

Arcana Magi Bolt

by H-M Brown

Sofia Moreno stared at her sink. The faucet struggled to pour water; instead it was spitting brown water. She used her towel to wipe the sweat off her brow, the cloth felt warm. Sofia walked slowly, through her heat filled apartment, with not a single fan on. She passed by every open window in the living room and kitchen. It was quiet outside with the occasional sound of a car or truck driving by. The street beyond the window was void of people, only a dog sniffing a fire hydrant. Walking around in only her tank t-shirt and under-shorts were not enough to survive the intense heat. Sitting on her couch only made thing worse because of it was hot. Most of the electrical equipment struggled to work; her radio alone had static that made it hard to hear the news report.

"It's... be a wet... in the..." The radio stopped and the chord smoldered. Sofia quickly removed the plug, flinching at each spark on the wall. Without hesitation, she threw it out of the window, watching it lit into flames upon impact. Her eyes grew wide as the flames melted the plastic. The dog below ran away. Sofia sat down on the floor continuing to wipe her forehead when the sound of voices outside got loud. She peeked through the viewer to see that a woman is handing out a flyer to her neighbors across the way. The woman wore a jacket and jeans. She jerked her back at the sight of this stranger dressed like that. The woman turned to Sofia's door, and knocked. Sofia opened the door, just a little because of the chain. Sofia took the flyer but before she could ask, the woman walked away. Sofia closed the door, and read the flyer.

"Trial today at the courthouse, right now. Absence will be punishable by public execution.

-Valdegaard'

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Sofia wearing only a skirt and sneaker with her tank t-shirt, followed a large group of people. Most of the men were shirtless, the

women in tanks or t-shirts, children in swimsuit or swim trunk. Mother held babies that wore only diapers and dry clothes on their foreheads, the elderly walking a snails pace some with umbrellas over their heads. All have gathered before an open plaza where dry brown grass kicked up dirt with each footstep. Ahead of them was a stage made of simple wood, it was a plaza surrounded by small stores, with broken glass and graffiti. On stage, a band played rock music that was slow. The guitarist stepped over black and red stains ingrained on the wood like paint. Each strum and beat lulled the crowd into fear. The band was shirtless with skull masks on. Lightning tattoos emblazoned their arms, each flex made the bolts look like they were striking from the sky.

The crowd just stood there exhausted as the band played slow calm guitar riffs. Each music key kept the townspeople on their toes, uncertain of what will happen next even though they have been here before. The guitarists felt the music pumped through their veins. The song slowly got aggressive and the drums grew louder. Once the crowd completed filing the plaza, the music got louder. The band felt the song's beats working through their minds. The epic combinations they were mixing together compelled them to headbang, letting their hair sway left and right. The crowd just stood there, cringing at the sounds fury. When the guitars hit a high pitch; the children cowed behind the adults. The men had that 'we're going to take you down' look in their eyes, but became fear when a group of adults dressed in jackets, jeans, leather clothes and plastic armor. Various hair colors and hair styles made them look like a rainbow. Some of them drank wear out of a canteen.

The group parted away creating a single path. The music reached a fever pitched high as a small man dressed in a white business suit walked by. He had a powder wig on with sunglasses. He looked clean unlike the gang he was with, a stark contrast. He stood in front of the stage, the townsfolk right within arms reach. The temptation was there, hands curling into fists. It would take one to end it all. But with a smile on his face, he stretched his arms out waiting, wanting it, but no one budged. A lift raised him onto the top

of the stage and the guitarist hid a high beat that made electricity shook out into the air and the drummer's slam caused a large spark plume into the air. He stepped back lifting his arms over his head. With the snap of his finger, the music stopped.

The wiggled man lowered his arm, and another snap parted another section of the crowd, creating a second path. Pushed forward were a family; a father, pregnant mother, and two daughters. They were dirty, beaten, and exhausted. They forced them to climb the stage with a rope. Not a single help given, as the townsfolk watch the family suffer. In time, the father made it to the top and reached out for his wife and daughters, but his arm was struck with an arrow. The gang laughed as the guitarists made a one note riff. With the snap of a finger every one stopped.

The small man rolled his head and waved at his gang to get them up. The mother and daughters were pushed up with force, the youngest girl scrapped her knees on the edge of the platform. The father reached out to her but he paused. The small man stared out at the husband, emitting a strange aura that made the father's instinct triggered into not moving. His wife and children on their knees; watched him stand there helpless. They got up to their feet, and separated from each other. The mother's hands slowly slipped away from the girls. Her hands on her back for support of her large belly, tears over her unborn child overwhelmed her. As soon as the family stood apart looking out to the townsfolk, the small man took a gavel from one guitarist and wooden plank from other. He clanged it three times.

"The emperor is displeased." He said presenting the family. "They have tried to enter our benevolent ruler's land by leaving this town."

The small man stood before the large gang and smiled.

"How do you find the defendants?"

"GUILTY! GUILTY!" The gang said raising their arms in the air with fists punching the sky.

"The law... has spoken. So shall be done. By Valdegaurd's justice!"

“BY VALDEGAURD'S JUSTICE!” The gang chanted.

The small man walked off to the sound of music from the band. He waved his hand at the family and shackles of light clamped their ankles, keeping them in place.

The clear sunny sky shook. It rumbled lightly to the sound of the rock music as it grew louder. The children cried, reaching out to their parents. Pregnant woman screamed for someone to help them, but all the crowd did was stood there. The father cursed them all for their cowardice. With a single riff, a single bolt of lightning from the sky struck the child. Her x-rayed body the last her parents and sister saw of her. The gang cheered as the family wailed out in such a way inhuman that the crowd's tears fell. Another lightning bolt struck the father and then the other daughter, then finally the pregnant woman. As the newly made black smudge smoldered over the fresh blood dripping between the cracks of the planks, the rock band eased their music up and both crowds dispersed.

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Back at her apartment, Sofia packed up what little she had and what little she could carry. Sofia picked up a sheet of paper marked with a 'B' on it, signed by Valdegaard. She exited her home into the hallway. She looked outside the vestibule of the apartment building and she walked casually down the street. It was devoid of any activity. She was alone. The only people out in the open were patrols in pairs of gang members. They were observing Sofia and her bag. They said nothing, made no response. They just watched. Those in police vehicles just followed her. Sofia's muscles tensed. Their eyes just fixed on her, ready to do something. Suddenly, people in their apartments peeked out the windows.

“Ladies and gentlemen! Don't close your windows!” The small man said over loudspeakers. “And let game begin!”

And Sofia ran as balls of flames burst out of the member's hands. The fireballs melted the asphalt behind Sofia. She sprinted fast enough to avoid each strike, but her weakened body could only handle so much. The lack of food and water put her at a disadvantage. Only adrenaline and the will to survive was her fuel.

She turned the corner just as a patrol car drove by just barely striking her. Sofia leaned on the wall to catch her breath and she began to try to open the doors. They were locked. One by one she tried to break them open as the patrol car skid into a turn. One of the gang members raised her hand up and Sofia dropped to the ground as the spell was cast. It struck a window to the scream of a man watching on. Sofia looked up and saw him covered in sheet of ice like a statue.

Sofia got up throwing away her bag. Her speed increased pushing through an alley when a motorcycle turned in and rode towards her. The biker carried a small pipe that suddenly grew larger. Behind Sofia was another biker, now she found herself caught between jousters. She looked up and saw a lead pipe on the wall. With loud grunt she jumped up one side of the wall and pushed to the opposite wall. Her hand caught the pipe and the jousters knocked each other off their motorcycles.

The gang watching above booed her and threw garbage and debris. Sofia was struck with each object until she picked up a pipe and swung at the trash. The jousters moaned trying to get up and she struck them in the head. She lifted up one of the bikes, sitting on it. The crowd booed as Sofia quickly learned how to start the machine up. At first she screamed as it stop and go with each twist of the throttle. This kept up until she reached exited the alley. Two patrol cars turned from one end of the street and with nothing in her way, Sofia picked up speed. She screamed a little due to the kick of the bike's engine, but she soon learned quickly how to control and balance it. Her hand trembling as drove fast, feeling the wind in her face. She smiled at first riding the bike, but once fireball flew over head, she remembered what was going on.

The vehicles chasing her soon got larger; pickup trucks screeched beside her. It bumped a little and she yelped, losing control. She skidded into a wall, wincing at the pain of her leg, but recovered and resumed driving. Turning a corner, on an intersection she picked up speed. Fireballs, ice spells flew past her. Now the earth started shaking. She maintained balance and focus. Pillar after

pillar jutted out in front of her. She swerved left and right with each rising earth. It got tighter and tighter, more maze like as the ground closed in t on her. Soon she was in a canyon unaware of the falling buildings around her. Men, women and children rained around her with screams echoing from the depth of the newly made canyon pointing her downward.

The opening ahead of her at the top of an incline, teased as a glimmer of hope, closed slowly before her. The buildings falling behind her like an avalanche drew nearer. With one final push of the throttle, she zoomed between the closing but the back of the wheels were clipped. She spun out and flew into the air. She tumbled on the ground at high speed. Sofia could feel her arm giving out. The rolling stopped and she lied on her back. Her heart racing from this experience she was aware of surroundings. She lifted herself up as the ground rumbled. Her legs bruised and bloodied but not broken, however, when stood to her feet, her ribs were pained.

Sofia looked around and found herself at a boulevard. She could see the town exit ahead of her. The bike still lied on the ground. She heard a loud blare nearby and saw three plumes of smoke billowing into the sky. Limping towards the bike, the rumbling shook the earth. At first she thought it was the canyon again, but it was something she had not seen in a long time. The bike was still good though the engine was dented, the handlebars bent and the seat cushion torn. Yet the engine was still on and no liquid leaked out. With a loud scream from the pain, Sofia lifted the bike up. Just as she got on, the building burst like an explosion, bodies flew out, and large truck turned toward Sofia.

She hit the throttle and drove forward. The truck gaining on her, Sofia ducked under another explosion, more people flying over head as a second truck barely struck her whole body. Both truck collided but not enough to stop each other. Sofia took advantage and pushed whatever speed was left of the motorcycle. A third truck burst out in front of her blocking the exit of the city. It turned to her and female gang member kneeling on its roof pressed her hands on it.

The trucks wheel turned into animal claws, its chaise opened up

into a mouth and its headlights blinked. Sofia's mind shattered at such a creature, and for a moment her mind blanked out. Her eyes looked side to side and saw the sidewalks. She began to swerve side to side, making the monster swerve with her. Sofia jerked the motorcycle left onto the sidewalk and the monster tripped over itself colliding with a park car. Just as Sofia hopped onto the sidewalk, a loud shook the earth. She struggled to find a way to the stop the motorcycle, when her fingers accidentally hit the brakes. The cycle came to screeching halt, and the front wheel bumped onto a large tube like yellow wall that suddenly appeared.

The two trucks behind screeched to a halt as well. She looked back at them and saw the drivers standing partially outside of their vehicles. The passengers climbed down from each truck with eyes wide open. She turned the motorcycle around, moving slowly towards the truckers. She saw a pool of red blood and the tongue of the truck monster lay dead. Sofia heard a strange rumbling behind her. As the truckers stepped back, Sofia turned her head and saw the obstacle move.

Sofia's eyes froze in place. She soon realized that there was a large foot in the air wiggling its toes. The truckers immediately climbed back into their vehicles and moved in reverse. Setting itself back in place was dragon, with yellow scales and golden lion-like mane. Its sky blue eyes turned side to side, its head shook to recover from its fall. Sofia struggled to scream, not even the pain in her ribs awoke her from her trance. She looked up to the sky, watching the dragon's wings spread open. She found herself under its shadow. Sparks of electricity crawled up the monster's back. The bolts sparked between the wings, channeled and aimed.

Then a flash of memory happened. The executions, the lightning bolt that came from the clear blue sky, all came from this dragon. The monster released the charge, it flew over head, but the heat tanned her skin instantly. Her heart dropped as the bolt of intense lightning destroyed the building behind her. Its roar made Sofia fall off her bike, the sound of lion and thunder disrupted her hearing sense. Her equilibrium lost for a moment. Her eyesight dulled, yet

saw an odd blur rising up behind the dragon. It was standing up. Her sight restored, she saw a large metallic hand rise above the dragon. A circle appeared over that hand and burst of energy pushed the creature past Sofia. She turned to the dragon rolling through the street, tearing the area apart. It rebalanced itself and its claws dug in.

Sofia turned around and saw a large robot. Armored in teal and white, it had a gentle look to it that eased Sofia's fears. Its shoulders surpassed the second floor of the apartment building, its' head could see the town and its rooftops. People began to emerge on the roofs, even the gang members. There was awe in their faces as the Golem looked at them. Helicopters emerged from outside the town, floating in the distance watching the machine intently. The machine picked up sound not far from it was at. It was rock music. It turned to the songs direction and there was the band playing the guitar and drums, building up electricity over their heads. The guitarists pointed their instruments like guns and with one loud strum, launched an electric blast.

Though at as the spell was, the Golem nonetheless obliged them by swatting away the spell with back hand. It redirected it back at the dragon. The force of the impact struck the dragon, but the electricity did nothing. Sofia wondered if what she was looking was true; the rumors, the stories, the urban legend, right before her eyes.

“Suzaku.”

The Golem and the dragon leapt at each other. Suzaku made its magic circle appear and slammed it in the dragons face. The dragon slammed into the ground shaking the earth. Sofia shook her head and drove off to get away from them. He turned the corner as Suzaku fell onto the ground creating a shockwave. Debris struck Sofia cutting her arm. It unfazed her. She got far enough, but she found herself passing by the truckers. Without hesitation, they followed her. The chase resumed.

“We have a new challenger! The Golem versus the Bolt Dragon!” The small man said over the town's loudspeakers. “Stand on the roof

to watch or you will be executed!”

More people gathered at the roof, and the gangs stationed on top stood guard over the people. Some watched Suzaku grapple the dragon, other looked down from the roof watching Sofia chased by the trucks. The gangs cheered loudly at both event, but the townsfolk had no way to react to one or the other.

The Bolt Dragon carried Suzaku slightly above the rooftops, but one jabbed on the leg with the Sabre. Its roar from the pain pushed people off the roof. Flying across the air. Sofia saw a couple of gang members and residents rain down on her, landing on the cars and swept under the trucks behind her. She was having a hard time losing them as more gang member in vehicles joined the chase. They created blockades to force her to turn right. She did not understand as the truck sounded their horn and the small man spoke.

“Let's see if she can survive the duel rolling in her direction!”

Sofia looked ahead and felt the rumbling of the earth. She knew Suzaku and the dragon are nearby, but where. Suzaku's arm dropped right front of her, but she was able to hard turn left. The trucks slowed down to turn but the Bolt Dragon unleashed a burst of electricity and destroyed one of them. The gang threw their arms up in the air. Sofia revved up the engine and picked up speed. She focused on the blockade. A make shift ramp waited for her. The gang members jumped out of their cars, placing their hands on the ramp to get it off the, but rode off it crushing their fingers clean of their hands. She flew into the air and landed on the ground, struggling to stay balance as the truck behind her crashed through the blockade. The driver roared, sounding the horn.

Sofia found herself under a shadow. She looked up and saw the dragon in the air, flying upside down as Suzaku had its arms wrapped around the creature's neck. She slowed down to avoid the battle, but the truck slowed as well and bumped into her, pushing Sofia towards the Golem and the dragon. As Sofia struggled to break free, Suzaku planted its feet on the ground, pulling the dragon head first onto the street. The earth shook cracking the ground around them. A sloped crater formed ahead of Sofia, there was no time for

her to escape. With a deep breath, she pushed the throttle. The motorcycle sloped downward with the truck. Using the gravity in her favor, she sped downward, crating a small gap between her and truck, as both Suzaku and the Bolt Dragon tumbled over each other at the bottom.

Shaking over the debris, the wheel and axle struggling to hold together, Sofia turned the motorcycle left. With all her might she roared with dragon as the truck flew past her, struggling to turn. Her new momentum allowed the vehicle to push forward along the slope rather than down, and the truck tumbled to the bottom where the dragon rolled over it creating an explosion. Sofia was now riding on an angle working her way up. She watched Suzaku unsheathe the Sabre, pushed the dragon's head, pinned to the ground, and slit its throat. Blood cascaded like a waterfall, gurgling and twitching.

Sofia tried to see if it died or not but she had to focus on what was ahead, for the gang's gathered in their vehicles at the top of the crater watching what had happened. She drove under the helicopters arriving at the scene, knowing that there is a big gathering, she dared not stop. Sofia pushed forward as a burst of light flashed from the crater and the helicopters rained on top of the vehicles. The gang members ran for their lives. Suddenly, Sofia found herself dodging a rain of gang members, each one pushed off the roof by the townsfolk. She moved forward, where she saw the edge of town ahead of her.

Sofia never looked back. Her blood trickled out of her mouth. The cheers of the townsfolk filled Sofia's ears, cheering her to keep going. She understood why. Getting out of the city was the victory of this game. She picked up speed and exited the town. The crowd roared from the roof, as she made her way out of town. She won.

Sofia did not stop. She kept going through the dried grassy plains. The forest in the distance lack leaves and crumbled. The motorcycle began to smoke and it came to a stop. Sofia fell out of the vehicle, tumbling down the nearby slope off the road. She lied on her back, and turned her head towards the city. She did not realize how far she went. The clouds rolled in. It was the first time she saw

them. The sun swallowed whole. The can only assume the Bolt Dragon controlled the weather.

One drop, two drops, soon more fell onto her face and mixed with her tears. It was the first time she felt this substance, the first time she felt her body cool down. The earth vibrated. Sofia lifted her body up, nursing her ribs. There she saw it. Suzaku walked slowly in the rain, carrying both wings of the Bolt Dragon's, and nothing else. It never looked back. Like the wind, it came and went, as the urban legend spoke of. Sofia's eyes just stared out at Suzaku vanishing in the rain, her final image ingrained in memory.

Her joy of freedom...

...was her last smile.

THE END

