

Arcana Magi Zero + Pure - c.9

by H-M Brown

Alysia, Megumi and Emi looked around the grey mist of the Manasphere. It was endless. Emi pressed her feet onto the solid ground. She could not tell what it was made of. She lifted her hands over the Mana. It felt like air, but it was like a part of body. She saw Alysia and Megumi standing still. She approached them with concern given their past.

“Are you okay?”

“No.” Alysia said tightening her grip on her staff Saga. She took a long deep breath. “I never thought I would find myself here again.”

“I know.” Megumi said, placing her hand over Alysia's shoulder. Her book *Fable* floated beside them. “We have a job to do.”

Emi watched the Perez sisters show each other support. It brought back memories of Mayumi giving her support, even fighting for her. The Manasphere struck her mind forcing history of her sister's battle. She collapsed onto her knees saw a strange school in her thoughts. It was brief. It was a basic one floor school, modern with automatic doors. Emi blinked and found herself in Megumi's arms. She startled.

“Easy.” Megumi said and placed her hand on Emi's to calm her. “You're still new to the Manasphere.”

“I saw a school.” Emi lifted herself up. “It felt like Mayumi's memories.”

“It wasn't.” Alysia said while scanning the area. “It's the Infinite Knowledge.”

“Infinite... Knowledge?” Emi turned to Megumi.

“A pool of...” Megumi paused for a moment to collect her thoughts. “Think of it as endless library of books throughout all of history, past and present. From the before the beginning of time, to

after the end of time. It's all here.”

“Oh...” Emi stood to her feet and remembered the pain she felt in her mind. “When I entered here in the Manasphere I was feeling a lot of headache. All this information forced into my head.”

“Our minds absorb all of the knowledge but it's locked away because it's too much to handle, so we lock that knowledge out of our minds. It is possible for us access and remember this but it will hurt physically and psychologically.”

“Meg?” Alysia said looking back. “I hate to interrupt your school lesson, but we need to start moving.”

“Sorry. Come Emi.”

Emi followed the Perez Sisters and spoke to Megumi. “Okay, so I saw this school, but... it's in here.”

“And this is from Mayumi's memories?”

“Yes. It really is here physically.”

Alysia looked back with the corner of her eyes. “Well, that's new. How do we find it Emi?”

“I couldn't get it's location.” Emi paused and she felt the air around her move. The Perez sister looked back.

“The Infinite Knowledge?” Megumi said.

“No.” Emi closed her eyes and felt the wind gently caress her hair. “The wind. The spirit of the wind.”

“You're still a priestess.” Megumi said, and Alysia looked down and away in guilt. “Is it trying to tell you something.”

“Yes.” Emi looked to her right. “This way.”

The wind led the girls through the Manasphere. It took a while. Despite the short time, it felt endless to everyone due to a lack of structure: buildings, roads, and landmarks. Ahead of them was the one floor school that Emi saw. The sign read ‘Irydia Academy’. The girls ran to the entrance and the door opened on its own. Emi stepped back but the spirit of the wind gently led her inside. The girls saw lockers in the main entrance. Megumi opened the door and saw school shoes inside.

“This brings back memories.” Megumi took out the shoes and looked at her costume. “It's pointless for us to change out of our

outfits. We don't know who's in here.”

Alysia looked at the hallway ahead. “Is this a Japanese School?”

“Yes.” Megumi said as Emi walked past her. “It's not like back in Newark.”

“It's so different.” Alysia saw a sign reading ‘1-A’ above the door. “It would be interesting to try coming here.”

Alysia watched Emi pass her by. Emi hesitated stepping up the platform with her boots on.

“It's not real.” Alysia said stepping on the platform and walking ahead. “Maybe Mayumi is here.”

Emi looked back at Megumi placing the shoes back in the locker.

“She's right Emi. We need to hurry.”

As the girls walked through the hallway, they passed by classrooms with sliding doors. Science rooms, a gymnasium, and a cafeteria. They looked up a sign that read ‘Faculty’. They heard voices inside.

“This was all made by the priestess, Mayumi.”

Without hesitation, Emi opened the door. “Mayumi!”

Emi stepped back. The Perez sisters looked inside and saw plushie looking creatures gathered before Barel standing on a desk, having a meeting.

“Mayumi?” Barel said confused by Emi's appearance.

“No.” Marel said. “It's the other priestess, Emi.”

“Ah.” Barel jumped down from the desk. “Come, I'll take you to your sister.”

Alysia was in shock and sensed who they were. “Mana Spirits?”

“This is Mayumi's doing.” Barel said walking by Alysia. “When she broke free from Victoria's control a burst of her priestess energy gave us this form.”

Barel found himself in Megumi's hands and struggled to break.

“Oh no, not again.”

Alysia and Emi entered inside. “CUUUTE!”

The Mana Spirits fought back to keep the girls from picking them up. As Marel tilted her head — slapping Alysia's hand to release her — they heard a voice outside.

“Emi?” Mayumi looked inside. “They're not plushie dolls.”

“I...” Emi looked at herself and planted the purple Mana Spirit back. “sorry...”

Alysia and Megumi planted Marel and Barel on the ground. “Sorry.”

Mayumi stepped inside dressed in a school uniform; navy blue sweater over a white blouse with a grey skirt. There was a patch of the school's emblem, a staff and book with I.A. in script font in the middle. Attached to the collar of her blouse was a pendant with a lavender gem.

Emi examined the outfit. “What are you wearing?”

“It's the school uniform for Irydia Academy.” Mayumi looked at the Mana Spirits and Barel spoke.

“Let's leave the girls alone.”

“Sorry again.” Alysia said, and Marel growled slamming the door.

After Mayumi explained what to her when she arrived, explained about the school. “I was still in recovery from the Infinite Knowledge, so I visualized this school. It took shape from the Mana, just like Spirits. From my spiritual energy. The spirit of the wind guided me through this.”

Mayumi placed her hand on the chair. “I don't why or how I did this. I can't remember it anymore.”

Megumi crossed her arms. “It's still in there. I'm sure with practice it will come back to you.”

Mayumi nodded. She noticed Alysia standing by herself looking at the glass shelf. Alysia stared at her reflection and Mayumi's appeared.

“Alysia, are you okay?”

“We should go now.” Alysia's eyes trembled.

“Please, I know we should but we should talk.”

“What's there to talk about?” Alysia turned around and noticed Emi and Megumi watching them from across the room. “I shouldn't be looking at you right now.”

Alysia walked past Mayumi.

Mayumi spoke. "I'm not mad you."

Alysia stopped, she threw Saga to the ground. "WHY?! I hurt you."

Alysia turned turned to Emi and Megumi. "We hurt you."

"Lys, stop it."

"No." Emi said to Megumi and walked towards Alysia. "Let's settle this now."

"This isn't the time." Megumi approached them. "Valdegaard will detect us, or Victoria will find us."

"And what will we do?" Emi looked back. "Fight them while we are like this? While mad each other?"

Emi turned to Alysia. "Yes. You hurt us. Both of you."

Emi turned to Megumi with tears welling up. "I trusted you... goddess Hikari. I wanted to understand what was happening to me, this Mana and spell. Instead my soul got ripped out. I did horrible things in your name. I hurt people, caused people to die. I see their faces in my dreams."

Emi paused and looked down. She took a deep breath. "No..."

Emi looked at Mayumi. "That's too easy. It's my fault too. I had to the power to say no. I've no right to lash out."

Alysia stood before Mayumi and Emi. "I'm sorry."

The twins looked at her and saw tears fall down her face. "I'm angry at myself because I allowed the Arcadians to use me to hurt you and so many people. I didn't fight back. I killed so many people."

Alysia lowered her head. Her eyes grew wide. "I killed... people... I hurt mom."

Alysia buried her face in her hands and cried. She saw the twins approach her but she raised her hand to stop them. She stood tall, opening her grey eyes. She bowed. "Forgive me."

Megumi stepped back watching her sister. She stood next to Alysia and looked Mayumi and Emi in the eyes. "Forgive me."

She bowed as well, and the twins began to shed tears. They looked at each other and nodded. Together they said... "We forgive you."

Mayumi spoke.

“You were there for us since the first day I called you. Despite being so far away, you gave us support, advice, and spells to help. You never abandoned us even at our toughest struggle. You even sent pictures and have conversations with us as if you were here. And you did all of this while suffering... while your souls were imprisoned. I can't imagine what you were going through all this time, but you never gave up... on us... or yourselves.”

The Perez sister lifted themselves up, wiping away their tears and Mayumi smiled at them. “Thank you... Alysia and Megumi.”

Emi held Mayumi's hand. “Thank you.”

“It's our job.” Alysia said with a mature voice.

Megumi nodded. “This is what we do... as Guardians.”

With heads held high the Perez sisters walked away. As Alysia and Megumi headed for the door without looking back, the twins bowed in gratitude.

Outside, Alysia and Megumi looked at Barel. “Girls, we can take you back to your world.”

“Take them twins back. We have a job to finish here.”

“Wait!” Mayumi and Emi exited the room. “We want to help.”

“This is dangerous.” Alysia said.

Mayumi shook her head side to side. “We made it this far.”

“Yeah.” Emi nodded. “We have to see this to the end as well. You need all the help you can get.”

Alysia looked at Megumi and her sister nodded.

“Girls?” Barel said pointing at Mayumi. “We will have that pendant ready for you. It will contain all of your transformation spells and creates a protection field while you change outfits. It's another creation of Mayumi's.”

Alysia, Megumi and Emi looked at each other, then at Mayumi, piecing together the school uniform she was wearing. “Eeehhhh!”

“BAREL!” Marel scurried over to the Mana Spirit and the girls. “Victoria Powers is outside, and she's not alone. Mayweather is here.”

“WHAT?!” Alysia and Megumi said together as the twin looked at each other confused.

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Takashi and Keiko arrived at the medics station where the evacuation was at its peak. They bumped into a people as the crowd scurried further into the forest. Nearby, they saw Goro the dog sniffing on the ground alongside Nina the fox and Yuri the cicada. His nose pointed in their direction.

"Shining Star!" Goro hurried to them with Nina and Yuri following him. He looked up at Takashi and Keiko and saw her wound. "You're injured."

"I'm okay." Keiko looked at the animals.

Takashi spoke. "We're trying to find Ayane and the others to regroup and look for Tomiko."

"Could you help us Goro?" Keiko said. "They're expecting us."

"Of course."

Keiko used her staff and spoke inside it. "Johnson?"

"Yes." Rumiko said through the staff. "We're here and are with Goro, Nina and Yuri."

Takashi reached out to Goro. "Is it possible to get Ayane's scent from me?"

"No need, since she is Rumiko, I can get her scent off Yuri."

"Johnson, you got that?"

"Yes. And call me Rumiko."

"Okay." Keiko looked at Takashi but he moved along.

Everyone gathered at a nearby tent where Rumiko drank a canned juice and bit into a bar. Her wounds healed a little as Ayane and her parents saw Takashi and Keiko arrive.

"Takashi."

"Ayane. Rumiko, are you okay?"

"Nothing a healing food won't do. It's not much, all the best ones are used on the severely injure."

Mrs. Nakamura spoke. "We were able to reach your families. They will be meeting here soon and we'll all go to the evacuation point together. I told the Society what happened to your friend. They are gathering a search party."

"I can find her." Goro said. "I just need her scent."

"We're going to find her." Ayane said.

"No, you will not."

"But Tomiko is in danger. The Arcadians are coming."

"The who?"

Ayane held her head and took a deep breath. "They're from the Manasphere, they're the ones who did all this. Hurt Mayumi, Emi and the Perez sisters."

"Why didn't you tell me, or the police?"

"It's the Manasphere." Rumiko said to Mrs. Nakamura. Yuri landed before Rumiko. "My mother said that there is this thing called the Infinite Knowledge. It's a large library that implants itself into people's minds. I don't know what their plan is, but I know that Ayane here has access to it. Not just me. But it's painful."

Mrs. Nakamura grabbed Ayane's hands and looked her in the eyes. "Stop hurting yourself."

"I can't help it, it's so... clear." Ayane stood to her feet. "We have to go. Rumiko, are good."

"Yeah." Rumiko hands a piece of her energy bar to Keiko. "Here Shining Star. It's for your wound."

"Thank you."

Mrs. Nakamura stood to her feet. "You stubborn kids. Say something to them, dear?"

Mrs. Nakamura looked at her husband and he gave a signal agreeing with the children.

"Fine," Mrs. Nakamura said. "but we're coming with you."

Keiko nodded. "Fair enough, Rumiko and I will protect you."

Rumiko looked down at Yuri. They looked each other eye to eye.

"Rumiko, I'm sorry. I didn't know..." Yuri's antenna shivered. "Are you okay?"

"It's nothing new." Rumiko stood to her feet. "I'm not mad at you, just the ones who agreed to round all of us up and use torture tactics. Come, we need you."

"Yes." Yuri nodded and she followed Rumiko and the others.

As they followed Goro into the forest, everyone a girl's voice calling out for them. Ayane saw Sayako and her father approaching

them. Everyone stopped and waited. Ayane briefed her on the situation. Sayako turned to her father.

“We need to help them.”

Mr. Mizuguchi nodded. “Of course. It's too dangerous for anyone to be alone out here.”

Goro growled. “Let's not waste anymore time.”

Everyone nodded and followed Goro further into the forest.

TO BE CONTINUED...

