

[Drawing Maps Audio 09: Season 6 Faction Creation Pt. 8 - Revisiting Kesh + Wrap Up](#)

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AUSTIN: Hey everyone, I fucked up. I fucked up and I made another Drawing Maps post. I said I wasn't gonna do that, I said that I was done for the pre-end of the year break, that we're gonna focus on getting PARTIZAN 00 and 01 out the door, I was gonna focus on Bluff City stuff, and I've done all of that. Also I've done this update, this Drawing Maps update.

I did it for a couple of reasons, and I'll talk about what it is in a second. There is a degree to which I wanted already, having finished that last one, to just talk about like... wrapping prep and getting into play—without giving specifics away, we're not gonna talk about characters, we're not gonna talk about sessions, you know, stuff like that. Um, but like a— a post-pre- no a Post Mortem, but a Post Mortem on the prep, right? A prep Post mortem. What would I do different, what went well, etc. Things like that.

The second thing, and we're gonna start there, is Stel Kesh, which... I hadn't realized how little, um, the— Actually these two topics are kind of intertwined a little bit. Because part of like a Post Mortem in this sense is really not Post Mortem, it's the final steps. It's like okay, you've done all this other stuff, now what? What do you do at the very end? So Post Mortem is kind of wrong, a wrong way of thinking about that. But the other day in the— In fact, I actually had an idea to do this before the other day when this thing happened. Because I had another like breakthrough around thinking about this one faction, Stel Kesh. But also the other day during a conversation in the Discord it came up... I referenced one of the squads in Stel Kesh. And I was like "Oh, read that, that'll give you some information, if you go back and read that!" And I realized- I was made to realize: Oh, right. Stel Kesh was the first of the... of this set of Drawing Maps updates, which means that it is the least developed in terms of everything, in terms of everything except for what that specific Drawing Maps update was about which was government type. And even then we mostly just talked about them in terms of *Beam Saber's* kind of categories of government.

And that was useful. But it can also be useful to kind of, from a wordbuilding sense to double down on that stuff and revisit it, and fill in the blanks once you have all those other things down, right? I knew there would be squads, I had like a few ideas for squads if you go back and look at that update. What I didn't have were exactly what those squads were, which I have now. What I didn't have was like an understanding of why characters were named what they were named, or if they... you know, names for specific characters. Here I'm thinking of Cynosure Kesh and Dahlia, the kind of rival pretenders to the throne. Did you know that "pretender to the throne" does not mean someone who is faking having the right to the throne? It just means... a pretender is just someone who has a claim to a title. So, they are both pretenders to the throne, which is great from a sort of evocative terminology aspect, or perspective.

Anyway. I wanted to go over some stuff that I figured out with Stel Kesh, and then if you check the update itself, you'll see that it's a full update now, with all of the squads + you

know, some additional notes on aesthetics, what the mechs look like, stuff we'll be talking about, but also like the regions. You'll see that there is some good description of the kind of major places here. And I... there's a chance that those were included, maybe they weren't, maybe they were in the past update, I actually don't remember if the stuff showed up in the Regios update, because I did it anyway... I did it by then, or whatever. But if not, it's still in this update. So I just wanted to give you those things, and then talk about what it is to kind of wrap back around to something like Stel Kesh, when you have a— When you have a good idea, you know, even after you started to record.

So, I guess I'll say that the big... the big thing that I— The two big like steps forward with Stel Kesh that I figured out were. Actually, let me back up a little bit and talk about the problem... Let me take sip of ginger ale and then talk about the problem I was having.

Um, so. The problem I was having. Where does Stel Kesh end, and where does Stel Nideo begin? What are the big qualities of Stel Kesh and Stel Nideo? Uh, well, they are human-focused factions, they are the two factions that are the most human-centric. They both have a history of kind of being manipulator and backroom dealers, right? Once you start thinking about the Rapid Evening, you start thinking about, you know, the Nideo clan, and how that all worked over the last, you know, over the Draw— over The Road to PARTIZAN games, and the ways in which we saw people like Pique Nideo, and... there's another Nideo who was named... who had a good name, I forget... I forget what their name was. In general it's like, it's hard to... you know. Oh, they're both very hierarchical, we know that. Um, one of the ways I started thinking about it was: can I say which one of them falls into the kind of like Byzantine Empire and which one falls into the Roman... or not the Holy Roman Empire, the Roman Empire, the Ancient Roman Empire? In terms of like, uh, stereotype or archetypical empires in terms of degrees of bureaucracy, or you know, histories of internal conflict, stuff like that.

So yeah, one of the- This was a kind of big thing, was like... So, which- To what degree- How do I separate these two powers that have so many things in common? Um, and one of the big spots where we knew- I knew for sure there was some differentiation was faith, right? I knew- we knew that Stel Nideo is the kind of hea— the ideological and religious heart of the Principality, especially in the era pre-Progressive Asterism. But I didn't really— But even that was just a void in Kesh. I knew that Kesh was a cryptocracy, which meant, you know, as a reminder, it says type of government in which someone is pulling the strings, but it's not the people who you think pulling the strings, right? It's- it's- That can mean a bunch of different things, you know. It could be an oligarchy— I mean, in the book it's specifically a type of olig- a different type of oligarchy.

It's like an oligarchy with additional kind of walls put up between the average person and the person in power, right? You can live in an oligarchic state, where you can go like "Yeah, the people who really run things are the billionaires", right? This is an oligarchy. But you could also live in a state where it's like... there's an oligarchy in which only people who are part of a secret society, or only people who own a certain amount of land can vote, and they vote secretly on a secret ballot, or only people who have access to a certain sort of technology

may be able to vote. You know, that technology can be something like reading. [He laughs a bit] Etc. There are ways in which cryptocracies can hide themselves from you.

And so we knew *that* was true about Kesh, and different and distinct from Nideo. And so, I was like, okay, can I build on that a little bit? And how do I differentiate from Nideo? And so, the two things that ended up coming to mind for me and helping to untangle this were. One thing is— Two important things to me. Gundam. I don't know if you've heard about this, Gundam, Mobile Suit Gundam. Specifically, in this case, Mobile Suit Gundam: Iron-Blooded Orphans, a show that you will hear me talk about in an upcoming Waypoint episode, in one of the end-of-the-year episodes of Waypoint we're gonna talk about pop-culture from the decade, and I talk a little bit about- about Iron-Blooded Orphans, and like my- my love-hate relationship with that show, and the ways in which it's dominated my thinking since it came out earlier this decade.

But the other thing is statues. And these two things are kind of similar to me. And if you scroll down and look at the descriptions of the Stel Kesh mechs, which has been updated, you'll get a little bit of taste for that. I've realized somewhere along the line, that one of the big differences between Stel Nideo and Stel Kesh is that Stel Nideo has lots of art inspired by Divines. You'll find statues of Divines. You'll find statues that are not of Divines but might be in relation to a Divine. As always— I go to the Divine Courage a lot for some reason. It's just a fun one to say, I guess. And so, maybe you have a Divine that looks like the Divine— or maybe you have a statue that looks like the Divine Courage, *or* you have a statue that is meant to *evoke* the Divine Courage, right? You have a- you have a piece of art that is supposed to evoke the, you know, Righteousness or- or— I'm not saying that Righteousness is with Stel Nideo here, necessarily. Nor am I saying... Nor am I saying that the only statues you would find in a Stel Nideo like church are statues of *Nideo* Divines. As a reminder, the church is the church, and though Stel Nideo... It tends to be in Stel Nideo's hands, like... Like many other major faiths, you know, worldwide, you could still have a large pantheon, or a large collection of icons, right?

So, that's Stel Nideo. Stel Kesh has lots of statues of people. I realized that somewhere along the line, a thing that I have forgotten about Stel Kesh... and maybe I kind of stumbled back onto this while thinking about the Branched that we talked about recently. Is that they are very humanist. And that in fact they are... they are very, not just humanists but like.... They're humanists both in the ideological sense, by which I mean they center the human, they have a sort of secular heart to them, they have a sort of like, you know, belief in the fundamental value of human life, and they maybe even understand humanity broadly, despite being primarily human in makeup and demographics. They're also very humanities. I've already talked about them in the past as academia, as, you know, theory-focused, as scholarly, etc.

And so, I like... I realized that if the Branched were post-humanism, and—I think I've written here in the notes below, which, again, you should read all the way through, I'm not gonna read them all through, you can hear my voice is not great right now—you know, if the Branched are post-human in the most indifferent, and frightening, and liberating way, then Stel Kesh is humanism at its most appealing, and comfortable, and insidious way. What I

mean by this is you can think about Stel Kesh— And here's another thing I've realized that was always true about Stel Kesh is that as far back as Kesh first showed up, as far back as Principality of Kesh first showed up, we were evoking or gesturing at a sort of like end of the Age of Reason vibe with them, right? You know, XVIIIth century, XIXth century Enlightenment Era shit. All the way down to their names, right? Their names sound like fucking... things that you- words that you would find in a romantic poem, that is, a poem from one of the Romantics, you know. You know, Addax Dawn: the name of an animal and the name of time of day. Keen Forester Gloaming. That is like some Byronist— you know, Byronic shit, right?

And so it's in the same mix and milieu of thinking about the nature and the human- I know the Romantics don't necessarily one-to-one line up with humanism, right? But you don't get to the Romantics without going through the Enlightenment. And in general Kesh has always had this sort of Enlightenment turn to them. They have— you know, think about the way they've— the way they've positioned themselves in both COUNTER/Weight and in Twilight Mirage as defenders of sapient life, people who were going to push back the scourge of "Annihilation Class Objects", people who were fundamentally, in trying to improve things—I touched on this a little bit in the kind of outro/Easter egg to the last episode of The Road, in which Keen Forester Gloaming basically says like: I thought history was progress, and that, you know, basically that things were bending towards justice, and so all I had to do was keep things on track. That even if there were some dips there, long-term, history moves us towards progress, moves us towards equality, etc. And the thing I wanna hit here is specifically the way in which this line of thinking does not necessarily do that, right? The Enlightenment is this incredible moment in human history, in European history, where there's a break with the church, there's an increase in secular education, there's a move towards real, you know, representative democracy, and increase in representation, and also it's an extension of misogyny, it's an extension of- of- of, you know, it's the ground of which a new sort of normative, good, white, straight man is born. Certain ideas of- of humanity are put into place that come from genuine philosophical or scientific engagement with new ideas about what it means to be alive, or what it means to be, period. And yet the Enlightenment also enables an entirely new style of "scientific" racism, right?

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It emerges from Enlightenment Era thinking. You know, the Enlightenment is- is... The Age of Reason is the period in which, you know, the European powers decide to caught up Africa, the European powers decide to begin to colonize, you know, Southeast Asia, East Asia, the rest of the world. This is, obviously, the Americas. "The Age of Discovery" is in line with the Age of Reason and emerges from the same, you know, a similar wellspring of emotional and rhetorical "We Can Do This" thing. You know, the beginning of the Age of Discovery obviously predates the Enlightenment Era, and is actually, you know, dressed up often as a sort of religious mission, in the kind of clothing of saving the souls of the damned, etc. But in time that just gets replaced with Enlightenment Era bullshit about bringing knowledge and culture to the backwards tribesmen of the deep jungles of South America and Africa. It is- it is, you know, one excuse replaced with another, and that degree of kind of paternalistic, uh, verve has always been there in Stel Kesh— or in Kesh, going back to the

Rapid Evening, going back to, again, the best parts of who the Rapid Evening have always been. Go back and look at the Rapid Evening characters in COUNTER/Weight, when they definitely played a role that was still at least a little bit more heroic. You still find them as being above it all, and better than, and knowing more than, and trying to guide the world. That is at the heart of who Kesh is, like, both, you know, aesthetically, when you think about the sort of like eras of fashion architecture that we've gestured at before, the ways in which we positioned those characters often as knowing more than other people, being sort of above the fray. There is a very like... It's so easy to think about the sort of Enlightenment Era philosophers as being from Kesh, right? As people who like "Ah, yes, everyone else is engaged in the world, and we would love to be engaged in that way, but first we have to- we have to solve this other much more difficult higher-level problems, do you know? And we have to do it from a position a priori, right? We're doing *real* philosophy and science up here, not your kind of more like grounded gritty street science. We're not— You know, you might me a street philosopher, but I understand the nature of the Galaxy." And they've always been condescending in that way.

And so, that kind of opened up this door in terms of both their aesthetics, and their government, and everything else. It also let me realize the centerpoint of their mech designs should always remain the person, the humanoid. You know, I said before that statues of people are a big deal, and they may be not always humanoid statues, in fact I think that there's a degree of like "We have statues of Talonites!" You know, "We think that this such-and-such Talonite is a great example of what a non-human, you know, could do in the world, and so we've built this great statue of a Talonite", or whatever. It's like, fuck off. Y'all don't walk that walk. But that is, that is in there.

And so I think that that was... That's like one direction, and I realized that should extend to their mech design. What I've written here, and I will read this 'cause mechs are important to me: While Kesh of course fields front line fighters in AdArm (the Adamant Arms and Artifice company) and from Zenith (which is the kind of group, collective, kind of governmental project from Columnar that a lot of prototype designs come out of) mechs, there is also a serious culture of mechs as familial heirlooms, like suits of armor passing down a line of knights. This means that over time—I didn't finish this quote here—This means that over time mechs often change in character and form, but keep a sort of continuous throughline that you can trace back like lineage. So, as before: Retrofitted/updated old mech designs. Literally mechs we've seen in this show: Rooks, Saints, Anglers, Hoplite, etc.

BUT ALSO: Even the mass produced mechs that are used by Kesh have to evoke some mythological past. Which, in this case, I mean robots that fucking duel. In the same way that—there's a nice overlap here, and this is why I was thinking about Iron-Blooded Orphans. If you've watched Gundam: Iron-Blooded Orphans I think that it's like 40 episodes, 35 episodes in before something has a beam weapon. Iron-Blooded Orphans, as far as Gundam goes is like lots of melee weapons, lots of ballistic weapons, but aren't beam sabers per say, I think, ever. Is that true? Maybe I'm lying about this. I have a hard time remembering... Let me see [typing]... "beam saber ibo"... Um... Yeah, I don't think there's any beam weapons, um, and in fact... Yeah! In fact, beam weapons get used at one point,

and the contemporary like armor of the time just like doesn't— doesn't concede to it in a really interesting way. Anyway.

Those are the mechs that have this very like humanoid form. They often almost look like as if there is a human frame or like a skeleton underneath armor that the machines have put on. Like, armor plating as if it is armor. But more stylized than that, you know, not just stepping into medieval suit of armor necessarily, but armor plating around the muscles of the machine. There's a great—in fact I should link it in this piece, or in this- in this section of the- of the update—[there is a new model, a Master Grade Gundam gunpla model of the main mech from Iron-Blooded Orphans](#), and you can see this just like... the way the torso looks is so detailed, there's these pistons that like really communicate all of the mechanical works that is going into making this thing move around like a person might move around. And a lot of that is on display, and like almost like a shawl over it is the heavier armor that's meant to protect the body, the kind of like inner workings.

These are machines that almost have calves, right? That was something I was thinking about this morning, was like, Kesh machines have calves. And they might even work the way... not exactly the way human calves do, but like, there's a calf muscles, and maybe it's gears, and is steel, and whatever else, oil. But like, that's— there's a protrusion where calf muscle should be. There are, there is the breadth of the chest for a mech that does lots of like heavy lifting, and slamming, and stuff would be there. And it's not bioorganic, right? These are not- This is not the Columnar stuff that blends, you know, bio... It's also not Stel Orion, where like it's *about* showing off the- the gears and like almost fetishizing the machine work to the degree that you might show something that doesn't need to be shown at all. This is just like, we're trying to rep—

This is “we built them to look like us”, right? We could have made them look like anything but we made them look like us—Stel Kesh did that, right? To the degree... The reason, the other reason that IBO is nice here is I think back about COUNTER/Weight, the Rook (which was like, our first grunt mech, to the degree that I know some people who thought that the word “Rook” was a real thing for mechs 'cause they hadn't watched any mech shows before)... I was just thinking in my mind that it was the Graze the whole time. The Graze is the kind of grunt mech from Iron-Blooded Orphans. And at that time, it's not like I sat down and did this sort of like long-term worldbuilding, it was like “I'm watching this Gundam show and it's dope, I like those designs, those seem cool.” Whereas in retrospect like, they didn't— they didn't really fit COUNTER/Weight in terms of communicating something about the aesthetic. It was just like the thing that was in my head. Here I think they communicate a *lot* about Stel Kesh. And so that *style* of mech is what I think that they... what they do, right?

Again, what I've written here is that Kesh Mechs “feel” like people wearing beautiful armor plates. They- they have a degree of— you know, even the ones that are new, even the ones that are not just retrofitted, or upgraded, or maintained heirlooms, even the new ones feel like you build a very good body, a frame, a, like, skeleton, and then on top of it you layer on those plates. Whatever also in here is like if Stel Nideo's mechs feel like human bodies pushed to the extremes of normative like humanoid beauty standards, then- to the point of

almost seeming angelic or creepily angelic, Stel Kesh is simple—it's humanoid bodies adorned with armor. They both...

Those two Stels should feel close, there should be a sort of familiarity and friction between the two of them, so close that they kind of rub against each other a little bit. But where they diverge is this idea or this premise is that humanity is fundamentally the best thing in the world. They might say that humanity include anyone who can think the way a human does. The Principality of Kesh certainly, you know, eventually learned to make space for Divines to the degree that they became a part- a key part of the Divine Principality. But that reverence for the Divine is almost intellectual, not spiritual if you're from Stel Kesh. You... You *respect* your- You go to church, you know? You might even have a favorite Divine, or a Divine that means something special to you, or all that shit. But they are not quite... It's not that they're not true believers. It's that maybe they have- They lean more towards the idea that the Divines represent the state, right? Like... Even more than even Stel Nideo does. There's a degree to which Divines are a daily part of life, and are important to who you are, but you only go in Christmas and Easter, right? Or they're, you know... key to those people who need them in their lives. But as a noble maybe that's not you, you know? I'm glad that there's a Stel Nideo Received—not Received... oh, yeah, Received—Asterist Church downtown, or, you know, towards the residential district, but I just meet with my own priest on my own time, and just talk to them about my struggle. I don't need to go to services. Or if I go to services, I go to be seen, you know. I go to make a big deal out of it. Stuff like that.

And along with this, I think one of the things I've realized was that there's a good line— This came up in a conversation briefly... It's something I've been thinking about already, but kind of laying it out this way was really helpful for me. There was a conversation in the Discord also about whether or not... What was the thing that Stel Kesh could bring to the table in terms of imagining that being a place from which a revolutionary or radical change could come from. You know, we've already kind of talked about the ways in which Stel Apostolos very obviously could be a place where revolution could come from... but also a place where fascism could sneak up on you, right? Each of the Stels has this kind of low-key capacity for revolution, but none of them has all of the pieces. None of them have all of what you need to- to kind of enact global histo- or galactic historic change.

You know, Stel Orion certainly has some people who are developing class consciousness, but they don't necessarily know what to do with that class consciousness, or they certainly don't have the backing to build that into something. You know, Stel Columnar as being, you know, largely non-humanoid, they- you could imagine a world in which they are the ones who can breach some sort of relationship with the Branched which is more than just hostile, right? They've already given away— or not given away, they're already not— They already don't have human bodies. And have a particular distaste—that we've talked about—for what human bodies “demand” of their culture. That's a different relationship from what the Branched have with humanity, honestly, but it's still something that's not just humans. Anyone has something like that.

And so for Stel Kesh the thing that I was trying to explain was like, it is, um... It is theory. These are the- This is the one place— It's theory, and history, and knowledge, right? The

Stel Orion worker who is slowly developing class consciousness can very easily be convinced that what they are going through is ahistoric, and is incidental, and is... "You know what, you just got a bad manager. Fucking shame. Ugh, someone corrupt got in the system and gunked up all the works." Right?

Someone in Stel Apostolos who, you know, might realize that the best thing for them in this culture all about change could be trying to enact a world in which they're not at constant war. There's no sense of history there that makes them think "Oh, if we don't do this thing— or, If we don't change things, there could be a huge cost to us long-term," so devoted is the culture to constant change and reinvention. There's no sense of like "Oh, we- sometimes it's good to pause. Sometimes we've hit something good and we can stay in that position."

You know, Stel Nideo has an incredible way of communicating to the world, and has this, this... the by-in of everyone. Like, ideologically people are bought in. And so if you can communicate through that vector something revolutionary, something rehabilitative, something radical, you know, maybe you- they could easily change the world, right? Like, if Stel Nideo was led by radicals, they have a mechanism in place to organize people very quickly. You know, I am—

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I have a very long and complicated history with faith, and when I was at my most... When I was flirting with the New Atheism instead of the kind of philosophical Atheism that I ended up landing on, the kind of more classical, historical one... When I was like 20 or whatever, and was first reading Hitchens and- and, Dawkins, and these people who were just vehemently, angrily anti-faith, anti-religion, very secular, you know, thinkers, etc. "Thinkers", umm... [He laughs a bit] One of the word here that I mean is Islamophobes. Um, one of the things that I couldn't quite wrap my head around with them was their disinterest in engaging with the ways in which the black church was key to the civil rights movement in the US. Which was not to like wash the hands off the Roman Catholic Church during crusades or of any religious group- or of the Roman Catholic Church during Holocaust, or any religious group that is allowing or pursuing genocide or conquest.

But there was never this— The thing for me was, like, it's so obvious that what the church allowed for for civil rights was a place for organization, a place for debate, a place for figuring out what next steps were going to be in the cause. And that was not going to be made available for them through the government which didn't think they were people, they didn't think we were *people*. But because of the possibility space that shows up when there's a church— I mean, this is why people bomb churches. The reason that white folks bomb churches in this country was because it was the one safe place black folks could organize and push for better conditions. They could get together and plan and make changes. And so to remove that... We're already scared in our homes, but if you could remove the church as a safe place, suddenly that becomes a way to prevent people from being able to organize in this way. And so Stel Nideo has that, has people who believe and who come together in a space and worship, and blah-blah-blah. Like, that's not nothing. So, that is an aspect.

And so for Stel Kesh what I realized was, it is about having a history, about having that space to do the academic theorization, about having the space to develop a longer argument for what might be a better world. Are they doing that, in any of those cases I just listed? No! You know, if you were, it's dangerous to do it. It's hard to even imagine it, when you're so so inside of it already. Especially at this point where it has been 5000 years, and this is the first little flicker of an idea that this thing could shake or fall. Or it could split, or whatever, right? And so maybe that we'll see in play if that stuff kicks up.

But for Stel- for Stel Kesh I realized it is that, it is theory but it's not praxis, right? It is the academic classroom, but it is not protest in the streets. It is the person who has access to the libraries but doesn't know what to do with the information, is overwhelmed by it, gets this sort of Derridian archive fever, right? "How do I even trust the archive? Is there..? ..." You've seen some of that in Cymbidium already. And, and... I think maybe the, the... the thing that kind of sealed the deal for me was realizing that the, uh... Slate Political Gabfest's David Plotz would be Stel Kesh. Because all of these things- all of these things I'm saying "Oh, they believe in the power of humanity, and they believe in academia, and intellectualism, and research, and science, and the humanities, and the value of art, and culture, and human achievement, and they have statues of people because they are impressed with people, and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah." All of that is true. And also, these are the motherfuckers who are like "I think it's just easier if the people in power can make decisions that are best for the people behind closed doors. Transparency can put a brake on policies that would help people generally." The kind of "behind closed doors" fetishization that you see from certain folks who like truly believe in elitism, right? Anti-populists who think the less people know about governance the better. Or, yes, you should know enough about who to vote for, but once you vote for them you don't need to know the particulars about what goes on behind closed doors, and the handshakes that are being made, and the kind of- this kind of a realpolitik like... "I'm above it all. You don't understand, Washington is a game..." bullshit. That is Stel Kesh, right?

So I've kind of developed it out a little bit here, if you look down in the notes again, how Stel Kesh is, um, organ— Like, what the government is organized like. And then, again, it is a cryptocracy which means everything I'm about to say could be wrong about how it actually functions. And in fact, if you look at the squad list you'll see that there's absolutely a group here that is like... has its hand in everything, that is kind of secretly pulling the strings to at least some degree. What I've written here is: 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 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?

Some additional detail: Kesh is technically something like a constitutional monarchy, though one with very few real voters. It's chief governmental body has five major legislative bodies, or kind of like subbodies, or branches, I guess, each of which is— I guess it's not branches,

more like halls or like, uh, wings or something, right?—each of which is said to carry a single vote when it comes to the establishment of laws inside of Kesh territory. Those bodies are:

- The Hall of the Elect: which is literally all of the Elects of Divines of Stel Kesh
- The Hall of the Ecclesiast: which are high ranking members of clergy that reside inside of Stel Kesh (which some say gives Stel Nideo an outsized influence on Kesh politics. Probably true.)
- The Hall of the Fundament: which are made up from the highest ranking members of the nobility. Each ranking family gets to submit one person, or send one person to court, basically, as their representative, and the kind of like House of the Fundament, or Hall of the Fundament.
- The Hall of the People: which is where the Princept, who is said to represent not only the people of Kesh but all of the people of the Divine Principality, carries their own vote. So, the Princept gets the vote equal to every noble. Equal to all of the Elects. The Princept gets to go “I get to vote too!”
- and then The Hall of the Designate [*dezignet*]: and the Designate are... (it’s spelled like “designate”) And in the Hall of the Designate candidates are approved by at least 3 of the other 4 voting bodies... Sorry, candidates approved by at least 3 of the other 4 voting bodies may run for membership in the Hall of the Designate, which is voted on by electors across Kesh. (How those electors are chosen varies. Some are chosen by holding land and territory. Others may be local mayors, appointed governors, or landed lords. In some very-very-very rare cases, some voting districts actually allow for direct election of the elector, who then goes on to vote for a Designate.) I need to actually fix that, “the elector, who then goes on to vote for a chosen Designate”.

Maybe this is a good place to also talk about names really quick. So, there are two Princepts. And in general a Princept is just referred to as the Living Princept while they’re alive. We talked about last week, sometimes a Princept can kind of call their shot, and be like: “No, I’m going to be the Glorious Princept”, which in this case is what Dahlia has done if you look into the last update, or last Road to PARTIZAN game, you can hear them saying, you know... “I’m going to start a Millennia of Glory.” And their rival, Cynosure Kesh, also the Living Princept, says that he is going to enact a Millennium of Peace. And so both of them are kind of like “I’m going to be the Glorious Princept / I’m going to be the Peaceful Princept”, etc. Good luck to both of them. Godspeed.

But that’s one interesting name thing is that in both of these cases these are called shots, which is like, high risk, high reward. If you do it you are like “Wow, incredible”. If you fail it’s a huge sign of disgrace that you called that shot and missed, right? It’s like pointing out for the home run and then striking out.

The other thing about names which is interesting is that Dahlia is not their Elect name. Or I mean it is, but they were born and given the name Dahlia at birth because they were supposed to be the Princept. And Princepts are in a sense... maybe not even in a sense. They are Elects. They are Elects of the the greatest Divine, The Divine Principality. [with extreme satisfaction] Which is a pun that has always been here, and that no one brought up *for months*. We’ve been doing this games for a years now, and I don’t think one person was

like “It’s funny that you called it The Divine Principality, because it sounds like you’re talking about a Divine.” When in fact you are, because remember, the state is the most Divine thing there is, in this culture, at least for the Received Asterists. And that is... that has always been there, that’s always been there in the background. So, Dahlia is the Elect not just of Commitment, but also of The Divine Principality. The Divine Principality. It’s not just a pun... or it is a pun, but it’s not like... People don’t refer to the Divine Principality as a Divine, but it is also the highest Divine. So it’s kind of like, you might hear it referred to that way in religious texts and stuff like that. But yeah.

So yeah, that is- that is Stel Kesh. All of that is Stel Kesh. It’s goofy, and it’s meant to be bureaucratic and a nightmare, and you don’t get to know votes for what. The votes are all secret, and then the decision gets made, and people... It gets announces, that three of the five Halls voted for... voted to allow for such-and-such planet to be colonized. Three of the five, or four of the five Halls decided to, you know, outlaw Coca-Cola or whatever the fuck, right? So even then it is- it is... There’s a black box, there’s a curtain being pulled.

So, Kesh sucks is what I’m getting at here, right? Like, that is- And that is the particular way in which it sucks, it sucks in this way that is like the illusion of democracy, the illusion of control. The actual belief and investment in history, and knowledge, and the kind of academic thought... You can get away with a lot more as an academic in Kesh, or as a public intellectual. There is a degree to which pushing the boundaries is seen as almost fashionable, but the way you push boundaries is still within the boundaries, right? Like... You think about something like...

Here’s a really good example that comes up sometimes if you’re on Twitter or something, right? Calls to disband ICE, right? Well within the realm of political discourse. Any presidential candidate right now could say that they want to disband ICE, and they might get the finger wagged at them, but they would still be in the debates. If any major Democratic candidate right now was like “I want to criminalize ICE, I think that what was done here was not just a breach of what the people’s will was but actually goes against human rights violations, and I am going to not only criminalize their actions going forward, but retroactively hold people accountable for the crimes committed under, you know, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah.” That person would immediately be outside of the realm of acceptable discourse, and it’s why you don’t see calls happen. Even from people who would be like, who’d hear and be like “Wait a second. We- We *could* hold people accountable for doing unjust things even if the laws at the time allowed for them. That’s a thing we could do!” The though doesn’t necessarily occur. Or if it does it seems a little bit too outside of the bounds of political discourse. Because the kind of field of discourse is kind of shaped in this way so that sometimes you can say something that feels oppositional or feel alternate, but it’s still centered on a kind of the core of ideological thought that is unchallengeable. It is accepted as paradigmatic in such a way that it’s hard to push against it. It’s hard to even- It’s hard to even know *how* to push against it because everything you do is in relation to it, and so you can’t just be over here doing your own shit, you *have* to engage with it, and the ways in which you engage are limited by a network of discourse.

Anyway. Stel Kesh is all of that shit. Stel Kesh is- is fucked up in this particular way, and I'm super happy to have figured out that particular way. It has really good poets, it has really interesting, you know, academic theorists, and also it is that style of like, you know, ineffective liberalism, the sort of like, um, "Debate me, bro"... Everything, you know, the marketplace of ideas, the belief that things will work out in the end because history is fundamentally just, and that the good guys win in the end. Which is part of how they can pat themselves on the back through becoming a galactic empire. It sucks.

I'll also note that in terms of their, their architecture, I really wanna lean towards that idea of being... The word I liked- The word I liked before was like in official stuff—Overbaroque. Not just Baroque, Overbaroque! We got- We got a little bit of Baroque Kesh from one of the arcs, the Privign arc in Twilight Mirage, in which the Baroque—sorry, the space station Privign had this sort of like- this sort of like highly ornamental version of- of what Kesh fashion and architecture had looked like until then.

[00:45:00]

So it's almost as if the the excesses of the Twilight Mirage culture had brought the kind of more reserved cultural touchstones of Kesh into- into something a little bit more, um, not flagrant, but like flamboyant and excited and, you know, huge in that way. In fact what I will say is actually, actually that segment was all the way to Rococo, right? Like, that stuff was all the way to like everything hyper-embellished, you know, gold plated, jewels encrusted, jewels on the floor... You've heard of crowns on the ground, here's jewels on the floor. And so this is maybe not as far in that direction, but is Baroque, and is like Tech Baroque. It is- it is the sort of like... again, Twilight Mirage aesthetic through a dark mirror. You know, brought forward in a way that doesn't necessarily understand that there are material reasons for certain things. Lots of like- Lots of like— There aren't holograms in the same way anymore, or AR... I guess there's no AR in the same way, but there are holograms that are like the sort that you can find in a mall in the US right now. Where it's just like: what you have in front of me is a fountain with laser pointing into it. So that style of thing. Except like, imagine that except that it is like the... a painting of a sort of... Do y'all know the... me, as if you can respond back to me. Whoa, wow, I'm tired, I've just typed "do you know" into Google. There's a painting called... I think it's like... [typing] Let me see if I can find it.

Yeah, it is called [American Progress](#) by John Gast. And it is this just... whoah, boy! Racist colonialist manifest destiny shit of a sort of large- large Neoclassical woman in a kind of white kind of flowing Greek robes walking westward across the valleys and, you know, towards wilderness, scaring away the indigenous people and replacing them with good hardworking white folks who are here to till the land and deliver the mail. This is not a joke, one of the things that she's leading the charge westward as literally brown people are running away with the buffalo is a mail- a mail carriage is under her feet, and a train, you can see a set of trains and boats, and "Ah, yes, America!" It fucking sucks! And so, imagine that except done with like a tasteful laser light display. Imagine that except there's like music coming out of it, and it's painted, you know, on the inside of a government building the way like, you know, any city has like "Oh, these are our forefathers" type shit.

Anyway, that is- that is the vibe here. Mixed with I think leaning towards kind of Baroque style architecture. It looks something like French Baroque which has like elements of kind of Classicism in it, lots of columns, lots of like slight touches of like Roman and Greek vibes. There's also- I mean, one of the big touchstones, and if you go through this entire update, you'll see that one of the major cities is called Cruciat. And Cruciat is a place that bears some resemblance to something like Saint Petersburg which has a number of kind of Russian Baroque buildings. I think those are also a very good touchstone for general architectural like vibe. Obviously, Russian Baroque I think is much shorter period than I believe Baroque in kind of Spain and Italy and Central Europe, but is definitely worth being a touchstone here too.

It is the least of the... Stel Kesh in general is probably the least of the outlandish things here in terms of just like overall visual style. There isn't- There isn't the sort of like... monument-driven stuff that you see in Stel Nideo, there isn't the like very dynamic, literal moving buildings of Stel Apostolos. And in that way, even with laser like paintings about the sublime and American... or I guess Stel Kesh dominance and blah-blah-blah, you and I would feel comfortable walking down the street in a Kesh town. May not... Sorry. We may not feel comfortable in the sense of the people there and what they might think of us, though I do suspect— I'm not particularly interested in showing on screen that style of bigotry this season. Nor do I think it's like the— We already have so much we're juggling that I'm not looking to get that style of racism, or homophobia, transphobia, or you know, whatever, on screen. We have so much in this way already dealing with marginalization, and other vectors for talking through that stuff. I also just don't know— I think that Stel Kesh, even Stel Kesh believes itself to be— Again, it is the well-meaning liberal house, right? It is the well-meaning... It is the "I would vote for Obama a third term if I could" Stel. Um, so, so...

But in terms of just like what the architecture is like, in terms of what a city feels like, Stel Kesh's cities are the ones that feel the most like Earth cities today no matter where they are. So that is definitely worth— In general, again, this is about comfort. Stel Kesh is about history, about familiarity, about like "Oh yeah, this is the way we do it! We do it this way! This is safe! This is familiar!"

So yeah. So, if you then go through the rest of the post you'll see that there's a bunch of... There's like 8 different squads for Stel Kesh. Again, the region notes, stuff like that. And all of this is stuff that I hammered on after that first update. I guess at this point kind of pivoting to talk about stuff that isn't just Stel Kesh. But it's such an interesting process to kind of bury yourself in the work of worldbuilding because the work that you do up top can be so important to giving yourself the direction. And when you go back and look at it, like "This is trash, there's nothing here, there's not..." There literally is nothing here in some cases, in some cases it's just like there's not enough here to breathe.

And so, in general even though we've already started the season, one of the things that I've been doing is just going back through and adjusting stuff, thinking through if something adds up the right way, if it seems like an idea that people are excited by on the cast. You know, it is one of those things where... I think sometime this week for Pusher tier backers I'm going to just share the versions of the docs that I showed the party, or the two parties, and kind of

what the players marked as what they thought was interesting, and stuff like that. And, you know, there are things on that list that are like, no one is interested in this. Like, let me take a look and actually see if I have a good interesting example or if there's anything left, because I definitely went through, and like, tweaked after that.

Here's a good one. Here's a good one that name's changed. Stel Nideo used to have a group, if you go back to the previous thing, called Empyrean's Plume, obviously referencing the Divine Empyrean. Now that is now called Imperium's Plume, I did that like a month ago. It was after no one's marked them as interesting, they're Hallows blessed by the firebird Divine Empyrean, sent to ensure that the home of Progressive Asterism remembers the strength of Nideo's virtue. Their goal is to inspire support of Stel Nideo. And I don't think that changing it to "Empyrean", a direct reference, to "Imperium"... a sort of like "Ooh, did something happen there, did Empyrean... did Empyrean's name changed at some point to Imperium?" is gonna draw a player closer to it necessarily. But it was one of those things where I was like "Oh yeah, I can do another pass on these, and if I get a good idea I can still change these, I can still spart all of that stuff."

There's a lot here that is like—I'm looking at this list now—where it's like, I'm super excited, and I know that, you know, I know that the Church of Received Asterism in some form will show up on screen because Received Asterism will. But the fact that a player didn't mark it is helpful—and this is like one of these final steps where thinking about is like... if you've built a world like this, you have to put it in front of your players in a way that's consumable, in a way that'll help them understand it, because they're not gonna listen to seven or eight Drawing Maps updates.

And so you have to get it in front of them in a way that is like: here is what the world is, here are the basics of the setting, here are the things that I'd love to know if you're interested in... What here is fun? What here gives you ideas? What here do you wanna sketch with or play with, or show up to, or fuck up? And so that's a huge part of this process.

The other thing is, it is never too late to kind of go through and just do a general quality pass, especially if you start playing the game and you know like "Oh, they're going to engage with this group a lot, because I can tell that this is the type of thing they want. But it's a Tier IV thing, and if they're gonna engage with this thing that's Tier IV, they're gonna get fucking wrecked. Let me rework stuff until they're Tier II or Tier III, so that at least he kind of degree of difference isn't so strong." Or the other way where it's like "Oh, they really care about this, I'd love for this group to be able to, you know, support them, and so let's raise that group up to be a Tier IV or Tier V so that they can be a good, like, you know, favor, the group that you can call on for favors." Stuff like that.

The other big thing here in terms of just like revisiting this material and thinking through it all has been... It's been so good to revisit it for what is gonna sound like a very patting myself on the back thing, but it's like... It works. The machine has worked so far. We're now three recordings in not counting episode 00, so four recordings in, but three into actual play. And it's like, "Okay, I know enough about the world to bring it to bear when someone says 'Is there a thing that does X?' or 'Is there a situation where Y could come up?' or 'How could I get X to

think that I'm 1 instead of 2?" Those sorts of things are useful— you can only do them when you're familiar with the world, and it doesn't mean that you have to build your own worlds, but it does mean...

I definitely advise, if you're running a game in a *Blades in the Dark*... or in a Forged in the Dark system, if you're running something in the Izya setting that is in *Blades in the Dark*... Sorry, that is in *Beam Saber*, or if you're running in Duskwall in *Blades in the Dark*... Learn that setting. Like, really sit with it. You know, really kind of inhabit it, understand what the different factions are, what the different crew are, what the different ways in which these things come together. Because you will... you'll have your resources, you know, you'll be able to flip through the book or look at your charts, and be like "Oh yeah, this is a group of whatever... Oh, you needed a mercenary band, here's a mercenary band!" And you'll have access to this stuff. But it really means something different when someone is like "What is a way in which I could puff my chest out and seem like I'm a big shot?" and you can do "Well... Funny you should say that. You would know that XYZ..."

And so like that stuff has been... has been really good, and it's been... I hope that you'll see this too when episodes start dropping, that there is... Having the kind of like — And this is actually just pure Post Mortem shit at this point. But the thing that first drew me to *Beam Saber*, before the mechs even, was the faction system, was, I could have five factions with a bunch of subfactions, or subsquads underneath those factional banners, but that things would be coherent in those five factions. And within the first... both sides of the kind of, both parties had—I've just let something slide, there are sides—on both sides of the coin in the first session there were clear kind of factional dynamics in play that were not overwhelming, because you don't need to know thirty different things. You need to know Stel Apostolos, Stel Kesh, Stel Nideo, Stel Columnar, Stel Orion. Five things. And the ways in which they... And really, you need to know that Kesh and Apostolos are at war, and that there's three others who want to get in on some action and make some money, or gain in prominence, or whatever, right?

And that like ended up being so useful. And so, to Austin Ramsay who made the game: thank you for that. Already, it's just like, coming into it with that in mind, thinking about the ways in which mission outcomes affect and change and advance the plots of these factions writ large has been really fun. And so I'm really excited, I'm really, really excited.

I'll also say like, we're in it, we're... I have episode 00 in front of me right now, I did a... I recorded the intro, the intro was recorded, I've heard a rough cut of the music today, and recorded an intro over it to send back to Jack, so they can then adjust the song and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. Like, we're fucking in it. And so, that's very exciting.

So, that'll drop this Thursday, Thursday or Friday... late Thursday / early Friday, somewhere in there probably. We'll see. And then another ep will drop, ep. 01 will drop a week after. So, look forward to both of those things. I'm definitely looking forward to it, I'm really excited for folks to hear.

I'm thinking if there's any other big stuff here that I wanted to hit.

[01:00:00]

That was- that was talking about everything. I think those were the big things at this point... And again, the way that these Drawing Maps updated are gonna change going forward is they're gonna- they're gonna become much more Post Mortem-y in terms of session. The way in which that stuff will get to you should be pretty similar. Like, it will be... Again, I might do the stream, but I think I'll do the stream in such a way that it'd be easier to break it down as like... as an episode to go here. And that'll be... The stream will probably end up being for Hacker tier backers, and the pods will be for Friend tier backers.

And I'm not sure if there's anything else. Oh, a quick note on the postcards 'cause I made this update in the Discord today but putting it here is also good. We're currently doing— We're currently working on three different postcard sets, basically. The way it is working is that... So, we have Hieron set that was coming together, and we just hit some snags in the production, the art side of the production of it. And those snags are complicated and aren't getting uncomplicated anytime soon probably. It's about scheduling and about how much time people have to put into stuff, and about like getting everything right up to a certain degree, and, you know, people just having personal pride and wanting to do work that they really can stand by. We really let that slide, and I'm fucked up over it, to be honest, like I feel really bad about it. The good news is we've two- So, that is going to keep being worked on, so at some point in the future the set that was supposed to go out with Spring will probably go out.

In its place we have another different Hieron thing coming that I'm super fucking excited about. And that'll be like the Bluff City set that went out, in that it'll be a singular package that will be a bunch of months together. And we're working with a great artist on that, that shit should be fantastic.

And then I'm also working with some artists for PARTIZAN stuff. The PARTIZAN postcards should start shipping early next year, soon after PARTIZAN starts. And so, also super stoked for those because I've seen art for the first one, and it rules. And those will be monthly.

So, there's a Hieron package coming, and these will go out... I will leave to Ali— I will leave it to Ali to make the actual announcement as to like where the months cutoffs are and blah-blah-blah, but whatever you would have gotten you will still get, whether you are currently a member at that tier or not. Like, anyone who was a— Anyone who was, you know, a postcard tier backer for the seven months of that thing, you'll get those- you'll get those postcards. It's just that they'll come in this package format from the Hieron set, and then starting early next year we'll start the PARTIZAN stuff, and that'll be back to monthly. And again, I'm super excited for you to see those because- because we have some great artists lined up for all three of those things. And it's...

And I want to be a 100% clear that the artists are all being paid for their work. Likewise, if you went back and looked at the maps from last episode, Annie was absolutely paid for that

work, I just want to be a 100% clear on that. If you make shit, pay artists. Commission something if you need— Pay your artists! Make Art, Pay Rent, right?

So. Yeah. I think that that's it. I hope that y'all are looking forward to PARTIZAN as much as me. If you wanna hear me talk more about mechs you can go and listen to the last episode, the most recent episode of the Waypoint Radio where I talk about MechWarrior 5 a bunch. You can also go to Waypoint- to [Vice.com to read my review of MechWarrior 5](#) if you're *desperate* to hear me talk about giant robot more. Which, you know. Maybe go do that.

Yeah. Okay. I think that that's it. I feel like I'm a little less... You can tell that there are less notes in front of me today but that's because it's like midnight... no, nope, I'm wrong, it's 12:43. Not midnight. It's after midnight by a little bit. And I'm just trying to make sure that I'm not forgetting anything else that I really wanted to bring up. I don't think that I do. I think that that's it.

So I will see y'all in just a few days for the beginning of PARTIZAN. Thanks for your support, everybody! Talk to you soon. Peace!