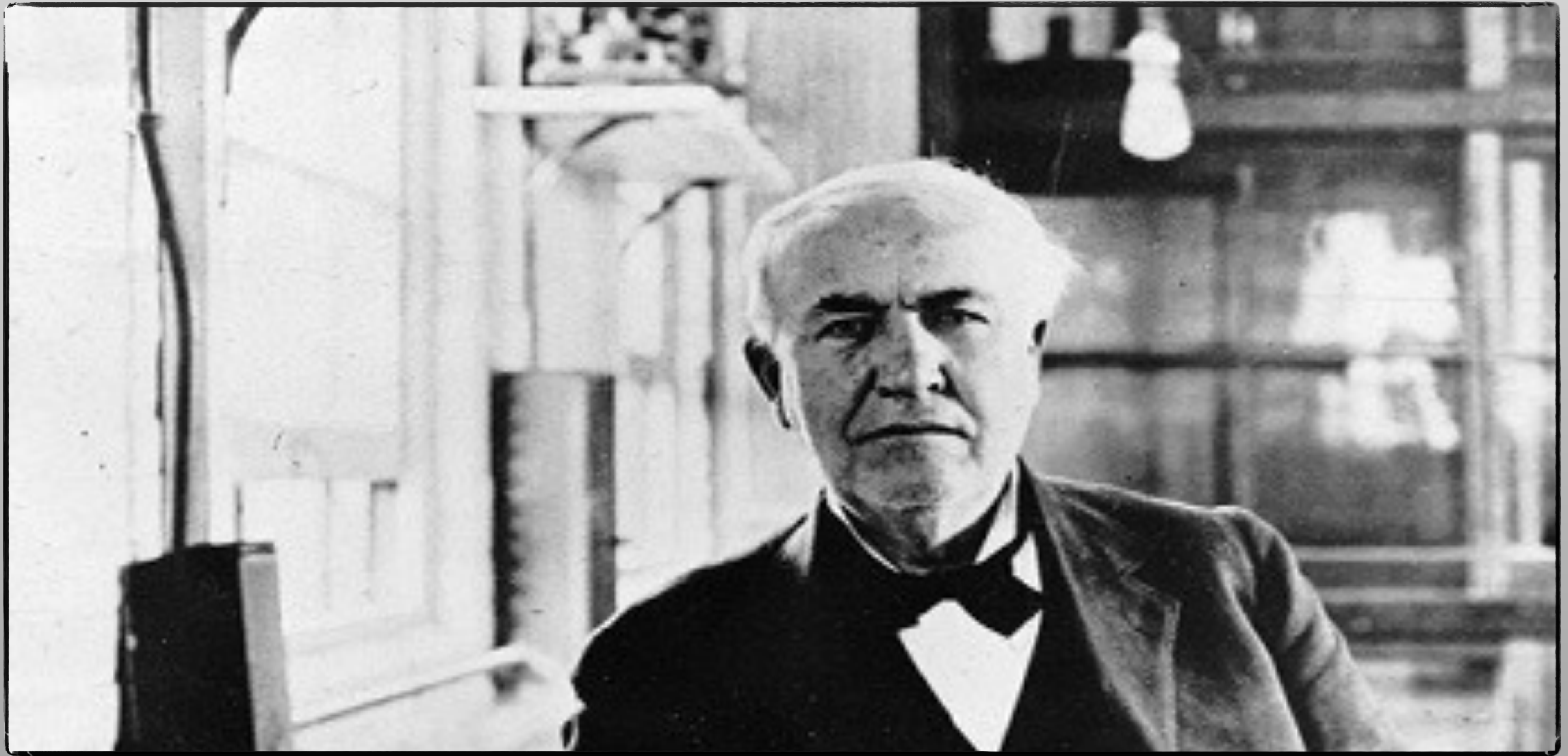
Strong colours may be better as a monochrome image

Find the "Wow"

It's a competition, you want to stand out.

Find the "Wow"

- Put it in amongst a bunch of other images, yours or for example magazine cuttings. Does it still stand out?

- Can you identify why it stands out? Colour, composition, mood etc. if you can, keep that in mind through the process
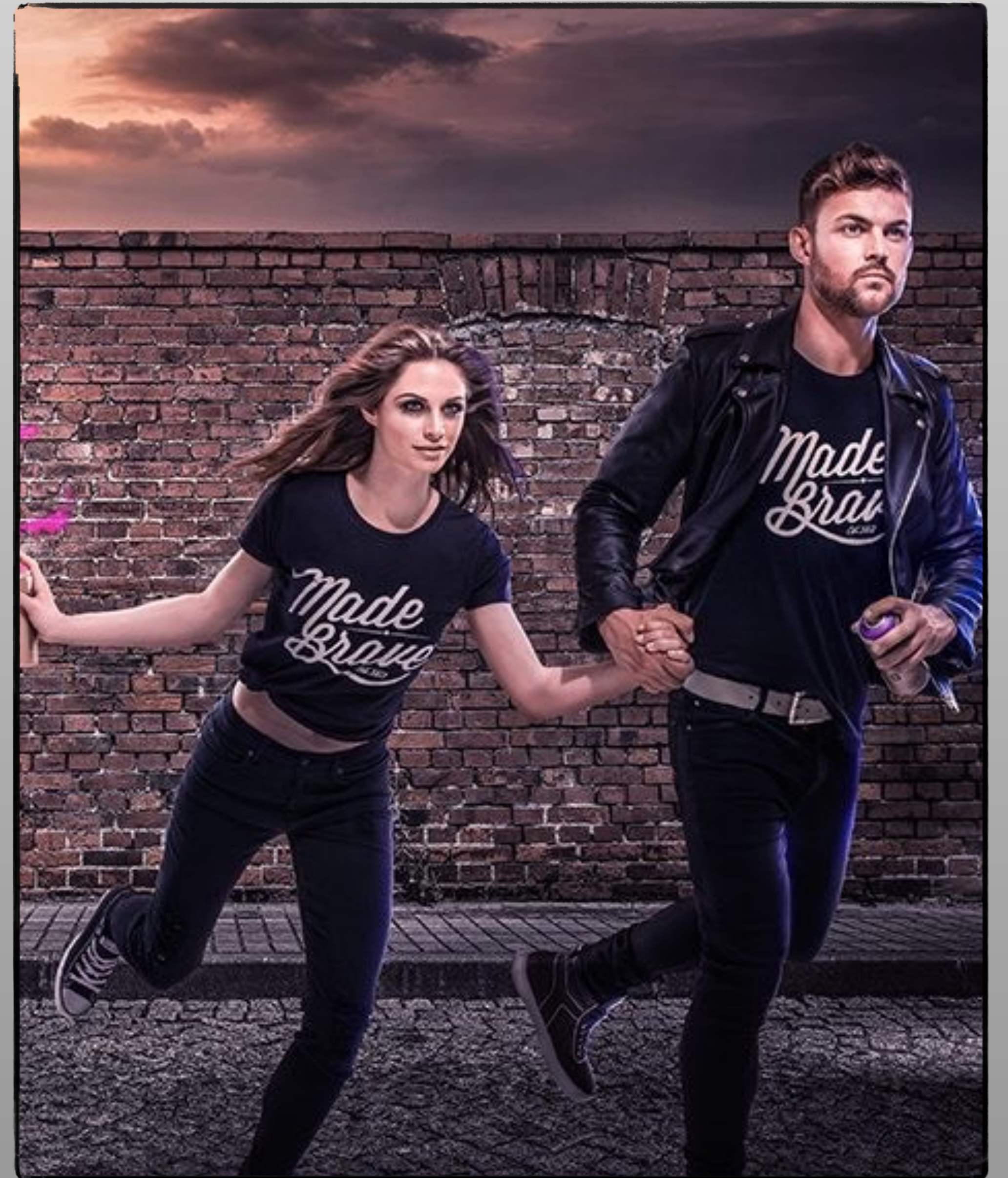
Great light or lighting is often the key

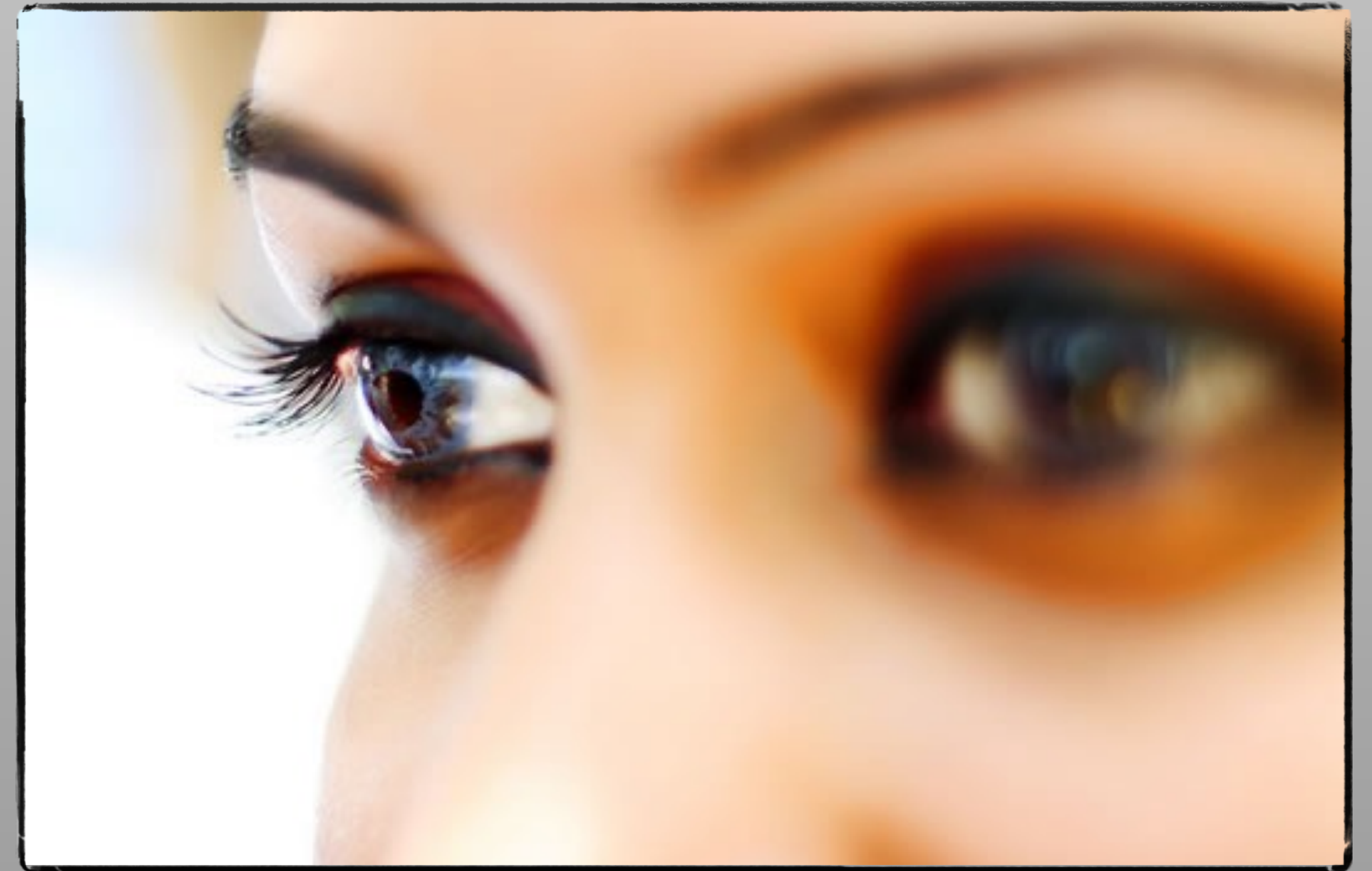# Forget the fakes

Poor composites

Excessive fill lighting

# Unnatural elements, scaling etc

Critical sharpness

- Unless your image is deliberately abstract, focus on the correct part of the image is a must have

- Out of focus eyes in particular is a fast track to non acceptance

Critical sharpness

- Apart from a couple of bleeding edge technologies in 3D computational engines, failure to focus on the correct part of the image is not normally repairable. Put it down to learning and pick another image.

- Sharpening filters should be done last after resizing for the final output (screen or print) They will make it look more crisp but won't fix focus problems
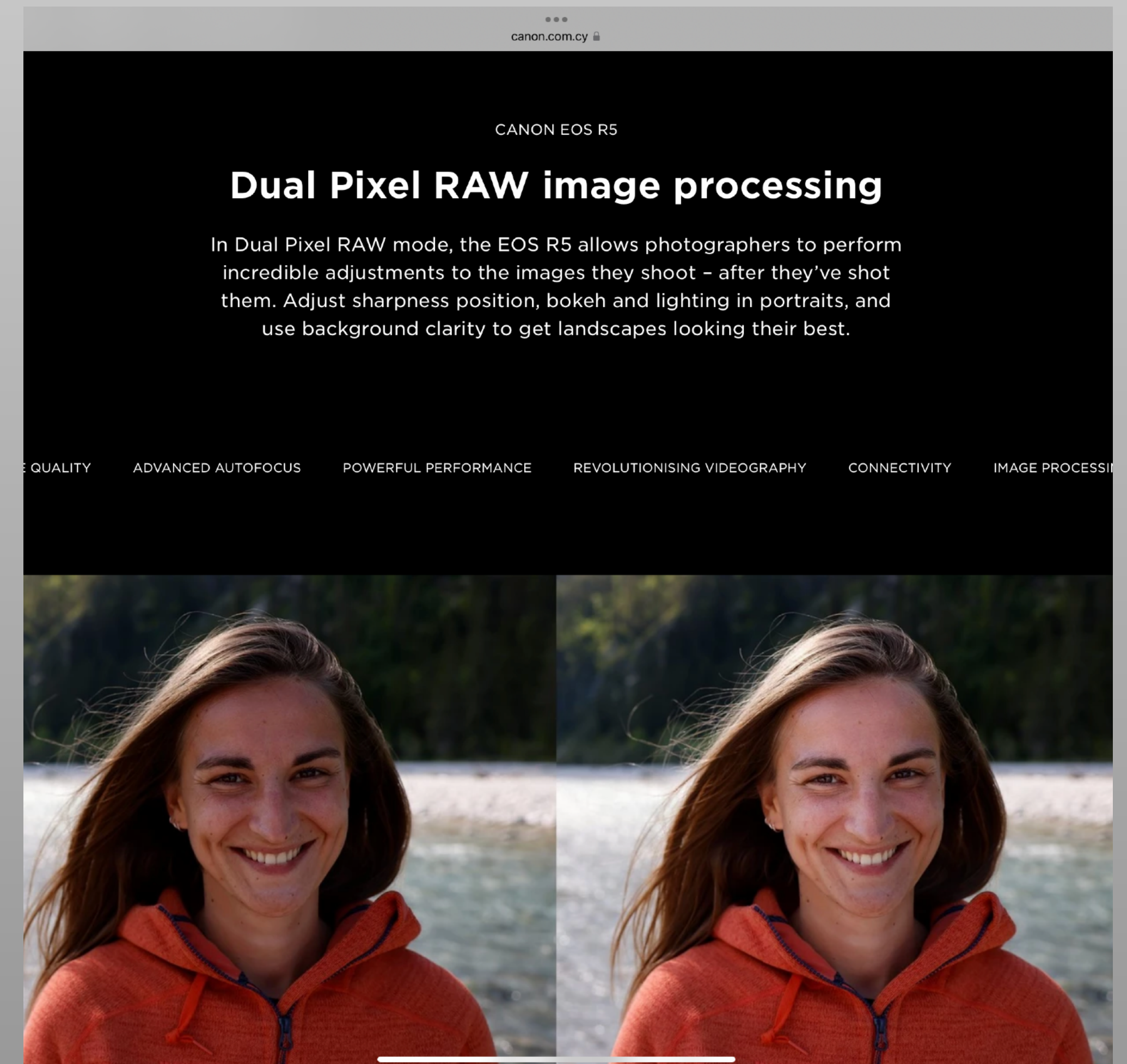
Blown highlights

- A little judge dependant

- If there are areas that are completely white apart from direct light sources such as lights or the sun, forget it

- Unless you plan to composite something in its place

- Peoples 'eye' get drawn to the lightest part of an image, such as the sun in this one. This image was crafted to illustrate ascendance, but it wouldn't be suitable for competition

Behind the scenes

Objective

- Photography is virtually always illustrating an object, even in the most abstract images there is usually an item to focus the viewers attention on

- **'just the facts, ma'am"**

- Only state exactly what happened, without embellishment or exaggeration. The phrase is often attributed to the character Sergeant Joe Friday from the 1950s TV show Dragnet. Despite popular misconceptions, Friday never said this exact phrase.

- Due to this objective tendency in photography, technical excellence becomes hugely important

- The story or narrative is what links the objective part to the subjective part

Just the facts, ma'am.
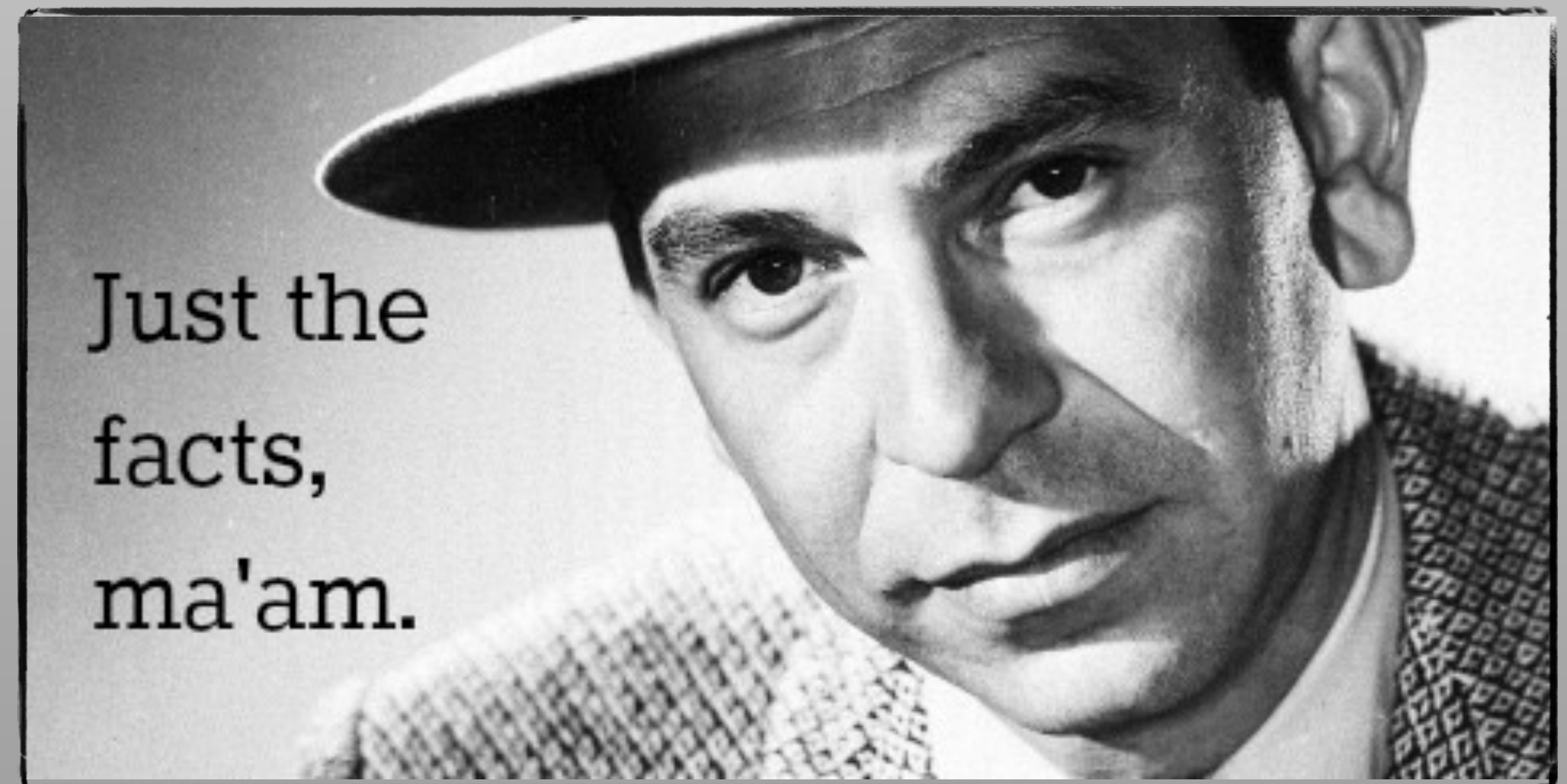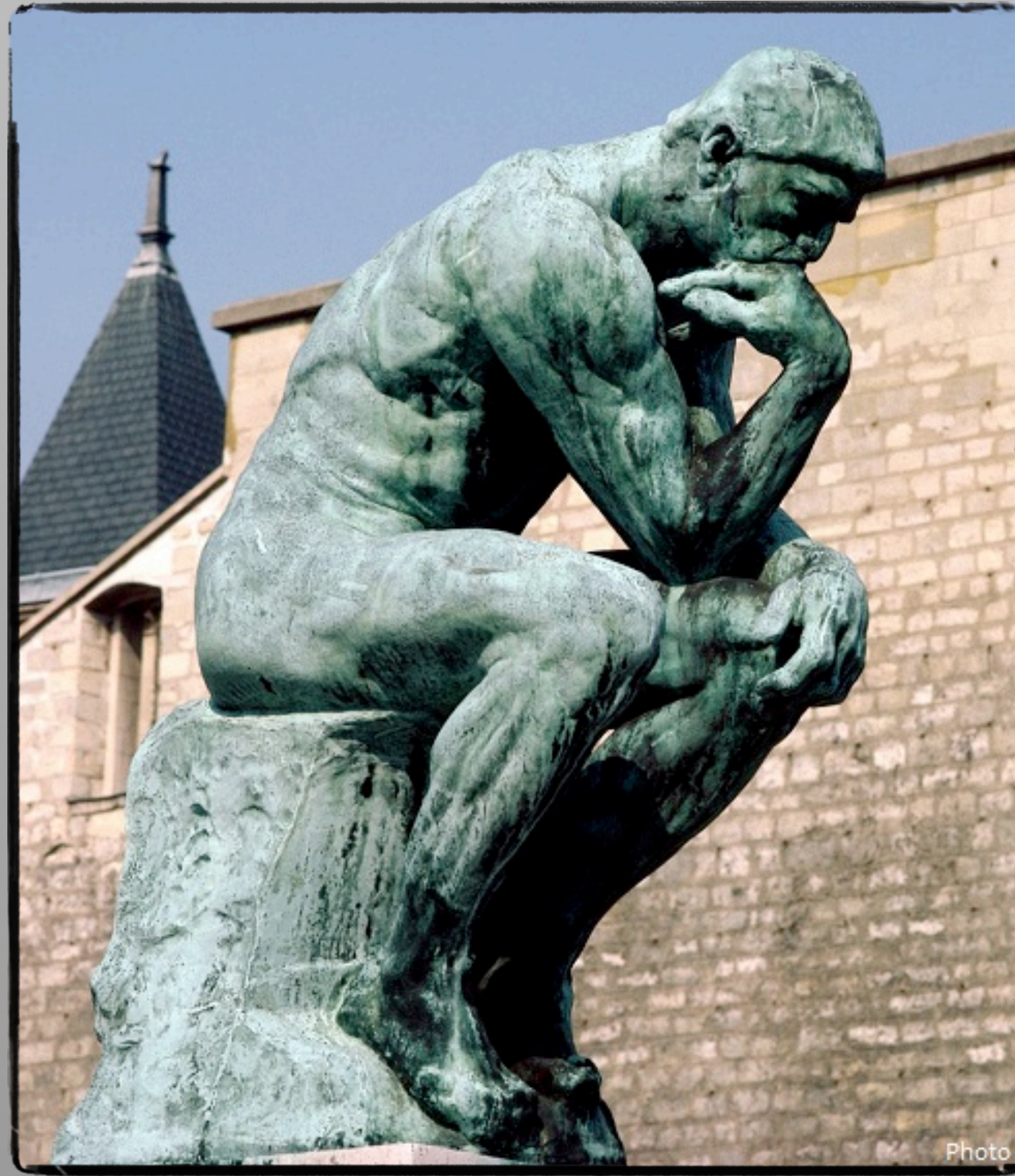
Subjective

The Thinker - Auguste Rodin

- Subjective: How the viewer feels or reacts to the image. This is seperate to the "story" but ideally aligned

- I think therefore I am; Descartes.

- Subjectivity brings with it the notion of the individual as a sapient, sentient being, conscious of his/her self as an individual and able to act as a free agent.   In this sense, subjectivity is taken to mean of or relating to a subject and evokes the notions of interpretation, perspective, point of view, ideology, and world view.

- In plain English, everyone is their own individual, with their own thoughts and their own reality.

- Why is this important?

- Each viewer including Judges or Assessor's will have their own personal interpretation of the image. You can make it anything from crystal clear so there is no doubt, through to deliberately making it ambiguous so the viewer draws their own conclusions

Pretty

- A photo that is just pretty IS just fine.

- Pretty is mostly the objective part

- The subjective part is the reaction, happiness, desire, empathy etc

Love is Blind

- William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice

- Step away from your own personal connection. Would you still like the image if it was somebody else's entry?

love is blind and lovers cannot see the pretty follies that themselves commit

~ William Shakespeare

AZ QUOTES
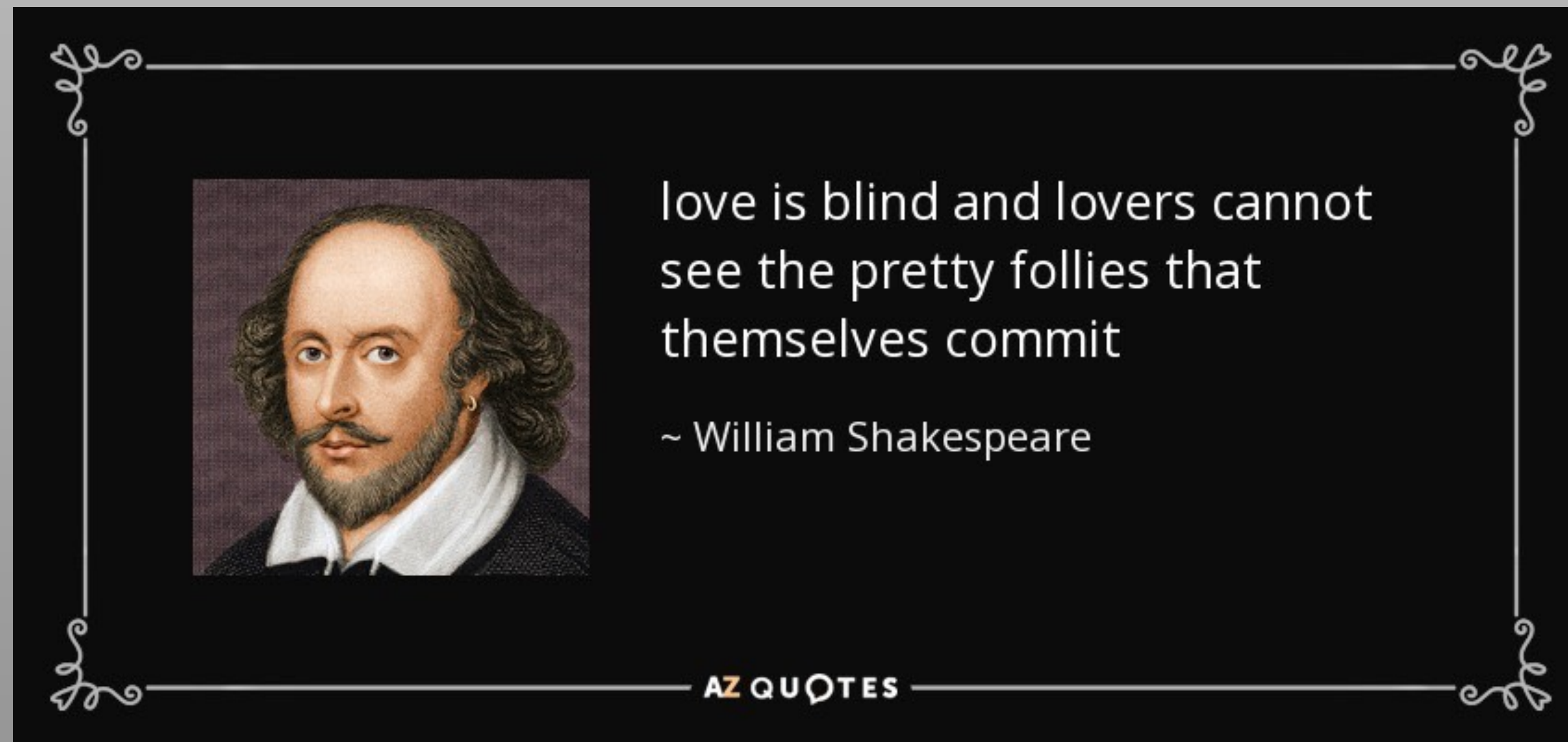
# "Look, isn't my baby is sooo cute in this photo ?"

- Consider both your image and the Assessor

  - If the Assessor doesn't like your style it might end up like trying to convince a flat earther of the globe, or a classicist the merits of Heavy Metal music. It may be worth considering saving it for another day.

  - If you can find out the assessor's pet hates you can pay attention to those

Judge 1

Judge 2
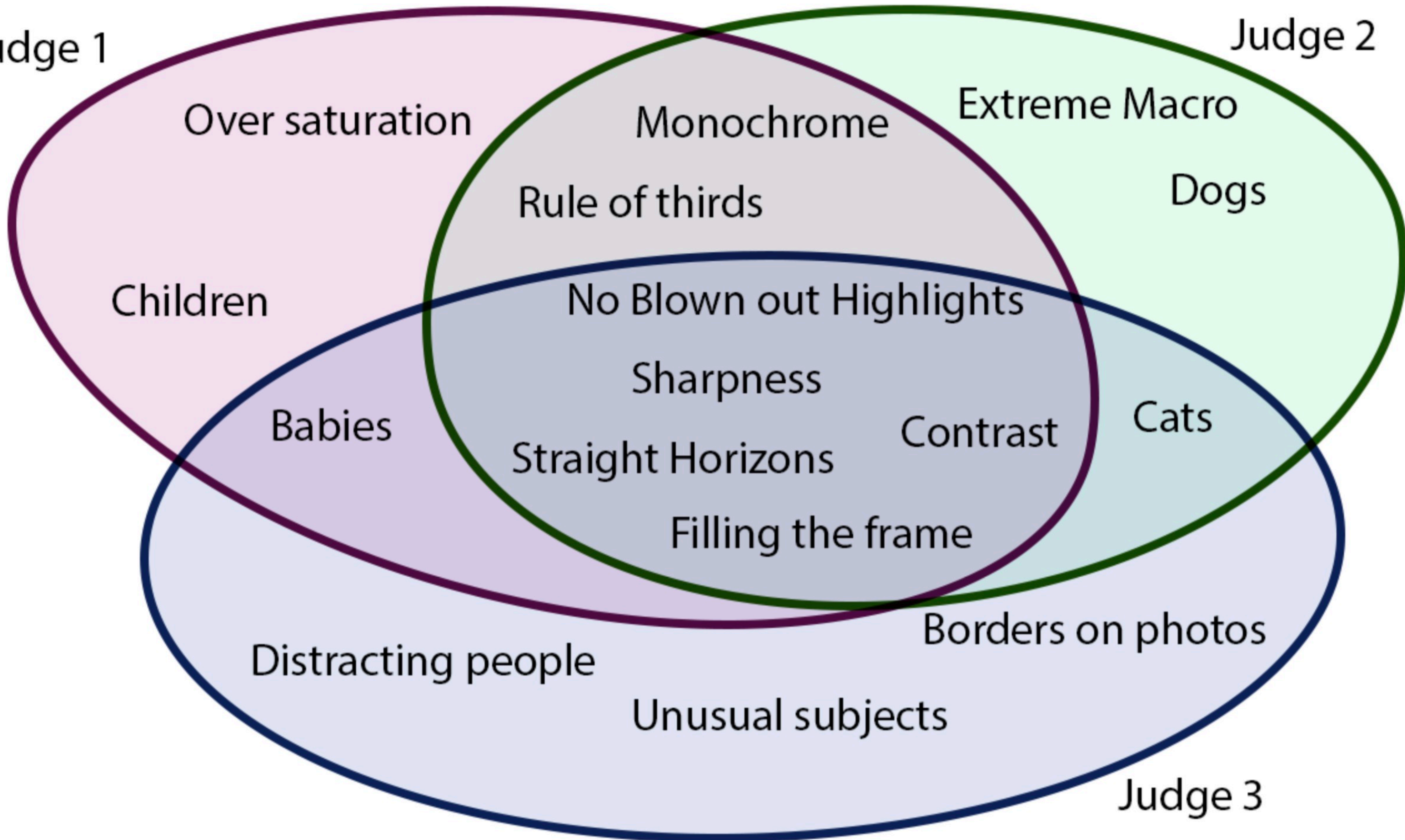
Judge 3

Over saturation

Monochrome

Rule of thirds

Extreme Macro

Dogs

Children

No Blown out Highlights

Babies

Sharpness

Contrast

Cats

Straight Horizons

Filling the frame

Distracting people

Borders on photos

Unusual subjects

Part 2: Choose your Polish

Have a process and checklists

Make a start

- Procrastination is not a pathway to success

- The mood will come once you get going

- Try to maintain a conscious connection to the mood of your image

- Playing music that matches can help

- Unless silence is your friend

Take a professional approach

- (presenters story)

- Use the best equipment and processes you can

- Avoid shortcuts

- Junk in junk out

If you can, use raw files at full resolution and 16 bit depth while processing

- Yes this will make for big files and slow down older computers.

- Do it right first time, If you chuck away data at the start, then put in a whole load of time editing and there's something wrong it's a long walk back.

  - A common conversation:

    - "can you print this x size?"

    - "No, there's not enough resolution "

    - "I only made it for screen, now I need to print it, isn't there something you can do?"

  - Mmmm not really

- 16 bit will allow for adjustments to fine colour graduations without stepping occurring

Part 3: Elbow grease, getting the shine

- The work begins

- Not in any particular order, depends on your workflow

Composition

- The overall layout of blocks of colour, luminance and line

- Workshop coming up on this with Graham

- Use rule of thirds and other techniques

- Normally avoid things that are centred, like the horizon of a reflection, as either the reality or the reflection will need to be dominant

- **Techniques to check aesthetic:**

- Look at it in B&W as we see luminance much more than colour (eg image contrast and eg image coloured lines)

- Squint at the image to reduce detail

- Blur the image temporarily

- Turn the image upside down, great for images with faces or words

- Make the image very small so it turns into shapes

- Closely relating too…
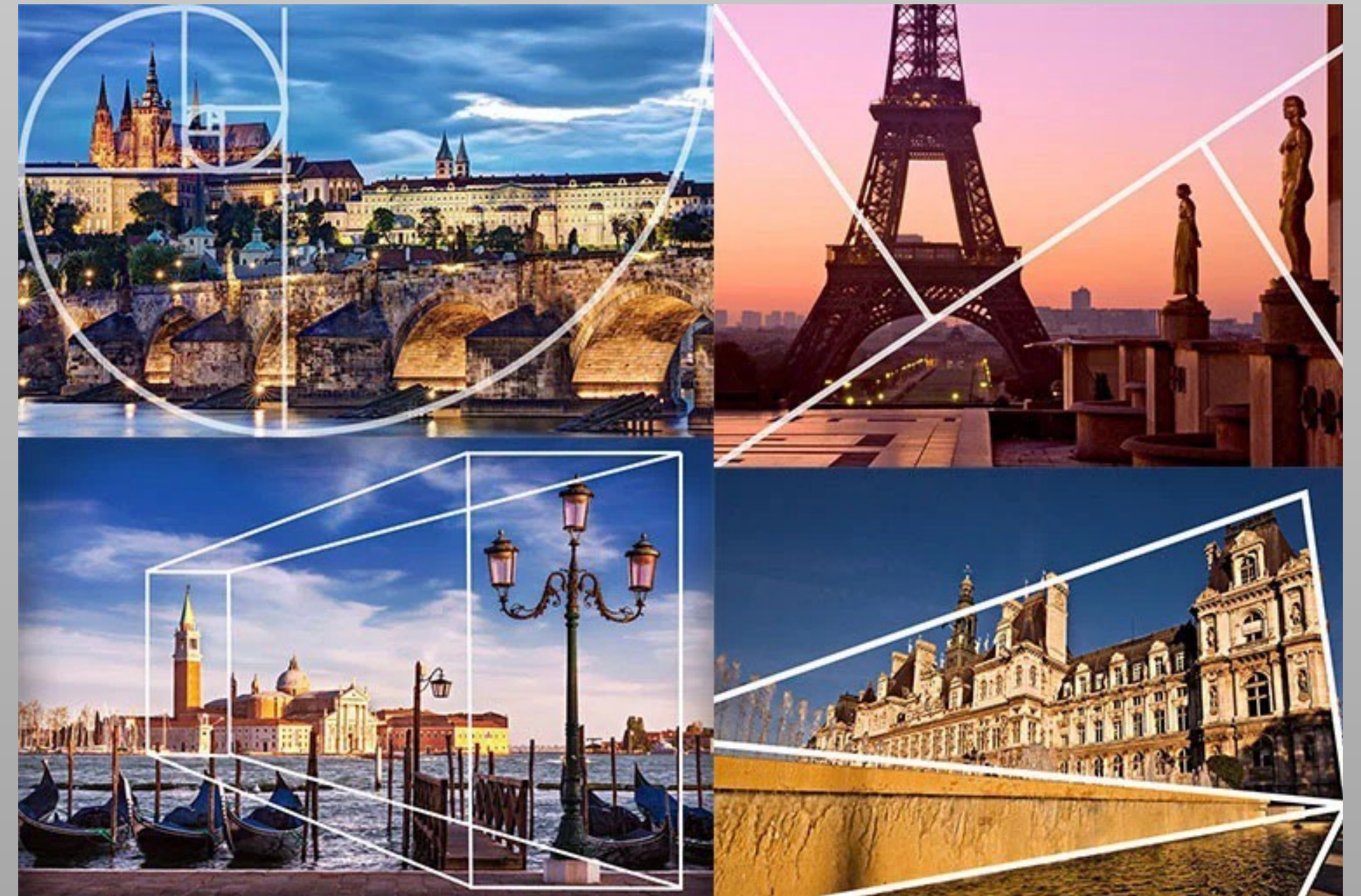
Subject and negative space

- Think of the subject as one block like a silhouette and the surrounding space as a seperate item

- Do they balance and compliment each other?

- Does the negative space contain the subject in the frame?

- Is there some space where dynamic things are going? for example birds flying, creatures looking?

Background control

- Does the negative space contain distracting elements?

- Strong colours

- Clutter

- Readable words that are not part of the story

- Bright highlights for lower key images

- Dark areas in high key images

- Utilise separation techniques such as depth of field, contrast, colour etc

Edge control

- Work towards keeping the viewers attention in the frame and directed to the subject

- Clean up clutter if the rules allow

- Clean up clutter before taking the shot for NH where possible, PJ moving your viewpoint and cropping are your main tools

- Vignettes, burning, desaturation etc are options to reduce the impact of edge items that remain if the rules allow

- This image is let down by the dark item on the ground contacting the side of the frame
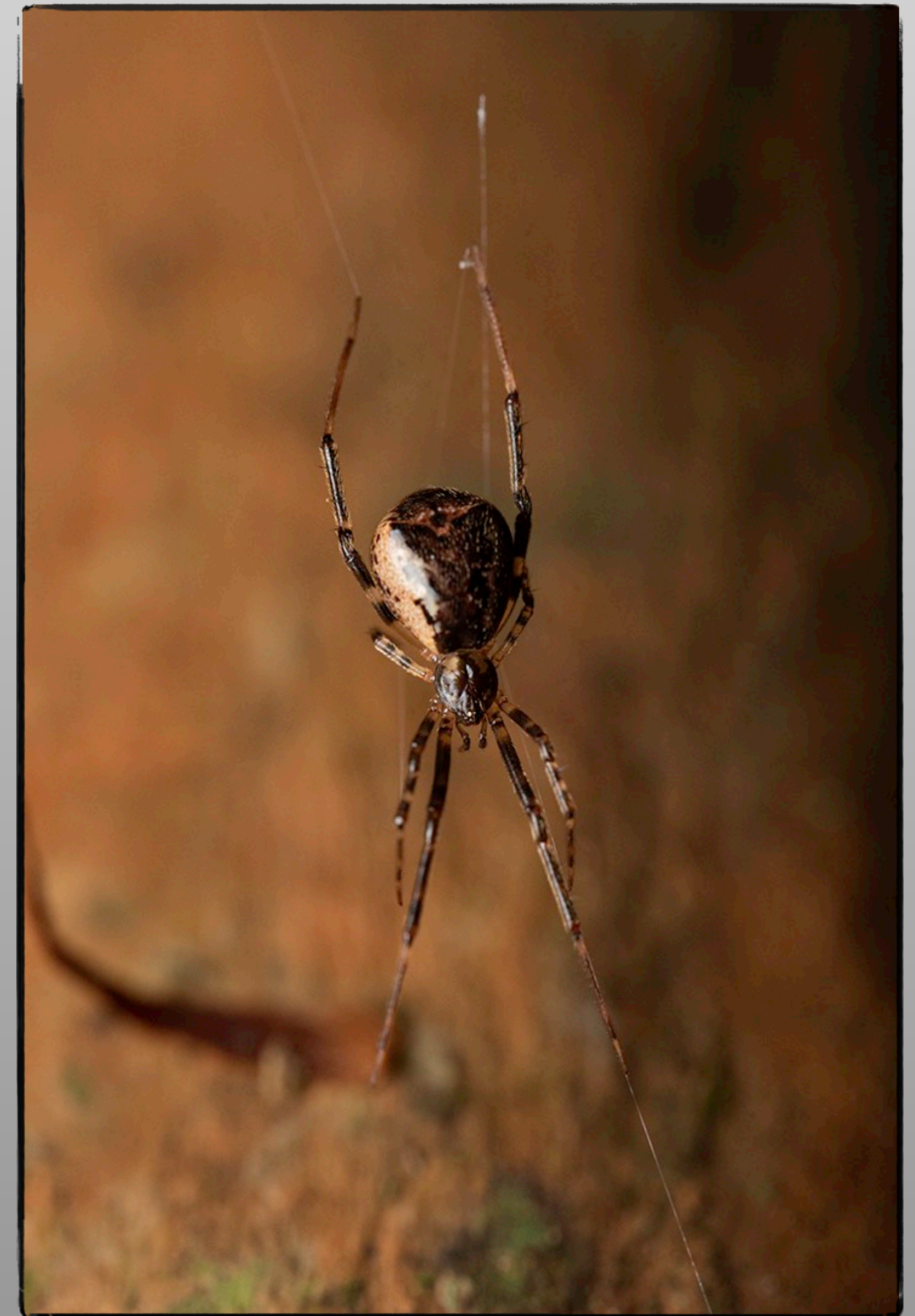
Subject strength

Techniques to help your subject stand out

- **Lightest and brightest**

- We are drawn to the shiny bits, use contrast to lift the subject

- High key - this still applies but the bright areas are contained to some extent seperate from the background

- **Colour**

- Colour is secondary to Luminance (Light and Dark) The following image illustrates this as its a black and white image with colour cross hatching, but we interpret it as colour

- Most vibrant, we always see the photographers wearing red jackets on club outings. Use colour to bring out the subject, but with care as over saturation, goes back to "forget the fakes"

- Black and white can be used to rescue an image with a colour problem

- Colour contrast is an age old technique, gold on purple, skin tones on teal etc

- **Sharpest**

- We focus on the sharp parts and kind of ignore the out of focus, so bokeh backgrounds are great

- For people try to achieve catchlights in the eyes, also hair or rim lighting can lift them from the background
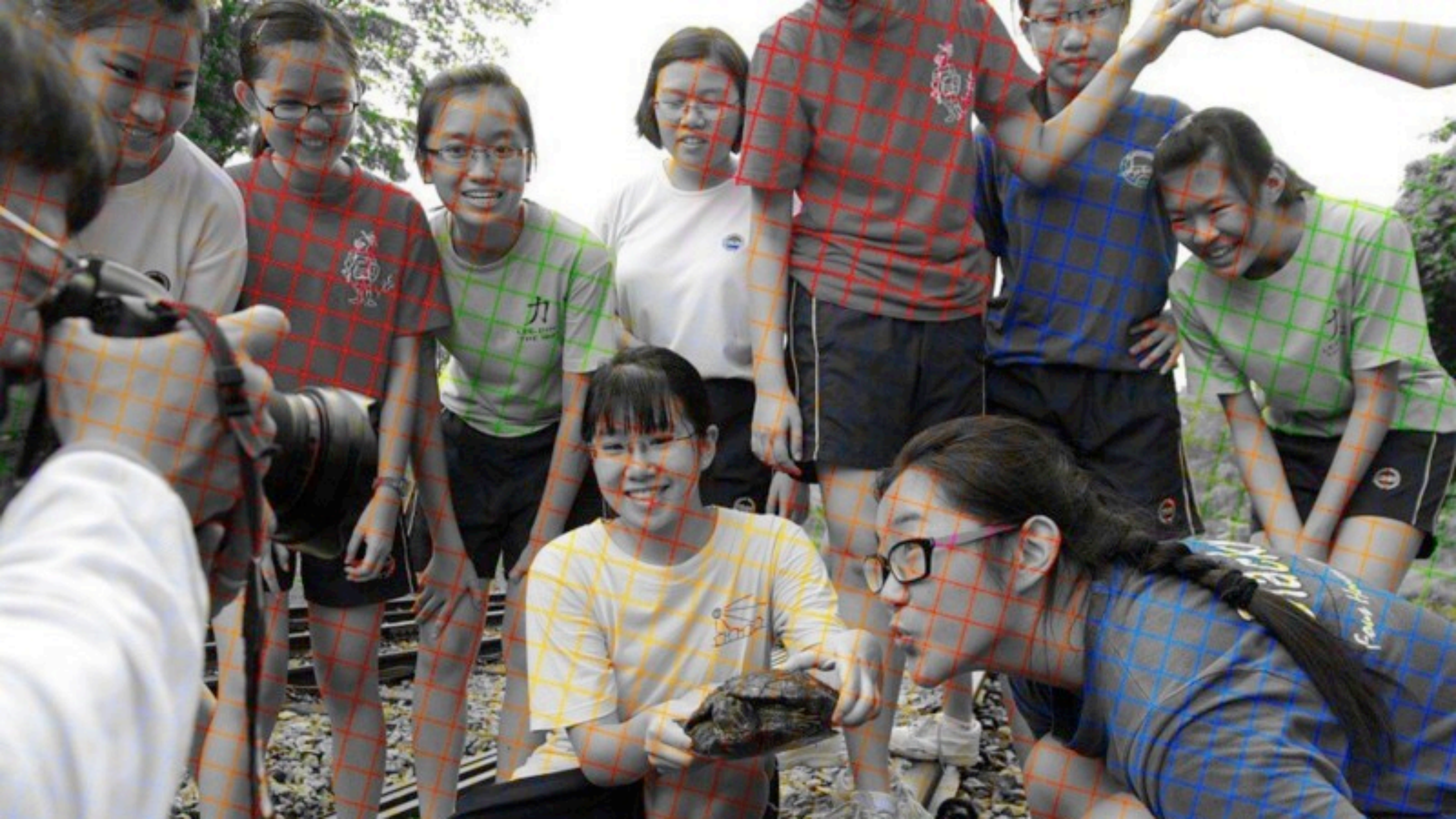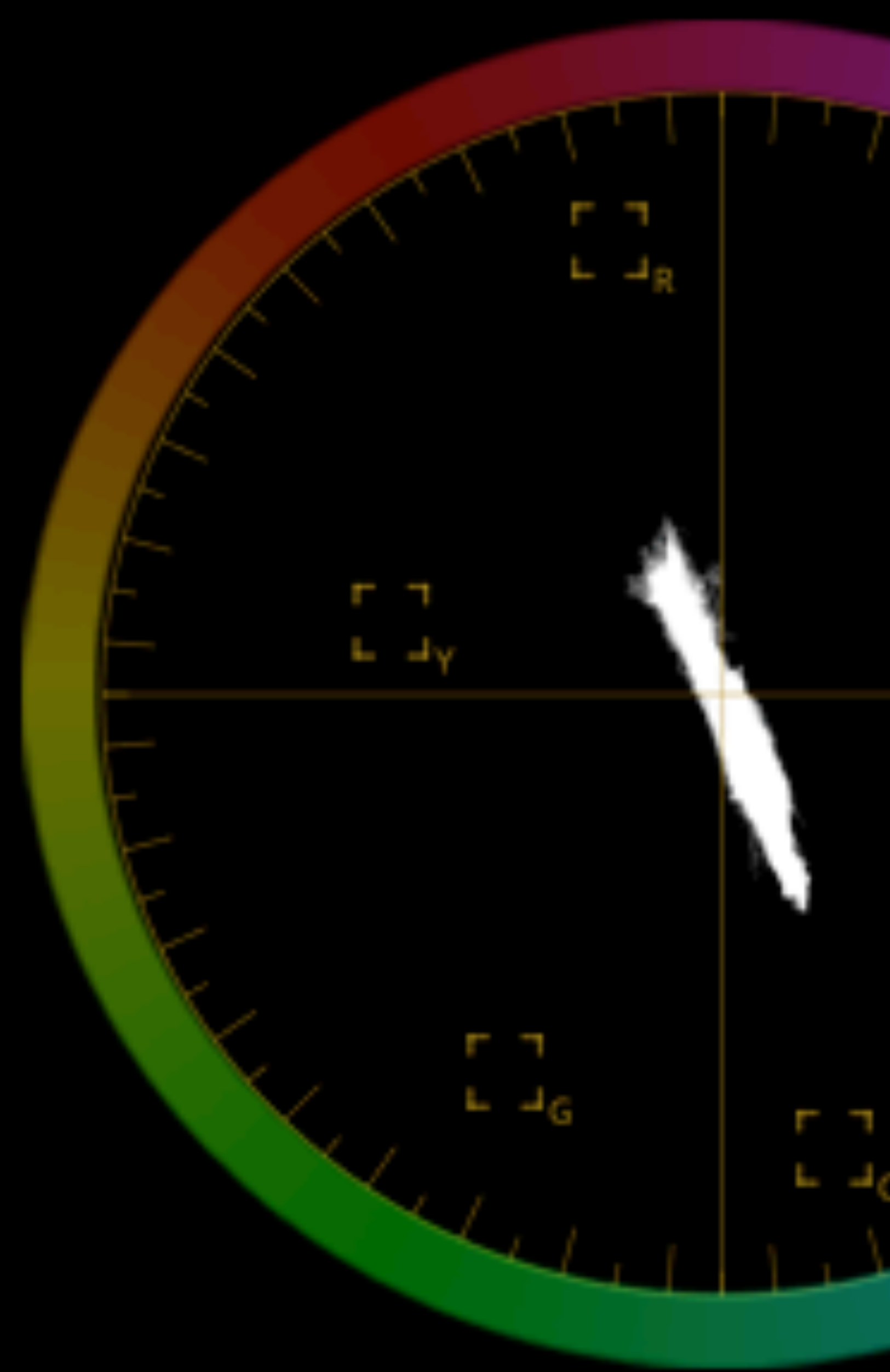
Orange skin tones surrounded by teal in Jurassic World (via TV Guide)

Level horizons

- Make sure this is right, unless deliberate it will usually get the image tossed

- Crop tools normally show a grid, otherwise put a guide on the horizon

Dust spots

- Caused by dust on the camera sensor

- Several techniques to find them depending on your software. Ask uncle google.

- Lightroom, for example, has a visualise spots option

DSC_4654.NEF
/06/2016 11:57:59
99 x 2928

verlay : Always   ✓ Visualize Spots
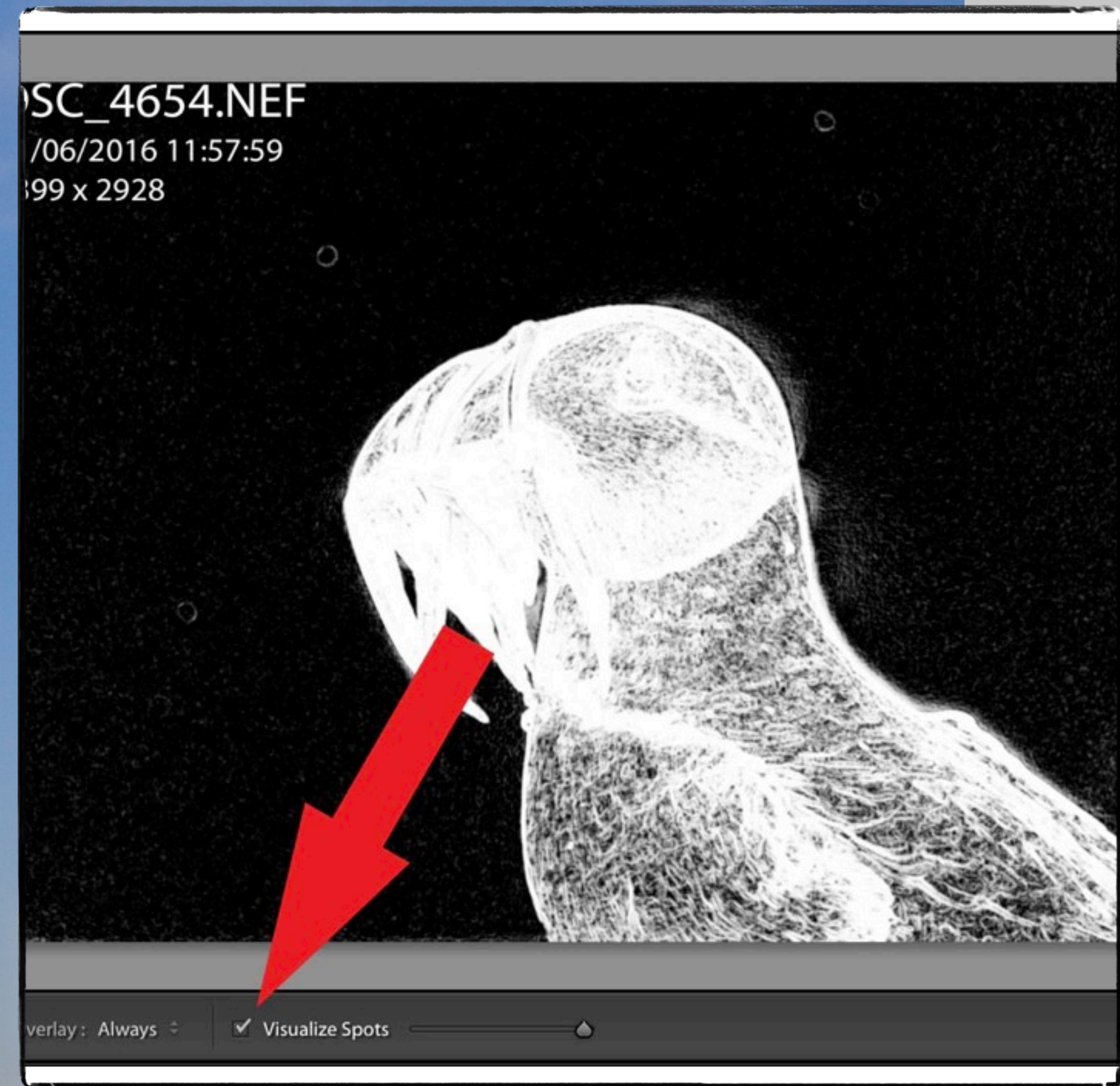
Exposure control and contrast

- Use the histogram and global adjustments to get a good range from dark to light

- Flat or dull images are probably not going to stand out

Underexposed   Correct exposure   Overexposed
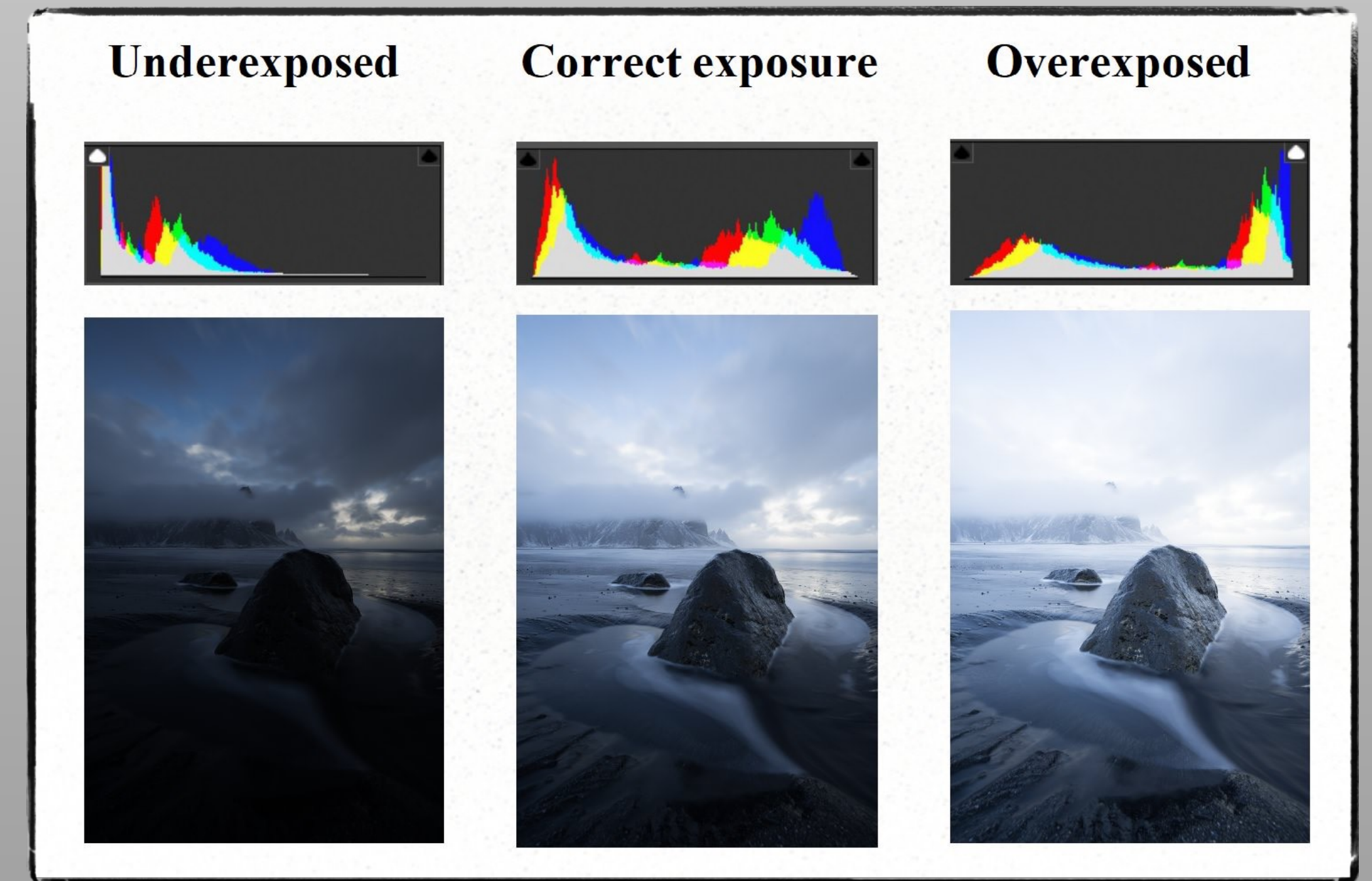
Noise

- Check for noise by zooming into dark areas and flat colour

- Modern noise reduction can work wonders but sometimes you just can't fix it
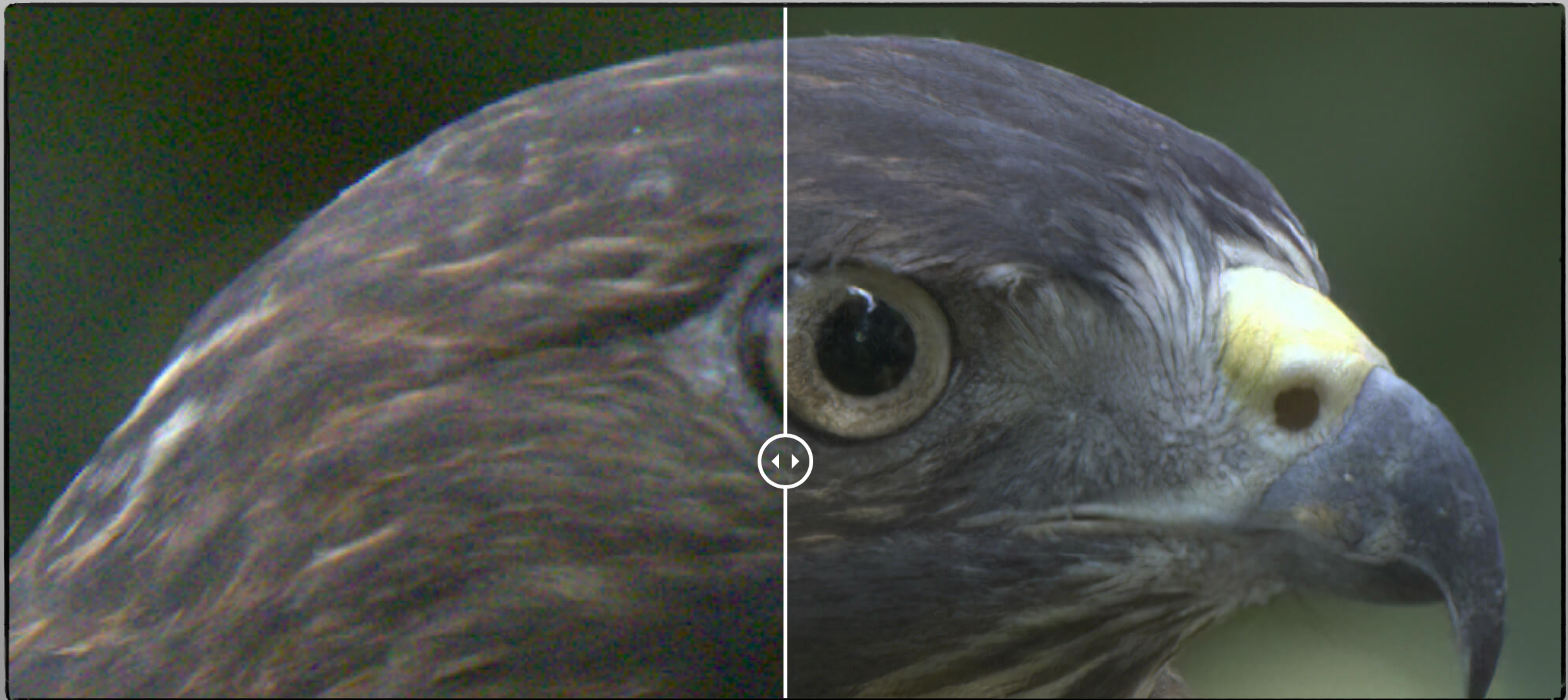
Skin tones and white balance

- These need to be right unless you have just photographed Donald Trump

- If possible use a grey card

- Having your camera white balance set at 5500K - 6100K will capture what your eye sees, and adjustments can be made later

ICM, abstract and what people fondly refer to as blurry s#%&

- Simplicity and composition increase in importance

- Still generally needs somewhere in the frame to centre the viewers attention

- Multiple exposures that appear to "jiggle" are often unsuccessful as rather than holding the attention of the viewer they are uncomfortable to look, at and force the viewer to look away

Silhouettes
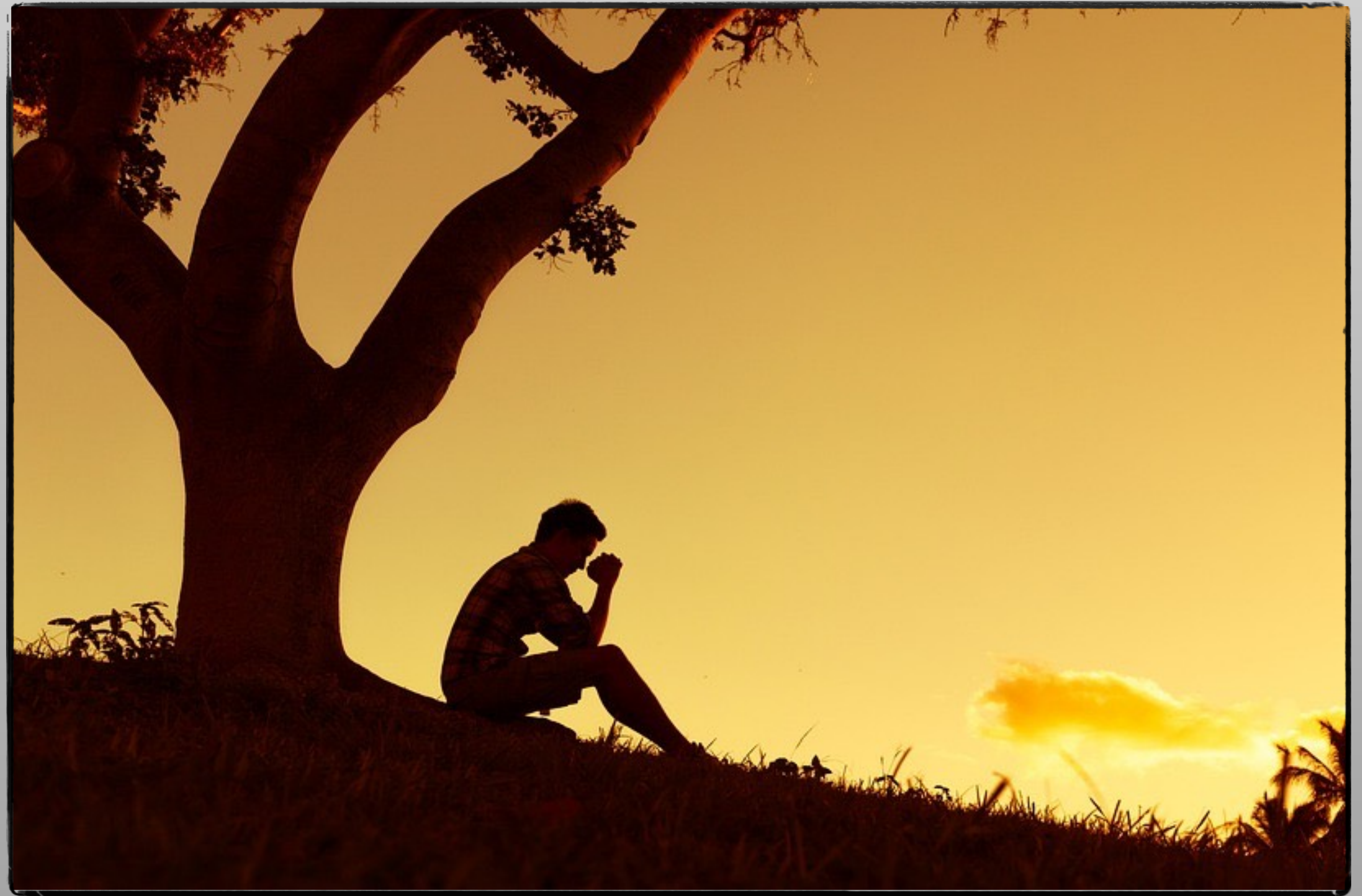
- These can be tricky

- Some judges want some detail to remain in the subject, others want the subject solid black

- Composition needs to be great, usually due to the subject having no detail

Portraits

- Eyes are key and the dominant or both eyes must be in focus

- Expression conveys mood through empathy

- Actions tell the story

- Catchlights in the eyes are needed to avoid the eyes looking dead

- Some form of background separation should generally be used, colour, focus, contrast etc

Frames / Borders

- Can be helpful with high key images to provide a boundary

- Choose carefully for style, mood and story

- Turn it on and off a few times to make sure it enhances the image. If it doesn't don't use it

- Too complicated will distract

Overlays

- These, like frames can get mixed results as they are often more of a treatment than part of an image

- They need to enhance the image and not distract or overpower

- Fit with the style, mood and story

Resize and sharpen for output - final step

- Keep your original, and save the resized one separately

- Resize to suit the competition rules

- Sharpen appropriately, take care not to overdo and create halo's

- For prints you may need to try a few times with small versions in order to get it right

- Projected or displayed images will tend to show detail well into the blacks, but not the whites.

- Print is the other way around, watch for dirty whites
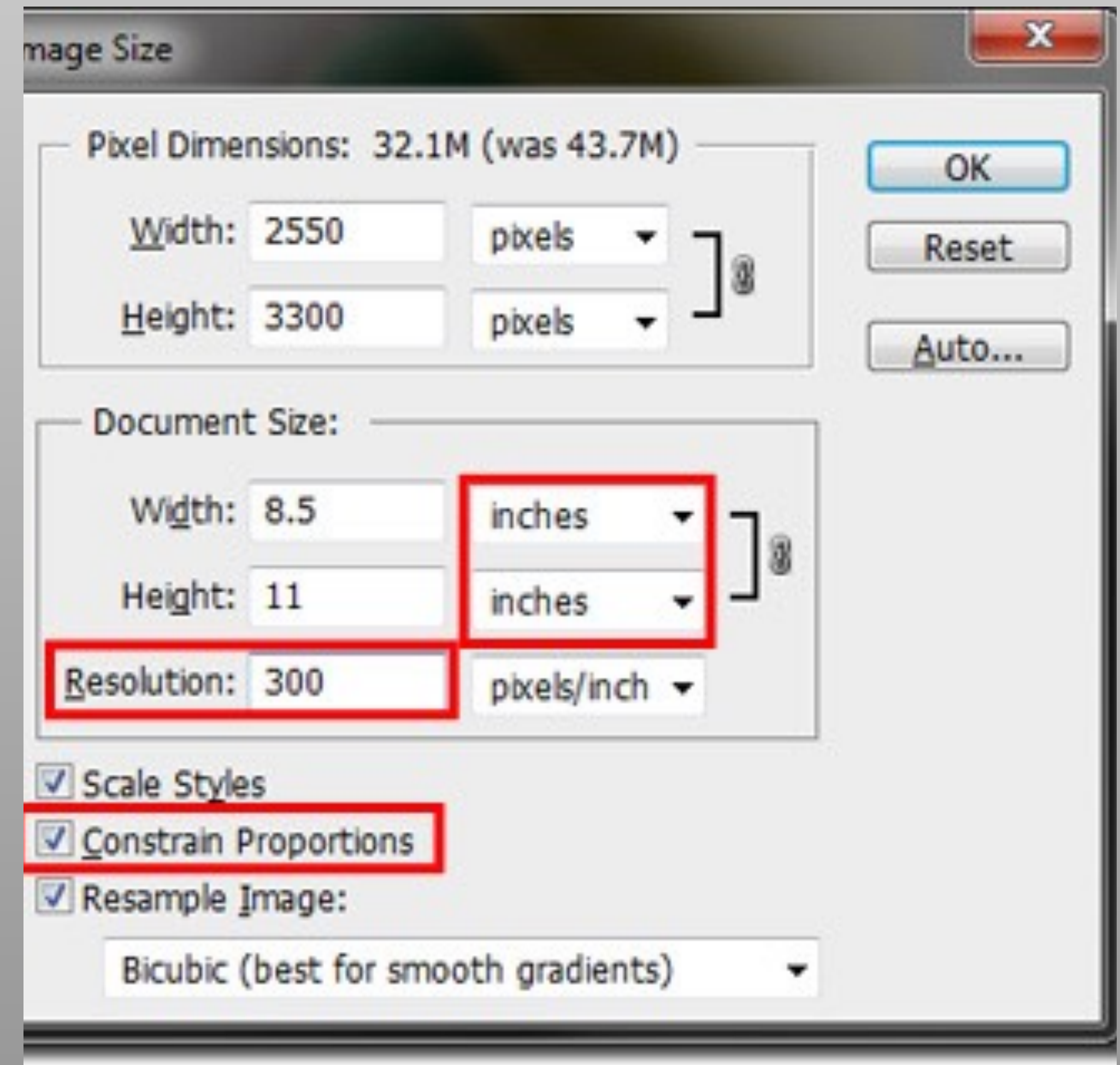
KISS Keep it simple s......

- The phrase; "keep it simple, stupid" is thought to have been coined by the late Kelly Johnson, who was the lead engineer at the Lockheed Skunk Works (a place responsible for the S-71 Blackbird spy plane amongst many other notable achievements)

- Less is often more

- The less distractions the more it's about the subject
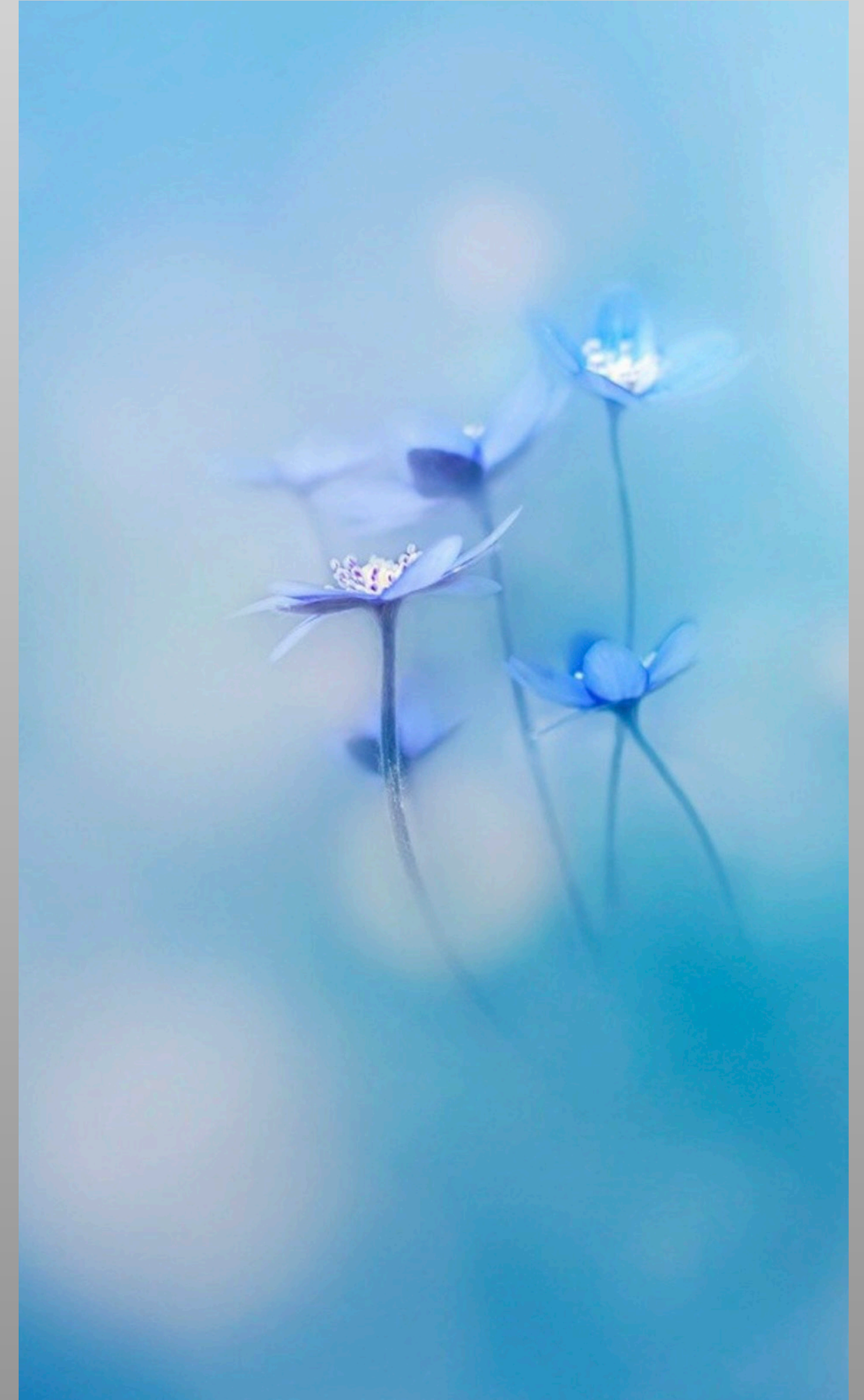
Break the rules, but with care, intent and design

- Does it look good, convey the story and communicate the emotional content?

- Is the Assessor sufficiently open minded

Credits

- YouTube video; Jackultramotive: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8K5... Jae Media: https://www.instagram.com/jae.media/

- Images of my own

- Images from Creative Commons sources including Flickr, several online photography sites such as Petapixel and Digital Photography school, Adobe & Apple software & dialogs

- The odd one ripped mercilessly of the net, pleading private and educational use