

THE MADNESS OF CHARTRULEAN
A Gardeka Story

S1:E04
"PRECIOUS CARGO"

Written by

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TMOC EPISODE 4: PRECIOUS CARGO

FLASHBACK TO END OF EPISODE 3 - WAR ROOM

CHARTRULEAN

We are not doing this for redemption. But we are giving you a chance at redemption. If you balk at that chance today, you will be left behind tomorrow. That is not a threat. It's a guarantee.

[Awkward silence]

YOBA

(distant)

Now who here wants to get rich? I do...

[Flashes to]

AFTER THE SUMMIT

[Wine pouring, sound of classical-like music playing gently in background]

KING STARBRINGER

Ah, well, that's one way to get rid of a crowd!

CHARTRULEAN

What Havelion said--

KING STARBRINGER

What about it? No one deserved to be put on the spot like that. Those men were being bullies.

CHARTRULEAN

He was out of line and I am responsible.

KING STARBRINGER

Out of line, but effective.

(beat)

On a positive note, you have whatever support you need from me. If you want to feel responsible for something, focus on that.

CHARTRULEAN

Lapadine is still down there
running damage control on our
behalf.

KING STARBRINGER

Believe me, things here are going
about as well as anything else.

YOBA

Is that supposed to make him feel
better?

KING STARBRINGER

Yoba, I hate it when you sulk. Get
over here and help me drink all of
Lapadine's wine while he isn't
looking.

[Beat]

KING STARBRINGER (CONT'D)

You know, Chartrulean...coming
here, I had no idea what kind of
person the Etruvian would be. I'd
heard stories and prepared for the
worst kind of personality. But you
are more of a paradox than I was
expecting. Humble, yet fierce.

(beat)

I like you.

[Beat]

KING STARBRINGER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, I'm embarrassing you.
What are you going to build first?

CHARTRULEAN

I will know more once we can move
past our current setbacks.

KING STARBRINGER

The--what'd you call it--berseker?

(beat)

It's funny, isn't it, how the past
can sneak up on you so
unexpectedly.

(awkward beat)

Anyways, I sincerely hope you find
an answer.

[Sound of wine pouring]

KING STARBRINGER (CONT'D)
 This is good wine! Can I pour you
 some?

CHARTRULEAN
 No, thank you. The taste is not to
 my liking.

KING STARBRINGER
 Come on, drink with me! You'll live
 longer.

AFTER THE SUMMIT B

[Sound of something being dropped across the room]

KING STARBRINGER
 Daughter, please resist the urge to
 touch *everything*.

SOPHROSYNE
 Sorry. I was just curious.

KING STARBRINGER
 This is probably the only time I'll
 ever ask you to be like your
 brother.

IMSEP
 (offended)
 What's that supposed to mean?

KING STARBRINGER
 Oh. Sorry son, I forgot you were
 still with us.

IMSEP
 Do I need to break things to
 announce my presence, like my dear
 sister?

SOPHROSYNE
 I didn't break it!

KING STARBRINGER
 That's enough from the both of you.
 This isn't the time or place to act
 like children.

[Sound of sipping wine]

AFTER THE SUMMIT C

KING STARBRINGER

Speaking of children, your young Lieutenant's zeal was refreshing. I agree with what he said. The war has brought us prosperity, there's no doubting that. But we are losing sight of our values. That's a big thing to say for someone his age, and in that kind of company.

YOBA

Will he be punished for his outburst?

KING STARBRINGER

He's just a boy. And he's clearly sick. Just let it go.

YOBA

(frustrated)

He called you out and disrespected you in front of members of your council!

KING STARBRINGER

But he's not wrong. In fact, if I punished him, some people might call me a hypocrite. I'll let Chartrulean handle it how he thinks it needs to be handled.

CHARTRULEAN

And I will.

[Beat]

KING STARBRINGER

Good. Well. Now that that's all over with, it's time for the other reason I wanted to see you.

CHARTRULEAN

Can I show you The Nine?

KING STARBRINGER

Yes, yes.

(beat)

But first, I have a special commission for you, should you accept it.

CHARTRULEAN
 (confused)
 A commission?

KING STARBRINGER
 Yes. I need a very rugged ship to
 move some precious cargo.

CHARTRULEAN
 And what is the cargo?

KING STARBRINGER
 Oh, right. I can't remember if
 you've met my daughter, Sophrosyne.

[Beat]

CHARTRULEAN
 I have.

SOPHROSYNE
 (meek)
 Hello again.

KING STARBRINGER
 Sophrosyne came of age years ago.
 Since her mother died, I've kept
 her selfishly all to myself. She
 had to take up a lot of my late
 wife's responsibilities starting at
 a very young age.

(beat)
 But now that the war is ending, I
 think it's time to put the
 spotlight back on family.

SOPHROSYNE
 What?! Wait, Dad...

KING STARBRINGER
 A ship would make an attractive
 dowry. Don't you think?

SOPHROSYNE
 Can we not do this here--

KING STARBRINGER
 Where else would I go to buy you a
 ship? I will only settle for the
 best, you know that.

IMSEP
 (sighing)
 Father, can I go? I'm very bored.

KING STARBRINGER
 Huh? Oh, yes. You can go.

[Footsteps leave the room. More wine pours]

KING STARBRINGER (CONT'D)
 I often wonder which one is the
 princess.

YOBA
 (under his breath)
 Truly.

KING STARBRINGER
 I have a son who spends most his
 days getting dressed and a...a
pertinacious daughter.

SOPHROSYNE
 But we talked about this! You said--

KING STARBRINGER
 I'm not going to argue in front of
 company.

YOBA
 I should remind you that WE are the
 company, and I don't think you'll
 get any sympathy from *him* on the
 topic of marriage.

[Beat]

KING STARBRINGER
 (defeated)
 What strength does the Starbringer
 name have left, anyway? The New
 Regime plots to usurp us, whatever
 that means. Can you believe it? If
 everyone in this room died today,
 they would have succeeded.

[Beat]

YOBA
 I think we've taken up enough of
 Chartrulean's day. We *should* be
 preparing for the ambassadors.

KING STARBRINGER

Oh, yes, right. I guess that's next.

(sighing)

So Chartrulean, what do you think? Will you built it?

CHARTRULEAN

(resigned)

What would be the requirements?

KING STARBRINGER

It would have to be fast. *Very* fast. And indefatigable. If something were to happen, and she had to run for her life, it must do *at least* those things.

CHARTRULEAN

What would you be expecting her to run *from*?

KING STARBRINGER

Does it matter? If you had a daughter, you'd understand. Just make it your best.

YOBA

(exasperated)

Ok, it's getting too hard for me to hold my tongue. The poor man is making an effort to be polite, but this is a ridiculous ask.

CHARTRULEAN

Yoba's right.

(sighing)

Frankly, it wouldn't be worth my time.

KING STARBRINGER

You'd be paid handsomely...

CHARTRULEAN

No sum of money could make up for lost time right now. I have to disappoint you.

KING STARBRINGER

But oh, the grandeur of it! Where's your vision? Imagine the statement it would make. You could make it a true zeitgeist of these crazy times.

CHARTRULEAN PANICS SILENTLY

[Chartulean layered thoughts]

YOBA

He is a *shipbuilder*, not a
toymaker.

KING STARBRINGER

Chartrulean, why don't you just
take some time to think about it? I
can have Sophrosyne come by
tomorrow to wrap up the parts of
the tour we didn't get to today,
and the two of you can talk it
over.

YOBA

(exhausted)

And reason has officially left the
room.

KING STARBRINGER

Yoba, your dissent mode is wearing
me out.

YOBA

Then today is going to be a very
long day for you.

KING STARBRINGER

Go spend the day with Imsep if
you're going to be that dour.

YOBA

Is there any actual business left
to cover, or can we be done here?

KING STARBRINGER

Chartrulean, you get the final
word.

[Long pause]

CHARTRULEAN

Great.

[Transitional music]

CHARTRULEAN MELTS DOWN WITH LAPADINE

[Heavy footsteps. Heartbeat sounds intensifying]

CHARTRULEAN

(*thinking*)

*I need to find a dark corner where
I can collect myself. I could just
go back into exile. That would
solve it...*

[Approaching footsteps, heartbeat sounds stop]

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

Have the Starbringers left?

CHARTRULEAN

(*breathing heavily*)

Yes. So has your wine.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

Do you need help? Come on, I'll
walk you to Shan.

CHARTRULEAN

(*gulping*)

No, it's fine. I just need a
moment.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

That was quite the show up there.

CHARTRULEAN

If you do your job poorly, no one
will ever ask you to do it again.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

I'll ignore that sentiment, because
there will be a next time. And a
next time.

(*beat*)

The war hawks were hard to get rid
of. But I think they left excited
in the end.

CHARTRULEAN

I did not intend what I said to
come off as a threat.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

They *came* because they are
threatened. And if you ask me, they
needed to be shaken. They'll
remember this day for some time.

CHARTRULEAN

(*sighing*)

I guess it could have been worse.

(MORE)

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)

They could have found out our ships
are crippled and we're all going
mad.

(sarcastic)

Oh, wait....

[Beat]

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

Havelion is getting bolder. He'll
probably end up with my job one
day. But he's being reckless. Those
people may not know exactly what it
is they saw, but that won't stop
them from speculating. Rumors are
tinder, and not everyone in this
city agrees with the king on his
leniency towards the Jhardekai. Add
strange diseases to the mix and
that tinder turns into a wildfire.
Understand me?

CHARTRULEAN

So this might get worse.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

Chartrulean. Say the word and I'll
have guards at every door to this
facility.

CHARTRULEAN

Only if it keeps them safe.

[beat]

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

Oh, before I forget,
congratulations are in order! We've
secured all the support we need to
continue.

CHARTRULEAN

What? How?

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

I guess in our case, greed is a
powerful motivator.

CHARTRULEAN

I guess going back into exile is
out of the question then.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

That's taking it a bit far, don't you think?

CHARTRULEAN

No.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

Anyways, I'd like to move forward. I expect you and Havelion to start planning for Idrica immediately.

CHARTRULEAN

Why the rush?

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

Because that's what will keep the war hawks happy and the money flowing. They want to see action.

CHARTRULEAN

Then I have to focus on the ships.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

I can buy you whatever time you need with the ships, I just need you to do this.

CHARTRULEAN

This is starting to feel like another disaster setup. One after the other...

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

I have *faith* in you.

CHARTRULEAN

Lapadine. You are a man of war. You know better than to lean on faith.

ADMIRAL LAPADINE

You've made a believer out of me before. You can do it again.

[Shoulder patting. Beat]

ADMIRAL LAPADINE (CONT'D)

Go to Idrica. It'd do you some good to walk away for a few days. Get some exercise, breathe in that mountain air, and come back feeling refreshed.

CHARTRULEAN
 (disbelief)
Exercise?

ADMIRAL LAPADINE
 We all need a little diversion to
 keep us sane. Now. Go check on your
 paladins. They've been very
 patient.

[Transitional music cue]

CHARTRULEAN TALKS TO THE PALADINS

ABRUC
 I can't believe we listened to you,
 Havi.

SUNYATA
 It was stupid.

HAVELION
 Yeah, well, I didn't twist any
 arms.

NICOLA
 Actually your exact words were
 "what are you all afraid of?"

CORBIN
 It *could* get worse! How long do you
 think it'll be before we're all
 dragged through the street now?

FAMKE
 What if we made him look bad? In
 front of the king and everyone
 else?

QUAY
 He already looks bad! How could we
 possibly have made it any worse?

NICOLA
 I *really* don't want to go back to
 Idrica.

ABRUC
 You guys, that will never happen.

FAMKE
 And Starbringer would never go back
 on his word.

SUNYATA

Shh! Someone's coming. It's probably him!

[Sound of door opening, slow footsteps entering then stopping, then nothing for a long beat. Chartrulean laughs softly]

QUAY

(sarcastic)

That's not creepy...

ABRUC

I think this is the end...

HAVELION

Is this part of our punishment?

CHARTRULEAN

Not at all. You all did very well. We ended up securing support we need to continue.

NICOLA

You aren't mad at us?

CHARTRULEAN

No, Nicola. I am not. We owe these people nothing.

HAVELION

(pressing)

But *will* we be punished?

CHARTRULEAN

Not directly. But we have to prepare for the consequences of your actions. The admiral and I will do what we can to see that you're safe, as long as you're *here*. Be leery of everyone who walks through that front door, and do not leave the compound under any circumstance.

(beat)

How are you all...feeling?

CORBIN

You mean have we gone crazy yet?

NICOLA

We're fine.

CHARTRULEAN
 Would you tell me if you weren't?

[Awkward silence]

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)
 I understand your reticence. But
 keeping it to yourself... Shan is
 here to help, you can trust her, if
 not me.

[More awkward silence]

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)
 (clearing throat)
 Before I let you go, we're going to
 do something we haven't done in a
 while.

[Groans in unison]

NICOLA
 I thought you said we weren't being
 punished?

CHARTRULEAN
 It's not a punishment, it's
 practice. Today proved that we all
 still have a lot of healing to do,
 and we need to do it together.

HAVELION
 Whatever, I'm out.

CHARTRULEAN
 Sit down, Havelion.

ABRUC
 Come on...

CHARTRULEAN
 We're just going to send a thought.
 Something small to carry us through
 the rest of the day.
 (beat)
 Now focus. You start.

NICOLA
 All right.

[Long Silence]

CHARTRULEAN
 Do you all have it?

SUNYATA
Butterfly.

FAMKE
Butterfly.

QUAY
Butterfly.

ABRUC
Butterfly.

CORBIN
Butterfly.

[Silence]

CHARTRULEAN
Havelion?

HAVELION
Homena.

CHARTRULEAN HAS A HEART TO HEART WITH HAVELION

CHARTRULEAN
Havelion stays. Everyone else can
go.

[Shuffling feet, door closing]

CHARTRULEAN (CONT'D)
You have not been practicing your
meditation.

HAVELION
I have a little. It's just not
working.

CHARTRULEAN
You will never reach the void
unless you learn how to quiet your
thoughts.

HAVELION
I don't even understand why you
think I need it. I do fine without.

CHARTRULEAN
You are stronger than the others.
You have this ability.

HAVELION

I guess....I guess I just don't
want to be alone with myself.
Homena and I worked on our
meditation together.

[Silence]

CHARTRULEAN

Yoba asked me to consider a
punishment for you. *Only you.*

HAVELION

Tsch. Of course he did.

CHARTRULEAN

I have something in mind. Want to
know what it is?

HAVELION

(sighing)
Give it to me.

CHARTRULEAN

No. You have to pluck it from my
mind. Now, deep breaths.

[Breathing. Long pause. Transitional music]

SIMITU CAPITAL BUILDING, COUNCIL CHAMBER - NEGOTIATIONS
START

NARRATOR

King Starbringer was seated at a large round table that
nearly consumed the entire council chamber.

All eyes were on Cydar, Drechen, and Grobien, who looked down
their beak-like noses at a stack of papers. The ambassadors'
entourage stood awkwardly at the back of the room. One of the
guards had managed to fall asleep standing up, and snored
gently.

It was the only sound in the room aside from the anxious
breathing of twenty-five serious-looking men and women. They
were aldermen and women representing each of Arcas's last
cities, joined by members of King Starbringer's cabinet.

[Sound of pages turning]

KING STARBRINGER

(*thinking*)
There should be more people here.

(MORE)

KING STARBRINGER (CONT'D)

I shouldn't be pulling empty chairs from the room, it should be packed. This is THE moment everyone should be showing up, not nursing their petty grudges. At least those who turned their backs on me have been spared this god awful silence.

NARRATOR

One large, uncomfortable-looking chair had been placed against the wall like a ceremonial throne. It was carved from a single piece of petrified wood, cut from a long-extinct species of tree. Three symbols joined by a triangle were etched into its high back. The symbol of the Jhardeho Order. The man who used to occupy that chair, Abbott Maldoro, was one of King Starbringer's closest advisors, and his father's before him.

The entire Starbringer Dynasty existed in part because of the Order. They ruled over Simitu in equal measure, an arrangement now mired in finger-pointing and confusion. The last time King Starbringer saw Maldoro, the old man was sitting in that chair, gripping it with such rage that the thin skin covering his knuckles looked like it might tear. King Starbringer kept the chair as a reminder of what happened that day.

[Transitional Music cue]

FLASHBACK - KSB BREAKING FROM ORDER

[Echoey voices fading into presence]

MALDORO

My king, I strongly advise against this!

KING STARBRINGER

This technology cannot be overlooked based on your personal grudge.

MALDORO

My *personal* grudge?! Chartrulean is defiling our gods! He's stolen forbidden knowledge and is using it to make weapons. There could be much more at stake than a *few lives!*

KING STARBRINGER

A few lives?! Try millions! All of Arcas barely has millions left! The Rau are strengthening their armada as we speak. If they attack us directly, our defenses will break. People will die if we sit here and do nothing.

MALDORO

Jhardeka has shown us every possible outcome. His word is my life's work. *This* path-- Chartrulean's path--is dark and unstable. It could be utterly catastrophic! Until you denounce him for what he is, an abomination, The Order cannot support you.

KING STARBRINGER

Him, the abomination? No. Your atrocities have not gone unseen! I've turned a blind eye all this time because I thought you had the peoples' best interests at heart. But all these things you've done in broad daylight to sow division and fear among *my* people?

MALDORO

We *do* have *our* peoples' best interest at heart! You have no idea how many sacrifices we've made to ensure that humanity can persevere for eons to come. It's our job to look at what's best for our collective future. Your short-sighted way of thinking threatens progress. Please, think about what you're doing.

KING STARBRINGER

I have thought about it, and I'm done listening to you. Our people will outlive this war without any further concessions to you and your damn gods.

[Beat]

MALDORO

Congratulations. You may have just killed us all.

[Chair scooting, footsteps leave the room. Door slams.
Dissent from Cabinet members]

KING STARBRINGER

Those members of my cabinet who
stand with me, stay seated.
Everyone else, you can leave, and I
won't hold it against you. But I
will remember your faces.

[Sounds of people standing up, footsteps leaving room]

CABINET MEMBER 1

This is a mistake.

[Door slamming]

YOBA

Well, there goes half your cabinet.
What are you going to do with a
junior chamberlain and a bunch of
random heads of departments?

KING STARBRINGER

Yoba, help Admiral Lapadine locate
Chartrulean. Give him whatever
resources he needs.

YOBA

Are you sure this is what you want
to do?

KING STARBRINGER

You had your chance to leave.

YOBA

I stand with you. *And* Chartrulean.
But this decision is going to be
highly divisive among your people.

KING STARBRINGER

Let them burn the capitol to the
ground if it makes them feel
better. We have been given a way to
fight the storm instead of weather
it. That doesn't happen very often.
If what I'm hearing about this so-
called forbidden technology is
true, we will be able to do
wonderful things within our
lifetimes. If the people can't see
it now, they will in time. But
first, we have to win.

DRECHEN AND GROBIEN CHALLENGE THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS

[Cydar coughing. Sounds of pages turning]

DRECHEN

What do you take us for?

KING STARBRINGER

Pardon?

DRECHEN

Rau paperwork is a tapestry of historical and cultural importance. Every word must flow and ebb as history dictates. What you have here is a detestable, putrescent, cavalcade of bureaucracy! Moving forward, we would like to make one thing clear. Our colony ship, Xisuthros, carries the entirety of what remains of our civilization. Women, children, elderly, and all we hold most dear. Such things are treated with respect. What we're going to be looking for is language that acknowledges that. So far this is unacceptably...formal.

KING STARBRINGER

Sorry. We'll be sure to include better language in the next draft. For said women and children, you'll find ample resources as part of the reparations we're offering. You'll have everything you need to stabilize your colony, and rebuild whatever needs to be rebuilt.

GROBIEN

And in return?

KING STARBRINGER

In return? That would be interesting. What have you brought with you to the negotiation table?

DRECHEN

Ah. What we present to your negotiation table is one that you might find most appeasing. We bring the secret of enduring life.

[Beat]

KING STARBRINGER
Elaborate, please.

DRECHEN
We've traversed great distances in a single lifetime. We can show you how it's done.

GROBIEN
A trade of technology.

KING STARBRINGER
Are you out of your mind? A *trade* of technology?

DRECHEN
Your azurea is more interesting to us than space rocks.

KING STARBRINGER
Unfortunately that is complicated. Let's start with the space rocks.

[Pages turning. Cydar coughing]

DRECHEN
Language aside, we find the overall terms appealing. But there are a few things that we would like to discuss privately, if we can afford a recess. Maybe make a few minor revisions?

KING STARBRINGER
How much time will you need?

[Cydar coughing more violently]

KSB ENDS NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE DAY

YOBA
Take him back to his chambers and call Doctor Tomlin.

YOBA'S ASSISTANT
Yes, Chamberlain.

KING STARBRINGER
Take whatever time is necessary, that's enough for today. We're adjourned until tomorrow.

[Coughing intensifies, then fades. Idle conversations]

KING STARBRINGER (CONT'D)
Well, daughter? What do you think?

SOPHROSYNE
I think we're off to a reasonable
start.

KING STARBRINGER
You're just trying to make me feel
better.

[Beat, more room chatter]

KING STARBRINGER (CONT'D)
You know, half my cabinet walked
out on me. And still, here we are.
(sighing)
I hope we're doing this right.
There's no guidebook for forming an
intergalactic empire.

SOPHROSYNE
It's kind of surreal. None of these
people here have known a time
without war. I can't wait to see
how much things change now.

DRECHEN
That's a fair observation,
princess. Although your statement
is not entirely accurate. We have,
in fact, outlived the war.

SOPHROSYNE
Oh! Uhm-

DRECHEN
Would you like to guess my age? You
won't offend me.

GROBIEN
While you glow from youth, we glow
from old age.

[Ambassadors laugh]

KING STARBRINGER
Ambassadors. Is there anything else
we can do to make Cydar more
comfortable?

DRECHEN

I'm afraid not. This has all been very taxing, but his presence is important to us.

GROBIEN

Your daughter is stunning. Her skin is so delicate and soft. May I?

SOPHROSYNE

No, please.

[Sophrosyne wincing]

KING STARBRINGER

I'd appreciate it if you kept your hands to yourself. My fatherly instincts may spurn a regrettable reaction if you don't, and I'd hate to start another war.

GROBIEN

But such a face just begs to be touched.

SOPHROSYNE

Oh...no...

DRECHEN

You should consider marrying one of us. We could help you immortalize your beauty, rather than let it go to waste with old age.

SOPHROSYNE

Oh don't worry, when I become an old queen I will make sure my short time is well spent making sure you stay in line.

KING STARBRINGER

Eh--Yoba--

[Ambassadors laugh uncomfortably]

YOBA

Guards.

YOBA'S ASSISTANT

Ambassadors, right this way please.

[Footsteps away]

KING STARBRINGER

Don't worry. They'll be gone soon,
and this will all be behind us.

SOPHROSYNE

Good.

KING STARBRINGER

And I don't want you to sit in
after today.

SOPHROSYNE

What? But I like having something
to do.

KING STARBRINGER

Yes, I know. And as much as I want
that for you, I don't think you
should be around the ambassadors
more than necessary.

SOPHROSYNE

I'm not scared of them.

KING STARBRINGER

I know. That's half the problem.
Please. Go to Astreus tomorrow like
I asked. Focus on the ship.

SOPHROSYNE

Not that again.

KING STARBRINGER

I want to know everything that's
going on there.

SOPHROSYNE

So you want me to be a spy?

KING STARBRINGER

Chartrulean is an interesting
character, and I want to make sure
he feels our presence. The azurea
is too important to lose sight of.
Ok?

SOPHROSYNE

All right.

KING STARBRINGER

You're disappointed. But will you
do this anyway? For dear old dad?

SOPHROSYNE

(sighing)

Fine.

[Transitional music cue]

YOBA WALKS THE AMBASSADORS TO THEIR APARTMENT

YOBA

Sometime, you have to tell me more about this life extension technology of yours. It sounds fascinating.

(beat)

Well, here we are! Rest well, ambassadors, and let me know if there's anything else we can do to make your stay more comfortable.

GROBIEN

You walked all this way just to turn around and leave? We should make the most of it, don't you think?

DRECHEN

You like wine! Perhaps you'd like to try some of ours? Come in and we'll tell you all about our technology.

GROBIEN

Our wine was thoroughly tested by your doctors.

DRECHEN

The acidity is palpable at its best.

YOBA

Euh...I'd be honored.

GUARD

(whispering)

Chamberlain, where do you want us?

YOBA

Keep guard out here. I'll be fine.

[Door opens and footsteps enter]

YOBA ENTERS THE RAU APARTMENTS

[Room tone changes]

YOBA
How do you like your
accommodations?

DRECHEN
Is there anything on your planet to
like?

GROBIEN
Hideous.

YOBA
I used this apartment myself, long
ago. I have many memories looking
out over this balcony. Some fond,
some not so fond.

[Wine pouring, music transition]

FLASHBACK - YOBA AND KSB DISAGREEMENT

[Large protest sounds]

KING STARBRINGER
Here they've come to smoke us out.

YOBA
Maybe it'd be a good idea to keep
your kids in the countryside until
this stuff blows over.

KING STARBRINGER
Sophrosyne wouldn't mind so much,
but Imsep is not long for the
wilderness.

YOBA
Don't look now, here comes one of
those New Regime activists.

KING STARBRINGER
Those kids really make my blood
boil...

[One voice grows louder above the crowd]

NEW REGIME STUMPER

(echoing)

When we cried out for peace, the
Starbringer Kings sowed bloodshed
under the guise of prosperity. When
we were promised a Messiah,
Jhardeho gave us an abomination.
And now, both the King and the
Order have turned their backs on
the people. For too long we've been
lied to! No more bloodshed, no more
false prophets! It's time to put
the future back into the hands of
the people!

[A mixture of excited shouts and BOOs rise up]

KING STARBRINGER

Well, at least he partly agrees
with me.

YOBA

That's darkly optimistic of you.

[Boos intensify]

NEW REGIME STUMPER

You can't silence me!

CROWD MEMBER 1

There's only room for one heretic
in this city, and that's
Chartrulean!

CROWD MEMBER 2

The gods will punish us for his
blasphemy!

YOBA

It's ironic that these people would
stand up for Maldoro when he
wouldn't lift a finger to protect
them, and the demonize the man
who's actually trying.

KING STARBRINGER

I don't know what's worse. A
wealthy populace that looks down on
everyone else, or a drone class
that can't think for themselves?

YOBA

We have to take responsibility for
our part as enablers.

(MORE)

YOBA (CONT'D)

Yo uknow, maybe it's not all that bad. This dynamic could be used to our advantage.

KING STARBRINGER

What are you talking about?

YOBA

Hear me out. You can't deny that this war has brought prosperity like we've never seen.

KING STARBRINGER

Prosperity, sure, but also corruption like we've never seen, avarice, oppression, iniquity, moral depravity...my domain is becoming a sea of empty shells.

YOBA

Your "empty shells" are out there being filled with all kinds of rhetoric. You may laugh it off now, but when it comes to influence, Maldoro is winning. Not to mention, he's run off with the better half your cabinet.

KING STARBRINGER

Don't remind me.

YOBA

You do realize that this war may be the only thing keeping a civil uprising at bay...

KING STARBRINGER

So you agree with the war hawks? "Play the long game", is that what you're going to say to me?

YOBA

I wouldn't go that far. Without a common enemy, both The Order and the New Regime will focus entirely on you.

KING STARBRINGER

Then we'll *win* the war and inspire everyone to take our side!

YOBA

It won't work on its own. We need a campaign to remind everyone who the enemy really is. We play it up. And just when all seems lost, Chartrulean and his azurea come to save the day, boom! Maldoro loses.

KING STARBRINGER

I'm not interested in unnecessary theatrics at the cost of more lives, I just want this done. With the Rau out of the way, we'd be able to build freely. In just a few decades time, our people could be flourishing, and all this will be behind us. All this fighting just gets in the way.

YOBA

I'm in this position because of you. You treat me like family. And as someone who loves you, I'm telling you that you're being idealistic. Wishing things will go a certain way doesn't make them happen. Stop reacting, and start leading. It's the only way to win.

KING STARBRINGER

I AM leading! Dammit, Yoba, I can't afford to have you turn on me too.

YOBA

I would never turn on you. But you have to gain control of the narrative.

THE RAU COERCE YOBA

[Riot sounds fade away]

YOBA

(thinking)

You were a fool king who would throw away everything so lightly. That your idealism would have been our collective downfall, had I not done what I did. I remember the way you stood right here in this open window, staring hopelessly at your reflection in a glass of wine.

(MORE)

YOBA (CONT'D)

Now, the reflection in the wine is my own. Funny. This wine is terrible. Nauseating, in fact. But the second I stepped foot in here, I committed to playing this game. I'll drink it down like a champ.

[Strong gust of wind, sound of paper being snatched and crinkled]

DRECHEN

What's that?

YOBA

Just some trash the wind carried in. Not to worry, I've taken care of it.

GROBIEN

I hope you like the wine. We like it quite a bit more...viscous.

YOBA

It looks like blood, but I doubt even blood is this dry.

GROBIEN

To each their own.

DRECHEN

What makes you interested in our life extension therapies, Lord Yoba?

YOBA

I like being rich. And I like the idea of being rich for a very long time.

[The ambassadors laugh]

YOBA (CONT'D)

In truth, we're on the cusp of the next great advancement of our civilization. But our time to exist is so short that we'll never get to experience all the benefits. As for me, I think I'd rather be alive long enough to see where all of this takes us. Not that I'm seriously considering it...

DRECHEN

And how do you feel about everything?

[Drinking]

YOBA

I'm a big picture man. As with all things complicated, I like to keep my eye on the horizon.

DRECHEN

Why stop at the horizon?

GROBIEN

Maybe we can persuade you to see things our way?

YOBA

How so?

DRECHEN

We want your azurea, and you want immortality. There's only one way this conversation can go, if you're willing to have it.

[Music cue]

YOBA

(confused)

I...I'm sorry. What were we just talking about?

GROBIEN

Do you support this peace process?

YOBA

(slurred)

What's wrong with me?

[The ambassadors laugh]

DRECHEN

The wine works quickly. If you're going to drink it that fast, you better get comfortable. At this rate you're going to be here a while.

[Drechen sipping]

[Sounds of coughing and laughing from across room]

CYDAR

This fool Chamberlain entertains me.

GROBIEN

Shut up and rest.

DRECHEN

Now if you please, there are a few details in this mountain of paperwork that we'd like to discuss. Why don't you sit back down?

YOBA

I'm not sure that's a good idea right now.

[Staggering. Sound of paper falling]

YOBA (CONT'D)

You're trying to coerce me.

GROBIEN

You dropped your trash. Are you just going to leave it there?

YOBA

Good day, gentlemen. I've had enough.

[Sound of door opening]

DRECHEN

If you need a friend to talk to, Yoba, our door is always open.

YOBA

Thank you. But I think you'll find that our people define friendship very differently.

[Door closing. A beat.]

DRECHEN

The Chamberlain may suit our needs just fine.

GROBIEN

Loyal, but not incorruptible.

CYDAR

Idiots. He's pretending. We'll start somewhere else. Then in time, he may fall into his own trap.

DRECHEN

Let's see this trash.

[Sound of paper crinkling]

DRECHEN (CONT'D)

Could be interesting.

GROBIEN

What does it say?

DRECHEN

(reading)

"Jhardekai Sympathizer King Starbringer Welcomes Enemies into Simitu with Open Arms in Another Attack on Simitian Values. Must Be Stopped. Join the New Regime Revolution!"

(beat)

I think I'd like to sign up, however the instructions on how to do so are unclear.