

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 8.3 -

The Blockade

The cards in Tessari's hand were exceptional. A Sylop, the Commander of Coins, and a three-pip from the Flask suit—fifteen points with room to manoeuvre. Across the felted table, a Devaronian merchant watched her with the careful intensity of someone who'd lost three consecutive pots and was looking for tells.

She didn't give him any.

The Canto Casino's private sabacc lounge hummed with high-stakes energy—the soft clink of chips, the whisper of cards against felt, the occasional murmur of a dealer calling results. Crystal chandeliers cast warm light across tables where fortunes changed hands with the turn of a card. Tessari had spent forty years reading rooms like this one, and she loved every gaudy centimetre of it.

"Your action, madam," the dealer prompted.

Tessari let her gaze drift across the table. The Devaronian was sweating. The Twi'lek beside him had folded two rounds ago and was nursing a cocktail with studied indifference. The human woman at the far end—some shipping magnate from the Core—had the rigid posture of someone sitting on a strong hand and trying not to show it.

Tessari pushed a stack of chips forward. "Raise. Five thousand."

The Devaronian's jaw tightened.

"Huh?"

Balron's voice cut through her concentration. She glanced sideways at her husband, who sat in the plush chair beside her table, holopad balanced on his knee and a half-empty glass of something amber at his elbow. His brow had furrowed—the crease between his eyes deepening the way it always did when numbers refused to behave.

"What is it, dear?" Tessari asked, looking up from her hand.

"Our monthly share from The Empty Pantry didn't come in."

The Devaronian called. The shipping magnate raised. Tessari processed both developments simultaneously—the bet and Balron's words—her mind splitting along the well-worn tracks of a woman who'd spent decades juggling casino floors and account ledgers at the same time.

The Empty Pantry had been their best investment in years. Not the largest—that honour belonged to a spice-processing facility on Kessel that paid handsomely and asked no questions—but certainly the most satisfying. Shirou and Arturia had transformed that tired old restaurant into something remarkable. The monthly statements had become a genuine pleasure, watching the numbers climb as the young couple expanded their operation with the same relentless competence they brought to everything else. The riverside stalls. The walk-up counter. The challenge queue that had apparently become a tourist attraction in its own right. Tessari followed the growth the way she followed a promising hand—with professional interest that had,

somewhere along the way, acquired a personal dimension she hadn't planned for.

More importantly, those payments funded their current lifestyle. The suite at the Canto Casino Resort. The daily sabacc tournaments. The rather impressive bar tab Balron had accumulated over the past several months—a tab that Tessari monitored with the indulgent tolerance of a woman who'd decided, after four decades of marriage, that her husband's drinking was not the hill she intended to die on. Their actual retirement savings had been earmarked for other necessities—the indefinite hotel stay, meals that didn't come from room service, and the occasional side excursion to other gambling establishments when they wanted variety.

"Huh? That doesn't sound like Shirou." Tessari kept her voice level, though something cold had begun to settle in her stomach. "Is there a problem with the bank?"

The last time a payment had failed to arrive, Shirou and Arturia had been sitting in a palace detention cell, accused of terrorism by a king who'd since become very publicly dead. Tessari remembered the holonet footage—the crowds in their black cloaks, the masked figure calling herself Amidala, and somewhere in the chaos, two people she'd grown rather fond of dismantling a government with the same efficiency they applied to dinner service.

They'd sent a lovely fruit basket afterwards. With a note apologising for the delayed payment. Tessari had eaten the fruit. Balron had framed the note. It hung in their suite's refresher, which Tessari felt was an appropriate location for correspondence regarding violent revolution.

Balron swiped his credstick at the table's interface as a server droid delivered his bottle of Whyren's Reserve. The transaction cleared without hesitation. The familiar chime of successful payment.

"I suppose it isn't the bank, then." Tessari's concern sharpened. "There must be a problem. Can you try contacting them?"

She drew from the interference field. The card slid into her hand—

Arcana—The Evil One.

Her total shifted.

Zero.

Bomb out.

"Karabast," Tessari hissed, the Lasat curse slipping out before she could stop it. She pushed her chips forward—the penalty for bombing, half her current stake—and watched them disappear into the pot. Forty years of sabacc had taught her to accept the cards' cruelty without flinching, but the timing felt pointed. The universe had opinions tonight, and none of them were kind.

The Devaronian's expression brightened considerably.

Tessari turned away from the table, her attention shifting fully to Balron's holopad. His thick fingers moved across the interface with the methodical care she'd always found endearing—the same deliberate precision he'd brought to logistics manifests and shipping schedules during his years in the trade. Balron didn't rush anything. Including, on occasion, sentences.

The call connected.

For exactly one point three seconds.

Then it disconnected. Not declined. Not redirected to a message service. Simply... cut.

"That's not right," Balron muttered. He tried again.

Same result. Connection established, then severed, as though someone had sliced the transmission mid-handshake.

"Try Arturia," Tessari said.

Balron's fingers moved. The holopad chirped its connection tone.

Cut.

"The restaurant's direct line."

Cut.

"Su Yan?"

Cut.

"Sio's office?"

Cut.

The cold thing in Tessari's stomach had grown teeth. Communications infrastructure didn't fail like this by accident. Individual failures happened—solar interference, relay maintenance, the occasional mynock chewing through a junction cable. But six sequential failures across six different endpoints meant one thing: the infrastructure hadn't failed. Someone had shut it down. Deliberately. Across the entire system.

She opened her mouth to suggest they try the HoloNet News feeds—

And realised the room had gone quiet.

Not silent. The ambient noise remained—the soft whir of climate control, the distant chime of slot machines on the main floor, the clink of ice in glasses. But the sapient sounds had stopped. No murmured bets. No laughter. No arguments about hands or odds or the dealer's heritage.

Tessari looked up from Balron's holopad.

Every face in the lounge had turned toward the same point. Gamblers frozen mid-gesture, drinks halfway to lips, cards forgotten on felt. The Devaronian who'd been so pleased about her bomb-out sat motionless, his winning hand abandoned. The shipping magnate's rigid posture had softened into something else entirely—something that looked like fear.

Tessari followed their collective gaze.

The holoscreen dominated the far wall of the lounge—a massive display usually cycling through sabacc tournament brackets and casino promotions. Now it showed something else entirely.

The Galactic Senate chamber.

She recognised the architecture immediately. The vast rotunda with its floating platforms, the Chancellor's podium at the centre, the thousands of senatorial pods arranged in concentric rings around the speaking floor. She'd seen it countless times on news feeds, usually as background noise while she reviewed quarterly statements or calculated odds.

This wasn't background noise.

The cam focused on a single pod—the Chommell Sector's delegation platform, hovering near the chamber's centre. A figure stood at its edge, robes immaculate, silver hair catching the chamber's ambient light.

Senator Palpatine.

Tessari had met him once, years ago, at some diplomatic function she'd attended with Balron during their trading days. A pleasant man. Forgettable, really—the kind of politician who made you feel important while revealing nothing of himself. She'd filed him away under "competent, harmless, probably useful at parties."

He didn't look harmless now.

"—reserved the right to transmit this data to the Senate body without delay," Palpatine was saying, his voice carrying the resonance of someone addressing not just the chamber but history. "The first packet, received approximately twenty minutes ago, informed me of a Trade Federation blockade of my home system. A military occupation of Naboo conducted without warning, without provocation, and in direct violation of Republic law."

"This is preposterous!" Senator Lott Dod rose in his pod, his elongated features contorted with indignation. "Does this governing body allow such blatant fabrications?"

The Senate chamber erupted. Shouts from a dozen pods, the crack of the Chancellor's gavel, the rumble of thousands of voices all speaking at once. Palpatine waited. His face betrayed nothing—not anger, not fear, not satisfaction. He simply stood and let the chaos exhaust itself against his stillness.

"The second packet—" He raised his hand, and the chamber gradually quieted. "—received mere minutes later, contained information of even graver import. The blockade does not encompass Naboo alone." A pause. Calculated. Devastating. "The Trade Federation has blockaded the entire Chommell Sector."

The eruption this time was deafening even through the holoscreen's speakers. Tessari watched senatorial pods surge forward on their repulsorlifts, watched delegates leap to their feet, watched the Chancellor's face cycle through expressions that suggested he hadn't been informed of this development before Palpatine's address.

Balron's hand found hers. His grip was tight—not painful, but firm.

"Thirty-six star systems," Palpatine continued, his voice cutting through the chaos. "Billions of citizens. Trade routes severed. Communications disrupted. And at the heart of this unprecedented action—" His gaze seemed to find the cam directly. "—my home. My people. Held hostage by corporate interests that have decided Republic law applies only when convenient."

Tessari's mind raced through implications. Thirty-six systems. The entire Chommell Sector. That wasn't a trade dispute—that was an act of war. The Trade Federation had armies, yes, but they were droid armies, theoretically bound by treaty limitations and Republic oversight. To deploy them across an entire sector without Senate authorisation was either insanity or the opening move of something much larger. Tessari had played enough sabacc to

recognise the difference between a bluff and a bet. This was a bet. Someone had calculated the odds and decided the pot was worth the risk.

The question was who. Gunray didn't have the spine.

The Chancellor's gavel cracked against its rest—once, twice, three times in rapid succession. The sound cut through the chaos with decades of practised authority, though Tessari noted how Valorum's complexion had paled beneath its carefully maintained composure.

"Order!" Valorum's voice carried across the chamber, amplified by the podium's systems. "This body will have order!"

The tumult subsided. Not completely—senators still whispered urgently to aides, still gestured toward colleagues in neighbouring pods—but enough for proceedings to continue. Tessari found herself leaning forward, her bombed hand forgotten entirely.

"Senator Palpatine has made grave accusations," Valorum continued, his tone measured. "Accusations that, if true, would constitute a fundamental violation of Republic charter and trade law." He turned toward a pod on the opposite side of the chamber. "The Trade Federation is entitled to respond. Senator Lott Dod, you have the floor."

The cam shifted. Lott Dod's elongated face filled the holoscreen, his expression arranged into wounded dignity. Tessari had seen that look before—on the faces of casino cheats caught mid-deal, on merchants selling counterfeit goods, on every two-credit swindler who'd ever tried to convince her that the discrepancy in the accounts was merely a clerical error. The performance was polished. The substance was hollow. Forty years of reading faces across sabacc tables had given Tessari an education that no diplomatic academy could match, and Lott Dod's face read like a losing hand dressed in expensive paint.

"Chancellor Valorum, esteemed colleagues." Dod's voice dripped with theatrical concern. "I am... distressed to witness such inflammatory rhetoric in

these hallowed chambers. The Trade Federation has always operated within the bounds of Republic law. Always."

A ripple of reaction passed through the Senate—some pods nodding in agreement, others shifting with visible scepticism.

"Senator Palpatine speaks of blockades and military occupation." Dod spread his hands, palms up—bewildered innocence, standard configuration. "Yet where is the evidence? Where are the verified reports? The holonet feeds?" He paused, letting the questions hang. "I submit to this body that we are witnessing nothing more than political theatre—a desperate attempt by certain interests to manufacture a crisis where none exists."

Tessari's grip on Balron's hand tightened. The Neimoidian was good—she'd give him that. The performance would play well to senators who wanted an excuse not to act, who preferred comfortable denial to uncomfortable truth. The Senate was full of them. It was, in Tessari's professional estimation, the largest sabacc table in the galaxy—and the house always won because the house made the rules and changed them whenever the odds shifted.

"In fact," Dod continued, his tone shifting toward something approaching triumph, "I have taken the liberty of establishing communication with an individual currently present in Naboo's capital. A respected diplomat, attending Queen Amidala's much-publicised cultural exchange."

On Senator Dod's pod, a holo-projection of a figure expanded from one of the pod's consoles for everyone to see.

Ambassador Torven of Karlinus.

Tessari recognised him from Su Yan's descriptions—the perpetually confident diplomat whose son had apparently made several unsuccessful attempts to court Queen Amidala. The man who'd been negotiating alongside Naboo for months, pushing for consolidated demands against the Federation's exploitative contracts.

He didn't look confident now. He looked relieved. Grateful, even. The way a man looks when someone throws him a line and he grabs it without checking what's attached to the other end.

"Ambassador Torven." Dod's voice oozed solicitude. "Thank you for joining us on such short notice. Could you please inform this august body of the current situation on Naboo?"

Torven straightened. His expression settled into diplomatic neutrality—the face of a man who had rehearsed what he was about to say and had decided that the words tasted acceptable, if not pleasant.

"Of course, Senator Dod. I am pleased to report that I am currently attending the Chommell Sector Cultural and Harvest Exchange in Theed. A wonderful event—truly a testament to inter-sector cooperation."

The chamber stirred. Tessari watched Palpatine's face for any reaction and found none. The man was either genuinely surprised or possessed the best sabacc face in the galaxy. Tessari suspected the latter.

"There is no blockade," Torven continued. "No military presence. No disruption whatsoever. I have spoken with Queen Amidala personally within the past hour, and I can assure this body that she is in excellent health and spirits." A pause. A smile that didn't reach his eyes—and Tessari, who had spent four decades cataloguing smiles that didn't reach eyes, saw the strain beneath it. The jaw held too tightly. The blink rate slightly elevated. Ambassador Torven was lying, and he was lying under duress, and the effort of maintaining the performance was costing him.

"I confess myself baffled by Senator Palpatine's claims. Perhaps there has been some... miscommunication."

The word landed with deliberate weight.

Dod's expression shifted to satisfaction. "There you have it, Chancellor. Testimony from a neutral party, currently present on Naboo, confirming that

Senator Palpatine's accusations are entirely without foundation." He turned toward Palpatine's pod. "I trust this matter can now be laid to rest."

Tessari felt something cold settle deeper in her chest. She'd seen enough coerced testimony in her career—trading disputes where witnesses suddenly changed their stories, customs investigations where inspectors developed convenient amnesia—to recognise the shape of it. Torven was saying what he'd been told to say. The question was what they'd threatened him with.

Then she thought of the ambassador's son. The boy Su Yan had described—young, eager, trailing after the Queen with the transparent ambition of a man who hadn't yet learned that some people were beyond his reach.

'His son is on Naboo with him.'

The cold deepened.

The same thought seemed to occur to Palpatine. Or perhaps he'd arrived at it long before and had simply been waiting for the optimal moment to play the card.

"A compelling performance," Palpatine said, his voice carrying a calm that Tessari recognised from the sabacc table—the calm of a player who'd already seen the other side's hand and was merely choosing the order in which to reveal his own. "Ambassador Torven speaks eloquently of peace and cooperation. Yet I find myself curious about certain details."

Dod's eyes narrowed. "What details could possibly—"

"The Trade Federation claims no blockade exists." Palpatine's pod drifted forward slightly, bringing him closer to the chamber's centre. "Ambassador Torven confirms this claim. Both gentlemen speak with absolute confidence about conditions in the Chommell Sector." He paused. "Yet I—Naboo's own senator, elected representative of the very system in question—cannot establish communication with my homeworld."

A murmur rippled through the chamber.

"My office has attempted to contact Queen Amidala thirteen times in the past hour." Palpatine's voice remained level, almost conversational—the tone of a man discussing weather patterns whilst describing a hurricane. "Thirteen attempts. Each one severed within seconds of connection. The same pattern repeats when we attempt to reach the royal palace, the planetary government offices, or any official Naboo communication channel."

The murmur grew louder. Tessari watched senators leaning toward their aides, watched datapads emerge from robes, watched the chamber's collective attention sharpen into something approaching alarm. Seventeen failed connections. The number was specific. Verifiable. It sat in the air like a challenge that Dod would have to address.

"Senator Dod." Palpatine turned to face the Neimoidian directly. "You have demonstrated that the Trade Federation maintains open communication with Ambassador Torven on Naboo. Karlinus's representative is, as we've established, currently present in Queen Amidala's capital city—attending a festival in the heart of Theed." A beat. "If your organisation can so easily reach a diplomat visiting my world, surely you can connect me with my world's ruler."

The silence that followed was absolute.

Tessari watched Dod's face. The confidence cracked—not dramatically, not the theatrical collapse of a bad liar, but the subtle structural failure of a man who'd prepared for accusations but not for logic. His mouth opened. Closed. His hands, which had been spread in that gesture of innocence, dropped to his sides.

The trap was elegant. Tessari appreciated it the way she appreciated a well-executed bluff—professionally, aesthetically, and with the cold awareness that she was watching someone get destroyed. If the Federation could reach Torven on Naboo, they controlled the communications. If they controlled the communications, the blockade was real. If the blockade was real, Torven was

lying. Every road led to the same destination, and Dod had built them all himself by producing a witness he shouldn't have been able to reach.

"I... that is..." Dod recovered, his voice regaining its offended edge. "The Trade Federation is not responsible for maintaining the Chommell Sector senator's personal communication devices. If Senator Palpatine is experiencing technical difficulties, I suggest he consult with his office's technical staff rather than making baseless accusations on the Senate floor."

"Technical difficulties," Palpatine repeated. He let the words sit in the chamber for three full seconds before moving on. That was all. No rebuttal. No indignation. Just the echo, and the silence that followed it, and the implication settling into every senator's mind like sediment in still water.

"Furthermore." Dod's voice rose, drowning out the murmuring that had spread through the nearest pods. "I have presented this body with testimony from a respected diplomat—a man with no ties to the Trade Federation, a man who has spent months advocating against our legitimate business interests. Ambassador Torven has confirmed, under the eyes of the entire Senate, that there is no blockade. No occupation. No crisis."

The Neimoidian drew himself up to his full height.

"I will not tolerate these lies any longer. The Trade Federation has operated in good faith throughout these proceedings. We have answered questions, provided evidence, and demonstrated our commitment to transparency." His voice hardened. "If Senator Palpatine wishes to continue spreading falsehoods about our organisation, he may do so—but he will do so without our participation in this farce."

Dod's pod began to retreat from the chamber's centre.

The Senate erupted.

Tessari couldn't track the individual shouts—couldn't separate the voices demanding investigation from those calling for calm, the accusations from the deflections, the genuine outrage from the performative kind. The Chancellor's

gavel cracked again and again, but the chamber had passed beyond its ability to restore order. Tessari had seen rooms lose control before—casino floors after a rigged game was discovered, trade conventions after a price crash—but nothing at this scale. This was a thousand people realising simultaneously that the rules they'd built their careers on might not protect them, and the noise they produced was the sound of institutional faith fracturing in real time.

Through it all, Palpatine stood motionless in his pod. Watching. Waiting. His face betrayed nothing.

Tessari studied him. She'd watched thousands of people win and lose across sabacc tables. She'd catalogued every variety of triumph and defeat, from the explosive to the imperceptible. Palpatine's stillness didn't match any of them. A man whose homeworld had just been invaded should look frightened, or furious, or desperate. A man who'd just outmanoeuvred his opponent on the Senate floor should look satisfied, however briefly.

Palpatine looked like none of these things. He looked like a man watching a machine perform exactly as designed.

Tessari filed the observation away. She didn't know what to do with it yet. But she filed it.

Tessari became aware of Balron's grip on her hand—tighter now, almost painful. She turned to find him staring at her, his expression the blend of worry and calculation she'd seen during their worst trading crises. The look that meant he'd already assessed the situation, arrived at a conclusion he didn't like, and was waiting for her to reach the same place so they could argue about what to do next.

"Tessari," he said quietly, his voice barely audible beneath the lounge's ambient noise. The other gamblers had started talking again—urgent whispers, speculation, the nervous energy of people who'd just realised their travel plans might become significantly more complicated.

She squeezed his hand in response. No words needed. Forty years of marriage had given them a vocabulary beyond speech—a compression language more efficient than anything the handmaidens could have devised.

They were in Canto Bight. Thousands of light-years from Naboo, from Theed, from The Empty Pantry and the young couple who'd become something more than business partners. Safe, in the most immediate sense—no blockade would reach them here, no droid army would march through the casino's gilded corridors.

But Shirou and Arturia were there. Su Yan was there. Sio Bibble was there—the old bureaucrat who'd frustrated Tessari during the property negotiations and whom she'd grown to respect, grudgingly, for his stubborn dedication to a planet that didn't always deserve it. The investment they'd built together, the futures they'd planned, the strange little family that had formed around a restaurant and a revolution—all of it trapped behind whatever wall the Trade Federation had built.

And they couldn't reach them. Couldn't warn them. Couldn't do anything except sit in a casino and watch.

No.

She pushed back from the sabacc table, scooping her remaining chips into their velvet pouch. The Devaronian made a noise of protest—something about her stake, about abandoned games—but Tessari silenced him with a look that had been ending arguments since before he was born.

"Cash these out," she told one of the nearby service droids, pressing the pouch into its waiting appendage. "Transfer the balance to our suite's account."

"Of course, madam. Shall I arrange—"

"That will be all."

Balron had already risen, his holopad tucked beneath one arm. His gaze met hers. The question on his lips hadn't fully formed, but she could read its shape.

Tessari glanced around the lounge. The other gamblers had returned to their games, their conversations, their carefully curated indifference. A sector was burning and the cards were still being dealt. None of them noticed the elderly couple making their way toward the exit.

Good. Better that way.

"We aren't going to sit here and watch," she said, pitching her voice for Balron's ears alone. "Not while our people are trapped."

"What do you suggest?" His tone held no scepticism—only readiness. Forty years. He'd followed her into worse than this.

Tessari considered the casino's gilded corridors, the private lounges where fortunes changed hands, the back rooms where different kinds of business were conducted. Canto Bight attracted wealth, certainly—but it also attracted the people who serviced wealth. Smugglers who knew routes that didn't appear on official star charts. Information brokers who traded in the kind of currency that couldn't be deposited in a bank. Ship captains who'd run blockades before and would run them again if the price was right.

Tessari had spent forty years building a network of exactly these people. She'd never expected to need them like this.

"I think," Tessari said, linking her arm through Balron's as they stepped into the corridor's ambient glow, "we need to have a conversation with a few of our friends. And I think we'd better have it tonight."

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End

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