

Arcana Magi - c.13: Along the Way

by H-M Brown

Alysia and Brie slipped on their backpacks, with their roller blades and helmet hanging on the side. Alysia went into Karl's wallet on the dresser and took all of us money. She went over to Reya's bed and watched her friend sleep peacefully. The Sentinel wondered if this was the last time she may ever see her. Placing her hand on the catgirl's chest, Alysia felt Reya breathing. She had second thoughts about leaving her behind, even though she knew she could not carry her back to Newark. Alysia saw Brie's hand over her own. She turned to the little Sentinel and saw her smile.

"Don't worry Alysia.' She whispered. 'Reya will be okay."

"I wish she would wake up. Then maybe...' Alysia and Brie looked back to Reya and clutched each other's hands. 'We'll be back, Reya."

"Let's go Alysa." Brie opened the door and saw Alysia looked to her side. They saw the manaboads leaning next to the chair and they had an idea.

Outside, the Sentinels slipped on their helmets. They placed the boards on the ground. When Alysia stepped on the board, she felt her wings stretched outward, and she floated into the air. Locked into place, her wings created a trail of teal light and visible heat. Both followed her movements. She rode around for a moment to get used to flying again. The feel of the flight brought back the little smile she felt that day in Avalon Tech. Even though the pain in her head kicked in, she ignored it the best she could. She wanted to enjoy this. After calming her emotions, she looked down at Brie, and saw the little Sentinel standing in shock.

"That's so awesome Alysia. How did you do that?"

"I don't know.' She said with a montone voice. 'Can you handle flying?"

"Yeah. Karl showed me the basics.' Brie hopped on the board and shook a little. She balanced herself, flew a little higher, and met Alysia in the air. 'We have to keep away from the open air. We don't want to draw any attention and attract Mystic Intelligence."

"Okay."

"East is that way." Brie pointed to the rising sun beyond the forest.

The Sentinels flew low and through the woods. Carefully navigating their way around the trees, they heard the sound of birds chirping and frogs croaking in the morning. There was some sunlight but clouds started gathering as time went on. They emerged from the forest and cross over a field on foot. It took them awhile. When they reach a new forest, they flew on their manabards again. The traveling felt like forever. Switching between flying and walking got repetitive and tiring. But they never stopped. When Brie looked at her watch, she saw that only three hours had passed and she has no idea where they are.

The latest forest they went through came to an end. The stepped out into the open and saw a farm. Staying near the forest edge, they flew on their manabards and saw the cows grazing in the distance. The forest edge leaned right and led the girls closer to the buildings. Worried, they stopped and landed near a tree. They saw a couple of horses set loose and running around the field. They all looked like they were free from captivity. One of the horses walked toward the girls and stood before them. Alysia removed her gloved left hand as Brie reached out to the horse. Together they felt the horse face as it jerked its head up and made a little noise. They giggled. Its hair was soft and warm, and it enjoyed their company as it nuzzled Brie's hair.

The horse looked up and turned restless. The horse ran away and head back for the farm. As they watched, the horse joins the others, and a pickup truck headed in their direction. The Sentinels grabbed their manabards and slipped into the forest. They ran as fast as they could, never looking back. Brie fell down and Alysia grabbed her hand to help up. Alysia looked up and saw a strange shadow

sprinting in the distance. Her eyes never got a chance to make out what it was. Having lost her bearings, she led Brie around the trees, twisting and turning. She looked back, worried about that strange shadow. There was no one behind them. Then they fell. A short steep slope appeared out of nowhere. They screamed and landed on the ground below. The Sentinels laid there for a moment and stared at the forest above them. Their manabards lay on top of their bodies. Their hearts raced from the fall and their helmets protected them from serious injury.

"Scary." Alysia said then clutched her head from feeling afraid. She checked her body and noticed she was okay. She then turned to Brie and placed her hand on Brie's chest. "Brie. Are you alright?"

"Yeah. I think."

Alysia helped the little Sentinel up and looked at her arm. There was a bruise but it was not serious. Alysia breathed a sigh of relief and helped Brie to her feet. The girls brushed off the dirt and leaves from their bodies. Looking around they saw a road right next to them. There were no cars in sight or any sign of people.

"We should get moving. There was something in the forest."

"What did you see?"

"It was a shadow and it moved fast."

"Well I didn't see anything." Brie noticed Alysia's hands shivered as she slipped her glove on. "Let's not find out."

They walked along the road as it curved down and to the left. At the end of the turn, there saw a sign up ahead. It had a drawing of a train that read 'Hackettstown — Train Station' seven miles. They took off their sneakers, tying them to their bookbags, and they switched into their roller blades. They wedged their manabards between the backs and their bags so they did not have to carry them. Together they followed the sign and skated on the road.

They spent a few miles, rolling freely downhill, and struggling up the hill. It took a toll on their bodies, still reeling from the pain of the fall. After seven miles, they skated past homes that spread apart. Soon the homes got closer and closer to each other and cars drove by one after another. They were in now town, drained of their

energy. The Sentinels saw a park across the street and they skated over to a nearby bench. Completely exhausted, the girls collapsed on the bench, and tried to catch their breaths. They could not move for a while, the pain from their little journey overwhelmed them. Alysia looked up at the cloudy sky and saw the sun was gone.

"It looks like it's going to rain."

"I'm hungry." Brie said not caring for the weather.

"I'm too tired to move." Alysia placed her hand on her forehead. Her emotional response to the pain and exhaustion triggered the enchantment.

"Is your head hurting again?" Brie shifted her head to Alysia's direction. 'I noticed you were struggling when we were climbing those hills.'

"I can ignore it.' Alysia lowered head and looked around the park. She saw cars driving by and a couple of mothers pushing baby strollers side by side. She noticed that other end of the park, a sign above the door that read 'Park Restaurant'. 'We could eat there and ask where the train station is at.'

"We could also use the restroom to clean up."

Alysia agreed with a nod. They got up and skated across the park. As they reached the intersection, a police car drove by with its sirens blaring. The Sentinels crossed the street, passing by a van with the letter Q marked on its door. The girls sat on the step, untying their laces, when a man and a woman wearing jackets with the letter Q walked by. When Alysia removed her helmet, revealing her short white and light blue hair, it caught the woman's attention.

"That's very exotic hair you have." The woman said with a smile as Alysia looked up to her.

"What's so exotic?" Alysia said as she slipped on her sneakers. Her emotionless voice turned off the woman's smile. Alysia gave blank stare as Brie waved to the woman.

"You have to excuse my friend. She has amnesia."

Alysia turned to Brie with a look that said 'what?'

"I'm sorry.' The woman said. 'I really like your hair."

"Thank you." Alysia said and saw the woman smile again.

"You girls have a good day."

"We will." Brie waved excitedly as the woman opened the driver's side and climbed into the seat. She started the car as the man talked into the CB radio. His face looked both nervous and angry. When the van drove off, Brie punched Alysia in the shoulder.

"Ow... What was that for?"

"You need to put a little more emotion in your voice. We can't draw attention to anyone."

"It's not as easy as you think Brie." Alysia said as Brie sighed. Alysia stood to her feet and looked back to her friend.

"I'm sorry Alysia. I know you're trying your best. It's just..." Brie felt Alysia's arms wrapped over her shoulders. It brought a sense of relief to her knowing that there is some emotion from Alysia.

"Don't worry Brie. Even if I never get this enchantment out of my head, I'll try hard to smile without feeling pain."

"I'll do my best to free your emotions Alysia. I won't give up." Brie took Alysia's hand and together they went inside.

The Sentinel's stood before a sign that read 'Wait to be Seated'. As they waited, they looked at the black and white pictures of the diner in its early years. Chefs, waitresses, and a businessman stood in front of a counter. As each picture showed a passing year, someone different had taken over the restaurant. At the end of the wall, the pictures became color and more modern. The girls awed at how long this restaurant existed. The sound of a throat clearing up startled the girls. They turned around and saw the waitress' frozen face.

"Are you two okay?' She approached them and checked their dirt covered faces. 'Did you get hurt?"

"Yeah. We were playing in the park and fell on the dirt. Right sis?"

"Sis?" Alysia felt Brie's elbow poke her chest and with a gasp, she nodded without saying a word. She looked up to the waitress with a smile, fighting the enchantment.

"Are you two alone?"

"No.' Brie said. 'We're just exploring the town, that's all. Our parents are at a store. Uh... Do you have restroom?"

"Yes we do. Come on. Let's get you girls cleaned up."

Inside the restroom, Alysia lurched over the sink holding her head. She splashed some water in her face. Her hands shivered for a moment as the light bulb above flickered. She stared at the light, taking short breaths. She felt it flashing in her eyes and her lips trembled. The sound of the toilet flushing blinked Alysia's eyes and Brie came out. Alysia clutched the side of the sink lowering her head and closing her eyes.

"Alysia..."

"I'm okay." Alysia looked up at the reflection of her wet face.

"No you're not."

"I SAID I'M FINE!" Alysia placed her hand on her forehead and calmed down.

Brie reached for Alysia's hand but stopped short and placed them over her chest. The room became quiet. No more words spoken.

They sat in a booth with their bags beside them. Alysia leaned on the side of the window looking outside. Brie kept her head down, afraid to look at Alysia. Brie lifted her head and saw the waitress coming with the menus. She sat up straight and tried to get Alysia's attention.

"Is she okay?" The waitress said.

"She's just tired. We were up all morning."

"I see. Well, I'm May your waitress. Today's soup special is chicken noodle. What would like to drink?"

"I'll have cola." Brie said.

"Apple Juice." Alysia said.

"Very well, I'll be back in a minute."

"Okay." Brie said cheerfully as the girls looked outside the window. They noticed a lot of police cars around the area. One of them drove up to the restaurant and parked. A female police officer stepped out of the driver's side. She stood before the entrance as the passenger side door opened. Stepping out was, a young man. He wore regular clothing, with a skullcap over his baldhead and sunglasses on his face. It was though he tried hard not to stand out from everyone. Brie pressed her hands on the window looking long

and hard at the man. It reminded Brie of Karl wearing his skullcap to hide his ears. Since this was summer, she figured this was no ordinary man.

"Is he an elf?" Brie said.

"Eh?" Alysia turned to look in Brie's direction and missed the man. She saw Brie slide over and peeking out from the booth. Alysia leaned over and saw the tall man flash a silver badge to the waitress.

"I'm investigating strange sightings at a nearby farm. Eyewitnesses believe that a couple of girls may have been involved."

"Mystic Intelligence.' Brie said as the girls slid back into the booth. 'We can't let him catch us."

"He could be with Orynn." Alysia said and Brie nodded. They looked over at a door behind the counter leading to the kitchen. They slipped on their bags and prepared to run. Watching the waitress talking to the officers, they saw the woman point at them and the girls rushed behind the counter. They entered inside the kitchen and navigated around the stoves. They kept low trying hard to find a back door. They saw the agent walking around. When they saw the door leading to outside, they did not notice the dishwasher by the sink.

"HEY!" The dishwasher said. 'What are you two doing back here?"

The Sentinels ran out the door and sprinted as fast as they could. They turned a corner and ran past people trying not to bump into them. The girls crossed a street nearly hit by a car. A police car in the distance sounded its sirens and drove after them. They arrived at an open fence and crawled inside. The car drove passed them and the girls sat on the ground leaning on the fence.

"That was close." Brie said.

"Look." Alysia pointed to the sign that read 'Hackettstown-Train Station' and noticed the minivan parked alongside the building in the empty lot. Alysia saw the letter Q and recognized it from the lady she talked to earlier. In fact, she noticed a body sitting behind the door.

The Sentinels approached the van slowly. Brie looked up and saw the windshield cracked and bloodied. She held Alysia's hand tightly as they looked at the body around the door. They stood there frozen for a moment.

"Where's her face?" Alysia said.

The body twitched and a moan called out for them. The van swayed. A growl came from inside startling the girls. Alysia and Brie stepped back as one of the side window shattered. Two grey claws reached over the window. The man's head stretched out. It slowly slid downward into an opening where a large grey head lurched out of the window. Its neck bulging from its meal, slowing sliding it back inside the van to its belly. Its blood red eyes looked over at Alysia and Brie as they stepped back to the wall of the building. The two claws clamped down on the metal van and pulled it down, bending it with ease. It stretched out its body and front claws touched the ground. The rear claws stepped down and stretched itself up, standing as tall as a horse. Its mouth opened into suction tube, and rows of teeth inside formed circular rows. Its roar was the sound of someone falling in the distance and catching up with whoever could hear it.

The Sentinels looked at the woman heaving from the pain. Her chest shifted up and down. The creature turned to her and sniffed her body. When its snout reached her legs, it opened its mouth and sucked them in like a vacuum. The woman's scream muffled and her body flailed frightening the Sentinels.

Their eyes locked in place, unable to move their legs. Alysia lifted her left arm up but struggled to call for Saga. Brie collapsed to the ground while reaching for her pendant under her shirt. It was the most horrifying thing they ever say. The sound of the woman's muffled screamed continued down the creature's neck until its belly grew large and her hands pressed out. In seconds, the hands stopped pressing and everything went silent. It turned to the girls.

"Awaken... awaken..."

"Ascend... ascend..."

They repeated over and over as the creatures long neck raised higher and opened its mouth.

“SAGA!”

“LEGACY!”

Their jewelry transformed into the staff and hammer. They grabbed the weapons and together they formed a shield of sound and fire. The creature's head bounced off that shield and the Sentinels looked each other. They regained their composure and nodded. Taking off their bags, they got up to their feet. The creature shook its head and roared again. The girls followed its movement in a semi circle as it moved its head side to side getting ready to strike. It dove its head down and the Sentinels jumped aside. The attack separated the Sentinels as Alysia aimed Saga. She channeled her mana and Saga glowed.

“EXPLODER!” She cast the spell with emotion ignoring the pain. She rammed Saga onto the creature's sidebody. A shockwave of heat burst out like a bomb and exploded. Flames licked on its body but it only charred it. It roared in pain as Brie lifted Legacy over her head and channeled her mana.

“RISING PILLAR!” She slammed the hammer on the ground and ripped the earth. A large spike ejected under the creature, piercing its flesh. It fell over and struggled to get back to its feet. It scurried away out into the open slamming into a police car.

“Let's get it!” Brie said and hurried to her manaboard with Alysia.

Together they flew over the heads of the policemen as they watched the girls chase after the creature. They saw the creature stumble side to side slamming into parked cars and scaring the people on the side walk. It tripped on itself and slid on the ground. It looked up at a father and daughter as more police cars screeched to a halt in front of it. It lunged at the father and daughter as Alysia aimed Saga.

“CANNONBALL!” The blast pushed Alysia back and struck the creature in legs. It fell over as the father grabbed his daughter and ran off.

Brie jumped off her manboard with Legacy over her head. She swung downward landing on her feet and smashed the hammer on its head. The impact pushed the creature's head into the street creating a hole. A police car pulled up behind Brie and the Mystic Intelligence Agent stepped out of the car. As Alysia landed next to Brie, they saw the creature's claws scrapped the street, struggling to break free.

"It's tough." Brie said.

"I'm going to have to finish it off now. Go get the police on the other side to get out of the way."

"What are you going to do?" Brie looked at Alysia and stepped back.

Alysia spread her wings outward and gathered heat. She watched Brie with the corner of her eye hop on the manaboard and flew to the police behind them.

"HEY! Agent whatever, get on the radio and tell those cops to clear the area."

"Why?" The agent said.

"That's why?' Brie pointed to Alysia's wings and she saw him scratching his head. 'You can't see her wings?'

"What wings?" He looked up and even though he could not see her mist wings, he made out the wing like formation of the heat gathering on her back.

"You Reg!" Bried said. 'Just get everyone out of the way.' Brie flew over Alysia and the creature. She hovered over the cops and tried to wave them off. They refused to listen as a large red and blue flame formed over Saga.

"Get out of the way kid."

"No you get out of the way."

"Get everyone back.' The agent said through a loud speaker.
'Now! Back away!"

"What?" One of the officers said. The cops looked at each other as they saw a large blue flame form into a ball. When the creature pulled its head out, all the cops ran.

Brie turned around and saw the creature lunge at her with its mouth open. She swung Legacy.

"REBOUNDER!!" A circular wave of sound froze the creatures head. It tried to push its way through the ripples of sound to eat her. She saw the light from Alysia's spell stopped growing behind it. She clenched her teeth and pushed the creature back. Brie slammed the hammer on the ground to launch herself back into the air with the manaboard. She looked down and saw no one around.

"NOW!"

"ASHES TO DUST!!" Alysia launched the red and blue fireball as her feet slightly shifted back along the ground. Liquefying the street into fresh tar, the heat wave turned the creature's body to ash. Its roar shattered the glass windows in cars and homes. When the flame struck, its body shattered into dust and flew with the wind.

Brie watched the ball continue onward and noticed it was not stopping. Alysia's spell headed for a building at the end of the street. She jumped off the manaboard channeling all of her mana.

"EARTHCRASH!" She slammed Legacy onto the ground and the entire street turned into an earth tsunami. At sonic speed, the dirt engulfed the red and blue fireball and shattered on the side of the wall. The damage was minimum. Brie looked back at Alysia as she saw her friend collapsed to her knees holding her head.

"Alysia!" Brie ran to her friend. She tried to lift Alysia up so they could run away, but the agent stood over them, and the officers surrounded the girls.

Minutes later, EMS crews and firefighters were on the scene. Agents from Mystic Intelligence, some wearing skullcaps, were also on hand to hide the mess from reporters trying to take pictures and get eyewitness accounts. Alysia and Brie sat on the sidewalk covered with a blanket shielding their faces from everyone's view. Their bookbags and manabards sat beside them. Their weapons returned to jewelry and they kept their heads down as a shadow loomed over their tiny bodies. They received a cup of water from the agent and took a sip.

"My name is Agent Fynir Robinson of Mystic Intelligence. What you two did just now was dangerous."

"We killed the monster." Brie said.

"And almost killed this entire neighborhood. There's a reason why it's illegal to cast spells out in the open. It's going to take time for us to clean up."

"We're sorry." Brie looked up at Fynir as he sighed. She watched him sit down beside them and fold his hands.

"What exactly are you two girls doing here by yourselves?"

"We're just passing through." Brie said.

"Really? I did a background check on you Brie. You're supposed to be in witness protection in Seattle. As for your friend, we're still looking into her. Now I will ask you one more time, why are you two here?"

The Sentinels kept their heads down in silence. With the corner of their eyes, they saw the bald man take off his sunglasses revealing bright blue eyes.

"Look Brie, I worked with your parents in one of their missions and I am truly honored to have served them. What you did was heroic, I won't deny that. But a good hero is one who can co-operate with law enforcement and provide any helpful information needed. What we just saw, that creature, is not supposed to be known by anyone outside of Merydia. It killed four people, including those two workers from Quillian."

Alysia and Brie looked up a little and lowered their heads.

"Quillian is a company we've been investigating. We believe that they have been exporting some of the... rare creatures from Merydia."

No response from the girls.

"I see. Here, let me show something. Maybe this will earn my trust.' They watched Fynir carefully lift up his skullcap revealing his pointed ear. 'I am an elf. I was born and raised in Port Serill, Merydia and I have been an agent of Mystic Intelligence for forty years now."

Fynir hoped that telling a little about himself would get the girls to talk. Instead, he got nothing but silence from Alysia and Brie. He saw another agent waving him over and he got up to his feet. “Don't do anything, until I come back.”

“What do you think Brie?” Alysia whispered. ‘Do you think we could trust him? We could use some help.’

“I don't know.’ Brie leaned close to Alysia. ‘He worked with my parents, but my parents were famous. Anybody could say that.’

“Okay then. Let's go.” Looking at the cop, they smiled and they slid their bags over pretending to look through them. They took the Manabards in hand and laid them flat underneath their legs. The officer did not understand what they were doing. The girls realized he was not around earlier to see their fight with the creature. Holding onto the blankets, they slipped on their bags underneath.

“One...” Brie said.

“Two...” Alysia said.

“THREE!” They said together and stood up to their feet on the manabards.

“COME BACK HERE!” The officer reached out for them but they flew up too fast.

The agents looked up at the girls flying in the air. Some of them stared with awed eyes.

“Her wings are beautiful.” The agent said to Fynir as the bald elf tried to figure out what they were looking at.

Alysia and Brie followed the signs to the train station. They saw tracks in the distance and hurried as fast as they could. They landed on the platform and found that there was no ticket booth, only an automated ticket machine. It took awhile to figure it out, but Alysia learned how to use. She then hesitated to click okay.

“What is it Alysia?” Brie said as Alysia looked at the timetable and saw how long it would take.

“We're not getting out of here if we wait for the next train. Let me try something.” Alysia looked at rail map and saw what the next stop was. She changed the tickets and turned to Brie. ‘We'll go follow the tracks to Mount Olive, the next station, and get the train there.

According to the map, we'll have to transfer in Secaucus to get the train to Newark Airport."

They heard the sound to cars screeching outside. They looked out the window and saw the police and unmarked cars parking. The Sentinels snuck out of the station and hid behind some bushes. As the train arrived, they watched the Agents walked around the station, talked to the conductors, and went inside the train for a moment. As the train left, Fynir circled for everyone to leave. They noticed Fynir looked back in their direction one more time and left.

Once train station emptied. Alysia and Brie followed the train tracks to the next station. They traveled along the tracks through a dense forest. Two trains had passed them along the way, one going back to Hackettstown and the other heading for Mt. Olive. It took them forty-five minutes to get to the next station. Once they got there, they sat on the bench and waited. It took awhile for the right train to arrive, since one went to Hoboken.

"The next train arriving on track 1 is New York via Secaucus."

The train pulled up and the doors opened. The girls climbed inside and picked a seat. They handed their tickets to the conductor and he punched the passes. After he handed it to them, the train moved. The girls covered their bodies with the blankets they received and huddled up to each other. Looking out the window together, they closed their eyes.

To Be Continued...
