Special Effects I

Oceanic Contours, Colour shifts and contrast adjustments, Snowfields, and Midnight

Thank you, Profantasy, for including this article in your blog ☺

Credits:

Quenten Walker - Australian desert photograph

Reference material:

The Continent of Dorina

Dorina drawn in the Mike Schley style.

Dorina drawn in the Herwin Wielink style

A brief note about this article

The main reason I have never written about the special effects I use in my maps before now is because they have to be applied differently on each new map I draw. Differences in map style and the random variability of the way I chose to warp the colour scheme each time have made it very hard to nail down any particular method to the point of there being a right or a wrong way of doing it, and it's nearly impossible to make a definitive set of instructions when nothing is set in concrete. I have often used similar combinations of effects on similar sheets in different maps once I discovered a useful result by experimentation, but I don't think I have ever used exactly the same settings on any two maps. So what follows is more a train of thought and an explanation of my method as I develop two example maps of the same place in two different styles in tandem. However, and having said that, there are a few simple instructions on how to generate and process sea contours in the first of the special effects to be described.

This article focuses on two versions of the continent of Dorina shown above in the Mike Schley style (MS) and the Herwin Weilink style (HW). I have chosen these styles because they are available to all CC3 mappers, and because they are so different in nature that the special effects will have to be applied differently to each one. By describing this process and providing the finished FCW files for reference purposes, I hope that those of you who have requested tutorials about how to get similar special effects to mine in their own maps may at the very least gain some useful information and ideas.

The effects I will be working on in this article are oceanic contours, global colour shifts, contrast adjustments, snowfields and something I've called 'midnight', which entirely changes the nature of the map in a way that makes it vaguely reminiscent of a view seen under brilliant moonlight.

First off, then, I should probably start with the basic stuff – how much I have already warped the default styles to produce the initial maps before we get started on the special effects. Please note that for some reason I set the scale of these maps completely wrong, but it was too late to go back and start again by the time I got to the finishing touches. I didn't realise until I was adding the scale bar and it was out by a very large factor.

Dorina – MS

The MS style is beautiful in its clean and radiant pastel colours. Unfortunately for me it is those very same pastel shades that make doing the kind of special effect I do quite difficult to achieve on an MS map. While I can appreciate the loveliness of many very different styles my personal taste tends more towards richer, darker colours. If you open the *Dorina – Mike Schley.FCW* file you will see that the sheets have been dramatically altered, so that while I tried very hard not to take it too far away from the intended appearance as to be unrecognisable as an MS map, I have used lots of Adjust Hue/Saturation and RGB Matrix effects. I have also swapped out some of the textures for others in the same set and changed their colours accordingly. I love the grassy texture of the Marsh_MS fill, and so I have abused it by using it for anything that is at all grassy in nature. There are other fills I've substituted, but even though I've bashed it about quite badly (and I cringe to think of what the purists would say) all the fills are MS fills and part of that style. There is nothing there that doesn't come from the Mike Schley mapping style.

Dorina – HW

You might think the HW style is made for me, with my already stated preference for darker, richer colours, but my taste is less subtle and a couple of degrees lighter in tone. I have done exactly the same thing with the HW map as I've done with the MS style – lots of colour changing sheet effects aimed at making everything a little brighter than before. I haven't swapped out so many of the fills, but I do very much like the grassland fill and I've used it in several shades on different sheets. There are couple of sheep and cows and a horse that remain from the MS version where there is no HW equivalent.

1. Oceanic Contours

Dorina was generated in Fractal Terrains 3 and exported to CC3 as the base of both the example maps. It was a quick way to generate a continent for use in this tutorial, but you don't have to do it this way if you don't want to. Hand drawn continents and oceanic contours will do just as well.

The basic idea is to create a plain solid polygon for each contour level in a series of grey shades with the darkest grey at the bottom of the ocean.

Using contours exported from FT3

1. Separate the exported underwater contours onto individual temporary sheets to make working on them easier.

2. Draw a rectangle slightly larger than the extent of the map in the darkest grey of your chosen greyscale.

3. Trim each successive contour to just outside the edge of the map using the trimming tools in CC3, and set each one to a solid fill in progressively paler shades of the grey scale.

4. Move all the contours back onto the CONTOURS (SEA) sheet.

The darkest level on the contour sheet represents the bottom of the ocean. Below this, and invisible without the sheet effects on, is the BACKGROUND sheet. The BACKGROUND sheet holds a polygon filled with the native ocean texture for each map style (I have shown the ocean for the HW map below, but the technique is the same for both maps)
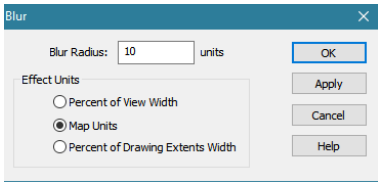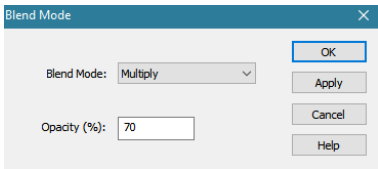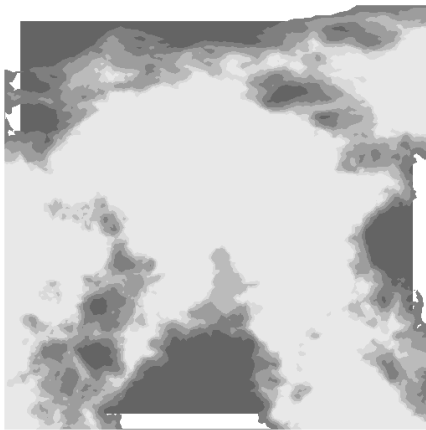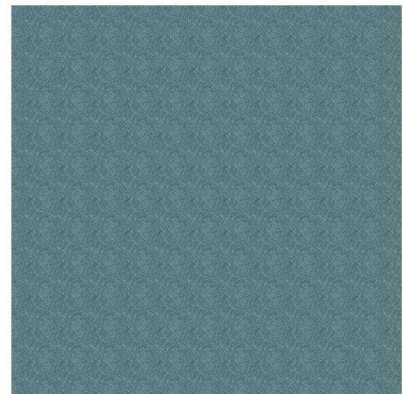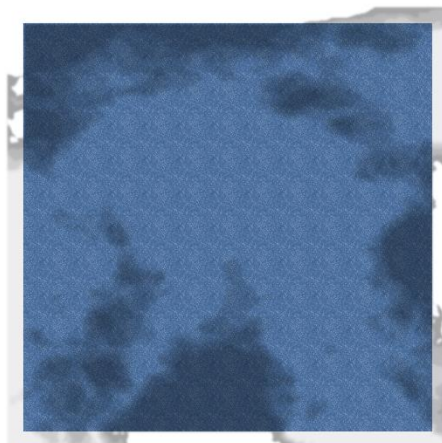
<u>Drawing your own contours directly into a CC3 map</u>

Try using the freehand drawing tool for ease and speed.

1. Set the fill to Solid, the colour to the right shade of grey for the contour you are drawing, and make sure you are drawing on the CONTOURS (SEA) sheet (or the equivalent sheet in whichever style you are using).

2. Draw a rectangle slightly larger than the extent of your map in the darkest grey of your scale. This is the deepest level of your ocean.

3. Pick the next grey up in the scale and draw the outline of the lowest contour level using the freehand drawing tool. You may need to undo and redraw it several times, or draw it in stages and then combine the paths into one using 'Combine paths' in the Fractalize right click menu.

4. Once you are happy with the shape you have drawn, and once you have joined any path segments together to form just one, right click the Fractalize tool again and pick 'Path to polygon'. Use this to convert the path into a filled grey polygon.

5. Pick the next grey in your scale and repeat the process for the next contour up from the bottom.

UNIVERSAL TIP: Whether you are changing the properties on an FT3 export, or drawing your own contours, avoid using black as the starting point of your grey scale. It's too dark. Start with something about half way between black and mid grey, and move up the greyscale at the bottom of the default palette in equal sized steps according to how many contours you have. Ending with white is good but not essential. Close will do.

The sheet effects on the CONTOURS (SEA) sheet:

Blur – to blend the contours together and get rid of the steps between each shade of grey. You will need to adjust the Blur Radius to suit the scale of your map and how widely spaced the different greys of your greyscale are, or you may prefer the steps to show and just have a very small blur to lessen the sharpness of each division.	
Blend Mode – the mode for this effect is set to Multiply, which removes all the white from the contours (including the darkest grey shade) and allows the sea texture to show through from underneath. The fact that this is a Blend Mode means that the remaining blackness in each level of grey will be blended with the underlying texture, instead of obliterating it. Reducing the opacity will lighten the contours.	

Exact settings may vary between maps. It depends on how dark the ocean texture is, what colour-altering sheet effects have already been applied to the BACKGROUND sheet, and how dark you want your contours to appear. Try not to make them too dark or they will distract attention from the map and may even turn completely black when some of the special effects described in this article are applied. Black oceans are to be avoided unless they are entirely black by design.

2. Global Colour Shift

Both maps of Dorina took quite some time to tweak so that the colours worked together in a way that pleased me. On completion of the originals, however, I realised that I had failed to achieve the red desert I wanted in the MS version. I had intended to create something similar to the red colours of the Australian desert, shown here on the right in a rather beautiful photograph taken by Quenten Walker.

Thank you, Quenten ☺

© Image copyright - Quenten Walker 2019

In particular I wanted the MS map to have a sandy red desert close in appearance to this little extract of Quenten's photograph (right), but a little brighter – as if viewed at noon on a cloudless day.

It is easy enough to adjust the colour and tone of a fill by adding an Adjust Hue/Saturation (AH/S) sheet effect to the relevant sheet and adjusting the attributes until the colour is right, but then I would have had to start all over again with the rest of the map to pull the general colour scheme back together again, so I decided to try shifting the colour of the entire map to retain the existing colour balances.

You can shift the colour of a map just by adding a sheet effect to the Whole Drawing. The radio button to switch to the Whole Drawing is located above the sheet list pane in the Sheets and Effects dialog. I know by having tried it that it's best not to try altering the lightness or saturation settings this way because it causes all kinds of interesting but undesirable side effects, like turning some of the darker colours almost completely grey while simultaneously causing some of the mid-tone colours to become oversaturated. So I added the AH/S effect to the Whole Drawing and only used it to reduce the hue of the MS map by -7 units, which seemed to do the trick on the colour without damaging the map too much. The sea was still blue, and the grass was still green.
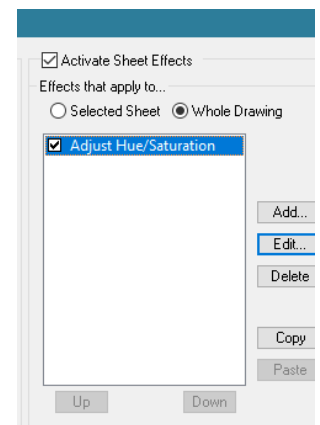
I had more or less the right hue, but at the cost of the natural built-in contrast of the style. I'd just lost the only pale yellow part of it, and everything was looking grey, even though it wasn't really all that grey at all. I needed to increase the contrast again, but at the time of writing there is no ready-made sheet effect to do this. That is why the next special effect is called 'Increasing the Contrast'.

3. Increasing the Contrast

There is a sheet called CONTRAST in the MS map, which has a Blend Mode effect on it that uses Overlay to blend a map-sized rectangle of black over the map. Overlay has the curious quality of affecting the mid and dark tones much more than the light tones, so I could use this to stretch the greyscale range of the map and create a pseudo contrast adjustment. False contrast – but better than nothing. The degree of this pseudo-contrast effect can be adjusted by altering the transparency.

Here are the original, colour altered, and the contrast adjusted versions of the MS map in that order from left to right.

The HW example is overall a lot darker, and the desert is already adequately red, so I didn't have to alter the contrast, but to show how this would be different for a darker map I created the tools to make it possible – two sheets in the HW example called CONTRAST highlight, and CONTRAST shadows, pick out the paler parts and deepen the shadows respectively using two different blend modes, a white map sized

rectangle, and black map-sized rectangle (also respectively). The CONTRAST highlight Blend Mode is set to Pin Light, and the CONTRAST shadows Blend Mode is set to Overlay, just like the MS example. These sheets together increase the contrast by pulling the relatively short tone curve of the HW map out at both ends instead of just at the dark end (which is what I did with the MS map).

As I said, the HW map didn't really need this treatment but here are the before and after halves of the HW map laid out left to right with just a small adjustment to give an idea of how this works with a darker map.
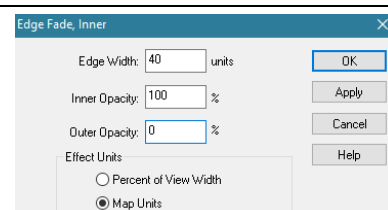

I prefer the contrast version now that I've put them side by side and can see the difference, so I will stick with it as we move on to the snowfield effect. That doesn't mean the contrast version is better. You might prefer the unaltered version. It's just a matter of personal preferences.
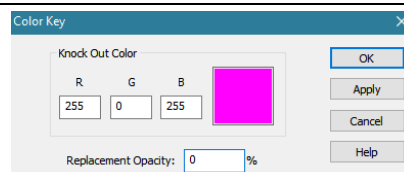
4. Creating a Snowfield
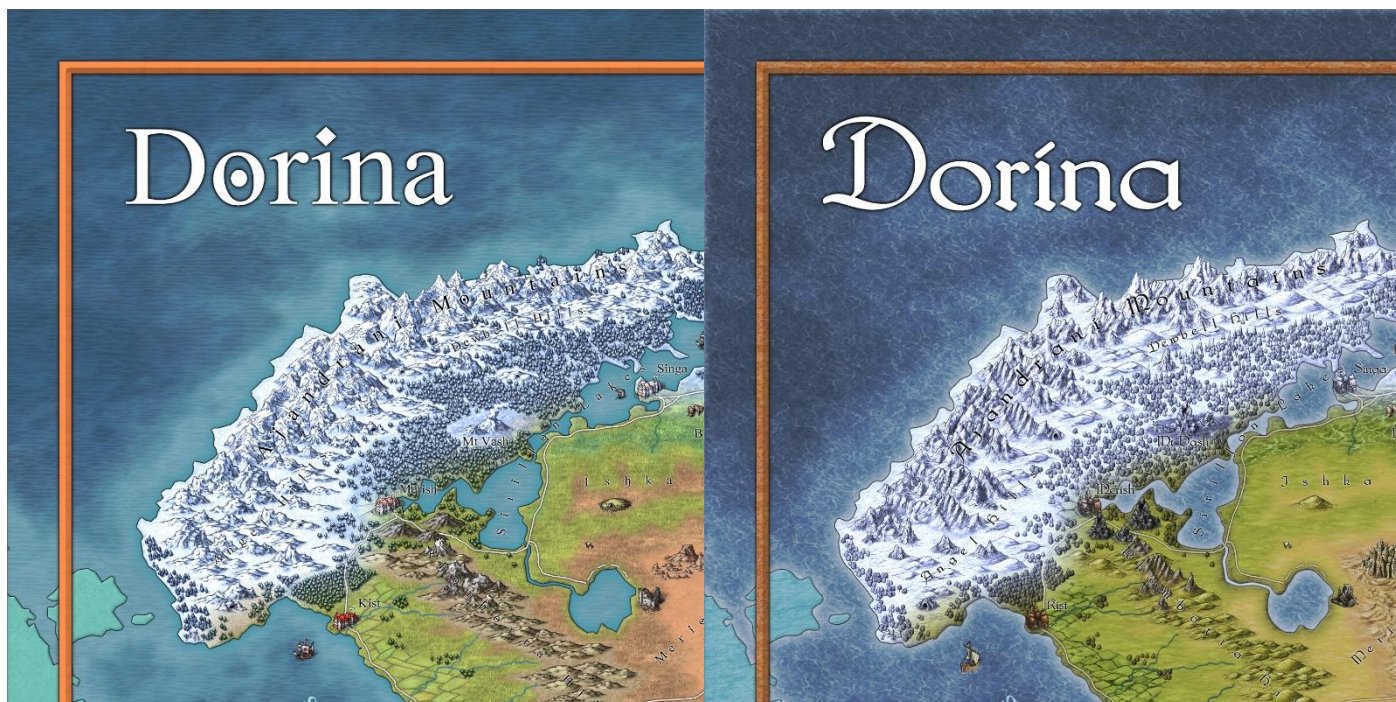
Both the example maps of Dorina have a hidden sheet in them called WINTER. If you unhide this sheet you will see the snowfield I have drawn and copied onto both maps using the same sheet effects but with different settings.
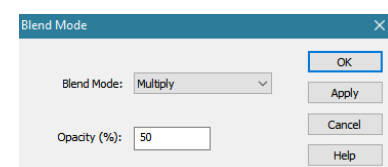
|	
Edge Fade Inner – to grade the emergence of the snowy region across the land. The scale of this effect can be adjusted to any size to suit the scale of your map and the area over which you want the snow to fade out.	
Colour Key – set to the default bright pink (colour 6) this will be used to trim the snowfield to a nice crisp edge along the coastline.	
Blend Mode – turns the edge-faded, coast-cropped snowfield almost completely transparent. The blank solid fill of the drawn snowfield isn't what we want to see. It exists as a way of defining the area and intensity of the following RGB Matrix effect. The HW example is much darker and the Blend Mode effect is set to Pin Light instead of Multiply to intensify the highlights.	
RGB Matrix – alters everything defined by the extent of the invisible snowfield to a graded scale of pale blue-grey to white to give the illusion that the area is covered by snow. The exact numbers in this matrix may need to be adjusted according to what style of map you are making, and the combined effect off all the lower sheet effects on the overall colour and tone underlying the snow.	
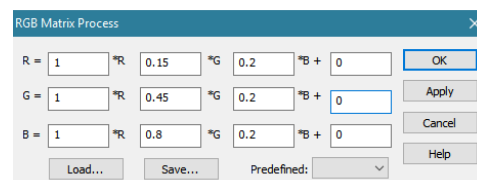
The snowfield should be drawn in colour 222 in the default palette quite a lot larger than the intended extent and a little way out into the ocean. 222 is a pale lilac colour that works well with this effect. Other colours, particularly white and any kind of grey, tend to cause transparency artefacts where some of the pixels in the mountain symbols just happen to be exactly the same colour as the snowfield. If you should ever come across a style where the mountains are pale lilac, maybe it would be best to try a different pale colour for your snowfield drawing.

This is what Dorina looks like with the WINTER sheet effects turned off in the Mike Schley example.
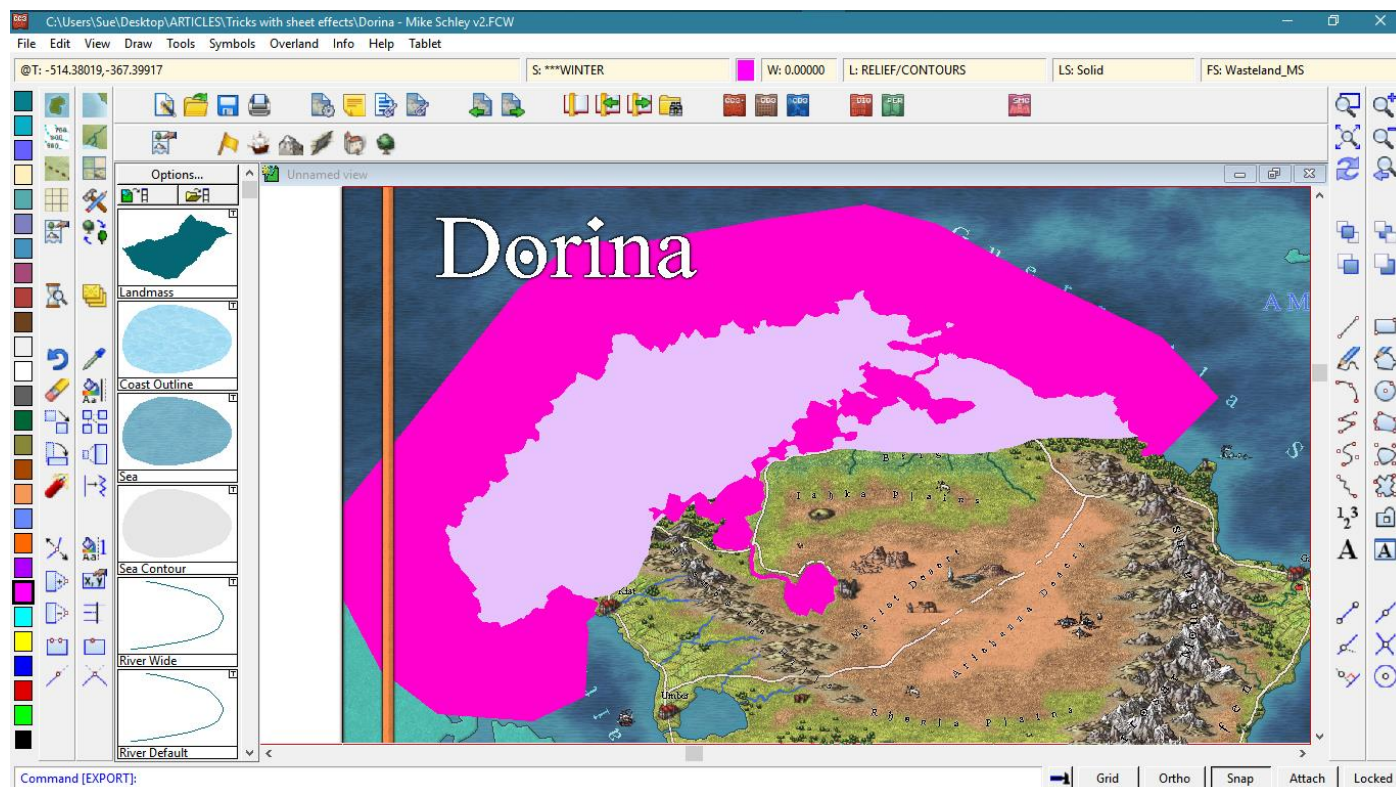
When you draw the polygons in the ocean around the line of the coast these should be in the same colour as the colour shown in the Colour Key effect (the default is colour number 6), and broad enough to absorb the entire extent of the Edge Fade Inner effect, so that when they are 'cut' away by the Colour Key there is still at least a fringe of them left to crop the edge of the snowfield nice and sharp on the coast. I drew mine extra-large just in case I decided to increase the Edge Fade Inner effect at a later date.

When you switch the sheet effects back on you may notice symbols that poke out around the coast and overlap the sea. They have always been there, but have been made extra visible by being the darkest things for miles around. Don't be lazy and just ignore them. You need to zoom right in and carefully draw a tiny polygon around each one in colour 222 to make it look snowy.

If you look very closely at the two example maps you will see where I have done this for several mountains, a couple of city symbols, and at least 20 of the HW pine trees.

5. Midnight

MS example
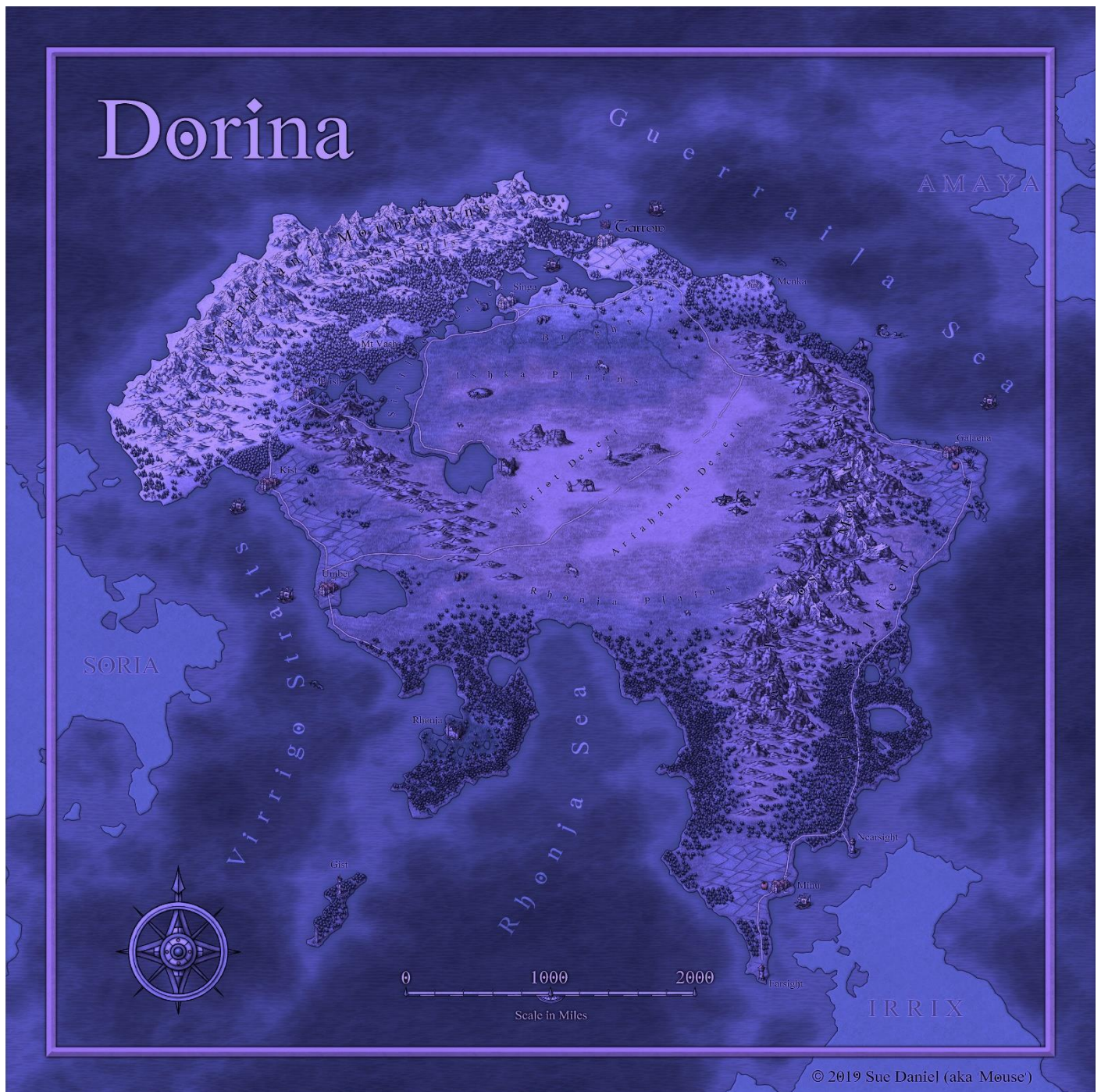
This is the result of using a Blend mode set to Subtract and 10% opacity, followed by an RGB matrix on a map-sized rectangle of colour 222, adjusted to remove most of the green/yellow from the map to simulate moonlight (it's very bright for moonlight, but I had to be realistic about the readability of the map). I'm not so sure this effect will ever be very useful in Overland mapping, but I've used it before for dungeon maps.

The truth is that I just wanted so see if the snow would glow on a moonlit night like it does in reality, and it does.

HW example

Thank you for reading this article. I hope you find the effects I have described here useful, and that you are able to adapt them to use in some of your own maps one day ☺