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Red Rising Revisited

<https://sites.google.com/brandeis.edu/redrisingrevisited/home?authuser=1>

The purpose of Red Rising Revisited is provide context and a sense of scale to readers of the book series Red Rising by Pierce Brown. The story takes place primarily on Mars and the books are narrated in an authentic style, meaning the narrator and protagonist, Darrow, describes locations relative to cities that exist only in the books and to locations not on Earth that most people know only vaguely if at all. By providing visual aids and explaining the distance between and locations of these events, the project aims to make the books more accessible and understandable, and therefore more enjoyable to a larger audience. This also doubles as a close reading and critique of Brown’s ability to world-build and create an understandable narrative of a fictional world.

Most of the decisions as to how to map the events of Red Rising were dictated by the fact that most mapping utilities, including the ones we learned about in class, were made to map locations on Earth, not Mars. The options left to me were either take an existing image and use photo editing software to mark locations or, by the recommendation of Alex, use Google Earth Pro, which has a 3D rendering of Mars. Google Earth turned out to be a very useful software for my purposes. I was able to mark locations and areas as well as add lines on the map. While familiarizing myself with the software I learned how to measure the distance represented by a line on the map and that capability led to me being able to include information on distance on my site, which I thought I would be unable to do without advanced math. Furthermore, Google Earth Mars included lines of longitude and latitude as well as markers for major geographical features, and because I used those elements to justify my placements of cities, it was imperative that I have them in the visual component of the website so the user can see what I am describing.

The most difficult part of the project was figuring out how to finalize the images taken from Google Earth. While I was able to save a jpeg of my current display via Google Earth, those images were not refined to the extent that I wanted for my website, they lacked labels for locations. Because my goal was for the user to be able to get the same basic information from either my images or my text, I needed to add labels so the user could tell at a glance what locations were being shown. I have no experience with photo editing software and while Alex recommended that I use GIMP to edit the images, I first tried using a software that I had experience with, Drawboard PDF. Through Drawboard PDF I was able to add the clarifying information to the images, though they could only be saved as PDF files. This is why my maps were added to the website as embedded Google Drive file because I saved the PDFs to Google Drive. I decided to keep this as the final version of the maps because the user is able to zoom in and out as well as move around the Drive attachment. This adds some interactivity in an otherwise static site, as well as the ability to zoom in which is imperative for users with impaired eyesight. The downside of the Drive format is that it comes off as less professional, due to the image being seemingly added on, and not part of the site itself.

On the page of the website devoted to Red Rising, a second image from the Google Earth map was included. The zoomed in view of the locations in the Valles Marineris was intended to show the proximity of two locations and to provide a visual aid for locations within the larger geographical feature that could not be seen clearly from the zoomed out map. I debated adding a second image for the same reason in the page on Morning Star to show how Yorktown, the Thermic Sea, and Tinos were related in space. Unfortunately, the imaging that Google Earth has for the Hellas Crater (the location of the Thermic Sea) is covered mostly by inexplicable white coloring, as if that imaging data does not exist or is not of sufficient quality. Whatever the case, the second map was omitted due to possible confusions that this might cause and a desire to have the resolution of the maps to all meet a certain standard. This was one unforeseen downside to using Google Earth.

The website is divided by book, and besides the inclusion of Yorktown on the Morning Star map for reference, the maps created for each book have no overlap. No common map was created because I felt that it was important for the information to be specific to a book, as the concerns of relative location are only relevant for a narrative, and the books do not overlap chronologically, and locations are rarely repeated. This was also a way to help prevent spoilers, because users only have to see material for books they have read. Unlike ARCGIS, Google Earth does not allow for interactive maps, so one map with different sets of information that could be toggled was not an option. Also, Google Sites does not support video files so that solution was not an option.

I stayed away from common maps because, due to the need to keep the books distinct, each map made use of the color theme of the book in question, and I wanted to avoid potential issues colorblind users might experience when the only way to tell which book is which by telling the colors apart. The drawback of this decision was that no information was given involving relative locations between books, which would have been interesting to know, however, it was not the focus of the project at this stage.