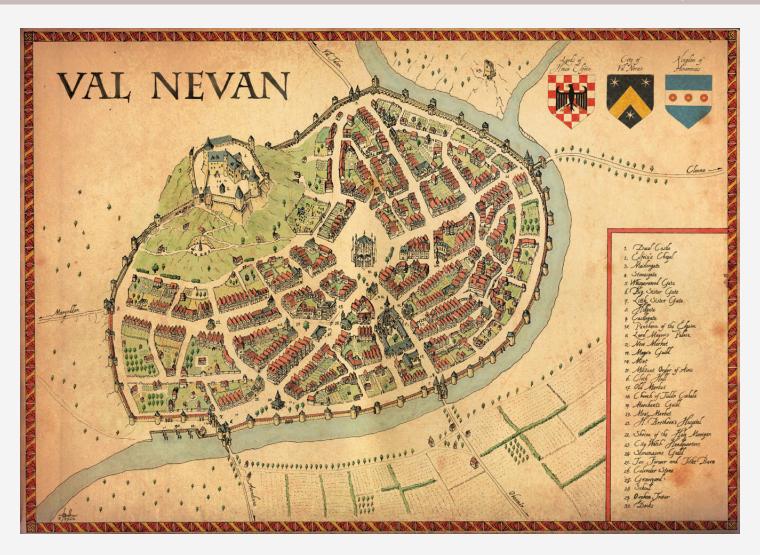# Fantasy Cartography

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I'VE ALWAYS LOVED maps. When I was a kid, I could spend hours poring over atlases and plans of my home town. I could get completely lost in them, daydreaming, making up stories in my head about the people living in the places that the maps depicted. More often than not, I was one of those people. Then I discovered fantasy novels and role-playing games and I started drawing maps as well as looking at them.

I made this map of Val Nevan, an entirely fictional city, with a medieval fantasy story or role-playing game in mind. This means that the map is essentially a prop; its function is to help convey the mood and look of the place the story is set in. Besides giving the players or readers a clear understanding of the layout of the city, it has to draw them into the story. It has to help them become immersed in it, to give them an idea what it's like to actually walk around the city.

To achieve this goal, I believe the map needs to fit the world. It should look as though someone living in that world made it, using the tools he had access to. As such, most of my inspiration for this piece comes from city maps by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century cartographers like Braun, Hogenberg, Blaeu, and de Wit. Their technique,

projection, colors, and enormous amount of detail are ideally suited for the job.

Drawing it by hand, then, seemed the most obvious choice. As gorgeous as many entirely digital maps may look, I feel they would be out of place in this case. Imagine the map in the opening scene of *The Lord of the Rings* looking like a satellite image—goodbye, suspension of disbelief! I did the linework and lettering with pencils and technical pens on paper. This approach creates some imperfections and gives the drawing a certain roughness, which I believe enhances its character. After scanning the map, I had to color it digitally, because I lack the skills to do so with real paint. I did my best, however, to mimic hand-painted watercolors.

The colors on old maps look very vibrant and warm and add greatly to their appeal. I used similar, but slightly less saturated colors for this piece. Combined with an aged-paper background, they create that warmth without becoming too garish or cartoony. I colored most of the rooftops red, but the important buildings have blue roofs to make them stand out more.

The amount of detail in this map is also very important. The more detail, the livelier the city looks. A parallel projection is perfectly suited for that. A top-down view would only show the contours of the roofs. With a parallel projection, however, you can see the buildings' façades and, with the right colors, even their construction technique (such as stone, brick, or half-timbered). Further details include fences, orchards, gardens, sheds, and small barns or granaries on staddle stones. I also drew some people here and there—a few farmers working the fields, soldiers training and people walking around.

My main motivation here was to recapture those daydreams I had when I was growing up. It was like an exercise in nostalgia, and it worked. While I was working on this map, I lost myself in it again. I hope that others can lose themselves in it, too.

Sources: this map was made using traditional media and Adobe Photoshop CS4. The old paper background is a free stock image from Struck_Dumb, found at http://struck-dumb.deviantart.com/art/Old-Paper-85821415.

Brian van Hunsel is a thirty-something hobbyist from the Netherlands. Some of his other work, a larger version of this map, and his email address can be found at http://blaidd--drwg.deviantart.com.