

Arcana Magi Zero - c.4

by H-M Brown

Outside the car window, Alysia and Megumi saw dozens of people walk along the street. The police lights kept the area bright. Like an endless sea, there were nothing but people, helping each other, families trying to stay together, and Samaritans helping the sick and injured. As Officer Brooks slowly navigated around the people with the sound of the sirens parting the sea, Alysia turned to Megumi with exhausted eyes. The level of despair projected from the crowds lent a sense of helplessness that she had never felt before. Her hands curled into a fist, shaking in frustration, wanting to say what she felt with all the powers she possessed. Yet Megumi placed her hand on Alysia's fist, her head shaking no. She could tell. Megumi leaned close to Alysia's left ear to speak.

"I know what you're thinking, but we can't expose our powers."

"I think we're a little past that." Alysia said looking Megumi in the eyes.

"I understand. We need to help these people but—"

"But nothing." Alysia looked out the people. "Why should we care what they think of us? We're the ones who stand between that vortex under the city and them."

"Is everything okay?" Officer Brooks said with her eyes looking at the rear view mirror.

"Everything is fine." Megumi said rubbing her wound.

"Don't worry we're just one block from the hospice."

Ahead of the car are bright lights. The car passed tents and emergency vehicles. There were lights everywhere, aimed at every possible angle imaginable. EMS Workers pulled out a gurney with an injured woman resting on it followed by husband and son. An army truck open the back door, and soldiers aided people out. Officers asking victims questions. It was surreal to the girls. It was bigger than they could imagine.

"Is everyone from the entire city here?" Alysia said.

"We don't know. We took a ten-block radius as soon as we learned

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about these things running around the city. This is by far the safest area you could ask for." The car pulled up to a soldier waving to stop. Officer Brooks lowered the window. "I have to minors separated from their families."

"Lot C." The soldier pointed and Officer Brooks drove off.

"We're actually sisters." Megumi said.

"Oh?" Officer Brooks said. "I use to have sister's too, before we went off college."

"No, no..." Alysia said. "we are actually sisters."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean—"

"It's okay." Megumi said. "It happens."

"So why did you become a cop?" Alysia said.

"Well..." Officer Brooks said turning the left. "I didn't know what I wanted to do when I graduated high school. I wasn't interested in college despite my parent's wishes, but I also didn't want to waste my life away. I just... wanted to do something productive rather nothing at all."

"I don't get it."

"It's okay." Officer Brooks looked at Alysia through the rear view mirror. "I don't think anybody knows what they really want until they actually see something."

Officer Brooks pulled up to Lot C where there were children lined up at the entrance of a tent. She got out of the car and opened the door up to let Alysia and Megumi out. The kids in line gave looks to the girls, since they both stood out in their tattered costumes. They felt out of place as they stood in the back. Officer Brooks talked to a man and woman in Kevlar armor. They both look like they are from S.W.A.T. Alysia squinted her eyes and recognized the emblem on the sleeve of the shirt.

"Meg, it's the Society."

"Great. That's the last thing we need." Megumi said as the members approached them.

"Come with us."

"Why?" Alysia said and she Megumi took a step forward with the kids in line.

"I am Jonathan Briggs and this Lucinda Walsh. We are from the Society and we have questions to ask."

Megumi immediately smiled as she and Alysia followed the line forward.

"What a coincidence that we are meeting you here? What question can we answer right here in front of all the kids and cops?"

"Now." Briggs said tapping Megumi's wings.

Alysia and Megumi looked at each other taking one more step on the line. With a shrug, they stepped off and followed the Society. They passed by Officer Brooks waving at her and she returned the wave. The group entered a tent and inside there was a map of Newark on the table. Walsh lowered the tent entrance and Briggs placed his hands on the table.

"You're both the Guardians of Four Mythic Beasts." Briggs said as Walsh stood behind the girls.

"You must have confused for someone else." Megumi said.

"We saw the cave. That's why we can identify you. We know you are in communication with the Priestesses."

"We just want to ask a few questions that's all." Walsh said.

"Well I won't." Alysia said crossing her arms. "Until you tell us what's going on."

"We believe that the problem that is happening here may have a connection with the Priestesses at your shrine. We have agents and other Magi available searching the city to find out what is causing all this, but we're turning up with nothing."

"So you've been to the edge?" Megumi said.

"We're working our way there, but we're caught up with fighting the Nocturne."

"So that's what they're called."

"Yes."

"Have you girls been to the edge of the city?" Walsh said and Alysia tilted her head without turning around.

"Yeah. How about an info exchange?"

Briggs and Walsh looked at each other and nodded.

* * *

Mulberry Street was once filled with people. Just going about themselves; day to day, minding their business. To school, to work, to deliveries, or to personal priorities, it all came to halt. What Marissa saw was unlike anything she experienced in her life. Yes, she remembered Alysia tell her about how everyone was turned to stone, including herself, but it was just a faint memory. A dream like state Marissa cannot recall as an experience, unlike her daughter. With each step, her hear raced, with each step, her mind could not comprehend, with each step, she passed people who were turned to stone. It was like walking through a museum, men, women, and children. Except, what pained Marissa with her eyes, is that their bodies were contorted and faces frozen in screams. She wondered if that was what she looked like to Alysia in the Museum. She wondered if these people had a chance to return to normal.

"How did this happen?" Marissa said to Madam Mayweather, whom mumbled under breath and did not answer. "Can they return to normal?"

Madam Mayweather shook her head negatively while maintaining her concentration. Not even the tipped over baby carriage shook the old woman, but it left Marissa eyes welled with tears. She passed the stone woman, she assumed was the mother. With hands over her chest, she felt like she was in another world. It was Newark despite the skies above, but it was some otherworld.

"I want to go home." Marissa said as Madam Mayweather turned around and planted her hands on Marissa's blouse.

"Armor Up." A flash of light flickered over the surface of the blouse. Nothing changed nor looked different. Marissa could not understand. "We're getting close to the center and the area is intensifying."

Red eyes watched the women intently from the distance. Madam Mayweather's illuminated spell kept them at bay, but they were getting closer. Their hissing louder and their presence bolder.

Marissa lifted up the enchanted bat, her hands shook on the neck. She did not know what to do if they attacked. All she could do was keep up with Madam Mayweather as they turned one more

corner with the center ahead of them.

"We're here?" Marissa said looking back at the Nocturne following them.

"Ignore them. They no longer have a chance."

"But they've been nipping at us since we've been getting closer."

"All you have to do bash them if they get too close."

"How can you be so calm?"

"I'm not." Madam Mayweather took out a piece of yellow paper that was cut into a circle. "I'm just not ready to die."

Madam Mayweather stopped in the middle of the intersection. She looked up at the sky as Marissa flinched her bat at the first Nocturne the got close to them. Madam Mayweather nodded. She planted the paper on the street and took a step back.

"I have to stop my Luminescence spell to start casting Sunshine. The problem is that the spells light won't stop them from moving."

"So they're going to attack?"

"Yes."

"And you were going to this all by yourself?"

"I was going to cast a small quick action Sunshine spell, it would have been weak but done its job. Now that I have you, I can make a bigger Sunshine spell that should penetrate even the windows."

"Okay, so I just have to fight them."

"I gave the enchantments enough time for you fight them off and allow me to concentrate."

"I'm not sure I'm ready for this."

"Neither am I." Madam Mayweather said and Marissa turned her head. "So let's get this over with."

A large magic circle appeared underneath the paper circle in the center with a small section set underneath Mayweather designating her spot. A barrier pushed Marissa away from Madam Mayweather and kept her outside of the spell. It was then that the Luminescence spell ended sending everything around them in darkness save for the blue light of magic circle.

The first Nocturne attacked. Marissa swung her bat striking the cat like monster in the face. The strike sent it tumbling back into the

crowd of red eyes. The numbers were staggering, but the first strike she made had an odd effect on her mind. Marissa could not believe she took down a monster. With a single gulp of the throat and long deep breath, Marissa concentrated, lifting the bat up as though she was ready to hit a baseball.

Three Nocturne made unified attack. A single swing to the right most doglike monster pushed it aside onto its partners right into a building. A loud screech from the sky distracted Marissa, and bull like horse Nocturne trampled over her body like doll. She coughed up blood, nursing her waist, until she saw a large bear like Nocturne heading for Madam Mayweather. Without realizing it, she slammed the bat naturally to the ground. The act was like second nature, and shockwave ripped the street apart, the pulse pushed the Nocturne away from the spell.

Marissa took short breaths. Her eyes wide at what she did. The Nocturne were still moving toward her and Madam Mayweather, and she felt confidence ride up her spine and into her mind. She could feel her instinct racing as she knew what strategy to take to stop them. Marissa bashed the bat onto the street and it collapsed under the feet the Nocturne plummeting them into the dark abyss. Flying Nocturne swung over her and Madam Mayweather. She saw the Magi flinched from the flyover. Marissa ran around the circle and swung her bat across the air, creating a large shockwave. It pushed aerial Nocturne into the nearby buildings breaking the façade apart. She looked back past the spell and saw more red eyes building up, ahead were another new set of red eyes.

She looked around overwhelmed, feeling despair when she saw the stone statues of a family. A man, his wife, and two children. Dead. That was when everything slowed down for Marissa. Her mind now realized why Alysia and Megumi fight. Why her daughters came home injured, both physically and mentally. This family she was looking at, falling apart into pieces by a tentacle gorilla like Nocturne, they did not deserve to die. They did not deserve to suffer. Everything went silent for Marissa, the pain she felt no longer mattered when compared to this families. Everyone's pain.

Marissa's grip tightened on the bat, and without thought or question or doubt, her next swing vaporized the gorilla-like Nocturne leaving behind only Mana. Every single swing she made from that point forward, killed a Nocturne. She bashed the bat over the head of one, decapitating it. Another swing made the leg of a Nocturne turn in different direction. She was slash in the back, a light wince was brief, and she resumed bashing the creature. Sweat soaked her body, blood dripped from her wounds, none of that mattered. None of that felt at all. Her roar with strike reached the sky as pillar of light shot out of the magic circle. Marissa never let up her attack, as the pillar grew wider.

"SUNSHINE!" Madam Mayweather stepped out of the circle guiding a dome surface. That surface was similar to the sun. Its searing heat held in check by the magic circle. Its' light revealed the horrific appearance of the Nocturne that ingrained in Marissa's mind. She could not scream, she could not close her eyes, or shut her mind. A small sized sun rose behind her and the Nocturne scurried to find a shadow. Many Nocturne jumped out of the buildings around them to escape the light. Marissa dropped to her knees as looked up at the sun rising above the city. Her tears dripped off her face like raindrops off a leaf. All she had left on her mind was Alysia and Megumi.

"I want my children back."

The sun rose above the city, large enough to make every Nocturne scramble to the only place that has darkness, beyond the barrier. With the sun's rays projecting outward, a strange warp appeared. Madam Mayweather saw it focused toward the sky.

"So that is the source of the problem," Madam Mayweather said. "and it is not far from us."

Marissa stood to her feet. Her eyes had a hardened look, the bat tapping her palm. She did not say a word. It was enough for Madam Mayweather to know what she wanted. Together they went to the source of the whole problem.

TO BE CONCLUDED...

