

Ending Maker: Fate Wizardry

Chapter Intro:

*This fic's premise is inspired by the webtoon titled **Ending Maker**/엔딩메이커 by **Chwiryong** and their illustrator **chyan**. Please check them out.*

Story Starts

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Ch 8.5 - Pardon my French

Bump.

Hermione recrossed her legs, shifting from right over left to left over right. Her brow wanted to knot itself into something ugly, and she smoothed it flat through sheer discipline, settling instead for the small violence of rearranging her limbs. Both hands gripped opposite elbows.

Bump.

Fine. The brow won.

The culprit sat wedged beside her—Ron Weasley, all elbows and freckles and outrage, lanky in a way that suggested his bones had outpaced the rest of him. Taller than Harry, even. Every time Draco Malfoy delivered another pronouncement from his position holding court in the middle of the compartment, Ron twisted to argue and his shoulder knocked into hers.

One of the main characters of the story, supposedly. Hermione studied him sidelong and found she didn't much care for the fair-weather friend of the books. Though fair-weather was perhaps unkind. He'd been jealous during the Triwizard Tournament, yes. He'd radiated insecurity the way a kettle radiates steam, yes. And the part in the seventh book where he simply walked out on them in a tent in the middle of a war—

She caught herself.

When, exactly, had she started superimposing herself onto the book's Hermione Granger? *Them*. As though she'd been there. As though a fictional girl's grievances were hers to inherit along with the name.

She'd been reincarnated into the body of Hermione Granger, certainly. But she was Rin Tohsaka, who happened to have been raised by two lovely dentists in suburban London. The bushy-haired swot of the novels had never existed in this world, and holding a grudge on her behalf against an eighteen-year-old who'd done nothing worse than jostle her shoulder was—she searched for the word—*unbecoming*.

Hermione shrugged internally and returned the redhead to the category of furniture.

She glanced up and found Cassiopeia Malfoy watching her from the opposite bench, one pale eyebrow arched a precise few millimetres. The girl had been watching her on and off since the compartment filled, cataloguing Hermione's irritation the way one might track weather over the Channel. Hermione met the look, held it a beat, then let her gaze slide away as though she'd noticed nothing at all.

Though, on consideration, the eyebrow raised a question of its own. Cassiopeia Malfoy sat in a compartment containing a Weasley, a Muggle-born, a Longbottom, and a part-Veela, and had yet to produce a single sneer. No contempt, no suspicion, none of the reflexive pureblood curdling Hermione had braced for the moment the name Malfoy entered the room. The girl simply sat, ankles crossed, hands folded, and observed—which was somehow more unnerving than open hostility would have been.

Her brother compensated for the deficit admirably.

"—and Father says the league's gone soft anyway, letting just anyone trial. The Nimbus people sent him the new model before it even reached the shops. *Before the shops*, Weasley. I don't imagine your family's ever owned a broom that wasn't second-hand twice over."

Draco Malfoy stood in the centre of the compartment because sitting would apparently have wasted the pose. Chin elevated, one hand describing lazy circles in the air, robes already immaculate hours before anyone would require them of him. A preening peacock—who probably had an investment vault whose profits went mainly on hair products.

'Though at least it looks like he'd used Sleekeazy's.'

Good money from the Malfoy coffers, flowing—via the Sleekeazy's royalties Fleamont Potter had never fully sold off—into Harry's. Which translated to more, and better quality, gems.

"At least my family doesn't have to buy their way onto a pitch." Ron twisted round, and his shoulder cracked into Hermione's again.

Bump.

Her jaw tightened.

Not once—she tallied it with the grim precision she usually reserved for accounting mana expenditure—not *once* had the Malfoy heir acknowledged her existence since she'd introduced herself. Fleur had received a stare of exactly four seconds before something in Fleur's answering look made him find the luggage rack fascinating—though despite officially ignoring her, his eyes did travel to Fleur after every boast, presumably checking whether whatever he was saying was impressing their blonde sex goddess of a former King of Knights. Cassiopeia had received the occasional glance of sibling grievance. Hermione had received the same consideration as the upholstery.

She couldn't decide whether to be insulted or relieved.

"Ummm—yes, it does have its magical applications, but it's also got quite the aroma. Mild nuttiness. It's mostly the flavour that people grow it for, really."

The other conversation in the compartment continued at half the volume and twice the sincerity. Neville Longbottom sat pressed into the corner by the door, hands knotted in his lap, addressing most of his sentences to a point

somewhere near Fleur's collarbone, because looking any higher or lower visibly cost him.

"And would one be able to grow a great deal of zis Moonpaddy rice?" Fleur leaned forward with the intensity other people reserved for matters of state. "For personal supply, you understand. Ze crop yield—'ow many harvests in a year?"

"Ah—erm—" Neville's ears went scarlet. "Only the one, if you're growing it under a natural moon. You can force a second crop with lunar lamps, but the grain comes out sort of... sulky. I've only a small corner of my greenhouse rated for East Asian climate, so I've never managed more than a few pounds a season. Y-you'd honestly be better served ordering from a speciality grocer. There's one in Diagon Alley that imports from the paddies outside Kyoto—I think it's a subsidiary of the Greengrass family."

"Kyoto." Fleur repeated the word the way some women said *diamonds*. "And zey deliver by owl?"

Hermione pressed her lips together against a smile. Trust Arturia—six years old in this life's memories or not—to conduct a full agricultural audit of the one boy in the compartment capable of discussing food production. The King of Knights had located her quartermaster within eleven minutes of meeting him.

Neville chose that moment to lock eyes with Hermione across the compartment, and the look he sent her was naked pleading. *Help me*. His pupils had dilated to twice their sensible size—the allure, leaking past whatever dampening Fleur was consciously managing, working on him despite his terror. The poor boy was drowning in equal parts infatuation and panic and clearly couldn't tell which was which.

That would probably have been a problem for a boy just getting used to a teenager's hormones—but in this reality, at least, Hogwarts started at eighteen. Or, in eighteen days' time, nineteen, in Hermione's case.

Hormonal confusion driven by equal parts lust and fear could pose problems for the Longbottom family's future. Though it probably didn't matter too much.

His toad sat on the seat beside him and, Hermione was almost certain, gave her the side-eye. A flat, gold-eyed, amphibian stare of judgement, as though the creature had assessed the entire compartment and found her specifically wanting.

She narrowed her eyes at it. The toad blinked once, slowly, unrepentant.

At least Neville suffered honestly. Ron's attention operated on a metronome: glare at Malfoy, stare at Fleur, glare at Malfoy, stare at Fleur, his mouth continuing the argument on pure momentum during the Fleur intervals.

"—my brother Charlie was captain, you know, and he says—" Stare. "—says raw talent beats gold every time, and—" Glare. "—and anyway—"

"Anyway, your brother works in a field shovelling dragon dung," Draco finished for him.

"He's a *dragonologist*—"

Bump.

Hermione exhaled through her nose and reviewed, for the third time, the sequence of decisions that had delivered her to this circumstance.

It had begun with a knock. A soft, polite knock, entirely at odds with the argument then conducting itself at full volume in the corridor. Harry had answered it, and instead of shutting the door on the bickering pair outside, he'd somehow returned with a platinum-blond girl who introduced herself as Cassiopeia Malfoy—very reminiscent of how the Blacks named their children, all constellations and dead stars, though come to think of it, Draco was a constellation as well, wasn't it? The whole family probably navigated by their own christenings.

Cassiopeia had barely finished her introduction when Neville appeared in the doorway hunting his escaped toad, which had apparently been sitting in the corridor between the arguing boys like a very small, very unimpressed referee. The boy dove for it. The toad dodged with the fluid ease of long practice,

sailed between Ron's ankles, and it had taken Harry—of course it had taken Harry—snatching it one-handed out of the air to end the chase. After that, there had been no polite way to evict anyone, and the compartment had filled the way a lifeboat fills: by accretion and desperation.

Crabbe and Goyle now stood posted outside the door. Two great lumps of calories given form and passable sentience, visible through the glass as a pair of shoulders and the occasional adenoidal breath. Standing guard, presumably, though against what, Hermione couldn't say. Perhaps against the compartment achieving quiet.

And Harry—Harry had excused himself eight minutes ago to find the washroom.

'Coward.'

She knew that face. She'd watched him wear it through goblin negotiations and dinners with her father. The pleasant, apologetic mask that meant Shirou Emiya had calculated the room's social obligations, found them exceeding his tolerance, and executed a tactical withdrawal—leaving her holding the peacock, the metronome, the herbology hostage negotiation, and a toad with opinions.

This was supposed to have been their private time. She'd planned it—not elaborately, nothing written down, but planned nonetheless. Seven hours of rail travel with her two favourite people in two worlds, a compartment door that locked, and a book she'd fully intended to read whilst Harry took one foot and Fleur took the other. She'd got as far as a chapter, and had been about to start riling Harry up—the reliable prelude to the pair of them pampering her—when: the knock.

No indolent afternoon. No massages. No watching them sigh and shake their heads before acquiescing to her exacting demands—sometimes it did feel good, being a Rin-reborn Hermione—but this wasn't to be the day.

She'd have to find a properly secluded corner of Hogwarts at the weekend instead. Somewhere with a door, or at minimum a wall thick enough to

muffle—and actually, now she considered it, seclusion offered other efficiencies. If she could secure a few undisturbed hours, she could combine recreation with practical work. Mana transfer was the single most efficient charging method available to her, and with the new wand cores to saturate, a proper session would accomplish in one evening what passive conversion managed in a mon—

Thud.

The compartment door slid open hard enough to rattle in its track, and Harry stood framed in it, wearing an expression she needed a moment to parse. Not his pleasant mask. Not the forge-calm either. Something closer to a man who'd stepped outside to escape a fire and found the garden flooded.

'At least he's back.' Whatever business the compartment's occupants had with the Boy Who Lived could now be discharged, the visitors could be shepherded out with brisk courtesy, and the afternoon could be salvaged. Some of it. A fraction.

'At least the day can't get any worse.'

Then a scent drifted in from the corridor—vaguely familiar, though she couldn't place where she'd smelt it before.

"Harry?!"

The voice came from the corridor behind him—bright, delighted, and entirely unfamiliar. Harry turned, and his shock was total: eyebrows up, mouth half-open, green eyes wide.

A blonde girl stood in the corridor. Curly hair—or partially curly; Hermione's eye, trained by years of losing arguments with her own hair, identified at once that some of those ringlets had been coaxed with heat and product rather than granted by nature. Pretty, in a polished, deliberate way. Trunk handle in one hand, the other already rising.

Normally, Hermione did not concern herself with women speaking to Harry. She was an open-minded individual. Demonstrably. *Provably*, given present company. She had, in point of fact, welcomed the addition of a reincarnated King of Britain to their relationship within roughly forty-eight hours of saving her from the Witch of Colchis, which she felt established her credentials beyond reasonable challenge.

"Sally? You're a *witch*?"

Something in Hermione's mind produced a low, grinding noise, like a gear encountering grit.

"I thought I wouldn't be seeing you for a year!" The girl abandoned her trunk where it stood and latched onto Harry's arm with both hands, beaming up at him, pressed close enough that Hermione could itemise precisely which parts of her were now in contact with which parts of him.

TICK.

Hermione uncrossed her legs. Angrily.

"Sally-Anne?"

"Yes, Sally-Anne Perks, don't wear my name out—oh, wait. I don't mind you wearing *me* out. I mean wearing my *name* out." The girl stuck out her tongue and winked, an operation she managed to make look choreographed. "Slip of the tongue."

Hermione's fingers found the hem of her skirt and gripped it.

'A slip. Of course. Entirely accidental. The way a Finn Shot to the face can be accidental.'

Harry, for his part, was still gaping at the girl attached to his arm the way one gapes at a piece of furniture that has begun offering opinions. "But—I never once felt any—"

"Muggle-born, silly." Sally tapped his chest with one finger, an act of casual proprietorship that scraped down Hermione's spine like a fork on porcelain. "Besides, it's not as though that sour, greasy-haired professor was going to hand me a directory of nearby witches and wizards to connect with." Her eyes went wide, and she rocked back on her heels. "Oh, this explains *so much*. The pantry door! The one Dad swore at for a decade! You had it swinging like new in an afternoon, and he still talks about it. He tells *customers*. There's an actual anecdote."

"Um. That was just regular WD-40."

"Oh, posh." She waved this away as beneath consideration. Then she froze, and Hermione watched an idea arrive on her face with the subtlety of a landing aircraft. "Wait. Are you like me? Are you Muggle-born as well?"

And she grabbed his arm again.

Not took. Not held. *Grabbed*, with both hands, hauling it close so that Harry's forearm disappeared into the space between her breasts as though it were being filed there for safekeeping.

Hermione looked down at her own chest. A brief, clinical audit, conducted at speed.

'Mine still look better. And they're just as large. Better, in fact. Objectively. If one were measuring.'

From her periphery came the distinct sensation of being watched, and she flicked a glance sideways to find Cassiopeia Malfoy regarding her with an expression of perfect, glassy neutrality—the sort of neutrality that took effort, the sort maintained over something enjoying itself immensely underneath. Hermione ignored it. Loudly. Internally.

She had already put her foot down once—a firm, deliberate placement of heel against floor that had communicated, to anyone with functioning survival instincts, that the compartment's tolerance for arm-sandwiching had been exceeded.

She had been ignored. By everyone. Including the toad's empty seat.

So she stood up.

Hermione cleared her throat.

Harry, to his credit, recognised a summons when he heard one. Two lifetimes of Tohsaka conditioning surfaced in his posture before his brain had finished processing: his spine straightened, his free hand rose in a small placating gesture, and he began—slowly, steadily, nothing sudden—to extract his other arm from its holster. "Sally, this is Hermione Granger—"

"His girlfriend," Hermione supplied, with the serene finality of a border being drawn on a map.

"—and Fleur Delacour."

"Is ozzer girlfriend," Fleur said from her seat, not bothering to rise, her tone less territorial than informative—a herald reading out the order of succession for the benefit of latecomers.

The compartment fell into a brief, collective silence.

Draco made a noise like a kettle deciding not to boil. Ron's ears achieved a shade of red that clashed with his hair on entirely new frequencies, and his mouth opened and shut twice without producing language. From the corner seat, Neville's abandoned cushion still held the toad, which croaked once—flat, unimpressed, the amphibian equivalent of *called it*.

Cassiopeia Malfoy's eyebrow gained perhaps another millimetre of altitude. Hermione had the distinct impression of a spectator quietly upgrading her seats.

Sally-Anne Perks processed the information. Hermione watched her do it—watched the words *girlfriend* and *other girlfriend* travel across her face, encounter no resistance whatsoever, and file themselves away.

"So there's room for more?" She looked up at Harry through her lashes.

Harry's expression underwent a small, contained catastrophe. Hermione knew that face. It was the face of a man rapidly composing an excuse involving the washroom and the fact that he had two kidneys, and kidney number two was ready to deliver its payload—anything that would permit a tactical retreat down the corridor and possibly off the moving train entirely.

'Oh no you don't. You left me with the peacock for eight minutes. You will stand there, and you will suffer.'

She caught his eye and communicated this in full. His shoulders lowered a fraction. Message received.

"How lovely to meet you both," Sally said, and her voice had transformed. Gone was the pub-daughter brightness, the London vowels that had shouted about knife oil across a taproom; in its place sat a finishing-school polish, each consonant buffed and set like a stone in a ring. "Harry's never mentioned you."

Harry wisely said nothing. Hermione awarded him no points for it. Survival was the minimum standard, not an achievement.

"Whenever he said he was busy for the rest of the school year and all of summer, I assumed something else." Sally patted his arm—the arm she was still holding, Hermione noted; the arm that remained, as of this moment, un-relinquished, an ongoing territorial violation being conducted in plain sight. "Football, perhaps."

"He doesn't watch football," Hermione said.

"I know." The smile Sally turned on her was sweetness itself, sugar spun over a blade. "I've known him since he started his apprenticeship. I simply thought he had other, more *important* things occupying him."

The emphasis landed where it had been aimed. Somewhere in Hermione's chest, a small administrative department—the one that handled Threats, Assessment Of—stopped filing its usual reports on Dark Lords and goblin contract law and began stamping an entirely new set of forms in triplicate.

Subject: Perks, S. Classification: pending. Recommended posture: DEFCON adjustable.

"I once came round to the shop early in the morning," Sally went on, releasing Harry's arm at last only to clasp her own cheek in fond remembrance, eyes going soft and distant, "and found him asleep on the floor of the smithy. Right there among the whetstones, soot on his nose. He looked so peaceful." She sighed. "Ohh-hohoho."

The laugh escaped her from behind a hand raised delicately to her lips—a rich, rolling, aristocratic *noblewoman's* laugh, ascending through three registers and descending again, utterly unearned by a publican's daughter from Guildford, clearly rehearsed off some period drama and deployed here with total commitment and zero shame.

Hermione's blood ran cold.

She could not have said why. There was no logic to it. It was one laugh, from one girl, on one train. And yet something in the deepest sediment of her—below Hermione Granger, below even Rin Tohsaka, down in whatever bedrock souls were quarried from—rose up and declared that noise *anathema*. Her hackles lifted. Her fingers curled. An ancestral enmity she had no memory of earning uncoiled in her stomach and bared its teeth, and for one vertiginous moment she wanted, quite specifically, to answer with a wrestling move whose name she did not know.

'What. What was that. Where did that come from.'

Beside her, the still-seated Fleur had begun to tremble.

Small tremors at first, confined to the shoulders. Then her jaw tightened, and a muscle beneath her left eye flickered, and Hermione realised with a swell of pure betrayal that the once and future King of Britain, victor of Badon Hill, wielder of the sword of selection, was fighting for her life against a laughing fit.

Hermione shot her a look containing the full weight of their two lifetimes' acquaintance.

Fleur composed her features into the blank ceremonial mask she used for state functions and Dickensian Manoeuvres—chin level, gaze at middle distance, mouth a diplomatic line. It fooled no one. Least of all Hermione, who could see her knuckles whitening around her own knee like a rider gripping the saddle at full gallop.

'You're enjoying this.'

Fleur's eyes, blue and brimming, slid to hers and answered: *enormously*.

'Traitor. Camlann was deserved.'

"Draco," Cassiopeia said, without turning her head from the window, "your tie."

Draco—who had spent the past minute rigid, staring at the Sally-and-Harry tableau whilst his entire social cosmology inverted in real time, blood status and boy-heroes and girls who laughed like duchesses all tumbling out of their assigned orbits—looked down. He found his tie flawless, as it had been since dawn. He adjusted it anyway, twice, and by the time he'd looked up to demand what she'd meant by it, his sister had returned to the scenery, her single deployed sentence already folded away, its work—whatever its work had been—done.

Hermione, breathing again, was distantly grateful. She filed the observation next to the others accumulating under *Malfoy, C.*: the girl used words the way Harry used arrows. Sparingly. On target. From concealment.

Then the compartment door's open frame darkened, and an older student leaned in—blue tie, bronze trim, a prefect's badge catching the light.

"What's the commotion in here? You're blocking half the corridor." Her gaze swept the compartment, itemising the standing bodies, the abandoned trunk, the general air of recent skirmish. "And does anyone know who owns the toad? It's three carriages down harassing the trolley witch. It's *sitting* on the pumpkin pasties."

Hermione glanced at the corner cushion. Empty. The creature had staged its second escape of the afternoon entirely unobserved—which, given its audience of trained killers and paranoid magi, deserved a certain professional respect.

"TREVOR!"

Neville materialised from wherever he'd been hovering and departed at a speed suggesting he had spent the entire journey waiting for precisely this excuse, his footfalls receding down the corridor like a drumroll.

The prefect watched him go, unmoved, then turned back to the compartment at large. "Right. We're still hours from Hogsmeade, but I suggest you all start changing into uniform now rather than in a panic at the end. We are *not* having a repeat of last year's half-naked boys changing in every open carriage section whilst the girls changed in their compartments."

Having delivered her verdict, she moved on down the train, already leaning into the next compartment with the same opening line.

The compartment dissolved at once into the logistics of changing. The boys were evicted to the corridor in a shuffling, grumbling herd—Ron muttering, Harry casting one last look back at Hermione that was equal parts apology and plea for asylum, Draco loudly informing anyone within earshot that at Malfoy Manor one had a *dressng room*, an actual dressing room, with a valet elf, and that communal disrobing in a train corridor was the sort of indignity his father would be hearing about. Crabbe and Goyle absorbed him into their gravity, and the door began to slide shut.

Hermione gave the female half of the Malfoy siblings a questioning stare. It was returned with a look that said, quite plainly: *he's special—and not in a nice way*.

Sally-Anne Perks stepped inside before the door closed, towing her trunk, and set about unlatching it with brisk domestic efficiency.

Hermione stared at her.

"We're changing first, right?" Sally said brightly, producing a folded uniform.

"Then it's the boys' turn afterwards."

Fleur made a very small sound, hastily converted into a cough.

Hermione reached for her own trunk and reflected, as she thumbed the latches rather harder than they deserved, that the day had, in fact, found room to get worse.

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End

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