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How to Cheat in Photoshop CS4

Price £24.99

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Format 440 pages, paperback

ISBN 978-0-240-52115-2

Pros Cross platform + Quick-hit workshops + Excellent bundled DVD

Cons None

Verdict A refreshing alternative to conventional textbooks. It's a colourful, engaging and, frankly, essential read.

After the calm comes the storm. Aftershocks follow an earthquake. And every new release of Photoshop is sure to be pursued by an update to Steve Caplin's readable, colourful and indispensable *How to Cheat* book.

This is the fifth edition, and it builds on its predecessors by updating the techniques they expound and adding new tricks facilitated by CS4's bolstered features. Those that will only run under CS4 are clearly marked, but we were glad to see the arrival of a thorough grading system marking out which will also work in earlier versions. This is something we'd like to see in other similar books, as anyone using a preceding version can still get value from the latest edition of the book. Those books that don't make it clear that they cater for more than the latest release risk losing sales. And rightly so.

It's not, at heart, a training manual, so don't expect to start at page one and read through to the end. What it is, though, is a series of excellent quick-dip tutorials that explain a single concept over two pages: how Unsharp Mask works, how to turn a sign rusty, how to give someone a receding hairline... Each step is explained succinctly and clearly, and accompanied by both a screen grab – appropriately cropped – and keyboard shortcuts for both Mac and PC users.

The tutorials all make use of real world examples, giving the book a feeling of authority and authenticity, and in places Caplin's professional day-work, such as images he has created for the national broadsheets, are used as illustrative examples to show how the

techniques he describes are not just theories, but actual money-making methods.

The remarkable thing about them is that there is no magic to the techniques – just the methodical application of careful strokes, masking and Photoshop's own built-in filters and dialogs, so if your artistic abilities are slim to non-existent, you should still be able to follow a good number of the spreads and, if you can't, you're bound to pick up a gem here and there from the copious 'hot tips' dotted around the margins.

There's a DVD tucked into the back cover filled with a good selection of the images used in the workthroughs in the book and some two-and-a-half hours of videos showing you how they were created. The range of content is truly impressive, and it's one of the few bundled CDs we've tested that we could actually see ourselves using again and again. There are even 56 extra pages of content that either didn't make it into this book or have been dropped since their appearances in earlier editions.

In a market so crowded as the one for Photoshop how-tos, Caplin's tome has come to be recognised as one of the best, and it's good to see that in this latest edition he has done much to maintain its richly deserved reputation. Read it in conjunction with *Art and Design in Photoshop* (see *MacUser*, 21 November 2008, p37) and you can save your self some serious money on personal or online tuition.

How to Cheat has long been one of our favourite Photoshop books, and in this CS4 edition its appeal remains. If we'd received it in time for our round-up of Photoshop books (see *MacUser*, 16 January 2009, p40), it would have come out on top.

Nik Rawlinson

