

# Arcana Magi Zero - v.2: Megumi's Fable, the Advance

*by* H-M Brown

“Is it a dream? Or is it real?”

Questions Megumi asked herself as she stood before the mirror. She no longer had fox ears or a foxtail. Even her long brown hair had turned jet black and her lavender eyes were a natural green just like Alysia. She pressed her hand onto the mirror and closed her eyes for a moment. Her mind had developed images of memories she never had before. It frightened her. Two weeks had passed since she met Alysia and her new family adopted her, and this dream continued to haunt her. She opened her eyes and looked around once more at the empty wooden room she had awakened in, still wearing her pajamas she wore when she went to bed. The last word she said to Alysia was goodnight, and now she was alone. Just to be sure she was dreaming, she shattered the mirror and took a shard from the wooden floor. She poked her finger, the pain was there, and a small drop of blood emerged from her skin. She was awake and she was in reality itself.

Megumi left the room as old memories conflicted with new ones. She walked along the wooden hallway passing by closed doors to other bedrooms. With each door she slid opened, they were empty inside. No furniture, no people. Megumi arrived at the kitchen. There were no appliances or food. Her mind wandered off and she submitted to the conflict of her memories. She saw a man and a woman dressed in business suits ready for the workday. It threw her off when they looked at her and smiled. They said something she did not expect.

“Good morning Megumi.” The woman said.

“How's my favorite daughter?” The man said.

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"I'm you're only daughter." Megumi said to them, only it was not her voice but a child's voice. It was Megumi when she was little, running to her father and hugging them. They were happy together and had breakfast together. Her mother hugged her and little Megumi looked back with smile. The three had finished their breakfast as time skipped a little and they went past the older Megumi to another room. She followed them quietly, forgetting that they neither could hear nor see her. She entered the living room with its couch and television on opposite sides of the room.

Megumi watched her young self-present her parents with a picture she drew for them. Nothing but happiness between the three, the pain became overwhelming. Her memories returned as if it happened yesterday, and never once replaced her new memories. She knew what happened at that moment. The moment she refused to remember. The moment she wants to deny but it will not let her forget. With one-step forward, her bare foot created a plume of soot blew by the wind. For where she stood, at that very spot, was a large opening to the outside. A gap surrounded by burnt wood and broken glass. A howling wind that blew her hair aside and silence that brought tears to her eyes.

"I'm home." Megumi dropped to her knees with a scream so unheard of, that the animals living in the tree outside ran away in fright, as if a fire had threatened their lives. Each breath she took, with each drop of tear, has brought her to the point of losing herself in the reality that had returned to her life. Questions she wanted answered, but no one was around to give them. Only her memories could answer them. In the final days she was with her parents, she remembered in her thoughts what they called themselves.

"We are Circular Magi. Mages who cast spells with circles. We use very little incantations and when we do, it is usually said with very few words."

"Why do all the other mages hate us?"

"They don't... they don't understand us Megumi. We believe in things they do not."

"I don't get it."

“I know. None of us do.”

Megumi remembered it clearly; they were the protectors of the bracelet she bestowed to Alysia. It was a mission given by her mother, to keep other mages from using its power. There was one other item they protected as well, her mother's Tome of the Artisan. A name Megumi remembered.

“Protect this bracelet until the Four Mythic Elements find the one to serve them.” Her mother said to Megumi.

Megumi remembered her mother putting on the lavender collar around her neck. Megumi turned into a mystical fox. When Megumi had opened her eyes and stared at the mirror, seeing herself as the mystical creature, her memories had changed. She believed she lived in ancient times, the days of the samurai. That was a lie implanted by her mother.

“Hurry, they're here!” The last words Megumi heard from her mother as everything went black. She believed she saw three samurai kill her mother, but it was not them, they were someone else.

All Megumi could do now that the truth returned to her, was sit in the corner of the living room, hugging her knees, her face buried between them in silence, trying to understand why she had been brought back to her home, or how. Time went on as the moon descended in the horizon. Megumi felt something placed on her back and around her shoulders. She opened her eyes a little looking at the floor between her legs. Her arms felt a blanket on her back, wrapped it around her legs, and covered her head with it. The sun rose to the east, its warm light shined through the broken windows. She stayed awake all night, never concerned one bit about her own safety. She did not care if she died so long as she would be with her mother and father again.

“Thank you.” Megumi said.

“It's about time you said something.” A woman's voice said to Megumi.

The child removed the blanket from her head. Her thoughts are now clear for she now knows her past. Megumi looked up and there

she saw an old woman in a white kimono, her hair was golden brown like the one Megumi's hair used to be, with a pair of fox ears and a foxtail. The old woman had made green tea. Its scent was familiar to Megumi. It was her favorite. The little girl crawled over to the old woman and took a cup of tea. Megumi sat silent for a moment staring at her reflection within the steaming liquid.

"Are you Nana?" Megumi asked.

"I'm surprised you remembered who I am. It had been so long since I last saw you. Your eleven now are you?"

"That's right, I am eleven. That means... I'll be twelve at the end of the month." Megumi took a sip of tea as the old woman set a sweet bean paste biscuit on a small plate before the child. She looked up at the destruction in her home as the old woman served herself tea and a sweet bean paste biscuit.

"The Four Mythic Elements had chosen the one they wanted?"

"Yes."

"Who did they choose?"

"Alysia Perez."

"A foreigner? Megumi..."

"They had no choice, lives were at stake and they had to decide quickly. Besides I think they saw something in Alysia that they had granted her their armor, so I gave her mystic staff."

"I see. What did she name the staff?"

"Saga." Megumi took a bite of the biscuit and Nana took a sip of her own tea.

"A good name. What does her magic circle look like?" Nana finished drinking her tea.

"It has the four phases of the moon." Megumi finished drinking her tea.

"Interesting..." Nana poured a new cup of tea for herself and Megumi. "...is this what the Four Mythic Elements have in mind?"

"Nana?"

The old woman looked at Megumi with a smile.

"You two will be fine. Right now we have business to take care of here."

Megumi nodded as they finished eating their biscuits and drank their tea. She stood up to her feet as the old woman took the blanket from Megumi and folded it.

“Come Megumi, it's time to see your parents.”

“My parents?”

Nana took Megumi by the hand and they walked together out of the house and up a dirt path in the forest. It led upwards through the dense trees and bushes. The birds and cicada bugs chirped from everywhere. It was a long path and Megumi was getting tired.

“Nana, you don't mind if we glide up there?”

“Glide?”

“Yes, it's a spell Alysia and I created together.”

Nana stopped for a moment and turned around to face the child.

“The foreigners are still here in the nearby city, waiting for someone to return to get you mother's tome. No one knows you have returned and the foxes have been watching the activity of the foreigners. If you channel your mana now and cast a spell, they'll know you're here. We're giving you time to mourn your parents and claim what is yours. The teleportation that brought you here was a generic fox spell, so we're hoping it fooled them.”

Megumi did not say another word and agreed with a nod. They continued up the path and they both reached the top of the hill. Patches of the sun broke through the trees, creating small spotlights throughout the path. It was serene and peaceful. They made their way out into an opening and before Megumi were two tombstones. She walked slowly toward them, leaving Nana behind. She looked down and she saw her last name etched on their grave markers. Engrave on the stone was beloved husband and father, beloved wife and mother. Megumi had lost the will to cry. She instead smiled and pressed the palm of her hands together, with eyes closed and head tilted downward, the winds brushed her hair and the leaves on the trees.

“Thank you, mother. Thank you father.” Megumi opened her eyes, gentle as they were, her memories of them now a cherished feeling in her heart. She looked up to the sun and it shined down on them

with its warmth. She bowed to her parents and turned back to Nana.

“I'm ready.”

“Come this way.”

Together they walked up a set of stairs leading upward. Along the way, the bushes shook and swayed. Out came a small group of foxes, tiny as they were, looking at Megumi with curiosity. Megumi stopped as one of them walked up to her and nuzzled her leg. She picked the little fox up and rubbed its fur.

“My name is Nina.”

“I'm Megumi.”

Others little foxes gathered around her looking for the same attention. She gave it them.

“Okay children.” Nana said. “She has business to tend to.”

“Aaaawwww.” The cubs moaned as they stepped back to let her continue up the stairs.

“We want her to play with us Grandmother.” Nina said.

“We'll play later okay?” Megumi smiled at the little ones.

“Okay.” Nina said as Megumi placed the little fox on the floor and they watched them continue up the stairs.

At the top of the stairs, there stood a small temple. Megumi walked ahead as Nana waited before the gate and guarded it. Megumi stood before the shrine; it had the carving of Byakko the Tiger, Genbu the Turtle, Seiryu the Dragon, and Suzaku the Bird etched on its door. She rang the bell and prayed to them. Afterwards, she walked around to the back and there was a cave with two pillars on each side to mark the entrance. She remembered how her mother took her inside after they prayed to the Four Mythic Elements. She knew where she had to go and entered into the cave.

The walls were made of stone. Each had a drawing that was her family's history. The drawings were at first ancient and archaic. As she delved deeper into the cave, the artwork became more refined and poetic, and at the end, it became modern and recent. Megumi noticed one of the drawings was from her. It was childish but she knew this was where her mother made it Megumi's rite of passage as a Circular Magi and wielders of the Tome of the Artisan. There

was still an unused patch of wall waiting for a new drawing. Megumi pressed her hand on it and the flat surface glowed. Lavender lines spread throughout the wall and crawled around the chamber at the end of the hallway. She followed the glow into the room. Magic candles lit up and Megumi approached the lavender magic circle on the wall at the end of the room. The wall spread apart and inside was a small alter. On it was a pendant with five small marbles attached on the surface, colored white, black, blue, and red. The fifth marble was crystal, as the one Alysia had, before hers turned teal. She approached it when her magic circle, with its four phases of the sun, appeared under her feet. Megumi stopped and the chamber turned into darkness. Only the pendant provided her with the light. The Four Mythic Elements appeared before her and she showed no fear of them.

“I am ready to inherit my mother's Tome of the Artisan.”

They looked deep into her eyes. She felt them peering into her heart, her mind, her body, and her soul. Her hands shivered but she tried to fight the fear, but it was overwhelming and she gave into it. She clutched her shoulders looking up at them and they nodded to her.

“To understand fear is the first step to the path of the Artisan.” A woman in white robes appeared from behind Megumi. The woman walked around Megumi and stood before her with flowing white hair and gentle green eyes.

“Mother.” Megumi reached out to her but her hands slipped through the woman's body. “You're just an image like the Four Mythic Elements. You're not here.”

“In order to inherit my armor you must open your heart and advance forward, not with fear or fearlessness, but respect.”

“Respect?”

“Call out it's new name and earn its respect.”

Megumi reached out to the pendant looking at the Four Mythic Elements. She stopped and looked back at the image of her mother smiling back at her.

“Megumi, my daughter, I love you.”

“I love you mother. I'll be okay.”

The image of her mother disappeared as Megumi shed a tear with a smile. To have heard her voice and see her face one more time, brought the Four Mythic Elements together to console her pain. She rubbed the cheeks of all four of them and faced the pendant. The crystal marble detached from the pendant and approached Megumi. The marble placed itself on the palm of her hands and her mana filled the crystal like water, with lavender light. The pendant transformed into an ancient book with the four marbles lined up in a circle. Like Alysia's Saga, four triangles pointed outward in four directions toward each marble representing the Four Mythic Elements, shaping into a compass. She felt the warmth coming from the Tome of the Artisan and called out its new name.

“ADVANCE... FABLE!!”

Megumi levitated in the air, her toes pointed downward, and her arms stretched outward from the side of her body. The lavender marble floated towards Megumi's neck as her head leaned back and it pressed upon her skin. A collar stretched around her neck and a line of light slid down her body, changing her pajamas into a one-piece white short-sleeved skirt that covered her body. A pair of long white gloves from the elbow to her fingers covered her arms and a pair of white knee length stockings covered her legs. Megumi lifted her arms over her head and her magic circle lifted upwards through her body. Byakko's armored boots formed over her feet and legs, Genbu's armored vest formed over her chest, and Seiryu's armored gloves formed over her arms and hands, all colored lavender and white. When the magic circle reached the tip of her fingers, Megumi stretched her arms outward towards the back, lifted her right knee bending it a little, and opened her green eyes. Her magic circle went through her body again, turning her green eyes lavender, her long black hair also turned lavender with a white and lavender artist hat materializing on her head and Suzaku's white and lavender tipped wings stretched out of her back, spreading outward then retracted once relaxed. When her magic circle reached the tip of her boots, Fable floated towards her as she leaned upright meeting her book

halfway. She gripped Fable with her right arm and spun around once. After she finished her spin, she held Fable to her chest and stretched her left arm forward, reaching out underhanded. Megumi's magic circle created a pillar of light as she pressed her book to her chest and closed her eyes. Her body vanished from the darkness and her circle shrunk into nothing.

Megumi opened her eyes and found herself in the chamber with the magic candles losing their flame. The Tome of the Artisan, Fable, floated beside her. She took it and opened it up. The pages were blank and a small brush with ink on its bristles rested on the inside of the front cover. She walked up to the flat empty part of the wall and with the brush; she magically drew a painting of herself and her mother. Her mother was dressed in the white robe she wore holding Megumi in her arms in the armor that passed to her. It was the final memory they shared intimately as Megumi donned the armor. She knew in her heart that her mother's spirit reached out to her and hugged her. Megumi felt at ease now and was ready to go home to her new family. With Fable hugged onto her arms, Megumi stepped outside, and stood before the shrine. One more time, she prayed to the Four Mythic Elements with gratitude and stepped out of the main entrance.

Megumi noticed that Nana was not at the entrance. She saw the ground ripped to shreds with the same soot that was in her home. The little foxes emerged out of the bushes and ran to her. Megumi released Fable from her arms, it floated beside her, and she lifted the littlest fox to her arms.

"They got Nana!" Nina said.

"Who?!"

"The foreigners she warned us about."

"Where did they go?"

"To the house."

"LOOK!!" Another fox said and everyone all looked up and saw a man in the air with white wings spread wide and heavy set around the waist. He had a staff and aimed it at her. A volley of fireballs rained down on them.

“REBOUND!” Megumi's lavender magic circle grew and a rune glowed bright on her circle. It deflected the barrage and sent back to the magic user. She looked up and watched him avoid the redirect attack. The spell cracked the center of the circle, her eyes grew wide, and she looked at the little foxes whimper in fear.

“GO! Hide in the forest!”

Megumi clenched her teeth as the little foxes ran into the bushes. She watched the man dive down towards her and formed a blade of light turning the staff into a scythe. Megumi jumped aside as he swung, ripping a piece of her skirt. She watched him fly back into the air and turned around to face her.

“You cannot beat me. I have the high ground little girl.”

Megumi raised her hands forward forming a magic circle under her feet.

“MANA GLIDER!”

“What?”

Megumi leapt into the air and two magic circles latched under her feet. A single band of lavender light connected to each other. Like riding a skateboard, she flew high into the air. Fable followed her as she headed toward the winged man. She moved the tome ahead of her, and with her brush, she drew a picture of fireball. A magic circle appeared before her.

“BLAZE!”

The winged man flew around the air as the volley of fireballs chased after him. He turned around and deflected each flame destroying it in the air like little bombs. He dove under Megumi to get behind her but he was too slow and clunky, for when he turned around, the child had already spun around in an incline. Before he could cast a spell, Megumi created a pair of light rings in front of her hands, and flew past him. She clipped his wings off and he fell to the ground, plummeting into the trees below.

Megumi landed in the forest and the glider disappeared. She walked around looking for the wingless man and heard the whispers of the foxes nearby. Megumi emerged from the bushes and found the man gasping for air, his body twisted and distorted from the fall. He

reached out to her for help but she did not care. Thinking of what he and his friends had done to her parents. She was happy for the moment until she remembered that night when she and Alysia help rescued a woman and her son from a mugger. Megumi remembered seeing Alysia freaked out because she had accidentally killed the mugger. Megumi had to hold Alysia in her arms when they returned home because her little sister was upset she took a life. It was something Alysia did not want to let happen again. Megumi closed her eyes with a sigh and knelt next to the foreigner.

“Lay still, I'll help you.” Megumi did not know what to do or how to heal. Nevertheless, she lifted his head and rested it on a pile of leaves to give him comfort.

“Why?” He asked.

“Because... I'm not like you. I don't kill people.” Megumi said as the man's eyes glazed over and he stopped breathing. Megumi sighed and the foxes led her away so they could dispose the body. Fable floated back to her and she focused her attention on rescuing Nana. She hopped on the Mana Glider and rode it down the slope of the hill floating around the trees until she reached the forest edge. She stopped short of going out into the open and saw Nana in the broken living room tied up, her head facing down, and her eyes covered in by a blindfold. Megumi noticed only one winged foreigner was there, short, slender, and carrying a sword. She drew on Fable, the night sky with meteors raining down on her target. Her magic circle appeared over the winged man as he looked up.

“METEOR CRUSH!!”

Stones and rocks pelted him and he dropped to the ground bleeding and clothing torn. When Megumi closed the book, an explosion struck her from behind and she flew out of the forest and landed on the ground, rolling next to the wall of the house. Her clothes were torn and her right leg bled. She looked up and saw the last winged man. He was tall, muscular, and carrying an axe.

“What have you done to our brother?!”

Megumi said nothing as the axe under her chin lifted her head up. Her heart pounded knowing that she may die. She looked at the winged man she struck down with her spell, nursing his arm.

“What happened?”

“She killed our brother.” The axe man said and his brother faced Megumi with a smile.

“Let me have fun with her before you kill her.”

“No. She has the armor and the book. I will not waste time so you can satisfy your lust. It took us a long time to wait for the seal that kept us out to break, but it was all worth it.”

Megumi shifted to the side but the axe cut her chin, her blood dripped down the blade. She watched the swordsman draw out his weapon with a sigh of disappointment. The blade rose in the air and she saw her reflection off the flat surface of the metal.

“Farewell... you Circ.”

Nana used a spell that allowed her to see through the blindfold and she shoulder tackled the swordsman from out of the living room. Nana rolled on to her belly as the blindfold fell off. She watched Megumi use her magic circle to push the blade aside while the axe man was distracted and rolled away from him. The old lady smiled as she and Megumi stared at each other, happy to see the little girl had grown up to become a beautiful young lady and strong as her mother. The last memory Nana had in her eyes was Megumi reaching out to her as she collapsed on the ground and her blood seeped from her body.

Megumi looked at Nana lying on the ground as the sword pulled out from the old woman's back. Megumi pulled herself up to her feet ignoring the pain in her right leg. Fable floated in front of her and the two winged foreigners turned their attention to her.

“MANA GLIDER!” Megumi floated on the magical skateboard, which stunned the winged men since they did not expect her to take to the sky over the forest. Megumi looked back and saw them following her. She spun around to face them and the men flinched at how quick she turned. A magic circle aimed at them from Fable and tips of icicles stuck out.

“ICICLE BARRAGE!!!” The ice flew right at them like missiles. They dodged the attack and raised their weapons in the air.

“ELECTRUS BURNICUS MALICIOUS!” The axe man chanted.

“AQUOS SUBMERGIUS DROWNIC!” The swordsman chanted.

Megumi was off guard as the attacks ran alongside the icicles. She could not stop the spell and the foreigner's spells struck her from both sides. The water and electricity painfully coursed through her body. She could not even scream in pain. Her spell shut off and her magic circle shattered into pieces. She fell from the sky fast and when she opened her eyes, she was hanging upside down from a pair of tree branches that wrapped around her right leg. She tried to push her skirt up so she can reach the branch but gravity would not cooperate. She lifted herself up but she felt pain around her waist and covered her mouth so she would not make a sound. Megumi lifted her head up and saw the winged men flying over the trees trying to find her. She had the advantage. The child suppressed her mana so they would not detect her. She took a risk and forcefully freed herself from the branches ripping her boots and scraping her right leg, worsening the injury she already had.

“MANA GLIDER!!” Megumi chanted and floated in the air before she struck the ground. She floated around the trees, stumbling to set herself straight. She saw the winged men looking harder through the bushes. She knew her spell got their attention as they chopped the tree branches making their way down. Megumi headed upward and away, twisting and turning around the branches so she would not make any sound. She reached the top of the trees and emerged above the forest. She turned around and a sword swung behind her. Megumi ducked, spun her glider around, kicked the swordsman in the face, and his tooth spat out of his mouth with blood. Megumi flew away as fast as she could when an arm from under the leaves grabbed her right leg and her body slammed on the top of the trees. She screamed from the shock of her wound and pulled under the trees. She saw the swordsman diving from above with the tip of his blade aimed at her. Megumi created a magic circle in her hand and without chanting, she created a small flame that burned the axe

man's hand. She heard him yelp from the pain below, releasing her, and she pulled herself away as the sword plunged into the trees.

"BROTHER!" The swordsman said.

Megumi floated back up and she heard the scream of the axe man below. The sword pulled out from the treetops stained with blood, dripping onto the leaves. Fable returned to Megumi, she created a magic circle, and painted a large sword while the last winged man was distracted from the shock of killing his brother. The sword emerged from the circle and she grabbed the hilt. Megumi flew at the foreigner, as he turned to her with his sword ready. She swung and severed his arm with his sword in hand, together falling into the forest below. She heard him scream and pressing his arm to stop the bleeding. Megumi flew behind him, chopped his wings off, and watched him fall through the trees. She used Fable and drew a safety net to soften his fall.

Megumi floated to the ground in a small circular motion watching the foreigners' every move. She landed and limped towards the swordsman. She kicked his arm and sword to the side, ignoring the pain in her right leg. She saw the sword wound on the axe man that ended his life, and felt sad that he died.

"Kill me." The swordsman said.

"I'm not like you."

"You dare show me mercy?"

"No, not mercy... a lesson."

"Pathetic child. What lesson are you teaching me?"

"That I can take a limb or two of someone like you and so long as you breathe... I have no regrets. If you do have your limbs reattached, those scars will be a reminder of what I had done to you. A reminder that you had scarred my family and me for something that was never yours to begin with. The lives you took for your selfish greed. A shame you will live with for a long time. Leave my home and never come back. You will be a warning to all who dare bring malice to everyone I hold dear in my heart."

Megumi limped away as the foxes gathered around and took the axe man's dead body away to dispose of it.

The swordsman lay on his back with a sigh knowing what she said was true and he was teleported away from the land by the foxes; he showed no resistance, and his arm and sword never returned.

Megumi returned to her house and found only Nana's clothes on the floor. She saw the trail of blood leading to the forest and followed it. There she saw Nana in her fox form pulled by Nina and her little fox friends. They cried for Nana. Megumi carried fox's body, with Fable floating beside her. The foxes through the forest led her to a small path she had never seen before. The forest got darker and darker as fireflies lit up the path providing her light. It was silent in the air. She limped down the path to a wide opening.

It was a large field with white flowers in bloom. Their fragrance filled Megumi's lung and her wounds numbed even though she was still limping. In the center of the field was a tree stump where the full moon shined on it like a spotlight. It was very big and long ago, someone chopped it down. Nina guided Megumi to the tree stump while her friends stayed behind. Megumi placed Nana's body in the center of the ring, rubbing her head for one last time. She prayed for Nana as more foxes emerged from the forest, bigger foxes that were the size of wolves, some as small as cats. She finished praying and they all walked past her, surrounding the stump. She watched them all sat down as the wind brushed all the flowers. The little foxes led her to kneel down as the big foxes looked up into the sky. Together all the foxes hummed as the big ones howled a melody that was soft to Megumi's ears. A song that touched her heart and she thought all the good things that happened when she was little...

...Nana, her father, her mother...

...it was all over now...

...her life had changed.

A bright light shined from the stump. It was a pillar of light and sparkles rose up into the air. It was Nana's body going to the heavens above. Megumi smiled as her tears fell from her cheeks. She wished she could have thanked her one more time, but she could not. The stars shined bright in the sky as it welcomed Nana. Megumi stood to her feet with her hand clasped to her chest, she

watched the stars shine even brighter, and she felt the happiness of Nana looking down at her.

The pillar of light disappeared and the big foxes looked at Megumi. They all gathered around her, as she stood fixated at the sky. They knew what was going through her mind and they sang to ease her pain. A pillar of light surrounded her. She could hear the voices of Alysia, her father, and her mother at the other end. It was her new life and she wanted it more than anything else. She wanted it so badly that when her eyes turned to the stump, her birth mother and father stood hand in hand with a happy smile knowing that she will be safe... and loved.

Megumi looked up at the pillar clenching her hands together, pressing Fable to her chest even tighter, and her eyes closed. Her tears stopped.

"Thank you everyone... I love you." Megumi disappeared from the light and never returned.

Megumi opened her eyes, she was still in her armor and Fable was in her hands. She found herself back in her room; everything was where it was, as though she had never left. The door opened and there was Alysia. Megumi can see it in Alysia's eyes that her sister missed her. They stepped forward and embraced in a hug.

"Meg you're hurt."

"No. I'm not hurt anymore." Megumi pulled herself back and Alysia tilted her head in confusion. Megumi limped out of the room using Alysia as leverage and there Megumi saw her mother standing at the end of the hallway with her hands to her mouth, her cheeks covered with tears.

"Meg what happened to you?"

"MOM!" Megumi with her own strength left Alysia's arms and met her new mother halfway. They embraced each other and held tight, never letting go.

"I love you mom."

"I love you too sweetie."

Megumi smiled in her mother's arm and shed one tear down her cheek.

“You're right Alysia, this is not a dream. I'm so happy.”

One week had passed. During this week, Megumi took her time and told her family everything about herself each day since she returned. Her parents, the fox spirits, the armor, everything. There was one last thing she had to tell Alysia and only her. It was very important because Alysia and her life changed by this one fact.

“Our birthday is on February 29th?”

“Yes.”

“That's great, this is leap year and we can celebrate it together.” Alysia pulled out a notepad and pen. She wanted to plan what they can do together that day but Megumi was not sharing that joy.

“Alysia, don't you feel something is wrong with this?”

“No. Why?”

Megumi raised her hand and her lavender magic circle materialized before them.

“My magic circle has four different phases of the sun. Sunrise, morning sun, noon, and sunset. Your magic circle has the four phases of the moon. New moon, crescent moon, half moon, and full moon.”

“Yeah so?”

“Isn't it strange that our circle alignments are identical yet opposite each other, and that we share the same birthday on a leap year? Even the runes on my magic circle are opposite your own runes.”

Megumi closed her magic circle and worried for her and Alysia. A hockey jersey landed on Megumi's lap. She looked up at Alysia, saw that she had changed into her own hockey jersey with spandex pants and sneakers, a ski cap and earmuffs on her head, and carried a hockey stick with two hockey gloves tied together slumped over her shoulder.

“I say we wait until our birthday to find out. Right now, we have training to do.”

Megumi sighed and nodded. After Megumi changed into the same outfit as Alysia, they both ran outside and jumped off the snow-covered porch. In the air, their magic circles grew under their feet.

“MANA GLIDER!!” They chanted together, their magic circles shrunk under their feet, and a band of light connected them together. With their hockey gloves on and hockey sticks in hand, the girls flew over the snow and played their game together.

THE END.

