

♦♂ Part 2: The True Arcane Secrets of

RenderPass

(SubPass + Image Layer Transition) & FrameBuffers

Welcome to the inner sanctum where GPU gods decide how fast your pixels live or die.

- ChatGPT

Chapter 5: RenderPass 🗇

" subpasses are the soul of RenderPass! . But it's not just about subpasses only...." - ChatGPT

0. Why RenderPass?

- "This is one of the most convoluted parts of the Vulkan specification, especially for those who are just starting out." P.A. Minerva
- ex. 1:- PostProcessing Effects

```
RenderPass:
- color attachment
- depth attachment

subpasses:
- Subpass 0: render geometry
- Subpass 1: post-process effects
    // multiple rendering steps without switching FrameBuffers/AttachMents

// All defined in ONE render pass
```

• ex. 2:- Deferred Shading

```
attachments:
- position: offscreen image
- normal: offscreen image
- albedo: offscreen image
- depth: depth image
- finalColor: swapchain image
subpasses:
- Subpass 0: G-buffer generation (write position, normal, albedo)
- Subpass 1: Lighting pass (read G-buffers, write to finalColor)
```

- Without subpasses , you'd need to switch framebuffers (expensive!).
- With subpasses, Vulkan can optimize this by keeping data in GPU memory (especially tile-based GPUs).

ex. 3:- Post-Processing Chain

```
attachments:
- scene: offscreen image
- postProcessOut: swapchain image
subpasses:
- Subpass 0: scene render → scene
- Subpass 1: post-process → postProcessOut
```

- Purpose:- After rendering the main scene, do effects like bloom, blur, or color correction.
- Why a RenderPass?
 - Again, Vulkan sees the full plan and can optimize the transitions.
 - You can define layout transitions (e.g. $COLOR_ATTACHMENT_OPTIMAL \rightarrow SHADER_READ_ONLY_OPTIMAL$)
- ex. 4:- Shadow Map Pass / Render from light's POV, to a depth-only image

```
attachments:
- depth: depth image
subpasses:
- Subpass 0: write to depth only (no color)
```

- Why a RenderPass?
 - This pass is often done offscreen, then used as a texture later.
- ex. 5:- 3D Scene -> Depth Testing

```
attachments:
- color: swapchain image
- depth: depth image
subpasses:
- Subpass 0:
- color attachment: color
- depth attachment: depth
```

1. What is RenderPass? �

- 1. RenderPass is designed around subpasses.
 - · The core purpose of a RenderPass is to tell Vulkan:

```
• "Hey, I'm going to do these rendering stages ( subpasses ), in this order, using these attachments."
```

- · So yeah, subpasses are the main reason for a RenderPass to exist. subpasses are the soul of RenderPass!
- · But it's not just about subpasses only:
 - a. Load/Store Ops "What should I do with the image before & after rendering?"
 - 🔋 loadOp When RenderPass begins:

```
LOAD: Keep whatever was already in the attachment.

CLEAR: Wipe it to a specific value (e.g., clear color to black).

DONT_CARE: Vulkan can throw away old contents (faster, if you don't care).
```

IstoreOp — When RenderPass ends:

```
STORE: Save the result (e.g., to present to the screen or use later).

DONT_CARE: Vulkan can discard the result (like shadow maps or intermediate stuff you don't need to read later).
```

ex.

```
colorAttachment.loadOp = VK_ATTACHMENT_LOAD_OP_CLEAR;
colorAttachment.storeOp = VK_ATTACHMENT_STORE_OP_STORE;
    // Meaning: Clear the image before rendering, and store the result so we can present it.
```

b. **Image Layout Transitions** — "How should the GPU access this image during the pass?"

- c. 📃 Attachments "What images are we using?"
 - RenderPass Attachment is not an actual thing!
 - RenderPass Attachment Description/Descriptor is a thing!
 - However, the idea is.... We do "define" the Attachments right here, as we send the AttachmentDescriptions -> RenderPass
 - RenderPass Attachment != FrameBuffer Attachment
 - FrameBuffer Attachment
 - ----> actual VkImageView S Of SwapChain Images

2. 🕳 Image Layout Transitions

i. In 1. Different hardware units = different memory access patterns

```
GPU Unit

Access Pattern

Fragment Shader

Render Output Unit

Compute Shader

Display Engine

Access Pattern

Texture-like (random)

Tiled or linear (write-heavy)

Raw buffer-style

Linear format

- for ex.
```

- · When an image is used as a color attachment, it might be stored tiled in memory for fast write performance.
- · But when you use the same image as a texture, the shader expects it to be in a format optimized for random read access.
- 🕝 If you tried to read from a tiled format as if it were a texture, you'd either:
 - Get garbage
 - Or pay a huge perf penalty as the driver does conversion.... (every single time you access a single pixel) (a single pixel would = an element in an 2D Array) (Texture might have Millions of Pixel)
- ii. 🛱 Physical Layout in VRAM (Tiles vs Linear)
 - · Most modern GPUs store image data in tiles internally.
 - (like Z-order, Morton order, or other optimized memory layouts).
 - This helps GPUs fetch memory in cache-friendly blocks for faster rendering.
 - · But when an image is to be presented to the screen/monitor, it must be Flat (linear) (as HDMI/display engines can't decode tiles).
 - Yes by "linear", we mean a simple 2D array where pixels are stored in a straightforward, left-to-right, top-to-bottom format.
 - · So when you do this:-

```
finalLayout = VK_IMAGE_LAYOUT_PRESENT_SRC_KHR;
```

```
• "Yo, I'm done rendering — please un-tile this, decompress it, and arrange it in scanlines for display."
```

- If you don't tell Vulkan, it has to guess or stall or worse, copy the whole thing behind your back.
- iii. 🕲 Transitions let the driver do reordering, compression, or memory reallocation

```
// When you declare:-
finalLayout = VK_IMAGE_LAYOUT_SHADER_READ_ONLY_OPTIMAL;
// you are not just giving a hint....
// ---- you are saying:-
```

• "After rendering, I'm going to sample this as a texture — so prepare it."

```
This allows the GPU driver to:

- flush caches

- Decompress the image (some GPUs compress attachments during render!)

- Move memory or restructure tiles

- Or even alias memory with another attachment in a single memory block

- In modern GPUs, there's hardware image compression, like:-

- ARM's AFBC (Arm Frame Buffer Compression)

- AMD's DCC (Delta Color Compression)

- NVIDIA has their own secret sauce too
```

- - · One of the sickest optimizations is this one
 - You can use the same memory for multiple attachments (e.g. shadow map, depth, HDR buffer), as long as you don't use them at the same time
 - · But to do that safely, Vulkan needs to know:
 - "When does this memory stop being 'render target' and start being 'texture' or 'compute input'?"

Layouts + barriers = safe aliasing.

Drivers can now:
- Use the same memory pool
- Skip clearing
- Not double allocate

You become a GPU memory ninja

v. 📃 Predictability = Performance

Explicit layouts give Vulkan this power:

- It knows exactly when and how you are going to use an image.
- So it can avoid runtime guessing, which causes:
 - CPU stalls
 - Cache flushes
 - Sync fences
 - Or even full GPU pipeline bubbles 🤓
- Compared to OpenGL or DirectX11, where the driver had to guess what you meant and do hidden magic Vulkan is like:
 - "If you don't tell me what layout you want, I'll trip and fall flat on my face 🔞"

- vi. 👚 You can skip transitions altogether if you do it right
 - This is the reward -> If your RenderPass is smart using VK_ATTACHMENT_LOAD_OP_DONT_CARE and reusing image layouts cleverly you can avoid layout transitions entirely.
 - This is massive for tile-based GPUs (like on mobile phones):
 - No layout transition = no VRAM flush
 - Everything happens on-chip, like magic 🏶
- vii. 🙉 Analogy: Baking Cookies 👀

```
Let's say you're:
- Baking cookies (rendering)
- Then you plate them for display (presenting)
- Later you want to show them off or decorate them (sample in shaders)
```

· Here's the deal:

```
Vulkan Image Layout

UNDEFINED

Empty tray, nothing on it yet

COLOR_ATTACHMENT_OPTIMAL

SHADER_READ_ONLY_OPTIMAL
in a post-process shader)

PRESENT_SRC_KHR

You're plating the cookies to serve (sending to the screen)
```

- · But... here's the twist:
 - * You can't decorate cookies while they're still baking in the oven.
 - * And you definitely can't serve someone cookies that are still stuck in a 200°C tray.
- · So Vulkan says:

• "Please transition between layouts, so I know what stage your cookie is in — and I'll move it to the right place, with oven mitts, spatulas, etc."

viii. 🥝 Why does this matter?

· If you don't do the transitions:

```
You may try to grab a cookie off a 200°C tray and get burned ( invalid reads)
The cookies may not be fully baked ( undefined writes)
Or worse: you show your customer an empty plate because Vulkan never moved them to the PRESENT_SRC_KHR plate
```

ix. 🖋 What makes Vulkan powerful?

```
You get to say:

1. "Bake in tray A"

2. "Decorate using buffer B"

3. "Present from plate C"

But you must tell Vulkan when to move cookies from one surface to another.

Layouts = telling Vulkan exactly thaaat!
```

x. Subpass Optimization (Tile-Based GPUs)

```
On tile-based GPUs (like PowerVR or Mali):

- Entire framebuffers live on-chip, in tiles

- You can run all subpasses without touching VRAM!

But it only works if Vulkan knows:

- The image will stay in the same layout

- No unnecessary STORE or layout transitions

By carefully using:

layout = VK_IMAGE_LAYOUT_ATTACHMENT_OPTIMAL;

loadOp = DONT_CARE;

storeOp = DONT_CARE;
```

• That's why subpasses and layouts are so closely linked — no layout change \rightarrow no memory movement.

3. Mage Layout Transitions Aren't Just Bureaucracy

```
They are literal instructions to the driver:

- "Where this image lives"

- "How it's structured"

- "What GPU unit will touch it next"

- "Whether you need to prepare, flush, decompress, or alias it"

And by explicitly telling the GPU, you:

- Avoid expensive guesses

- Skip hidden memory ops

- Unlock mobile-level optimizations

- Prevent subtle bugs and undefined behavior
```

4. RenderPass Attachments Desc.

- · RenderPass Attachment is not an actual thing!
- · RenderPass Attachment Description/Descriptor is a thing!
 - However, the idea is.... We do "define" the Attachments right here, as we send the AttachmentDescriptions -> RenderPass
- RenderPass Attachment Description/Descriptors are not actual images they're a template for what the RenderPass expects!
 - & The FrameBuffers must delivery RenderPass exactly with that
- · RenderPass Attachment != FrameBuffer Attachment

RenderPass Attachments	Framebuffers
Define what is needed	Provide which resources to use
Abstract (format, usage, layout)	Concrete (image views)
Reusable across Framebuffers	Swapchain-dependent (often 1:1)

```
Think of it like a Socket & Plug

- `RenderPass` 

= The RenderPass defines the socket (shape, voltage).

- `Framebuffer` 

= The Framebuffer provides the plug (actual wires) that fits the socket.
```

5. FrameBuffer Attachment

· Actual VkImageView

```
Image Views (VkImageView):
    Handles to specific images (e.g., swapchain images, depth textures).
Compatibility:
    Must match the RenderPass's attachment definitions (format, sample count, size).
Swapchain Link:
    Typically, one Framebuffer per swapchain image.
```

6. ₩ FrameBuffers [🅶🍎 🖜]

- · Binds concrete ImageViews (e.g., SwapChain Images , Depth Textures) to the attachments defined in the RenderPass .
- · Must match the RenderPass's Attachment Descriptions (format, size, sample count).
- · Is SwapChain -dependent (e.g., each SwapChainImage typically has its own Framebuffer).
- Analogy

7. HATTACHMENTS

- · Attachments are simply images (or buffers) where Vulkan stores or reads data during a RenderPass.
- · Attachments are the actual framebuffer images (swapchain images, depth buffers, offscreen render targets, etc.)
- i. 🖋 Color Attachments = where the pretty pixels (RGBA) are painted and stored. This is like your paint palette! 🤢
- ii. 📤 Depth Attachments = the landscapes that prevent objects from clipping or showing up out of order. Imagine topography maps for depth! 🕅
- iii. Stencil Attachments = the guides that show where we can paint, like drawing a "map" where only certain areas can be modified.
 - · What's inside?
 - A framebuffer that stores things like RGBA values (Red, Green, Blue, Alpha/Transparency).
 - For example
 - Color Attachment 0 might hold the albedo or the final color of an object, while
 - Color Attachment 1 could store the lighting information or additional passes like ambient occlusion.

```
Each attachment you declare includes:
- Format (VK_FORMAT_B8G8R8A8_SRGB, etc.)
- Sample count (for MSAA)
- Load/store ops
- Layouts (see above)
```

- · Then, each subpass tells Vulkan:
 - "From all the attachments I've declared, I'm gonna use these ones in this subpass."
- · in Code:

```
attachments[0] = colorAttachment;  // swapchain image
attachments[1] = depthAttachment;  // depth image

subpass.colorAttachment = &attachments[0];
subpass.depthAttachment = &attachments[1];
```

```
So even if your RenderPass only has one subpass, the Vulkan driver still wants to know:

- How many attachments

- What to do with them (clear/store?)

- What layouts they go into and come out as
```

8. 🗑 FrameBuffers v/s 🛍 Attachments :- The Last Fight, (If Above stuffs got you confused):-

i. Quick Comparison Table

Aspect	Attachments (RenderPass) 🗶	Framebuffers 🖭
Purpose	Define what resources are needed (format, usage, layout transitions)	Specify which actual images (image views) to use for those resources 🗷
Concrete/ Abstract	Abstract (blueprint) 🗖	Concrete (instance) 🔣
Lifetime	Long-lived (reused across frames) 🎄	Short-lived (often recreated with swapchain) ${f v}$
Dependencies	Independent of images/swapchain 🖨 🖾	Tied to swapchain images or specific textures <i>⊗</i>
Example	"Need a color attachment (SRGB) and depth attachment (D32_SFLOAT)" ۞ + ❖	"Use this swapchain image and that depth texture" ☑ ᠌ □ ☑ ☑

ii. Lifecycle Flowchart

iii. Use-Case Scenarios

Scenario	Attachments (RenderPass) 😵	Framebuffers 🖭
Swapchain Rendering	Define color/depth formats and layouts. ᠍ 🔁 🕏	Bind swapchain images + depth texture.
Deferred Rendering	Define G-Buffer attachments (Albedo, Normal, Position). 🏽 🗘 🖒	Bind actual G-Buffer image views.
Post-Processing	Define input (e.g., HDR color) + output (e.g., SRGB).	Bind input texture + swapchain image.

iv. Key Interactions

```
RenderPass Begin Command (1)

Uses RenderPass Attachments (2) (format, load/store rules)

Uses Framebuffer (2) (actual images to write to)

↓

GPU Renders (2)

Reads/Writes to Framebuffer's Image Views (1)

Follows Attachment Rules (clearing, layout transitions) (2)
```

- v. Emoji Analogy Time! 👸
 - Attachments = Recipe Ingredients List 📃 (e.g., "2 eggs 🔘 🔘 , 1 cup flour 🕮 ").
 - Framebuffers = Actual Ingredients 🛒 (e.g., "This egg 🔘 from the fridge, that flour 🚇 from the pantry").
 - Rendering = Baking the Cake $\stackrel{\text{def}}{=}$ (combine them using the recipe steps!).
- 9. Next Chapter will be on \ FrameBuffers !!!! ♦

Everything above is written with help from chatGPT

Everything below is not!

2. vkCreateRenderPass()

- https://vkdoc.net/man/vkCreateRenderPass
- · REY_DOCs
 - Copy Paste amVK_SwapChain.hh Current Implementation & Change it as needed
 - Trust me, this is the most fun way of doing this, xP

VkRenderPassCreateInfo()

- https://vkdoc.net/man/VkRenderPassCreateInfo
 - .flags -> Only Option:- used for Qualcom Extension
 - .pAttachments -> this->SubChapter4
 - .pSubpasses -> this->SubChapter5
 - .pDependencies -> this->SubChapter6

4. ImageViews

- vkGetSwapchainImagesKHR()
 - https://vkdoc.net/man/vkGetSwapchainImagesKHR
 - Implement Exactly like Chapter2.5 🗟
 - vkGetPhysicalDeviceQueueFamilyProperties()
 - · REY_DOCs

```
class amVK_SwapChain {
    ...
public:
    amVK_Device *D = nullptr;
    VkSwapchainKHR SC = nullptr;
    REY_Array<VkImage>    amVK_1D_SC_IMGs;
    REY_Array<amVK_Image> amVK_1D_SC_IMGs_amVK_WRAP;
    bool called_GetSwapchainImagesKHR = false;

public:
    ...
```

vkCreateImageView()

- https://vkdoc.net/man/vkCreateImageView
- · REY_DOCs

```
void CreateSwapChainImageViews(void) {
    REY_Array_LOOP(amVK_1D_SC_IMGs_amVK_WRAP, i) {
        amVK_1D_SC_IMGs_amVK_WRAP[i].createImageView();
    }
}
```

amVK_Image.hh :- 4.guide.chapter5.3.2.Image.hh

VkImageViewCreateInfo

- https://vkdoc.net/man/VkImageViewCreateInfo
- · REY_DOCs

```
void amVK_SwapChain::CreateSwapChainImageViews(void) {
    REY_Array_LOOP(amVK_1D_SC_IMGs_amVK_WRAP, i) {
             // ViewCI.image
             // ViewCI.format
                  // should be set inside amVK_SwapChain::GetSwapchainImagesKHR()
        amVK_1D_SC_IMGs_amVK_WRAP[i].ViewCI.viewType = VK_IMAGE_VIEW_TYPE_2D;
         amVK_1D_SC_IMGs_amVK_WRAP[i].ViewCI.components = { // Equivalent to:
             VK_COMPONENT_SWIZZLE_R, // VK_COMPONENT_SWIZZLE_IDENTITY
             VK_COMPONENT_SWIZZLE_G, // VK_COMPONENT_SWIZZLE_IDENTITY
VK_COMPONENT_SWIZZLE_B, // VK_COMPONENT_SWIZZLE_IDENTITY
VK_COMPONENT_SWIZZLE_A // VK_COMPONENT_SWIZZLE_IDENTITY
        };
        amVK_1D_SC_IMGs_amVK_WRAP[i].ViewCI.subresourceRange.aspectMask =
VK_IMAGE_ASPECT_COLOR_BIT;
        amVK_1D_SC_IMGs_amVK_WRAP[i].ViewCI.subresourceRange.baseMipLevel = 0;
        amVK_1D_SC_IMGs_amVK_WRAP[i].ViewCI.subresourceRange.levelCount = 1;
        amVK\_1D\_SC\_IMGs\_amVK\_WRAP[i].ViewCI.subresourceRange.baseArrayLayer = 0;
        amVK_1D_SC_IMGs_amVK_WRAP[i].ViewCI.subresourceRange.layerCount = 1;
        amVK_1D_SC_IMGs_amVK_WRAP[i].createImageView();
    }
}
```

5. VkAttachmentDescription

https://vkdoc.net/man/VkAttachmentDescription

6. VkSubpassDescription

https://vkdoc.net/man/VkSubpassDescription

7. VkSubpassDependency

https://vkdoc.net/man/VkSubpassDependency

8. All the last 3 together ---> Code

```
class amVK_RenderPass {
  public:
    REY_ArrayDYN<VkAttachmentDescription> attachments;
    REY_ArrayDYN<VkSubpassDescription> subpasses;
    REY_ArrayDYN<VkSubpassDependency> dependencies;

  void set_attachments_subpasses_dependencies(void);
}
```

amvK_RenderPass.hh [Full Implementation]:- 4.guide.chapter5.8.RenderPass.hh

```
amVK_RenderPass *RP = new amVK_RenderPass(D);
    RP->attachments.push_back({
        .format = SC->CI.imageFormat,
                                                            // Use the color format selected by the
swapchain
        .samples = VK_SAMPLE_COUNT_1_BIT,
                                                           // We don't use multi sampling in this
example
        .loadOp = VK_ATTACHMENT_LOAD_OP_CLEAR,
                                                           // Clear this attachment at the start of
the render pass
        .storeOp = VK_ATTACHMENT_STORE_OP_STORE,
           // Keep its contents after the render pass is finished (for displaying it)
        .stencilLoadOp = VK_ATTACHMENT_LOAD_OP_DONT_CARE,
            // Similar to loadOp, but for stenciling (we don't use stencil here)
        .stencilStoreOp = VK_ATTACHMENT_STORE_OP_DONT_CARE,
            // Similar to storeOp, but for stenciling (we don't use stencil here)
        .initialLayout = VK_IMAGE_LAYOUT_UNDEFINED,
            // Layout at render pass start. Initial doesn't matter, so we use undefined
        .finalLayout = VK_IMAGE_LAYOUT_PRESENT_SRC_KHR,
            // Layout to which the attachment is transitioned when the render pass is finished
            // As we want to present the color attachment, we transition to PRESENT_KHR
    });
    VkAttachmentReference colorReference = {
        .attachment = 0,
        .layout = VK_IMAGE_LAYOUT_COLOR_ATTACHMENT_OPTIMAL
   };
```

```
RP->subpasses.push_back({
       .pipelineBindPoint = VK_PIPELINE_BIND_POINT_GRAPHICS,
       .inputAttachmentCount = 0,
           // Input attachments can be used to sample from contents of a previous subpass
       .pInputAttachments = nullptr, // (Input attachments not used by this example)
       .colorAttachmentCount = 1,
                                           // Subpass uses one color attachment
       .pColorAttachments = &colorReference, // Reference to the color attachment in slot 0
       .pResolveAttachments = nullptr,
           // Resolve attachments are resolved at the end of a sub pass and can be used for e.g.
multi sampling
       .pDepthStencilAttachment = nullptr, // (Depth attachments not used by this sample)
       .preserveAttachmentCount = 0,
           // Preserved attachments can be used to loop (and preserve) attachments through subpasses
       .pPreserveAttachments = nullptr // (Preserve attachments not used by this example)
   });
   RP->dependencies.push_back({
       // Setup dependency and add implicit layout transition from final to initial layout for the
color attachment.
       // (The actual usage layout is preserved through the layout specified in the attachment
reference).
       .srcSubpass = VK_SUBPASS_EXTERNAL,
       .dstSubpass = 0,
       .srcStageMask = VK_PIPELINE_STAGE_COLOR_ATTACHMENT_OUTPUT_BIT,
       .dstStageMask = VK_PIPELINE_STAGE_COLOR_ATTACHMENT_OUTPUT_BIT,
       .srcAccessMask = VK_ACCESS_NONE,
       .dstAccessMask = VK_ACCESS_COLOR_ATTACHMENT_WRITE_BIT | VK_ACCESS_COLOR_ATTACHMENT_READ_BIT,
   });
   RP->set_attachments_subpasses_dependencies();
   RP->createRenderPass();
   ----- Made with help from P.A.Minerva Vulkan Guide
_____
   https://paminerva.github.io/docs/LearnVulkan/01.A-Hello-Window#416---creating-a-render-pass
```

• main.cpp [Full Implementation]:- 4.guide.chapter5.8.main.cpp

9. By This time, VkSurfaceKHR deserves it's very own class amVK_Surface

• amVK_Surface.hh [Full Implementation]:- 4.guide.chapter5.9.Surface.hh