

## These Tragic Souls and a Sword Reborn in an Intergalactic Space Opera

Story Intro: "Welcome! I'm an evil god, though not that evil of a god!" is what they woke up to. Join our heroes and heroines, having just met their demise, displaced by an extradimensional event."

### Story Starts

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### Book 1 - The Empty Twin

### Ch 3.1 Into the Deep

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Grakkan Empire

System: Leafil | Planet: Unnamed Pair of Theta

Date: Grakkan Standard (GknS) | Local (Leafil) | Galactic Standard (GS)

'Revolution' / 'Prime Satellite' / 'Rotation' / 'Time'

GknS 34k6.rev-70% / 10.rev-53% / 259.rot-48% / 11:32:06

Local: 42k6.12.rev-58% / 8.rev-56% / 295.rot-34% / 13:24:00

GS 13k9.rev-47% / 8.rev-55% / 258.rot-48% / 21:18:23

*Three Days Later... Almost noon.*

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The nineteenth floor opened like a cathedral's throat.

Ryuu stepped through the archway and let her senses unfurl. The ivory walls had widened dramatically compared to the eighteenth floor, stretching twenty metres across and climbing high enough that the faintly luminous ceiling

vanished into a pale haze. The air tasted different here—thinner, cooler, carrying a faint mineral tang that reminded her of deep caves beneath Orario.

With every descent, the floors had grown larger—not just the corridors, but the distances between them. It had taken the three of them more than an hour to find the entrance to the nineteenth, and that was with them rushing, leaving the strip-mining team to work through the previous floor slowly and deliberately.

Strip-mining, one of the skrattes had called it—extracting every valuable thing a floor could give, emptying it before moving forward. Lately, they'd even started bringing pickaxes to mine the walls for material, though the harvesters had to keep a careful eye on how quickly the dungeon healed itself and began birthing replacements.

Marin called it min-maxing—one of her roommate's many video game terms.

Behind them, the sounds of their team—the wet thud of cleavers through monster flesh, the low murmur of Skratte foremen directing their crews, the sharp cracks of Brownie apparition—faded as the passage curved. Standard procedure. They'd learned that lesson on the twelfth floor, when the ten-legged lambs had swarmed like a kicked nest of hornets and very nearly overrun the rear guard before Rose sealed the corridor with a wall of conjured stone. Since then, the three of them pushed ahead on every new floor to assess the threat before signalling the all-clear. Once they'd mapped enough to know what the floor held, one of their personal Brownies—Mipsy, Topsy, or Pockey—would apparate back to Grackle, who coordinated the rest.

Not that it was a slight against the centaurs, skrattes, and brownies—they were perfectly capable of fighting everything they'd faced so far. The problem was timing.

Once a monster was killed, its body needed to be moved onto a surface that kept it from touching the dungeon floor. Tarpaulins, in their case. If they waited too long, the dungeon began reclaiming what it had made, and it always started with the magicite.

Ryuu had quickly learned that Rin—one of the group's self-appointed lead organisers—bordered on obsessive when it came to preserving every last crystal. Given that magicite was their sole source of mana on a planet with no ley lines, it was difficult to fault her.

Tipsy, Mipsy, and Pockey popped into existence right between Ryuu and Shirou, as Rose summoned her broom again, grumbling that she'd like to apparate between floors as easily as them.

The three witches had recently remastered line-of-sight apparition, but they hadn't reached the brownies' level—who, as long as they knew the approximate distance between floors, could apparate without needing to see their destination at all.

*'Brownies.'* Ryuu rolled the word through her mind as she scanned the hallway ahead. Syr's suggestion, that one. The grey-haired woman had raised it at Haruka's meeting with that characteristic half-smile of hers, the one that made her look as though she were sharing a private joke with the universe.

"Brownies. Like the old hearth-spirits," Syr had said, tapping her chin. "The little ones deserve something that sounds warm, don't you think?"

The goblins had been trickier. Skrattes—drawn from some fragment of Nordic folklore that Syr carried like a splinter beneath her skin, a remnant of the goddess she'd been.

*'Nordic.'* Another of those Earth words the gods and goddesses who'd descended to Orario had occasionally let slip—terms from a reality beyond her own that she'd had no way to place until recently. Her roommate's world, as it turned out. Marin's homeland had its own names for things the gods and goddesses simply referenced in offhand without clarifying, whilst their confused children wondered.

Ryuu was one of the few who knew the full shape of that splinter. Everyone from Hestia Familia knew. Everyone from Loki Familia knew. And the scattered remnants of the disbanded Freya Familia certainly knew, because their goddess had never truly been banished from Orario at all. She'd

remained hidden in plain sight at the Hostess of Fertility, pouring ale and stirring trouble in equal measure, whilst Hestia—of all people—had been responsible for keeping the Love Goddess contained. A fox in a hen-house, watched by a rabbit.

Now Syr was mortal. Truly mortal. Just a grey-eyed woman with a sharp tongue and the faint ability to perceive souls. She'd asked them to keep her secret, and Ryuuk had agreed without hesitation. Some friendships and shared commiserations outlasted divinity.

Still, watching Syr in the dungeon had given Ryuuk something to measure herself against.

When it came to sword work—to anything involving a weapon, really—Syr was leagues above everyone in raw skill. She moved the way a river moved: without effort, without wasted motion, every stroke finding its mark as though the weapon had always been mid-swing and simply needed a target to complete the arc. She'd admitted that Shirou's archery might be the one exception, something even she wasn't certain she could match.

High praise, from a woman who'd once held dominion over both war and death.

A sound pulled her from reflection. Ahead, where the corridor branched into a wider chamber, something clicked against the ivory floor. Rhythmic. Deliberate. Like knitting needles worked by eight hands simultaneously.

"Contact," Ryuuk murmured, drawing her twin short blades.

The first monster of the floor emerged from the ceiling.

It descended on a thread of silk so fine it caught the ambient glow like spun glass—a spider-form the size of a cow, perhaps larger, its carapace the colour of old bone, eight eyes arranged in two gleaming rows that reflected Ryuuk's approach with insectile dispassion. '*General Knowledge*' supplied the classification without effort: aranea type. Multi-limbed arthropod predators with web-spinning capability and potential venom.

The specifics always varied between dungeons—no two spires produced identical monsters, only recognisable patterns, like a family resemblance across generations. A fifty-floor spire might birth aranea that burrowed and ambushed. A hundred-floor labyrinth might spawn ones that wove illusions into their silk.

This one just hung there, watching her with eight eyes that held no fear.

Ryuu closed the distance in three strides and bisected the creature in a single draw—not through the centre, but offset to the left, leaving the crystallised magicite nestled between cephalothorax and abdomen intact. The aranea folded inward like a crushed paper lantern and hit the ivory floor in two wet pieces.

Two more dropped from the ceiling.

Then five.

Then the corridor ahead filled with clicking.

"Is this another swarm like those bleating lambs?"

Rose's voice carried from above and behind, already airborne on her broom, her wand tracking the growing mass of pale carapaces flooding from every surface of the hallway. Emerald light pulsed at her wand-tip—she'd spent the last three days refining her spatial coordinate framework until her shots landed precisely where she intended, and had settled on a rotation of Blasting Curses, cutting curses, and the occasional elemental spell as her dungeon repertoire.

With a wave of her wand, Rose sent a torrent of flame sweeping across the ceiling and left wall. No incantation. No hesitation. The fire caught the silk threads first, and they burned like fuses—bright, fast, racing along the web network until the entire upper third of the corridor flickered orange.

*'Like a dragon.'* The thought sent an involuntary wince through Ryuu. The heat on her face, the light dancing off ivory walls—for a half-second she was back

in Orario, watching the sky split open and the world she'd known burn to ash. She remembered all too well what a dragon had done to her—to everyone who'd come from Orario.

She pushed the memory down and kept moving.

"Aren't those lambs your favourite?" Shirou fell into step beside Ryu, his tone flat as hammered steel. He'd Traced Kanshou and Bakuya at a larger scale than usual, and the oversized black and white blades carved through the swarm in sweeping arcs—severing thorax from abdomen, shearing legs to remove mobility. Each stroke was precise, economical, the kind of swordsmanship that came from a body that understood blades the way most people understood breathing.

They wouldn't be caught off guard again by a monster that could still fight after a debilitating wound.

"The meat is my favourite, you absolute—oh, bloody fuck, they have pincers!" Rose banked hard as a glob of silk shot past her ear and an aranea lunged for her broom with outstretched forelegs. The bit where five hundred of the little sods made me wish for tinnitus and the big ones tried to roast me alive? Less fond of that part!"

"And I quote: 'We're having shepherd's pie tonight,'" Shirou said, without looking up from the aranea he was dismantling.

Rose had shouted that the second time they'd descended to the twelfth floor. She apparently hadn't appreciated him remembering.

"There's a difference between appreciating a good warm dinner and wanting to relive the slaughterhouse!"

"Noted."

A Blasting Curse punched through a cluster of aranea descending from the ceiling in a tangled knot of legs and silk, scattering chitin fragments across the corridor. Ryu sidestepped the debris without breaking stride.

"And another magicite gone," Shirou observed.

Ryuu glanced at Rose, who winced at that. She switched to cutting curses without missing a beat, angling them with practised precision—several aranea dropped to the floor with their undersides cleanly separated from the rest of their bodies, magicite intact.

"Are you gonna tattle on me to mother?" Rose called down, and despite the chaos, Ryuu felt the corner of her mouth twitch. *'Mother.'* Something Rose whispered whilst rolling her eyes at Rin's habit of lecturing anyone who wasted so much as a chip of magicite.

"Concentrate," Ryuu reminded them both, kicking an aranea back into a cluster of its kin. The impact stunned them for a half-second—long enough. "Luminous Wind."

Green-white orbs bloomed from her blades and tore through the stunned group in a chain of detonations that left the ivory wall behind them scorched.

"Spoilsport," Rose's mock-hurt voice followed as she threw several more cutting curses and a gout of fire at those advancing across the ceiling.

The floor's architecture worked against them—or perhaps for the aranea, which amounted to the same thing. Where the lamb floor had been a single vast warren of interconnected tunnels, this floor presented itself as a labyrinth of wide chambers linked by broad corridors, the ceiling vaulted high enough for the creatures to establish silk networks overhead. Ryuu could see the threads multiplying as they pushed deeper, geometric patterns spreading across the upper walls like a second architecture laid over the dungeon's own.

"Rose, more fire!"

"Rose, more fire, or we'll be sitting ducks."

They'd spoken at the same time. Rose barked a laugh somewhere above them.

"Oooh, I'm popular today."

Ryuu wove between three aranea lunging in staggered sequence, her blades trailing green luminescence—Luminous Wind's residual energy bleeding through the steel. Each stroke found its mark without conscious aim, one kill flowing into the next, her orbs of light detonating in her wake like delayed grenades.

Rose swept back and forth across the corridor, her flames devouring aranea and silk thread alike. The webs caught fastest—bright lines of fire racing along the geometric networks, collapsing them into drifting ash.

"Brownies, help with cleaning up the webs!"

A chorused, "Yes, Mistress Rose!"

The trio apparated around the corridor, vanishing silk with sharp cracks of displaced air. They'd been asked not to engage the monsters unless absolutely necessary—apparition drew from their own finite reserves of magic, and no one wanted them trapped without an escape route when it mattered most.

The aranea kept coming. Just as Rose had said—another swarm, like the lambs, but smarter. More of them surged from the chamber ahead and from corridors behind, pinching inward.

"Trace on."

Shirou spoke the words without urgency, the way another person might clear their throat. The air above the advancing swarm shimmered—and hundreds of blades materialised in staggered rows, hanging for a fraction of a heartbeat like guillotine blades waiting for the drop.

They fell.

Iron rain. Each weapon punched through carapace and pinned its target to the ivory floor, and those that struck magicite shattered the crystal in a spray of blue-white fragments. Wasteful, but necessary—the corridor behind them had been closing.

Yet their count still climbed. The clicking intensified. From somewhere deeper in the labyrinth, a sound rose—a vibration more felt than heard, thrumming through the ivory floor, through the soles of Ryuu's boots, through her teeth. The aranea responded to it. Their movements sharpened, became coordinated, groups of four and five attacking in synchronised patterns whilst others hung back, spinning silk barriers to funnel the corridor into chokepoints.

"I think the whole floor is converging on this place," Ryuu called.

"I figured." Shirou.

Shirou gripped an enlarged Kanshou in his right hand—the black blade grown to greatsword length, its edge catching the ambient glow with a hungry gleam. Bakuya occupied his left. The married swords, he'd called them. Bound by a conceptual attraction that drew each inexorably toward the other—throw one, and it would arc back to rejoin its partner.

Ryuu had not fully understood the theory. She understood the result.

Shirou hurled Kanshou in a wide lateral arc. The black blade scythed through three aranea at thorax-height, continued past them, curved—she tracked its trajectory in the edge of her vision, the way one tracked a hawk banking—and swept back through two more creatures approaching from his flank before slapping into his waiting palm with a sound like a bell struck underwater. The entire sequence lasted perhaps two seconds.

The ability to analyse, replicate, and project any weapon he had ever witnessed—complete with its history, its composition, its accumulated legend. Ryuu thought of Goibniu's forge in the depths of Orario, the divine smith's hands shaping weapons that adventurers would kill for. She thought of Hephaestus, one eye gleaming behind her eyepatch, appraising a blade's worth with a glance.

Either god would have wept watching Shirou work. Goibniu with the raw-throated envy of a craftsman witnessing miracles he could not replicate. Hephaestus, perhaps, with something closer to joy—recognising a kindred

soul who understood that weapons were not merely tools but expressions of will made tangible.

Though that would only be in gekkai, but with their divine powers unleashed, the comparison would have been a different story entirely.

And knowing Hephaestus, she'd have demanded he explain the technique. In detail. For hours.

A fresh wave surged from the chamber ahead—dozens of aranea pouring over and around their own silk barriers, only to meet Rose's flames head-on. The clicking reached a pitch that vibrated in Ryuu's sternum.

Rose answered from above. Blasting Curses fell in measured rhythm, each one detonating amongst a cluster of creatures with a concussive *whump* that scattered legs and chitin. She'd improved markedly since the first day—the spells landed precisely where she aimed, her spatial framework holding steady even whilst banking and weaving between silk strands. Occasionally a different spell flashed from her wand: something violet that liquefied carapaces on contact, something white that froze silk-threads mid-flight and sent them clattering to the floor as brittle glass.

Shirou rained blades. Rose rained spells. Ryuu occupied the spaces between—the gaps in the bombardment where creatures slipped through, the flanks where smaller aranea tried to circle behind Shirou's position, the ceiling-corners where silk-spinners worked to re-establish their web networks. Her body moved through the patterns she'd honed across years in Astraea Familia, that fluid economy of motion where each step positioned her for the next strike and each strike created the opening for the next step. Green luminescence trailed her blades like cometary tails.

She lost count of how many she killed.

They pushed forward. The corridor widened into a final chamber—broad, domed, the ceiling lost in shadow and silk—and the remaining aranea made their stand. Ryuu estimated forty, perhaps fifty creatures packed into the space, the larger specimens positioned at the centre whilst smaller ones

formed a chitinous perimeter. The larger ones stood waist-high and bore darker carapaces streaked with patterns that might have been natural colouration or might have been something else entirely.

Shirou stepped forward. A single word, and the air above the perimeter bristled with steel—weapons appearing in staggered waves this time, heavier, aimed with intent rather than the indiscriminate rain from the corridor. Rose's Blasting Curses and flames punched and burned through the centre cluster. Ryu carved the left flank, then pivoted to intercept a group of six that broke formation and rushed Shirou's exposed back.

It took perhaps three minutes. It felt longer.

Then silence.

The chamber floor was carpeted in pale chitin and pooling ichor. Aranea corpses lay in overlapping heaps, legs tangled, silk threads settling over the carnage like shrouds. The ambient hum of the dungeon walls reasserted itself—that ever-present pulse of energy that Ryu had learned to filter from her awareness but never quite managed to forget.

She exhaled. Rolled her shoulders. Flicked ichor from her blades.

Shirou straightened from a crouch and dismissed Kanshou and Bakuya—the married swords dissolved into motes of light that faded before reaching the floor. His expression was the same studied calm he wore through every engagement: assessing and cataloguing. Golden eyes swept the chamber, paused on each exit, then found Ryu.

Rose landed beside them.

She nodded.

"Right." Shirou turned toward Topsy, who had appeared at his right shoulder.

"Topsy, head up to Grackle. Tell them floor nineteen is clear, though they might need more hands—"

The temperature dropped.

It was subtle—a breath of cold that had no source, no draught to explain it—but Ryuu felt it prickle across the back of her neck a half-second before her eyes confirmed what her instincts already knew.

Every corpse in the chamber twitched, enveloped in an aura of dark purple.

Ryuu's blades were in her hands before conscious thought caught up. The movement rippled outward from the centre of the room—not the spasmodic jerking of dying nerves, but coordinated, deliberate, as though a single signal had passed through every fallen body simultaneously. Legs that had curled inward in death unfolded. Carapaces that had cracked and split under spell-fire and steel knit themselves together with a sound like cracking ice played in reverse. The ichor on the floor flowed upward, drawn back into wounds that sealed as Ryuu watched.

The aranea she had bisected—the first kill of the floor—pulled its two halves together and stood. The cut she'd made was still visible, a dark seam running through the pale carapace, but the creature moved as though it had never been touched.

Dozens of pale eyes opened across the chamber. Hundreds.

The clicking resumed. Louder.

"Oh, bollocks."

"Indeed," Ryuu added.

"Banter... from Ryuu!?" Rose called out as she mounted her broom.

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Grakkan Empire

System: Leafil | Planet: Unnamed Pair of Theta

Date: Grakkan Standard (GknS) | Local (Leafil) | Galactic Standard (GS)

'Revolution' / 'Prime Satellite' / 'Rotation' / 'Time'

GknS 34k6.rev-70% / 10.rev-53% / 259.rot-47% / 08:32:06

Local: 42k6.12.rev-58% / 8.rev-56% / 295.rot-26% / 10:24:00

GS 13k9.rev-47% / 8.rev-55% / 258.rot-45% / 18:18:23

*Same day, a few hours back, midmorning.*

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Sakura is present but recovering from her magic crest transplant—Rin used Ore Scales, the Edelfelt family trait, to copy her integrated Tohsaka-Edelfelt crest and transplant the copy to Sakura. She's paler than usual, shadows under her eyes, but insists on being useful and is handling documentation and calculations while the other two do the heavier magical work.

Hermione pressed the nib of her pen against the paper and watched the ink bloom into a fat, shapeless dot. She lifted the nib. Stared at the dot. Set the pen down.

She looked to her left, where the midmorning sky stretched wide and serene above the camp. She'd refused to work inside the tent. Her British sensibilities demanded it—if the weather was bright and cloudless, one might as well bask in it. Especially after Project Noah, where she'd spent the better part of four and a half years trapped inside their travel tent organising the logistics of humanity's last desperate gamble.

The breeze off the plains smelled of nothing she recognised. Clean air, alien soil, a foreign sky backdropped by a nearby planet—one that, according to '*General Knowledge*,' harboured intelligent life. The thought still hadn't settled properly in her mind. She suspected it never would.

The clatter of Rin's pen hitting the table pulled her back. Rin had been twirling it between her fingers—a nervous habit Hermione had catalogued within the first day of knowing her—and had finally lost the battle with gravity.

Hermione pressed her fingers into the bridge of her nose. The numbers refused to cooperate.

Not the arithmetic itself—the arithmetic was elegant, almost offensively so. The kind of cascading reduction that would have earned top marks in any

Arithmancy seminar. Twenty-eight cycles, each one hundred and forty-four hours long. Each cycle stepped the stasis bubble's temporal gradient closer to real-time by—well, not by one per cent exactly, but by a scaling factor of 0.99 raised to the power of N. The exponential decay of the remaining extraction time collapsed beautifully with each iteration, compressing three hundred and sixty-five days down to roughly six.

She'd checked it four times. The maths didn't lie. Rin had proposed the theoretical framework after hearing about Hermione's expertise in time-related magic, and Hermione had to admit—grudgingly, because admitting Rin was right about anything came with a tax on her pride—that the woman's instincts had been sound.

Time magic was her speciality. It was what had earned her a position in the Department of Mysteries—the Time division, specifically—an obsession that had taken root the moment a thirteen-year-old girl held a Time-Turner for the first time and felt the world shiver around her.

She knew how time behaved when you folded it. She knew its moods, its resistances, the way it pushed back when you tried to force it into shapes it didn't want to hold. She'd spent years learning its grammar.

And the grammar was telling her this method didn't scale.

For the long-term patients—those who'd been in stasis for years—the 0.99 decay was a gift. Twenty-eight cycles could compress a year's worth of extraction down to—

Hermione's eyes flicked to the spreadsheet. A hundred and sixty-eight days of cycle work, plus the six remaining days needed to synchronise with real time. Call it a hundred and seventy-four days. For someone who'd been under for an entire year, that was extraordinary.

But for those who'd only been under for a month or less, the hundred-and-forty-four-hour cycle cost more time than it saved. The overhead devoured the benefit. She'd be spending six months of cycles to shave twenty-nine days off a thirty-day extraction.

And all of these calculations were predicated on Earth days. Twenty-four-hour rotations. After three days of observation, they now knew this planet operated on a frustratingly odd thirty-nine-hour day cycle, which meant every formula she'd built needed recalibrating.

Now the question was whether—

"Hey, Hermione, you have three stasis chambers, right?"

Hermione looked up. Rin took a bite of a biscuit from one of those old tin cans that grandmothers the world over repurposed for sewing supplies—though in Rin's case, the biscuits inside were actually biscuits. Small mercies.

Beside her, Sakura Matou sat with her arms folded on the table, her head resting on them. Asleep, or close to it. The shadows beneath her eyes had deepened since yesterday, her complexion carrying a greyish pallor that Hermione recognised from her years working alongside curse-breakers—the look of a body fighting something it hadn't fully accepted.

The crest transplant. Rin had used '*Ore Scales*'—the Edelfelt family trait—to copy her integrated Tohsaka-Edelfelt crest and give the duplicate to Sakura. When Rin had initially proposed doing it in stages, Sakura had cut her off.

"I can take the whole thing." Her voice had been flat, pragmatic, entirely without self-pity. "I integrated the Matou family crest. The worm crest. My absorption trait from the Matous will handle the rest."

Rin had flinched at that. Just slightly—a tightening around her eyes that most people wouldn't have caught. Hermione caught it. She didn't know the full shape of whatever had happened with the Matou family's crest, but the word *worm* and the way Rin's jaw had set told her enough. She hadn't pushed. Rin hadn't elaborated.

Sakura's reasoning was sound, even if the cost was written across her face: the sooner she integrated the full crest, the sooner she could contribute. A slower assimilation would have left her indisposed for the better part of the year—time they couldn't afford.

"Hermione?"

"Sorry—yes. We have three stasis chambers."

She hadn't told Rose about the logs. Not yet. One of the other chambers—the one from Lily Evans's timeline—bore a name that Hermione had stared at for a long time in the quiet hours of the previous night. *Lily Evans*. A common enough name, she'd told herself. Evans was common. Lily was common. There was no reason to assume it was *her* Lily, and raising the possibility with Rose before she had confirmation would be an act of cruelty disguised as hope.

The other log bore the name Black. That was a conversation she wasn't ready for either.

Rin set her stack of documents down.

"You confirmed that one of them was your stasis chamber for Project Noah, correct?" Rin didn't wait for an answer. "Since you have rapport with that one, let those patients come out of stasis naturally. You said yourself—some of them were only under for a matter of weeks. The method would be counterproductive."

She took another bite of biscuit, chewing with the unhurried precision of someone whose mind was three steps ahead of her mouth.

"Then, before we place the overlapping time-dilated bounded field—before we initiate the twenty-eight-cycle plan on the other two chambers—we extract the project leads first. Wake them, brief them, and gain their perspective on what's inside their particular chambers. Patient manifests, stasis durations, priority cases. They'll know their own people."

Hermione winced inwardly. Rin was right—of course she was right, the logic was impeccable—but it meant the conversation with Rose couldn't wait much longer. It wasn't just Lily Evans. The other project lead's surname was Black.

She needed to tell Rose before someone else stumbled across those logs.

"Yes, I'd reached the same conclusion." Hermione tapped her pen against the spreadsheet. "The other variable is food. If Rose, Shirou, and Ryou find a biome floor with viable vegetation, that changes our timeline considerably. The surface cultivations have begun, but even with acceleration wards, the first harvest is a month out at minimum—and self-sustainability is further still."

She didn't add what they were both thinking: that waking thousands of people from stasis without a reliable food supply would simply be trading one crisis for another.

*Pop. Thud.*

A boot materialised on the table beside Hermione's spreadsheet, wobbled once, and tipped onto its side. It joined an increasingly absurd collection of objects that had been arriving at irregular intervals throughout the morning—a brass compass, a wooden spoon, half a brick, someone's left glove, and what appeared to be a small ceramic frog of indeterminate purpose. All successfully transported via the portkey beacon that Illya and Gabrielle had been testing for the better part of two days. The beacon itself sat at the centre of the accumulation like an altar to organised chaos.

Hermione ignored the boot. Her eyes had caught the document Rin had been reading—written in the English alphabet rather than this reality's Aurebesh.

"What's that you're reading?"

"Oh, this is Illya's personal project. She inherited a lot of stuff from different families, like the Yggdmillennias." Rin shrugged. "I don't even understand that bastard's logic with the inheritance system—anyway, this one is related to that girl in stasis, the Noble Phantasm, and the Animusphere family, which largely deals with Astromancy."

Hermione's lip curled before she could stop it. '*Astromancy.*' It sounded uncomfortably close to Divination—a subject she had walked out of in her third year and never once regretted leaving behind.

Curiosity won over prejudice. She tilted her head to read the title on the cover page.

*Chaldea Security Organization.*

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**End**

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