

Arcana Magi Zero + Pure - c.10

by H-M Brown

A female voice spoke.

“Will you witness the end of time?”

Tomiko walked one step at a time. She ignored the Society troops marching in squads out of the shrine grounds.

“Will you witness the beginning of time?”

Tomiko walked one step at a time. She ignored the police guiding people further into the shrine grounds.

“Will you witness the now of time?”

Tomiko walked one step at a time. She ignored the animals within the forest of the shrine grounds.

The last questions she heard her mother read to her as a child. It was a memory she held onto, and repeated over and over, as her thoughts tried to grasp her loss. Her heart kept pounding. Her tears struggled to break free. All she could do was take one step at a time. Into the forest.

The warped sun in the sky still gave the forest its light. Tomiko did not feel lost. Although she struggled to understand what was going on around her, she knew where she wanted to go. The brushing of bushes nearby did not faze her. When she looked up at the sky, she saw orbs connected by a wave of ruby light across the city. She stared at it as she walked forward, unaware of her surroundings.

Tomiko stumbled onto a path. She looked left. She looked right. Nothing but forest in either direction. Ahead of her was a slope further into the forest. It looked grey. She stared at the grey forest. It was hypnotic. Another world. It did not fascinate her. It was made from the grey mist. The very mist that enhanced the Nocturne and gave new powers. Powers that wiped her family.

Tomiko approached the stone forest as more of her memories

repeated the fact that it was people who created the grey mist. People who brought the Nocturne. Her mind repeated that someone did this. All of this. Her mind paid no attention to where she was going and she found a small path. It guided through the stone way to an opening.

Before her was a pond of grey mana, to guards, scientists and Mrs. Saito. No one noticed her until she stood at the pool's edge. The grey mana rested in the ground. She found herself surrounded by adults, their voices muffled as she stared at the pool. It grew distant for a moment. More voices emerged and she looked up. She saw Takashi and Ayane hurry to her side. She saw their faces, filled with concern, calling out to her. Then everything went silent, and she heard one voice, a male voice, speak clear.

"Is this where the fall of Arcadia begins?" Darius and Myriana startled everyone and they looked at the pool of mana.

"Fascinating." Myriana approached the pool and the guards aimed their magic guns at her. "It's stable. None of the other grey mana stayed exposed for this long."

"Step away from the pool." One of the guards said.

Myriana ignored him. "Perhaps maybe it's due to the sacred land. Its spiritual properties are maintaining."

"Yes." Darius nodded. "It may be. But first..."

The Arcadians looked at the children and adults. The Society and Mrs. Saito.

"You're..." Mrs. Saito said. "You're the Arcadians I heard about."

The scientists hurried to the other side of the pool and stood in front of the Ayane, her friends and their families.

"Mrs. Saito." Keiko said stepping forward but the scientists raised their arms up. "I overheard them. They are searching for an Arcadian that betrayed them. If they capture the Arcadian, they will rip their soul out, just like the Akamatsu twins."

Mrs. Saito waved to the guards. "Seize them."

Goro turned to the adults. "We need to get out of here."

Mrs. Nakamura called out to Ayane and Takashi. "Bring your friend here and let's get out."

Mrs. Saito looked at the scientists. "Protect the civilians. Get them out of here."

"Yes ma'am." The scientists waved the families to leave.

Tomiko looked up at the sky and saw it warping. She stopped. Everyone looked back and Ayane tried to move Tomiko forward. It got Myriana's attention.

Mrs. Saito saw Tomiko. "Oh no."

"Darius, she's the one."

"Look, Myriana."

Everyone looked up and saw the dome fighting to stay stable.

"Arcadia will rise. Valdegaard shall reign."

"Keep the child aw—." Myriana's eyes grew wide as a spell flashed in her face.

Mrs. Saito channeled her mana again and the guard fired magical bullets at the Arcadian's legs. The bullets bounced off their barriers unaware of Tomiko resisting to move.

Tomiko was not sure who these Arcadians are, but she can see the pool of grey mana ahead behind her. She knows that it will give her magic, just like Ayane. Another flash of memory visualized her mother reading a book to her. An image of a girl with a magic wand opening a door was on the page. Her mother spoke. "Petra used her spell to travel back in time to see the dinosaurs."

Tomiko watched Myriana's spell pierce the soldier in the stomach, Mrs. Saito and the other guard started to retreat while fighting back. The pool was there before her as she felt Ayane's hands pulling her away. "Will you witness the now of time?"

"What?" Ayane said. She felt Tomiko's hands break free. "NO!"

Tomiko leaned over the pool. She felt Keiko's gloved hand grab her. Tomiko slipped through her fingertip. A spell came towards her from Darius, but it bounced off and cracked a magical shield. Tomiko turned her body around and saw Ayane's hands up, protecting her and Keiko trying one more time to reach her with a spell. All she saw was grey mist, and Ayane diving in with arms stretched out to her. Tomiko's eyes welled into tears as Ayane hugged her, and they both disappeared in the grey mist.

* * *

Alysia and Megumi led, Emi and Mayumi down the hallway. They crouched before the windows, looking out at a plaza with a fountain in the middle and cherry blossom trees. The girls looked at Mayumi and she cracked a smile.

Emi spoke. "Why a school?"

"The last thing I remembered was that show you and I watched a long time ago. I never forgot most of the layout."

Megumi waved at the twins. "Focus. I see Victoria."

Everyone peeked out the windows and looked across the plaza to the other side of the school. It was another hallway, and there was Victoria leading Karin Mayweather behind her.

Mayumi spoke. "Is that your friend Alysia?"

The twins turned to the Perez sisters and saw their eyes tremble. They took a second looked and realized what happened to Karin. She was wearing the same outfit they wore as goddesses. Karin was in armor. She stopped and looked out the window in their direction. The girls ducked.

Alysia looked at Megumi. "Did she see us?"

"I hope not."

"What did they do her?"

"The same thing they did to us." Megumi looked at the twins. Their eyes showed readiness for their next move. "Listen carefully. Karin has cancellation, disruption, and suppressive spells."

Alysia examined Saga. "If she hasn't added anything new."

"We're in trouble if did."

Mayumi gripped her pendant. "Do we have a chance?"

Alysia crawled ahead. "If she's anything like our world's Madam Mayweather, then we have no chance."

"Lys!?" Megumi jerked her head as she saw on Alysia's eyes. Her sister rubbed the back of her head and remembered the injury she got fighting Karin. "It's not her fault. Whatever it is that Valdegaard is up to, she got to Karin. We have to reach out to her just out parents did."

"Yeah..." Alysia looked out the window and saw no one there.

“Mayumi, I don't know if that pendant idea of yours will work, but I hope those furballs hurry up and them to us.”

“They will. We just need to stall out. It will increase the magical strength of your armor. Like steel, sort of.” Mayumi stood up to her feet.

“So you don't know.”

“We will soon.” Mayumi touched her pendant and close her eyes. “WINDS OF CHANGE!”

A cylinder barrier slide around Mayumi. Her magic appeared over her head and it slid over body replacing her school uniform with her combat outfit instantly. A gust of wind flew around her yellow boot and white knee length socks. The wind brushed over her white shorts covering her green and yellow long sleeved leotard. The gust flipped under her white short-sleeved jacket and slipped between her small yellow gloves. The wind pushed her hair and twisted it into a tail bound by a yellow and green ribbon.

Emi chuckled at Mayumi.

“What?”

“You still have that outfit?”

Mayumi pointed at her pendant on her chest. “This recorded all the outfit spells I had gathered since I met Natsume. It even includes my outfit from the Vermillion Armor, only without the armor.”

Alysia looked at the corner of the hallway. “Quiet. Retreat back to the faculty room.”

Alysia held Saga up as Megumi grabbed her book Fable and walked past the twins. The Perez sisters kept the twin in between them watching ahead and behind. They ran down the hallway when they heard a voice.

“Disruptive Wave!”

A ripple in the air struck Emi and Alysia. Their bodies rippled in the air. The spell passed through their bodies like water through sponge. Their mouth s screamed but no sound projected and they dropped to their knees. As they breath heavily and gripped their chest, Karin stepped between them and their sisters. Alysia looked

up as her friend stood over her. She saw Karin dressed in the armor over her leotard; her metal boots looked like a bird's feet, the metal gloves were claws and the metal floating behind her back sparked electricity. The jewel containing Karin's soul rested on her chestplate.

"Karin." Megumi said as Mayumi channeled her mana.

"AIR—"

"Cancel!" Karin waved her hand at Mayumi and the spell ended. Mayumi stepped back in shock and Megumi stood in front of her.

"Karin, it's me. Meg. You're friend."

There was no response as Victoria approached Karin.

"You like her. Valdegaard's masterpiece."

"You..." Alysia struggled to her feet as Emi lifted herself to her knees. "Why are you doing this?"

Karin spoke. "It is part of Valdegaard's plan."

"What?" Victoria said. "You're not supposed to talk. The Irydian Brace should have you under control."

Karin glided behind Victoria and placed her metal claw on the woman's neck. "Slumber."

Victoria collapsed and fell asleep.

The girls took a defensive posture as Karin stepped in the center of their circle.

"Valdegaard is willing to forgive all of you, if you submit to Arcadia."

"Never." Alysia said raising Saga over her head.

"I will just cancel your spell."

Alysia swung Saga at Karin and struck the top of her head. Karin stumbled back, wincing in pain. "I thought so. You aren't a machine."

Megumi curled up her fists. "GET HER!"

The girls ran towards Karin. They tackled her, but she cast a spell that pushed them back.

"STATIC STORM!"

"Cancel!" Karin ended the spell but she felt a punch to the ribs by Mayumi. She stumbled back nursing the pain. Karin looked up and Emi tackled her to the ground. She saw mana channeled.

“GRAVITATION!” The floor under them cracked as gravity pushed down on them. Emi moved freely and grabbed the jewel on Karin's chestplate, but Karin jabbed her claw into Emi's arm forcing her off.

Karin stood to her feet and saw Megumi's sword, Torako swung at her. With her metallic gloves she deflected each strike. A wind brushed her shoulder.

“AIR BLAST!” Mayumi chanted and the wind pushed Karin into wall.

Karin looked up and saw Megumi's blade touching her neck. “I am ready.”

“You are my friend.” Megumi said. “You're stronger than this. Valdegaurd is not the person you think she is.”

“Arcadia is the light and darkness.”

“What does that mean?”

“We are the Magical Fairies of Valdegaurd, the next evolution of the Magical Girl.”

“The what?” Megumi said distracted by Karin's statement and she scream from pain as Karin removed her clawed toe from Megumi's leg.

As Megumi fell, Alysia ran up to her swing Saga over her head.

Emi aimed her hand at Saga and channeled mana.

“GRAVITATION!”

Alysia swung Saga down with Emi's spell enchanting it. Came down with great speed and Karin raised her hand up.

“CANC—”

Saga struck Karin in the stomach and the ground pushed down into a crater. Karin screamed in pain from the force. As she rolled around cradling her stomach, Marel and Barel arrived with three pendants in hand.

“Here!” Barel said throwing two pendants in hand along with Marel. Alysia, Megumi and Emi caught the trinkets. Megumi and Emi put them on their chests and they glowed. The spells to activate their magical outfits recorded onto their pendants and changed their outfits to school uniforms.

Megumi turned to the mana spirits. "What's happened?"
Marel looked up. "The pendants reset your outfits so it can enhance them. You just have to change back."

"ADVANCE... FABLE!"

"DARKLIGHT BIND!"

After Megumi and Emi changed, Alysia looked at her pendant. She looked at Karin stumbling to her feet and clenched the pendant.

Barel said. "Hurry up Alysia. Put the pendant on."

Alysia raised Saga over her head. Sparks of electricity flowed down the staff to Alysia's fingers. "STATIC STORM!"

The electricity struck Karin and she fell down.

"Everyone, hold her down!"

Emi ran faster in her armor-less Orichalchum outfit. She was the first to tackle Karin down. Mayumi glided with the wind and grabbed Karin's legs. Megumi hurried over and held down Karin's shoulders.

"Lys, whatever you're planning, now is the time."

Alysia hurried over with the pendant in hand. As Karin clutched Emi, Mayumi cast her spell.

"AIR BURST!" Pulse of air pushed Karin's arm off Emi and Alysia arrived.

"NOO!" Karin watched as Alysia planted the panda on her chest. Her entire outfit and armor went into the pendant and replaced it with a school uniform. Freed from the armor, Karin screamed in and held her head. "Stop it! Get out of my head!"

Alysia pulled Karin into her arms, and the girls watched Karin's tears fall down. Alysia caressed her friend's hair as she heard Karin's crying ring through the hallway.

Megumi placed her hands on Karin's cheeks. "Open and look at me."

Karin resisted as she kicked her feet from the pain.

"Look at me!"

Karin opened her eyes. She saw Megumi's face and her memories snapped open. "Meg?"

"Yes."

"Alysia?" Karin looked up and received a nod. "I'm so sorry."

"It's not your fault." Megumi hugged Karin and Alysia wrapped her arms around Karin's waist.

"It's okay." Alysia said. "We're here. You're safe."

Barel and Marel approached the girls. The mana spirits saw the jewel containing Karin's soul.

"Take her to the infirmary so we can place her soul back into her body."

Alysia scoop her arms under Karin and helped her up. As Alysia used herself as a crutch, Karin turned to Mayumi and Emi.

"I don't who you are... but thank you."

Megumi bowed. "It's no problem."

Emi smiled with a bow. "It's our job. Right?"

Megumi nodded and saw Victoria under Karin's Slumber spell. "How long do we have before she wakes?"

Barel smiled. "We'll take care of her while we have the chance. Go on to the infirmary."

TO BE CONTINUED...

