Arcana Magi Memorial - c.4

by H-M Brown

Outside the building, Sora tapped two gears on her magic circle and the word standby appeared under each one. She shrunk her circle into a bracelet as she approached Flaros. The screech of Aeros flying ahead of them caught the student's attention as they looked out the windows of the infirmary. Sora mounted Flaros and scratched its ear with her Mana covered hands. She shaped the mist into reigns around the robot wolfs head and its eyes lit up like a flashlight, shining on the darkness.

“Where are you going Ms. Narutaki?” Madam Mayweather said while approaching Sora.

“To save Azure.”

“I can not allow that. Your safety is top priority, and I have a search party ready.”

“I have Aeros flying right now looking for her.” Sora directed Flaros to stand beside Madam Mayweather.

“That's good enough. You don't need to jeopardize your life. You've just recovered your Mana.”

“With all do respect Madam Mayweather, but my friend is out there. It may mean nothing to you, but it does to me. She never abandoned me when that giant creature attacked me and she made her injury worse protecting us to get here. So… so screw you and your emotionless heart. Let's go Flaros.” Sora tapped her heels and flicked the reigns. She leaned down as her Golem picked up speed and the wind whipped her hair back. All she had in her mind was Azure. Sora did not know what made her leave like that. Knowing that Azure's Mana was the cause of her transformation into a shadow creature, she feared that the dome monster would take her away forever.

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The discernment of the passing time was lost as Flaros slowed to a halt. Sora tapped her bracelet back to a circle. She activated the monitor from Aeros' viewpoint. Its night vision showed shadows moving together in one direction. It was a sea of abominations, sloshing through the area like a wave. The migration of horrors sent a chilling gasp from under Sora's breath. Not because there were so many creatures together, but that Azure was amongst that group. She prayed that Azure was not there. If she was, Sora could only imagine what she was going through, or thinking, or if she was even alive. Either way, Aeros could not give a clear picture of where this was happening. So she activated the homing beacon from Aeros and entered the commands to follow the creatures. After changing her circle to a bracelet, Flaros rode again.

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Azure walked through the fog as though she were walking to class. Her hands swayed through the mist and felt the thickness of the cloud through her fingers. Her eyes focused on what was ahead, unaware that this was her imagination, acting in unison with what she saw through her right eye in reality. Shadow monsters, large and small, walked alongside her in the migration, unaware of her presence. Fear shocked her nerves.

Small rat like creatures with two tails scurried over her socks. A long necked three-legged beast lifted its head up to open its mouth and swallowed something that flew across its face. A strange carpet, whose edges waved along the grass to push forward, paused for a moment and turned left. Many of the shadows up ahead, jumped to the side as a large foot stomped into the crowd. Ignoring the roars of the monsters underneath its feet, a creature as tall as a giraffe walked onward with the sound of a drum beat. The whips thrashing it's back swatted tiny bats with scissor beaks that tried to pick on it. A weird long snout pig sniffed Azure's arm, and walked alongside her for a while. Her hand shook and her eyes quivered from the touch.

Azure looked forward and focused on her fogged mind. The sounds the shadows made around her had little effect on her

hearing, though they imprinted themselves in her memories. The cries of wailing children mixed with a lion's roar. Screeches that sound like nails scraping a chalkboard. It was so sharp Azure's eyes winced. Long drawn hum as if someone fell to their deaths. Azure wanted to stop now. She wanted to cover her ears. She wanted to run and hide. She could not take it anymore. Yet the oily scent from the creatures and her acid covered skin reduced her will to drivel. Only her drive to unlock the shackles allowed her to move forward. A rampant libido to see herself freed and regain her imprisoned Mana. The mist that fell from the red light in the sky spread around her and every one of the shadows. The mist mixed with the oily scent and reeked of sweetness that left a sour taste in the throat after inhaling.

When the mist settled to ankle depth, Azure walked past a parked car with tinted windows. It was beside a sign that read Poet's Pond. She remembered seeing it early in the afternoon. This insight flashed in her mind and she shifted her eyes to the windshield. Stepping aside for the carpet creature sliding down the hood, she saw the driver inside. He leaned on the window with mouth opened wide and eyes glazed over. Azure turned away, her throat gulped. She was so close to clearing her mind after seeing that, but the scent mixture overpowered her and her thoughts drifted away again.

Azure continued onward, past the creatures alongside the edge of the pond. A wave of water splashed on Azure as a pair of three toed feet slammed beside her, trapping her in the middle. She walked around the heel as it hissed above her, spilling its drool on her head. Ahead of Azure was a hill. At the top was a waterfall of mist reaching high into the sky like a tower. It poured out of the red light. The sight of this majestic beauty filled her with frightened awe. The cascade slowed to a halt and everything went silent around her. She looked at the creatures as they waited. The mist around her feet moved ahead of her. The waterfall became a vacuum. Each monster climbed the hill beside her and burst into Mana. It mixed with the mist and flowed up to the sky into the red light.

Azure reached the top of the hill. At the center of the vacuum there was a black cloak sprawled on the ground. She looked around unsure if someone was here. Azure wondered if this person was the one who used the driver to get into the academy. A pillar of red light slammed the ground. It illuminated the entire area in a color of blood. As every creature continued into the falls, Azure's legs became heavy. She struggled to move forward even as her arms reached out to the pillar. Azure looked up at the sky and saw something coming down. A ball of purple light slowed down and inside was a shadow. Azure dropped her arms as she watched its human like arms and legs stretch apart. The feet floated over the cloak. The head lifted up and blinked its red eyes. There was no gender or face. It stood there looking at Azure. With arms outstretched, their hands wanted to clasp each other and pull closer.

“Is it possible?' Azures said, her shackled glowed as the shadow tilted its head. The pain made it difficult for her to hold her arms up. ‘Can you free me?”

The shadow stepped aside and waved its arm inviting Azure to step forward. She could not. The shackles all turned purple, the weight pushed her down to the ground. On her knees, in tears, she curled her hands into a fist. Punching the grass, she thought about the four mysterious creatures that locked away her Mana.

“WHY?!' Azure threw her head up at the sky. ‘IT'S MY MANA! IT BELONGS TO ME!”

“azure…”

A familiar voice opened her eyes. Azure hardly recognized it. She turned her body around. Her back lied on the grass. Held down by the shackles, she struggled to lift her head. She heard her name again. Sora came to mind so suddenly. Somewhere in the sea of nightmares, her friend was coming to her. Sora's voice slowly lifted the fog in Azure's imagination, but her head throbbed in pain because of the odor she inhaled. Azure tried to think clearly, focusing her mind. She did not know what she wanted anymore. She drew a blank. Staring at the sky, there was a battle going on. Azure

closed her left eye and saw in the darkness a robot bird destroying each hideous reptile like monster.

“Ae… ros…” Azure lifted her head by force. She felt the collar trying to slice her head off. Pushing her chest off the ground, she sat up. An unexpected surprise, as her eyes grew wide, the arms of the shadow person wrapped around her chest, giving her comfort. As she watched the flames of Flaros burst each creature into Mana, the scent of the sweet and sour mist filled her lungs again. Her eyes lowered and blurred as Sora raised her arm up forward enlarging her magic circle.

“terros… hydros…” Sora said with a distant voice in Azure's ears. A portal appeared. A large robot bear named Terros, and a robot alligator named Hydros, stomped out. Terros roared at the large shadows as Hydros hissed at the creatures swimming in the lake. They split off to their respective combatants. Hydros sprayed ice on the surface of the lake and Terros ripped the earth before its feet. Each shadow they faced shattered and burst into mist. With earth shattering attacks at the bottom of the hill, the explosive sounds rattled Azure.

“Ah!” Azure opened her eyes from the shock of the earth. Her eyes shifted to the faceless shadow nuzzling her cheek in a loving manner. With a growl under her breath, she pushed the shadow's arms apart. Azure faced the shadow and her human hand clasped its neck. Her eyes shivered as her mind cleared and her chest heaved with each breath she took. She resigned to her emotions and realized what she almost done. Azure stepped back looking at her wrists. A teal shackle and a purple shackle. The difference came to light. Selfishness versus selflessness. Clutching her shoulders, her inner most desire exploited by these things. She looked in the eyes of this human shadow, and saw her reflection.

“Azure!' Sora made her way up the hill and clutched Azure's shoulders. Her Golems provided protection, pushing the shadows down the hill while she examined Azure. ‘Look at me.”

Azure lifted her head up. Lips trembled. Eyes looked all over the place. She pressed her head on Sora's chest and stared at the creatures in the pillar.

“I wanted to unlock my Mana so badly Sora.”

“Azure, you know that you have to learn to control your Mana before you can unlock it. I understand you're frustrated, but you know better than I do why you're forbidden from channeling it.”

“My Mana is also their Mana. Our Mana merged and became unstable when I drew their Magic Circle that day. It belongs to us. It's not just mine alone. But, I'm so tired of these shackles.' Azure closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She stepped back, opening them, and shifted her sight toward the shadow person as it stared at them. She flexed her claw regained her sense of reality. With the wave of the shadow person's hand, the creatures near it stopped and turned to Azure and Sora. A flash of thought occurred. Azure remembered Madam Mayweather mention that this dome creature was summoned here. Looking at the black cloak within the pillar, she wondered if this shadow person wore it to hide from the sun. It was made of fire, even if it was not as close as a torch and the shadows hated the natural light. With the mysterious glass tinted car parked down the hill, she understood that this creature traveled around to get what it wants. ‘Sora, that person is the Summoner. We stop it and all the shadows will be un-summoned right?”

“Right, but it looks like the Summoner is protecting itself.' Sora saw her Golems tied up fighting the shadows below. She tapped on her magic circle and her robots looked in her direction. Watching the Summoner wave its hand commanding the creatures to gather around the girls, the Golem marched back up the hill. As the creatures surrounded her and Azure, Sora raised her hand into a fist transforming her circle into a bracelet and gathered mist around her knuckles. ‘ELECTRIC SHOCKWAVE!”

Sora punched the air and bolts of electricity flew out like a hand reaching for the door. The first row of shadows shivered from the shock and burst into mist. It was not enough for the next row made the girls step back.

The shadows behind Azure separated her from Sora, forcing her toward the pillar. The purple shackles glowed anchoring her, but the shadows dragged her feet. Azure used her claw to slice and jab the monsters. She pushed them back without casting a spell, but the task was overwhelming. Azure felt the pillar pull her hair. She forced herself forward despite the effort of the herd, until a wave of heat blanketed the shadows. They burst into mist and Azure fell on her hands and knees. Flaros' howl got her attention as she watched the wolf jump over her. It bit and swiped at the monsters as water sprayed past her.

Hydros pushed the crowd into the Summoner with a geyser blast of water, saturating the grass and dirt throughout the hill. The Summoner and its minions rolled down the hill and Hydros stood beside Flaros. The hill shook and rumbled, as the Golems looked at each other with raised eyebrows. A red light under their feet collapsed the dirt into mud and became a landslide. As the machines slid down the hill, the Summoner jumped over them with a red glow and landed.

Azure's arms tensed. She watched strange pairs of lights in the distance behind the Summoner gather and stop. At first, she thought it was this shadow's doing, but when she saw flames and lightning lit up the area, she realized it was Madam Mayweather and the guards. Suddenly, she felt something warm on her belly. Looking down, the Summoner pressed its hand on her shadowy skin. Two layers of red circles, with no drawings or writings on it, clapped together and pushed Azure to the ground. She rolled to edge of the hill and lied on her stomach. Azure picked herself up and coughed blood. She barely could breathe.

The grass swayed around her. Her hair pushed over her face and a wave of sound covered her body as two bat-like baldheaded reptiles, flew over her. Azure covered her ears as the ringing punched her skull. She felt the wet grass slosh on her face. Her heart tried to burst out of her chest as she saw the foot of the Summoner swing toward her eyes. Azure's head jerked back and her spit flew. She could barely tell which way was up or down.

Everything sounded distant around Azure. Lifting her head up, she watched Aeros destroy the two flying shadows that attack her. The aerial battle included fireballs from Madam Mayweather on the ground that exploded like fireworks. It turned night into day. Below the guards provided cover for Aeros while Terros ripped the head off the long necked creature. It placed its paw on Sora as it guided her behind its back and punched the ground. The earth ripped apart, creating a chasm where the four-legged shadows spilled over like water. Sora's Golems gathered around as a large shadow from the pond climbed out. It was so big that when it hissed, it was the first sound Azure heard.

“GLOBOS… COMBINE!”

Sora's words were refreshing to her ears, even as the Summoner kicked her body to flip her over on her back. Azure saw the Golems combined into a winged human robot human. It jumped at the monster and wrestled it into the water. She felt the Summoner's body press onto her chest. Azure's head ached so much she did not realize what was happening to her right now. Its hands wrapped around her neck. Fingers tightened until Azure struggled to breathe. She slapped the Summoner across the face and slid her fingers over its head looking for hair to pull. Her fingers reached the Summoner's eyes and she pushed her nails into the socket. When the shadow stumbled off, Azure coughed and gasped for air.

Azure and the Summoner were on their knees, their chests shifted up and down. Their eyes locked in place. Azure was not sure what to do next. It seemed that the Summoner was thinking the same thing as well. There was no sense of opening or room to maneuver. That was until the Summoner raised its head up. Azure sat there unsure of what happened. All she knew was that the shadow lowered its eyebrows and jabbed its fingers into the grassy mud. Azure felt the ground under her knees buckle under. The Summoner's two red circles appeared underneath her and she fell into a muddy pit. It was thick and difficult to pull out. When she looked up at the Summoner, it channeled red Mana and swayed its finger side to side.

Without a word, Azure understood what it learned. She was not casting spells because of the acid covering her body.

Azure's heart raced as the mud rose up out of the ground and turned into a slide. She clawed her way up as the pillar came near. Kicking and screaming she channeled her Mana as the shackles crushed her body. Azure thought about the mud around her and sensed both the water and the earth. Her eyes saw the Mana of both elements mixed together. She focused both mind and Mana.

“MUDSLIDE!” The mud collapsed and dropped Azure. Her toes neared the edge of the vacuum. She saw the mud move with her arm even as the acid spread slowly over the rest of her body. Azure turned to the Summoner as it stepped back struggling to regain control over the mud. Azure swung her arms moving the mud into the shadow's face and it stumbled back onto its butt.

The Mana she channeled was so strong, the acid covered her body quickly. Whatever remained of her clothes dissolved and she transformed into a shadow creature. It did not end there as her body twisted and stretched, rolling around the mud. Her human ears fell to the ground and lumps grew on the top of her head, sprouting cat like ears. Her teeth grew into little fangs. The left arm stretched with her bones cracking. Blood spilled out of her back and small black wings burst outward instead of light. A lump grew on her lower back and the skin split open growing a tail. The toes straightened and a thin layer of black skin formed in between turning them into webbed feet. All of her nails stretched out into claws. Her left teal eye turned red. The purple shackles crushed her.

Her brain tried to handle all of the pain at once. Lifting her head back, she let out a roar. A girlish scream blended with the sound of a cat dying and a bird singing. It shattered the tinted windows of the car below. It made everyone, from the shadows to the people to Globos stop fighting. She swung her arms around and pounded them on the mud. Azure lifted her body with her hands and feet, stretching all of her muscles and new body parts to ease the pain. She looked like an animal warning others not to get near her. Once on her knees, Azure felt a hand touch her back, she turned and

thrust her claw forward. Her eyes trembled as red blood trickled over her oily fingers. She saw the Summoner standing before her shivering.

Azure saw pain in its eyes.

Azure saw its tears.

To Be Continued...