Arcana Magi Memorial Vol.3 - c.4

by H-M Brown

"Who are you?" Sora said standing up with Azure.

"My name is Nathan. I am here on behalf of Mechro to extend an invitation."

"An invitation?"

"To join us. You have the potential to become a great assassin. It was unfortunate that you didn't solve all of today's puzzles. It was your final test after all, when the stakes are high. It's sad that your golems ended up destroyed. You truly have a long way to go as a professional to know not to fall for such tricks."

"My golems. It was a trap?"

"Were you the one in Sora's dorm?" Azure said and he gave no answer, but Sora's eyes lit up.

"Of course. He wanted to isolate me from Technomancer."

"Good deduction. However, your lack of security is your drawback. Join us Sora Narutaki. We will train you better at stealth and covert tactics." Nathan held his hand up and a hologram of blue armor design for females appeared. "We will also adjust your golem parts, and retrofit you into this state of art golem armor. You will be faster, stronger, and more powerful magi than your entire family."

"I can't." Sora stared at the armor and shook her head side to side. "My body hasn't grown into the golem parts yet. I don't know what will happen if I wear the armor now."

"The flesh won't matter." Nathan raised his metal arm up and curled his hand into a fist. "You will be a true golem. And we have the spell ready for you right now."

Azure raised her hands up, channeled her mana with her shackles glowing teal. It was hard to tell what his emotions were with the metal mask on. His body stood there like a perfect statue, but she was ready to strike.

"Child, didn't your mother tell you never to raise your spells at an adult?" Nathan stretched his fingers and mana gathered at the palm of his hand. "Vertigia!"

A flash of light struck Azure's eyes. Nathan started to twist and bend. The ground rolled up and down like a wave. The clouds in the sky expanded close, then pulled back reaching to space. Azure's body flattened. Her arms stretched. Her legs bent in different directions. Azure could not focus her thoughts. It felt like something was squeezing her brain, and like a flip of a switch it happened. That crushed feeling triggered the emotional pain from her experience inside the dome monster. The memories played in her mind like television, only with the distortions of the spell twisting and turning those visions. Her scream went beyond anything human, and her body collapsed on the ground. Hands clasped, knees to her chest, shivering and mumbling.

"AZURE!" Sora knelt beside her friend. She turned Azure's body and placed her hands on the cheeks. "Look at me. Focus."

"It's in my head. That monster. Help me."

"It's okay. It's gone and…" Sora felt her hair pulled back. She screamed, dropped Azure, and struggled to break free. A pulse of electricity spread throughout her body, numbing her altogether. Her eyes closed, the last vision she saw was Azure laying from shock of the spell.

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Sora opened her eyes. She saw herself in the mirror. She was a little. Her subconscious remembered this day. Four years ago. She ran down the stairs. Waiting for her was an old man. She gave a hug and called out his name.

"Grandfather." She looked up and saw a smile on his face.

"Are you ready?" He patted her head and she nodded.

"I get to finish my first golem. Let's go let's go let's go." Sora pulled her grandfathers arm and ran out the door. The light turned a bright light and she found herself inside a factory. She walked around greetings members of her family at their stations. Each one working on different golems from installing parts, to running

diagnostics with their magic circles, or building new ones. They all greeted her with smiles, warm and secure. She stood before a robot bear laying on the platform. Sora opened a hatch, and received a part from her grandfather. A silver gear and silver pin. She installed it inside and placed the pin to hold it in place. She closed the hatch as everyone gathered around, and she made her magic circle appear. "I'm ready."

"Did you memorize the incantation?" He said.

"Yes." Sora smiled and took a deep breath. "From the breath of life I grant thee, through mana's heart I raise free, always be by my side, my guardian forever my guide."

Her magic circle moved forward and slide through the body of the robot. A gear on her circle glowed bright and turned clockwise, locked into place. Its eyes lit blue, its yawn let out a roar. It stood to its feet and stared at Sora. Her smiling face was its first recorded memory. It watched Sora run to another girl, slightly taller than her, who showed no expression whatsoever.

"Sis I need to borrow your mirror." Sora received the mirror to the sound of a grumble. "Thanks."

Sora ran back to the bear and showed its reflection.

"Hi there. You're my first golem." Sora held a mirror and it saw itself in the reflection. "Don't you look cute? You're name is Terros. And this is my grandfather. He helped me build you. We're going to be best friends."

Sora rubbed Terros face, but she did not receive any reaction from it. She turned to her family.

"How come Terros doesn't react when I touch it? Just like how all of you did with your golems."

Their faces covered in shadow, smiles so relaxing, a tall woman approached her, gently rubbing her face. Her lips moved with no sound, but Sora subconsciously understood what she said. She felt her younger self smile and nod, unaware of what she had to do to feel Terros in her fingertips. Her mind sunk now more than anything, if this decision was truly what she wanted. Yet her older self felt it in her heart, as she found her younger self lying on an

operating table, that his may be her greatest regret.

"This is what I wanted?"

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"I don't know."

Sora opened her eyes to the sight of words and numbers scrolling on a screen, around a graphical outline of her body. She lifted her head up. She did not feel the ground, nor the air, but something crawling underneath her skin. Sora realized she was inside armor while lying on an inclined magic circle. Surrounded by circuit lines, her chest pained with each breath she took, her head pounded with each cough she made. She felt the sweat trickle down her face and the heat of her golem implants weakening her strength. Sora did not recognize her surroundings, but she knew she was no longer at Memorial Academy. The trees around them acted as a shade, creating a sense of night.

"My… head…" Sora felt the pain from her memories. It was as though someone or something peered into it. "Azure… is this what it felt like?"

"Yes sir." Nathan said beyond Sora's helmet. "I am ready to complete the process."

"No." Sora felt her body moving inside the suit, yet unable to move the armor itself. The uneasiness of being in a trap without seeing what was happening to her body overwhelmed her emotions.

"Huh? I see." Nathan said. "Very well then, I will finish up and release her."

"What?" Sora coughed wildly and moaned from the pain in her chest.

"Oh, you're awake."

Sora saw the sky turn to the ground, the motion of the circle made her heart beat rapidly. There was Nathan staring right at her. Looking into the eyes of her kidnapper brought her to tears and the fear consumed her.

"Good news." A small circle appeared in the form of a keyboard and he typed. "You get to go free as soon as I finish uploading this spell and installing this program to serve us. Its okay, you won't

remember a thing, until we send a signal to activate you."

"Don't please." Sora tried to move her body.

"Of course the side effect will be that who you are right now would be permanently replaced with a new version of you. Our vision of you." Nathan tapped the enter key and stepped back. "So unfortunate you will not be a true golem, but you will be a great addition to our organization. Welcome to Mechro. Agent Narutaki."

The circle slowly moved into a vertical position and Sora watched a small text box on the screen read uploading. As the bar filled up, she sensed something in her mind. Her own thoughts repeated a sentence over and over again. Her lips moved as though they were speaking it aloud. Her whimpers echoed inside the armor. She had no choice but to accept the spell and saw her magic circle appear. One of the gears that housed Terros took its place. The image of the armor she wore became a part of her spell list.

"I don't want this spell."

"You'll grow to appreciate it." Nathan stood before the keyboard and started typing a list of orders under a directory list named Sora. "This list of directives will make sure of it."

After clicking install, the sound of bushes caught Nathan's attention. Emerging out into the open was Azure. Her nose pointed in the air with the sound of sniffing. Nathan took a step back in shock.

"How did you find us?"

"I followed Sora's scent." Azure said pointing her nose. "For some reason, my mind just thought of her as I sniffed the air. It's so weird doing that."

"What?!"

Azure saw Sora on the magic circle in the armor. She stared at the mask. It only had eyes, no other facial feature. She heard Sora whimpering through the armor, it sounded like a robot. Her eyes trembled at the sight of her friend. A rush of emotions flooded her memories of Sora and her hand curled into a ball. Her teeth tightened shut and a let out a strange growl that rattled the ears of Nathan.

"That sound… what is that?" Nathan gathered mana around his hand and turned it into a ball of light. Just as he raised his hand up to cast his spell, his head lifted up slightly. There was a strange shadow building up around Azure, her teal eyes turned red and her wings stretched outward shaking like a rattlesnake. Her shackles glowed purple, causing her to slouch. Her magic circle appeared under her feet and mana gathered around her wings. Nathan shook his head and released his spell. "Missyria."

The ball of light was so fast, that it struck Azure in the face and knocked her flat on the ground. The impact affected her wings. The pain made her scream. She lifted herself up but Nathan pushed her down and sat on top of her chest. The weight of his body made it difficult for her to push him off. Her shackles weight made it worse. With his hand to her face, a blade emerged through a small magic circle aimed at her throat. She took a deep breath and focused all her strength.

"Sliciaaaa…" Nathan saw the sky and watched his spell fly into the air.

Azure pushed her chest up using her weighted arms as leverage. She lifted her hand off the ground and used the heaviness as momentum to push Nathan onto his back. She reversed the pin and sat on his chest, foaming a dark shadow from her mouth.

"How does it feel?" Azure's voice changed, Sora recognized it from early this morning. "To stare at the eye of darkness?"

"What are you?!" Nathan struggled to break free from Azure's clutches. Shadows expanded beyond her wings and a pair of eyes opened. It was like looking into another world that should not exist. He screamed unlike any other. He grabbed Azure's shoulders and tried to push her off, but she forced him back down. And once she smiled, his mind shattered. There were no thoughts for him process.

The magic circle that Sora laid on shattered and she fell onto the ground. She coughed wildly while looking at Azure standing to her feet and a bright light shined down on her. The sound of flying machines consumed the area. The tree branches pushed apart by the wind. Her breathing lessened and her sight slowly darkened.

The last she saw was a group of people in armor looking at Azure turning back to her normal self, clutching her shoulders and lowering her head. Sora cracked a smile not just because her friend was okay, but that her family had arrived and reached out to her. There was a twinge on the back of her neck. Sora realized it was active this entire time, but the pain masked it.

"Ciel… you did it… thank you…" Looking up at an armored agent, she almost heard her say she would be all right. "Mother?"

Sora closed her eyes as Azure knelt beside her with tears.

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Sora was her younger self, standing out in a grassy field. There was Memorial Academy and all its buildings in the distance. She heard a strange groan just over the hill and she ran. Sora found a girl lying on the ground, struggling to get up. She saw the purple shackles holding her down.

"What's wrong?" Sora received no response and watched the girl try to get up.

"These shackles are heavy."

Rubbing her wrists, her eyes shed tears and she wiped them away. Sora stood over the girl, and smiled.

"You're doing it wrong."

"What do you know?"

Sora knelt down and took her hand. She picked her up with ease shocking the girl. Sora positioned the girl's arms outward and bent her knees.

"There. You should move easily until your body is use to weight."

"That's great but, how does this help me get up?"

"Oh… heh heh." Sora smiled tapping her fingers together. She saw the girl's bookbag with the name Azure Martinez written on a tag. "So you're Ah-shur Martinez."

"Ah-shoo-rey."

"That's how you pronounce it?!"

"Yeah there's actually an accent over the e."

"It's not on there."

"That's because I'm too lazy to put the accent over the e, so I

decided to not bother.”

"You... really admit that?" Sora watched the girl smile without shame.

"So what's your name?"

"I'm Sora Narutaki."

"Thank you Sora." Azure walked past her as though she was carrying buckets of water. "I'll see you later."

"But you don't have to walk like that." Sora hurried by her side and walked with her.

"Then why am I standing like this?" Azure looked up at Sora with a snarl.

Sora laughed and in turn made Azure laugh, and the memory fade of Azure's smile fade to white.

"Sora." Azure's voice reached her and she slowly opened her eyes.

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