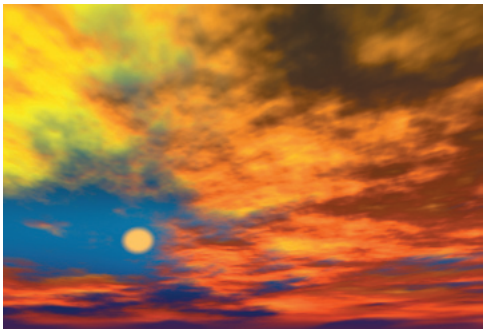
Aurora Sky Quickstart

So let's get going and jump into Aurora Sky. Once you understand how the different sections relate to each other, it's a pretty easy plug-in to use. We'll go over some of the more important parameters in each section and discuss how to get things animating. It shouldn't take you more than 20 minutes or so to go through this.

We're going to go from this:



to this:

Applying Aurora

Launch AE, create a new comp, and create a new Solid (Layer>New>Solid or cmd/ctrl + Y). Aurora is a self contained plug-in. It doesn't use the image that it's applied to and will completely overwrite it. Because of this, you should just apply it to a solid layer. You can apply it to a quicktime movie or image or whatever, but you'll get exactly the same result as if you applied it to a Solid layer.

Apply Aurora Sky to your Solid layer.

After it renders you'll see the default sunset scene. This is great, but let's change it from this sunset scene to a more 'noon-ish' type of scene. Blue skies, wispy white clouds, white picket fence, etc., etc.

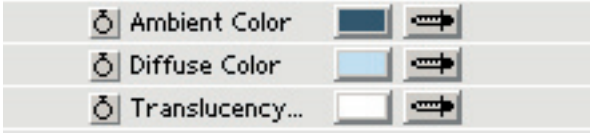
Aurora Sky doesn't really have a draft mode. The best way to quickly see what the results are is to just lower the resolution. Since clouds are fractal by nature, they tend to look the same at quarter resolution as they do at full resolution. Give it a try!

Switch the resolution from full to quarter. Switch to half res. Notice that at each res the clouds look more or less the same. Of course, they're more detailed at higher resolutions, but as far as shape, color, shading, etc. you can be pretty sure what you see at quarter res is what you're going to get at full res.

So leave your comp at quarter res and let's get started.

Setting Up Colors

First thing to do is change the colors so we don't have such rich colors. In the Cloud Layer section, set your colors to something like this:



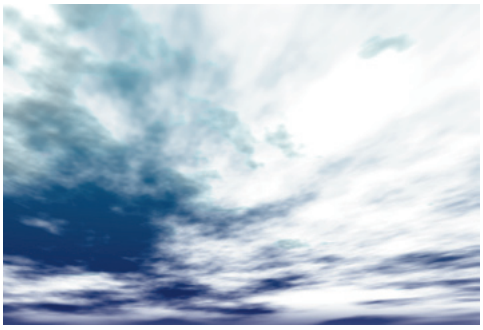
Just get close to that. It's not important that they are exactly those colors… just something close.

The lighter colors will give a more appropriate shading to what you would expect from a noontime sun. note: The sun is still on the horizon, so things are going to look quite right yet.

Now let's change the Sun Color. Go to the Sun Disk #1 section and set the Sun Color to something like this:

In the same section, set the Pitch parameter to 90. The Pitch sets the height of the sun and 90 will position it at the noon position. 0 will set the sun on one horizon and 180 will set it on the opposite horizon.

Pitch set to 11



Pitch set to 90

The Background

We've got the clouds looking pretty good at this point, but we've got a problem with the background. It's a little too dark for a noontime scene. The way to change that is to adjust the Ramp. The Ramp sets the colors for the background gradient.

This makes it very easy to change and customize your background. However, you need to make sure to animate this if you change from a noon to sunset scene. We're not really doing any 'time' animation here, so it's not a problem.

So set the Ramp parameters to the colors shown:

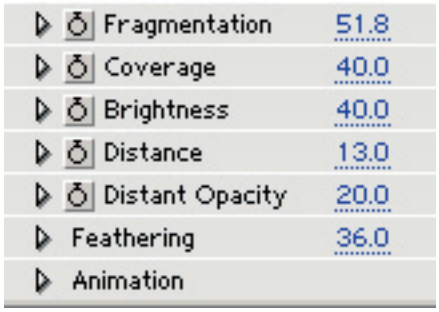
Wispy Clouds

On second thought, maybe the clouds are a bit heavy. A nice pleasant day would have clouds that are a bit lighter and wispy. Let's take care of that.

In the Clouds section, set Coverage to 45. Coverage sets the amount of clouds in the sky. If you scrub this up and down you'll see the sky go from a cloudless sky to completely covered.

Now set Feathering to 36. Feathering will adjust the opacity of the cloud edges, creating a softer look. This will enhance the 'wispy-ness' of our clouds.

After you make the adjustments you should get something like this:



The Camera

The camera is currently aimed upwards towards the sky. If we're going to composite this with a landscape or ocean, most likely the camera will need to be adjusted.

Go into the Camera section and set the Pitch to 10. This will have the effect of tilting the camera down. This should bring the virtual horizon into view and you'll see where the clouds end.

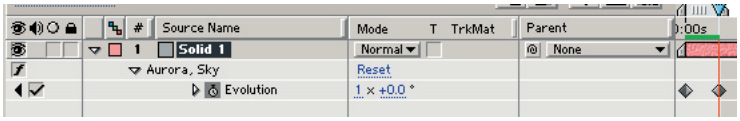
Woohoo! We're done with the setup part! Let's jump into setting up a little animation.

Animation

You can animate Aurora Sky like usual, just by setting keyframes for the regular parameters. For example, if you want to animate the clouds, just animate the Shift X/Y parameter. Very easy.

However, there's another way to animate the clouds. This involves the Animation section in the Cloud section and you can pretty much automatically animate them.

All you need to do is animate the Evolution parameter. Set a keyframe at time 00:00 for Evolution set to zero. Set another keyframe at time 02:00 and set it to 1 revolution.

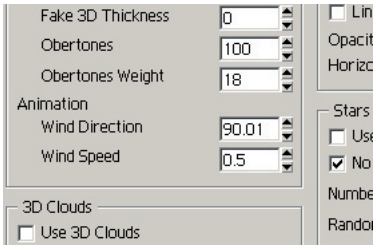


When Evolution is animated, two parameters kick in. The Turbulence parameter directly above it, and the Wind Speed parameter in the Options dialog box.

With Evolution animated, RAM preview the animation. Notice that are clouds are changing shape pretty fast. Set Turbulence to .8. This will slow them down a bit. RAM preview the animation now.

Turbulence causes the clouds to undulate and change shape but doesn't move them across the sky.

Wind Speed will cause them to move across the sky. Open up the Options dialog box (the button at the top of the filter). Find the Wind Speed parameter and set it to .5. Click 'OK'.



Now RAM preview again. Notice that not only are the clouds changing shape, but now they're moving across the sky.

The Turbulence and Wind Speed parameters ONLY work when the Evolution parameter is animated. Play around with different combinations to see how it all works.

That's it! We're done! Cool animated skies, as easy as pie.