

Realistic Relief Maps

for RPG campaign settings

How To Do Them !?

by

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Foreword

If you want to know the method to create that kind of Realistic Relief Maps, like the one below, no problems. In this text you will find all my SECRETS to copy me. However, before smiling at this good new, let me tell you a few things :

I am a professional Photoshop-worker, and when doing such a map, it doesn't take me a few minutes, but several hours ! So, before beginning to work, you must know three things :

- 1) To use the SECRET method, **you need Photoshop !**
- 2) Despite the principles involved to create such a map are very simple, **you will need to try and exercise**, before obtaining a result conform to your expectations.
- 3) Making such a map is deadly taxing on the computer resources. You should better use a Giga Hertz processor, and don't expect being able to do anything with less than a 200 Mhz....



Discover the Secret Procedure !

A) Map Shape

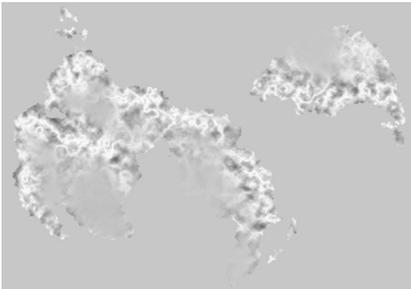


Before beginning the real job, which is doing some kind of realistic relief on the map, you need to have drawn a map. Personally I prefer to do it as a gray shape on a white background.

I mostly use a 3500 X 2500 pixel sized file, which is perfect for later A4 to A3 print.

1) SELECT and then **MEMORIZE** the continent and ocean shape!

B) Relief



To get a realistic-looking relief, the idea is of creating a gray, fractal drawing, to then use with Photoshop's Lightning-effects filter. In fact, this is the most important part of the SECRET. Note that if you try to hand-draw the relief instead of using fractals as described, you won't get a natural effect. Anyway, it could be a good idea to try, if only to modify that relief.

In fact, the below procedure is nothing more than creating a bump texture, as the kind you would use with some 3D software. Thus, you may try many other sorts of bump textures instead of doing it that way.

This "relief" will be done in black and white on a layer. When finished, the layer will be changed into a channel (use copy-paste if you don't know better):

1) FILTER / RENDER / CLOUDS (using black foreground and white background)

2) FILTER / RENDER / DIFFERENCE CLOUDS

(note you can repeat this operation several times to get a thinner relief)

3) IMAGE / ADJUST / INVERT

4) make of this image (the one you got at #3) a new **CHANNEL**, and then call it (for instance) "Relief". Once a channel, suppress it from the **LAYERS** window.

Note: This relief you just created, will produce mainly mountains. As such, if you want to get plains, hills, and other different features on your map, you will have to alter some parts of this image, so it resemble the one shown above. Use airbrush with transparency, try some filters (but very softly). Try it, until you understand the process. Anyway, a flat gray area will give a flat plain, while strong (fractal) variations between black and white will produce mountains.

C) Colors for Relief



Now, you need a color base to use the "Relief" channel with Lightning-effects:

5) Now do a flat color image (green and brown for instance), of your map. That is, on the map-shape put appropriate colors on the terrain it will be (for instance, yellow for deserts, green for forests, etc.). Use preferably neutral and grayish colors; as flashy ones will give you bad results one the next operation.

Note: The colors you will use must be relevant to, and overlap the appropriate features of your Relief channel. For instance: brown for mountains over fractal areas which will produce mountains; and green for plains over near flat areas which will produce featureless terrains.

D) Lightning Effects



Now, the fastidious thing is to use the Lightning effects to get the desired visual miracle on your flat-colored map. Note however, that in most cases you won't be able to get the result in only one application of the filter. In fact it creates burned areas on one side, and dark to black ones on the other side. So you must do it several times, on several parts, then adjust all the parts using the layers, the eraser, etc. Anyway the operation is:

6) On this flat color image apply : **FILTER / RENDER / LIGHTNING EFFECT**
When the window of lightning effect opens, activate the **TEXTURE CHANNEL** with the "Relief" channel (from #4). Then adjust all the parameters.

E) Raw Map



Once you have got all the areas well lighted (to get the nice relief you so dearly lusted for), I hope you had kept various channels (i.e.: memorized selections), so you can do a perfect blue on the ocean, and much more. Here are a few suggestions of manipulations giving good results:

7) You have got something looking like mountains, hills, etc., on your map. In order to improve the colors, first do : **SELECT / LOAD SELECTION / TEXTURE**

What is "TEXTURE" ? It's a channel copy of "Relief", but that you forcibly contrasted using **IMAGE / ADJUST / LUMINOSITY-CONTRAST**.

8) IMAGE / ADJUST / HUE SATURATION (and there, modify the hue and other parameters to change the color of what looks like valleys, in relation to what looks like mountains).

9) Another effect intended to improve the map's overall colors. Put a copy of the "C-Colors for relief" image on a layer above the map you just obtained. Then change that layer from **NORMAL** to **MULTIPLY** (with an **OPACITY** of 40-60%, depending on your taste). Then, **MERGE DOWN** that layer on the image of the map.

10) Well... I feel becoming lazy tonight.

F) Final Map



Add names, with beautiful fonts of your liking. If you wondered where to find such nice icons of castles and cities, I got them on a TSR software : the "CD-ROM Core Rules". However, due to copyrights, I cannot distribute them. Thus, for those who would need such kind of icons, see next page a sample of drawing I made, and that you may use freely.

That's all. Nonetheless, to create a whole map, with flat regions, coasts, etc., usually requires much more sweating than you would like to spend.

Sincerely,

Dominique Crouzet (from France)

Nice Pictos & Symbols

If you don't know where to find nice little drawings of castles, cities, and else, I added the following items that you may use to fill your map:



If you make a nice map using these principles, I would be glad to get a copy of it.

However, if you have problems, please do not ask me. The fact is the procedure explained in this document is not all. Artistic talent, trying and testing, and much sweating of the brain... Well, you see what I mean.

Dominique Crouzet