

# Blood Moon Concept

If you were to ask me what makes a great image, the first thing that comes to mind is lighting – light affects our mood and our emotions more than most of us are aware. I am very lighting centric, my choice of restaurants, cafes and such usually revolve around their atmosphere, of which lighting plays one of the strongest roles. Throughout my career I have been guilty of creating images that I think are magnificent because of the lighting but fall short on concept! Case in point: I recently created a Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) Fight-Night poster (see Image 001) featuring a friend of mine, Hannah Laird who at a ripe old age of 16 is something of an MMA champ. It started as an in-studio image I created of her doing a high kick. The pose creates a graphically interesting body shape, her expression creates tension, and the lighting I created over her body creates depth and drama; but still it is really just an action portrait – low on concept and high on boring to anyone that is not interested in her personally. I started the project with Hannah on set, capturing her doing a number of action poses such as this high-kick, all with no real concept other than 'Scary Female MMA Fighter'. Needless to say, slapping down some type on this image didn't elevate it much either, it needed something more. As you can imagine I was feeling pretty inadequate with the results. Really, what was I expecting? To my defence, I did put a lot of effort into lighting and getting the shot; it was pretty crazy the amount of variables at play with trying to capture a fast moving martial arts movement that had to be, not only accurate but also needed to have some artistic appeal in terms of making Hannah's form appealing. All this as well as having to create it in a very specific spot in space and time for the lighting. As you can imagine, it took a ton of directing from me and a ton of concentration from her to get the kick right whilst looking good doing it! As a result of very little forethought, I had to develop a concept around the image after the fact to give it some pizzazz – not a great way to work!

To this end I started to look at fight posters online, this really helped to get the creative juices flowing. Of the posters I viewed, I noticed that most included the date for the fight, this triggered me to think about what else might be happening in the world in and around Hannah's event. As it turns out, the date for Hannah's fight night is also a solar eclipse. This got me to thinking about full moons, celestial ceremonies late at night and so why not tap into this magic for Hannah's Fight Night? This led me to include the moon with Hannah's kick (see Call Out Box entitled 'Moon Image' for more details). The copy (type) for the poster helps tie the concept of moon and fighting together, hence 'Blood Moon' and it adds a graphic element. To be accurate, 'Blood Moon' is poetic slang for a total lunar eclipse not a solar eclipse, but I figured that since Blood Moon is not really accurate terminology I could apply a little poetic licence and get away with it; probably only risking the wrath of the odd troll out there!

I guess my unwillingness to really develop a strong concept prior to the shoot was just plain laziness; I do, however, suffer from chronic fatigue so I guess I can cut myself some slack here. It also occurs to me that most of my photographic career I've been creating images for advertising which means that a lot of the time I'm using/interpreting someone else's concept, usually an art director or designer. In these cases, my artistic responsibility is in creating the set and the lighting, plus capturing the moment. But from now on, when it is all up to me, I'll take a good long nap first, then hit the internet for images as fuel for firing up a productive brainstorming session, then develop a solid concept to plan around – it is more than apparent to me now, that it is easier to start with a strong concept. Also, I should add, don't forget to bill for this conceptualising; after all, this is a key part of the process and so you should be compensated for it, not for just clicking the shutter!



With the above in mind, what makes an image appealing? Is it great photography? Is it good compositing? Is it a clever concept? Or is it all of the above? I have for instance, seen great concepts with mediocre photography and still love the piece for its message or perhaps for its plain goofiness. Compositing has only become widespread among photographers since digital capture and its post-production potential; today, so many award winning images rely heavily on compositing and/or other manipulations in post. It is evermore difficult to win the eye of the public – and judges for that matter – with just plain good old photography! Now that's not me whining, that's just a plain, hard, cold fact that I'm okay with, or at least after a good kip!



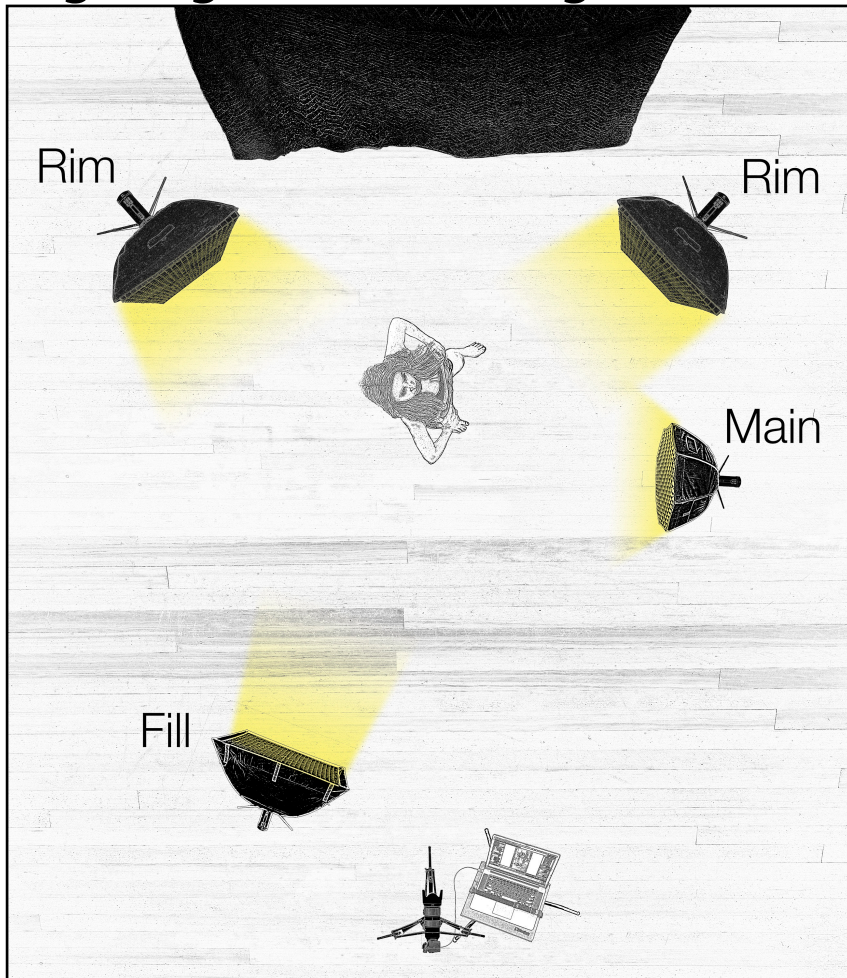
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## » Lighting and Processing



### Moon Image:

I found just the right moon image for this fight night poster in my file of stock images. It was, however, low resolution and so had to be up-sized a fair bit. However, since it was to be behind Hannah sizing it up was okay as long as I added some blur to it to made it look a bit out of focus, this solved the low res problem and gave a greater feeling of depth to the composite. It is amazing what you can get away with when using softened low res images as backgrounds since blurring them mimics shallow depth of field – the blur hides the upsizing pixelation; many a time I have used client's terrible low res smart phone images for backgrounds with good results!

Word of warning, make sure that after blurring the image that you apply some Noise to it (from Filter menu in Photoshop I choose Noise > Add Noise... > Amount: 2 to 4% > Distribution: Gaussian > Monochromatic). Noise will hide any banding that might occur by visually breaking up unwanted hard transitions in what should be soft tonal gradations in the image. In the digital world gradations of tone are not actually continuous the way we see them in the real world – they are represented digitally with steps of tone that are hopefully such small steps that they fool the human eye into thinking that it is seeing continuous tone. When we do see a tonal gradation start to break apart it is called 'Banding'; Banding occurs when the bit depth is not high enough to create a finely incremented breakdown of tonal gradations.

### Bio

Dave Montizambert lectures internationally on lighting, digital photography and Adobe Photoshop. He is also a published author having written two books on lighting and digital photography ([www.montizambert.com](http://www.montizambert.com)) plus numerous magazine articles on these topics in North America, Europe, Russia and Asia. Dave also creates lighting and Photoshop tutorial DVDs for [www.software-cinema.com](http://www.software-cinema.com) & [www.PhotoshopCAFE.com/video](http://www.PhotoshopCAFE.com/video) and authors 'Dave On Demand' ([www.montizambert.com](http://www.montizambert.com)) lighting tutorial based photo-training. Dave is available for lectures and workshops in your area and can be reached through [www.montizambert.com](http://www.montizambert.com).

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