

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 1.5 Gaining Trust in the Thirteen

(Haruka Azuma)

[Part 5 of ?]

Location

Grakkan Empire

System: Leafil | Planet: Unnamed Pair of Theta

Date:

Grakkan Standard (GknS) | System | Local | Galactic Standard (GS)

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

GknS 34k6.rev-70% / 10.rev-40% / 255.rot-55% / 15:07:46

GS 13k9.rev-47% / 8.rev-46% / 255.rot-82% / 29:31:03

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Haruka Azuma, who'd just finished her first year at Toudai, had never imagined her life would end with a summer high school reunion in the mountains.

Instead of travelling to the venue individually, her classmates had wanted to capture that high school spirit and nostalgia, so they'd arranged a bus service that could accommodate their entire year group. Unfortunately, she hadn't known she would become a statistic that day.

On a bright, sunny summer morning, the weather had turned torrential without warning. The mountain sides—reinforced by both man-made concrete barriers and the natural roots of native trees—had given way in a catastrophic landslide, catching their bus completely unaware.

One moment, laughter and excited chatter. The next, screaming metal and the sickening sensation of falling.

The next thing she'd known, she'd been floating amongst a sea of souls in a vast, empty void she could only describe as space itself. A bearded child had sat upon a throne of—

"Haruka?"

She jerked her shoulder away from the sudden touch, her newly elongated ears flattening against her skull.

It was Rin—her fellow Japanese, who'd also been thrust into this new reality alongside eleven other people. Thirteen in total. They'd awakened on what was probably an empty planet, save for one of the most dangerous things in this galaxy: a celestial dungeon.

"Haruka?" Hermione's voice joined Rin's, concern colouring her voice.

Haruka blinked, suddenly aware she'd been staring at nothing for who knew how long. They were standing in another tent they'd attached to the main structure—this one dedicated to everything involving Hermione's group and Project Noah. Three expansion-charmed trunks sat at the centre, that contained... everything. Everything humanity had managed to save before the end—well, at least Hermione and company's reality.

Last she'd checked, there weren't any random demonic attacks plaguing their relatively peaceful country, Japan.

"Sorry," Haruka managed, her voice coming out rougher than intended. "It just—it's just dawning on me that this is real. All of this."

The bus. Her death. The void. Zelretch's mocking entertainment. Waking up with elven ears and an extra forty centimetres of height in a body that felt both hers and not hers. Standing here about to catalogue the preserved remnants of someone else's apocalypse, whilst her best friends, Naofumi—her childhood friend—and his buddy Tomoya, were presumably reborn without any memory of her.

Except for Natsuki and Yuki—the two she'd been desperately rushing towards when the 'evil god' did his final countdown, subsequently crashing into this group and dragging them all along with her.

Her two friends were somewhere, only with each other, and whilst they were bright and quite independent, with the expanse of this reality and the fact that magic existed, she worried for her close friends.

The weight of it didn't really threaten to crush her; she just felt numb from the realisation. Distant. Like she was watching someone else's life through frosted glass.

Rin gave her a quick pat on the shoulder—Hermione moved closer as well, her expression radiating worry—and asked quietly, "Do you want to talk about it?"

Haruka took a long, slow inhale, holding it for about three seconds before releasing it in a measured exhale. A breathing technique her father had taught her for managing stress. In through the nose, hold, out through the mouth. Again.

It helped. Marginally.

"I'm fine," she said, even though they all knew it was a lie. "Or I will be. Just... give me a moment."

Rin exchanged a glance with Hermione.

"Take the time you need," Hermione said gently.

"Hermione, why don't you go ahead? I'll wait for her to calm—" Rin offered, but was interrupted.

"No." Haruka straightened, forcing her ears upright through sheer willpower. Her elven ears, she'd discovered, betrayed emotions far too easily—drooping when sad, flattening when anxious, perking up when curious. Right now, they wanted to plaster themselves against her skull and hide. She refused to let them. "No, I'm here. I'm ready."

She'd initially planned to volunteer for cooking—a task she could actually handle with her normal, non-magical skill set. But Shirou, Sakura, and Haruhime had already taken over that work before she could offer, so she'd volunteered for this instead.

She was one of only two people in their group of thirteen with no background in anything magical or beyond the ordinary. The other was Marin, who seemed to be adapting to the impossibility of their situation with considerable enthusiasm. If Haruka was going to survive in this reality, she needed to catch up quickly, especially given that cryptic 'hint' Zelretch had sold them all. *'Your adventure will begin at the bottom of the dungeon.'*

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"Okay, this trunk—or rather these trunks if they're all the same—is one of the most technically complex achievements done by a collaborative think-tank between the Department of Mysteries all over the world," Hermione started, her hand gesturing towards the three trunks.

To Haruka, they looked less like trunks and more like giant caskets wrought from materials she couldn't even begin to identify—a seamless fusion of what appeared to be wood, stone, and metal, their surfaces alive with intricate etchings and markings that seemed to pulse with their own internal rhythm.

A faint humming resonated from within the structures, so low it was more felt than heard. It reminded her of standing outside a concert venue in Shibuya, feeling the bass notes from some band's performance vibrating up through the pavement and into her chest. Except this wasn't music. This was the thrum of thousands of lives held in suspension, their existence compressed into this impossible space.

Even with her enhanced height—now sitting at approximately two hundred and four point five centimetres—these 'trunks' still came up to her waist. They were probably as long as either Rose or Shirou was tall, with a width that might match Haruka's armspan if she stretched fully. The sheer scale of them was overwhelming, their presence dominating the space like sleeping giants waiting to wake.

"We call these trunks Seeds," Hermione continued, her voice taking on a particular cadence and a more reverent quality. "As these are supposed to be the foundation from which civilisation itself can bloom anew—the vessels that will carry the essence of our world's knowledge, culture, and people to take root and flourish once more from absolutely nothing."

The weight of those words settled over Haruka like a shroud. Seeds. The metaphor was both beautiful and terrifying, carrying within it the hope of rebirth and the stark acknowledgement of complete destruction.

Hermione raised her hand level with her face as if she were beckoning something from the very air itself, and like before, her wand coalesced into existence—Haruka still found the fact that magic existed something surreal.

'Were there hidden societies of magic users back in her reality?' Haruka thought, though she couldn't help but feel excited at the prospect of finding out that there's something more. Being the only daughter, she had already come to terms with the fact that she would probably continue the family's legacy, brewing both sake and shōchū, her life already dictated even before she was born.

She didn't really resent that fact, which was why she wanted that business degree and strove for admission to Toudai—to improve on the family's legacy.

Now her world had opened to new possibilities—having felt the numbing shock that her life had been snuffed out suddenly and now given a second chance, with all these different people from different societies and realities—it was both daunting, numbing, and exciting at the same time.

Haruka had noticed these pouches before—they looked a lot like the temporary bags of holding everyone received if they purchased either or both 'Inherit Previous Life's Assets' and 'Inherit Claimable, Unclaimed Inheritance' from the mysterious entity that had brought them here. But those emergency storage solutions would only last about eighteen months, according to 'Help Guide.'

These pouches, according to them, were specially enchanted, so these were more or less permanent.

Hermione's wand traced small, precise circles as if she were coaxing something particularly stubborn from the bag's depths. Then, with a flourish and a confident pull, out came another rectangular box about an eighth the size of the massive caskets—or rather 'Seeds.'

"Okay, this is basically a two-way access point," Hermione explained, setting the smaller device down with reverent care. The metallic clink as it touched the ground seemed unnaturally loud in the charged atmosphere. "As configured now, the Seed operates as a one-way system, where we place

people into stasis using a very powerful sleeping draught which puts the imbibor into a death-like state akin to suspended animation." Her voice grew more serious, each word weighted with the gravity of what she was describing.

"Ah, Rin, be careful with touching it—if any of the rune matrices fail, it would either cause the stasis charm to collapse, risking the lives of everything and everyone within, or with how much space is folded in—it might implode so spectacularly that it would probably swallow a large chunk of this planet." Haruka felt the colour drain from her face as horror dawned on her like a cold sunrise. Her heart hammered against her ribs with such force she was sure the others could hear it, and she found herself involuntarily stepping back.

But Rin just waved her off with casual dismissiveness, her turquoise eyes bright with fascination rather than fear as she inspected the various etchings on the supposed 'Seeds,' her fingers hovering mere millimetres from the potentially catastrophic runes. The sight made Haruka's stomach clench with worry.

"Oh, so this is like its own world egg—with its own limited time flow that's practically frozen?" Rin suddenly interjected from her squat position, her fingers still tracing the air just above the dangerous runes. "How are you going to inspect everything in it if that's the case? And what was the point of ingesting the sleeping draught?" There was a sharpness to her voice, not quite accusatory, but deeply curious—like she'd stumbled upon something intriguing.

Hermione froze mid-motion, blinking rapidly. "H-How are you able to know that with just one look?" Her voice hitched—just for half a breath.

Haruka edged closer, her long legs bending gracefully as she too lowered herself into a crouch beside Rin, the fabric of her clothing shifting with quiet elegance. The floor was cool beneath her palms as she steadied herself, but try as she might, no burst of insight came.

No prompt from '*General Knowledge*,' no hidden understanding waiting to be unlocked. Just the same bewildering carvings, flowing in patterns that meant nothing to her.

Rin tilted her head, a smug little grin pulling at the corner of her lips as she rose smoothly, the motion making her crimson ribbons flutter, catching the dim light. "Well, I've seen some particular runes related to flow, time, and space," she said, as though explaining something obvious. "And if you factor in the fact that you already said this is the container for all the people who are in stasis..." She shrugged, twin tails swaying with the movement. "It wasn't that far of a leap."

A pause. Then, with the teasing lilt of someone revealing a magician's trick:

"That, plus I cheated. I used *structural analysis* to glean its function."

Haruka blinked. "Is it a spell that gives you information about anything?" Her voice was quieter than she intended.

Rin's grin turned wry, a glimmer of something almost playful in her turquoise eyes. "Anything understandable to a human, at least. If it's a divine construct or a material that came from beyond reality or reason, then I probably wouldn't be able to glean much—or if anything at all." Another shrug, effortless.

Hermione, now recovered from her momentary shock, straightened with palpable curiosity. "So it translates conceptual frameworks into comprehensible terms?"

"Mmm. More like it reads the underlying principles the way an engineer might intuit a mechanism's workings. It also reveals history, material composition, and construction methodology." Rin glanced between them, her amusement softening into something more diplomatic. "I'm sure we can later do an

exchange of knowledge. After all, I've glanced at both of your stat sheets when Rose collected them."

"You two also have '*Conceptual Crossover*,' so there's common ground there."

Rin's expression shifted when she mentioned *Conceptual Crossover*—a brief frown, thoughtful rather than disapproving, as though the term had reminded her of something. She shook it off quickly; whatever concern it was, it was apparently not urgent enough to voice.

'*Was she opposed to sharing magical knowledge?*' Haruka wondered. Though the frown hadn't seemed hostile—more like... puzzled? Or perhaps concerned about something else entirely.

Haruka exhaled, tension unspooling just slightly.

"Okay, looks like this is the original Seed we used. We'll check this out first," Hermione said, gesturing to the shimmering Seed. The box she had drawn from her pouch now attached itself to the Seed's broad side with a soft click that sent a vibration through the air Haruka could feel against her skin.

The air between them hummed with latent magic as Hermione conjured three stools around whatever this was. Box? Device? Short pedestal?

"To answer Rin's previous question, she was absolutely correct about our inability—well, not inability, more like it being ill-advised—to enter the Seed," Hermione explained. "The magic within would stretch our perceived time into an incomprehensible span—locking us in a temporal freeze. From our perspective, our minds would feel like they were functioning normally, we would function normally, move normally, but the outside world... well." A pause, her lips pressing together just briefly. "Centuries could pass. Millennia, even. Though if Rose and the others were to pull us out, it would register as less than a millisecond of elapsed time for us."

Haruka felt her stomach twist at the thought. She'd only taken a general physics course, and from what she remembered, time dilation only occurred at velocities approaching the speed of light or within very strong gravitational fields. Yet here was magic, casually achieving what should require a black hole or near-light-speed travel.

Haruka shivered, the earlier warning about planetary implosion suddenly feeling far more real.

Hermione had turned fully toward Rin now, the dim light catching in her amber-brown eyes, making them gleam like polished copper. The flicker of the runes on the pedestal cast shifting shadows across the sharp angles of her face. "As for why we still need to administer the Draught of the Living Dead—well, that comes down to uncertainty. We never pinned down an exact timeline for when the Seed would be planted."

Her voice took on a weight that hadn't been there before, a seriousness that made Haruka unconsciously sit up straighter. "We had to consider every possible scenario—decades? Centuries? What if the Seed was lost, only to be discovered several million years later?" A faint dryness entered her tone as she added, "Or, more hopefully, what if we managed to perfect the galactic vessel and reach a viable planet, but only after generations in transit? We had to cover all possibilities."

Hermione's wand hovered over the box—no, pedestal—again, and Haruka realised belatedly that it wasn't just a container but an intricate, low altar of some kind. The runes along its edge flared to life under the wand's touch, threads of gold light weaving through carved channels before resolving into familiar patterns.

Haruka had only half a moment to register them before two leather-bound books—thick, their spines cracked from use—materialised atop it. Rin was already shifting closer, her sharp eyes tracking the motion with undisguised

fascination. The scent of old paper and something faintly metallic, like iron gall ink, whispered through the air.

"And here—just a moment," Hermione murmured, wand arcing again with unconscious precision. Four more books joined the first pair, materialising in careful arrangement. "Right. These first two are our personal journals—Rose's and mine—for context. The other four are your working sets."

She pointed to the books. "Two log journals—these you can take with you, move around as needed. And two status trackers—" She tapped the thicker volumes that seemed to rest more heavily on the pedestal's surface. "—these are bound to their pedestals. They can't be separated from the access points. You'll need to query them here."

Haruka settled fully onto the floor, tucking her legs beneath her in what she hoped was a close enough approximation of the others' postures. The wood was smooth beneath her, oddly warm despite the coolness of the surrounding chamber.

Hermione hadn't finished. "The larger volume tracks the status of every living thing inside the Seed—four million humans at minimum, not accounting for magical creatures or other sentient beings. Though—ah, just—"

With another flick, she summoned her mokeskin pouch, that impossible little bag that swallowed her arm up to the elbow when she reached in. Haruka watched, fascinated anew despite herself, as Hermione rummaged briefly before producing—ah.

"Here." Two pens, sleek and modern-looking with their rounded tips, were handed to each of them. "Do you know how these work, Rin?"

Rin's fingers closed around hers without hesitation, flipping it in one smooth motion to twirl it across her knuckles like she'd done it a thousand times

before. The deadpan look she levelled at Hermione was almost impressive in its dryness.

Haruka bit her lip to stifle a laugh—barely.

Hermione's cheeks flushed a delicate pink. "Right. Of course. Stupid question."

Rin waved it off with a chuckle, the sound unexpectedly warm in the quiet space. The pen stilled between her fingers as she spoke. "Believe it or not, I did live among normal people. Even if half the magi I knew were—" Her nose wrinkled minutely, "—self-important assholes who considered anything in the normal world as beneath them, calling normals plebeians." She made a pinching motion with her free hand, the word 'plebeians' all but dripping with scorn.

Hermione leaned forward slightly, curiosity bright in her gaze. "You refer to the non-magical world as 'normal.'"

"Of course," Rin replied, matter-of-fact, her fingers tapping lightly against the cover of one book. "Magecraft—or magic, in your terms—is by definition an aberration. The bending of reality to the will of the practitioner is anything but normal, and even those self-important assholes I mentioned think this too." She exhaled sharply, shaking her head. "But we're getting sidetracked." "Ahem, yes," Hermione replied.

Haruka opened the log book to the latest entry. Time-stamped, dated:
Hermione: We're the final team standing. Pulling out at 87% completion in South America, approximately 70% globally. We are NOT risking Project Noah. Lead begins extraction in half an hour—return trigger in seven hours. Merlin, help us all.

The desperation bled through every word.

"So what I need help with is identifying key individuals we can safely bring out of stasis to help develop this frontier planet," Hermione explained. She quickly scribbled something in the book, then spun it towards the space between Haruka and Rin so they could read what she'd written.

'Status of latest batch placed in stasis.' The ink faded into the paper until it vanished entirely. Then, after a heart-stopping moment, new text appeared—not in Hermione's handwriting, but in something more mechanical, almost printed:

'Stasis 10% effective...'

'Recommendation: Redo Process'

'...Seed does not have a leyline to tap into. Belay previous recommendation.'

'Latest batch: 94% complete syncing with real-time.'

Haruka immediately saw Hermione's face frown as she reflected their puzzled expression when they saw the lines coming out of the book, and she immediately flipped it towards herself.

"No. No. No," Hermione said as she read the latest logs, scribbling more into the book as more text appeared on the page.

Both Rin and Haruka opened their own version of that book to see if it would reflect their own, but nothing happened, nothing was shown.

"Hermione," Haruka stood up, walking over to Hermione, Rin copying her as she too stood up.

"Wait, Rin, can you call Rose! It's really urgent," Hermione stood up as she pulled two other mokeskin pouches, retrieved identical pedestals and attached them to their respective seeds. "Rin, sorry, this is really important, thank you!"

Rin just nodded and briskly walked out.

Hermione summoned the other two logbooks and their corresponding status trackers, frantically scribbling queries into each.

"Do you need any help?" Haruka offered.

"Sorry, but not right now," Hermione politely declined.

Haruka, unsure how else to help, picked up the two remaining log books—the ones for Seeds Two and Three—and set them beside the first. She opened both to their latest entries, curiosity overriding her growing dread.

'Dorea: We pushed too far, we achieved almost a hundred per cent, but at what cost? My betrothed, dead; my brother, dead; a significant half of the world's population dead.'

'Lily: This was a mistake in thinking that the future holds more technology for success has boxed us in. They only take the female of each species. Everything else is just the thrill of the hunt.'

Haruka's spine suddenly tingled, her arms' air instantly perking up, feeling goosebumps across her body when she saw two identical lines at the end of both separate logs.

'We must commence with operation Kaleidoscope.'

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END

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