

Arcana Magi Cross - c.2

by H-M Brown

“TORRENTIAL GEYSER!!” As Manami flung her hands outward, a large pillar of water shot out from the manhole ripping the street apart. A group of undead fell over and slid aside creating a small opening, but it started to close up fast. Manami shook her fist from the growing number of the walking dead at both intersections of the street. With the sound of sirens echoing in the air, Manami prepared to cast another spell. With her Mana channeled, she saw Ai standing before a car away from imminent danger.

“My name is Ai Hino” Ai noticed the red bead at the base of Tori's neck embedded within the feather. It had the look of a ruby. She slid her hand over the bead and a tingling sensation climbed up her arm. It was as though she felt another arm pulling out of her body. Her heart skipped, and it felt warm. It was unlike anything she experienced before. “What is this strange feeling?”

“Your Mana is reacting with mine.”

“Mana? No that can't be. I'm not a Magi.”

“I see. However, Mana is within all life regardless of whether you are a Magi or not. The fact that you can't channel Mana yet react to me is not uncommon.”

“So I can become a Magi?” Ai received a confirming nod and she raised her head up, her eyes alit at the idea.

“Ai!” Manami said grabbing her friend's arm and saw the red bird. “That bead.”

“Hello Kame.” Tori said looking at the blue bead on Manami's chest.

“Hello Tori.” The blue bead flashed with word spoken. “It's good to see you again.”

“Manami this is Tori. She says I can be an Avatar. Is that what you are?”

“We'll discuss later. The opening is closing” The sounds of sirens and tire screeches made Manami look beyond the opening. As the police fired gunshots on the undead, the gap was closing. The

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officers could barely keep up. With one of the officers waving for the girls to hurry, Manami grabbed Ai's hand and they ran. The opening was almost gone and one of the cops disappeared in the crowd with a scream.

"We're not going to make it Manami."

"Not if I can help it." Manami stretched her hand out ward and focused her thoughts on the pools of water her previous spell left on the ground. She channeled her Mana and raised her hand. "WATER WALL!"

The pools rose up in the air and formed a wall. With another sound of gunfire beyond the opening, Manami found their chance of making through improved. With Ai in tow, she pulled her friend ahead and pushed her forward. Ai screamed as she passed through the gap watching the undead moan and struggle to reach out to her. The girls went through and fell over. Looking back the undead were already facing the officers. A small group of corpses overwhelmed one of the officers. With each bullet taking down a creature one by one, Manami pulled Ai to her feet and a female cop quickly got in front of them firing another round to protect them.

"Don't stop running." The officer said. "Follow the policeman's directions when you get to the next intersection. Everyone pull back. There's nothing we can do about the theater."

"I can help." Manami said.

"Get out of here kid. You'll only get in the way."

"Manami," Kame said. "we should find Melinda and Katarina and come up with a plan."

"Who are they?" Ai said.

"Fellow Avatars I work with." Manami looked at the bead on her chest. "Okay Kame, let's find them and regroup. Come Ai."

The girls ran with the surviving officers following them. The girls found themselves in the middle of a war zone. Black cars pulled up and men in business suits stepped out with wands and guns. They cast spells and fired bullets at the army of undead, struggling to take them out in the clusters. Officers formed a barrier with their cars to slow down the swarm but there were too many. The girls

found themselves within a stampede of screaming survivors. It was so overwhelming for them to keep up with each other due to the crowd pushing and bouncing the girls around. Ai held onto Manami's hand but her fingers slid away, swallowed completely by the trampling crowd. When Ai looked up she was all alone, swept away in a river of running people. She tried to stand on her toes to look over the crowd, but she could not get the chance to stop. In time, the crowd dispersed and Ai found herself with Tori, alone.

* * *

An hour passed as Ai wandered with Tori alone in streets. With no sense of direction or any street sign nearby, Ai had hoped the unlit homes had someone she could talk to or a place to take refuge in. Unfortunately, she feared they might not be safe. The neighborhood was too quiet to assume security. No sign of any person, not even animals. One thing assuring was that there was lighting from the lampposts. Ai stepped out into the open street and found the neighborhood decimated. Cars lit aflame, torn clothing littered, broken glass everywhere. It looked like a bomb exploded and wiped everyone out.

Ai walked on the middle of the street navigating around the flipped cars when she heard a gunshot. She hid behind a nearby mailbox watching two men carrying a television and stereo out of a house. The smoking gun held tightly in one of the hands made close her eyes hoping they do not find. As the looters ran past Ai, she spun around to other side of the mailbox and hoped they did not see her. When they turned the corner, she crawled past the gate and saw a woman's arm draped over the door. Ai stood there for a moment watching the blood trickle across the floor. Having watched the undead kill the living left her unfazed at the sight of the murder victim. She wondered for a moment if she could have saved the woman if she had known. If being an Avatar would have made a difference.

“How do I become an Avatar?”

“Since you're not a Magi there is a lot I have to explain how that happened. Ai?”

It's weird because when I first saw, I thought about flames for some reason."

"That's because you reacted to my Mana. When get to a safe place I'll explain. Be patient. Ai?"

"The woman?" Ai stared at the corpse. "She's not rising like the others."

"Is she supposed to?"

"If this was like zombie films, outbreaks usually result in the dead rising with or without bites. But it's not happening here."

"When we find the other Avatars, we'll let them know about this. We may have an advantage. Right now, there are probably more looters and we need to keep going. Come on."

Ai stepped back one last time looking at the victim and walked away. She held Tori tight to her chest holding back her tears. Ai felt her arms and chest warm up, and it spread throughout her body. She looked at Tori and saw the bristly feather overlap her wrists, providing comfort.

"Thank you."

"Ai, I won't lie to you. If you decide to become my Avatar, you will see something like this from time to time."

"Dead people rising?"

"Well that, and what you just saw back at the house. It's an unforgiving duty as an Avatar to protect people and life itself. It is very hard and there are no rewards."

"Then why do this Tori? Why offer people this job?"

"Because we love this world. We are kindred spirits of nature. We contribute throughout history to make this world beautiful and to allow life to fulfill its course. As contributors of this world, we feel it is part of our responsibility to maintain the peace and continuity. You could say we are like your local law enforcement or that Mystic Intelligence Agency."

"Are there more like you? More Avatars like Manami?"

"At one time yes, but now it's just us four."

"What happened?" Ai crossed the street and turned right at the corner.

“The Roman Empire, The Crusades, the Inquisition, the Mongols, the Renaissance, the birth of the Americas. Time. History. It said our place in the world is no more.”

“But Merydia has relations with many countries for hundreds of years.”

“Yes, for many reasons of course, but have you ever heard of spells cast in the streets Paris, Moscow, or New York?”

“No.”

“Exactly. It's what the world wants in exchange for co-existence.”

“Then let's change that?”

“Change what?”

“We start the Avatars. Find kindred spirits like you and have them recruit more Avatars. The maybe we can all make the world a better place.”

“I appreciate it but there are only four of us kindred spirits left in this world. Many have died in wars and conflicts throughout the generations. Once we're gone, so too will all of our history.”

“That's so sad.” Ai smiled and hugged Tori. “Then I'll become an Avatar, and the first thing I'll do is have you and your friends tell me about your history.”

“I don't understand?”

“I want to be an archeologist and what a better way to record history then document your stories and all the past you know. I'll make sure you, your fellow kindred spirits, and the Avatars are never forgotten.”

“Ai.”

When they turned a corner, two undead children stood before a person knelt down beside a corpse. Ai's hand shivered at the sight of the arm reaching inside the cavity of a man, playing around to find something. She covered her mouth when she saw the arm pull out a heart. The blood dripped and the veins pumped the heart. She saw the little boy and little girl with same open wound.

“Ai.” Tori whispered and saw the white mist around the heart turn purple. “She's a necromancer. She's reanimating the dead with

unstable Mana.”

“That’s no woman.” Ai saw the long red hair and recognized the man at the bus stop earlier in the day. Her thoughts were to run, but she could not compel her legs to move. Watching the necromancer return the corrupt heart back into the body instilled her curiosity. She watched the corpse shake in a seizure and let out shrilled moan that rattled Ai’s ears, shocking her mind. Ai stumbled back, fell to the ground, and got the necromancer’s attention.

When the necromancer rose to his feet and looked back with the corner of his cold eyes. Ai scurried to her feet and when she turned around, the necromancer appeared behind her. A brush of wind pushed her back, as though he ran faster than sound itself. Ai found herself trapped, forced to move to the back of a nearby wall. The undead opened their mouths with dripping drool and the necromancer raised his hand up in the air ready to give the command.

“Ai.” Tori said fixing the girls hands around the wings. “Raise me up in the air, concentrate your mind and think about the flame you saw earlier. Shout Fuse Heart Flame and press me into your chest. Just be ready for some pain.”

With a nod, Ai raised Tori up. She focused, saw the flame in her mind, and held that thought. For a moment, as her eyes saw the undead march toward her, she realized that those children and that man did not deserve to die. Looking at the necromancer, she wanted to stop him. Fear no longer gripped her.

“FUSE HEART FLAME!” Tori turned into a red ball of light with the bead in the center. Ai could not believe she made that happen. She saw the necromancer take a step back and saw the fear in his eyes. Ai pressed the ball against her chest. The bead pulled her skin and the light burned her heart. Her muscles ached all over and she felt like there was another version of herself within her body. Her heart burst a force of energy the knocked the undead back. She could feel Tori inside of her heart, and all the good and comfort feeding into her. When she opened her eyes, she found herself in the same outfit as Manami but in red and white. She pulled her hair

over, saw the red streaks at the tip of the strands, and winced at the hairclips pulling the roots. Ai saw white mist cover her body and it felt like she was holding an object. She struggled to her feet, reeling from the pain of the fusion. "It hurts."

"It's okay." Tori said with the red bead blinking. "Concentrate."

A force of energy pushed Ai back into the wall and she covered her waist squealing in pain. She looked up and saw the necromancer command the undead to rise. Her arms shivered.

"Focus. Raise your hand up, get the mist around your arm to form a ball and think of what a burst of light looks like. Then chant Flash Burst."

"Okay." Ai focused and curled her hand into a cup. With a deep breath, she made the mist gather into a ball. Ai looked at the mist and smiled. Looking up at the necromancer her eyes showed focus and imagined the flash of a camera. "FLASH BURST!"

Ai pushed her hand outward and the ball burst into a flash of light. The necromancer shielded his eyes but it did not stop the undead. Now that he was distracted with blindness, Ai ran away knowing he will not intercept her and block her escape again. After turning a corner and crossing a few intersections, Ai stumbled to the wall with her hand over her chest. She could barely breathe and her muscles wore out. Ai wanted to sit down and rest, but she feared she might not have gotten far away. She collapsed on the floor and her eyes blurred.

"AI!"

She heard her name but it was not Tori. It was someone else. Ai forced herself to her feet but fell to her knees. She felt a pair of arms wrap around her waist and lay her on her back. When she opened her eyes, there was Manami kneeling before her. She saw two girls behind her friend in the same outfits surveying the area.

"Stop wasting time Manami." The girl said in her green and white outfit, with her brown and green hair made into a ponytail with bangs along the side of her face.

"Easy Melinda." The girl said in her yellow and white outfit with short blonde and white hair. "She just turned into an Avatar. You

know what that felt like.”

“I know Katarina but right now we can't stop moving. The undead are regrouping for some reason.”

“Me?” Ai said.

“What are you talking?” Manami helped Ai to her feet.

Ai used Manami's shoulders as leverage to stand up. She immediately clutched them shivering like a leaf and looked up with trembling eyes. Ai felt Manami's hands slid along her cheek and held her tears back.

“I saw... the necromancer.”

TO BE CONTINUED...

