

# Arcana Magi Zero Arc 3 - c.2

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As the van drove through the town, Megumi watched the houses transition to businesses. With each streetlight passing by she could hear her mother and father in her memories. Megumi saw them in the front, her father driving and her mother in the passenger side. Outside the window, were people shopping and dinging. She found herself in school uniform. It was clear as day. Megumi had finished a participating in a school fair. Her parents were arguing. It was about her mother arriving late to the fair because of priestess duties.

Megumi turned to the night sky. The moon was brighter than she ever saw. The argument got louder as her smile shrunk into sadness. She planted her hand on window, pretending to grab the moon. The yelling changed from her parents voices to the Society's special team guiding her to the shrine. She saw Nocturne crawling within the shadows, their red eyes following the vans movement. Buildings overrun with these creatures. Each spell flashed at them and they dropped like bugs. A hand landed on Megumi and startled her. She turned to the side and there was Arturo — the crow resting on his lap — with concerned look on his face.

"Are you okay?"

"Dad..." Megumi's eyes shifted to the side. She was short of breath. "...I just... I thought about my parents. My mother missed the school festival and my father was mad at her."

Megumi looked forward at the driver's seat. "I watched them argue. Like you and mom... but, I missed it. It wasn't fun, I was upset, but I missed hearing their argument. It feels weird remembering them like that. Shouldn't I remember them happy?"

"Well yes, but its okay to remember the arguments as well." Arturo put his arm around Megumi. She leaned onto his shoulder. "Every memory you have with your parents, good or bad, should be

held tight. They are your precious memories Meg."

Megumi looked at another spell cast from the van pushing the Nocturne back. She tightened her grip.

"I'm so sorry this is happening. So many people are injured or dying."

"We've been through this. What you went through is not your fault." Arturo pulled her closer. "This Valdegaurd... she hurt you and Alysia. She did all of this to you and others as well. If wasn't for the fact that your souls are imprisoned in these shrines, your mother and I would take you girls far away from this war zone and help you two cope with what happened."

Megumi lifted her head up and saw tears well up in Arturo's eyes. She saw his hand curl up into a fist, his face wanting to hurt someone.

"They hurt my daughters. I can't forgive them."

Megumi pulled herself up, her hands holding onto him. She looked deep into his eyes and remembered her father making that face when he was protecting her. Her father's image replaced Arturo's.

"Father." She said in Japanese and Arturo turned to her. Her eyes blink and she saw Arturo instead of her father. She covered her mouth. "I'm sorry."

"I don't understand." Arturo said and Megumi took his hand with a smile.

"Father." She said in English, looking into Arturo's eyes.

The look on her face reminded Arturo of Alysia, a child looking up to her parent as someone special. "We're going to get through this Meg."

"The shrine is ahead." The driver said. "Get ready."

Megumi nodded and held the Tome of the Artisan to her chest. The doors opened, and the team cast spells driving back the Nocturne. Megumi stepped out of the door flipping through the pages. As her father stepped out of the van, her magic circle grew under her feet. She looked up the steps and saw darkness toward the main gate. There were vines along the stairs, old trees

splintered. She planted her hand over a drawing of a sword.

"Torako!" A katana sword rose out of the pages. It floated before Megumi. She grabbed and the tome floated beside her. She turned to Arturo as he held the crow.

"So, uh... transform?" The crow flew back and glowed. He turned into a large hammer. He stumbled back, holding the weapon, and his eyes grew wide. Arturo analyzed the weapon, trying to figure out where the crow is at.

"Dad." Megumi said getting his attention.

"Right." Arturo stood beside Megumi and the team led them up the stairs.

Flashlights shined bright onto the red eyes of the Nocturne lurking within the forest. Each spell cast drove some off. One reached out to Megumi and she sliced its arm off. Red blood spilled out. She stepped back bumping into Arturo from what she saw.

"Is that real?"

One of the flashlights shined at the Nocturne and they saw it was a human body hissing at them.

"My god." Arturo said.

"Is that... human?" Megumi looked at the team.

It lunged at one of the team members and tried to fight off, but they watched as the black skin grew over his body. Every stepped back as the man screamed from the pain, until it covered his body. His eyes opened red, and he hissed at everyone.

"Move it now!" The team leader said casting a spell at the former soldier knocking him down the stairs. Everyone ran up the stairs as fast as they could, pushing back each Nocturne they came across. They reached the top and stumbled upon a vine covered well. It reached over the well as if it grabbed it like hand.

The moon light shined bright and Megumi's eyes grew wide. The Shrine of Hikari was before them shining bright by the moon. The shrine's wood was grey and splintered, its age showed. Megumi's heart pulsed and she clutched it tight. She looked up at the doors beyond the fence taking a step forward. She collapsed to her knees.

"I'm in there."

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As the helicopter flew above the buildings, Alysia watched the streetlights become dotted lines. She saw movement in the shadows, but could not make out the shapes. The first thought was the Nocturne. Where did they come from? Why are they here? She tried her best going through her memories that collected the information from the Manasphere, yet the pain from there blanked out her mind. She tightened her grip on the staff and took a deep breath.

Alysia's body quivered from the experience there. Scanning every moment she could handle. The grey mist, the Arcadians, and Valdegaurd. She lifted her eyes — turning into a withdrawn state — and saw the reaction of the pilot and assigned team looking out the window. Alysia slowly turned to their direction and saw two flashes of light in the distance. Mayumi and Emi flashed in her thoughts and she snapped out of her trance.

"Alysia?" Marissa said with the little crow by her side. "Are you okay?"

"Is that them?" Alysia planted her hand on the window, and watched two streaks above rooftops bouncing off each other. Her right vibrated as she recalled the orichalcum and vermilion armors that Valdegaurd dressed her and Magumi's souls with. "Am I sensing the metals?"

Alysia turned to her mother, with her eyes twitching. "I hurt them."

"No." Marissa immediately took Alysia's hand. "You didn't hurt anybody."

"I hurt a lot of people."

"How many times am I going to tell you, it's not your fault?" Marissa looked deep into her daughter's eyes. "That Valdegaurd broad had no right to hurt you and Meg. The fact she laid her hands on you both... I want her head."

Alysia turned back to the window, the battle was further behind them now. "Will Mayumi and Emi understand?" Or are they going to be mad at us?"

"If they are your friends, they will listen and understand."

Alysia lowered her head and Marissa leaned close to get her attention.

"What were you doing just now?"

"I was trying to remember the Manasphere. Seeing what information I got from there that could help us. I can feel the pain from being in there."

"Don't do it again." Marissa said and Alysia lifted her head up towards her mother. "I don't want you hurting yourself any further."

"I have to do it mom. People are getting hurt." Alysia looked below. "Everyone down there, because of m— I mean the Arcadians. I can't sit here and wait."

"Look at me." Marissa grabbed Alysia's shoulders. "Stop trying to do things by yourself."

"But—."

"You think I don't know that you put so much on yourself. Not just with this, but with school and—." Marissa saw it Alysia's eyes, something she never saw in her. She placed her hands on her daughter's cheeks, gentle and calm. "You are not alone. You don't have to go through this alone."

"I know."

"No, you don't."

Alysia felt uncomfortable staring into her mother's eyes. Memories of the Manasphere crept into the surface of her of thoughts. Her heart pounded and lips trembled.

"Valdegaud?"

Marissa released Alysia — a startled motion — as the town fell behind them.

"We are now over the forest." The pilot said.

"Looked at the trees." The co-pilot said.

Everyone looked out the window and saw the helicopter's searchlight shine below. Forest's treetops were covered in stone. The moonlight helped provide more clarity. Everyone murmured at the sight of the devastation.

"This." Alysia said. "This is why I have to fight mom. This is why—"

Alysia turned around and Marissa hugged her. Alyssa's eyes grew wide, her fingers stretched out from the shock. Her pounding heart slowed into calmness. Her mother's hand slid over the back of her hair. She avoided crying again, but she felt her mother's arm pushing her to do so. Alysia's clenched her teeth, with a deep breath, and she pushed her mother back. Her eyes welled up in tears, but her face was focused.

"Thank you mom." Alysia looked around trying to find something to change the subject, but she choked up. "This costume... is nice. I have wings, even though they are small."

Marissa chuckled as she wiped her tears away. "You are my angel Alysia. You really looked like one."

Alysia and Marissa looked at each other on last time. "Mom, I know I'm going to be okay. It's hard, but I know I can make it... because... I know you, dad, and Meg are with me."

Marissa nodded and smiled.

"We found a safe place to land." The pilot said as the helicopter floated over the valley.

Alysia looked back and saw the town lights in the far distance. A dot in the darkness. She looked down where there was a grassy hill untouched by the pure Mana and nothing turned to stone. As it landed, a large magic circled appeared over the vehicle and large blast shot out. The helicopter exploded, sending a plume of smoke into the night sky. The area lit until darkness consumed it.

Suddenly, Alysia emerged from the smoke flying on her Mana Glider. She left behind her magic circle and her mother with the pilot's team inside a protective bubble. With the staff in hand, she scanned the area. She raised her staff over her hand and made a large ball of fire appear, it provided light and ninja scattered into the forest. Angered she was ready to release the spell until she heard Magumi's voice in her memories.

"People could get hurt."

Alysia looked down at her mother and the team. She calmed herself and recalled her Pyro Maelstrom spell. Alysia saw the torches of the shrine in the distance. The pure Mana was nowhere

near there. Alysia floated down to the team.

"Mom." Alysia said landing before Marissa. "The pure Mana is not surrounding the shrine. It's safe for us to go there without turning to stone. That's how those guys moved around and attack us."

"Good." The captain said as he signaled the pilot and co-pilot to suit up. "And thank you for shielding us."

As the captain walked to his team, Alysia turned to her mother. "I saw the shrine."

"It's okay. We'll get there. Don't worry."

"No, its not that. I think that spell that attack us was mine. It felt like Pyro Maelstrom."

Marissa pulled her head back as the crow landed on her shoulder. She and Alysia looked towards the shrine.

"I'm aware of my presence."

TO BE CONTINUED...

