

Arcana Magi Zero Arc 3 - c.4

by H-M Brown

Alysia followed the team down the hill. She stayed close to Marissa — who carried the crow-transformed bat — watching the pure Mana repel away from the group. It was unusual for her given what has happened to the life around them. It was quiet. No sound from animals or the rustling trees. Knowing that the enemy is nearby, it was hard to tell where they may be coming from. The only logical place they could come from was above the stoned treetops, since there was Mana everywhere.

“We're nearing the shrine captain.” One of the soldiers said and the captain signaled for everyone to stop.

With night vision goggles on the captain zoomed in on the shrine ahead. There was a clear path but his nerves got to him. “This may be a trap. Get your spells ready.”

Just as everyone channeled their Mana, a ninja dove from the sky and pushed himself into one of the soldiers in the rear. They both tumbled into the Mana screaming aloud. As soon as every turned around, another ninja dove onto another soldier and pushed themselves into the Mana.

Everyone ran. Just as the remaining team made it to the top of the hill, one more ninja pushed a soldier into the mist. Marissa watched on as they both turned to stone. She felt her arm pulled by the captain and she stumbled onto her knees. Marissa lifted her head up. There was the shrine. The sound of an explosion startled her, and there was the captain and three soldiers left, casting spells at the ninja.

Alysia lifted her mother up to her feet and held Saga over their heads.

“REFLECTOR!” A blast of energy bounced off the magic circle. The spell crashed into the treetops shattering the nearby Mukado

statues.

"What are those?" Marissa said.

"Mom! LOOK OUT!"

Marissa turned around and a ninja was in the air throwing a kunai knife at her. She swung the bat and deflected the knife back at the enemy. The force of the rebound pierced the ninja in the chest and he fell to the ground. Marissa's hand shook as realized what she had done. She looked at her right hand as another blast bounced off Alysia's Reflector spell.

"Are you okay mom?" Alysia looked back at her mother only with the corner of her eyes.

Marissa never saw that in her daughter. She now understood what Alysia has been going through as a Guardian. "Don't worry about me ffocus on the shrine."

"Right." Alysia turned her attention to the old structure while Marissa swung at the oncoming ninja and the team regrouped with them. She stared at the wooden fence and the house like structure containing her soul. Kurai's magic circle appeared in front if her. It was identical to Alysia's but colored purple. She made her magic circle appear and she channeled Mana. "AIR BLAST!"

Two burst of winds sprung out of both circles. It blew everyone around them back. One soldier and one ninja flew into the pure Mana. After the spell ended, Alysia jumped back. She thought about using the Mana Glider, but looking at the mist, she figured it may envelope everyone. Alysia recalled from the Manasphere that as long as she stayed on the ground, the Mana would stay repelled. Her options were limited.

"Everyone gather at the shrine!" Alysia planted her foot on the fence and captain understood. As he signaled everyone to gather, Alysia jumped the fence. She ran towards the door with Saga over pulled back. She swung the staff, striking the door. The shockwave pushed her back. Her head bumped the fence. Her vision blurred as her mother looked her in the eyes. Alysia saw a magic circle behind Marissa and she aimed Saga at it. "PROTECTOR!"

The impact created an explosion. Alysia and the team were safe,

but the ninja blew into dust, floating in the air. The Guardian stood up to her feet, standing in front of everyone as a shield. "ENOUGH KURAI! You're not going to win."

"I will." Her voice resonated in Marissa.

"Alysia?" Marissa's eyes grew wide hearing her daughter's voice within the shrine.

"Yes." She said. "After all these years... to hear you voice again... it hurts."

"Please." Marissa stood up and reached her hand out. "Return to your body and let's go home."

Kurai was silent. The captain signaled the rest of his team to prepare a spell. Alysia lowered Saga, showing no sign of threat.

"Alysia." Marissa said taking one-step towards the shrine. "I'm here for you. You don't have to go through this anymore."

"Hearing your voice hurts me."

"No... no baby I'm not hurting you. Valdegaurd is. Whatever she told you, is a lie."

The door opened. It was dark and empty. A bright light shined behind Marissa. She turned around and saw Alysia glowed.

"Step aside mother." Alysia walked forward. Ahead of her, a metallic hand clutched the wall of the shrine.

Marissa gasped. She watched Alysia's soul emerge in the vermilion armor. The body was ghostly, but had tactile form due to the outfit. It was like looking at cyborg. Marissa lost her footing and grabbed the fence to prevent herself from falling. The captain helped her up. "My baby. What have they done to her?"

Alysia approached Kurai twirling Saga. Her Mana channeled, she raised her staff at the sky. "STATIC STORM!"

Alysia stretched her left hand out at Kurai, and the electricity connected with her fingertips like beacon. Strands of electricity stretched outward at the goddess, but Kurai used her magic circle to absorb it.

"Weak." Kurai said unaware of Alysia's approach. She felt the impact of Saga striking her face. It knocked her back. Kurai looked at her shivering hand and realized she felt pain. "It can't be."

Kurai threw a punch and knocked Alysia back. She jumped to stomp on her, but Alysia rolled to the side.

Alysia kicked Kurai to the ground and her magic circle appeared. "AIR BURST!"

The blast knocked the goddess back, and her arm bled. Kurai growled as Alysia rushed at her. Using Alysia's momentum, she grabbed the Gaurdian's arm and flipped her to her back. She aimed a spell at her. "STATIC STORM!"

Alysia screamed at the surge of electricity. She curled her hand into a fist and grabbed Kurai's leg. They electrocuted each other. Alysia used Kurai as leverage to stand up. Arm in arm, increased the power of Static Storm to the point that they knocked each other back. Alysia opened her eyes and saw Kurai struggle to stand up. She hurried across the ground and grabbed Saga. On her feet, she stood over Kurai.

"I don't care if I destroy you." Alysia raised her staff and made a large fireball appear over her head.

"Without me, you will live your life without a soul."

"Then that shall be my apology to the lives we took."

"NO!" Marissa pushed the captain off and rushed to Alysia. She jumped her daughter, knocking Saga away from her. Grabbing her by the collar, Marissa stared Alysia down. "Don't you dare!? I'm not losing you like this!"

"Stay out of this!" Alysia and Kurai said together. "This is our problem!"

"This is everyone's problem!" Marissa turned to Kurai. "Come here!"

Her voice shook Kurai. The goddess had not heard such a tone in a long time. It was affecting her feelings and it built up anger. She approached them slowly. At first tears welled up looking at her mother, but when she looked at Alysia, she reached her hand.

Marissa took the goddesses hand. The metal was cold. She could feel her hair rise up. Suddenly, Marissa found herself pulled away from Alysia and she tumbled to the fence. She saw the captain looking outside the fence. Marissa turned around and saw the pure

Mana mixing with the impure Mana. This caught Kurai's attention.

"The experiment will soon be complete." She looked at Alysia reaching out for Saga. Kurai kicked her in the stomach. "It is over. Mother, I am coming home."

As Marissa turned around, Kurai pushed Alysia face down. She slid herself into Alysia's body replacing her Guardian outfit for the vermillion armor. Kurai stood up before Marissa, floating in the air. Her pupil-less eyes stared down her mother.

"Alysia."

"Yes mother." She floated toward her mother. Towering over her with a sense of dominance. She landed with the tip of her toes and looked right into Marissa's eyes.

"Let me help you." Marissa placed her hand on her daughter's cheek, but all she saw was cold eyes.

Kurai struck her mother in the stomach with a punch. She watched Marissa cover her stomach coughing. "You have no idea what I went through for all of this."

Kurai kicked Marissa. She made a magic circle appear under her mother's body. "LEVITATE!"

As Marissa floated in the air, blasts of magic spells knocked her back onto the footsteps of the shrine. She looked up and saw the captain and soldiers channeling Mana.

"AIR BURST!" A blast of air pushed the soldiers over the fence, and she put distance between herself and them. Kurai turned to Marissa and raised her finger into the air. She aimed her other hand with channeled Mana. "STATIC STROM!"

Electricity shot out and struck Marissa. She heard her mother scream and Kurai felt her own hand shivering. The goddess could feel Alysia fighting inside to stop her. She felt a tear fall down her cheek. "I understand."

Kurai stopped her spell and approached her mother.

"Alysia..." Marissa said. "... this isn't you."

"Thanks to Valdegaurd, I can see that fighting monsters, watching people die, having been turned to stone at the museum... it all hurts. But now, I have a chance to rid of that pain."

"It's okay to feel pain." Marissa said watching Kurai stand over her. She struggled to move from the Levitate spell. She felt the goddess hand caress her hair. "Everyone experiences pain. It's happens all the time, but as long as you have your father, your sister, and I... you don't have to go through pain alone."

Kurai waved her hand releasing Marissa. She sat on top her mother, the crow tried to distract Kurai, but she slapped him aside. Kurai looked at Marissa in the eyes. "I will be free from pain."

"Alysia don—" Marissa felt the metallic gloves wrapped around her neck. She placed her hands on her daughter's arms struggling to stop her.

Kurai just stared, with no emotion. She felt her hands tightening around the neck. It felt like it was shrinking. She watched Marissa's eyes rolled back. Every ounce of memory of her mother, the good and the bad, flashed before her eyes. From birthdays to getting in trouble to rooting for her in hockey to being scolded, it was rapid and fast until it all ended with them in a hug. Then she felt something snap.

Kurai blinked once and saw Marissa's eyes glazed over. There was no movement. She released her mother and watched her head shifted to the side. Marissa's body glowed. Kurai watched her hands cast the Heal spell against her will. She felt Marissa's chest rise up. The goddess jumped off the body, she lost control over her own. Tears fell down her cheeks like a cascading waterfall. She dropped to her knees and her magic circle appeared. It was teal instead of purple. She looked up at Marissa, and saw her tears falling, her body still immobile. Kurai saw her hands over the circle and the pain struck her heart like a needle.

"MOTHEER!" Kurai looked up in the sky, crying her heart out at what she did. Her lips quivered as she heard the name of the spell in her mind and shouted. "PURIFY!"

The magic circle slid over her body. The vermillion armor separated from Alysia's body. Her body glowed bright as she watched her soul float in the air. The armor collapsed from her soul, falling all around her. She had a moment of thought. With the

opportunity to destroy Kurai, her own soul, she thought of what it had done to Marissa. Alysia heard her mother's words in her memories.

"You don't have to go through pain alone."

Alysia raised her arms up and drew her soul back. It re-entered her body and her Guardian costume returned. As the captain and soldiers tended to Marissa, Alysia looked to her mother. The captain made a temporary neck brace and Marissa raised her arm a little. Alysia crawled quickly to her. She buried her face in her mother's chest crying aloud.

"I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry."

Marissa planted her hand on Alysia's head and felt her daughter startle. Her eyes shifted to the captain and struggled to speak. "I can't... feel my legs..."

Alysia raised her head up, her tears dripping onto Marissa's clothes, eyes red from crying. Her face crumbled and she rested her head facing Marissa. Looking directly at her mother's eyes, Alysia saw her smile, a sign of relief. Breathing heavily, she struggled to understand why her mother was happy until she heard her words.

"You're... safe now..."

TO BE CONTINUED...

