

Removing the background atmosphere

You will need: Vue d'Esprit 4 or later; Photoshop (or a similar image editor which understands alpha channels)

Vue does excellent atmospheres but sometimes you don't want one. For example, you might want to use a pre-made background which will be added to your rendered image in an image editor such as Photoshop. Unfortunately Vue won't let you create an image without specifying an atmosphere first, and it is not possible to have a completely blank, transparent atmosphere. What to do? Just follow the steps below.

1. First, render your image. You can choose any atmosphere you like, it doesn't matter, except that if you choose one with lots of haze and/or fog, the effects of these will not be removed. However, clouds, sky colour, etc. will be.
2. When the image is rendered, go to the File menu, Export picture, and choose Colour image. Then save your image as a .TIF file (this is important). Accept the defaults which appear and save the image.
3. Now go back to the File menu, Export picture, and choose Alpha channel. Again, export as a .TIF and accept the defaults.
4. Now you have two images – the full colour image and the monochrome image which will become your alpha channel. Run Photoshop and load both images.
5. In Photoshop, first duplicate the background layer of the colour image and hide the original background (so you have a copy if things go wrong). Then switch to the alpha image, hold down the Shift key, and drag the alpha image onto the colour image. The Shift key ensures that the dragged image is displayed in the exact centre of the receiving image. Since both images are the same size, this ensures that the alpha image is positioned precisely over the colour image, which is critical.
6. The alpha image is now present as a new layer (which should be called Layer 1 if you did everything exactly as listed). Make sure this layer is the active one, then open the Channels palette. By default, all four channels are selected. At the bottom of the palette is an icon which looks like a dotted circle; if you hover the mouse over it, the words 'Load channel as selection' appear. Click this icon.
7. The alpha image is now selected. Go back to the layers palette, hide the alpha image layer (Layer 1) and switch to the layer which is the copy of the background. The selection now applies to that layer.
8. From the Select menu choose Inverse, and now everything except the objects in the original image is selected. The atmosphere doesn't count as an object, so only that is selected.
9. Hit Backspace to delete the contents of the selection, de-select, and you are left with just the objects which made up the original image, on a transparent background. All you do now is add your pre-made background.

Remember again that this technique will remove the atmosphere background but not effects such as fog which you may have added to your image.