

Cloud Blur (using Radial Blur)

To achieve cloud blur essentially what you need is a slow shutter speed which is not always possible in normal light conditions. You could pop an ND filter over the lens to reduce the amount of light entering the camera which allows the shutter to stay open for longer without over-exposing the scene but if you don't have one or indeed want to spend the money on one, you can simulate it with this simple technique:

Open file in ACR

Step 1: Make a selection

Open your file and duplicate the layer. Grab the Quick Selection tool from the Brush Preset picker (shortcut w) and select the sky. If you wish you can make any adjustments to saturation, levels etc now. If you do once edited merge down the adjustment layer and reselect the sky

Step 2: Set the blur values

Next on your duplicate layer choose Filter>Blur>Radial Blur. Set Amount to 10 for a reasonable amount of blur although I do tend to push it up a bit, experiment with what suits you and your picture.

Set the blur Method to Zoom and Quality to Best. In the box to the right of these settings is the adjustment that controls the direction of your blur which you can move around by clicking and holding your mouse on. If the clouds are going right to left you would normally drag the centre of the adjustment to the bottom right hand corner, keeping the direction of the blur, in line with the direction of the clouds. The lines within the box itself give you an indication of direction

Have a play around but once your happy hit ok. That should be it but if it occurs that the blur has bled over into other parts of the image, all you have to do is add a white layer mask and with that selected go over the bleed with a soft black brush at about 60% opacity to remove/blend in the blur.

Adding Sunrays (crepuscular rays - now I've looked it up!)

Open image and duplicate layer

1: Press 'd' to select foreground and background default colours

2: Foreground colour to be white so flip with 'x'.

That's two quick shortcuts that are worth knowing

3: Layer>New fill layer>gradient when the box opens rename (your choice)>mode> soft light (reason being you can see how the effect is affecting your image if you leave it to normal you're just creating a gradient that you won't see until you change the blending mode later)>click ok

4: Once you've done that the gradient fill dialogue box appears....and this is where it all starts to happen

5: Change the style box from linear to angle it will look a bit odd at first but as you go through the process you will understand why.

6: Now we need to change the look of the gradient by clicking inside the gradient box itself which brings up the gradient editor

7: First thing we do is change the gradient type from solid to noise...and wow....it's a bit colourful ...we only want white light rays so....

8: Go to RGB click and change it to HSB (Hue,Saturation,Brightness) then desaturate by dragging the middle slider all the way to the left...that give us our black and whites....click ok

9: Whilst the gradient fill dialogue box is still up it means I can click inside the image and drag the gradient around in real time

10: So what you want to do is drag it till it's at the hottest part of the sun, because that's where the rays are originating from

11: Click back on the gradient fill dialogue box and in the bottom right hand corner there's another box that says randomize. Click on it and you can change, as the name suggests, the type of gradient or in this case light fill you want, randomly...I went on forever but eventually found one that suited. Once you're happy with your chosen look click ok then ok on the gradient fill box.

12: Chances are you might find the rays are a little too spread out so we need to bring them in and we do that by using free transform...

13: Go to edit>free transform....whoops! A notification box pops up....we can't use it on this layer. We really need to contract or bring in these rays...so we need to make the layer into a smart object

14: Close the notification box, right click on the layer and select convert to smart object....now looking at the layer you can see the little icon saying that the layer is a smart object and we can now use the edit menu

15: Go back to edit>free transform (or ctrl t) and then the edit 'bounding box transform handles' appear.

16: Hold down the alt/opt key and because you're doing that you can draw both sides in at the same time using the little square handles. Once you have achieved the look you want press enter or the tick sign

17: Now what we have and don't want are these very defining vertical lines either side of the rays...to get rid of those:

- Add a white mask to the layer
- Make sure foreground colour is black
- Soft brush, opacity to suit, but start at around 80%, & adjust brush size by using the square bracket keys (another shortcut)
- Paint over the hard lines/outside edges and start blending the rays in adjusting the opacity to suit.

As an option:

18: You could double click on smart object icon to bring up the gradient which shows on a separate tab

Then you can double click on the gradient layer to bring up the gradient fill box again, double click on gradient box and the gradient editor comes up again

Then you can change the gradient via randomize and once selected click ok & ok again

To apply click file then close yes/save PS then updates the layer within your original image

19: You can always duplicate the layer to brighten up the rays and adjust them via opacity

Remember - this only works if you have a hotspot in your image, if not, it's not going to look realistic

Before



After

