

Arcana Magi Zero + Pure - c.5

by H-M Brown

Nina and Goro guided Sayako through the forest. The giant dog felt Rumiko on his back slipping off. He jerked his body to prop her steady. The path narrowed ahead and everyone formed a single file. Goro looked back to Sayako. She was falling behind. Her legs felt like they were sloshing through sand.

“The child can't keep up.” Goro said to Nina.

“I'll take care of her, get Rumiko to Yuri.”

“Yuri...” Rumiko said with a low voice.

Nina turned around. She reached Sayako as the girl collapsed on the tree trying to catch her breath. The fox looked up to her when the bushes rustled. They both looked deep into the forest darkness and there were red eyes watching them. The track captain leaned forward to see who they were. Their eyes lock into each other. It was like looking into the mirror. Yet, Sayako's breathing was in control. She expected to be afraid of them, but instead she was curious. She wanted to ask them questions, but Nina tugged at her sneaker.

“Don't get close Sayako.”

“Are those feathers?”

“Sayako!” Nina got the girl's attention. “They are not going to hurt you as long as they don't feel provoked. We're not too far. Come... we'll walk.”

As Sayako followed Nina, she looked at them one more, and noticed the red eyes she stared at bowing to her. She nodded back and focused on the path ahead of her. Sayako emerged out into the opening where young spirit animals from all the clans were gathered. Many of them were as big as horses, and as small as common pets. They all turned to Sayako. She just stood there in awe of their presence.

“Right this way.” A large cicada said to Nina and led her and

Sayako through the crowd.

“Rumi-chan!” Yuri said in the distance. “Look at me!”

Nina and Sayako arrived in the middle where Rumiko sat on the ground. Her back was facing them and Yuri the cicada was on her lap looking up at her.

“What have they done to you!?”

Sayako answered. “The Society did this to her.”

“NOT THEM!” Yuri leaned over looking at Sayako. “Her family. The Kinomotos.”

Yuri lifted up Rumiko's arm and the shackles appeared.

“All these years together and they hid this from us?”

Sayako approached Rumiko and Yuri and on the ground was a drawing of Rumiko's magic circle. She sat on her knee next to Rumiko, but was pushed away. Rumiko's eyes glared at the track team captain, then she lifted her head up with her eyes forward.

“I am ready for your judgment.” Rumiko took a deep breath. “My family betrayed the Higurashi Clan and I take full responsibility on behalf of my mother and grandparents.”

As the cicada looked to each other, Goro marched up to Rumiko and clamped his teeth on the shackles. He channeled his Mana, and a spell formed around his teeth. It crushed the spell like a can. It burst into sparkles, along with its counterpart on Rumiko's other arm. Rumiko collapsed onto the ground, taking long deep breaths. Sayako rushed over to Rumiko. She pulled her friend onto her lap and help her hand.

“Forget me. We need... to focus on the people... tell them about the Society.”

Sayako looked at Yuri, but cicada planed her feeling on Rumiko's hand.

“We're aware of what they have done. With the Elders dealing with Satoshi and our adults gathering the Neko Clan to answer for their crimes. All that's left is us.”

Nina walked closer and spoke. “And the Karasu.”

Everyone looked back at the forest, where the red eyes continue to watch them all.

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Takashi and Hideki stared at the pool of grey Mana. A scientist carefully contained some of the mist into a container. As Takashi watched the scientist walk away, Hideki just stared at it, unmoving to his amazement.

“I never thought I would ever see Mana.”

“Eh?” Takashi turned to Hideki.

“I only from my sister about what it looked like. How it felt to her.” Hideki let out a smile. “If she was alive right now to enjoy this with me.”

Mrs. Saito finished speaking with the scientist while holding the radio to her ear. She approached Takashi and Hideki. “The Perez sisters and the Akamatsu twins are detained in an undisclosed location.”

Takashi and Hideki turned to Mrs. Saito. “That's all the information I can get. I'm sorry. It's time to go back.”

Hideki looked Mrs. Saito in the eyes. “I wonder how the Kitsune are going to react when they find out you unlawfully detained the lady of the house and their Guardian?”

“It's a risk, but they have a lot of information on the Arcadians. We have to do this now before they make their next move.”

“And the Akamatsu twins?”

“Same thing.” Mrs. Saito waved her hand at the guards to take the boys, but Hideki looked over at the grey Mana. “Look we will release them once we have all the information we need.”

“After finish torturing them like Rumiko Johnson?”

Mrs. Saito sighed. “The Kinomoto Family and the Neko Clan backstabbed all of us. They were all in on the Arcadians and they helped destroyed the city. Rumiko is their family, biologically. She has information on them as well, and... given how many members of the Society died fighting—”

“No excuses!” Takashi said. “None for hurting our friend.”

“I'm sorry the world is not so simple for you, but magic is something that is not supposed to be public knowledge to the world. Not with the way technology grows so fa— Look, I don't have time

for this type of discussion.”

“Then tell us why everyone with grey Mana is detained in that magic fence and people are being tortured in those camps? You have the Perez sisters and our friends with all that important information on the Arcadians that you need.”

Mrs. Saito rubbed her neck as the soldiers lifted up their rifles.

Takashi pointed to the guards. “Hideki, why do magic people have guns?”

“I don't know.”

“They're magic rifles.” Mrs. Saito said. “They'll fire magic bullets.”

“Why don't you have one?” Takashi said.

“We only use them for situations like this.” She points to the grey Mana. “High level crisis... like those camps.”

“Why?” Takashi took a step and the rifles aimed at him.

“I don't think I have to tell you what is happening out there.” Mrs. Saito approached them boys signaling the guards to stand down. “The Arcadians destroyed our city. We are cut off from the rest of the world, and what do you think will happen when the world sees the stoned forest? Dawn is upon us.”

Takashi and Hideki looked up the sky and saw the break of light.

“People like you two were never supposed to know that Mana and spells exist.”

“I know that.” Hideki said.

“And yet your sister told you about it.”

“Don't change the subject.”

Takashi jumped in. “You don't want to answer for what the Society and city is doing to these people right now.”

“In case you have amnesia, we have a nearly half the city now capable of channeling Mana. From what our doctors told us, they too went into madness just like your friends did when they entered Manasphere.”

“Yeah...” Hideki said.

“And look what happened to the four of them. Pawns for the Arcadians. Do you understand?”

Takashi answered. "You think the Arcadians will take advantage of the people... and make them join?"

Mrs. Saito nodded. "Right now, as we are fighting these upgraded Nocturne, we are gathering all the civilians in the city caught in the blast, giving them a brief explanation of the Mana they are looking at and bringing them here to safety."

Hideki approached Mrs. Saito. "This is a big risk you're taking. Putting them in a holding area away from their families. Using torture methods in your interrogations. I've seen what happens when scared people are put in those situations."

"You're not going to give me that 'They'll become bad guys.' excuse."

"You're torturing kids!" Hideki stared at Mrs. Saito. "What kind of impression are you giving them!? That's the type of thing the Arcadians can exploit. Like they did to our friends! The Arcadians could just as easily come up to any one of them and convinced them how wrong they were treated by the Society. The very group organized to prevent Magi rights from being violated. A haven for those who awaken to Mana for the first time."

Takashi turned to the grey Mana. "I assume you know that this grey Mana could be a way for the Arcadians to recruit more people."

Yes." Mrs. Saito said. "You're very observant."

Mrs. Saito approached Hideki to back him down, but he stood his ground.

"This is how my sister died. She was helping a Magi that your people assumed was a criminal. He was scared and alone. She tried to help him, but you pushed him so much with your accusations that he did turn into a criminal and killed her."

"I'm sorry for that."

"You gave him an excuse to kill!" Hideki said and everyone lifted their heads getting his attention. "That's why I'm begging you. Don't treat these people like criminals. Don't lump them in with the Arcadians. Don't give any of them an excuse to join the Arcadians."

Mrs. Saito looked in Hideki's eyes and saw the truth in his concerns.

"I'll take that into consideration." She nodded to the guards.
"Take the civilians to holding Area B, and find their families."

As the guards escorted the boys away, Mrs. Saito's radio blared loud.

"Yes General?" She answered the radio as she watched the boys leave the area.

"Captain, the Clans are attacking the holding areas."

"WHAT!?" She said getting Takashi's and Hideki's attention.

* * *

Ayane stood wither arms crossed with her mother on the other side of the magical fence, finished telling her everything that has happened. About her friend, the Clans, the Arcadians, and now, being covered in grey Mana.

"Are you mad at me?" Ayane said with her eyes lock onto her mother.

"Yes... but that's not important right now. Your father will get you out of here and we'll home and..."

"What home?" Ayane said. "The city is destroyed, the forests are turned to stone. Now, this. Mom?"

"I'm so sorry. This is so much to handle, I don't where to begin. All I know is, that right now, you are detained against your will, and your father and I will get you out of here."

The crowd began to raise their voices. The sounds of screams got Ayane and her mother's attention. Everyone looked at the guards above the hill around them fall backwards one by one. Shadows with red eyes rose up from the hill, with the first light emerging from the sky. Completely surrounded Ayane's eyes trembled.

"The Nocturne?" Ayane said and the light revealed humanoid crows, dressed only in shorts, with claws for feet and wings for arms. "The Karasu Clan..."

They spread out their wings and each one took to the sky. They dove directly over the magical barrier. People ran screaming for their lives as each one was scooped off the ground by their clawed feet. Ayane dropped to her knees to avoid getting picked up. One by one, each crow carried a person and like a flock head over the hill

into the remaining night sky.

"Mom!" Ayane looked to her as a crow scooped her up. She struggled to break free and looked back at her mother. "Moooom!"

"Ayaneeee!"

The crow carrying Ayane signaled to another crow and it dove down to Ayane's mother and picked her up. He looked at the girl frightened, but maintain his tight grip on her.

Ayane looked down and the Clans attacking the Society and the camps. They were escorting people out of the interrogation tents, tending to their wounds.

"Ayane!" her mother said from behind. "Those animals attacking."

"It's the Clans. They are getting the people out. They're helping us."

"By attacking the police and the Society?"

One of the tents was blown off by a cicada's spell, and it revealed a little boy on a seat with a wand over his face. Ayane's mother stared in horror as the interrogator was rammed into a tree by a large boar. Looking at the device hovering over the kid, she it together and her mouth opened wide.

"What are they doing to the child?" Ayane's mom looked up to the crow. "I thought these people were here to help us."

The crows made their way past the hot springs to an open area where they gently placed the people on the ground. Ayane's crow slowed its descent and planted her feet on the ground, as though she was just taking a step. He released her and flew off. Her landed next to her and they watched the crows fly off toward the night sky.

"Thank you!" Ayane said waving to them. She looked around and saw the Clans approach the people with care. "Everyone listen. Don't be afraid. They got us out of that detainment area. They are here to help us."

"She's right." Nina said approaching a couple with their daughter. "What they Society did to you was wrong and not the solution to this problem."

The Clans brought food and water as more people with grey

Mana were brought over. Some with injuries. A man and a woman hurried to the injured.

“We're doctors, bring the injured over here.”

One of the teen foxes, the size of a pony stood before the humans.

“This land belongs to the Kitsune. You are our guests and we will not allow the Society, or any public official, to insult our land, our home... by having you treated this way, no matter the crisis we are experiencing.”

Campfires were started and the people were given blankets by the Clans. Nina, Goro and Yuri brought Sayako and Rumiko. Ayane saw them and ran to her friends. Some of the human adults saw Rumiko and overheard their conversation about the interrogation. Injured children arrived saying the same thing.

As Ayane's mother approached her daughter and her friends, the Elders arrived, carrying Satoshi's body. All the humans stood there frozen at the leader's size. It was intimidating and frightening, but the cubs stood between the Elders and humans.

“It's the Society and the mayor.” Nina said as Ayane carried her to Nemo. “They detained Ojou-sama, the Guardian, and the twins.”

Nemo's eyes glowed red, with a snarl, and the foxes stood at attention.

TO BE CONTINUED...

