

VISUAL EFFECTS

Production Workflow Journal

Part 1 – Pre-Production

Concept Development:

Before beginning the VFX phase, I will research and analyze various references to broaden my creative perspective. This process will help me determine, in combination with my own ideas, the visual effects, narrative elements, characters, and environment to be featured in the final video.

So, for this VFX project, I explored two different storyboard ideas to find a concept that felt both visually engaging and narratively meaningful.

The first idea shows a character opening a mysterious door and being suddenly surrounded by floating lights or orbs, while the second idea shows depicts a person sitting in nature, witnessing beautiful aurora-like lights as animals gather peacefully around them, a symbol of unity and connection with nature. I was inspired by various VFX references I found on YouTube and free 3D character models I found on another website like animation.methods.com and more, which helped me visualize how these effects and scenes could come to life. Even though I'm still deciding, I'm leaning toward developing the lights concept because it allows for more dynamic visual effects and a sense of mystery and wonder, along with the techniques we were practicing in class. My plan is to combine animation with VFX. I'll also use green screen footage, a forest background, camera tracking to integrate all the elements seamlessly, and sound at the end.

For the sound design, my goal is to create an immersive and emotional atmosphere that enhances the visual storytelling of the piece. In the opening scene, I will use subtle ambient sounds such as distant wind or soft background hums to create a sense of calm and anticipation. A low resonating tone or echo will emphasize the mystery of the transition. As the character steps into the magical environment, I will introduce more ethereal and uplifting sounds, possibly using light chimes, reversed tones,

or ambient pads to suggest wonder and discovery. This gradual evolution of sound will help me guide the viewer emotionally through each part of the story and strengthen the connection between the visuals and the narrative theme. Overall, my intention is to create a short but magical sequence that combines storytelling and visual effects to evoke curiosity and a dreamlike atmosphere.

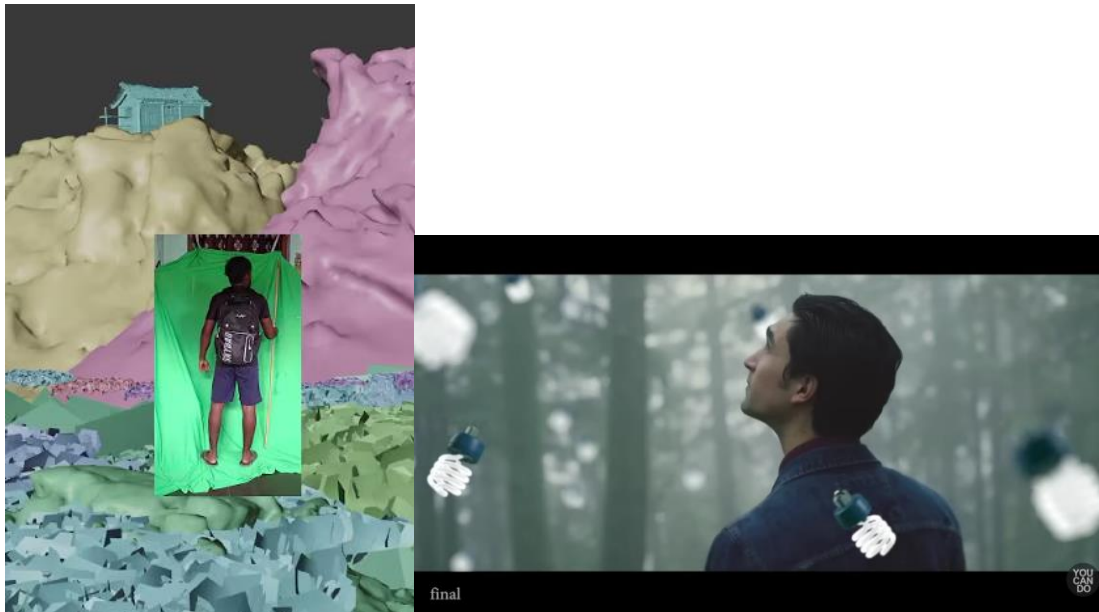


Image 1 & 2

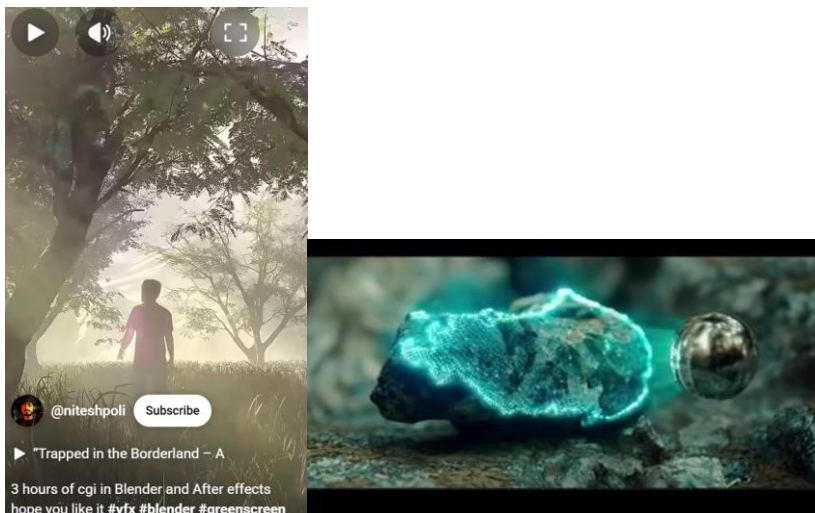
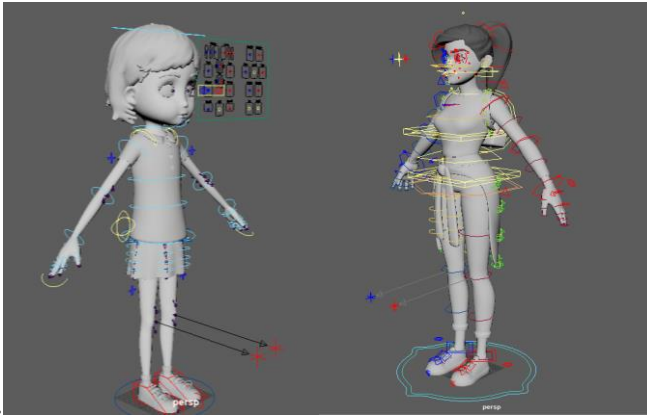


Image 3 & 4



Asset Planning:

For the asset planning stage, I identified and organized all the visuals and technical elements needed for the project. The 3D character models will be downloaded from two free online resources that provide pre-rigged assets, although some of them may need additional rigging adjustments in Autodesk Maya. The floating objects that appear around the character might also be modeled in Maya, depending on how the final composition develops or by downloading lights with a green screen. All visual effects such as lightning, color grading, background blur, camera tracking...will be created and composited in Nuke to enhance the atmosphere and contrast of the piece. In terms of sound, I may plan to download a few sounds, for example, instrumental sounds as the character enters the new environment. Ensuring a cohesive and immersive audiovisual experience.

Proposal Notes:

In my project proposal, I outlined the main concept, visual style, and technical workflow for my VFX piece. I explained the two initial storyboard ideas, one focused on a magical connection with nature, and another centered around a mysterious door with floating lights, and how they both explore themes of wonder and discovery. I also described my plan to combine live-action footage with 3D elements and sound, adding volume rays, lightning, camera tracking, blur effects, compositing...in Nuke. The proposal includes the software and tools I will use, such as Autodesk Maya for animation, and Nuke for visual effects and color correction. Overall, the proposal serves as a clear plan that guides the creative and technical direction of the project before moving into production.

Part 2 – Post-Production**3D Modelling & Animation:**



Downloaded from <https://www.mixamo.com/>

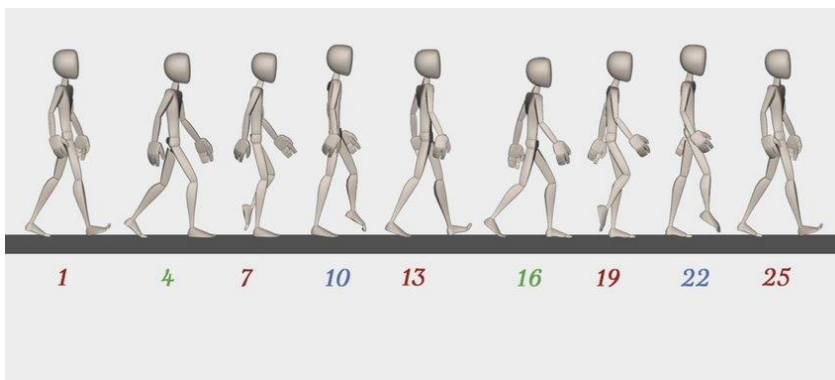
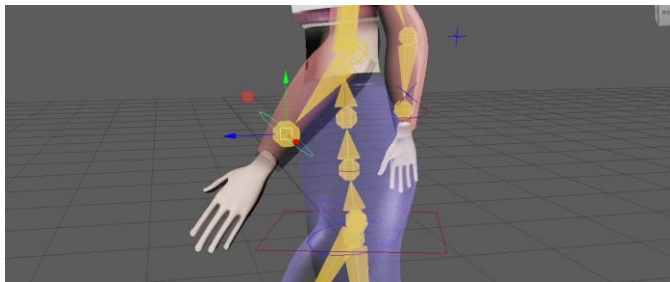
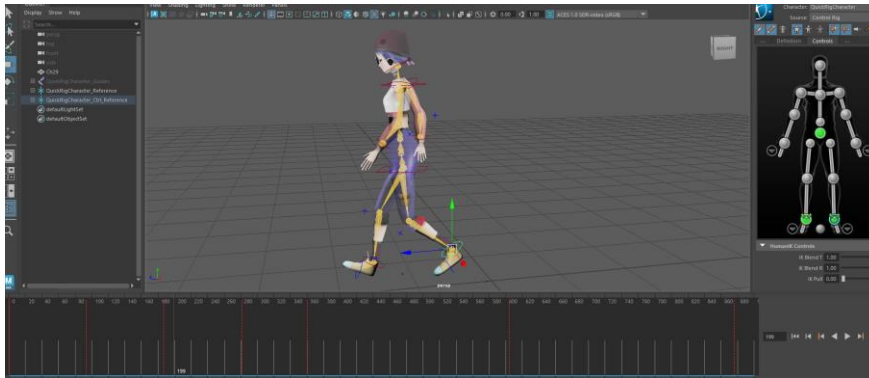


Image 5

First, I downloaded a free 3D character from a free website. In the end, textures were not necessary because the idea was to present the character as a magical spirit or ghost walking through the forest.

To animate it, I started by applying an autorig, which allowed me to rotate and move each body part. I animated the character frame by frame, setting keyframes by pressing the “S” key in Autodesk Maya.

For the walking animation, I used a reference image to guide each pose. After walking, the character stops and looks around, giving the impression that it is attentively observing the glowing lights floating around her.



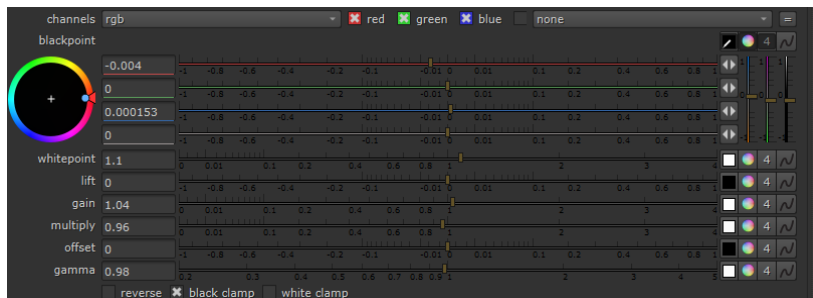
Part 3 – Post-Production

Compositing:

Compositing was used to combine and enhance all visual elements of the scene. A selective background blur was applied using roto masks to create depth, keeping the foreground sharp while gradually blurring the distant forest.

Volume rays were added to enhance lighting, realism, and visual movement throughout the shot. Additional compositing work included color correction and grading, retiming to adjust the speed of both the character and the background, and keying and the transform adjustments to properly integrate the character into the scene. Glow effects and sound design were also applied to reinforce the magical atmosphere and improve the overall visual and emotional impact.

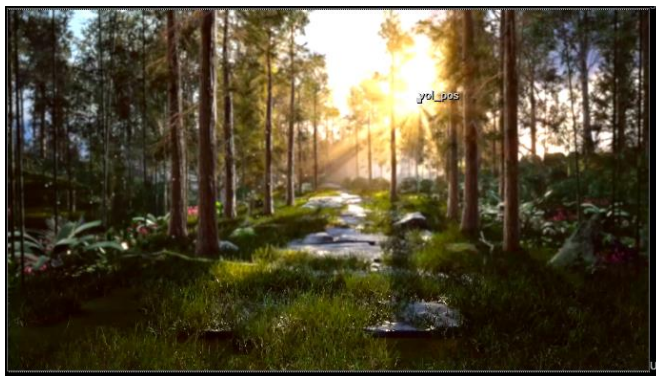
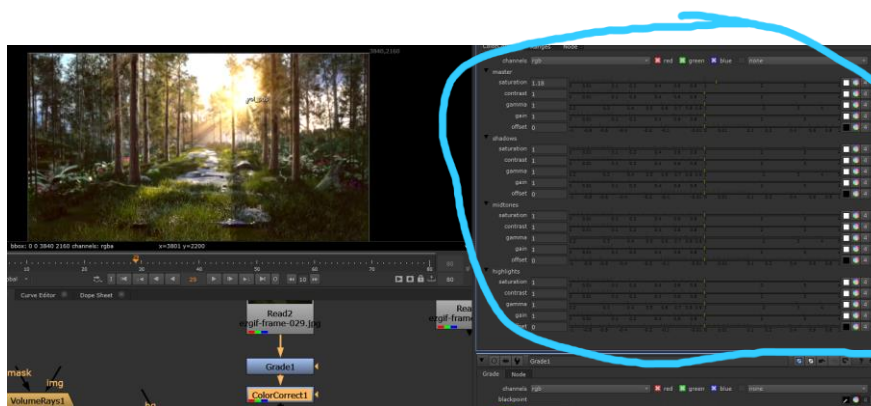
Color Correcting & Grading:



Color Correcting was applied in Nuke to balance the scene and ensure visual consistency between all elements. Basic adjustments to exposure, contrast, saturation, and color tones were made to correct the image and unify the character, background, and visual effects.

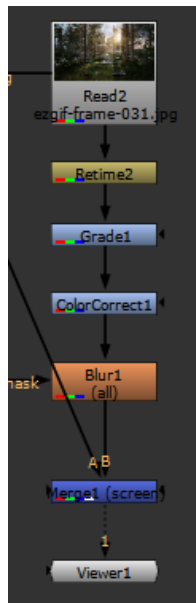
These corrections helped establish a clean and neutral base, allowing all elements to integrate naturally before applying the final artistic look.

Grade



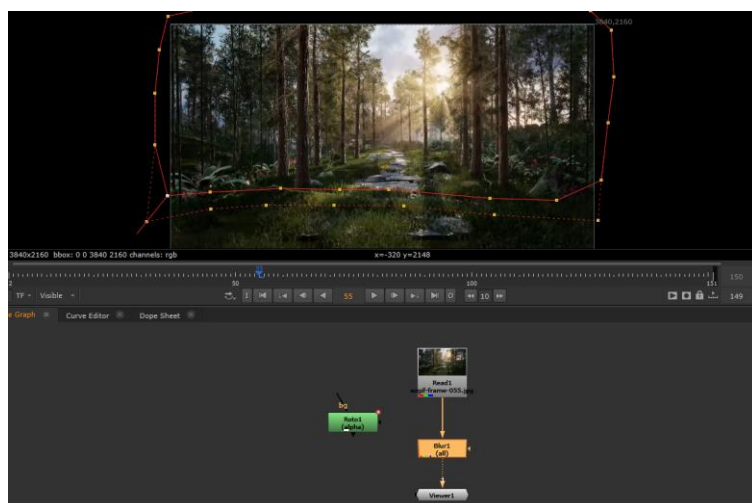
After color correction, grading was used to enhance the artistic style and mood of the scene. Color tones were slightly stylized, and saturation and contrast were refined to achieve a more vibrant and visually appealing result.

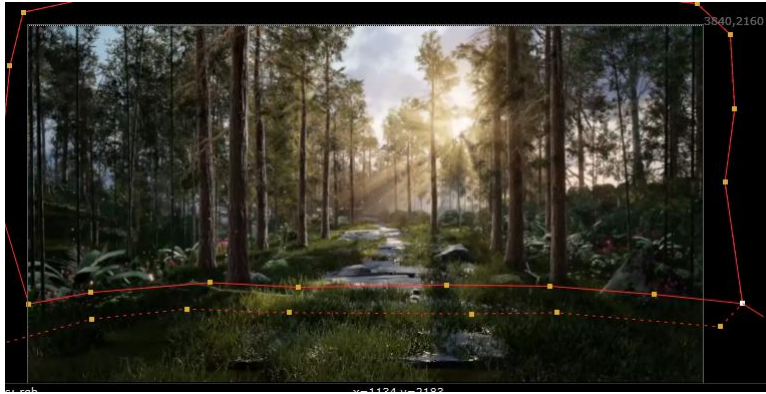
The lightning effects were also graded by adjusting the color, brightness, and saturation, reinforcing the magical atmosphere of the scene while maintaining consistency across the shot.



Additional VFX Elements:

Blur

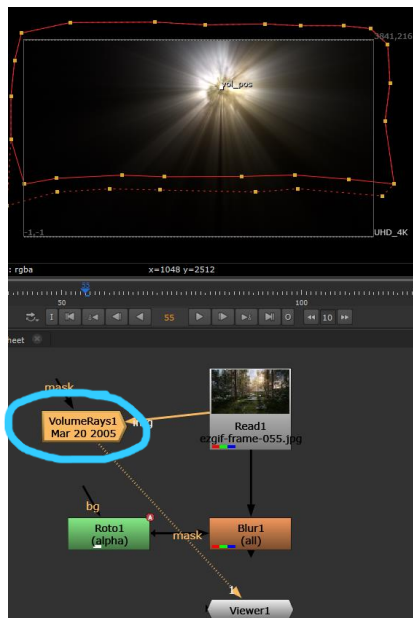




A background blur was applied in Nuke to create depth and focus within the scene. A mask was used to isolate the background elements, allowing the foreground to remain sharp while the distant areas of the environment gradually became more blurred.

The mask was adjusted by modifying control points to create a smooth transition between focused and unfocused areas. This progressive blur helped simulate depth of field and enhanced the sense of distance in the background, contributing to a more natural and cinematic look.

Volume Rays

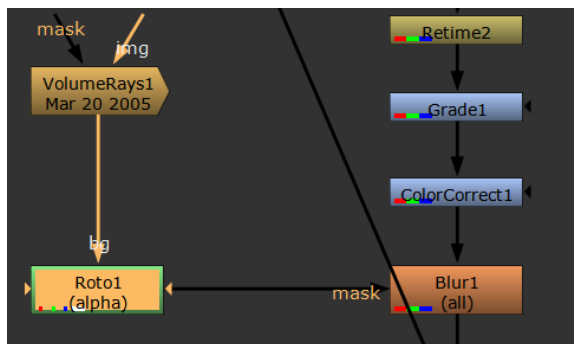


Volume Rays were added in Nuke to enhance the lightning, depth, and realism of the scene. The effect was used to simulate light beams passing

through the environment, contributing to a more atmospheric and immersive look.

The intensity and visibility of the Volume Rays were animated from an initial keyframe to the end of the shot, creating a subtle sense of movement and adding visual dynamism to the scene. This helped reinforce the magical mood and improved the overall integration of lighting within the VFX piece.

Roto

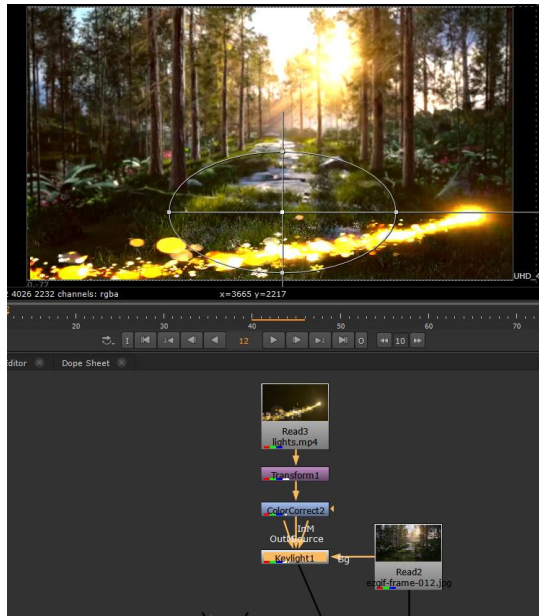


Rotoscoping was used to isolate specific areas of the scene of the scene in order to better control the Volume Rays effect. By applying roto masks, the light rays were selectively adjusted so they interacted more naturally with the character and the environment.

This process helped prevent the effect from affecting unwanted areas and improved the overall integration of the Volume Rays within the shot.

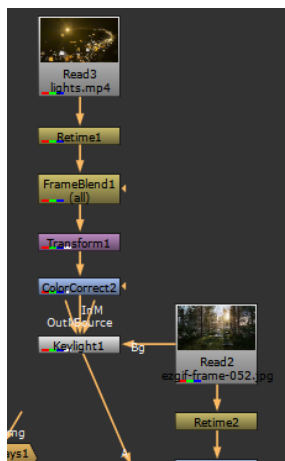
Keylight





Keylight adjustments were made to refine the integration of the character into the scene. Minor tweaks to the matte helped improve edge quality and ensured a cleaner and more natural composite.

Frame Blend



Frame Blend was applied to the floating lights around the character to create smoother motion and a more natural, fluid animation. This technique helped blend frames together, enhancing the magical effect of the lights and improving the overall visual continuity of the scene.

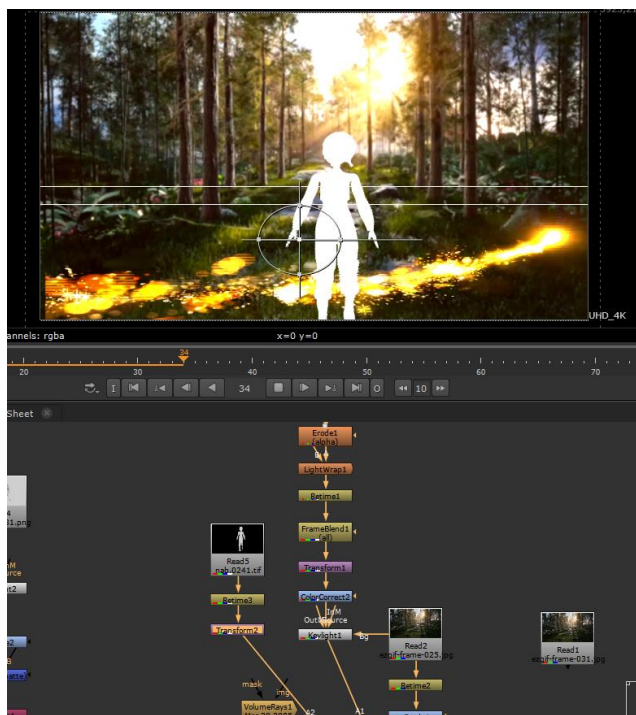
Transform (position and scale)

Transform nodes were applied to both the character and the floating lights to adjust their position, scale, and rotation within the scene. These adjustments helped ensure proper alignment, movement, and integration of all elements, contributing to a more cohesive and visually balanced final shot.

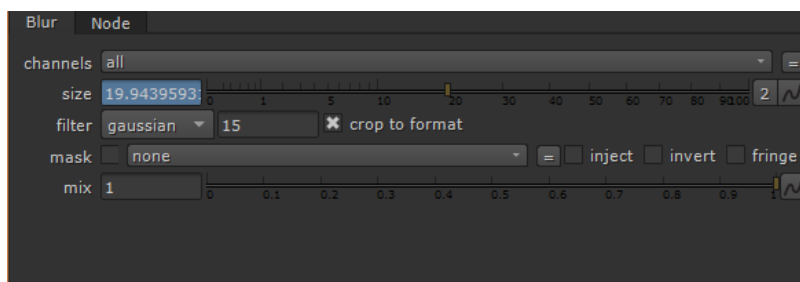
Retime 1 & 2 (Background & Effect)

It was applied to adjust the speed of the animation for the character, the background, and the floating lights. By modifying the timing of the frames, the overall motion was slowed down, enhancing the magical atmosphere and improving the overall pacing of the scene.

Slowing down the character's movement allowed for better emphasis on each gesture and pose, making the animation more expressive and readable. Similarly, the background and floating lights were retimed to maintain visual consistency and to reinforce the sense of depth and flow within the shot. Overall, retiming contributed to a more immersive and cinematic experience for the viewer.



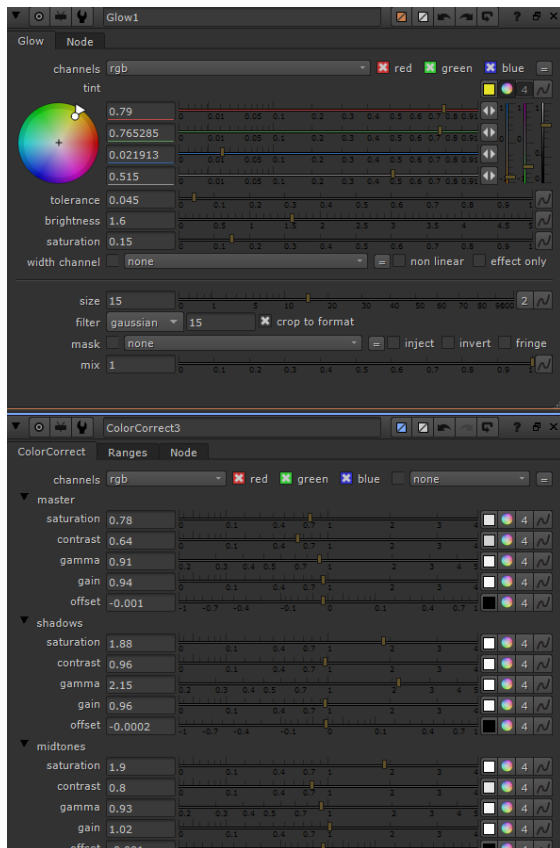
Blur Animation



A subtle blur animation was applied to the character to enhance the ghostly, ethereal appearance. The blur intensity was increased slightly, but not excessively, to maintain the character's form while giving it a soft, otherworldly quality. By animating the blur over time, the character felt more dynamic and visually integrated with the surrounding lights and environment.

Glow & Color Correct (to give more transparency)

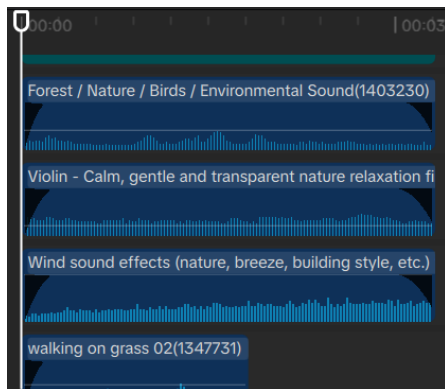
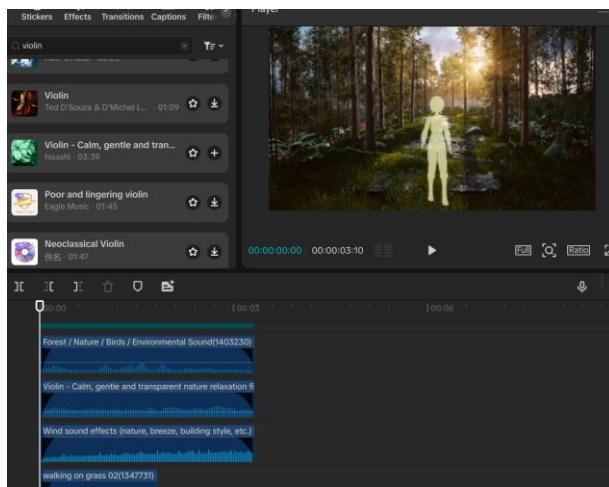




Glow effects were applied to the character to make it visually consistent with the surrounding lights. The intensity and radius of the glow were carefully adjusted to avoid overexposure while emphasizing the character's presence in the scene.

A final color correction was applied to refine the overall hue and saturation of the character. A yellow tone was chosen to harmonize with the warm colors of the floating lights, improving visual cohesion and aesthetic appeal. These adjustments ensured that the character integrated seamlessly into the environment while reinforcing the mystical atmosphere of the shot.

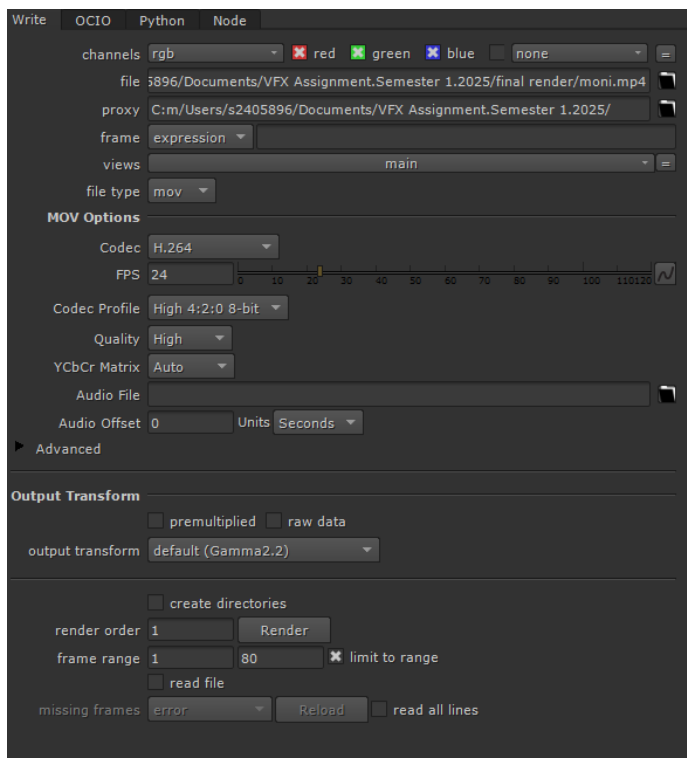
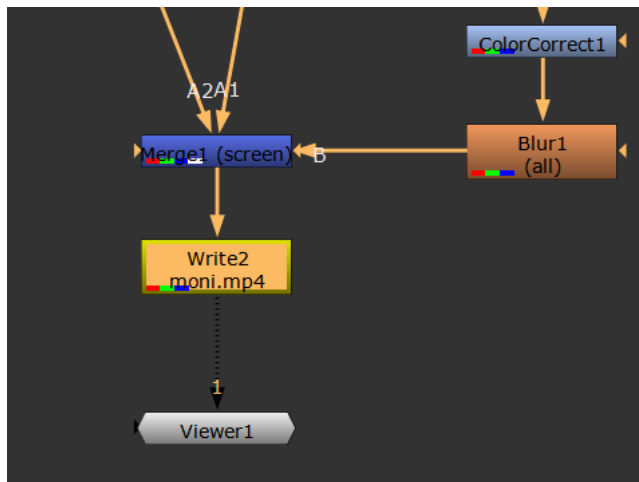
Sound Design:



The sound design was created in CapCut using four tracks: footsteps on grass, wind, a nature-inspired violin, and ambient nature sounds. These were arranged in the timeline to match the visuals and timing of the scene, enhancing immersion and reinforcing the overall atmosphere. The final video was exported in MP4 format, selecting a folder to save the video.

Part 4 – Presentation

Final Rendering:



The final rendering in Nuke I used a Write node connected directly to the Viewer, ensuring that all compositing adjustments were included in the final output. Before rendering, the export settings were checked and the destination folder was selected to correctly save the final sequence.

Presentation Reflection:

This project helped me understand the VFX workflow from animation to final compositing. I improved my skills in Nuke and learned how different effects work together to enhance mood, consistency, and storytelling.

Some challenges included transferring the animation into Nuke and resolving initial issues with lightning effects and character textures. As a solution, I adapted my approach by making the character translucent, which ultimately improved the visual result and better supported the spirit-like concept.

Before-and-After Showcase:



Bibliography

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