

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 4.5 Depersonalization-Derealization

"Hermione, I need you to hold on to this and tell me how it feels."

Crash!

"Wha—what did you say?!"

Heat crept up Sakura's face as the morning's breakfast incident replayed itself behind her eyes. A glance around the forge confirmed she wasn't alone—nearly every face in the room had gone some shade of pink as Shirou advanced on Hermione, one hand outstretched in invitation, the other holding one of his weighted-hilt prototypes. The device was among the many inventions he'd proudly presented to them that afternoon, an adjustable grip-and-balance rig designed to help him customise each sword to suit its wielder's hand.

Hermione, buried in research all day, had missed the presentation entirely. Now, confronted with a vaguely phallic length of wrapped metal and Shirou's earnest expression, she kept retreating one step at a time—a woman clearly still haunted by what she'd walked in on that morning. Her heel caught a stool. It clattered away across the flagstones, the source of the crash, and still she didn't stop backing up.

It didn't help matters that Shirou was shirtless, wearing nothing but a hakama—loose, skirt-like trousers cinched at his waist. Both he and Marin

lived in hakamas whenever they worked the forge, though Marin paired hers with a tube top that covered her chest and precious little else. Nobody blamed either of them. The heat rolling off the forge pit turned the whole workshop into a slow oven, and Sakura had felt sweat gathering at the small of her back within a minute of stepping inside.

Well—when she thought everyone was blushing, that excluded Marin, who whistled a merry, tuneless something while jotting notes on a clipboard. A tape measure floated around Sakura's body, looping her waist, her hips, the length of her arm, relaying each figure back to Marin's page in shimmering ink. It was one of the new charms she'd picked up from the wand witches, and she wielded it like she'd been born to it. She had, after all, officially declared herself the team's armourer and fashion designer—and nobody had been brave or foolish enough to contest the title.

On top of the skills she'd bought in the transfer ritual with Zelretch, Marin and Shirou had spent weeks researching enchantments together, tearing through the recently translated library and hoarding the best finds from each other. Sakura had watched them argue over rune sequences at two in the morning more than once, Marin sketching furiously while Shirou traced sample blades to test theory against steel.

Before all this, the pair of them—along with their team of skrattes, centaurs, and brownies—had mass-produced standardised gear or retrofitted everyone's old clothing with plates and padding. Shirou in particular applied his own brand of alteration magecraft to weapons, adjusting weight, balance, and edge geometry to each user's build and habits.

Now, with better materials flowing up from the dungeon—monster chitin and hide, ores, jewels, magicites, and the blackstones everyone kept requesting—they'd moved on to crafting personalised equipment for each member of the thirteen. Which was why they'd all gathered at the forge today.

Well. Everyone except Rin.

Sakura turned away from the awkward little dance unfolding between Hermione and Shirou as they inched ever closer to the wall, and spotted their missing member at last. Rin entered the forge wobbling on unsteady legs, Cuspey flitting around her ankles in tight, fussing circles. Every step looked negotiated. She made her way towards the group one careful, rolling stride at a time, drawing every eye in the room.

"Hmmm... Sakura, why is everyone suddenly acting weird?" Marin tilted her head, ballpoint pen tapping at her lip.

Ah. Right. This was Marin and Shirou's third iteration—their third cycle through the day and second use of the time-turner—which meant neither of them had witnessed what happened that morning. From their perspective, the group had simply arrived at the forge pre-loaded with embarrassment.

Across the room, Hermione—now cornered against the wall with nowhere left to retreat—finally surrendered and reached for Shirou's hand. He just looked puzzled, helped her upright from where she'd half-slid down the stonework, and pressed the baton-shaped rig into her palms. She gripped it with both hands, face beet-red, eyes fixed on a point somewhere above his shoulder in a valiant effort not to glance at his crotch.

The effort failed. Twice.

"Umm, Hermione, is it comfortable to hold with one hand, or is it too big for you?"

Someone behind Sakura snorted, followed by a giggle stifled so poorly it barely qualified as stifled at all.

Shirou, oblivious as ever, gently took Hermione's hand again and repositioned her fingers along the grip, demonstrating the proper hold. She'd requested a single-handed sword, after all—something she could dual-wield alongside her wand—and he was nothing if not thorough about ergonomics.

A chair popped into existence beside Sakura, courtesy of Cuspey, and Rin dropped into it with a long, exhausted sigh that seemed to empty her whole body.

"Ummm, there was... an incident during breakfast at Base 1." Sakura searched for a way to explain it properly, without sounding crude. Nothing suitable came to mind. The vocabulary for this situation simply didn't exist in polite registers.

"Ohhhhh, was it bad? Do tell! I haven't sat down for a proper breakfast since yesterday." Marin leaned in, eyes bright, gossip-hungry. She turned to Rin and motioned for her to lift her arms as the tape measure moved on to its next victim.

Rin lifted her arms with visible effort.

"Whatever!" She waved off the awkwardness with the last of her energy.

"Hermione was looking for me this morning, so she barged into Sakura and Syr's room—where I slept last night—while Shirou and I were in the middle of, you know—" She finished the sentence by jamming her thumb between her index and middle fingers in a gesture that needed no translation in any of their languages.

"Hoh hoh hoh~!" Marin lifted a hand to her mouth in mock scandal, delighted beyond words.

Sakura gave them both a flat stare and decided the record deserved more context.

"When Hermione barged in, she fell over from the shock—and the door was left wide open, so everyone in the corridor saw them in a, ummm—" she coughed into her fist, "—compromising position."

"Oh, you mean our resident genius here—bent over on all fours, face pure ecstasy—while Shirou wielded his 'sword' like he was about to slay some pussy?"

Illya strode in mid-sentence with Syr and Gabrielle flanking her, timing her entrance for maximum devastation.

"That sword was massive," Syr supplied, ever helpful. "And Sakura, we really should charge a fee whenever they use our room as a den of debauchery. I'm thinking hourly rates."

Sakura shook her head at the pair of them. There was no stopping it now; there never was.

"Are you all right, though? You look haggard for someone who just got some this morning." Gabrielle's tone carried genuine concern wrapped in tease, while Illya, Syr, and Marin traded grins over her head, already composing the next round.

"Mistress Tohsaka just be stopping making babies with Master Emiya."

"..."

CLANG! Clang. clang.

"..."

CLANG! Clang. clang.

Cuspey's tiny voice had, through some acoustic malice of the forge's vaulted ceiling, carried to every corner of the room.

Everyone heard it. Everyone except Shirou, who had already finished with Hermione and returned to hammering a new blade at the back, lost to the world in a rhythm of steel and sparks.

And then—in an eerie, wordless synchrony—everyone checked either the wall clock or their wristwatch. Everyone except Marin, who just looked confused, and Rin, who buried her face in her hands.

They'd installed clocks in all the major work areas for convenience, but most of them also wore wristwatches, modified by those who'd acquired engineering skills through Zelretch to track the planet's thirty-nine-hour

day-night cycle. Marin had supplied the watches themselves—she'd collected G-Shocks in her past life and brought the entire collection over through *Inherit Previous Life's Assets*, a fact she mentioned at every possible opportunity.

The room fell silent. Glances ricocheted between flabbergasted faces just as the rest of the girls filtered in through the forge doors.

Rose, who'd checked her own watch, locked eyes with Sakura across the room and mouthed, '*Nine hours?*'—eyebrows somewhere near her hairline.

Gabrielle broke the silence first. "Wait. You've been at it since—?"

"Yes." Rin cut her off, voice muffled through her fingers.

"And you only just fini—?"

"Yes," she croaked.

"*How?*" Illya demanded, arms crossed, sounding personally offended by the arithmetic.

Rin slumped further into her seat, until she was more puddle than person.

"Apparently, his Battle Continuation applies to sex too."

"Wait... what? Someone please explain what happened. Why is everyone shocked about Rin getting some?" Marin looked from face to face, pen frozen mid-tap.

"Was it at least good?" Syr asked, leaning her elbows on the back of Rin's chair.

Rin was quiet a moment. Then, flatly, with nothing left to defend:

"It was amazing. Tiring... but amazing."

"Well." Syr patted her shoulder. "Thank whatever deity for stamina potions."

Sakura twirled her new double-bladed sword—or perhaps it qualified as a polearm or naginata at this point; even Shirou hadn't settled on a classification. The two of them had tested different shaft lengths over several sessions and found her optimum spanned from fingertip to opposite shoulder: just about hundred and twenty-five centimetres of haft, with each blade running roughly sixty centimetres beyond it.

An unwieldy length by any conventional standard. But with *Divinely-Bestowed Arms* humming through her muscles, the whole weapon felt practically weightless—one of the skills bestowed upon her during the transfer, none of which she'd been permitted to choose. Gifts from hands she'd never seen, for reasons she was still piecing together.

An aranea broke from the swarm and charged straight at her, all clicking legs and glistening fangs.

Sakura lunged into a throwing stance—back and shoulder muscles flexing, left arm extended for balance, right hand gripping the shaft behind the rear blade—and hurled the weapon. It crossed the distance in a flat, whistling line and punched through the creature's cephalothorax, pinning it mid-stride.

At the same moment, two of her shadows peeled away from her feet and intercepted an ambush descending from the ceiling. Their ribbons lashed out in fanning arcs, slicing the drop-attackers into pieces before they touched the floor.

She doubted the reanimator would bother with those. There wasn't enough left of them to reanimate.

Her thrown weapon—still embedded in its target—was swallowed whole by a black void, monster and all. A heartbeat later it emerged beside her, blade upright and cleaned, the butt of the shaft still gripped by the same darkness until her hand closed around it.

That void was a pocket of Imaginary Numbers—an unplotable region outside XYZ spatial coordinates. Through her elemental affinity and sorcery trait, Sakura could open doors into that plane at will. Paired with the rather less

welcome Absorption trait, she could not only store things inside but convert them into energy—or, with focus, control them from within.

Lately she'd been working with Rin, Hermione, Illya, and Gabrielle on three projects built around the trait.

First: improving the witches' mokeskin pouches—those spatially-altered bags deceptively larger within than without. Expansion charms and containment enchantments carried fundamental limits, as it turned out. One could only stretch a bounded space so far before the forces anchoring the pocket dimension—and the pressure exerted by all that compressed volume—caused the contents to spill over or, in the worst case, made the whole pocket pop. At least, that was how Rin and Hermione had explained it to her, trading sentences back and forth across a blackboard, each finishing the other's diagrams without asking. Apparently it was far easier to expand an already expansive environment than to stretch something small, which was where her Imaginary space came in.

Second: absorbing a whole menagerie of monsters. Beyond her shadows—familiar woven from the Imaginary Numbers element itself—she had several captured monsters deployed on this very expedition, assisting the skrattes, brownies, and the three centaurs accompanying the push towards the thirtieth floor. Beasts of burden that could be folded away into nothing between floors had proved remarkably popular with the logistics teams.

"...!"

The change hit the chamber all at once. Every aranea around them went rigid, then collapsed in a single rippling heap, legs curling inward like burnt paper.

Somewhere ahead, Marin and Haruhime had finished with the reanimator.

Sakura let out a long breath and rolled the tension from her shoulders.

And the third project—the one still stubbornly out of reach—was travel through Imaginary Number Space itself. So far, she'd only managed to transport

objects. Living passengers remained a locked door, and nobody had volunteered to test why.

The skrattes and brownies moved in with practised efficiency, unrolling broad tarpaulins across the dungeon floor in overlapping rows. Sakura reached into her void and deposited the absorbed corpses one by one atop the sheets, keeping each carcass clear of direct contact with the dungeon floor so the breakdown team could begin disassembly at once. The method preserved the quality of the monster drops remarkably well—especially the magicite, which degraded fast once the dungeon began reclaiming its dead.

"Here."

Haruka approached and held out a canister of water, condensation beading along its metal flank.

Unlike the bubbly, boundlessly outgoing Marin, Haruka—who like her had arrived in this reality alone, her friends having either reincarnated without memories or never seen the choices the rest of them were offered—ran quieter. Reserved, sometimes even aloof, though never unkind. Apart from their collaborations on the farming projects, Sakura hadn't grown as close to her as she had with the others. Their interactions had stayed polite and professional and nothing more, two careful people orbiting the same group at a respectful distance.

Sakura took the canister and smiled her thanks, and Haruka settled onto a crate beside her rather than moving off.

That was newer. After the incident between Rin and Shirou, a great many walls had started coming down all at once. The whole group had bonded over the sheer absurdity of it—Shirou, mortified beyond speech the following morning, had attempted to avoid all thirteen of them simultaneously, a logistical impossibility on a shared base that he'd nonetheless pursued with impressive dedication. It had taken coaxing from Rin and relentless teasing from Syr and Marin to drag him back into the common room, everyone

assuring him between fits of laughter that it was fine, truly, and that nobody would mention it again.

Everybody mentioned it constantly.

Marin and Ryuu, rooming together, had since transformed their quarters into a cross between a manga café and a gaming den, showcasing Marin's absurd inherited collection—game consoles spanning three decades, anime merchandise, figurines in glass cases, and boxes of things Sakura had decided it was healthier not to catalogue.

Haruka, along with the two other elves in the squad, had been dubbed the fairy-trio by Syr, a nickname that stuck fast and to their eternal, visible annoyance. In their free hours, the three of them had been working through some ninja-samurai game with a brutal parry mechanic. From what Sakura had observed, they passed the controller around every time someone died—which was often—and even the ever-stoic Ryuu let out a genuine cheer whenever they finally downed one of the towering enemies. Lefiya had once spent forty minutes on a single boss-fight, blue ribbon askew, muttering incantation-adjacent threats at the screen.

"Hey, Sakura." Lefiya's voice preceded her as she approached with Marin and Haruhime in tow, the three of them dusty and flecked with aranea ichor. "Don't stray too far from the team—especially if you're going to throw your weapon like that. Unlike Shirou, who can Trace a replacement instantly, your retrieval takes a moment. You could get caught flat-footed—familiar committed elsewhere, no weapon in hand, and no backup in reach."

Lefiya had taken the lead of their team of newer fighters, since they handled the upper floors and, increasingly, some of the middle ones too. Haruhime had been an adventurer for years, but her role had always leaned towards support through her enchantment sorcery; melee combat was a recent addition to her repertoire, and she still held her ko-naginata with more caution than instinct.

Today's arrangement had put Haruka—who once picked off monsters from a distance with her bow and now favoured a katana—and Sakura on swarm

containment, holding back the tide of arachnids while Haruhime and Marin double-teamed the mini floor boss: the reanimator responsible for raising the fallen aranea.

Sakura pulled an awkward face and dipped her head. "I'm sorry. I'm still not used to the length of the weapon. I was worried I'd catch someone behind me on the backswing."

Lefiya's expression softened; she hadn't truly been angry, only careful.

"I understand—" She glanced round at the others. "We can all keep track of Sakura's position, and her weapon's, yes?"

Nods all round. Haruka raised the water canister in lazy confirmation.

"Then I still want you sticking close to the team," Lefiya continued. "Just note everyone's position before you commit to a throw, and you'll likely be fine."

The hiss of a high-intensity burner echoed down the hall, cutting through the wet sounds of the breakdown crews at work. Off to the side, the rest of the expedition sat sipping tea in a pocket of improbable domesticity—while Sakura's team had been waist-deep in the monster horde not ten minutes earlier.

Shirou, Rin, and Rose—along with a team of brownies—had set up the mobile kitchen against the chamber's far wall. Throughout the fight they'd been protected by a perimeter of Shirou's rained-down swords, a fence of steel sprouting from the dungeon floor at intervals too tight for anything larger than a rat to slip through, while Rin and Rose sniped the stragglers between sips. Sakura caught the smell of dashi and something citrus drifting across the chamber, and her stomach informed her, firmly, that containment duty had earned a meal.

As the group made for the resting zone, Sakura settled onto a bench beside Illya. From there she had a clear line of sight to the working skrattes and brownies, and she kept feeding corpses out of her void onto fresh tarpaulins as the crews cleared each row—a steady rhythm of absorb, hold, release.

Illya watched the process for a moment, chin propped on one hand, crimson eyes tracking each carcass as it slid from nothing into existence. Then she turned, and there was a sharpness in her expression that had nothing to do with lunch.

"So... do you think you'll be able to absorb the Weapon?"

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End

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