

Arcana Magi Rush

by H-M Brown

It fell from the morning sky. A red piece of slab as big as the car door it landed next to. It startled the people nearby and they all looked up. A trail of smoke lingered above Avalon City. The burst of a sonic boom from the fighter jets rattled the glass from the skyscrapers around them. A flyover brought awe. Amongst the crowd was eighteen-year-old Magi, Akane Ramirez. She piloted Suzaku, a Golem class robot designed for combat she illegally made at fifteen, but this year, she received her license just three weeks after she graduated Memorial Academy. She was heading for the Department of Motor Vehicles to hand her registration papers for Suzaku, when she recognized what the slab was.

A dragon scale. Akane noticed a small bird caught under the piece. Akane approached it but the bird pulled itself free. She covered her mouth when its right wing separated from the body. It stumbled and struggled to fly again. It failed. For some reason, Akane felt something bad was about to happen.

The red slab triggered raw memories, even though it had been six years ago. Akane was with her little sister, Marisol, returning together from school. While passing by a park, a baby dragon the size of a wolf pounce Marisol and attacked her. Akane found a stick and rammed it into the dragon's left eye. The dragon stumbled and rolled along the ground as the adults arrived to chase it away.

The baby returned with its mother and family later that week, and without hesitation, the dragons attacked everyone in town. Houses destroyed, people burned alive, nowhere to run. With Marisol in her arms, they watched the mother eat their parents alive. Their horrific screams faded into nothing, as two lumps slid down the dragon's throat. The very thought of them suffering slowly in the mother's belly was an unnerving vision in their dreams. The invasion lasted all night as she and Marisol watched the destruction with the survivors in the distance. When searching for the victims, they found their mother's bracelet attached to a twisted arm bone in a pile left

behind by the mother dragon. The monsters were not satisfied as long as Akane and Marisol were alive. The dragons hunted them and in return, the girls hunted them.

The screams snapped Akane out of her thoughts. She looked up and there was a dragon, all alone. It flapped its bat like wings, stationary in the sky. Without hesitation, the people ran as Akane hurried for her parked motorcycle. It was too late. The dragon landed between her and the bike as its hind feet crushed three people on impact, and an arm reached out from under the heel before it slapped the ground. Their deaths did not faze her.

The dragon stood tall on all four feet. Its head stopped at the fourth floor of the nearby building, scaring the remaining people watching from within. It slid its front feet past Akane, her tiny body stood between them. She resisted fear as the dragon flexed its fingerlike toes and police cars arrived surrounding the area. Akane took short breaths as the dragon's head leaned close to her. At first, it shifted its head to the side showing its empty left eye socket for a second then shifted to the right, showing its intact red eye. Akane felt her heart dropped as though she were falling from the sky. The dragon took one long inhale of her body, the scent matched. Its lips opened up revealing teeth. As drool slid down the fangs, the stench of its breath overpowered Akane and affected her senses.

The sound of a sonic boom shocked everyone but Akane and the dragon. A volley of bullets rolled over the creature's back. As it jerked its body up to scream in pain, Akane ran under the belly and hopped on her motorcycle. Just as she threw her helmet on without securing it, the dragon turned to the police officers firing their guns at it. Its throat glowed yellow and orange, and opened its mouth. A combination of liquid and flames blanketed the police officers. It spread like split milk and left nothing standing, not even a chance for them to scream.

Akane started her motorcycle and caught the dragon's attention. As she drove past other police officers, she looked at her side view mirror and saw the dragon spray its liquid flame to finish them off. Escaping was easy. Her bike was too fast. The only problem was that

she drove past people, running or driving away, making them collateral targets as the dragon tried to take her out. Cars flipped over. The explosions shattering the running people like glass. The liquid flames consumed them all. Not even the missiles the jets fired over Akane were enough to slow down the youngling, let alone destroy it. After turning the corner, Akane looked back. It was too far away and out of sight. Only the fighter jets crossing the intersection was the last thing she saw. She focused on the road ahead, and entered the highway escaping the now ravaged city.

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Akane drove past a sign that read Tulane Airfield. A small road along the runway led her to a hangar. In front of the wide open doors were her sister Marisol and their Elven foster mother Erilyn Jackson. She stopped on the grass and jumped off her motorcycle. Collapsed on the ground, she threw her helmet and tried to stop her hands from shaking. The shock of being up close to the once baby dragon sucked the air out of her. Akane found herself in her sister's arms and she calmed herself.

Moments later, Akane leaned over the sink splashing water on her face. She overheard the news report from the television outside, talking about the dragon attack. It escaped with injuries, but not enough to kill it. The military has Golems stationed in and around the city in case the dragon returned. Actual casualties were unknown since no one could find the bodies within the liquid flames. Those who have survived suffered from smoke inhalation or burns, or lost limbs. Akane thought about the men and women caught in that attack until she heard a mother interviewed about her children trapped and consumed in the liquid flames, screaming in agony. A tear dripped into the sink. Her hand curled into a fist and pounded the edge. If only she had Suzaku, she could have fought it, but she never expected this to happen. Akane looked up at the mirror and saw Erilyn behind her. It became a quiet moment. They just stared at each other. She could feel it in the mere presence of her foster mother. A mantra repeated in her mind, even as she wiped her tears from her face.

"If I want to cry,' Akane said. 'then go sit in the corner while the world moves forward without me. If I want to stop crying, then walk ahead of the world and leave it behind."

'Good.' Erilyn said leaning on the side of the doorway with her arms crossed. "The news reported that the military will be issuing a curfew tonight. Nobody will be allowed in or out of the city."

"I see.' Akane turned around and leaned on the sink. 'It was the baby dragon. It got my scent before I could escape. It will find me here."

"Then let's get Suzaku ready."

Akane walked out of the bathroom and felt Erilyn's hand on her shoulder. It was comforting, but Akane focused on what was ahead of her. She approached Marisol, who sat before the television watching the news. Akane rested her hands on the back of the chair and stared at the screen.

"Did you do your homework?"

"No.' Marisol lifted her head up and saw Akane upside down. 'Is it true what you said? Is it really the dragon that attacked me?"

"Yes.' Akane tugged the collar of Marisol's blouse and saw the scars on her back and shoulders.

"What are we going to do?" Marisol lifted her left hand, starring at her mother's bracelet.

"I'll worry about the dragon, Marisol. You focus on your homework."

Marisol nodded and took her bookbag. Akane watched her sister head for the office and had a frightening thought. If the dragon recognized her own scent, it would probably recognize Marisol. Unlike herself, Marisol was still attending Memorial Academy at Central Heights, training to be a Magi. Their combined powers would not be enough to protect themselves.

Akane followed Erilyn and they stood before a giant metal leg. They looked up at the Golem Suzaku, held up by a large harness and standing before a catwalk. It was teal with white highlights around the armor. It had a human look. A gentle giant that stood tall and proud. Suzaku stood up as high as the third floor of an office

building. Akane and Erilyn rode an elevator up to the catwalk to prepare Suzaku.

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"I'm ready Erilyn." Akane said in the seat of the cockpit. It had three different monitors in place of the windows. She pulled up a keyboard and started the onboard computer. The Neas Operating System booted up and she typed in the commands on the C prompt to activate the Charger Program. She fixed her hair into a tail and slipped on a pair of flat white and teal hairclips. Once she hit enter, Akane leaned back on her seat and closed her eyes. White mist covered her body and the hairclips glowed. A small teal magic circle appeared behind her seat. The runes lined the edge of the circle. The inner part of the circle had four arrows pointing outward at the four phases of an eclipsed sun. It activated a domed light in the back and the drawing pulled the Mana in like a vacuum, guiding the mist. The dome was part of a prototype engine invented by Erilyn's husband DeMarcus, before his death fifty years ago. Suzaku was the first and only Golem to run on Mana as fuel.

Erilyn stood before a console station and looked at the display of the battery charging on the monitor. An empty meter filled slowly. She watched Akane fight to stay awake and hoped she would not push herself too hard. The meter just made little over halfway and stopped. The domed light turned off and the magic circle disappeared. Erilyn approached the cockpit and found Akane sleeping. She shut down the operating system, took a folded blanket on the station and covered Akane. Erilyn gave a kiss on the forehead and stroked her hair gently. She walked away from the Golem, and looked back at Akane like a guardian angel.

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Akane heard laughter. She saw herself and Marisol running to the front door of their home. Ahead of them, with arms wide open, was their parents. The girls embraced them and squeezed hard. The laughter drowned out the moment and her eyes opened to tears. Akane heard Marisol laughing below. Akane leaned back on her seat

for a moment. Just to listen to her sister's laughter, hearing her voice alive and filled with joy. She smiled.

Looking at the window across the hangar, there was darkness outside. The clock attached to the middle monitor showed that it was the afternoon. Flashes of light flickered from the clouds. Akane looked over the side of the cockpit and saw Erilyn push a metal pane on the foot of Suzaku, locking it in place.

"Erilyn?"

"Oh,' Erilyn said looking up. 'you're awake."

"Is it raining?"

"The weatherman said it would rain tonight. Why?"

"I was just hoping that the rain would chase the dragon away."

"I hope so too.' Erilyn said wiping her hands with a towel. 'I'm going to make dinner. Come on down and get ready."

"I was hoping I could work on the Sabre right now."

"Okay then.' Erilyn walked away from Suzaku. 'But don't take too long."

"Marisol?' Akane stood up and saw her sister looking up. 'Would you like to help me with Suzaku?"

"Really?" Marisol's eyes opened wide as Akane nodded. She cheered and ran for the elevator. When she arrived, she took the folded blanket and waited for her sister's instructions.

Akane reached down the right side of the seat and slid her hands through a glove connected to an arm joint called the Brace. Since the Golem was off, she pushed down on the brake pedal to set the robot on neutral. This allowed her to pull her arm up and move Suzaku's right arm. Her muscle bulged upon lifting. Akane curled her hand into fist and her fingers pressed into the palm. Nothing happened. She punched her gloved hand to get it to work but the blade would not come out.

"Marisol, go the monitor on the station and activate the diagnostics program."

"Okay.' Marisol hurried to the console station, setting the blanket down. She moved the mouse and clicked enter. 'I'm in."

"Click on the right arm and then click yes."

"Got it.' After Marisol activated the diagnostics, she approached her sister and leaned on the side of the cockpit. 'Sis, I want to build a Golem."

"What?" Akane turned to Marisol.

"I want to build my own Golem. I think I'll call it Seiryuu."

"We had this conversation before. The answer is no."

"But I want to fight alongside you. I want to help you fight the dragons."

"Marisol.' Akane looked down and took a deep breath. 'What I'm doing is not a game. I hunt because they are out to kill us."

"I want to kill them all too. They don't deserve to live."

Akane turned to Marisol and saw her sister's hands tighten on the side of the cockpit. Marisol struggled to keep her composure and understood her feelings.

"Don't be like this.' Akane placed her free hand on her sister's cheek, but Marisol pulled away. Akane looked her sister in the eyes. 'I don't want to lose you."

"I don't want to lose you either. I rather we die together than be alone."

"NO!' Akane startled Marisol. 'Don't ever say that. I don't ever want to hear that from you again."

"But I'm tired of running, sis! I'm tired of being scared of them. I want this to end." Marisol took a deep breath and turned around.

Before Akane could take off the Brace, the windows shook creating an echo from the high ceiling. Akane and Marisol looked at the windows and saw lightning flash from the clouds.

"Thunder before lightning?' Marisol said as Akane looked at her. A loud bang from the hangar doors left a large bump. Akane and Marisol looked down and saw another bulge push inward. As Erilyn came out to see what happened, a large nail wedged between the cracks of the door, and she ran for the elevators.

The doors bent down and the dragon's snout wedge inside. It took long whiff of the inside and picked up Akane's scent. It pulled back and leaned its eye close to the opening. It saw Akane sitting inside the cockpit.

“Hurry Marisol. Help me get the harness off Suzaku.”

“What about the Sabre?” Marisol said as Akane slipped on the seatbelt over her shoulders while Erilyn arrived and stood before the console station.

“I’ll worry about it later.” Akane said as she started the engine and the cockpit slid inside Suzaku’s chest. Everything went dark once the chest doors closed, and the lights from the three monitors lit up the cockpit. She saw Erilyn on the left screen typing on the keyboard as she slid her left hand down the left Brace. The dragon burst its way inside and stumbled over everything. When it got up, Akane saw the wounds throughout its body. She could not believe it withstood the military’s assault. Akane curled her hands into a fist and swung her right hand forward. She made Suzaku’s arm punch the dragon, the force was enough to knock it back to the floor. Akane felt a vibration outside. Erilyn freed Suzaku of its harness. Before Akane could step forward, the dragon’s throat glowed orange and yellow. Akane raised Suzaku’s arms up and her magic circle, as large as the Golem’s chest, appeared. ‘DEFLECT!’

The liquid flames burst out of dragon’s mouth and bounced off Akane’s magic circle. It spread across the floor and lit the hangar on fire. She watched Erilyn and Marisol run to the stairs at the end of the catwalk, passing by an exit sign. With flames rushing up the wall, the dragon roared at the escapees and took one-step forward before Suzaku stood in its way. Glass shattered from the heat as the dragon stepped back and remembered who was inside the Golem. The smoke built around Suzaku and the dragon slinked into the darkness.

Blinded by the smoke, Suzaku tried to feel its way around. The fingers waved looking for a wall, the hangar doors to outside, anything, but nothing was around. With the sound of an avalanche, the dragon rammed into the Golem and they crashed through the wall. With the wall falling on top of them, Suzaku’s hands pushed the dragon’s head back as it snapped its drooling teeth.

Inside the cockpit, Akane saw Marisol and Erilyn on the left monitor, safe and jumping into the nearby jeep. As Erilyn drove

away, Akane turned her attention to the beast and her eyes grew wide.

The dragon curled its right forefoot into a fist. It pounded on Suzaku's chest, denting the metal. It slammed two more times but the plating held up. With a roar, the creature wedged its nails in the slit of the chest with both forefeet and tried to rip it open. Despite its determination, it failed to notice the magic circle formed under its belly by the palm of Suzaku's hands.

"SPEARS OF LIGHT!" A flurry of spears ejected from the circle and poked at the soft belly of the dragon. It sent the dragon into the air with blood dripping. Yet it still had the strength to fight on. Kicking the floor of the cockpit, Akane got Suzaku up to its feet. She watched the hangar burn, eaten by the flames.

"AKANE! LOOK OUT!" Marisol said through the radio, snapping Akane out of her distraction, just as the dragon's roar pierced into the cockpit.

Suzaku turned to the dragon and its hand rose up into the air. A magic circle grew just as the dragon's claws swiped at it.

"SONIC PULSE!" The burst of sound waves rippled in the air as if a pebble dropped into a pond. The impact bent the dragon's fingerlike claws back, and the screeching sound of the spell rattled its ears. The dragon stumbled on the grass, tearing the ground apart. With a roar, it flexed its claws, and shook it to fight the pain.

Inside, Akane curled her right hand into a fist and pressed the button on the palm. The pilot looked at the right monitor and did not see the Sabre come out of the arm. When she lowered Suzaku's arm, the dragon's tail appeared on the screen and she felt her Golem fall over.

The dragon flew high into the sky. It turned around with its throat glowing like a star lit in the night. The beast dove like a falling brick, straight for Suzaku. When it opened its mouth and spewed the liquid flame, the Golem rolled to the side. The dragon pulled up leaving behind a river of fire spreading across the grass. It gave light to the overpowering dark clouds above and attracted the attention of fighter planes in the distance.

"Akane." Erilyn said on the radio as she drove on the road past Suzaku. "Fall back so we can try to get the Sabre active."

"Okay." Akane said as she got her robot on its knees.

Marisol looked out the jeep's rear window and saw the jets chase the dragon as Suzaku stood up. The missiles exploded behind the Golem as it followed the jeep. Marisol tightened her grip on the seat as she heard the dragon's roar and saw it chase after her sister. Her lips moved with no sound saying hurry as the beast caught up to the Golem.

The dragon tripped Suzaku as the fighter planes rained bullets on its back. It flew after them with the reflex of a fly, and went high into the sky. It waited as one of the planes came toward it and fired another volley of bullets. The dragon spewed its liquid flame at the cockpit, spilling into the cockpit. It shifted aside as the plane spun to the ground and exploded. The dragon turned its head and saw the other fighter jet preparing to make a pass. The beast pushed itself over the plane and sliced one the wings off. The dragon watched the plane fly toward Suzaku as the Golem raised a shield up. The spell shattered the plane past the robot.

The dragon roared and dove for Suzaku as it picked up one of the wings from the debris. Just as the dragon neared, Suzaku stepped aside and swung the wing. The edge sliced the thigh of the beast, ripping its scales off, and wedged into the flesh. As the scales and blood rained down, Suzaku watched the dragon land to remove the metal with its claws. Before the Golem made its next move, a barrage of bullets, missiles, and Spears of Light showered the monster. Suzaku looked to the side.

There were two squadrons of green and red Golems approaching them. Unlike Suzaku, these Golems were bulky and slow moving like tanks. They do not have the same design as Suzaku nor do they rely on Mana to power the vehicles. The green Golems fired bullets and missiles, while the red Golems cast more Spear of Light spells using generic magic circles consisting of intersecting triangles. They overwhelmed the dragon as it ripped the wing out of its leg and forced it into a ground battle.

With the speed of a cheetah, the dragon circled around the Golems as the barrage from the two squads tried to keep up. But the beast had the advantage over the clumsy vehicles. Now behind them, it spewed its flames in a sweeping motion like a fire hose. It turned the metal white and one after another, each Golem exploded when the liquid flames reached the fuel lines. It stood tall behind the flames and roared with the lightning cracking the sky.

Inside Suzaku, Akane tried pressing the button to activate the Sabre with both her free hands. She felt heat building up around her and slipped her arms back into the Brace. The pilot looked at the monitor and saw the dragon's flames draw closer. Akane shifted her arms to make her Golem jump aside. She stared at the trail of liquid fire and felt a jolt in her seat. The monitors flickered for a moment. From what she saw, the ground seemed further away.

The dragon carried Suzaku in the air. Each punch and slap did nothing to the beast as it arc in the sky. Lightning flashed behind them and together, they free fall back to the earth. The dragon tightened its grip as it pushed the Golem into the highway, forming a crater and the impact bent the metal chest inward. With the dragon's mouth opened, Suzaku punched its nose, and the creature stumbled back. The strike was sensitive to the beast as it brushed its claw across its face and shook.

Suzaku sat up on its knees and found itself at the edge of the city. With Erilyn driving by, the Golem crawled after the jeep down the street. Each moving car stopped at intersections or veered off onto the sidewalk to get out of the way of the metal hands and feet. The people pushed their way into the buildings screaming, a stampede ensued.

"Are you alright?" Erilyn said at the microphone as she saw Suzaku sitting up against the building, leaning its back on the corner.

"I'm alright." Akane said inside as she saw the jeep drive around the corner. She was short of breath as the right monitor flickered in snow. She heard the sound of thunder outside and rain pounding on Suzaku's body, blinding her two good monitors. Akane removed her

hand from the Brace, pounding the damaged monitor to get it to clear up and instead, it turned off. She kicked her foot on the floor and crossed her arms, taking a moment to think of a strategy now. Akane turned Suzaku's body to the side and saw a couple of tanks and helicopters crossing the intersection. Akane changed the radio frequency to the military's and overheard them talk about engaging the dragon. It was a struggle for the soldiers as the dragon entered the city. Tanks destroyed. Helicopters crashing into buildings. Golems ripped apart. She switched the channel back and pressed her hands on her head. It was too much.

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Suzaku crawled to the nearby intersection. Just as the Golem looked around the corner, the dragon rammed it like a bull. They crashed into the building, the debris and people spilled over Suzaku. As the survivors ran out of the intact entrance, the dragon wrestled the Golem over most of the people. During the struggle, Suzaku patted the street and grabbed a small-parked car. It swung the vehicle onto the dragon's head. As the creature stumbled back and tripped over a tank, Suzaku picked up a delivery truck and threw it. It bounced off the dragon's head again and it lost its sense of direction. After the dragon shook its head, another magic circle appeared before Suzaku.

“ELECTRIC CLAW!” And a hand shot out of the circle. The fingers were made of electricity and wrapped around the dragon's neck, shocking the beast. It thrashed around the street, bashing its tail and head into the nearby buildings. When the spell ended, the dragon laid on the ground for a moment. It looked at the Golem, taking short breaths. The creature stepped back and crouched. It was ready to lunge forward as another magic circle appeared. Before the spell cast, the dragon took to the sky, but did not get above the buildings as fighter jets flew over it.

As the rain eased into a drizzle, Marisol and Erilyn watched from down the block. Suzaku waved them to move away as the Golem stepped back and turned to the corner of a building. Suzaku climbed up the side as tanks arrived. Everyone watched and whispered,

wondering what it was doing. Even the dragon tilted its head as the Golem waved for it to come. The people from within the building escaped as Suzaku's hand touched the roof, where the helicopters waited above. With the left arm raised, Akane prepared a spell.

The dragon flew toward Suzaku. It did not want to go above the roof and stayed low to get under the circle. In doing so, it gave Suzaku the high ground, allowing the Golem to feint the spell and jump off the building. The dragon did not have time to stop as the robot landed on its back. They both spun around through the air as helicopters followed them through the canyon of buildings. They punched and clawed at each other as the dragon pulled Suzaku under its belly. Suzaku held onto the right wing. When they spun one more time, the dragon yanked Suzaku hard, and the Golem accidentally pulled its wing off.

Suzaku and the dragon rolled out into the open, toward a nearby park. They crushed the passing cars triggering a pile up, and left behind an exploding fuel truck. The two slid along the wet grass and stopped before a pond. The dragon pinned down the Golem as the robot struggled to lift its right arm. With force, the claw slammed the right arm down, and a large serrated blade jolted out over the hand.

"The Sabre is active!" Erilyn said over the radio, while stopping the jeep at the park entrance.

The bullets from the helicopters struck the dragon's back. As the dragon pulled its head up and spewed its liquid fire at the helicopter, Suzaku's left arm was free. The Golem reached for a lamppost and ripped it off the ground. When the dragon finished and turned to the Golem, the post rammed right into it. The beast jumped off of Suzaku, as Akane saw the eyeball stuck on the lamppost. The dragon stumbled and rolled all over the grass. Wailing and crying from the pain until it stopped.

Suzaku wrapped its left arm around the dragon's neck and pulled its head back. With the Sabre, the Golem slid the serrated edge across the beast's neck and blood splashed all over the ground and pond. Suzaku stepped back as the dragon's roar gurgled and turned

on its back. Suzaku climbed on the belly as the creature moaned. It sounded like it begged for mercy. Mercy. Something this dragon and its family did not give when they attack the girls and their family. It did not care.

“i...’ Akane said. ‘I WANT OUR PARENTS BACK!’”

Suzaku stabbed the dragon's belly, once, twice, on and on, as Marisol stood beside the open door with her moth covered. With tears dripping over her fingers as her sister's inhuman screams blared out of the jeep's radio. Marisol stepped forward in a trance, her arms reaching out for her sister, wanting to comfort, seeking her comfort in return. She felt her arm tugged and saw Erielyn holding her back. Without hesitation, Marisol embraced her foster mother and cried.

The hind foot of the dragon twitched then stopped. Suzaku looked up at the sky, covered in blood. The Golem slid off the dragon and sat on its knees. As the military and first responders gathered around, the rain picked up and washed away the blood.

The chest opened up, struggling to open all the way. When the cockpit emerged, the military Golems lowered their weapons and watched Akane stand up with arms raised. Her eyes trembled in tears mixed with the rain, but she kept her composure and waited for the soldiers to do something. They turned their attention to the fallen dragon and walked away. Akane climbed down the ladder. She slipped on the wet grass and pressed her hands into the mud. Everything blurred, her hands looked distant and far away, but she felt arms wrapped around her body. When her sight cleared, there was Marisol and Erielyn hugging her.

She stared one last time at the dragon and closed her eyes, hugging her family tight.

The End.

