

Drawing Maps - Season 6 Faction Creation Pt. 1 - Government Type

Transcribed by Ril (@kaorukeihi)

[T/N: The whole thing is just Austin talking, so I only marked it once.]

AUSTIN: Hey, everybody! It is Austin here with another one of these experimental Drawing Maps updates. This is a continuation, in a sense, of an experimental update we did last time, where Dre, Jack and I talked through all the Road to Season 6 stuff. And if you like this model for Drawing Maps updates, this thing where maybe I'll do a text post here or there, maybe I'll do a text post with a audio update like this, maybe I'll just do a big audio update like last time... Things that are not just live streams, then let me know in the comments, because I like doing them this way, this gives me... This kind of opens up for a bunch of additional types of stuff I can open the curtain to to show in terms of what my prep looks like, and may hopefully even help me review some of my own prep, and kinda get deep in my own brain.

This is going to be Part 1 of 5 for a new stretch of these Drawing Maps updates, as I continue to catch up on those. Why five? Well, I need to build five factions for Season 6. Five is so few factions compared to last seasons... [laughing a bit] Or I guess normally in COUNTER/Weight and in Twilight Mirage we get *down* to five, eventually, right? But we normally start with way more than that. So, it's good to start with only five.

And, it turns out that there's about 5 steps, more or less, in *Beam Saber*, which is the game that we'll be playing for Season 6, in making a faction. *Beam Saber*, by the way, developed by Austin Ramsay, who has been great as someone who I can like shoot questions to. You can follow Austin [@notaninn](#) on Twitter, he runs a very good *Beam Saber* Discord for people who are interested in finding groups for the game, and the game is available over on itch.io; if you go to [austin-ramsay.itch.io](#) so you can find out more about the game there.

Today... Or I guess I should say, broadly, the way we're gonna do this is, every update, I'm gonna pick one of the major factions from Season 6, and I'll include a bunch of notes on where I'm at in prep right now, about, you know, what the factions are. You know, what type of squads they have, some notes on the aesthetics, etc. And then I'm gonna pick one of these steps of building a faction, and zoom in on how I decided what I decided, and kind of at least give a little bit of insight into decision making that goes into some of this stuff.

Those steps for building a faction in this game are:

- 1) You determine the government type. You might determine its goal too; it's kind of optional, but I like doing it;
- 2) You determine how corrupt the faction is, which we'll get into next update;
- 3) You list out some aesthetic notes: what's the architecture like, what are the vehicles for that faction like, what are some of the major NPCs, any additional traits;
- 4) Then you create squads for that faction;

- 5) And then, finally, you create regions in the game, and either tie those directly to a faction or you think about how a faction might integrate into those regions.

I'm gonna take a note from the *Beam Saber* playbook, or the *Beam Saber* guide, and actually probably just build one region per faction. Maybe a sixth additional independent region or something, we'll see. We'll decide that over the coming weeks.

But today we are going to take one of the factions, I'm gonna take Stel Kesh, which is one of the oldest factions in the setting in some ways, and we're going to talk about government type and goal. I'll start by just quoting the *Beam Saber* book a little bit.

"The factions and squads", writes Austin Ramsay, "are the driving force that moves the story behind the scenes. While there are several premade factions and many squads for the GM to choose from, some groups want to play with organizations that are unique to their campaign. What follows is some advice for creating your own factions and squads, but not every faction or squad deserves this level of detail. See the Political Scale section for advice on how many factions and squads to make."

We're gonna make five, we know that the Divine Principality—and I should note right now that there are going to be spoilers in this for past Road to Season 6 stuff, which also means for the very very end of Twilight Mirage (not character stuff, but the fact that the Divine Principality exists, the thing that I just said the name of), and then maybe occasional other tiny spoilers, this is Drawing Maps, it happens. And then, looking forward, there will be spoilers in a sense that... if I say a name of a Divine in 20 minutes then you will be like "Oh wow, I guess they have that Divine!" [He laughs a bit.] Or if I say the name of a character that's a throwback or a reference, you might recognize that, but this is all information that players are going to have from the jump, I believe, based on just the way that information is transparent in this game. So, I wouldn't worry too much about like long-term spoilers. There's not gonna be twists or turns here, this is setting down the bedrock that everything else will be built on top of.

"The place to start when creating a faction is to determine its type. Is it an autocracy, a corporatocracy, a democracy, an oligarchy, or a theocracy? Answering this helps to influence its goals, and lets you know how it mechanically affects the players if they chose it for their patron faction. This is the only thing required for making a faction. Factions, other than the player's patron, do not require faction goals, however if the GM or players find it useful to assign them, then it should be done." Boy, do I find it useful. [Austin laughs a bit.] In the book at that point Austin goes into what these five different types of governments are. Again, I'll read those, those are: autocracy, which, as you might imagine, is a culture of faction that has a single leader, a very powerful single leader. It tends to be very militaristic, tends to have a very fearful population, and very violent, physically enforced power relations.

Corporatocracies are political systems that give power to corporations and other kind of merchant and economic interests. They look at wealth as the primary signifier of competence,

the book says “primary measure of competence”, they’re like “if you have money, it means you must be good.” There are, you know, maybe there are elections, maybe there is a king or a prince, but really it is a small group of corporate representatives that are the leaders of the faction. You know, there are plenty of places in our world, where despite the fact that there might be political people in power, governments, or, sorry, corporations and corporate interests override that by sheer fact that they control way more wealth and have way more day to day influence on people’s lives. And then, finally, corporate representatives are disposable, and will be readily replaced by their corporation. Corporations are very resilient in that way. You know, an autocracy... You kill, you cut the head of the autocracy, maybe everything falls apart because there’s fighting over who gets to take over. You kill a CEO, they’re gonna put another CEO in that CEO’s place, right?

“A democracy”, says the game, “has a populace that expresses political power through voting, a leader with limited political power, a leader that must justify their actions to the populace, universal or near-universal suffrage.” You know, a democracy. [He laughs a bit.] I’ll note as a fun thing here: each of these has an alternative version, so, for instance, the autocracy also has monarchy as an alternative, we’ll revisit that at a certain point, and the democracy alternative is a demarchy, which is a real thing, and also a thing that came up back in COUNTER/Weight.

An oligarchy, the fourth of the five government types, has a small percentage of the population with access to political power. You know, there’s kind of one group of people who has more access to political power, but that group may be different. You know, corporatocracies that have businesses that are tied to a single leader that are not controlled by a board of representatives or a board of—what do you call it?—a corporate board, basically, would at that point become an oligarchy, right? Nations that have a lot of superwealthy individuals, who are themselves the ones who wield the power more so than the more disembodied corporate structures, lean oligarchy. They also have “a codified system that determines who can access political power, a small group of individuals who directly wield political power, and limited opportunities for wielding political power which encourage underhanded methods to acquire or even retain it.” You know, if you don’t have it, if it is not something where you can just work towards getting political power, or you can, you know, convince people to back you, etc., then, if it’s a rare thing, you’re going to do what you can do to get it and to keep it.

Finally, there are theocracies, “where leadership is comprised of one or more entities of great spiritual power, mortal clergy who employ political power, leader who are kept in power by the populace’s belief in their divine authority, and a political structure where mundane failures and perceived lack of religiosity may cause the populace to believe that its leaders have lost their divine authority.”

As always, these sorts of categories are strategic, they are meant for us to quickly organize our thoughts, and make some decisions about how we’re framing these different factions. They are not necessarily like purely representative, I don’t think Austin Ramsay is like “And that’s it, that’s how history works!”. [He laughs] “Those are the five types of organizations and governments

there have been!” Obviously the lines between some of these blur, certainly in real life, but also in the fictional touchstones that *Beam Saber* is drawing on, and that Season 6 will draw on as well.

But they are useful, and, I will say, they’re not only flavor. The thing to understand about these, is that in the course of play when you work for one of these factions, they will reward you differently. And this ended up being a key component for me to decide what... which factions, which Stels became which type of faction, which type of government. An easy example—I’m looking ahead here a bit, but—Stel Orion obviously, in terms of pure flavor, was gonna become a corporatocracy. That’s going to be a faction that is all about corporation, that’s all about, you know, trade companies, and trade guilds, and merchant families, and stuff like that. But part of the reason why I wanted to chose that for them, was also because, if you go back to the Road to Season 6 stuff, especially if you look at the map that we showed in the *Microscope* game, Stel Orion has a *ton* of space under its control, just like a *huge* swath of an entire galactic arm, that is just filled from, you know, asteroid belt to asteroid belt with mining operations, with R&D, Research & Development labs, with all sorts of like, logistics systems and shipping systems and all that. And so they have a lot of resources in that physical sense. And that’s reflected in the game because corporatocracies, when you complete a mission for them, they... I guess I should explain this a little bit here, now that I think about it.

When you... God, I guess I have to get a little bit... So, in *Beam Saber* you have a squad, right? And with that squad, you complete missions, and you’re completing missions, in *Beam Saber*, for factions most of the time. You could be an independent, you could be working for yourself instead of for a faction, but by and large, someone is paying you money, and is hiring you to go do a thing. Sometimes that might look like *Cowboy Bebop*, where you’re a freelancer who’s being picked up by a specific faction, but chances are it’s more like something like *Mobile Suit Gundam*, where you have a patron faction, who you’re primarily working for. And that’ll be one of these main factions here. Or, again, you could be independent, and that’s really difficult, it’s sort of like hard mode for *Beam Saber*, where you don’t get paid, right? No one’s gonna pay you outside of maybe, if the GM is feeling very generous, a couple of bucks so to speak, right? Kind of a low pay, compared to what everybody else gives you.

So, when you do a job, at the end of the job, as long as you’re working for a faction, they will give you a resupply roll, they’ll give you a kind of a chance to roll some dice, and see how many supply points you get to help, you know, patch yourself up, and do some stuff during downtime. The reward is supply points, which then turn either into materiel or personnel. Materiel is, you know, the stuff that you would need to keep your mechs repaired, it’s the stuff that you would need to improve your vehicles, it is what you would do to acquire other sorts of physical things, if you wanted to do the Acquire asset move, basically. It’s what you do in this game to... if you wanted to change out what type of gear you had on your giant robot, you would spend materiel.

And then there’s personnel. And personnel is like “Hey, it’s people, it’s stuff people are doing for you”. It’s favors, it’s IOUs, it’s, you know, an agreement to... It’s new recruits, right? So, let’s say

you had a cohort, which is like a fire team, like a group that worked with you, and they got hurt—you could use personnel to heal them up. You could spend personnel to do better at the kind of stress recovery move called Cut loose. You could spend personnel to gather information as a flashback, stuff like that. So, personnel is like, imagine it's sort of like promises to do labor, right?

And that's what you kind of get, you know? You're not getting money in this game at this point, you're not getting cash, you're getting these two types of supply point, *and*... Again, this is the thing about factions, it is not just fiction, it is not just that a corporatocracy and an autocracy are different fictionally, though that's also true and important. They are different in how their rewards work.

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So, a corporatocracy like Stel Orion, who has all these parts of space locked down, who has all those R&D labs, who has all these mines, who has all these space tracking lanes set up—they give you +2 materiel when you do your resupply roll at the end of a mission. And so for me it was like: “Oh, Stel Orion very obviously is gonna be a corporatocracy, they already have all that stuff.” Even if they were... Even if you wanted to talk about them as an oligarchy, if you wanted to argue like “Okay, well...” even though they're corporately... You know, even though they're set up as like being capitalists in this case where we're kind of thinking about them as merchant republics, or that era of the Hanseatic League, or like Italian merchant families, stuff like that... You would... The thing that's important is that I wanted to represent that they have access to all these material resources. And so, I picked the one that gives materiel points.

Which leads me to Stel Kesh, which, as we all know, is in some ways the oldest of the Stels. You know, obviously Stel Kesh and Stel Nideo become Stels at the same time, they become the Divine Principality together, but in terms of unbroken singular culture, the Kesh culture goes back to COUNTER/Weight. And so... And has always been organized as a principality, which is to say, around a principedom of some kind in some form, right? There's a Prince or a Princess—is what I've thought before we started the Road to Season 6—for as long as there's been Kesh. And I think I'm happy with the idea that there has been historically a Princept—which, if you haven't listened to the past games is the word I ended up settling on for a kind of gender-neutral title for the person who is either elected or hereditarily assigned the role of Princept, the kind of executive role.

And so, I'd thought that I was going to make Stel Kesh a monarchy. And a monarchy is a special type of autocracy. I will real from the book here.

“An autocracy's basis has two key points: that there is a single leader, who holds ultimate decision-making power, the autocrat—or, I thought, the Princept—and that that person in charge uses force to remain in charge. The first point creates an organization where powerful individuals, often those who are charismatic and/or innovative, are viewed with suspicion,

authority figures jockey for what little power they can hold by selling each other out to the autocrat, and anyone not seeking power keeps their head down and follows orders.

The second point means that the autocrat must keep their military happy, which requires funding them, which leads to needing more resources, which causes them to continually expand their influence. An autocracy will always be looking to weaken and then conquer its neighbours.

An autocracy has similarities to all other factions in that most other factions will have a single person who leads them, in this regard maybe most like a theocracy (if the theocracy has an all-powerful religious individual). An autocracy's differences are that other factions with leaders do not put the ultimate decision-making power in the leader's hands. They may have a council of elders, a parliament, a board of directors. Additionally, unlike the theocracy, the autocrat's power comes from the fear of physical violence, while the theocracy's leader likely wields power due to their followers' sense of religious duty to them."

"An autocracy's alternative"—and this is what I thought Kesh was gonna be—"is a monarchy. Their main difference is that a monarchy's ruler, the monarch, does not maintain power through subjecting the people to constant fear of physical violence, but subtler means. The monarch rewards those who are loyal, impoverishes the untrustworthy, ostracizes the dangerous. Very rarely do they resort to physical violence, and when they do it is often performed through their control of the judicial system, making everything legal." I think this is an important distinction between the two, or at least a useful one in terms of asking questions about your autocracy. Is this someone who is despotic in a way where they have not even spent the time to build a cover? Not that cover makes it more moral, when, for instance, police violence kills marginalized folks, but sometimes cover can produce weaknesses in the armor. If an autocrat has to keep a judicial system in place, then that's one more vector from which challenges can emerge, they have to empower someone else. And so, I like the idea that there's this distinction here, even if, again, it is strategic, or it is a kind of shorthand.

And so I was like: "Oh yeah. The Principality, it's a monarchy." And then I sat with it, and I spoke to Austin Ramsay about it. And his first advice to me was like: "Oh, check to see if the resources you might gain line up." And I should note that the... You know, let's start there, actually. If the resources lined up. And so I looked, and with autocracy you get 1 materiel and then, 1 trust with the employer. You're kind of like "Hey, you're working with me, trust is important, I'm the one you're supposed to work with. Sure, I don't pay you as much, but listen. Is there anything more important than the trust of the autocrat?" I was like, "Yeah, that seems right, that seems mostly right."

But then I started thinking about Kesh, and nothing about Kesh made me think of materiel. Especially not in Season 6, where, if you look at the map—which you can see from going to a past update¹—Kesh, Stel Kesh has the least territory of all of the Stels. Maybe Columnar has a little bit less, but I'm pretty sure it's Kesh. And they're boxed in! To the north, they have the Golden Branch, to the south they have the Twilight Mirage, and then the space beyond the

¹The Live at the Table for June 2019.

Twilight Mirage is Stel Nideo. They haven't grown in years, they certainly aren't the thing that an autocracy is supposed to be, which, again, is about this urge to ever expand because they need more resources, they need to continue growing. Sure, the Divine Principality at large does that, and I'm certain that political relationships that Stel Kesh have are a way for them to continue grow in resources that's important for them. But at the same that's not the core of what they are, they're shouldn't be able to give the players materiel. What they should be able to give to players is personnel. The group that gives the most personnel is theocracy, they give 2 bonus personnel during every resupply roll. But it's definitely not a theocracy, Nideo is going to be the theocratic government here. We know this because of the importance of Aram Nideo's Asterism, of the Many-Stars Thesis, of the Nideo Argument, and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. Many-Stars Argument and the Nideo Thesis, I may have switched those.

Which leaves, if you're looking at personnel, either oligarchy, democracy, or... that's it, it's either oligarchy or democracy. Definitely not a democracy! It was not like a sudden face turn [He laughs a bit.] in Stel Kesh that made them a democracy off screen. And that left oligarchy, and that started to turn the wheels in my head a little bit. As written in the book, "An oligarchy's basis is that only certain people should have access to the levers of power to prevent mob rule. The reason that these people have access to the government powers differs from oligarchy to oligarchy. Some will give landowners suffrage, others will require voters to be from certain familial lineages, a few may require military service in exchange for the responsibility of voting. All have very low percentage of their population as eligible voters, and are about making sure that the right people are the only ones who can vote.

An oligarchy's similarities to other factions come from it being managed by a fairly small group of people, a corporatocracy may have a board of directors, which votes for many different corporations, and a democracy with large enough representative ruling body may have a number of senators comparable to the entire voting body of an oligarchy. Its differences are that power rests in the hands of a few people. Even if oligarchy has a monarch of some kind, that ruler is only a single voice, no louder than any other. Some oligarchies will have enough voters that they will have to elect committees from themselves to handle tasks, while others will have so few members that they can all sit around a table. A corporation cannot sit at a table, it can only be represented by small parts of its whole, being a disembodied and non-sapient entity. A democracy likely can't fit inside a single building, let alone a dining room, there are far too many people."

And so I was like, "Yeah, oligarchy, that seems close." And then I kept reading, and I saw what Austin Ramsay had written for the alternative version of oligarchy, and that is a cryptocracy.

"The main difference," says Ramsay, "is that those eligible to vote in a cryptocracy have their identities completely hidden from the people whose lives will be affected by their decisions. How the voter is selected in this group of secret electors will vary according to government. Some voting positions will be handed down with the retiring elector selecting their replacement, others may have an AI whose only purpose is to select new electors at the end of every office term. Perhaps there is actually no ruling body at all, and it's actually the faceless civil servants that keep the wheels turning."

This core idea of “the people really in charge are hidden from public view” felt perfect for Kesh. The one recurring thing from COUNTER/Weight to Twilight Mirage and now moving into Season 6 is the Rapid Evening. And I thought a lot about what the Rapid Evening might be or become. You know, they started as do-gooder space cops, kind of secret agents meant to track down threats to the entire Galaxy at the top of COUNTER/Weight... Still manipulative, you know, maybe still, um, you know, censure-worthy even, maybe fuck them. Maybe you shouldn’t be manipulating people into being your... your public arm, right? But from COUNTER/Weight to Twilight Mirage that got trickier as their desire for stability, their paranoia, their fear led them to enact policies and create technologies that limited freedom, let’s say. And moving forward from there, after what happened at the end of Twilight Mirage... it raises the questions of like what do they become next? Or, who inherits the name, right? There’s a lot of time here, I’m in the middle of working through the calendar, maybe that’ll be a bonus Drawing Maps along the way here. And you know, it’s been thousands of years since Twilight Mirage. Not as far from Twilight Mirage as Twilight Mirage was from COUNTER/Weight, you know, we’re talking about a few thousand years, not *tens* of thousands of years. But there’s been a lot of time, and even a very stable society changes in that time.

And I think over time the Rapid Evening become the people pulling the strings. And that’s especially interesting when you take into account the end of the last Road to Season 6 game, the *Microscope* game, where we realized... There was this incredible moment where there’s a Princept, who’s also deciding... who’s also claiming to be the Apokine, and there’s an Anti-Princept—or something we’re calling the Anti-Princept for now anyway—and that person has stepped forward to say: “No, I’m the real Princept!” And that’s already interesting. But I decided that it’s way more interesting if *that* person—I talked this over with some players, to be clear, and so kind of we decided, collectively—way more interesting if that person is themselves a pawn. They are someone who has stepped forward to be like “I’m the Princept”, and it’s like “Of course you are, sweetie, you’re doing great.” [He laughs a bit.]

And so, what I landed with is:

Stel Kesh

Type: Oligarchy (Cryptocracy)

Kesh is the eternal home of the Princept, the singular leader whose role is supposedly to be the loyal servant, chief advocate, and heir of all citizens of the Divine Principality. And yet... in this current moment, at least, Kesh is not a monarchy or an autocracy. Though it positions itself as the inheritor of a lost legacy of justice and stability, it is Kesh’s long running history of macro-scale manipulation, backroom dealing, and intelligence operations that powers the engine of this empire. Sure, there is a Princept on the People’s Throne. But who runs Kesh, really?

And then if you scroll down, you'll see that I've listed here Squad 1: The Rapid Evening (Name TBD)—it might be slightly different, it might change, who knows—and that is the Secret Society Pulling the strings.

I should note, really quick, that I'm not gonna go through everything listed here, because we'll get to corruption, and aesthetic notes, and squads, and regions, and all that later in additional updates. Again, everything is TBD.

And one thing I do wanna note about the way I'm doing this is. This has come up before, where, in COUNTER/Weight for instance, OriCon and the Diaspora, they mostly exist off screen, they're mostly off doing whatever the fuck they're doing, while what's happening in the Golden Branch in COUNTER/Weight is happening. And they have agents in the Golden Branch, it is an important part of their empire, or those empires, but it is not the whole of them, it is not even the majority of them. In fact, there are probably many people in those worlds, who don't even know what happened in COUNTER/Weight, who live their entire lives and maybe hear about it once on the news, or hear a story, or hear a fictionalized account of COUNTER/Weight. That's similar here. I... In this sense... It's similar in some ways, and it's different in others. It's similar in that, I don't know that I expect, at the start of this game especially... If you look at the Squads, the Princept is not going to show up, right? The Princept/Apokine. That person is a major force in the political spectrum of this world, but is not necessarily the... wouldn't necessarily be in the field of view here.

This is gonna be a game about characters on a small moon. An important moon, a moon that has a with a lot of history, a moon where, you know, things are running hot, a moon that *might* gain the attention of the Stels in a larger way long term—I'm sorry, people are yelling outside my window—but it is not like the central planet of all of space, right? It isn't the case that despite having a ton of other territory, all of the main leaders of all of the major factions happen to hang out here.

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They may pass through, there may be moments during this season where it's like "Oh shit, guess who's come to town" for sure. But it is not going to be... All of the major figures we've talked about before are not necessarily going to be on screen here. There will be hooks, don't worry, like, it's not going to waste, I just want to make that clear. But at the same time... In that way it's similar to COUNTER/Weight, where the bulk of Orion, the bulk of OriCon, the bulk of the Diaspora, were off screen and they had representatives here.

On the other hand, I am writing the basis of what these factions are in line with the larger self. Because it is as if the faction is like a synecdoche of what the larger faction is, right? Like, I don't want Stel Kesh on this moon to feel distinct from the larger Stel Kesh, it has the same qualities, it has the same traits, it has the same aesthetic sense. You know, maybe there'll be small touches that are different, that a player says like "Oh, actually, I think that on this moon,

you know, Stel Orion's fashion is way more colorful...", whatever. Awesome, let's run with it. But that will be a thing that comes up in play. By and large they should feel like the same faction, and that would be useful if I do need to slot in new squads, if someone important *does* come to town. So in that way it's kind of walking the line between those two types of thing.

I should note that, just really quick, in case you don't have time to look at the episode notes, I'll just read through the rest of the Stel Kesh notes. ...I guess actually I should pause and talk about goals.

Stel Kesh has a goal, a stated goal right now, and it is Divided They Fall.

Goals are things that are set up primarily for the patron faction of the player characters, and if you help your patron faction enough, you get a cool reward. So, for instance, there is "Assault the Foe: soften up a specific enemy held region in preparation for capture. This can be done by brazenly attacking that region, cutting that area off from reinforcements, gaining intel about the district's weak points, etc." And if you do that you get a benefit, you get a new move, and that move is "Vengeful: your Squad's righteous anger empowers their actions. When making an action roll against a squad that employs any player's rival, take improved effect." These are really powerful and cool moves, that is... Rivals are a big deal in this game, if you've listened to the *Beam Saber* oneshot we did you know that. And so the idea of like "Oh yeah, whenever you do an action roll against a squad that employs the rival, take improved effect" is *huge*.

I'm going to end up setting goals for each of these factions. The one for Kesh is... I mean, all of these are gonna be TBD, because who knows, and we'll go through character creation and be like "Oh shit, that goal's way wrong, here's a way cooler goal," or the players might end up with one of these factions as their patron and then they'll give me a direction on that. But for now I'll go over what these all are and what their benefits are, and then I'll say which one is the one that Kesh has.

The second one is Divided They Fall. "Manipulate the enemy's plans. This can be done by planting false orders and intelligence, disrupting communications, pitting enemies against each other, etc. The benefit is 4D Chess"—and this fucking rules, this move is the best—"you and your faction's agents synergize to pull off incredible feats of manipulation. A pilot can manipulate an active clock. Describe how you manipulated the situation to your liking. A pilot can spend up to 3 Stress to move up to that many ticks into any other clocks. If the being emptied has a negative outcome when filled, then the ticks must be transferred only to clocks that also have negative outcomes. If the clock emptied has a positive outcome when filled, then the ticks must be transferred only to clocks that also positive outcomes." So if you are like "Shit, we've almost broken through the shield, but what I *really* need right now is to finish filling this rival enemy's clock and get them the fuck off my back," you can just do that, right? You can somehow transfer that, and then what I would do is have you explain how does that work. What agents of Stel Kesh did you use—spoiler, Stel Kesh has Divided They Fall—how did those agents work in your benefit? How did you pull this trick off? It's very good.

Golden Streets is another potential goal, and that is “improve the supply situation of the patron faction. This can be done by improving wealth rating of regions, giving supplies to your patron faction, refusing supply rolls from your patron, etc. Make your faction money, and then you’ve done Golden Streets.” I should note that the way you do this stuff is there are clocks, you’re filling a 4-tick clock by doing actions, basically. And when the fiction gets there, and when you’ve ticked those clocks, you’ve successfully done the thing. When you complete Golden Streets, when you make your faction rich, you get the benefit “Beggars Can Be Choosers: the Squad know how to beg, barter, and steal for more supplies when they really want to. If each player that participated in the mission spends 1 Stress, the mission supply roll is rolled again, and the Squad gets the higher result. This can be chosen after the initial roll is made, this does not applied to the Bureaucrat’s Cook the Books ability.” The Bureaucrat is one of the playbooks in this game, and it rules. It is like a playbook all about making your downtime better, basically, it is the person who, like, burns the midnight oil making sure that you get the supplies you need, that you get the rest you need, and etc. It’s very good. But yeah, that move is good too. That move is just like “Hey, if your supply roll is bad, you can spend Stress to reroll it”, it’s good.

Hearts and Minds is another goal. “Change the popular opinion of a faction in a manner that benefits your patron faction. This can be done by protecting the populace from marauders in your patron’s name, publicizing the corruption of an enemy faction, shifting musical tastes in support of your patron, etc.” The benefit for completing Heart and Minds is “Recruitment Drive: the people have seen the glory of your faction, and want to be part of it. Cohorts now cost 1 squad upgrade instead of 2, as the populace flocks to recruitment centers.” As you might remember from Marielda, cohorts are like special NPCs that work for you, and that you can use the Command skill, the Command action to help you out with stuff—if you need a distraction, if you want someone to help provide cover fire, if you want someone to storm the palace gates, cohort are that. They can either be like cool and very expert individuals, or they can be more... not faceless, I wouldn’t say faceless, but more generic than that, right? You know, maybe you have an individual, you know, spy, but you have a group of thieves as a cohort, right? It can go either way.

Hostile Takeover is a goal that is “deny the enemy supplies. This can be done by blockading imports, destroying infrastructure, turning enemy supply sources to working for your patron faction, etc.” And when you complete that, you get Level the Playing Field. “You’ve worked hard to deny the enemy what it need to continue the war and your efforts have begun to wear down their squads. Choose a faction. All of the squads belonging to that faction permanently lose one hold, going from strong to weak at their current Tier, or weak to strong but in a lower Tier.” So, just like, instantly you just make another really strong faction less strong, not just one squad in that faction, *all* of the squads in that faction. You’ve starved them in such a way, that they’re just worse than they are, which is great.

Intelligence Coup, which is one of the other ones I was considering for Stel Kesh, “steal valuable information from the enemy. This can be done by acquiring VIPs, retrieving actionable

intel, stealing technological advances, etc.” And the benefit for that is Big Brother, “Between advances in technology and an extensive spy network, you can get answers you want. Once per session a Pilot may spend 2 Stress to ask the GM a question. The GM must answer honestly. This does not provide improved effect, improved position, or additional dice.” This also fucking rules. The idea that like “Oh yeah, our spy network is so good, that I can just ask the GM a question and find out the truth about a thing.” 2 Stress to ask me a question, *any* question, once a session? So worth it! I would spend that Stress every time! [He laughs a bit.]

The next goal is Manufacture Heroes, “act against a specific squad at least 2 Tiers higher than the players’ squad. This can be done by attacking regions controlled by that squad, denying that squad mission objectives, luring that squad into acting irrationally, etc.” This is very much, the way it’s described here, the focus on the players’ squad and less so about the broader factional idea. It basically only works when you think about it in terms of the players’ squad, because it’s very... Or I guess you can be thinking about them... about a faction... I guess, the Rapid Evening certainly tried to do Manufacture Heroes with a number of different squads over the course of COUNTER/Wright, so what the fuck do I know. The benefit for doing it is Poster Child. “Now that you’re heroes, your faction needs to keep you alive without removing you from action. Any Pilot can push themselves for only 1 Stress a number of times per session equal to their squad’s Tier”, i.e., if your squad’s Tier is I, if your squad’s Tier II, if your squad’s Tier III, that’s how many times you can do this, pushing yourself for 1 Stress instead of 2 Stress, half-cost pushes, “by revealing”, you’re allowed to do this when you reveal “how another squad belonging to their patron faction assisted them.” Maybe they gave you some special equipment, maybe they showed up and provided a distraction, maybe they called in with some supportive words, who knows.

The final faction goal is Secure Borders. “Take proactive measures to protect the patron faction. This can be done by removing enemy agents acting within the patron faction, weakening neighbouring regions, constructing defenses, etc.” And the benefit is like very much just a very physical thing, Nanolaminate Armor. “Molecule-thin layers of ceramic alloy composite are electromagnetically bonded to each other to create armor that is half the weight of standard vehicle armor, but maintains the same durability. Each vehicle can have 1 Nanolaminate Armor declared.” It is like armor, but it’s only 1 load, so it is better than regular vehicle armor, it’s like lighter armor, basically. Maybe not the most exciting of these, but still pretty useful.

So those are goals. For Stel Kesh I’ve picked Divided They Fall. Again, there’s a chance that that changes with conversations with players, with the way things shake out, we’ll see.

Going down the list of stuff still on this page, corruption is 5—that might drop to 4, but I think it might stay a 5, we’ll see.

In terms of aesthetic notes, notable NPCs, Vehicle Designs, additional traits, I’ve written: “Courtly, urbane, and largely incapable of exerting its force.” You know, it is... It has some strong factions in here, strong squads in here, but it is not a military faction, compared to some other

ones, right? It has a lot of cultural force, it has a lot of political force, but it is not swinging fists the way... At least not here on this moon, right? Again, that's kinda the thing that I wanna get to here. It is very much an information-based faction. Um... In like 10 minutes, if you haven't read this thing... less than that, you're gonna be like "What the fuck are you talking about, they have all sorts of military power!" And maybe they do.

They... we probably see an extension of previously seen Kesh architectural styles. I'm leaning maybe towards the early Baroque stuff that we saw a little bit in Twilight Mirage, less of the Victorian stuff.

In terms of NPCs I know that there'll be the Living Princept, I don't know what their name is, or what their pronouns are yet. I don't think that person will be on this moon either, actually. But maybe we'll see images of them, maybe they'll be printed on money, maybe they'll show up in statues, etc.

I do know, I have one Stel Kesh NPC, and that's Alise Breka who is... She is a guest lecturer at the university on the planet, and she is the author of *Renegade Hearts*, which is a romance/action series. I don't know if it's books, I don't know if it's plays, I'll figure out what like the predominant form of fiction is right now in this world later, but I do know that months ago on a livestream for Waypoint I mentioned... I said the words, the phrase "Renegade Hearts", and I was like "Damn... That's a good name for something." And I figured it out, it's definitely like the cool mech hero series, that's very much like the romance/action series of the day. So, so yeah. Alise Breka, she's a lecturer at this university, which is one of the factions, or one of the squads inside of the faction.

I don't know what these vehicles look like yet... It might be the case that Stel Kesh imports most of its vehicles outside of Divines... Or it might be that they have very old things, we'll see, I have some ideas... That's actually kind of a cool idea, the idea that they would be the faction that has—and now you're just hearing me do prep live—the idea that they would have... I'm just gonna write this down, I like this enough. [Typing] "Retrofitted/updated old mech designs. Literally mechs we've seen in this show before." So like, what if they had Rooks? What if they had the knights—what were they called?—the Saints from... Um... Saints, Anglers, etc. Saints were from Twilight Mirage, or the Hoplites from early on in COUNTER/Weight. I like that a lot! A think it's a really cool idea. And like, they've been retrofitted with contemporary technology, which might mean worse technology [he laughs a bit] in some of these cases. I think that's a very Kesh thing.

In terms of squads, things I know:

The Rapid Evening, Tier V, secret society pulling the strings. Rapid Evening but political, Rapid Evening but moving in the back halls of the palace, Rapid Evening but, you know, sending messages with birds, less so a military force, less so a secret agency force. Maybe still have some assassins in the midst, but not as much.

[00:45:00]

House Chasma, which is the family that is in charge of the intelligence efforts here... I might end up deleting it and rolling this into Rapid Evening, we'll see, I... We'll see. Again, everything here is TBD.

The other Tier IV one... So, that was Tier IV, this next Tier IV one is the Divine Order and Its Elect—Elects are pilots of Divines in this setting—and so yeah, the Divine Order is here.

House Whitestar—maybe a name that you could dig around in some transcripts to remember, or wikis, it is a late COUNTER/Weight reference—that is the noble house that the Anti-Princept is from... So, even the Anti-Princept aka the Living Princept, depending on who you ask, might be from... or might not be on screen, the House that they're from will be, right? So, here's an example of how there's this direct influence between the two. I don't know what they do yet, I'll figure it out. Again, this is not the episode where I build the squads, we'll talk about that in a few weeks.

House Brightline/Horizon. They're a group that we saw way back in the *Armour Astir* game... I've been calling that game *Armour Astir*², probably because I had Asterism in my head, but it's Astir, it's... *Armour Astir* is a pun, in a sense, on Mobile Suit. *Armour* is a suit, and to be *astir* is to be mobile, so it's a mobile suit, that's... Shoutouts to Briar Sovereign who made that game which is also dope, and people should check out *Armour Astir*. And so yeah, House Brightline is... They are monarchists and social reformists... I don't think they're loyal to the Anti-Princept. They might not be loyal to the Princept who has become the Apokine either, I don't know yet, I'll think on it.

Uh, Verglaz University—[trying out pronunciations] maybe Verglaz, maybe Verglaz... it's based on the word "verglas" but I put a "z" on it, 'cause sometimes putting a "z" on a thing is cool—Verglaz University is a major university... [He laughs a bit] Major University here in the area of the moon that the Principality of Kesh, Stel Kesh has taken over. That's Tier II.

The previous two Houses I mentioned, Brightline and Whitestar, are both Tier III.

And then a Tier II Hallowed Squad and a Tier I Hallowed Squad. And then a TBD ninth squad, I have no idea yet, another Tier I. Hallows are the mechs that have been kind of blessed by a Divine. They don't necessarily have a Divine with them, but they could be the representative of a Divine, right? So let's say Justice, right? There could be a Justice Squad, that has been blessed by the Divine Justice, although Justice itself might not be here, hence the low Tier level.

² With emphasis on the A in Astir, like "Aster".

These contrast with Hollows, and Hollows have not been blessed, they are not Divine, they do not have any Divine blessing, they are mercenaries normally, they are ronin, they're like that style, they're wandering... what's the word I'm looking for for a wandering knight that is like a European wandering knight? Um... [typing] Knight-errant is the word. Yeah, knight-errant, thank you. Not loyal to any particular Divine or House. Maybe to a faction still. And I think we'll probably get some Hollow squads when we get to Orion, and maybe even Columnar, we'll see.

And then, yeah, a ninth TBD squad.

And then finally, the region is the Verglaz Taiga. It is a polar region that is under Kesh control. I think it's the northern polar area of this moon. There is a Winter Palace somewhere, and I think it's probably at its most southern point, which is where a river meets the Prophet's Sea. Details TBD. We'll see.

Again, this is not an episode about regions, this is the episode about government types, and so. And so I've done that, I've done the government type, this went for 50 minutes give or take, so. Still went longer than I intended, so it goes. Hopefully I'll get better at this as I continue. Thank you for joining me for this post, that's a lot of me talking, so, apologies there. I hope you enjoyed it, and if so, let me know by leaving a comment in, you know, below [the post over on the Patreon page](#). For people who don't know this, these posts go up on the [friendatthetable.cash Patreon page](#), and you can scroll down and leave a note, so please do that and let me know what you think.

Thanks so much, and we'll have another one of these coming soon. Peace.