

[Drawing Maps - Season 6 Faction Creation Pt. 2 - Aesthetics](#)

Transcribed by Ril (@kaorukeihi)

AUSTIN: Hey, everybody! It is Austin again with another one of these catch-up Drawing Maps updates. Today we're gonna take the next step—and I actually moved some stuff around, instead of talking about Corruption, which was going to be the second step in our prep for factions, and going over that, we're instead going to talk about Aesthetic notes, notable NPCs, vehicle designs, and that stuff, because I had a big breakthrough in the last like week or so, of prepping for PARTIZAN, which is the name of Season 6. If you missed that because you didn't see it on social media, or or because you didn't hear it in the Post Mortem for Spring, that is totally okay, and in fact, I'm gonna kick things off today with some announcements, and and also—just so everyone could hear it again, or hear for the first time if you haven't heard it yet— the trailer for PARTIZAN, the next season of Friends at the Table. So, enjoy that, and I'll be right back.

[00:00:55 - PARTIZAN trailer]

[Jack de Quidt's "[HOURGLASS. SUNRISE. CRYSTALLINE.](#)" begins playing.]

AUSTIN: What might a just history look like? On the barren moon of Partizan, it might look like frozen time. Today it drifts in placid loops, third satellite of its system's largest world. But by the year 1423 of the Divine Principality's Perfect Millennium, when it is at the crossroads of a fractious empire, war will shake its orbit.

DRE (as Vessel's Gold in *Armour Astir*): These Divines basically wrecked my people. So even though I fought pretty much anything, when I saw you in the sky I went cold.

KEITH (as Pique Nideo in *Microscope*): We would like for it to be dedicated to Stel Nideo. A grand gesture for a grand House.

JACK (as Marianne Perfect in *Ech0*): In order to attune artillery unit sensors better, we are not told anything about our bodies before we inhabit them. We enter our mechs in darkness, and we leave them in darkness.

ALI (as Pidgeon in *Beam Saber*): No one needs to get hurt here, but I do need you to shut down the power to this facility immediately.

ART (as Memphis Longhand in *Beam Saber*): The only god Memphis Longhand has ever seen in a mech is in Memphis Longhand's onboard mirror.

JANINE: Uhh, anyway the thing I wanted to do was to mess with someone's blood.

SYLVIA (as Orbit Shard in *For the Queen*): If my Apokine decides to give me something, and tells me keep it close, I will keep it close to me, whether it's a weapon or not.

JACK: Hey, Austin?

AUSTIN: Yeah?

JACK: You wanna know what the weak point of a mech is?

AUSTIN: Yeah, what's the weak point of a mech?

JACK: The fucking pilot.

[Music stops.]

[00:02:32 - Announcements]

AUSTIN: Alright. I'm super excited about this season! You know that already, you know that I'm excited to play *Beam Saber*, which is, as always, a game by Austin Ramsay. You can find that on itch.io, if you just do a search for "beam saber itch.io" on your search engine of choice, you can find it that way, or you can go to austin-ramsay.itch.io, sorry, it's pronounced "Ramsay", not "Ramsey", it's spelled that way too, R-a-m-s-a-y... So, austin-ramsay.itch.io, you can find *Beam Saber*.

Other announcements. We have two new merch items.

The first is a—well, I guess one of these is a couple of merch items... Because it's a T-shirt in two different cuts, both fitted and straight cut, a poster, and also a hoodie, of the sequence in *Fall of Magic*, or featuring art of the sequence of *Fall of Magic*, where the party met the Gilded One. Which, if you haven't heard *Fall of Magic*, please go back and listen to that, it's in both the Patreon feed and the main feed, there's some great music from Jack on the main feed—I guess it's on follow-up games in the Patreon feed. The shirt is designed using the art by Simon Sweetman who's an incredible artist, who's done a ton of great *Friends at the Table* art, you've probably really enjoyed some of Simon's art before whether you know it or not. And you can follow Simon on Twitter [@SiSweetman](https://twitter.com/SiSweetman), and you can find the shirt at HeartoftheDeernicornr.com, you can also probably come to [our Twitter feed](#), and find a link there, or to mine [@austin_walker](https://twitter.com/austin_walker), I've done some tweets in the last couple of days about this. So, shoutouts to everyone there, we were working with Ross Cowman over at Heart of the Deernicorn—Ross Cowman who is the co-designer of *BFF*, and the designer of *Fall of Magic*, who also runs this print shop.

And we're also working with Ross on doing the warehousing and distribution and stuff for another product we've just launched, another piece of merch. If you go to friendsatthetable.shop—ooh, I just clicked wrong on my computer, and it made a noise at me—if you go to friendsatthetable.shop, you will see that you can now purchase Seasons of

Hieron cover art as posters. Those run \$15 a pop, or \$35 for the full set. It's incredible art, you've seen it on your phone, on your computer screen, or wherever you listen to the show, our own website, our twitter, etc. You can get those for \$15 a pop, or \$35 for the full set. As a note, you know, we're working with Craig Sheldon, who did the art for all of our seasons so far. He's on Twitter [@shoddyrobot](#), and this is a great way to show him some love too, as someone who's done a ton of our art—and we've obviously paid him for that art before, but it's a great way to be like "Yo! I have loved your art for years, shoutouts to you, here's some money!" So we're really excited about that.

Finally, songs that have appeared in some Live at the Table games—not all of them yet, but some of that music, including the Fall of Magic track that Jack recorded for us—is all up at [notquitereal.bandcamp.com](#). That music is incredible, the new art that Craig put together for our Live, like, album cover, is incredible too. Maybe I'll use that for this album cover too, that could be fun. For this like update, that'd be a fun one... It's not a Live at the Table, but makes more sense than the Bluff City art for me for this in some way, right? We don't have any Season 6 official art yet from Craig. We have a really cool placeholder piece that Ali came up with, using a planet I generated, which I'll talk about in a little bit probably, actually.

Alright, I think that's all of my business, I think it's all of the announcements to make. I wanna say, I did a previous recording, and it took me like 13 minutes to get through all of those announcements. It turns out like, knowing what you wanna say helps a great deal.

I guess one more little announcement, which is just that if you didn't listen to the Post Mortem, or if you did and you also saw us on Twitter or whatever, I wanna clarify on the release schedule thing. This week the Post Mortem will come out on Thursday, like normal, like a normal episode, it will be in the feed, then next week we're gonna take the week off. I think on twitter I said that the Road to Season 6 would start going into the main feed, though it'll actually start on October 3rd. I'm gonna spend the next week looking at that stuff and figuring out "Hey, how do we wanna cut this down? How are we doing that?" But everyone needs a break, the production team especially needs a break, and we also have other stuff to work on that isn't just the main show. Like, we still have this, we still have Bluff City, we still have a bunch of other stuff. That's all coming, and in fact, Jack sent me the next Bluff City song today, so I have to start sitting with that and figuring out what an intro sounds like again, so that'll be fun. So that will start... The Road to Season 6 stuff will be starting in the main feed on the 3rd, and then the Bluff City will be some time in October probably, will start coming back out, and we'll be recording another one of those soon enough too. And as always you can look forward to more Lives and other stuff like that.

I guess the last thing that was also in the Post Mortem—I know this is like... This is why it took 13 minutes last time—was that we did officially change our Tier lists on the Patreon, go take a look. The big thing is, we dropped... we used to have a \$30,000 goal that was: we would do a live show somewhere probably in the United States, 'cause that's where most of us are, and that was \$30,000. We've now dropped that to \$20,000, where we're already at, which means in the next year we're looking to do a live show that is not behind closed doors at a \$100+... \$200+ live game event, so not at PAX, not at SHUX, not at GenCon. Probably in a big marketplace city like New York or Chicago or LA, because flight prices and hospitality prices tend to be lower in those cities... Or at least you can get good deal

because of those locations, especially because there's a lot of airports. You won't have to take like a 13-hour flight if you're in the States to get there because of like a thousand different connections and stuff like that. So that is probably what it looks like, we will give you more information when we have more information. This will definitely be a next year thing at this point, won't be a this year thing, but it will be in the next 12 month is what we're aiming for.

There's also now a \$30,000 goal which is a new show, which is called a [Random Article](#). And you can go listen to, or watch a test version of it, if you scroll through... Actually, if you're listening to this you can click on... If you go to [friendsatthetable.cash](#), the Patreon page, and click on "Posts", then click on "Pusher Updates", you'll see a bunch of things that are for Pushers only, but one of them will be an update that is the Patreon like—what do you call it, not a test, but—a pilot, and that will now be unlocked for everybody, you can go listen to that, it's called Random Article. The premise is we go to Wikipedia, and for an hour we click on random articles. There's like a button on Wikipedia called "Random article", you click that, and then hey, it turns out there's some interesting stuff to talk about for an hour. It was really fun to do, I would love to do more of them, but it is the next big-big-bit Tier goal, because it does mean finding more time in our schedules, and our schedules are already also super packed.

So, that's it. I guess I cut 3 minutes. Whoa, I didn't even... Here's what I'll say, I wanna be clear, that 13 minutes did *not* include the trailer, the PARTIZAN trailer, so it probably would be more like 15 minutes with the trailer, so still doing okay, I'm still coming in early. I'm gonna take a sip of water, and then I'm gonna get into what is actually going on this week on this Drawing Maps update.

[00:11:32 - Episode begins]

AUSTIN: So, I think the first thing you're gonna notice if you scroll down into your feed, into the Patreon post, or into the episode description, it's just that there's a lot more detail in the update this week. And I think that's because when you do this sort of work, this sort of creative work, it often happen in a way that's not linear. It doesn't always mean that it's like there's exponential growth, sometimes you just hit a complete brick wall, and it fucking sucks. It is not a situation where it's like, well, day 1, you do 10%, day 2, you do 20%, and day 3, you do 40%. Sometimes it's, day 1 you do 10%, day 2 you do 5%, day 3 you do 2%. And it sucks. So you never know. It's also very rare that it happens linearly in the sense that like... You know, last week I basically said "Okay, well, the first thing you do when you build a faction in *Beam Saber* is you figure out the Government type, and you figure out its goan, than you figure out its Corruption, then you figure out its Aesthetics, and its notable NPCs, and its vehicle designs, then you figure out its squads, then you figure out its regions." It doesn't work like that.

Like, it does in the sense that you have to do all of those, it's rare that you do them all in order and it's even rarer that you'd do them all in order and *a/so* do them one faction at a time. Creative work like this, this style of worldbuilding, tends to be something that you do in kind of, you know, starts and stops, you sketch ideas out when you have them. Sometimes you have to hop out of the shower and write something down, or hop out of bed and write

something down, sometimes you have something in your mind all day and you can't quite figure out what it is you have in your mind, and then finally it aligns, and it's "Oh, *this* is the idea I've been having! Let me write it down!" And so, you do a lot of that. The other thing I'll say is that like sometimes you have 90% of an idea, and then that last 10% is really hard to find. Or sometimes you think that you are 90% through an idea, but really that idea is so much bigger than what you know, because on the way to the path you realize like "oh, I thought I was climbing a hill, but I was climbing a mountain", or you thought like "oh, I'm building a shed", but you're really building a foundation for a house. And that is kind of what happened this week, which was super exciting and super fun for me.

I guess I'll set it up this way. Months ago, I told the cast that I really wanted to capture... I've been thinking a lot about the actual-play podcast format and the way in which boldness, kind of largeness in design is really useful. Largeness or kind of broadness... Not to the degree of caricature and certainly not to the degree of reducing or rejecting nuance, especially in performance, especially in characterization. You know, smart characterization means nuanced characterization. But when we say "critical worldbuilding"—and I guess, critical worldbuilding also does mean that degree of nuance and reflectivity—but part of what the audio medium really really benefits from is me being able to say like in 10 words, what the deal is with something at a big scale, not only for you, the listener, but also sometimes for the players.

[00:15:00]

When you're doing an actual-play, there is an asymmetry of knowledge—I know so much about these Stels, about these big factions for Season 6, for PARTIZAN. The players... some of them know more, some of them know less, some of them were in a few games, some of them were in no games, or nearly no Road to Season 6 games. I guess no one was in none, but I think Ali was only in *Beam Saber*. And you shouldn't demand... I don't wanna demand that my players study my notes or something, I don't even want them to see my notes, right? And so, part of what I wanna do both for them, and also for the listener, who maybe is half-listening, or who maybe can't quite remember like, "Ah, Stel Colum... Columnar? Stel Kesh? What's the difference between those two again?"

I wanna find ways to communicate quickly their character in ways that reflect what is true about them, but also, again, does leave space for nuance and stuff like that. So, if you think about something I've compared this coming season to stuff like Legend of the Five Rings... Obviously people—I'm not a Game of Thrones fan, I'm not... This is not me dissing Game of Thrones, to be clear. Game of Thrones has never really brought me in. When people like think of the major Houses of Game of Thrones, you could probably describe them in a sentence or two in a way that makes sense even to me, a neophyte for that series. And in a show form, or in a book form, or in a visual form, you know, you could do that in a bunch of different ways, including character design including iconography. We don't get that ability, I can't literally move the camera and show you a Kesh palace, right?

And so, I needed to come up with, or I thought about this months ago, how badly I wanted to come up with a throughline for each Stel that was a one-word kind of phrase, or watchword, or like term, that summarized what it was, and then, you know, more than one-word after

that. So I've been thinking about this for a long time, you know, thinking about iconography and stuff too. Obviously if you listened to *Armour Astir* game from the Live at the Tables, you'll know that there is a big firebird, a big phoenix associated with one of the Stels. So, I was like "oh, they're cool, are there animals, are there mythological creatures tied to each of them?" Like, what the fuck is the thing that will help me communicate quickly what is up with these fucking Stels? And nothing came to me. I've been at it for months, you know, like... I've basically known it's five Stels, and it's some combination of the Stels we have here, plus some stuff I don't necessarily know yet. Fuck, what was it gonna be? I couldn't get it.

Then, over here, in this other place—I've moved my hands, I've put my hands out on my desk, as if to signify "over here, not at the same place"—I was working on another thing, which is that I knew that a past... a thing from a past season was going to come back under a new name, under the name the Divine Past. And I knew that there'll be like a Past, a Present, and a Future—I didn't know if they were actually gonna be on screen, I still don't think any of them will actually be on screen directly, but their presence will be felt. It's very funny to say the word "present" over and over now that I've said Past, Present, and Future as Divines.

But I didn't know what I wanted to do besides... Like, I knew the one—which is if you recall is a thing from *Twilight Mirage*—was going to show up here as the Divine Past, we talked about this in the *Microscope* game and in the kind of like addendum to that *Microscope* game. I knew that was gonna show up. But I didn't know what Stel it would be part of, I didn't know if Past, Present, and Future were all tied together as a single Divine, as like a special cool gestalt Divine, I didn't know if they were like...

I knew it'd be important, because a thing we talked about in the *Microscope* game, that I think is fundamental to this, and I want to be a 100% clear, Season 6, PARTIZAN, is a game about characters who are interacting with politicians, interacting with politics, interacting with war, that are driven by their ideal, and their goals, and—it's *Beam Saber*, it's about getting into big robots, it's about fighting for what you believe in, it's about, you know, coming up short, it's about learning how to work together with other people or failing to learn and facing the consequences. This is not a big metaphysical season, I'm about to get into some philosophy shit, but this is not what this season is. So if you're like "Oh, I can't do that again, I can't do a metaphysical season again!" I promise you that's not what we're getting into in PARTIZAN. but for me as a storyteller, I need to know what this stuff is. So, you know.

At the beginning of the PARTIZAN kind of timeline, when Aram Nideo is putting together Asterism, which is a big faith in this setting, he had in mind a specific goal. Which was the obliteration of space and time. He believed that the Divine Fleet from the *Twilight Mirage* had lived in a sort of perfect state of nature. Like, he believed we had sort of gotten back to... The state of nature is a phrase, is a thing that comes up in philosophy, and it means metaphorically sometimes, sometimes, like, genuinely, a time before society and civilization, kind of us in our natural states... Fucking as in take it or leave it as a metaphorical/rhetorical device. But what you do need to know is that there's different philosophers who think of it differently. Sometimes philosophers think of it like "Oh, we used to be like animals, then we'd learned nature..." or rather, "we'd learned how to be civilized, we'd learned how to get away from our animal natures." And there are other philosophers who believe that actually we

were pure, and good, and, you know, we shared, and didn't have ideas of mine vs yours, and that version of us was somehow more angelic. Or, you know, civilization is somehow impure, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah.

Nideo was one of those latter ones, and saw the Twilight Mirage or I guess the era before the Twilight Mirage, the Divine Fleet just kinda floating from place to place as... that's what humanity should look like. And so like a lot of tyrants, his belief was—I guess he wasn't a tyrant, but, certainly, a tyrant's philosophy—his belief was “Let's take over everything. If we take over everything, if everything is part of the Divine Principality, if divinity stretches from star to star until all of them are covered, then we will all be part of the same thing, we can't fight anymore, we'll get back to this prehistorical moment of perfection.” No more conflict. He's wrong, obviously. He was even wrong about the Twilight Mirage, the Twilight Mirage or the Divine Fleet had conflict, it had history, etc. etc. But because of that, because of his vision of like “I want to obliterate difference, I want to obliterate time and space, I want to reach a point where every Monday is just another day, and there's never gonna be a day when history happens, when something dramatic changes and...”, you know, maybe there's still rulers and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. That's what he wants in the way that's almost like the reverse of what some previous characters who come to mind, Our Prophet and Grace both had similar ideas, but he almost inverted it.

And so because of that I knew Past, Present, and Future were going to be important, the idea of obliterating time, of getting to a timeless empire, the empire that last forever, it's the only way you could imagine living is under this empire... So I knew that these would be important. But I didn't know... Again, I didn't know where they'd be, I didn't know who'd have them, etc. This past week those two different projects, these two different creative kind of branches of the PARTIZAN project... who I saw open up last week for... I don't know, for 100 Gecs. [He laughs.] I did not actually, there is not a group called Partizan Project. Actually there could be, I have not checked. [He laughs a bit.]

Those two projects, one of them being “What's up with Past, Present, and Future as Divines?”, the other one being “What are the throughlines, what are the one-word throughlines for these different Stels?” came together. And I realized, I was walking around my neighbourhood and I realized, what if each Stel had a different one of these? And so, what if like Kesh had the Divine Past? That kind of lines up, right? When you think about the Rapid Evening, when you think about Kesh from previous seasons—I don't wanna get into spoilers here necessarily, but think about it. Think about the ways in which they had interest in cyclical history, they had interest in protecting people from “progress”, or the march of history, think about how Kesh as a culture had always been symbolized with aesthetics of the past, whether that was Edwardian, or Victorian, or Baroque architecture, stuff like that. We talked last about how, you know, I think that they have... I think that they are leaning past already, I was saying, ‘cause I was like “Well, I think they use old mechs that are like retrofitted old mech designs from past seasons”, I was like so close! I was like right on the precipice of having this idea, I just couldn't quite get there.

And I realized, walking about my neighbourhood, thinking about all this stuff, like: Oh! It is that each one of these Houses has a Divine that is tied to one of these ideas. And that that idea flows through the entirety of that Stel.

So—we'll stay with Kesh, even though this is the Nideo episode—so it's not just that Stel Kesh has the Divine Past, which, again, is not even in the Partizan system, whatever the name of that system is, it's not *just that* that they have that. It's that they are the Stel that is about the past. Again, there's exception, there's always exception, there's overlap, there are differences that are like very minute, but for a quick reference... Almost like a fighting game character, or like a... You know, I like the idea of like a fighting game character, like, the clarity of like, you sit down to play Street Fighter, you see, like, Ryu—that dude knows karate, I bet he's like an average all-around fighter. Zangief—I bet he throws motherfuckers, he is big as shit. Like, you make those quick decisions, and, again, it's not like this is what we should walk around the world and do, but in storytelling and especially in a storytelling medium like this, and especially in an improv collaborative one, it's so good to be able to tell everybody involved like "Here's is our touchstone, here's our loadstar. Think about *this*."

If you wanna deal with something that has to do with the past: data and information retrieval, historical information, mysteries of the past, foundational laws and myths... You know, if you wanna know where something *was*... Kesh. That's Kesh. Kesh is about the past. That's why their mech designs are old mechs that we've already seen. Not just old mechs, not just like "Oh yeah, they're rusty." Mechs that you, the listener, if you've listened to past episodes, or past seasons, and that the players who have both played in and listened, know what a Rook is, they know what a Saint is, they know what an Angler is. And so like, playing in that same rhetorical and aesthetic space ties it back to this idea of the past immediately. And then at that point it's like "Oh well, then the squads can be designed like that too! And the architecture can reflect that too," right? So now I realize that the architecture for Stel Kesh should be this kind of Neo-Mirage style. Even though Stel Kesh was not tied to the Divine Free States, to the Divine Fleet, they are the ones who have kind of blended this... We saw a taste of this already actually, if you go back to Twilight Mirage, there's this hyper-Baroque blending of the Twilight Mirage aesthetic with the Rapid Evening aesthetic, and that is in one of the first arcs, it's the first half of the season, the Privign arc—that style, this kind of like gaudy, like, over-Baroque style. Too many curves, too many jewels, I feel like, you know, faux precious metals, faux gems, lots of fake augmented reality. This world does not have augmented reality the way Twilight Mirage or even COUNTER/Weight did. But I imagine like, you would walk down a causeway in a Kesh city, and there'd be like mist in the air that like bad holograms were being projected in, because they wanted to achieve the effect of augmented reality, even though no one had those sorts of like cybernetic implants, because you can't in this setting anymore—without them not working because of the Perennial Wave, to be clear.

So like, that's the stuff that's like "Okay, past, I get it, that's what Stel Kesh is." So, that breakthrough was *huge* for me. The next one—again, today we're gonna talk about aesthetics and this was like the big discovery for me. I'm not gonna go through all of them for all of the different Stels, but I *do* wanna talk about the Nideo one, because it was actually one of the hardest ones to do. We'll talk about Future. And we'll talk about the other two... I guess maybe I should address that. There are five Stels, past, present, and future is only

three things, right? Well. One of them is Past, one of them is Present, one of them is Future, I'm curious if you can guess which ones those are. Then one of them is Space—because again, this is about the obliteration of space and time—and one of them is Motion. It's kind of like I wanted to create... I wanted each of them to contribute to this notion of physical reality, right? And I don't think... I'm not a scientist and I don't think that that is a complete picture. I don't know that they think this is a complete picture, necessarily. But it is... Again, it's emblematic of the way that these groups work.

For Nideo, for Stel Nideo, I knew that they would be Present, because I wanted them, and I had already talked about them as being tied to these ideas of biopolitics and necropolitics, which are two philosophical concepts that are tied to kind of the discipline of the body and the decisions of, in the former case, biopolitics, the ways in which we're allowed to live, and, necropolitics, who gets to live and who dies. Not by sword, but by distribution of medicine, by access to resources...

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...by the ways in which populations and demographics, or populations and public housing, and you know, resources in that sense, are made available. You can look up necropolitics or biopolitics and start reading more if you'd like to.

So, I knew that was the case, and so for me they quickly became... Nideo was the Stel, or the Great House, of the Present. And so what else comes from that? And this is where it starts getting so useful as a storyteller, as you go: Okay, what else is about this moment? Well, they are about mass culture, the biggest of the big parts of culture, they are about political education, in contrast, I'd say, with Kesh, which is about kind of... I kind of wrote down that Stel Kesh was tied to... I'll pull up my notes here, 'cause I have a whole... I sent my players this huge breakdown of all this shit.

So. Stel Kesh: Past, university education, archives, archeology, lost information, staple goods that maintain the test of time—I've forgotten about that—like, Stel Kesh: the Past. Those are, that is... They're about rice, they're about sugar, they're about like iron—stuff that like we know people will continue to use for a long time—wheat, right? They are the guardians of myth and truth, and we talked about their mechs already.

Nideo, if Stel Kesh is university education, "Ah, what really happened, what... I wanna get to some deeper stuff!", Stel Nideo is elementary and high school education. And I mean it kind of literally, these are people who are setting the curricula for kind of the fundamental, foundational educational system, like, the one that everybody passes through. Nideo sets those standards. They are church, they are mass media and mass culture, right? So they are the press, but they are also entertainment. I don't know what the most popular form of entertainment is in this world, but that is Stel Nideo. They are also surveillance, right? And they're also the justice system.

And again, this is about like... It's not to say that those things don't exist off on some Orion, you know, asteroid belt colony a billion light years away, or whatever... I know that there aren't a billion years... you know what I mean, you know, forever away, it's not that like "Oh,

in that place no one is doing mass media". But when you're at the crossroads, like PARTIZAN is, and when you are trying to find the kind of like characters of these different places, this is what they've invested in, this is what they're interested in, these are the elements of their culture that lies to the forefront. This is not like, there is nothing in these people genetically in any way, it's not like that, it's not like "Ah, you have a journalist's build, you are built like a priest." It's not that at all, it's that culturally they've continued to prioritize these things, they found success by prioritizing these things, and historically have been shaped by these things, and shaped to continue to invest in these things.

So, Stel Nideo, again, elementary to high school, church, mass media and culture, surveillance, policing. They are the arbiters of modern moral and aesthetic good, which is to say, like... You know, what's good look like, what's it means for something to be beautiful? Stel Nideo decides what that is, right? In a similar way to the way that the Catholic church contributes to kind of making certain bodies feel attractive through the commissioning of art and stuff like that. The way that, you know, mass media today produces what they think of as normative body types, etc. Like, I don't even think they think of them as normative body types, but they kind of produce normativity through the body types that they highlight and the way that they highlight them.

The other stuff about Stel Nideo and this idea of them representing the present. They have the architectural design that, uh... Figuring this out was so useful. [He sighs.] I have a friend who's into architecture who once talked to me about how there's a school of modern architectural design— not modern, sorry, contemporary, modern means something else when you're talking about art and culture and stuff like that, it means a particular... You know, modern architecture is a school of architecture, is a period of architectural thought. Contemporary architecture, architecture from now, he was saying like, he was complaining that so many people build these skyscrapers that disappear from the skyline, it's as if they don't wanna be seen. And I was thinking about that. And they do this through like mirrors, and glass, and the way that they're shaped, they're like meant to disappear and reveal just the sky all around them, or the rest of the cityscape.

And I was thinking about that, and I was thinking way to make that even more like, you know, ominous, and I remembered something that someone wrote, I had to dig around for that for a little bit. And there's this quote from Nicolai Ouroussoff who used to be an architectural critic at the New York Times, who was writing about the Freedom Tower at what was Ground Zero in Manhattan, and he called that, he referred to it and the school around it, as "hidden medievalism". Because it was one of many recent building that... I'm gonna pull up the exact quote. [typing] That is was kind of hiding the fact that it was built to be a... I'm having trouble finding it, one second... That it was built to be a fortress, basically. I misspelled his last name, there's your problem, there's a second "f" there. He writes... here we go.

"The most chilling example of the new medievalism is New York's Freedom Tower, which was once touted as a symbol of enlightenment. Designed by David Childs of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, it rests on a 20-story, windowless fortified concrete base decorated in prismatic glass panels in a grotesque attempt to disguise its underlying paranoia."

And that idea of like, this is what Nideo is about. Stel Nideo is all about controlling the now, and they kind of project that even in their architecture, and so the kind of two-part technique that I think that they use, and I'm gonna read this below, one, is this idea of misdirection, they deploy the sort of "invisible" design elements I talked about, mirrors, glass, they place their buildings in such a way, that when they build cities, there's a lot of the city you kind of don't even experience as being around you. You could be around... not skyscrapers, I don't see this ...maybe in the biggest biggest biggest cities we're talking about skyscrapers, and even there you would have this thing of like, you don't *feel* them, you're not... You don't feel like you're small looking up at everything else around you, you're not like in a canyon, which is a way I've described being around skyscrapers before, you know, actually in the Rosemarrow arc of Hieron, I talk about those streets as feeling like canyons. You don't feel that way in towns built by Stel Nideo. So, that's one of the ways in which they try to hide that they are everywhere and they've built fortresses out of towns.

The second thing that they do is... There's a school of architectural design that is called critical regionalism, not critical realism, critical regionalism, which is like... It's more than just regionalism. Regionalism is the idea that you would take kind of... almost like outsider art style local architecture, and focus on that instead of like trained architecture. So, if you're from, you know, a culture that has lots of... that uses lots of local stone in its structures, and you're an outsider coming in, and you're gonna be regionalist about it, you're gonna use that same stone and use basic principles that they have. That's not what critical regionalism is. And critical is not like a code word here for like "I think it's good", it's called critical regionalism. They take local custom, they take local aesthetic, and they blow it out of proportion. Critical regionalism is a real thing, you can go look up this stuff, and what you'll see is like... Imagine a town known for like a big gate, you know, like an archway, imagine that but that archway is way fucking bigger. Imagine a town that's known for the fact that it's built houses into the side of a mountain. Well, what if you fucking built a giant house on the side of a giant mountain, or what if you make it so it feels like the houses are cascading down past each other like as if there were hills, even if there aren't hills. It's like emphasizing that regional character in a way that makes new development not just blend in, but underline the fact that this place is its own place. Which sounds awesome in some ways, but also for Stel Nideo it is then emphasizing that Asterist principle that everyone is its own thing, everyone is that kind of like, you're your own cell, but you are together a body, right? You're a part of the Divine Principality. And so they are partially ingratiating themselves with locals, and they're also partially kind of like bragging that they could do it better. Like "Oh hey, motherfucker, you like to have big orange gates? Well, we've got the biggest, orangest gate you've ever fucking seen."

So, the other half of that is, when you have a giant orange building and that's the one place that is bright colored in your city, everything else is kind of transparent, or has the appearance of transparency, or has the non-appearance, you kind of look past it all... You know where everyone's looking. It's very easy to make moves, when you know everyone is looking at the big giant orange gate that's at the center of the city, right? And so that is a huge part of their aesthetic.

And, you know, there'll be specific instances of this once we start building regions and building places, and once, you know, we have to have a fight inside of a Stel Nideo town, I'll

be able to use these ideas, I'm kind of seeding them. ...Or they'll never come up. This is the job. The job is getting this ready in case someone says "I think I know someone in the city that Stel Nideo is in control of." And I have to then be like "Oh fuck, word! What's their deal? Okay, I know about Stel Nideo. They are the ones who do this weird architecture, they are the ones who represent the present," right?

One thing that is this exact thing, this exact style of critical regionalism that we've already seen from the Divine Principality, but has actually kind of broken through and is everywhere is that the Stel Nideo's aesthetics include these like singular asymmetrical statuettes that can be part of fashion, or just be like on the side of one building as a gigantic statue. And then you end up looking at the statue, instead of looking at the building, right? Like, that's not a building, that's a statue. "Meet me at the Statue." And it's like "Oh, do you mean the barracks?" Like, "Oh, there's a barracks there? Uh, meet me at the Statue." There's a kind of game of misdirection happening here, right? There's a sleight of hand in their design. But that is the thing that we talked about with the Hypha game, going all the way back to *Dialect*.

So, Nidean art, Stel Nideo's art, and architecture, and fashion has this thing of just like, there's a cool statue hanging from your shoulder, or you've a ring that looks like a cool statue, all of that was lifted from the poor fucking Hyphan folks.

Their mech designs I know now, and those designs are normative humanoid bodies, right? This is like "oh, they're beautiful!" The note I have here is they're beautiful in the way "beautiful" might apply before you put on your critical thinking cap. That you have like... In your mind you're like "Oh, yeah, I know what beauty looks like, I know what a beautiful body looks like." And if you're like me, and don't have like a normatively beautiful body, maybe you don't just immediately jump to that, or, if you're like me and don't have a normatively beautiful body, you are in fact deeply obsessed with that fact, and even though you know in your rational mind that beauty standards are fucked and are fatphobic and racist and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah, and queerphobic, you still can't get over it, or you can get over it, but your first thought is still those beauty standards that have been compelled into your brain. That is... These are *hot* robots, right? In my mind I think a lot about these looking almost like... we've talked about, the old Divines look like Zone of the Enders mechs, sleek, you know, exaggerated, but not over exaggerated, etc.

There is one exception though, which is I think all of them have this one critical detail. Which is very, um... It's very important to me that this is true, but also is very clearly me up to my own shit, which is, all of their mechs have this 4x3 eye design. Which is literally the... 4x3, so it's like a total of, I guess, 12 lights here? Yeah, I had to make sure that I was not misremembering, that are...

[00:45:00]

It's literally the lamp from my dentist, I was fucking staring at this lamp for the last year of my life, and every time I look at it I think about a giant mech with it as its face. And now I can do it. And I think it's like this one thing that marks the fact that these are also machines that are watching you, that are paying attention. And so, I've linked this image here in the description, [those are what their eyes look like](#). It's like, you know, 6 on the left, 6 on the right, they can

light up in different colors or different sequences, I think they communicate with those lights sometimes, it's real creepy, I love it. I love it so much. It's creepy, and is also beautiful in this non-normative way. But it's cool.

So, those are, those are the aesthetic touchstones, I figured all that out.

Let me talk a little bit about these NPCs and some other stuff that we have here. I had to figure out what the church was like, and I also had to figure out—finally figure out the name of the different, the different ranks inside of the church, if that makes sense. Sorry, the different ranks, and also finally the two different schools. We knew that there was like Orthodox Asterism, or Old Asterism, and then we knew that there was Progressive Asterism, that's the one thing that the *Microscope* game made clear. Progressive Asterism and Orthodox Asterism. But I didn't like the name Orthodox, Orthodox has such a strong connotation in faith already, and so I decided... talked with some folks, and the thing they ended up liking was Received Asterism. Partially because it's like the Received Pronunciation, partially because it's like being a gift given us now from Nideo in the past, from Aram Nideo. So, Received Asterism is what I'm going with.

And I realized, part of this is also that I wanted to continue something that started in Twilight Mirage, which was rank tied to musical notes, or musical concepts, except different. You might remember that Aram Nideo, in kind of the supplemental material, was a Note, and then a High Note, and then I think a High Clef or something. And I feel like a thing that happened here is at some point someone in the church found some ancient, you know, note, newspaper, that was like "Ah, yes, Note Nideo". And they were like "Ah! Cool, yeah, that's how we should build our church." And so the ranks, which, again, you can see below, in the church are that there is... The top of the church is a Cycle. A Cycle is like as high as you get in the church, as like the singular executive body, or executive person at the top, your Pope analogy is the Cycle. Then, below that is someone who is in charge of a big sector of space, that is a Song. Below that you're a Passage, and you can either be a Chorus or a Verse, I don't know what the division is there yet. I can think of ideas, but I want to sit on it and I really want to pitch it to my crew and see what they think. I'm very excited to be like "What's the difference?" to somebody else. Again, I have ideas, push come to shove, I could tell you what those are, but, I'm not asking for ideas here, but I like that ambiguity there, and I'm excited on the microphone to be like "You tell me." Melodies are underneath Passages, Chords are underneath Melodies, and Notes are the lowest level. I bet that those are like lay people who help at this point, right? Like, "Note Walker, can you please bring the candles up to the front," etc. It's like, I'm not, I'm not even... "Note Walker is going to do the reading today." I'm not, you know, clergy, but...

And as part of that, as part of figuring that out, I realized that this planet, even though it's not... This is a planet that's super important to Progressive Asterism, Received Asterism still has a presence here, and will probably even keep a Song here. And so the Song of Partizan is Aleel Verdicate, whose name you can see spelled below. And then there are some other names. I don't quite know what all of these people are or what they do, though you might see a couple of names that show up either in the squads below, or somewhere else. So just some cool names are here in the list too, I'm not even gonna go over those quite yet.

Do know that I've spent a lot of time as part of that Past/Present/Future/Space/Motion stuff thinking about names, thinking about... Those names shouldn't have to do with those things, it isn't like a thing where it's like "And all the Past names sound old-timey", though, again, if I had to come with something off the top of my head, those are things that are good touchstones to have. But I did... I have been thinking about them, I have made some ties to some past stuff here.

And below that on the description you can see some cool squads. And you'll note again, these squads have way more description than what there was for the Stel Kesh ones last time. And yet again, that's just what happens. Sometimes you're just like, you have a breakthrough, you go on a run, you get a bunch of cool ideas, you know. And that is what's happening here, so I hope you enjoy reading those.

I hope you enjoy, this like, me talking about this thing that drilled into my head. I'll talk more about why the other Stels are the things that they are. I'll also say that if you have seen the trailer post on Soundcloud, or if you've seen the really call the really cool Road to Season 6—what do you call it?— emoji that is in the Discord, you'll see like that there is a map. I used the great dunjon map generator, and put in a ton of different prog gen seeds that would generate potential different like planets until I found one that matched what I wanted. And so some time in a future update, probably for the region one, I will show what that map really looks like, and how it all divides up.

I'm really excited to show that off too, but I've decided that this update already has a lot in it, and already has a lot of me rambling for a long fucking time. So, I hope you enjoyed this, and I'll be back again in the near future with another one of these.

Peace.