CHAPTER **5**

SUPERIMPOSING SPECIAL EFFECTS

Any open area in any video image can serve as the canvas on which to paint another layer of video. Compositing and overlaying layers in Final Cut Express is often a simple drag and drop operation.

The open area in the sky provides us with a canvas on which to add any ornaments we can envision. Ominous clouds, planets, and moons in the distance, streaking meteors or comets: The choice is yours.

In this chapter, you take a look at several superimposition special effects and how you can enhance and alter your video content to include these different enhancements.

LIGHTNING BOLTS

23.1

23.2 (CP22)

Using simple layer effects, you can create your own lightning bolts striking any object in your video project. The technique takes advantage of the Final Cut Express advanced layer and composition mode effects.

This project uses sample files, created by using Adobe Photoshop, provided here for your use. These art samples are included and pre-arranged in the project folder for this technique. **Figure 23.1** shows your basic "before" snapshot, with a peaceful summer sky, while **Figure 23.2 (CP22)** shows the addition of an ominous stroke of lightning disrupting the landscape. Properly applied, this technique adds an effect that is nearly indistinguishable from the real thing.

STEP 1: OPEN THE PROJECT MEDIA FILE

■ Make sure you close any previous project tabs that may still be open.
■ Open the **Chapter 5 Projects** folder. You can find the bins for each technique that you work with in this chapter.

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■ In the **Lightning Bolts** bin, double-click the sequence named **Lightning Demo**, as shown in **Figure 23.3**. It appears in the Timeline window, as shown in **Figure 23.4**.

STEP 2: ADD THE LIGHTNING FILE TO THE TIMELINE

■ Make sure the play head in the Timeline is at the very beginning of the clip, as **Figure 23.5** shows.
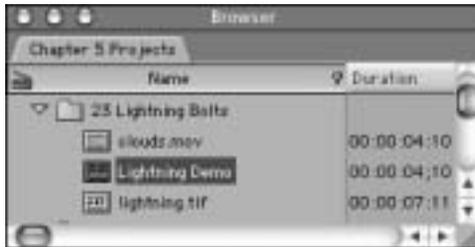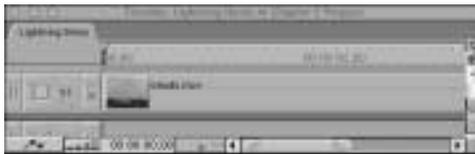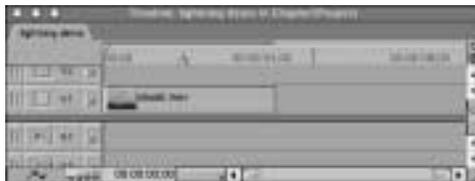
You can use the up arrow keyboard shortcut for this if the Timeline window is selected.
■ Add the lightning file to the Timeline on top of the base track.
■ Drag and drop the image file named **lightning. tif** from the Browser window onto the Canvas window and choose the **Superimpose** overlay, as shown in **Figure 23.6**.
■ Notice that the lightning graphic appears in its own new video track above the V1 clouds track in the Timeline, as shown in **Figure 23.7**.

23.3

23.4

23.5

23.6
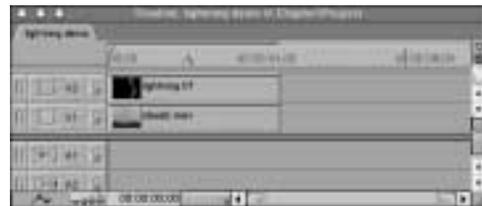
23.7

STEP 3: ESTABLISH THE STARTING POINT

■ Select the Current Timecode field in the Canvas window to set the insertion point at the 2-second mark into the clip. Type **2;** (the semicolon key) and then press **Return,** as shown in **Figure 23.8**.
■ Notice that the play head moves to the 2-second position in the Timeline window, as shown in **Figure 23.9**.

23.8
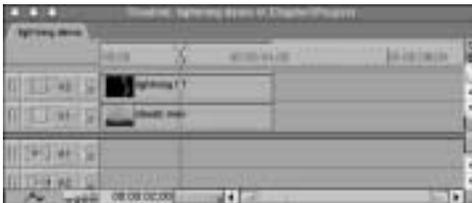
STEP 4: CHANGE THE LIGHTNING'S STARTING POINT

■ Turn the snapping function on by choosing **View ➢ Snapping** or by using the keyboard shortcut **N**. (The N key toggles the snapping feature in Final Cut Express.)
■ Click the insertion point of the lightning clip in the V2 track in the Timeline window and drag the left edge of the lightning clip to the right until it snaps into position at the 2-second marker, as shown in **Figure 23.10**.

STEP 5: CHANGE THE COMPOSITE MODE

■ Select the lightning clip in the Timeline by clicking it.

> **TIP**
>
> **Marking this point in the Timeline allows you to return to it easily later on by using the keyboard shortcut key M. This Timeline has it marked and labeled for you to easily navigate to the beginning point of your lightning clip.**

23.9
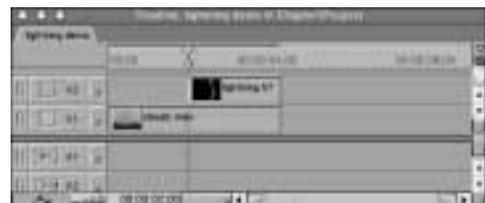
23.10

■ Choose **Modify** ➢ **Composite Mode** ➢ **Screen**, as shown in **Figure 23.11**.

STEP 6: MAKING IT "FLASH"

■ Double-click the lightning clip in the Timeline to display it in the Viewer window.

> **NOTE**
>
> Composite screen mode allows lighter and white pixels to show up against a background, while darker pixels are ignored and appear transparent.

■ Choose **Effects** ➢ **Video Filters** ➢ **Video** ➢ **Blink**, as shown in **Figure 23.12 (CP21)**. This sets up the process of keyframing positions in the Canvas window so that you can control how the lightning flashes.

■ In the Viewer window, select the **Filters** tab and set the values for the Blink filter to those shown in **Figure 23.13**:

  ■ On Duration: **3**
  ■ Off Duration: **5**
  ■ Opacity: **0**

STEP 7: CLIP THE CLIP AND CHANGE THE FLASH FREQUENCY

■ Move the play head another second later in the Timeline by dragging the play head in the Timeline window to about 1 second further down to establish its position, as shown in **Figure 23.14**, at the 3-second mark in the Timeline.

■ Use the **Blade** tool (keyboard shortcut **B**) to clip this clip in the Timeline. You effectively create two identical clips, split roughly in half, as shown in **Figure 23.15**.

23.11

23.12 (CP21)

Both clip segments carry the identical attributes and values as the original clip before you sliced it with the blade.

■ Now double-click the second **lightning.tif** media element in the V2 video track to see it in the Viewer window.
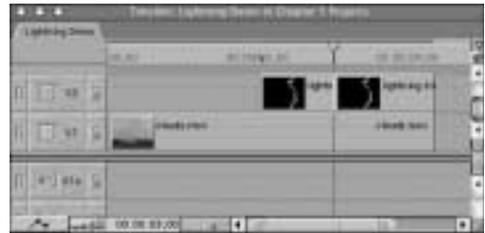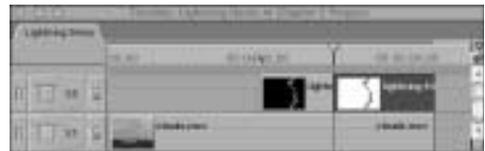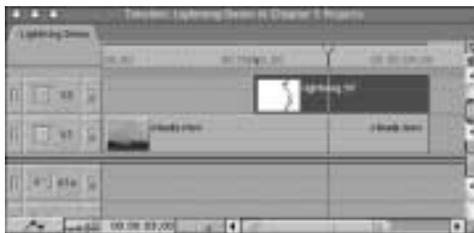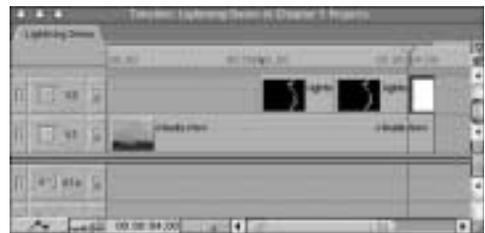
■ In the Filters tab, set the Off Duration to **10**, which makes the time between the lightning flashes longer, as shown in **Figure 23.16**.

■ Move the play head to another second later in the Timeline and slice the remaining bit of the second clip with the **Blade** tool, as shown in **Figure 23.17**.

23.13

23.15

23.16

23.14

23.17

■ Double-click the media element in the V2 video track to show it in the Viewer window.

■ Set the On and Off Duration to **1**, as shown in **Figure 23.18**. This makes the lightning bolts flash more frequently when you render the clip.

STEP 8: RENDER THE SEQUENCE

■ Choose **Sequence ➢ Render All**, as shown in **Figure 23.19**, to see results of the changes that you made.

■ After you finish, close this project tab by Control-clicking the tab name and choosing

Close Tab or by using the keyboard shortcut ⌘**W**.

You can now see how easy it is to add a still graphic element to a video track as an active element of your project. By experimenting with the keyframes and blink settings with the blink filter, you can achieve very realistic lightning bolt effects.

Be prepared to experiment with the settings to get the best results. Half the fun of composing special effects in Final Cut Express is experimenting with the settings to get the most believable results.

23.18

23.19