

Arcana Magi Zero - c.3

by H-M Brown

Alysia and Megumi flew in the air behind the fireflies. Below them, they heard screams. Within the darkness were red eyes moving about. Each set were of various sizes, worse, some set came in different numbers. Alysia tried to focus on what was important, but it was too much to bear. She was ready to dive down when a shot of wind blew past her, causing her and Megumi to lose control over their gliders. Once they straightened themselves, they heard a loud caw above them and watched a pair of eyes splash into the barrier above providing other people's Mana to the vortex underneath the city. The mist was like a tiny plume of dust in the sky.

"I have to help the people." Alysia said looking down.

"It's pointless." Megumi said looking up.

"It isn't right."

"And if you get yourself caught, how are you going to save the city?"

"I... I don't know, but it's better than hearing them suffer."

"I understand." Megumi turned to Alysia. "But they're chances are better if we don't get hurt and destroy the source of this problem. Besides, I'm sure the other Magi are doing their best in their areas throughout the city. Maybe some are trying to figure out what is going on."

"We don't know that." Alysia go close to Megumi's face. "Maybe they ended up like the people below."

"Lys, Newark is very big. Do you really think the two of us can save the entire city?"

Without saying a word, eyes locked into Megumi's, Alysia dove down to the street below. She channeled her Mana, raising Saga over her head. Alysia was about to cast her spell, when she felt something attached to winged armor. She felt the feathers stretch back and her body flew back with force. Unable to see what was going, she felt herself swimming inside a pool. No time to scream,

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she pulled herself to the surface. Alysia started feeling weak. Her Mana pulling away from her body. Her skin tingling from the thick liquid she swam in. Its scent disrupted her senses. Her hair and clothes pulled down by the pool. She knew she had Saga in hand, but she could not lift her arm up.

There was motion. The sound of thumping at first, but before she knew it, the monster roar. Alysia saw the outside for a moment. There was a flash of light; it was Megumi's spell. Then it closed. She realized she was in the mouth or close to it. When she focused her Mana, she felt it taken away. Her heart raced from the sensation. It was as if someone pulled her arm to rip it off. The pain made her memory flash to the Sacred Trunk at the Shrine of Four Mythic Beasts. She saw an image of the trunk for a brief moment. Alysia clutched her hair screaming out loud, shutting out the memory immediately.

Unsure of what was happening outside, Alysia felt the creature moving downward. She did not know which direction the pool fell, but she felt herself landing onto a surface. Alysia smelled the fresh air. Four fireflies flew around her, in a pool of thick liquid, stretching it when she lifted her arms up. When Megumi landed, Alysia cried. She punched the ground, splashing the goo around. She saw Megumi's hand reached out to her, she slapped it away. Alysia stood on her feet, looking at the monster with the big flaming hole in its stomach. It had three legs and was froglike. The flames showed the Mana seep out of its belly, she wondered which of that was hers. Alysia picked up Saga and closed her eyes.

"I'm sorry Meg." She took a deep breath. "I should have listened."

Alysia turned to Megumi and saw blood on her sister's costume. There was a tear in the costume by the waist. The slit of the wound was long but not wide-open to the point of blood loss. Alysia watched Megumi resist the pain. They both reached out to each other wanting to help ease each other's pain, but they dropped their arms.

Megumi saw the thick liquid oozing down Alysia's tattered wings and body. The liquid showed no sign of drying up on her sister's

costume and body. It concerned her when she saw how Alysia struggle to stay standing. She grabbed Alysia's wrist, ignoring her wounds, pulled her sister out of the pool, and with her mind, controlled the fireflies to find a fire hydrant. They followed the fireflies around the corner and found one.

Without hesitation, Megumi used Fable to create a large wrench. She twisted the hydrant open and water gushed out, but very little. She saw Alysia stand there with a lost look, almost as though she did know where they were. Placing her hand on Fable, Megumi focused her thoughts on the water in the hydrant. With all her strength, with as much Mana as she could muster, she got more water to come out. The spray splashed Alysia, it made her scream from the cold.

“Quickly bathe yourself.”

“I can't, it won't come off.” Alysia suddenly felt the liquid peeling off like sunburned skin. She pulled the clumps off her faces and legs. Whatever she could remove from her clothes. “I can't reach the back.”

Megumi stopped the water. She walked over to Alysia and turned her sister around. She pulled the now dried ooze off the winged armor. Megumi carefully pulled it off Alysia's hair. A light tug made her sister yelp.

“Sorry.”

“I don't want to lose my hair.”

The sound of a loud siren blared from the distance. There were lights around the corner. The girls looked to their right and saw a police car slowly driving by. The brightness showed the entire area covered in the thick liquid like a spider web. There were people of all ages hanging on walls inside the ooze. Some moaned and struggled to move.

“Are both of you all right?” A woman said from megaphone of the police car.

The girls ran over with the fireflies following them and an officer stepped out of the car. They stood before her, seeing the look on the woman's face. The adult's eyes tried to comprehend what she was looking at. It was like another world to her.

“Officer.” Alysia said getting the woman's attention. “You have to tell everyone about this.”

“I don't understand.”

“You need to tell everyone not to go to the edge of the city.”

“Edge of the city?”

“Yes.” Megumi said while Alysia nodded. “You can fall off the edge and die.”

“Are you injured?” The officers said to Alysia looking at the girl soaked in water.

“I... I feel weak, but I'm okay. It's my sister, she got hurt.”

The officer saw Megumi's injury and went into the car to get a first aid kit. She covered Megumi's wound with patch, as the teen cringe. One look at the girl's costumes threw off the officer as to what she was seeing. Instantly, her one thought was to get the children out of the street. She grabbed the back door and opened it. She immediately rushed them inside. The officer grabbed the radio looking out at the horror down the street.

“This is Officer Brooks. I am at Clinton and Ridgewood. The entire area is just like over at Ironbound. I found two survivors, girls around their teens. There may be others but the area looks inaccessible.”

“Tell them about the edge of the city.” Alysia said but the officer ignored her as Megumi wince, resting her head on her sister's shoulder.

“We'll send a unit down right away Brooks. Bring the children to the hospice.”

“Roger that.” Brooks moved the car, looking back at the girls with her rear view mirror. “Don't worry girls, you'll get medical attention at the hospice, and you can explain everything that happened to the National Guard and the FBI at there.”

* * *

Marissa and Madam Mayweather found themselves at Market and Mulberry Streets. There was devastation everywhere. Footprints as large as cars. Vehicles flipped over. People lied on the ground unconscious. It was a war zone. Marissa held onto her bat

with trembling hands. She kept up with Mayweather, noticing how calm the old woman was. Her face reminded her of Alysia and Megumi. How calm they looked. No emotion expressed whatsoever, yet she could see it in their eyes just as she saw in Mayweather's, pain. If not pain then some sort of experience that could not be said.

"You have something in mind Mrs. Perez?" Mayweather walked down Mulberry Street.

"I was thinking about how much you look like my daughters."

"Oh? How so?"

"You look like you have something you want to say, but you can't."

"Is that what is happening to your daughters?"

"Yes." Marissa walked beside Mayweather. "They went to Japan without me or my husband knowing, and they came back different. Like..."

Mayweather stopped to give Marissa a chance to think.

"Like they are different people now."

"You mean like they were switch with someone else."

Mayweather resumed walking.

"No I mean like their personalities changed."

"An experience can change a person, Mrs. Perez."

"But not to the point of trauma."

"Trauma is an experience. It will always change people from who they once were."

Marissa went silent. She tried not to think like that. She refused to believe that her daughters changed in that manner. That they both were these, happy girls who enjoyed life like other children.

"Do not live in denial Mrs. Perez."

"I'm not. It's just that, they're little girls. I know they want to talk to me. I ask them all the time, but it's like they're not there."

"You're pushing yourself on them, instead of letting them express their feelings at their own pace. You still see them as tiny fragile children."

Mayweather walked by people lying on the ground, shivering beside cars. She knelt before a man with her light to his face and he

just stared out into nothingness. No liveliness from him.

"Your daughters are no longer wearing tutus and handling dolls, they are now wearing dresses and handling tampons."

"What do you know?!" Marissa said as Mayweather stood up.

"Enough to watch my own children grow up and I never realized how mature they got."

Marissa stood there, her eyes staring outward as Mayweather walked away. She snapped out of it and hurried behind the old woman. Walking beside her she asked a question.

"What happened?"

"My boyfriend and I were Purged when I lived in Japan."

"Purged?."

"A very dangerous spell. It's like Purify but crippling to mind." Mayweather saw a pair of red eyes down the street, not noticing them passing the intersection. "Purge strips a person of all emotion. When I lived in Japan, the cultures were changing between generations. The adult Magi were tired of the teens embracing foreign culture, even dating foreigners, and not doing as they were told. The push back from the youth movement reached a point where the adults wanted to use the spell called Purge on the Magi kids throughout all of Japan to bring them in line, but Satoshi and I, we couldn't let that happen, and we took the hit ourselves."

"You mean... you and..."

"Satoshi."

"Satoshi had the Purge spell cast on you."

"Yes." Mayweather stopped as she felt Marissa's hand gently hold her arm. She did not turn to the young woman, but she did at least place her hand, patting Marissa's hand. "If you must know, I do scream in my head when I try to feel."

"I'm sorry." Marissa walked ahead of Mayweather and stopped. She covered her mouth holding back her tears. "My girls."

"I assumed they tried talking to you." Mayweather saw Marissa nod. "Did anything they said make sense?"

"No actually, they look they wanted to talk but can't say what was on their minds. I think they gave up trying to tell me. I even

took them to psychiatrist and... I think we're missing something."

"What about their expressions?"

"Silent. Like they put on a brave face."

"When you see them again, just ask them to tell you whatever it is that is on their minds. No matter how they can explain it, just have them tell you as best as they can describe it. Be sure to have a pad and write it down. No matter how weird it sounds, like if they say they saw rabbit or they felt their skin burn, right that down, it could be a metaphor."

"A metaphor." Marissa looked to Mayweather.

"Sometimes, experiences are hard to described, so people try to use the closest object or living being that could best describe the experience of what they saw. It is not meant to be literal, but what their mind could grasp it. From what I am understanding, they saw something or dealt with something that their minds couldn't handle. It's what we call a Mind Break. The memory is there but too hard to comprehend."

"Is it like PTSD?"

"It is part of it, but unlike Shell Shock it's more of a 'losing yourself to the madness' than trauma."

Marissa remembered seeing Alysia's side of the bedroom clean and straightened. She thought it was Alysia just growing up, but now she wondered.

"You thought of something?" Mayweather said continuing to walk down the street.

"Alysia is cleaning her side of the room now."

"Anything unusual."

"I don't know, I never paid attention."

"When you see her room, look for any unusual pattern to her organization. Look for something in common, a theme."

"Okay." Marissa looked at Mayweather with a smile. "Thank you."

"uuh... youth."

As Marissa had her eyes forward, Mayweather looked up at the sky and can see it very clearly now. Mana splashed in the air, cascading down the side of the barrier. Her thoughts assumed that

Mana is being collected, but she found it odd that this is the process to do so. The sound of crunching on the floor made her and Marissa stop. Aiming her light spell to the floor, Marissa picked up a rock. Mayweather took the rock and held it close to the light.

“What is it?” Marissa said, receiving it from Mayweather.

“A stone eye.” Mayweather expanded the light's strength and ahead of them was sea of human statues. Some intact, others in pieces. She sniffed the stone and her eyes lowered. “Burnt flesh.”

“They're dead.” Marissa said stepping behind Mayweather hearing the crunching sounds of the stones. “I thought Stone Spells put people to sleep.”

“Stone Spells vary based on the user's intent. However this isn't a Stone Spell.”

“It's not.” Marissa turned to Mayweather and saw shaking her head negatively.

“No.” Mayweather tightened her grip on the stone eye. “It's drained Mana. This is a set up.”

TO BE CONTINUED...

