

[Drawing Maps Audio 04: Season 6 Faction Creation Pt. 3 - Corruption](#)

Transcribed by Ril (@kaorukeihi)

[T/N: Again, the whole thing is just Austin talking, so it's marked once.]

AUSTIN: Hey, everyone! Welcome to the third of these Drawing Maps updates for PARTIZAN, the upcoming season of Friends at the Table, which has an anthology series lead-in that's going to kick off in the main feed called Road to Season 6 this week, once I finish the edit of the *Dialect* game, which I should get to as soon as I'm done recording this at 11:13 PM on Sunday.

So.... Actually, before I say anything else, really quick, just wanna say. One, thank you for all the kind words about the end of Spring in Hieron, the end of Hieron, the Post Mortem, all that stuff. All of the incredible comments, all of the incredible letters, all of the incredible messages, all of the fanart, all of the... like, everything has been overwhelming and great. So, thank you for that first and foremost. Again, I wanna say that like I read everything that comes in to the Friends at the Table e-mail, and that includes every positive thing, every thing where you're like "Hey, you could do better at this...", I take all of that stuff super seriously, so as I prep for this new series I definitely have a lot of that stuff in mind. Please always feel free to reach out about stuff.

The other thing I wanna say is we have this new print series that's up... I guess actually it's still, based on the time, there's still those two merch things up right now that are worth checking out. The first is, if you go to [friendsatthetable.shop](#)—oh, I misspelled it on my own fucking thing here—you will see that we still have up... we're still in preorder mode for the Season of Hieron cover posters set. Those are \$15 a pop or \$35 for the full three-piece set plus shipping. Those are... art by Craig Sheldon, [@shoddyrobot](#) on Twitter... Who just send me the first sketches of the proper PARTIZAN art, and the fucking... It's dope! I'm excited for where that's gonna go.

The second piece of merch that is still available for the next... as of my recording time, 1 day, 15 hours, 45 minutes and 50 seconds, is the *Fall of Magic* "Hospitality of the Gilded One" print, which was designed by Simon Sweetman—you can follow [@sisweetman](#) on Twitter—and is being produced by Heart of the Deernicorn, which is the tabletop studio behind the *Fall of Magic*. And that is available at [heartofthedeernicorn.com](#), like a unicorn, but, you know, a deer. So, only a little time left, that ends on October 1st.

The preorders for the Hieron cover prints are also over on October 1st, but we should still have some stock after that, so you should be able to make a regular order on that for a little bit longer, but just to be safe I would say try to get in those orders earlier if you're thinking of like a holiday gift or a birthday gift or something just in case. We don't know that we're gonna be able to do a second printing of those, there's gonna be a limited amount of them, because it's expensive to print stuff, it turns out, and store it also, so. Again, it's [friendsatthetable.shop](#) for the Seasons of Hieron prints, and [heartofthedeernicorn.com](#) for the *Fall of Magic* T-Shirt, hoodie, or tote bag—or print, not tote bag, I'm thinking about my Heaven Will Be Mine tote bag which just showed up also produced by the Heart of the

Deernicorn like print shop, and it rules. Heaven Will Be Mine, good touchstone for Season 6, by the way.

So. Today we are continuing, again, like I said, this Drawing Maps series about factions. As you remember the first through I talked about how you decide upon a government type in the game of *Beam Saber*. *Beam Saber*, again, by Austin Ramsay over on itch.io. I think it's currently—I'm gonna double check, but I think it's currently the #1 physical game on Itch right now. Let's see, physical games... Yep! It's the #1 physical game on Itch. Shoutouts to Austin Ramsay, congrats on that. So, in the first update of these I talked about how you decide what government your faction is going to be when you're developing a faction here. And so, for instance, Stel Kesh was an oligarchy, and we got into all of why that might be the case. The second time through I talked about figuring out a way to make effective and interesting aesthetic choices for the key factions. I talked a lot about—sorry I'm stuttering, my monitor is deciding to unplug itself over and over again, so it's flickering and I can't see my notes. Alright, there it goes. Love to have computers and trust them. The second update was supposed to be about Corruption, which is another thing that you determine when you build a faction in *Beam Saber*, but instead it ended up being about this idea of an aesthetic throughline, this core organizing principle that I ended up finding with regard to how I was trying to separate and identify in big distinct sweeping ways the different Stels, the different core factions of PARTIZAN. And so I talked about how they were all tied to a unique element of kind of... of the material world which as people have told me now, is kind of comprised of—I guess you would say, time, matter, and energy. And so, close enough, right?

What I ended up doing is Past, Present, Future, Space, and Motion. And we know that Kesh is all about the Past, we know that Nideo is all about the Present. And today I'm gonna say that Orion is all about Space. Even though they were the third Stel to join the Divine Principality, they... there were not people sitting like "Oh, yeah, we have to complete the set, Past, Present, and Future." These things kind of just happened organically over time, and eventually you look and go, "Oh wow! Cool, we have this whole set, interesting. Okay."

We didn't even get into how does a Divine get built in the Divine Principality. To which I'll just say briefly: it is probably super fucking involved, very political, very like... lots of like backstabbing over who gets what, in terms both of identity, and also resources needed to build these things. These things which seem to be able to, in unique and individual ways, override the limits of the Perennial Wave, right? Do things that regular technology simply cannot do at this point. Is that about something innate to this specific subset of Divines? Is it about just putting the resources in one specific place? Who knows. What I do know is that like, we know from our view as the listeners, and the writer, you know, and the players, that the category "Divine" is a social one, not an ontological one, there is nothing true... there's no true checklist of like *this* is what makes a thing a Divine. What there *is* is in-fiction checklists, and I bet the ones for the Divine Principality are long, and complicated, and arbitrary, and just mean, you know?

So, that said, we can finally get to what it means for Orion to be Space, and then we can also get to what today's update is actually about, which is Corruption and how you determine how corrupt a faction is in the world of *Beam Saber* and why it's useful to do that.

So, Stel Orion is, one, a corporatocracy. I've written here that it is a loose league of republics comprised of dynastic merchant families, entrenched professional guilds, burgeoning labor unions, and increasingly faceless corporations. It's remained carefully neutral, not only because it presents an opportunity for them as a whole to kind of stay out of the impending conflict that seems to be primarily about a conflict between Stel Apostolos and Stel Kesh, but also because there is actual real internal division about who to back. While every Stel has presence on Partizan, Orion has de-facto control of space in the system. Meaning outer space, meaning the lanes between planets, meaning orbit, etc. That said, Apostolosian vessels are fast enough and are maneuverable enough to break those blockades.

I'll take this moment for a second to talk about space in general in PARTIZAN and the way we're thinking about it. You know, going back to COUNTER/Weight, we did think about space as being—and space travel—as being an important and rare thing, that was definitely a touchstone; if you look at something like Gundam, or any of the many other kind of anime mech show touchstones that we go to, a lot of those kind of real robot shows make a big deal about when you get off the planet. How are they gonna do it? Are they gonna take the, you know, orbital elevator up, or are they gonna take some sort catapult device that flings the ship, you know, up into orbit? A lot of Gundam show in their like... by episode 20, the show that starts on the ground goes up to space, or the show that starts into space lands on the ground.

And so like, in COUNTER/Weight that was a pretty big deal, and I wanted to make sure that was true. But by and large we still talked about space travel as being like "Oh yeah, you could just have a spaceship." Like, you could be independent contractor, you could be someone who like... you could be a space pirate, blah-blah-blah-blah, and you could do that kind of as an individual. And that carried forward in Twilight Mirage, right? You had someone like Tannoy Kaji, kind of a really fun side character in Twilight Mirage who just has a spaceship and is an explorer. And you know, you had a lot of characters who are able to just pilot a spaceship without having been described as being trained to do that, because that's what technology was like.

In PARTIZAN it is going to be the strictest we've been in terms of space travel. Not only space travel is something rare, it's something very carefully controlled and administered. And I don't just mean like you have to get a license, I mean literally the skill set for piloting spaceships specifically is rare. It is not something that you are able to just like "Oh yeah, I'm gonna grow up to be a space pilot!" Making that claim is almost like making it now? It's like, what if today you were like "I wanna pilot a spaceship". Like, alright! There aren't that many astronauts. There truly are not that many astronauts, and in the subset of astronauts, there are probably even fewer who can pilot or who do captain ships, and pilot ships, helm ships. And so to be, you know, a helmsperson in PARTIZAN is a rare thing that is caught up in kind of getting through, you know, political and military... calling in political favors to get into like a military academy, or to be, depending on a faction, maybe brought up through some

sort—I'm thinking about Stel Orion—some sort of apprenticeship program, signing your life away, right? I bet you there are families, who are like, "You know what? I'm going to become a pilot, and I'm going to get like a pilot's badge..." Almost like a taxi badge in New York, "...that I'm going too..." Not badge, what are they called? They're called... God, what are taxi..? Not a shield, it's called a... Uh... God, what are they? There's a better word for this. New York, here we go. Medallion! They're called taxi medallions, you should look up taxi medallions. "I'm gonna get like a pilot's medallion that I can pass down to my children or keep in my family, because I'll have the right to do it, and it'll get them access to schooling and blah-blah-blah."

So it's a really rare thing, and Orion, because they're Space—and I'll get into what that means—has a lot of people who fit that mold, but more than that what they have is kind of stationary and substationary... or like, pseudo-stationary things. This is gonna be important to...

Also, I guess I revealed earlier that Apostolos is Motion, now that I think about it. Apostolos is Motion, right? Orion is Space, Apostolos is Motion, those things overlap when it comes to like moving through space, but what you can think of is: Orion is satellites and space stations, and, you know, slow but steady infrastructural travel. Apostolos is what they were back in COUNTER/Weight: moving through dark space, moving with experimental engines, coming at you from every direction, being unpredictable, being tactical in military situations, being efficient in non-military situations, etc.

Let me get to what Space means, and then we'll finally get to Corruption. I'm not gonna go over all of the squads, I'm not gonna go over NPCs. In fact, I may not even list any NPCs on this update, because I'm not quite happy with where they are yet. And as always, a note with all of these updates is that they are provisional, there's always a chance that I'll come back and change all of this, I throw all of this away. For instance, I'm not quite happy with some of the names of the squads that you'll see here. Or like the names of regions, etc., etc. All of that can change up until the point in which they enter gameplay. You know, I've been known to change things that I've written down the second I say them out loud as I find another word while I'm saying it, and go "Oh, this is actually better."

So. In terms of Space as their kind of key phrase or watchword. It means that they take up space, it means that they have mastery over distance, and form, and kind of volume, right? They take up space. Which means that while, you know, you look at Kesh, and think, "Okay, Kesh is..." I think the analogy I used was that Kesh is—Is that not up here anymore? Maybe I got rid of it—Kesh is like, you know, university, and Nideo is like primary school and high school. Stel Orion is specifically business school, agricultural school, and technical school, right? It is all about extraction, it's all about refining, it's all about mass production. It's not about—I guess this also means you can by process of elimination understand that Columnar is Future. [He laughs a bit.] I'm now realizing things, you did not... There was a skip there that was me actively understanding that I've given you all the tools to guess the rest of the associations with words, so I'll just say them out loud.

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Because, for instance, Stel Orion is mass production, whereas Stel Columnar which is going to be Future, is going to be like handcrafted prototypical, you know, experimental stuff. Both of them make stuff, but Stel Orion makes stuff that gets used *everywhere*. Stel Orion makes, you know, everything from blender to missiles to lawnmowers, and their stuff is the stuff that most people... If you think of a car, there's a car that comes to mind. In the world of PARTIZAN, the car that comes to mind is probably made by an Orion company. That is like,,, they own mass manufacturing. It doesn't mean that the other Stels don't make stuff! We've talked about what the other Stels' mechs look like, for instance. Those other Stels have those mechs. They probably also have Hollows from Orion. They probably also have, you know, agricultural machines from Orion. They certainly have automatons from Orion.

What else does Space mean for this? It means property brokerage and land management. These are... They're about land, they're about territory. They are about using that land in the most, kind of like, the most simple way possible. Again, I'll contrast with Columnar—who we'll talk about in probably... one of the next two updates, I forget what the order is gonna be—but Columnar might be like “Hey, if you... We're gonna give you a bunch of money for resources, what we want is the one rare mineral that you've found on an asteroid. You can keep everything else.” You know? Maybe like, Columnar finds an asteroid, captures the asteroid, then hires an Orion company to show up and mine it, and they say “You know what? You keep all of the iron, you keep all of the copper. We want this weird gas that's only in a few pockets on that asteroid.” And Orion is like, in general an Orion company will be like “Alright, cool. We're gonna... You have fun with your weird experimental gas, we know that iron is important in this world. We're going to take the iron.” And so that is who Orion is terms of how they embody that idea of Space.

I'll say again that they are a defender of the marketplace, right? But also that has like a different meaning in what you might think in terms of like... Like, in one hand, it is supposed to be an extension of what we know about Stel Orion and Stel Orion's history. But on the other hand, it is supposed to be distinct from the kind of cyberpunk megacorporation vision of kind of contemporary capitalism, contemporary hypercapitalism that we live in, that we saw in COUNTER/Weight, for instance. It is a slightly different vision, but what's core to it is... It's different because, you know, it's based around the sort of like—obviously I'm looking at things like the Hanseatic League or the kind of Mediterranean merchant families, stuff like that—It is a faction that believes in a marketplace in an ideological way, but in a mercantilistic way, in a way that is about individual competitors more than a global unified market. And tying a lot of that together is this idea of contracts that I think is super important.

Orion sees individuals as kind of—and in this way it is still a very Liberal Economics view of like: “Ah, you're a willing participant in the market, and you're within your rights to sign your life away in agreements and contracts that don't benefit you at all, or that don't benefit you the way you think they might, and we are not going to regulate to stop that.” But it's also not fully that style of faceless, kind of deeply disembodied algorithmic capital that we know today, and that was at front and center of COUNTER/Weight. You know, it's one of the

reasons I've made clear that like, there are guilds here, there are unions here, there're burgeoning unions. But there are also burgeoning kind of faceless corporations, there are the sort of like... the board is taking over bit by bit. But at the same time that labor is starting to organize here. And in that way I want Stel Orion to feel... you know, I'll keep reading as I'll get to some of this stuff as I describe it.

The architectural look, the kind of design look... How do I emphasize Space, and particularly the way in which Orion embodies it is this mix of—and these are like, these are terms I understand in a very amateurish way, I recognize this, if you're an architect listening going like [He hisses painfully.], I get it, just pretend that I do that every time that I see someone misuse dialectics. It's retrofuturism meets brutalism, right? Which are two things that are, in our common historical parlance, architectural and design aesthetics that don't necessarily mesh. But I think Stel Orion finds a way. So. Retrofuturism you might know from parts of the way like the Fallout series looks. There's lots of Googie architecture and design in that, these big rounded, very curvy designs... Think about like classic Golden Age science fiction here, things like Flash Gordon. Think about... the upcoming *Outer Worlds* has designs like this. Retrofuturistic can also have element of Art Deco or—the one I always forget the name of, something “modern”—Streamline Moderne; think about something like *Bioshock* here, etc. But it's blended... So, it's like, big rounded shoulders, big rounded buildings, sharp hyper straight lines that like cut through the roundness. You can kind of imagine the round dome, or the round half-circle at the top of the clock, and then big straight lines of gold, you know, that are kind of breaching up past it. Very, like, striking, optimistic designs.

But what it has is the element of brutalism, which is another architectural school that is about transparency, and that it also has transparency. So you know, one of the thoughts that goes into brutalist architecture is that when you build a building, and you make it out of just like, concrete, you can't not see it as a building, as a structure that's there in front of you. It is materialist in its philosophy, because it demands you recognize the structures that define our lives around us. And I don't think that Orion is brutalist in that same concrete sense, in the sense of like big blocky buildings. But it's almost as if things look unfinished, or as if it uses the element that are normally hidden from view as flare. So, for instance, you can have a building where girders are a part of the visual architecture. You can have a machine or a sign let's say even, where normally you would cover up the screws that screw the sign in to the post that its attached to, you would paint over them, or you would put like a little, you know, metal cover, so you couldn't see them, or you put a metal cover over the power unit, you know, the battery or whatever, on a machine. Here that cover might still exist cause you need one, but it might be glass, or it might be, you know, a clear synthetic, so that you can see the machinery inside, you can see the gears turning, you can see the battery pack, you can see the screws in the sides of the machines, you can see the smoke coming out of it, right? Like, I bet that they have low... They have made stuff that's like “Oh yeah, that doesn't pollute as bad”—if that's a thing that a certain company is concerned by—but they would literally make it so that the machine looks like... You can see that the engine is churning 'cause it's putting out like puffs of black smoke, even if that black smoke evaporates into nothing and actually doesn't harm anything, they want you to see their machines, they want you to know this is a machine. But then also it has a cool, you know, 1950s logo on it.

The mechs that they pilot are very similar in that way. I think very much about Jakub Rozalski's 1920+, the same designs you might have seen in the board game *Scythe*, they're fantastic pieces. Rozalski, just as like a quick throw-off note, Rozalski may or may not have done some tracing for some of those, I believe that he responded to that criticism and at this point has done a lot of work being like "Here is how every new piece that I do is drawn, you can see the process to show that I'm not tracing everything." And I'll let you come to your own conclusions on that, but I will say, those designs, which these kind of like pastoral European landscapes that are dotted with these gigantic machines, are really influential on how I'm thinking about Orion, and space, and scale. I think a lot about the ways in which Rozalski's stuff uses like giant machines in the background, and smaller ones in the foreground, the ways in which they're a part of everyday life, you know, the kind of blend of "here is pastoral life, here are farmers doing their work, and then, you know, a weird mech is walking towards them."

As I said before, these are the least humanoid of the mechs, or maybe I didn't say it, but it's in the text in the post. These are the mechs that maybe have hard points that aren't like hands. So these are like *Battletech* mechs here also, which is like "Oh yeah, that arm is a gun." Some of them might also still be humanoid in that same way, or they might be humanoid generally, in the like two legs, two arms, one head... But their arms might not actually be... Their arms might be a claw, or a, you know, a crane. Vs the other machines that we've seen from other Stel, which are like "That's a Gundam." [He laughs a bit.] These, you might point at and be like "That's a tractor," and then suddenly you realize that like actually that's a tractor with a flamethrower. They also absolutely have designs that don't look humanoid in any way, or that have multiple legs, or treads, or whatever, etc.

The biggest thing about their vehicles—and this is what I was talking about before a bit, when it comes to how you contrast them... they, who master Space with Apostolos, who master Motion—is that all of their stuff is like tied to infrastructure. If you can think of Apostolos as like... I mean, the truth is all transportation is tied to infrastructure in some way, there's no such thing as like the a-infrastructural transportation vehicle. But you can think of Orion as being on rails, or being like, very tied to the limits of having built permanent infrastructure. So, you might see machines that are literally like *Evangelion* units, plugged into a power source, or that need to stay inside of a sort of like active field of... an active range field, where like maybe they're being powered wirelessly, they can't go further than that. Yes, they have controlled space around Partizan, but they only have that inside of their kind of spheres of influence, where they have enough fuel to send their ships out. They're not able to freely move, you know, indefinitely out in the reaches of space. That's even true for their commercial, or their civilian and commercial stuff, where it's like, yes, they have shipping routes, but they don't necessarily have control of the seas. If that makes sense, right? Like, consider the difference between like... Think about like, it's almost like a... If you're thinking about *Mad Max: Fury Road*, where at the beginning of that movie, Max has like his car, he is free to drive his car wherever the fuck he wants, and then he gets caught in to a system that's all about infrastructure, it's all about like moving through and being stuck to like the one path that you're on with the war rig, and then being chased by an entire group that knows that route and that can just like own that route, they already have places where ambushes are set up, they already have their like smoke signals set up for how to maneuver

through those places, and he loses all of that freedom of movement in order to... etc., you've seen... If you haven't seen *Mad Max: Fury Road*, you should see *Mad Max: Fury Road*. That shit rules.

A couple of additional things that are not so directly tied... Well, I still think they're tied to Space because for me Space is about form. And one of the things that's interesting about Stel Orion I think is... I've been thinking a lot about the fact that we tell... I've been thinking a lot about the fact that PARTIZAN is supposed to feel a little more grounded than Twilight Mirage, or maybe even more grounded than COUNTER/Weight in some ways. And so I was thinking about how in the *Expanse* series you have people whose bodies have changed because of the way that they have worked in non... you know, lower gravity environments. It's like, I don't wanna lift that straight out, but at the same time, I don't want to just handwave the idea that mining in space and, you know, work in space would not change people's bodies. So instead of just that being like "Okay, they have anti-gravity on planets," which is especially not the case given what we know about the world of PARTIZAN, and the Perennial Wave, and all that stuff. Like, maybe there's a Divine that can fuck with gravity in that way, but by and large, if you have a high-gravity planet, and you bring people to that high-gravity planet, they are going to live under high gravity, it is going to change their bodies. And so I think over the thousands of years of Stel Orion existing— this was not a few hundred years, this was not a few dozen years—over the hundreds of years, it became increasingly normative to have prosthetics, to have cybernetic enhancements...

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...I think especially among the vast majority of the people in the Stel who are like workers, who are not counts, or are not captains of industry. It is super common to have someone who has like had enhancements done, or had, you know, something installed in their bodies so that they can go work in a super low-temperature planet for 30 years, right?

And the thing that I'm thinking about a lot with that stuff, or that I'm trying to get towards, is, again, a pretty complex idea of prosthetics. I think a lot about Jillian Weise's *Common Cyborg*—which ran on... I think Granta was the publication that ran it—which is this like explosion of, and critique of Donna Haraway's kind of like *A Cyborg Manifesto*—it's a fantastic read, everyone should read Weise's *Common Cyborg*, because it kind of says that a thing that critical theory and, I mean, specifically in the case of Haraway, kind of contemporary kind of cyberfeminism does is by taking the cyborg as their own they erase actual currently existing cyborgs, people with disabilities, people who use prosthetics, who at once hold that their prosthetics make their lives better, but also recognize that society has disabled them because they require the individual to change themselves instead of society accommodating the disabled individuals. And so this kind of double bind of like, yes, prosthetics are useful, yes— And I think this also talks... For me, this is also all caught up in the ongoing conversation about cyberpunk, and transhumanism, and posthumanism, and the ways in which cyberpunk texts can either emphasize the sort of radical reshaping of the self in a really positive way, or can, again, I think, in an important way, talk about normative bodies, talk about corporate control of access to things like prosthetics, or the medicine that's required for disabled bodies, disabled people, etc. Or can fuck all that up. A lot of

cyberpunk just fucks all of that up, and is like, “No, the only good body is the natural human body as you were born, and be careful, because if you get too many cyber-implants, you’ll lose all your humanity.” And fuck that. So, we’re definitely not doing that.

But instead what we’re doing is like... I’m interested in a world where like, yes, billions of people in Stel Orion have cybernetic implants, have, you know, elements of themselves that are replaced with metal and biotechnology. But also like less sci-fi sexy technologies, less... You know, there *are* going to be people with cyborg arms and prosthetics in that like Aria Joie model. But there are also people who like blew out their knee on an asteroid and walk with a cane. There are also lots of people who know sign language because it’s part of like of your curriculum as you’re coming up, because you’re probably going to work alongside people who have hearing loss. You know, this is a culture where people regularly are on, you know, medical regimens in terms of taking pharmaceuticals, taking drugs that are important and are not, in this specific way, are not stigmatized.

This is like... Again, it’s about adding a little bit of nuance to Orion. This is not like “And that’s why the market is good.” It’s “There are people here.” And history can go a bunch of different ways, and in this case specifically I think it’s even like, you know, the normative body... what we think of as normative bodies have even changed in this culture. Yet at the same time it’s also the case that access to medical technologies is still controlled by those in control, by corporations, they’re still controlled by the people who have means. And I don’t know that that normative standard extends beyond Stel Orion in the same way. I think that each of the different cultures probably looks at them differently. I want all of that complexity here, and as always, I know that I’m like reaching for the stars a little bit, but I also think it is better to attempt that, than to not.

One of the things I’m... you know, I did this before Twilight Mirage, but I’m gonna do it again this year, just like... speak with people I know who are disabled, speak with people I know who are in disability studies, and like try to get additional perspectives on this. And that’s where a lot of this comes from, that’s why I’ve done some of the reading I’ve already done. But always can get better at this. Again, you know, a 100%, not someone who was like “And that’s it, I solved writing disability narratives!” I think it’s impossible even if you... Even if you’re in a marginalized group, you can never speak for all perspectives there, in the same way that I don’t think I will ever write The Definitive Black American Novel, it would be ridiculous to claim that. It’s even more so ridiculous for me to be like “And that’s it! I know that this is going to be perfect and unproblematic!” But I would rather try to be ambitious and think about bodies in this way, especially in the season about mechs, a season where like mechs are going to be related to bodies, and war is related to bodies, and beauty is related to bodies, and like we *have* to confront some of this stuff head on. It would be weird to not engage with these ideas. And I think Stel Orion is the place to do that. I mean obviously Keith has already brought cyborgs up because... just kind of what propelled me to think about this stuff with Orion also, is that we know that Stel Columnar has explicitly been kind of like... regulating and criminalizing an entire subculture of Columnar. Keith’s whole idea around the Equiaxed as being automatons or synthetics who are cyborgs because of the integration of organic material. We know that that whole culture has been kind of like targeted for various reasons, and Keith like is super interested in that.

And so it's like, well, I know that they are not the only cyborgs who exist, because we have cyborgs alive now in our daily lives, we have disabled people who use prosthetics, and who use, you know, like mobility aids, and who use aids for seeing and hearing and everything else. And so like, why would it only exist in this one part of the Galaxy? Especially when we know that like the sort of period of labor history that we're looking at here too is tied to a period where people got injured, where people were asked to take great deals of risks, etc.

So yeah, so I think that's gonna be a part of the way Stel Orion presents. And again, a way that I think complicates them, because... They're shitty, right? They are, they are shitty. All of these Stels are bad, there might be something that you might like, but they're all part of this big galactic empire. But they're not a galactic empire in a sense of like the way that the Star Wars movie presents the Galactic Empire. They are a galactic empire the way like America and the West is a galactic empire, which I know, because I know our listening statistics, it is a high probability that you live in one of those places as you're listening to this, I live in one of this places. How... To what degree are we complicit with the things that happen here? I suspect to a large degree. We are not in the streets, we're not here like doing decolonial work, as in our individual lives, you know, or... When I say we, I mean the people I know directly. We're doing our best to be good people, and doing our best to make impacts where we can, but it is complicated, and part of why I wanted to kind of like complicate Orion in this particular way is because I always wanna represent the possibility of a better world. I always want there to be points of contention, and points where you can see the place where a spark for improvement might come, right? Where historical and systemic tensions might give way to change. And so here it's about labor, it's about bodies, it's about ownership of both of those things, right? Your ownership of your body, and your ownership of your labor, and the way those things intersect. And so it's super important.

And I think that kind of brings me to Corruption, the thing this update—that is now 40 minutes long—is technically about. But thankfully it's actually not that long of a thing.

So, Corruption in *Beam Saber* is a particular score that you give to a faction you create. I'm just gonna read from the text here.

"Corruption is the next thing to consider for creating a faction. A government's purpose is to care for the populace through protecting against external threats, building infrastructure, ensuring health, and other ways of providing the populace with stability. The degree to which each government embodies this ideal can vary wildly, though a faction's type will influence this. The leader of an autocracy could be beneficent, ruling over their populace as a loving parent, but the need to threaten violence tends to sour even the kindest dictatorship."

"The easiest way to judge how corrupt a faction is to look at how much power and wealth its leaders are gaining because they lead the faction." Adds up. Very funny to be doing this update in the midst of the beginning of this whole impeachment shit. "If the leaders are earning resources in a way that harms the populace (embezzling public funds, biased implementation of laws, drastic self-imposed pay raises, etc.) they set a tone for the entire government that likely results in widespread corruption. This corruption can express itself

with dishonest government reports, bypassing protocols for friends, underhanded legal proceedings, and all the ways that leaders enrich themselves but on a smaller scale.”

“Here are some questions you can ask about each faction that will provide a shallow idea of how corrupt it is. If you really want a numerical value of Corruption, each “yes” gives that faction +1.”

And so, I’m gonna read these questions, but as Austin Ramsay is kind of saying here, like, this is... You can just assign a score in *Beam Saber*, you don’t *need* to go through this checklist, it’s not, like, binding... And in fact you’ll see that my answers end up being like “Eh, well, what’s the answer to this?” on some of them. But I’ve ended up giving Orion a 4. You know, honestly, maybe through talking through this it will drop to a 3, we’ll see. The top is a 5, right? It’s a 0 to 5 score.

“Are the factions leaders more interested in enriching themselves than the masses?”

Ab-so-lutely. Undeniably. And that... To be clear, that includes even, I think, some of the guilds, probably even some of the unions, which at this point have not developed anything like a real class consciousness. You know, at this point there is not like Intergalactic Workers of the World... I guess that would be... It would be like... Intergalactic Workers of the Worlds. [He laughs a bit.] That doesn’t exist here, right? There is no unified labor movement yet, so even among those groups there is a degree of competition. And so, yeah, the faction’s overall leaders from the bankers to the kind of dynastic families to the kind of faceless corporation boards, corporate boards—absolutely more interested in enriching themselves than the masses.

“Are there few people in the faction’s power structure trying to make it better serve the populace?”

I think this is mixed. Because of the thing I said before about wanting there to be hope. I think by and large the answer is yes, there are only a few people... Inside of the overarching collection of people who are leading this faction there aren’t that many who are trying to make it better. But there is a degree to which I do wanna represent this notion of like... these tensions in some ways are leaders themselves. History is not only made by people, it’s made by motion, it’s made by momentum, it’s made by systems, it’s made by the kind of collision of different factors that don’t happen to be people, and so... that don’t happen to be willing people. Sometimes it is like, a class gets pushed so far and a protest begins about one issue and then suddenly it can kind of snowball into being a bigger thing. Sometimes dramatic change can happen because of climate change, or because of a shift in the availability of resources, or because of a great tragedy, like, it does not always happen to be one person’s will against another, history is not about... Like, is not driven by people who say “Debate me!” So, eh. It’s somewhere in there, right? It’s a mix.

“Are positions of power assigned based on qualities other than competence?”

They are, but I also think that the way we presented Orion is one in which... It’s not, there’s no such thing as a true meritocracy, like, there’s not an a-historical world in which people’s relationships don’t influence their positioning, but I would way in contrast to Stel Nideo, in

contrast to Stel Kesh... way more opportunity for individuals to find themselves in positions of power in Orion than in those other Stels.

“Will the vulnerable face reprisals if they speak out against those in power?”

The answer is yes... If they're speaking out without being... If they're speaking out about people in power to whom they are a part of, probably, right? They will face reprisals. If you are a part of—I'm just gonna go look at my squad list right now—if you are a part of The Scriveners Guild, and you're like “Yo, *fuck* The Scriveners Guild!”, I bet there will be a reprisal! If you're a part of The Scriveners Guild, and you say “You know what? The Logisticians Union is fucked up, and we should figure out a way to bite into their base.” I bet that's okay, right? If you are a part of the Company of the Spade, a kind of a military organization here, and you're shittalking another, you know, mercenary company, I bet you're okay. Even if that other mercenary company is more powerful. It is not Stel Kesh and Stel Nideo in that sense that there's such a unified structure.

[00:45:00]

There really is... It's looser than that, and that is kind of why it's also a corporatocracy by the way, is like... It is... In some ways Stel Orion embodies that aspect of Asterism, of Nideo's Asterism, better than anyone else, because it is not just a bunch of noble houses squabbling with each other. It is noble houses! It's also companies, it's also, you know, smaller family units, it's also unions and guilds, it's also restaurateurs, right? Like, it goes all the way down in that way where everyone sees themselves, for better and worse, as either individuals or individuals in a unit that are competing with other individuals or other units. And so, there is a degree of freedom there for... to be outspoken. It's just like, know who has your back when you speak. And also, don't speak in ways that get your crew into fights they can't win, if that makes sense.

Finally, “Do the leaders ignore laws if they are slow or interfere with their goals?”

Absolutely, especially if they can get away with it. With, again, the note that others will hold them accountable if they fail. Or if they get in the way. But basically, you know, the vision of like... A bunch of people are sent to their deaths to mine for minerals somewhere, a bunch of people get hurt, you know, walls are broken so that it ends up with people... I mean, are the laws even in place to protect the vast quantity of people who are not of means to begin with? Probably not. Not to the degree that we would want there to be now. That is going to be a point of contention in the broader world in this time period, where like, you could imagine the people of Stel Orion, the vast masses of Stel Orion unifying and pushing back. But again, it's hard to do that if you don't have control of... if you don't have pilots! Stel Orion has all this space, and all these people, but like they can't communicate instantly to one another, they can't, you know, send supplies to one another if they don't control the Portcullis System that connects their planets together, or their solar systems together. They can't build an army if they don't have pilots who've been trained by the military or by companies who demand and instill absolute loyalty. It is a bit of a fucking bind that they're in, but at the same time like... Are there ways to see this change? We'll see. Maybe. I hope so, I hope that that becomes a thing that we talk about. We'll see.

But see, the other half of this that's so interesting is that like... If you scroll down to look at this squad list, these's like 9 or 10 squads here... Who knows how many of them—if any of them—show up in the main play when we get to it? Like, part of building factions and squads in *Forged in the Dark* games is producing a palette from which your players and you as the GM can pull from. But, you know, I will say on this recording, there is one of these that is literally me being like “Ah, fuck, I wish we've gotten to see more of them in *Twilight Mirage*!” Total side bit, not important in *Twilight Mirage* at all, but here, I wonder if they'll come up, I've put them in the mix again, let's see if they come up, that could be fun. And that could just happen. So.

As always, the goal is not to think about these squads as things that *have* to come up. But they are background material that could come up. I think even if you look at *Beam Saber* directly, Austin recommends you kind of picking a total of like 8 squads at the most that will come up in play. So we'll see. We'll see how that goes.

So, all of that said... Or, I guess I'll keep reading here from the book.

“How corrupt each individual faction is, and how corrupt all the factions as whole sets the tone of the game. If half the factions are very corrupt, and the other half has a minimum amount of corruption, your game will tend towards a “good vs evil” tone. However, if all factions have a middling amount of corruption, then your tone might be similar to a pessimistic (some might say, realistic) view of the real world. If everyone is incredibly corrupt, you get a setting where the only difference between the factions is the lies they tell their populace.”

I think we'll probably be in that middling area, middling towards heavy. It is meant to be a fucked up space empire, right? It is meant to be a vision of kind of... touches of... of our own history, looking at moments where great change could happen. And for those moment of great change to happen, both on the battlefield and, you know, in and around the palace grounds, means starting in a place of corruption. But that doesn't mean that it's going to be... Like, I'm not trying to make *Warhammer* here, right? And I know people love *Warhammer*, but that's not the tone, this is not going to be the fucking “For the Emperor!” type story. If someone... If a player character ever shouts like “For the Apokine!” or “For the Princept!” or something, then please know I will be doing everything in my power to frame that as naive or, you know, naive at best and villainous at worst. So, look forward to that if that happens to come up.

So yeah. I think I'm gonna go 4, I think given all that we've just said, I think it's Corruption 4 here. Let me scroll, what have I given the previous factions here? Nideo I have down at 4, and Kesh at 5. I think it's still 4. I really do, I do think it's 4. Especially because I think of... Hm. Maybe it's 3? ...Maybe it's 3.

I'm gonna end this recording, and then we're gonna see, by the time this gets posted, will it be a 4 or will it be a 3? I'm gonna think about it as I edit this file, then post it. And we'll see, we'll see what it looks like.

Anyway, thank you as always for listening and checking out these notes. As always, Drawing Maps is an ongoing experiment, as we do it in this format, let me know what you think. You could see part of why I'm like... It's a weird thing to show the work, right? Because part of it is... Part of it's weird because you might fall in love with a faction or... you might fall in love with a squad that never shows up.

Or, in a month I might get a note from someone who's like "Austin, ditch all of that, like, all of that cyborg stuff, stay in your fucking lane. You don't have the chops to pull that off." that's effective in its argument, and makes me go like "[Hiss.] You know what? Ah... Maybe I *don't* have the chops for it, let me back out." And I'd rather be upfront about my ambition, and my hope, and my aims, and like the reasons I'm doing the things I'm doing, and have that stuff come in, than be like, you know, caught off guard in three months when I'm like "Oh, I... did I fuck this up?"

And so it's just weird. It is a weird thing. I'm still getting used to doing these Drawing Maps updates in any form, but especially this one that doesn't have a constant back and forth of the streams. So, as always, let me know what you think about these in the Patreon comments.

I'm trying to see if there's any other announcements... Again, the *Dialect* game, either Part 1 or the full thing—I'm not sure yet, I have to do the edit after I stop recording this and put this up—will be up this week.

Then... then we'll see, we'll see what else comes... I guess, we've two more to go, two more of these updates to go. One of them will be about squads, and how I decide what squads are what, and blah-blah-blah, and then one of them will be about regions, which are super fun. So, look forward to those.

Alright, that's gonna do it for me. Have a good week, everybody!