

# Arcana Magi Zero + Pure - c.11

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Ayane's closed eyes twitched. The muffled sounds of explosions woke her from her slumber. She opened her eyes and focused out of the blur. She saw Tomiko approached her in fright. Ayane looked to her right and saw a man and woman casting spells behind a crate barrier. She felt Tomiko's arms wrapped around her. Tomiko's trembling and breathing alerted her that there was danger. Another explosion from above in distance made her and Tomiko scream.

"Where are we!?"

The woman spoke. "Stay down Magical Girl."

"What?" Ayane turned to Tomiko.

"They're some kind of resistance group. They're trying to get us home, through that portal." Tomiko pointed to Ayane's left and there they saw a large flat pool containing grey Mana. "We're in another world."

"No way." Ayane looked to the man. "My name is—"

"Don't tell us! Don't say anything." The man fired another spell.

Ayane turned to Tomiko and received her nod. "I don't understand."

Tomiko spoke. "They have some kind of technology that reads minds or something. If we tell them our name and they get captured, Valdegaurds army will come after us."

"Valdegaurd?" Ayane remembered Alysia and Megumi mentioning that name the first time they met. Ayane turned around and peeked around the corner of the crate. She saw soldiers, men and women casting spells at resistance fighters dressed in regular clothes. There were so many of the soldiers the battle was lost.

The female fighter spoke "Magical Girl?"

"Why do you calling me that?"

"Your outfit and trinket." She pointed to Ayane's costume and

continued. "Seeing gives me hope. Knowing you exist means we have a chance to win and take back our lands from Valdegaurd."

"I don't understand." Ayane found herself covered in shadow. Dressed in armor was a tall bulky man. He made a magic circle that looked like circuits and microchips appear behind the girls.

"It's time." The armored man looked back. "I'll set the bomb on the portal after I dropped the Magical Girls."

The woman spoke as the man next to her is struck down. "Ready?"

"Ready."

"GO!" She stood up and fired a volley of spells.

"MOVE IT!" The armored man pushed Ayane and Tomiko out in the open. The spells bounced off his magic circle and the girls screamed. They all arrived at the portal.

Ayane took another look of the area and it was large warehouse. A loud thud vibrated outside. She looked at the large opening where the sunlight created a silhouette of a large robot. She lifted her head. Its reflection appeared in her eyes. It was as big as the warehouse "Tomiko."

"I see. I don't believe."

The woman screamed from the crate distance. "GOLEM!"

An explosion struck her, and the armored man's magic circle block the shrapnel. When Ayane her eyes, the woman was ash like statue. Her arm dropped off like a cigarette. Tears welled up as she saw Tomiko lifted up to the portal by the armored man.

"Ayane, hurry!" Tomiko jumped in and Ayane reached out to the armored man.

"Thank you." Ayane said.

"No." The armored said as held Ayane over the portal. "Thank you."

He released her and Ayane fell in. Before the mist covered her sight, the last thing she saw of the armored man was a smile, before a burst of flames closed the portal's opening.

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A young woman's voice spoke. "We did it... Ayane."

Ayane opened her eyes. She was in a hooded cloak. Underneath was a long dress. Perched on the tree branch, she held her staff up close observing through a small window, her family and friends gathered around the pool of grey Mana she and Tomiko jumped through. "I messed up in Newark, Tomiko."

"You were off by a couple of seconds. I'm glad the statue I planted in the park helped correct your dome."

"Still..." Ayane faced an adult Tomiko also in a hooded cloak, standing tall on a branch on another tree. "I almost destroyed our universe."

"True. You were too hasty."

"Thank you... for helping me."

"I should punch you for this. You risked everything by physically coming back in time. There was a reason Valdegaard sent souls through time."

"But my calculations were correct. Everything in time will correct itself from this point forward. Time will also correct our memories as soon as we return."

"Then we shouldn't waste time. How long until this dome of yours ends?"

"After the battle with Lunar Sanctuary ends."

"Time has to run its course, Ayane."

"I know, but at least we undid some of Valdegaard's tampering. She still gets her way, but we're on equal footing with her as the proper timeline showed. Time will heal itself, and the future will be written naturally, not artificially." Ayane looked at her staff and saw her mother and father crying out over the pool. "I miss them."

Tomiko took a deep breath and closed her eyes. "I got to see my family... before..."

"You didn't do anything did you?" Ayane turned to Tomiko and her friend shook her head.

"Just minutes before they died, I texted them. They said they were pinned down and couldn't escape. My parents said 'Leave the city, we love you.' They thought about me to the end. My brother and

sister never got to text me.”

“I’m sorry.” Ayane jumped down from the branch. She landed on the ground and observed her magical window.

“You’re not mad.”

“You weren’t going to get another chance once we leave. I know I would try to get one last word to my parents if I had the chance.” Ayane walked and Tomiko landed beside her.

“Thank you.” Tomiko followed Ayane. “So anything else we have to do?”

“We wait for my spell to end and we leave. The best we can do is stay in the shadows and watch history unfold.”

“A rare treat. Let’s go.”

Ayane looked at the staff one last time and saw Myriana and Darius created their own portal to the Manasphere. “Good luck Rumiko.”

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As the grey Mana started to evaporate, Rumiko made her magic circle appear and aimed it at Myriana and Darius. Everyone around her stepped back, except Keiko.

Darius stopped before the portal. “Do you really want to attack us?”

“Where did our friends go?”

“In the Manasphere. We will meet them there.”

Mrs. Nakamura spoke. “Give me my daughter back.”

Mrs. Saito waved the guards and aimed her spell. “You heard her, return the girls now!”

Myriana smirked. “No.”

“We’ll follow you in.” Mrs. Saito said and Darius entered the portal.

“You will succumb to the madness once you step inside.”

Myriana planted one leg into the portal.

“BUT I WON’T!” Rumiko charged at the Myriana. She used her magic circle to strike the woman in the back. They fell in as the portal closed. Rumiko looked back and Mrs. Nakamura. “I’ll bring Ayane-san and Tomiko-san back. I promise.”

The portal closed just as Mrs. Nakamura spoke. Her words never reached Rumiko.

Rumiko jumped back and created distance between her and the Arcadians. She looked around and saw nothing but grey mist all around. She tapped her foot on the ground. It was solid but made no sound. "I won't hear them moving around. Wait."

Rumiko realized she was alone.

Myriana spoke within the mist. "Don't worry Arcadian... we have no intention of harming you. Go. Explore."

"What?" Rumiko turned her body around maintaining a defensive posture. "Come out and fight!"

Her magic circle grew a little larger expecting a sneak attack. She waited for awhile and nothing happened. "Are you serious? Why aren't they attacking?"

Rumiko realized no one was around. She expected Ayane and Tomiko to be here. "Focus. Where is Ayane-san and Tomiko-san?"

Rumiko closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Her body glowed light blue. She sensed the Mana all around her, but struggled to separate physical forms. A shadow scurried to the side. She opened her eyes and cast her spell. "Kunai Bolt!"

An electric shaped knife with a ring at the end of the hilt jabbed the ground in front of the shadow. The electricity struck the shadow. It screamed. Rumiko rushed to it and jerked her head back. She saw a white ferret with cat ears and tail twitching its legs from the electricity. Rumiko knelt down. She reached out to it but hesitated to touch the fur. Rumiko watched her back.

"Ow." The ferret spoke with a girl's voice and Rumiko turned her attention to the ferret. "That hurt."

"What... are you?" Rumiko picked up the ferret and examined her.

"A Mana Spirit." The ferret crossed her front legs like arms. "My name Eira."

"... I'm going mad aren't I?"

"No. We were like the mist, but the priestess gave us shape."

"Priestess?"

"Mayumi."

"She's here? Where?"

"At Irydia Academy."

"Irydia... Academy?" Rumiko looked at the emptiness of the Manosphere. "Where is that?"

"I'll take you there." Eira struggled to break free, but Rumiko placed her on her shoulder.

"Later, I'm looking for my friends, Ayane-san and Tomiko-san. They entered here through a pool of grey Mana."

"A pool of grey Mana?" Eira tilted her head and Rumiko looked around the Manosphere scanning the area. "Overchanneling is the only way to enter the Manosphere. This is not good. I have to inform the others. You must take me to Irydia Academy. Once we're there, you can meet up with Mayumi and begin searching for your friends. The more of us to help, the better."

"Okay." Rumiko nodded.

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At the shrine, the Elders arrived at the path where the adults gathered the Neko Clan in a single area. The Elders presented the corpse of Satoshi and laid him gently before them. Whimpers spread across the Neko Clan.

"You killed him!" One screamed from the crowd, but an old cat and two adults approached Satoshi and examined his wounds. With the adults surrounding the Neko Clan, the tension was as sharp as a knife. One wrong move would result in all out fight.

Nemo the fox spoke. "We found him at the bottom of a cliff, impaled. You will find it in the stoned forest, just past the Sika Clan."

"Sika Clan?" The cats whispered to each other.

"They were found turned to stone. All of them, even their cubs... are dead."

The old cat turned to Nemo. "We want to confirm this."

Daimon the cicada spoke. "You are in no position to make demands. After what you did to the humans' city and our homelands, you should be grateful we are not executing each of you at this moment for treason."

“Some of us have the grey Mana.”

“As do the humans.” Daimon stared down the old cat. “Is that fair to them?”

Nemo noticed humans in the distance, marching like a parade. Nemo spoke to Daimon. “Something is wrong, they are moving deeper into the grounds.”

Daimon nodded. “We can't afford to get them caught in out fight.”

Shadows covered all the adults and elders. They looked up to the sky and saw crows descending upon them. Kiba the wolf growled. “They've returned.”

Upon landing, Ren hopped before the Elders and lit his pipe. He took a puff. “Well, it appears that this dome is keeping us closer together.”

Ren offered Nemo a puff, but the fox shook his head rejecting it.

Kiba growled. “Why are you here?”

“The dome.”

“No... I mean before us?”

“Take a good look at the humans.” Ren took another puff of his pipe. “You realize something is not right. Have you talked to any of them?”

“We've been dealing with the Neko Clan.”

“I see, but you noticed something different about the humans.”

All the Elders and adults looked at the crowd. Nemo nodded.

“Only emergency personnel, the injured, elderly, children...”

“The Society is not there.”

“Exactly. I sent scouts to the city to see what is happening. They'll be back soon.”

“What does this mean Nemo?”

“Something happened with the Nocturne. We may have to make a decision regarding the humans.” Nemo looked out at all the Clans. “This could very well mean we would have to team up with them and fight the Nocturne.”

The crowd whispered, and looked frightened. Some looked out at the people walking by in the distance. The Elders looked to each

other and then to Ren who took another puff of his pipe.

TO BE CONTINUED...

