

THE MADNESS OF CHARTRULEAN  
A Gardeka Story

S1:E01  
"THE STARBRINGER GIFTS"

Written by

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## TMOC EPISODE 1: THE STARBRINGER GIFTS

### PROLOGUE

It is said not every obstacle that's faced can be overcome. But nothing can be overcome if no obstacles exist. Such obstacles have tested humanity's resolve through all of history.

Be it by luck or grand design, sometimes we pass the test. Other times we fail. But despite those failings, we persevere, and are reminded of the frailty of our being and the facades we wear in spite of it.

What follows are the events that marked the end of The Long War, and the beginning of the Age of Azurea.

It is a story about gods, good men, and the devil they call progress. But at the core, it's the story of a man at war with himself. A man who walked through the gates of perception at the edge of the human experience, and the calamity that followed him back in.

This is The Madness of Chartrulean.

[Opening theme cue]

Episode 1. The Starbringer Gifts.

### SOMEWHERE IN THE COSMIC VOID

#### NARRATOR

Artedemis soared through the cosmos. His final destination, the source of all things. He had reached such a velocity that his mind's eye perceived the creation and destruction of entire galaxies. The birth and death of entire civilizations, happening in the blink of an eye. A display of celestial fireworks that no single expression of beauty or horror could encapsulate.

Free of his body, Artedemis was limitless. Long had his being journeyed through time and space, learning all that there was to learn. At last, it was time to face ultimate authority: the starmaker, Jhar. The immensity of the cosmic being was impossible to comprehend, even for Artedemis. Jhar was the culmination of three cosmic minds. Jhardeka, Jhardekai, and Jhardoestra. As Artedemis approached, he could feel all three energies, distinct yet unified, focus on him. He called out.

ARTEDEMIS  
(with bravado)  
I have come to join with the  
collective consciousness of the  
universe!

[Spooky 3 voices in one]

JHAR  
Your journey has been in vain,  
Artedemis. It's not time.

ARTEDEMIS  
What do you mean? I've lived out my  
mortal purpose.

JHAR  
Chartrulean has unleashed  
abomination. Now it threatens to  
destroy everything we've built  
together, unless you intervene.

[Rumbling]

ARTEDEMIS  
I can no longer influence  
terrestrial matters. It's up to him  
now.

JHAR  
Go back. Guide him towards the true  
source.

ARTEDEMIS  
No! P !

[Wormhole sounds and Artedemis screaming]

SPACE BATTLE

[Heartbeat sounds and ringing ears drown out all other  
sounds. Intense battle music fades on. Sounds of explosions  
and energy beams escalate, as if playing back from memory]

ARTEDEMIS  
A battle? Who are these people?

JHAR  
As you perceive time, this is the  
recent past. Watch, and you will  
see.

[Sounds of ships soaring past. Conversations over radios.]

HAVELION  
(struggling)  
No, no, no, no, no.  
(frustrated)  
Come on!

ABRUC  
The Rau are closing in from all  
sides now! Hundreds of them.

SUNYATA  
This is bad, guys. Really bad.

CORBIN  
Where is our backup?

HAVELION  
The cowards never showed up. We're  
on our own.

CORBIN  
(sarcastic)  
I men, they realize there's only  
nine of us, right? Am I stupid?

[Sounds of enemy ship attacking]

ADMIRAL LAPADINE  
Havelion!

HAVELION  
Where are your generals, Admiral?

ADMIRAL LAPADINE  
They refuse to deploy. Chance for  
losses is too high, so they're  
returning to our defensive line.  
You have to get out of there!

HAVELION  
Sorry Admiral, we don't have that  
choice. We're in it now.

[Sounds of ships accelerating]

NICOLA  
But we're completely boxed in! How  
do we get out of this?

HAVELION  
(over comms)  
Guys, it's time to show them what  
we can do. We need to interlink.

ABRUC  
What's our target?

HAVELION  
That big one. If we can that out,  
the rest will lose confidence.

[Metal clanging sounds]

ABRUC  
We're all here.

HAVELION  
If we don't push our limits, we're  
all going to die. Now's not the  
time for mercy, it's us, or them.  
Remember that. Let's go!

PALADINS IN UNISON  
Ready!

[Sounds of energy building]

HAVELION  
Fire!

[Explosions and energy beams]

ADMIRAL LAPADINE  
Incredible! It's working!

[More giant explosion sounds, emergency alarms]

HOMENA  
My ship's gone haywire! I-I can't  
control it!

[Paladins screaming; agony]

ADMIRAL LAPADINE  
What's happening out there?!

HAVELION  
The azurea it's--it's gone out of  
control!

CHARTRULEAN  
Sever the link!

HAVELION  
We can't! It's like it's acting on  
its own!

[Sounds fade from radios to Astreus environment. We are now viewing the events from another perspective and hearing all paladins through radios]

ADMIRAL LAPADINE  
Chartrulean! Can you stop this calamity?

CHARTRULEAN  
I can try.

[Void sounds]

HOMENA  
(crying)  
It hurts!

CHARTRULEAN  
Stop it stop it stop it!

[Giant bass drop, Chartrulean screaming in agony, then silence. Eerie music]

ADMIRAL LAPADINE  
The Rau...they're...gone.

[Sounds of Chartrulean collapsing]

ADMIRAL LAPADINE (CONT'D)  
Chartrulean? Chartrulean!

HAVELION  
(over radio, panting)  
What....what did we do?

[Eerie high pitched sound drowns out the scene as it fades to]

ARTEDEMIS'S "TOMB"

[Intense blizzard sounds]

NARRATOR

Artememis's eyes opened to the sight of the low stone ceiling of a tomb. Beyond the open door on the far side of the antechamber, a blizzard of acid snow raged.

The antechamber was illuminated by amber light. A caretaker was there, crouched over a table containing a myriad of clay vessels. Incense danced through the air and filled his senses with unwelcome life.

[Coughing]

WOMAN  
(confused)  
You're...awake?

ARTEDEMIS  
How long have I been in the void?

WOMAN  
Almost ten years, I think.

ARTEDEMIS  
(annoyed)  
What a waste of time.

[Sounds of grunting, stiff joints cracking]

WOMAN  
You can't get up, you're supposed  
to be dying.

ARTEDEMIS  
A slow death is one you can outrun.  
We return to Idrica.

WOMAN  
You're too weak!

ARTEDEMIS  
(defiant)  
What? I am not. Help me get  
dressed.

[Transitional music]

IDRICA SEMINARY

[Stone doors open and close]

ARTEDEMIS  
(yelling)  
Yulia!

[Footsteps on stone]

YULIA  
Artememis? You've...returned?

ARTEDEMIS

I've endured one hundred and eighty years on this planet and still haven't earned the right to die in peace. What's happened in the world since I left?

YULIA

A great deal, and some things that may not please you to hear. You should regain your strength first.

ARTEDEMIS

No need for that, I've rested long enough. What of my successor?

YULIA

The Etruvian messiah has denounced the Jhardeho Order, and chosen the path of abomination. He was exiled, and returned to Idrica for a time.

ARTEDEMIS

Where does Idrica stand on the matter?

YULIA

We stand with the messiah.

ARTEDEMIS

Where is Chartrulean now?

YULIA

In Simitu. He's unlocked the secrets of azurea, and used it to build weapons powerful beyond measure.

ARTEDEMIS

Predictable. So the long war is finally ending.

YULIA

Not quite. The Rau are sending an envoy to Arcas to negotiate the terms of peace. The end game is uncertain.

ARTEDEMIS

Are they to be trusted?



YULIA

Time will tell. But even without their presence, Simitu is ready to rip itself apart with senseless infighting. The Starbringer King has broken with the Order. With luck, Maldoro's tyranny may be coming to an end.

ARTEDEMIS

Finally, some common sense with these fool Starbringers. That's good.

(trembling)

But...I sense a great tragedy.

YULIA

Yes. The war bore heavy losses on both sides. Chartrulean's bane issued a great deal of damage.

ARTEDEMIS

That's not the tragedy I'm referring to.

YULIA

Nine sons and daughters of Jhardekai were involved in the incident. They were the ones who unleashed the calamity. Shan is with them now. It's unclear whether they can be helped.

[Strange deafening sound, as if Artedemis is hearing it in his head]

ARTEDEMIS

Gah!

YULIA

What is it?

ARTEDEMIS

The starmakers' grand design is compromised. New pathways are being forged as we speak, and everything we've come to understand about the future is now moot.

YULIA

Such is the path of abomination. It's happened before.

ARTEDEMIS

And just as before, our nature has not been elevated high enough to meet our potential. Either Chartrulean is stopped, or the world becomes one that deserves him.

YULIA

Everything considered, both seem unlikely.

ARTEDEMIS

This is a black swan on a cosmic scale, Yulia. The starmakers themselves are concerned, which is why I have returned. We have to try.

YULIA

What *could* we do?

ARTEDEMIS

We wait. Chartrulean will come to us when he's ready. It's up to him to set Arcas on a path it can endure. All we can do is guide him when he's ready.

[Transitional music]

#### CHARTRULEAN MONOLOGUE

CHARTRULEAN

That presence. The hair moves on the back of my neck, as if someone is standing over me, each exhale crashing into me like a wave of terror. But it's just me standing here. It's the darkness that moves inside of me. In the stillest of moments, I can feel it, creeping through my extremities like hungry vines. The vines are obstinate, like a cancer. They feed on the light that gives me power. What remains of that light is very faint now. Soon there will be nothing left at my center but a black hole, and I'll just be a man, weak and plagued by madness, forced to watch helplessly as everything I've built crumbles down around me.

The foundation on which I've built this little empire of mine is weak. Astreus. Azurea. I was never meant to exert myself in this way, to force destiny upon itself. To harness this much power. The cost has been etched into my very flesh.

I may very well be to Arcas as this invisible companion is to my own undoing.

Life may be unending but our potential is limited only by our paradoxical nature in which the fight to live is constantly at odds with our tendency to self destruct. So which will it be?

It's no longer up to me. I may have put this path in motion, but I'm just the catalyst. I could withdraw from the world but would risk abandoning those who suffer because of my choices.

I cannot. And so the choice is clear. If I'm to correct these mistakes, I must become something different in my final moments of clarity before this madness--this berserker--consumes me.

[Transitional music]

ASTREUS SPACEPORT

NARRATOR

Chartrulean paced the observation deck of Astreus spaceport, brow furrowed in deep, silent consternation. Looming high above planet Arcas, the deck offered a stunning view of the world below, and the cosmos beyond.

Chartrulean's gaze, however, was fixed upon a single object off in the distance. Arcas's sister moons gazed back at him like an odd pair of eyes. And between them, an almost infinitesimal speck of light. An approaching ship.

Chartrulean wasn't the only one on edge. Reaching to the left and right of Astreus, Arcasian battleships formed a defensive line in anticipation of the Rau envoy's arrival, and any surprises they might bring. The man who would play host to the envoy was Yoba, Chamberlain to House Starbringer.

[Approaching footsteps]

YOBA AND CHARTRULEAN ARE REUNITED

YOBA

Ah, there he is. The superman in his natural habitat.

CHARTRULEAN

Whatever remains of him.

YOBA

Still as dour as ever, I see.

CHARTRULEAN

Give me an auspicious occasion and you might find me in a better disposition.

YOBA

Is being reunited with an old friend not sufficient occasion?

[beat]

CHARTRULEAN

It is good to see you, Yoba.

YOBA

A long has passed, hasn't it? I'm not sure if seeing you like this makes me feel younger or older.

CHARTRULEAN

I have little nostalgia for our seminary days. Those were tumultuous times.

YOBA

I'm liking the beard, by the way. It compliments your black aura.

CHARTRULEAN

And you...are turning gray.

YOBA

Us lowly lifeforms don't age as gracefully as Etruvians.

(beat)

Look at all this. Such a crazy ordeal.

CHARTRULEAN

It doesn't sit well with me.

YOBA

We're supposed to put on a show of confidence.

CHARTRULEAN

Haven't we already done that?

YOBA

Mm. No. We've shown them power. The rest is up to diplomacy.

CHARTRULEAN

We won. Just let them leave.

YOBA

They're stuck here unless we can help them leave. We have to learn how this type of diplomacy works while we still have the advantage.

CHARTRULEAN

But why receive their envoy?

YOBA

Tell me what other choice we have.

CHARTRULEAN

You forget that I have seen the future.

YOBA

(antagonizing)

So you say, but what *exactly* would that look like? I think I deserve to know.

CHARTRULEAN

You might see first hand if this ends badly.

YOBA

That's just pessimistic.

[Sounds of footsteps approaching]

YOBA (CONT'D)  
Is this one of the paladins?

## HAVELION INTRODUCTION

HAVELION  
Havelion, at your service.

CHARTRULEAN  
*Lieutenant* Havelion. He's recently promoted.

HAVELION  
Right, sorry. I can't get used to the formality.

YOBA  
Chamberlain Yoba at yours, Lieutenant.

CHARTRULEAN  
Havelion is my protégé.

YOBA  
Is it rude to ask how old you are?

HAVELION  
I'm sixteen.

YOBA  
Oh, goodness, so young. King Starbringer has something big planned for your division.

HAVELION  
Looking forward to it. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm ready to head back down.

CHARTRULEAN  
You're excused.

[Sounds of footsteps leaving]

## YOBA AND CHARTRULEAN ARE REUNITED B

YOBA  
Are all the paladins around his age?

CHARTRULEAN  
They are.

YOBA  
Certainly some bright futures  
ahead.

[Sounds of conveyors]

HAVELION  
(in distance)  
Let's go.

NARRATOR

Yoba's eye was drawn toward a small interceptor in the ship bay below.

YOBA  
Is that one of The Nine?

CHARTRULEAN  
This one is called Niven.

YOBA  
Are all the ships named after  
Mystic Saints? How boring.

CHARTRULEAN  
The paladins named their ships.  
Havelion just happens to be more of  
an old soul.

NARRATOR

The ship whirred to life, and began to levitate. Its rotating engine and gun modules undulated, sending waves of heat through the hangar. It turned in place, then was gone.

YOBA  
What exactly happened that day? I  
keep hearing conflicting accounts.

CHARTRULEAN  
Chaos.

YOBA  
What's your side of things?

CHARTRULEAN  
(frustrated)  
There is no side to pick from. We  
were under pressure. I should have  
demanded more time.

YOBA  
There *was* no time.

CHARTRULEAN

That's a bone of contention. The generals set us up to fail. And it almost worked.

YOBA

And many of them lost their ranks over that.

CHARTRULEAN

Which puts me in a very uncomfortable position.

[Beat]

YOBA

Well whatever happened out there, it was effective nonetheless.

CHARTRULEAN

(interrupting)

Our part of the war is done. Hopefully we can all move on.

YOBA

By the way, any chance I can get a primer on Lapadine's little summit?

CHARTRULEAN

Astreus's resources are stretched dangerously thin.

YOBA

Ah.

CHARTRULEAN

We need to make a case for future development.

YOBA

That *should* be easy for the most powerful man on Arcas.

CHARTRULEAN

You would be surprised.

YOBA

Azurea. How strange a thing, energy plucked from thin air.

CHARTRULEAN

(chortling)

That's one way to belittle our accomplishments.



YOBA

Just tell everyone how rich it will  
make them.

CHARTRULEAN

For my part, I would rather sell  
them on substance.

YOBA

The world doesn't work that way.  
You either lure them in with  
riches, or scare them.

CHARTRULEAN

Well. I'll go with scare if  
pressed.

[Beat]

YOBA

So far everything's still on  
schedule for King Starbringer's  
little surprise. He and his  
children are returning to the  
capital as we speak.

CHARTRULEAN

What is he wanting to do exactly?  
Astreus is still a closed facility.

YOBA

You are *war heroes*. Don't tell me  
you weren't expecting any pomp and  
ceremony.

CHARTRULEAN

The Admiral's summit should remain  
our first priority. Whatever else  
should offer little in the way of  
distraction.

YOBA

Eh, my guest lists do have a way of  
growing on their own. I make no  
promises.

CHARTRULEAN

(firm)  
Keep it small.

YOBA

I'll do my best.  
(remembering)  
(MORE)

YOBA (CONT'D)

Oh. Before I forget, this is for you.

[Sounds of paper rustling]

YOBA (CONT'D)

A letter. A little old fashioned, but that's his style.

[Sounds of envelope opening]

CHARTRULEAN

An invitation. To a...oh no.

YOBA

Oh yes. Speaking of foolish acts of confidence, King Starbringer is hosting a banquet as a prelude to negotiations with the Rau.

CHARTRULEAN

I won't go.

YOBA

But you're invited as a guest of honor.

CHARTRULEAN

The last thing I want is a public life.

YOBA

You'd be missed.

CHARTRULEAN

I highly doubt that.

YOBA

Not so fast. There's also this.

[Sounds of rustling clothes and jewelry]

YOBA (CONT'D)

*Someone* trusted me to deliver a gift.

CHARTRULEAN

What is it?

YOBA

A brooch. You're supposed to wear it on your lapel.

CHARTRULEAN

That's not what I meant. Who is it from and what do they expect in return?

YOBA

I've been sworn to secrecy. But a special lady hopes you'll wear it.

CHARTRULEAN

*That won't change my mind.*

YOBA

You can't hide behind your work forever.

CHARTRULEAN

Oh yes I can.

YOBA

You told me you need resources, and here I am extending you the gift of my inner circle. Everyone who can help you will be there.

CHARTRULEAN

All the more reason to stay far away.

YOBA

Look, I get it. But please, just come to the party. We've even picked out something for you to wear.

CHARTRULEAN

Of course you have...

YOBA

I'm well aware of your penchant for black, and that will never do.

[Music cue, alarms, background activity]

OFFICER

It's time. The Rau envoy is approaching.

[Bay doors open]

YOBA

Well, time to go play welcoming committee. Thanks for letting me borrow Astreus.

[Beat]

CHARTRULEAN

Yoba, I--

[Beat]

YOBA

See you at the party.

[Transitional music cue]

CHARTRULEAN TAKES THE ASTREUS ELEVATOR DOWN

[Sounds of elevator mechanisms]

NARRATOR

Chartulean began his long descent to the surface, the sole passenger on board a glass elevator. A great tower connected Astreus's upper and lower counterparts. At the top of the tower was the spaceport, situated in the planet's stratosphere. An almost garish monument to Arcas's technological accomplishments.

Hundreds of smaller structures like it spanned the horizon, great pylons drawing lines between the earth and the cosmos.

The elevator was in a race against the setting sun, adding an element of serene beauty. As it broke through a layer of haze, the sprawling capital city of Simitu showed itself. The metropolis was dwarfed by the purple mountains and expansive salt flats of the Blighted Valley. The neighboring city of Cailou peeked through the haze from an even greater distance. Retaining walls fought back against the caustic environment that encroached upon Arcas's last great cities.

That familiar nagging sense of unease couldn't touch Chartrulean in the air, and the elevator gave him a rare window of silence in the midst of chaos. But seeing the whole landscape at once made one fact irrefutable: The planet was running low on things to give its people.

[Elevator landing sounds]

The elevator finally touched down in the middle of a large compound. At its center was Astreus Labs, where Chartrulean lived and worked.

He paused, breathed in the evening air. Something small and sharp nagged at his hip. Then he remembered the brooch in his pocket.

CHARTRULEAN

This is no ordinary gift. Nothing that could be purchased to say the least. Had I recognized it sooner, it would not be in my possession right now.

NARRATOR

The trinket was a simple design made of pure silver depicting two moons eclipsing a translucent blue stone carved from azurium lunestra. It was salt crystal with bioluminescent properties that glowed azure blue in moonlight. It was especially reactive to Jhardeho energy, which was sacred to those, like himself, who had the ability to harness it. Because of this mystical property, Jhardeho energy -- the mother of all energy -- was called azurea. Controlling it in the physical world was the cornerstone of Chartrulean's work.

But the brooch's symbol was a warning sign to any Jhardeho with a trained eye.

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)

It looks harmless, but the message it sends is not. Dual totality, during which the very fabric of our planet quakes. In Jhardeho, it is a harbinger of chaos. It would not be put into my hands lightly. The giver knows me. My insecurities. My fears for the future. My curse.

NARRATOR

Arcas's sister moons watched him through the salty haze that drifted in from the flats. The brooch radiated brightly as he held it up to the night sky, comparing the phases of the moons.

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)

I may be able to demystify this right here and now.

[Void sounds]

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)

(layered, over-confident)  
I relax my mind, invoke Jhardeho, and summon the void. Here, I am no longer bound by the laws that govern the material world.

(MORE)

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)

And my superman is free to roam  
through time and space, so long as  
the power of the collective  
consciousness flows through me. The  
azurea is the key the gates of  
perception at the edge of  
existence. I have only to open them  
and the future will unfold before  
my mind's eye.

[flash forward; distorted voices. Void sounds dissipate.  
Sounds of collapsing]

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)

(panting)

Maybe I was a little overconfident.  
My body has yet to recover. And  
until it does, my energy is  
limited. If I wish to satisfy this  
curiosity, I may have to brave the  
banquet.

[Transitional music cue]

ASTREUS LABS - BANQUET PREPARATION

[Lab ambience; machinery in distance]

NARRATOR

On the day of the banquet, Astreus bustled with last-minute preparations. The Nine were arranged for display, but in an exploded state. Technicians swarmed them, a sea of parts and work carts littering the area.

Chartrulean's head was buried in one of Niven's control panels. An engineer hovered nearby, nervously shifting his weight from one foot to the other and flinching at every little noise.

CHARTRULEAN

And here is another problem. These  
need to be replaced.

HAVELION

Get all the ghosts out yet?

CHARTRULEAN

Havelion, we are crippled...

HAVELION

Come on...it's temporary.

CHARTRULEAN

Once that's done, go ahead and close up.

ENGINEER

(relieved)

Yessir.

[Beat]

HAVELION

Did you tell your *friend* what really happened?

CHARTRULEAN

I said only what was relevant. If we can find the problem quickly, there will be no reason to involve Yoba beyond that.

HAVELION

This doesn't seem like a problem we can solve in a rush. Rushing's what got us into this mess in the first place.

CHARTRULEAN

We haven't been given much of a choice. If these people want to see the ships, then let them come see the ships. But I have no intention of entertaining them further.

HAVELION

They still fly, don't they?

CHARTRULEAN

No one is flying *anything* until we have a better handle on the problem.

[Beat]

HAVELION

Can't we push the summit back until we have some real answers?

CHARTRULEAN

No. It would be obvious that we are hiding something.

HAVELION

But we *are*.

CHARTRULEAN

If we have to bury the truth to buy time, then so be it.

(beat)

Will you go find the others? I think they're hiding from me.

HAVELION

I would too if I could. You've been an absolute madman.

CHARTRULEAN

It's not beneath you all to *clean*.

HAVELION

I don't understand how all this salt even gets in here.

CHARTRULEAN

Have you looked outside?

HAVELION

Yeah.

[Sounds of footsteps approach]

CHARTRULEAN DECIDES

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

No soldier takes joy in the mundane. But you'll have to get used to being grounded. At least for now.

CHARTRULEAN

Admiral Lapadine. Are you headed out?

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

Of course. Tonight's the banquet.

[Chartrulean sighing]

HAVELION

Are you going or not?

CHARTRULEAN

I don't know.

HAVELION

How could you not know?



CHARTRULEAN

There's too much to do here ahead of tomorrow.

HAVELION

Well, since I'm a *Lieutenant* and all, I think I can make sure it all gets done.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

Oh. Finally accepting the new title are we?

HAVELION

(defensive)

I never had a problem with the title. Just everything else.

CHARTRULEAN

(scolding)

Havelion...

HAVELION

Sorry, Admiral.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

Save some of that combative energy for tomorrow. You've going to need it.

CHARTRULEAN

Can we please focus on the dilemma at hand, which greatly concerns my dignity? Should I go or not?

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

It's not about *you*, it's about *Astreus*.

HAVELION

Exactly. You're being melodramatic.

CHARTRULEAN

My involvement in all this has been very polarizing. One public misstep from me could compromise everything.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

I'll be there buttering up the war hawks ahead of the summit.

CHARTRULEAN

They aren't what bothers me.

[Sound of approaching footsteps]

BORSHA  
Director, a package just arrived  
for you.

CHARTRULEAN  
From whom?

BORSHA  
The capitol, I think.

CHARTRULEAN  
(annoyed)  
Leave it outside my room.

HAVELION  
Not so fast. Give it here, Borsha.

BORSHA  
But--

CHARTRULEAN  
Don't you dare--

HAVELION  
Dare what?

[Sounds of package opening]

CHARTRULEAN  
Dammit, Havelion--  
(aghast)  
Oh, no.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE  
Well look at that!

BORSHA  
Oh, wow...

CHARTRULEAN  
No, no, no, no, no!

HAVELION  
(snickering)  
What's wrong? Not your style?

CHARTRULEAN  
I don't have the energy for this!

BORSHA  
(gushing)  
Oh! What a beautiful suit!

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)  
You're kidding me?

BORSHA (CONT'D)  
So rich in color!

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)  
A bit too rich....

BORSHA (CONT'D)  
And look at this embroidery!  
Such immaculate gold  
threading.

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)  
You must be joking.

BORSHA (CONT'D)  
Don't you just love it,  
Chartrulean?

HAVELION  
I guess it didn't come in black...

CHARTRULEAN  
Give me that. He's obviously  
messing with me. This is the  
gaudiest thing imaginable. I can't  
wear it. I can't even look at it!

ADMIRAL LAPADINE  
On the contrary. Capital galas can  
be a spectacle. This is very in  
style right now, and somewhat on  
the conservative side.

[Havelion laughing]

CHARTRULEAN  
You can't be serious. What are you  
wearing?

ADMIRAL LAPADINE  
What I'm wearing now. Why?

CHARTRULEAN  
Borsha, please take it. Burn it,  
make something from it, I don't  
care.

BORSHA  
It'd look so good on you! Please  
just try it on.

CHARTRULEAN  
I really can't tell if you're  
joking.

HAVELION  
I guess you definitely have to go  
now.

CHARTRULEAN  
You think this is funny.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE  
Come on. Let the young *Lieutenant*  
finish up in here and go get ready.

CHARTRULEAN  
Jhardeho save me.

[Transitional music cue]

CHARTRULEAN GETS READY

NARRATOR

Chartrulean's apartment was small and spartan. Despite having occupied it for several years, he never bothered to add any measure of comfort. The only furnishing was a low bed. A large mirror leaned against the far wall, and a mat occupied the floor directly in front of it.

He had requested that his work bench and several carts be relocated from the lab to his room. Even the bed had become an odd collage of tools and personal effects.

Chartrulean ignored the mess and stood facing his reflection in the mirror. Unruly dark curls cascaded across his forehead. His beard itched with newness, and a web of dark scars covered parts of his back and chest, forking like lightning. He traced the darkest lines with the tip of his finger, but knew the worst of it was on the inside.

CHARTRULEAN  
*(thinking)*  
*More wounds to heal. Though  
damaged, this vessel still looks  
vaguely like a man. But whatever  
humanity there once was -- can I  
find it again, or has Jhardeho  
killed that part of me?*

[protest sounds drift in]

*The last time I was in a crowd was  
the day of my exile. All the people  
of Simitu had gathered in the  
streets to exacerbate my  
humiliation. They called me an  
"abomination."*

[Ghostly, detached voices: "Blasphemer. Traitor. Monster.  
Abomination."]

*But it wasn't the words or the stones they threw that cut. It was the realization that I could hurt, and I could hate.*

*Everything I did was for them, but they were blind. Will people tonight remember me as the monster? Or am I different in their eyes now? It may take more than this technicolor frock to disguise what I really am. At least there are things in the craftsmanship that can be appreciated.*

[Sounds of fabric]

*I don't understand this kind of frivolity. I never imagined being capable of stooping to this level. Lying. Pandering. Begging.*

*(resolved)*

*No. Sorry, Yoba. I will come to your party, but I will come as the abomination. I own it.*

NARRATOR

Chartrulean set Yoba's gift aside, revealing a seemingly plain black suit with a high collar and translucent piping on the chest forming the symbol of Jhardeho--a modern parody of temple fashion. The detailing was made from alytra, a nanotech fiber made right there at Astreus. Like the brooch, it became illuminated when worn. It complemented the jewel very well.

Chartrulean dressed, fixed the brooch to his lapel, and returned to the mirror. He half-hoped to find a new man, but his reflected self was still a little unhinged.

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)

*(reciting)*

*I stray not from the path in the shadow of fear. It's in darkness where I find my strength. Jhardeho, guide me.*

*(a beat)*

*This is going to be a disaster.*

[End credits]