

BEFORE YOU START

OS	Windows 10 or 11 (64-bit)
Graphics	NVIDIA GPU strongly recommended — runs 30–50× faster. Works without one via a CPU fallback (much slower).
CUDA	Bundled — no separate CUDA Toolkit install needed.
Blender	4.0 or newer (for the live bridge — optional)
Account	Admin rights (installs to Program Files → one UAC prompt)

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Installer	<code>LightMonkey-HDR-Setup-v... .exe</code> from <code>lightmonkey.app</code>
License key	From your email — format <code>LMHD-XXXXX-...</code> (free trial or purchased; both work the same)
Time	~2 minutes (plus a one-time Defender scan on first launch)

1 Download & run the installer

Download `LightMonkey-HDR-Setup-v... .exe` from `lightmonkey.app` and double-click it. Windows will ask for permission to make changes (UAC prompt) — click **Yes**. The app installs to `C:\Program Files\LightMonkey-HDR\`.

- A **Start-Menu shortcut** is created automatically. A desktop icon is optional — tick the box if you want one.
- Keep the **"Pre-scan with Windows Defender"** step ticked (recommended) — it makes the very first launch much faster.

⚠ Expect a Windows warning — this is normal

LightMonkey-HDR is made by a small independent studio and isn't yet code-signed by a big vendor, so Windows shows a caution screen the first time you run a new app. **It's safe**. Here's exactly what you'll see and what to do:

🛡 "Windows protected your PC" (blue SmartScreen box)

Microsoft Defender SmartScreen prevented an unrecognized app from starting.

- 1 Click the small **"More info"** link in the SmartScreen box.
- 2 A **"Run anyway"** button appears — click it. The installer starts normally.

Antivirus flag? Some antivirus tools (or Windows Defender) may briefly quarantine the file — a common false positive for new, unsigned software. If that happens, restore/allow the file and add `C:\Program Files\LightMonkey-HDR\` as an exclusion, then run the installer again.

2 First launch — activate your license

Open LightMonkey-HDR from the Start Menu. On first run the **"Activate LightMonkey-HDR"** window appears.

- Paste the **license key** from your email — `LMHD-XXXXX-XXXXX-XXXXX-XXXXX` (it auto-formats as you type).
- Click **Activate**. That's it — the app opens.
- No key yet? Start a free 14-day trial on the website — you'll get a trial key by email and activate it the same way.

i Good to know

Activation is online and the app checks in with our server periodically. A license covers one machine; you can move it to a new computer from the activation dialog (up to twice a year).

3 Install the Blender bridge add-on

The bridge lets LightMonkey-HDR sync HDRIs and 3D lights live with Blender. (Optional — skip if you only export HDRs.) The add-on file `lightmonkey_bridge.py` is in your install folder, or download it from the website.

- › In Blender: **Edit** › **Preferences** › **Add-ons** › **Install...**
- › Browse to `lightmonkey_bridge.py` and click **Install Add-on** (pick the .py file itself — not a zip).
- › Tick the checkbox next to **Lighting: LightMonkey Bridge** to enable it.

4 Connect Blender to the app

- › Make sure **LightMonkey-HDR is running**.
- › In Blender's 3D View press **N** to open the side panel, then switch to the **LightMonkey** tab.
- › Click **Connect**. A green badge + "Connected to Blender" means you're live. It auto-connects next time.

Requires Blender 4.0+. The bridge uses ports 17836 / 17837 by default; both sides must match (change them under the add-on's Preferences and the app's **Blender > Settings...** if needed).

✓ You're all set

Add lights on the canvas, watch Blender update in real time, and export your HDR when you're happy. Grab the **keyboard-shortcuts cheat sheet** from lightmonkey.app/resources.html to work fast.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Windows won't let me run the installer

On the blue "Windows protected your PC" screen, click **More info** → **Run anyway**. It's an unsigned indie build — safe, just unrecognised by Microsoft yet.

My antivirus deleted / blocked the file

A false positive for new unsigned apps. Restore the file, allow it, and add the install folder as an exclusion, then reinstall.

The app is slow / no GPU acceleration

Without a supported NVIDIA GPU it uses the CPU fallback (much slower).
With an NVIDIA card, enable GPU Boost in the app.

Blender won't connect

Make sure the app is running first, Blender is 4.0+, and the ports match on both sides (17836 / 17837). On corporate PCs, a firewall may block loopback — whitelist LightMonkey-HDR.exe and Blender.

"License is on its maximum machines"

Use the **"Move License to This Computer"** option in the activation dialog (allowed twice per year).

Still stuck?

Email support@lightmonkey.app — include the "Support Code" shown under Help > About.