

Fate/Knights of the Heroic Throne

Chapter Intro

Human order: Restored.

History: Preserved.

But what of the ones who made it possible?

Heroic Spirits—echoes of legends, bound to vessels, fated to fade without remembrance.

But a wish was made.

One last miracle from humanity's saviour—
that her fallen companions might live once more.

Story Starts

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Chapter 6.3 -

The Tyrant's Last Festival

The light was blinding.

Padmé had thought she was prepared for it—had rehearsed under similar conditions, had steeled herself for the heat and the glare and the way it would press against her painted skin like a physical weight. She'd stood beneath practice lights in the safe confines of their rented studio space, felt the warmth on her cheeks, practised her breathing whilst Tsabin adjusted angles and Eirtama timed her cadence with a stopwatch. She'd told herself it would be manageable, that preparation would be sufficient armour against the moment's intensity.

But knowing something intellectually and experiencing it *firsthand* were two very different things.

The holorecorder's lens stared back at her like an unblinking eye, utterly indifferent to her thundering pulse or the slight tremor in her carefully

positioned hands. Behind it stretched darkness—absolute, impenetrable—as the harsh glare of the studio lights cast the staff into shadows. Before it, *she* stood alone at the focal point—dressed in crimson and gold that seemed to drink in the light and throw it back as molten fire, face painted white as bone, positioned against a backdrop of absolute black that swallowed everything beyond her immediate presence.

Her friends stood behind her—Tsabin, Eirtama, Su Yan, Sasha, and Mara—all wearing white masks that rendered them anonymous, identical, their robes similarly fashioned to suggest unity rather than individuality. They were witnesses and symbols both, present yet deliberately faceless, representing something larger than themselves.

All standing with her. All choosing to be here. Rabbine had locked eyes with her just moments ago—a brief, significant exchange—before stepping back into the darkness of the studio. Her job was done: she had fashioned Amidala, the symbol through which light might shine again. Or perhaps she had merely painted the face of a delusional activist who thought too much of herself.

Padmé drew a breath. Held it. Felt her ribs expand against the structured bodice of her robe, felt her heartbeat slow fractionally, felt the familiar sensation of self slipping away like water through cupped fingers. Released it slowly, deliberately, letting the last vestiges of Padmé Naberrie—the young woman who worried about her family's reaction, who second-guessed her word choices, who feared failure with an intensity that sometimes left her breathless—drain away into the darkness beyond the lights.

What remained was Amidala.

"Good evening, Naboo. My name is Amidala."

Her voice carried across the hijacked frequencies—steady and clear, each syllable precisely weighted—reaching into homes and cantinas and public squares across the planet. She couldn't see them, couldn't know if anyone

was even watching, couldn't gauge whether the transmission was holding or fragmenting into static. But she spoke as though addressing each citizen personally, intimately, one conscience to another, as though this weren't a broadcast but a private conversation happening in thousands of living rooms simultaneously.

"Allow me first to apologise for this interruption. I do, like many of you, appreciate the comforts of the familiar—the security of routine, the peace of knowing tomorrow will resemble today. I understand the appeal of that certainty, that predictability." A pause, deliberately timed, before she continued. "I understand it because I crave it myself."

She could feel her friends standing behind her—those she trusted most in this world—united in purpose if not in perfect agreement, their presence a physical reassurance against the isolation of the spotlight. They'd argued about phrasing, debated tone, and revised the opening seventeen times until Eirtama had threatened to calculate precisely how many hours they'd wasted on a single paragraph. But they were here. That mattered more than perfect consensus.

"But in the spirit of remembrance—of those moments in history when ordinary people faced extraordinary choices—I thought we might mark this evening by taking some time from our daily lives to sit together and speak truthfully about what is happening to our world."

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In the Royal Palace, King Ars Veruna's private study had become a command centre, transformed from a sanctuary of polished marble and ancient texts into something far more sinister. The afternoon light filtering through the high windows seemed to mock the darkness gathering within.

Holoprojectors cast their ghostly blue glow across every surface, each display showing feeds from security stations scattered throughout Theed's pristine districts. And on every single screen, the same image burned into his retinas:

a masked figure draped in ceremonial robes, speaking words that made his blood run cold. The voice echoed from multiple sources, creating a dissonant chorus that seemed to close in on him from all sides. His pulse thundered in his ears, competing with the growing rage that threatened to consume him entirely.

"What is this?" His voice emerged quiet, barely above a whisper. Dangerously quiet—the kind of quiet that preceded storms, that made seasoned advisors step back and junior staff flee the room entirely. His fingers pressed against the desk's surface, leaving faint impressions in the leather inlay. "Who authorised a broadcast on my frequencies?"

The communications officer's face went pale, colour draining away as though someone had opened a vein. Beads of sweat gathered at his temple despite the study's climate control, and when he spoke, his voice cracked like a boy's. "Sir, we didn't—this isn't coming from any authorised source. The systems show no access logs, no authentication codes. Someone's hijacked the entire holonet relay system." He swallowed hard, his throat working visibly. "Every channel, every frequency across the planet—it's as if they've simply... taken control."

"Then shut it down." The words fell like stones into still water, each one deliberate, measured, lethal.

"We're trying, sir. The routing is—" The officer's hands trembled as he fumbled with his datapad, scrolling through screens of incomprehensible code. "The technicians say it's unlike anything they've encountered. The signal seems to be coming from everywhere and nowhere simultaneously—"

"I don't want excuses." Veruna's hand tightened on the arm of his chair until the ornate woodwork creaked in protest, his knuckles white as bone. The fury building in his chest felt volcanic, ready to erupt and consume everything in its path. "I want it *stopped*."

On the screens, the masked woman continued speaking, her voice maddeningly calm, unhurried, unafraid. Each word felt like a personal affront, a deliberate challenge to everything he'd built, everything he controlled.

"There are, of course, those who do not want us to speak. I suspect even now that orders are being shouted, that security forces are mobilising, that men with weapons will soon be dispatched to find the source of this broadcast."

Veruna's jaw clenched until his teeth ached. She knew. The damned woman knew exactly what was happening in this very room, as if she could see through the palace walls themselves.

"Why? Because whilst blasters and binders may silence conversation, words will always retain their power. Words are how we give meaning to our lives—and to our deaths. And for those who will listen, words can speak truth."

"Find the source," the King said, and his voice had dropped to something cold and terrible, something that belonged in tombs and execution chambers rather than the sunlit halls of Theed. "Find it *now*. And dispatch security units to every district. Every cantina, every public square, every gathering place where citizens might be watching this... this *sedition*."

The officer hesitated, his training warring with his fear. "Sir, the scope of that operation—we'd need to deploy nearly the entire garrison—"

"Did I stutter?"

"No, sir."

"Then move."

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"How many units do we have mobilised here on Theed?"

Captain Maris Magneta's voice cut through the chaos of the security command centre, sharp with authority that barely masked his own uncertainty. The air tasted metallic—recycled too many times through struggling ventilation that wheezed and clicked in the background. Screens flickered around him, each one showing the same damning broadcast, their blue-white glare casting skeletal shadows across the faces of his subordinates. Someone's terminal emitted a persistent, anxious beep that no one seemed to notice.

"Forty-seven active units, sir. Another thirty coming online from reserve status."

The numbers hung in the stale air like an accusation. Maris felt the familiar tightness creeping up the back of his neck, the same tension that had plagued him since the broadcast erupted across every channel.

"Not enough. Pull officers from the outer districts. Reassign traffic control. I want bodies on the ground—boots, batons, shields—in every population centre within the hour."

"Sir, the logistics of that move—"

"I don't care about logistics." Maris's palm struck the console with enough force to rattle the stylus holder beside it. The sharp crack echoed in the confined space. "The King wants this contained, and I want to know how a signal this sophisticated, this *polished*, got past our entire communications infrastructure without triggering a single alarm."

No one had an answer for that. The silence pressed against his eardrums, broken only by the whir of cooling fans and the distant hum of traffic outside. On the screen, the woman called Amidala continued her indictment. Her voice—calm, measured, utterly unshakeable—filled the room like smoke seeping under a door.

"The King speaks of prosperity, but whose prosperity? The King speaks of security, but security for whom? Certainly not for the miners whose safety concerns were dismissed without so much as an acknowledgement. Not for the families struggling beneath taxation that funds palatial expansion whilst infrastructure crumbles beneath their feet. Not for any citizen who dares to question why wealth flows upward whilst suffering trickles down."

The white paint on her face seemed to glow against the dark background, the red accents stark as fresh blood. Every word was enunciated with precision, each syllable weighted with quiet fury.

Maris's hand moved to his sidearm, fingers brushing the worn grip—a reflexive gesture that meant nothing, that changed nothing. The cold metal offered no comfort. You couldn't shoot a broadcast. You couldn't arrest a signal that had already wormed its way into a million terminals, a million minds.

But you could shoot the people watching it, and you can silence the rest with fear.

The thought tasted bitter on his tongue.

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In a modest apartment in Keren, a family of four sat frozen around their dinner table, the evening meal abandoned and growing cold on their plates.

The father's hand hovered uncertainly over the holoscreen controls, trembling with an anxiety he couldn't quite name. Every instinct screamed at him to shut it off immediately, to pretend they'd never seen this transmission, to protect his family from whatever dangerous consequences might come with witnessing sedition. His mind raced through the possibilities—interrogations, surveillance, perhaps worse. What was he thinking, allowing this to continue?

But his daughter—twelve years old, with eyes that seemed far too knowing for her age, bright and clever in a way that both filled him with pride and terrified him—had placed her small hand over his with surprising firmness.

"Wait," she whispered, her voice barely audible above the hum of the holoscreen. "Please. Just... wait."

"And now, after decades of this slow corruption—this gradual erosion of everything Naboo should represent—we have arrived at this moment."

The mother clutched her younger son against her side, one protective hand pressed firmly over his ear as though sheer force of will could shield him from the dangerous words themselves. Her jaw was clenched so tightly it ached. But she didn't look away from the screen either, couldn't look away, her own curiosity and fear warring within her.

"A moment where the King can orchestrate an attack on his own citizens, then arrest the only people brave enough to stop it."

"That's not—" the father started to protest, his voice hoarse, then stopped abruptly. Because he'd been at the festival. He'd seen exactly what happened with his own eyes. He'd watched those two strangers—whoever they were, whatever they represented—wade into absolute chaos to save people they'd never met before. And he'd watched them be led away at blaster point, whilst Veruna's propaganda machine had already begun its relentless work, spinning the story into something he barely recognised.

The walls suddenly felt too close, the apartment too small to contain the weight of what they were witnessing.

"A moment where lies are broadcast endlessly from every screen until they become indistinguishable from truth itself."

Outside, in the corridor beyond their sealed door, the sound of speeders grew louder. Much closer than before. The father's heart lurched into his throat.

The daughter's grip on her father's hand tightened with desperate urgency, her knuckles turning white.

"Let it play," she said again, her voice steadier than his own thoughts.

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"Who is to blame for this?"

Padmé let the question hang in the air, feeling its weight settle over her own shoulders as heavily as it would settle over anyone listening. She could almost see the faces of each viewer—that uncomfortable, inescapable truth they'd all been avoiding. Her heart hammered beneath her ribs, but she kept her expression steady, her gaze unwavering.

"Certainly there are those more responsible than others. Certainly King Veruna, who has presided over this corruption, who has turned our government into his personal instrument of power and profit—certainly he will be held accountable."

The anger that flared in her chest when she spoke his name was real. Veruna. The man who had betrayed every principle Naboo held dear, who had twisted their beautiful institutions into mechanisms of greed. But anger alone wouldn't save them. It never had.

She paused. Drew a breath, feeling the cool air fill her lungs. This was the moment that would either galvanise them or lose them forever. Everything hinged on what came next—on whether they were brave enough to face themselves as honestly as she was asking them to.

"But if we are honest, if we are truly seeking truth, then we must acknowledge something difficult."

Her pulse quickened. This was the line.

"If you're looking for the guilty, you need only look into a mirror."

Padmé paused for a moment, letting the people of Naboo absorb the accusation for what it was, her stoic face softening as she gazed directly into the lens of the camera.

"I know why it happened. I know you were afraid. Who wouldn't be?"

She softened her voice now, letting compassion replace accusation, feeling the tightness in her own throat as empathy welled up. These were her people. They weren't villains—they were victims, just like her. Victims who had made the same compromises she might have made, if circumstances had been different, if she'd been born into their lives instead of guided towards this path of service.

"Economic uncertainty. Political instability. Threats both real and imagined. There were a myriad of problems that conspired to cloud your judgement, to make you believe that surrendering freedom was the price of safety, that silence was the cost of peace."

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"Sir, we've got the first arrest reports coming in from across the city."

Veruna didn't turn from the screen, his gaze fixed on that damned masked face. The woman's words continued to pour out like poison into every home on Naboo. "How many?"

"Close to two hundred individuals so far, and the numbers are climbing by the minute. Mostly public establishments—cantinas, pubs, a few restaurants in the lower districts. We're encountering some... resistance." Veruna's jaw tightened.

"Define resistance." Each word came out clipped, precise.

The officer swallowed audibly, and Veruna could practically feel the man's discomfort radiating across the room. "Citizens refusing to comply with dispersal orders, sir. Some physical altercations with security forces. One unit reported a crowd of approximately fifty people blocking our men's way near the market district."

"Then use force. That's what force is *for*." The answer came automatically, delivered with the casual certainty of a man who'd made such decisions a thousand times before.

"Sir, if we escalate in such public spaces—if citizens see their neighbours being—"

"If we *don't* escalate, every malcontent on this planet will think they can defy royal authority without consequence." Veruna finally turned, tearing his attention away from that masked face, and his eyes were chips of ice as they fixed on the officer. The man actually flinched. Good. "Make examples. Make them *visible*. I want every citizen of Naboo to understand what happens to traitors and those who harbour them. I want it demonstrated so clearly that even children understand the cost of defiance."

On the screen behind him, the masked woman spoke of fear and complicity, her voice gentle as a knife sliding between ribs, intimate as a confession whispered in darkness.

"Fear convinced you that questioning authority was dangerous. That organising was radical. That demanding accountability was destabilising. And in your fear, you accepted the King's promises. You accepted monitoring and curfews and emergency decrees because he assured you they were temporary, necessary, for your own protection."

Every word was calculated. Every pause deliberate. She knew exactly what she was doing—turning his own rhetoric against him, making his protection sound like imprisonment.

"I know what she's doing." Veruna's hand clenched into a fist, knuckles whitening. The rage that burned in his chest was cold, focused, utterly controlled. "Find her. Find whoever's running that signal, whoever's sheltering her, whoever helped set this up. And when you do, bring them to me *alive*."

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In the University of Theed dormitories, students had crowded into every common room, clustering around screens with expressions that ranged from exhilarated to terrified. The air was thick with tension and barely suppressed energy, bodies pressed shoulder to shoulder as they watched the broadcast. Some stood on chairs or boxes to see over the heads of others. Others sat cross-legged on the floor, craning their necks. The usual chatter and laughter of evening gatherings had been replaced by a silence so complete that every breath seemed to echo.

"But yesterday—two days ago—something changed. Two people reminded us what we have forgotten."

"Here it comes," someone whispered, their voice barely audible even in the hush. "She's going to talk about them."

The whisper rippled outward like a stone dropped in still water. Students leaned closer to their screens, eyes fixed on Amidala's face as though they might miss something vital if they blinked.

"Their names are Shirou Emiya and Arturia Pendragon. You may know them as the owners of The Empty Pantry—the small restaurant near Palace Plaza where many of you have shared meals and laughter."

A murmur went through the crowd, soft but undeniable. Recognition bloomed on faces throughout the room—eyes widening, mouths opening in small gasps of realisation. Some of them *had* eaten there. Some of them knew that restaurant, knew the white-haired man with the gentle smile and the tired eyes who always remembered their preferences, who spoke to them with such quiet courtesy. They knew the small blonde woman with the imperious gaze and the inexplicable appetite, who moved through the dining room like a general surveying her troops, whose rare smiles felt like benedictions. *That* restaurant. *Those* people.

"The King calls them foreign agents. Terrorists. Dangerous criminals who murdered one hundred and twenty-three of his 'security personnel.' But you were there. You saw what truly happened."

The murmur grew louder, more agitated. Students exchanged glances, some disbelieving, others darkly knowing. The words 'one hundred and twenty-three' hung in the air like an accusation.

"I was there," a young woman said suddenly, her voice shaking with barely controlled emotion. "I was—I saw—"

Her friend gripped her arm, fingers digging in with desperate pressure. "Kira. Not now. Please, not now."

"No, I—" She was crying, tears cutting tracks down her cheeks, her whole body trembling as though she were caught in a violent wind. The words kept trying to escape, to burst free from whatever dam she'd built around them. "I saw them. The blonde woman, she—there were so many of them, the slavers, they had blasters and she just—she had a *sword*, where did she even get a sword—and she just—"

The images were clearly playing behind her eyes, vivid and terrible. Her breathing had gone ragged.

"You saw armed slavers descend upon Palace Plaza. You saw them open fire on innocent families. You saw them drag your neighbours, your friends, your children toward freighters that would carry them to distant worlds where they would be sold like livestock and never seen again."

Amidala's voice was steady, relentless, painting the scene with merciless clarity. In the common room, more than one student had gone pale. Others had tears streaming down their faces. Still others wore expressions of barely suppressed rage, hands clenched into fists at their sides.

The door alarm chimed.

The sound cut through the tension like a blade, sharp and unmistakable. Security override.

Everyone froze. The silence that had been charged with emotion became something else entirely—cold, stark, terrified. Students turned their heads slowly, unwilling to look away from the screen but unable to ignore the meaning of that chime. A security override. Here. *Now.*

This wasn't a coincidence.

"And you saw two ordinary people—two restaurant owners with no obligation to intervene, no reason to risk themselves—throw themselves into that hell without hesitation."

The door slid open with a mechanical hiss. Two officers stood silhouetted against the harsh corridor lights, their forms dark and imposing. Blasters gleamed in their hands, weapons already drawn, already aimed. They didn't look uncertain. They didn't look conflicted. They looked like men who had been given orders and intended to carry them out.

"Everyone against the wall. This gathering is in violation of Emergency Decree Seven. You're all under arrest."

The words fell into the room like stones into a grave.
No one moved.

They stood frozen, caught between the screen behind them—where Amidala's voice continued speaking truth into the darkness—and the armed officers before them who represented everything she condemned. The weight of the choice pressed down on all of them. Move, and accept the lie. Stay, and face the consequences.

On the screen, Amidala's voice continued, steady and unafraid, as though she could see them, as though she were speaking directly to this moment.

"They fought through dozens of armed slavers—not soldiers, not security forces, slavers—to reach people they had never met. They saved over two hundred lives. Men, women, children who would otherwise have vanished into the Outer Rim's flesh markets."

"I said *move*," the lead officer barked, his voice harder now, edged with frustration and something that might have been fear.

Kira stepped forward instead. Tears still wet on her face, hands trembling at her sides like leaves in a storm, but standing. Moving toward the officers rather than away. Her whole body was shaking but her feet kept moving, one step, then another.

"No."

The single syllable hung in the air.

The officer's blaster came up, the barrel finding her chest with practised efficiency. "That wasn't a request."

"I was there." Her voice cracked but didn't break, each word pushed through tears and terror and something stronger than both. "I watched them save my life. I watched them save *dozens* of lives. And I watched your 'security forces' try to kill the people they were protecting." She gestured at the screen with a hand that shook but didn't waver. "She's telling the truth. We all know she's telling the truth. And I'm not going to pretend otherwise just because you have a blaster pointed at me."

Behind her, other students began to stand.

One by one at first. A boy near the back. A girl by the window. Each rising slowly, deliberately, their fear visible but their resolve stronger.

Then in groups. Three students near the door. Five by the refreshment station. A cluster by the wall.

Within moments, the entire room was standing, dozens of young people facing down two armed officers with nothing but their conviction and their refusal to look away.

The officer's hand was shaking now, the blaster trembling in his grip as he stared at the sea of faces before him.

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"They asked for nothing in return—no glory, no reward, no recognition. When the battle ended, they distributed food to survivors. They carried our dead with gentle hands. They stayed to help even after witnessing the fear in our eyes when we looked at them, covered in the blood they'd spilt to protect us."

Padmé's voice caught on that last line. Because she remembered. She remembered Arturia reaching for her, flinching away, and the flicker of hurt in those golden eyes before the mask of composure slammed back into place.

"And now they sit in prison."

She let the words land like a verdict.

"Charged with murder for killing slavers. Charged with terrorism for saving lives. Charged with conspiracy for daring to stand between evil and innocent people."

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In a cantina in the Gallo Mountains, the miners had stopped even pretending to drink.

These were men and women who worked with their hands, who had little patience for political theatre and even less for noble speeches. They'd heard Veruna's broadcast earlier and responded with eye-rolls and muttered profanity.

But this was different.

"Yesterday, I sought to honour their courage by speaking this truth. By reminding Naboo of what we have forgotten—that fairness, justice, and freedom are more than words. They are choices. Perspectives. Actions."

"She's got a point," someone said quietly.

"She's got more than a point." The speaker was a massive Zabrak, his horned head still bearing scars from a mining accident three years past—an accident that had killed two of his friends because the company refused to install proper safety shielding. "She's got the truth."

"Shirou and Arturia reminded us that there are still people willing to choose courage over safety, willing to risk everything for strangers, willing to stand against impossible odds simply because it was right."

The door burst open.

Four security officers, blasters drawn, faces hard with authority.

"This establishment is in violation of Emergency Decree Seven. Everyone will submit to identification processing and—"

The Zabrak stood. He was enormous—easily twice the mass of any officer present, arms as thick as tree trunks from decades of manual labour.

"No," he said simply.

"This isn't negotiable. Comply or face—"

"Face what?" Another miner stood. Then another. "You going to arrest all of us? Shoot all of us?" He gestured around the room, at the dozens of weathered faces now turning toward the officers with expressions that held no fear at all. "There's sixty of us in here, friend. And four of you."

On the screen, Amidala's voice rang out like a bell.

"They reminded us what we could be if we remembered our own power."

The lead officer's hand trembled on his blaster.

"This is your final warning—"

"No." The Zabrak stepped forward, and the officer stepped back without meaning to. "This is *your* final warning. You can leave now, go back to your commanders, tell them you couldn't find anyone watching. Or you can try to arrest sixty miners who've spent their whole lives swinging pickaxes and hauling ore." He smiled, showing teeth. "Your choice."

The officers looked at each other.

They left.

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"Sir, we're losing control."

Veruna's head snapped toward the communications officer, his neck muscles tensing with the sudden movement. "Explain." The single word carried the weight of absolute authority, but beneath it, he felt the first tremor of something he refused to acknowledge as fear.

"Multiple units reporting non-compliance across the southern quadrant. Citizens refusing dispersal orders—actively defying them. Some locations, our officers are being physically blocked from entering secured zones. Others, they're being... convinced... to withdraw." The officer's voice wavered, and Veruna noticed how his hands trembled as they hovered over the console. "Convinced?" Veruna's tone sharpened to a blade's edge. He knew what the word meant, what it implied about the deteriorating situation, but he needed to hear it spoken aloud. Needed the officer to commit to the reality they were facing.

"Threatened, sir. By crowds. Large crowds forming in the commercial districts, the residential sectors, even outside military installations." The officer swallowed hard. "They're organising. Coordinating. It's not random anymore." On the screen before them, the masked woman had reached the heart of her speech—the call to action that Veruna had been dreading since the broadcast began, since he'd first heard those measured, resonant tones cutting through his carefully constructed narrative. Each word she spoke felt like a chisel against the foundations of his authority.

"So I ask you now: If you have seen nothing—if the crimes of this government remain invisible to you, if yesterday's massacre and today's arrests seem justified and right—then I would suggest you allow this evening to pass

unmarked. Return to your routine. Trust that tomorrow will improve. Accept the King's promises and hope that fear will keep you safe."

The pause that followed felt calculated, deliberate. She was giving them time to choose. Veruna's jaw clenched.

"How many arrests total?" His mind was already moving past the immediate crisis, calculating, strategising. Control could be regained. It simply required the proper application of force.

"Close to twenty-two thousand around the planet and climbing, sir. But our capacity—the holding facilities are already at maximum, and—"

"I don't care about capacity." Veruna cut him off with a gesture, his patience for logistical concerns evaporating. "Requisition the sports arenas. The warehouse districts. Every empty building that can hold bodies. Convert them if you must. I want makeshift detention centres operational within the hour." His voice had gone flat, mechanical, the voice of a man who had stopped seeing citizens and started seeing problems to be solved, obstacles to be removed. "I want everyone who watched this in custody by morning. Everyone."

The officer's face went grey, the colour draining from his cheeks as the full scope of what Veruna was ordering became clear. "Sir... that could easily be half of the planet. Maybe more. The broadcast reached—"

"Then arrest what you can, make an 'example' of someone in plain view where the masses can witness it, and make the rest understand what defiance costs." Veruna's fingers drummed once against the armrest of his chair. "Publicly. Make it memorable."

"But if you see what I see... If you feel as I feel... If you recognise that something is terribly, fundamentally wrong with what our government has become..."

"And what about those who wouldn't understand or listen?" The officer's voice was barely above a whisper, the question hanging in the recycled air of the command centre like a confession. "What about them, sir?"

Veruna didn't turn to look at him. Couldn't afford to see the doubt, the horror, the moral crisis playing out across the man's features. "Then do what needs to be done." He kept his eyes fixed on the screen, watching the painted face of his enemy speak words that were dismantling his kingdom one sentence at a time, one heart at a time. "Whatever is necessary to restore order."

The officer didn't move. Didn't acknowledge the command.

"Did you hear me?" Veruna's voice gained an edge of irritation now, sharp enough to cut.

"Sir, I..." The man's throat worked, struggling to form words around whatever protest or plea was dying in his mouth. "That would be... that's..."

"Captain Maris." King Veruna's voice was flat, final.

And a thud of a body followed a blaster bolt, the sound echoing in the sudden, terrible silence.

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"Then I ask you to stand with me."

Padmé felt the words leave her mouth—felt them rise from somewhere deeper than rehearsal, deeper than strategy—and knew, with a certainty that settled into her bones like prophecy, like fate inscribed in stone, that there was no going back now. The declaration hung between her and the crowd, irrevocable. Final. She had crossed the threshold from citizen to symbol, and the weight of it pressed against her ribs with every breath.

"I know you are afraid. I am afraid too."

She paused deliberately, letting that admission breathe in the charged silence. Letting it settle over them like falling snow, soft and undeniable. Letting them see—really see—that the mask was just paint, that beneath the crimson lines and porcelain powder was a person as frightened and uncertain as any of them. A girl, barely starting her adult years herself, asking them to risk everything on the strength of shared conviction. Her pulse thrummed beneath the careful composure, a frantic counterpoint to the measured calm of her voice.

"You may wonder why I wear this face—this painted mask that hides who I was before tonight."

She could feel their confusion, their curiosity pressing against her like a physical thing. Good. Let them wonder. Let them question.

"Because Amidala is not a person. Amidala is a choice."

The words hung in the air, crystallising into something larger than themselves, something that transcended the small frame of the young adult who spoke them. Padmé felt the truth of it resonate through her chest—the knowledge that she was building something that could outlive her, outlast her, become greater than any single mortal life.

"Anyone can be Amidala. Anyone who chooses truth over silence. Anyone who chooses to stand rather than kneel. Anyone who looks at injustice and says: not here, not now, not ever again."

Her throat tightened with emotion, but she kept her voice steady, pouring every ounce of conviction she possessed into those words. This was the point—the very heart of what she was trying to build. Not a cult of personality, but a movement. Not a leader, but an idea.

She leant forward slightly, instinctively, letting the light catch the crimson marks that cut through her painted brows like wounds, like battle scars earned in the service of something holy.

"When you wear a mask, you become Amidala too. We all do."

A breath. She drew it in slowly, feeling the weight of a thousand eyes upon her.

"And they cannot kill an idea. Not with blasters. Not with prisons. Not with all the emergency decrees in the galaxy."

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"They cannot arrest all of us."

Padmé felt the words building now, each one adding weight to the ones before, momentum carrying her towards something inevitable. Her pulse thrummed in her ears, steady and insistent, as if her very heartbeat were lending rhythm to the declaration taking shape beneath her fingertips.

"They cannot imprison a planet."

The conviction behind each word surprised her—not in its strength, but in its clarity. She had spent weeks wrestling with doubt, with the gnawing fear that she was leading good people towards ruin.

"They cannot erase what hundreds witnessed and thousands now know."

The timer in the corner of her vision was counting down—their window of untraceability shrinking with every second that ticked past. But she couldn't rush this. Wouldn't rush this. Some pronouncements demanded weight, demanded care. To hurry would be to cheapen what Shirou and Arturia had risked, what the people gathering in streets across Theed were preparing to stand for.

Some things had to be said properly.

"And they cannot break what Shirou and Arturia showed us—that ordinary people, when they choose courage, can change everything."

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In the palace detention centre, a guard's portable console played the broadcast on low volume.

He'd turned it on out of curiosity—everyone was talking about this hijacked signal, this mysterious 'Amidala' who'd somehow taken over the planetary holonet. The transmission had blazed across every screen in Theed, interrupting the King's carefully curated news feeds with something raw and unfiltered. The guard had expected propaganda, of course, maybe some unhinged manifesto from whatever fringe group had managed this impressive technical feat. Revolutionary rhetoric always sounded the same, didn't it? Empty promises wrapped in flowery language, designed to stir up the gullible and the desperate.

He hadn't expected... this.

The voice coming through the console was young, female, and carried a conviction that made something in his chest tighten uncomfortably.

"The curfew will still be in effect. The consequences could be severe. The King will call this rebellion, terrorism, insurrection."

She wasn't promising safety. She wasn't sugar-coating the risk. That alone set her apart from every other dissident broadcast he'd ever heard. This Amidala—whoever she was—spoke with the measured honesty of someone who understood exactly what she was asking people to risk, and the weight of that knowledge sat heavy in every carefully chosen word.

Behind him, in the cell he was supposed to be watching, two prisoners sat in perfect stillness.

The guard had been warned about them when they'd been brought in. Dangerous, he'd been told. Extremely dangerous. Responsible for over a hundred deaths of their fellow royal guard. Foreign agents, possibly enhanced, definitely not to be underestimated. Keep your distance. Don't engage unless absolutely necessary. Wait for the interrogators.

They didn't look dangerous. The man was lean and white-haired, with pale silver-grey eyes that seemed to catch the light strangely. He was leaning against the cell wall, sitting cross-legged on the floor with a casualness that suggested he was entirely comfortable despite the durasteel cuffs around his wrists. The woman was small—barely tall enough to reach his shoulder—with blonde hair that fell in a messy curtain around her face and golden eyes that seemed to glow faintly in the dim light of the detention block. She had her head resting on the man's lap, her own bound hands folded neatly in front of her.

'Tsch. Even terrorists are luckier than me,' the guard thought bitterly, before he realised where his attention had drifted.

Back to the prisoners. Both of them were watching the screen now. The guard hadn't meant for them to be able to see it—protocol said no outside information, no contact with current events—but the angle of the console and the way he'd positioned himself...

Damn it.

"But ask yourself: What is the greater risk? That we stand together and demand accountability? Or that we do nothing whilst our freedoms, our rights, our very humanity are slowly stripped away in the name of safety?"

The question hung in the air, and the guard found himself unable to look away from the prisoners' faces.

The white-haired man's expression hadn't changed. His features remained perfectly neutral, almost serene. But something in his posture had shifted—a subtle straightening of his spine, a gathering of focus that reminded the guard of predators he'd seen in those biodocs. That same coiled readiness. That same absolute stillness before the strike.

The guard's hand drifted towards his sidearm without conscious thought.

"Three days. Sunset. Palace Plaza."

The blonde woman turned her head slightly towards the man. A tiny motion, barely perceptible. If the guard hadn't been watching them so intently, he would have missed it entirely.

The man's eyes moved to meet hers. Still that same unsettling calm.

Something passed between them—a communication that needed no words, no gestures beyond that simple meeting of gazes. The guard felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up. He'd seen soldiers do this. Partners who'd worked together so long they could coordinate in absolute silence. The kind of synchronisation that came from countless missions, countless fights, countless moments where their lives had depended on perfect understanding.

"Wear white. Cover your face. Stand with your neighbours, your friends, your fellow citizens."

The woman nodded. Once. Precise and deliberate.

The man nodded back. Agreement. Decision. Commitment.

"Show them we remember."

The guard's hand closed on his blaster as he clicked the safety off, the small mechanical sound absurdly loud in the quiet detention block.

"Show them we saw."

Too late, he realised what that silent exchange had meant.

"Show them that Naboo belongs to its people—not to the tyrant who claims to protect us whilst he chains us."

Both moved.

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"Together, we shall give King Veruna an evening he will never, ever forget."

Padmé drew a final breath, feeling the weight of every syllable she'd spoken settle across her shoulders like an invisible mantle. The timer showed twelve seconds remaining. Twelve seconds before their window closed, before the routing became traceable, before everything they'd built—every careful plan, every whispered conversation, every risk they'd taken—collapsed into consequences that would ripple through their lives and perhaps end them entirely.

Her pulse thrummed steadily in her ears. Twelve seconds. It was enough time for one last truth, one final declaration that might change everything or nothing at all.

"I am Amidala."

She let the name settle into the silence that stretched between heartbeats, into the millions of ears she hoped were listening across Theed and beyond, into the future she was trying to build one word, one broadcast, one act of

defiance at a time. The name felt strange in her mouth—larger than herself, heavier with meaning than any identity she'd carried before.

But it was hers. Hers to claim, hers to wield.

"And I am no longer afraid."

The lie tasted almost like truth—and perhaps that was the point of all this, wasn't it? To transform fear into conviction, uncertainty into purpose, until the mask became indistinguishable from the face beneath. Her calm, stoic bravado was no longer mere performance; it was the armour she'd forged for herself and now offered to everyone listening, a shield they could raise together. If she could stand before Veruna's tyranny and declare herself unafraid, then perhaps others would find that same courage kindling in their own hearts. Perhaps her lie would become their truth.

The screen went dark.

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End

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