

Arcana Magi - c.6: Damage Control

by H-M Brown

Alysia sat on her bed, buttoning up her blouse over her mage suit, getting ready for Monday work. She received orders from Oryn to wear the suit in the event she gets into a fight; her outfit remade to resist fire damage. The Sentinel thoughts about some sensations she recently experienced. They affected her head that caused a blurred vision. When Reya returned to the room fixing her ponytail, Alysia looked up to her with a blank expression.

“Are you ready to go to work Suzaku?” Reya said as she sat on her bed to put on her shoes.

Alysia nodded and never said a word. Her mind tried to process everything she experienced yesterday. Alysia wanted answers to these questions but could not find a way to talk about it. Instead, she stood to her feet ready to leave and stretched her hand out to Reya, which surprised the catgirl.

“Let's go Suzaku.” Reya smiled, took Alysia's hand and left together. When they arrived at the elevator, a male employee just got off and the doors closed suddenly. Together they stopped the door and it opened up for them. They entered inside and rode it to the cafeteria first to get breakfast. As they watched the light on the numbers change, Reya smiled and turned to Alysia.

“Suzaku, I'm fourteen years old, and I like to read a lot of books.” Reya said. “They help me relax and are fun.”

Alysia turned her head to Reya and listened.

“I also love flowers. Their scent is so sweet and it makes me smile. I want to grow some for our room but we don't have sunlight at all. It would be nice to have flowers. Wouldn't it would make everything cheery?”

Alysia just stood there with no response to the idea.

"Suzaku, do you feel anything at all right now?" Reya looked at Alysia in the eyes, waiting for an emotional response liked she saw when they went to bed. Nothing happened. It was as though someone pressed a reset button during their time asleep.

"We'll take this one step at a time."

The elevator stopped at the cafeteria and they stepped out to get their breakfast. The girls walked passed a couple of employees, who watched them with an odd expression before entering inside the elevator. As they waited for the chef to bring them their assigned breakfast, Reya thought about what to do about their situation. The programming in her mind has a set of specific instructions. She could not leave Oryn no matter what. Although aware of this fact, she wondered if she could find a way to undo those orders. So they could escape. The last time she tried to leave, Oryn caught her and sent her to therapy. Reya went through the most horrific pain ever and promised Oryn never to do that again. Now, everything changed with her new friend here. Reya wants to get her roommate away from Oryn. For now though, the chef handed the girls their breakfast in brown papers bags and sent them on their way.

Once they arrived at their desks, Alysia examined her new computer and the files the head of security gave to work on. They settled down in their seats and the phone rang for Reya. Alysia opened her bag and took out an orange while watching the catgirl hang up the phone. As she peeled it, Reya's phone rang again frustrating her.

"Good morning, Oryn Zentharis' Office."

"Reya, this is Anna,' The executive's colleague said on the other end. 'I would like to speak to Oryn."

"I'm sorry, Madam Oryn hasn't arrived yet. Would you like to leave a message?"

"Yes.' Anna said as Reya took a memo pad and pen to write. 'Tell Oryn to go to the website Magiviewer.com. This is very important. Make sure she gets this message."

"Yes Ms. Ling."

"Thanks." Anna hanged up the phone.

Alysia booted up her computer and saw Reya across the way smiling. Alysia never said a single word to the catgirl, ever since they met. She did have a lot to say, but did not know what to talk about. If she talked, her eyes would go blurry, and her head will have that pounding sensation again. She does not want to go through it anymore. When Reya looked up at her, Alysia faced the computer.

"Suzaku." Reya said getting the Sentinel's attention. "If you want to talk to me, I'll listen."

Alysia thought about what she wanted to say. She wanted to ask questions actually. She wanted to know what feel is, why she woke up with tears everyday, and what friend means that Reya talked about. She was just too scared to say anything and turned her attention to the computer.

"Suzaku." Reya felt sad for her friend as she saw Oryn exit the elevator and approached the girls.

Oryn carried a small metal box as the girls stood up to greet her. The executive looked exhausted. She stayed up all night preparing the limo driver and the hat man for her countermove against Quillian. Oryn yawned.

"Reya, I don't want to see anyone for a couple of hours. I'm expecting a call from Vyndor. That's the only call that gets through, understand?"

"Yes Madam Oryn. You have a message from Ms. Ling."

"Thank you."

She took the memo that Reya wrote and entered her office. She saw Anna's note and stood before the large television screen. She turned the television on which activated the internet on its own. Oryn slid out a keyboard from underneath the screen and typed in the website, Magiviewer.com.

A website of amateur videos of people casting spells. It had a disclaimer stating that all of the videos featured special effects, a way to ensure that Mystic Intelligence did not arrest the administrators of the website. She clicked on the word 'New Videos' and the page showed small pictures of the latest videos posted. Oryn

scrolled down with her mouse and spotted a video called the Winged Girl Attacks, it had a picture of Alysia holding Saga. Oryn pressed play and watched the movie.

"What?" Oryn's eyes twitched as she saw the whole kidnapping attempt from yesterday. "How?"

Oryn saw Alysia activate her spells. She never realized how much power the teen had. She saw how the Sentinel fought hard to resist her orders and growled under her breath. At the end she saw how pretty Alysia looked in the flames, but that feeling changed when she noticed Reya looking out at the camera's direction. Oryn's eyes grew cold, ignoring the fact that the catgirl tried to get her attention before cutting off.

"Reya."

The sound of beeping interrupted Oryn's concentration. It linked from Reya's computer. She saw on the screen a window that said videophone from Vyndor. Oryn moved the mouse, clicked 'Accept', and on the screen, the orb rested on a pillow on top of his desk.

"Oryn," Vyndor's orb glowed with each word. "I read your report. Would you please explain to me what happened yesterday?"

Having seen the video, she did not know how to explain this. Then she had an idea, one where she can get her Sentinel Project back. She smirked at Vyndor.

"Talk to me Oryn."

"I'm sending you something you need to see." Oryn linked the video page by instant messenger and Vyndor watched the whole video.

"You incompetent..." Vyndor's orb glowed violently and she giggled.

"Now, now, you'll crack." Oryn watched Vyndor's orb stop glowing and they were silent for a moment.

"Oryn, you have something in mind."

"Take a look at the comments on the page."

"Yeah and?" Vyndor noticed the number of replies is over one hundred in less than twelve hours. People watched this video.

"As you read in my report, Quillian is after the Sentinels. So if we use this video, and send a few comments about the Sentinels we should be able to draw out the other three."

"Too risky."

"Since when was business never risky? Do you want Quillian to have the Sentinels and the edge over you?"

Oryn crossed her arms brimming with confidence. Now that they know they have competition, the risk truly increased if Quillian gets their hand on a Sentinel let alone all four.

"Fine Oryn, I'll get the new funding ready."

"Thank you.' Oryn reached for the mouse but looked up at the screen. 'Oh, there is one more thing."

"What Oryn? You have spent all of my patience."

"I want the password to your lockbox in Archives. The lab boys at chemical are looking for test subjects, and after my little visit with an old friend yesterday, I have a candidate."

"No Oryn. I don't want that thing loose again. Leave it alone."

"Very well. Just remember that the fault lies on you if we come up short a Sentinel or two."

"You insolent little..." And the video phone cut off as Oryn stared out at the video paused at Reya looking towards the camera. She looked at the box held in her arms and sighed. Oryn went to her phone and summoned the girls inside.

Once they entered the office, they saw Oryn standing in front of the large television screen with her arms behind her back facing the bookshelf.

"Stand before me." Oryn said and the girls complied.

They stood in front of the executive as the woman's eyes invoked fear into Reya. The girls were quiet as Oryn stepped back to give the girls a better view of the screen and played the video of the incident. As the video reached the end, Oryn approached Reya as the catgirl took a step back.

"Madam Oryn I..." Reya felt a slap across her face and fell down to the ground. The catgirl looked up covering her face as the executive's shadow covered her body.

"You knew and you didn't tell me." Oryn towered over Reya as the teen crawled backwards.

"I tried to, but you wouldn't..." Reya saw Oryn's hand raised and she covered her face with her arms to shield herself, when she heard a slap. Reya looked up and Alysia's right hand wrapped around Oryn's wrist.

Alysia's eyes stunned Oryn as the woman struggled to break out of the teens grip. The Sentinel threw the executives hand back and stood in front of Reya. The sensations in her brain made her fist shake. She took short breaths as Reya stood to her feet and saw the fear in Oryn's eyes.

"Suzaku." Reya said.

"My..."

"My name..." Her lips quivered.

"A...Aly...sia..." The Sentinel stared down Oryn.

Reya covered her mouth with her tears welled up after learning her friend's real name and watched Alysia struggle to keep her legs up. Reya clenched her fist and felt her legs buckling under her as well, while Oryn smiled walking around them both.

"It appears that you gained a lot of strength Reya. Being around Alysia has really changed you."

"What have you done to her?"

"We tried to erase her emotions." Oryn placed her left hand under Alysia's chin and lifted her head up while keeping her right hand behind her back. 'But we had a problem with her head injury that kept us from controlling her. So we erased her knowledge of emotions and feelings instead."

"No." Reya said with a whisper.

"Yes." Oryn walked behind Reya and stroked the catgirl's grey hair gently. 'We were able to use her injury to control her mind. Every time she feels, her head hurts. Unfortunately, I underestimated the concept of free will when I erased it from her mind. Never again."

"Is... this... feeling...?" Alysia opened her hands and watched them vibrate. The sensations, and how she reacted to them, she

learned that these could be the feelings that Oryn explained. What she experienced was so unusual to her. From flying in the air on her manaboard, to when she woke up in the morning with tears.

"Everything... were... feelings...?"

"Yes." Reya said. "They were feelings. Your emotions. Oryn took them away from you. You can fight back. I know you can. Just listen to me."

"Why listen to her Alysia?" Oryn leaned alongside the teens ears. "Remember who you are?"

Alysia's eyes grew wide as she thought about the girl in her reflection. The memories that they told her were not real. Those memories belonged to someone else, another person, and her real ones were gone.

"They lied to you Alysia. Those memories were fake. Your real ones replaced by these false images. Your identity stolen."

Alysia clutched her shoulders and tilted her head down. Her dreams of standing before a mirror without her reflection ached her heart. That empty mirror called her Alysia but she refused to accept it as truth, but she took the name out of necessity.

"Don't believe her!" Reya reached out to Alysia, but Oryn stood between the girls, grabbed Alysia's shoulders, and turned the teen around to face Reya.

"Look at her Alysia. She lies too. What does she know about your life?"

She looked at Reya and listened to Oryn. Alysia felt the catgirl did not know what it was like to live a lie. Even as she watched Reya stand there fighting Oryn's mind, Alysia lowered her eyebrows as the executive caressed her cheeks. Alysia closed her eyes; she does not know truth from lies, reality from fantasy. What she did know, as she struggled with the pain, was that Reya cared for her. She remembered Reya apologizing for not protecting her. Felt Reya's hands and heard her cries last night. Alysia knew her friend suffered just as much as she did, and the Sentinel smiled at the catgirl through the pain.

"Reya, I don't blame you for what happened." The Sentinel took one-step forward slipping away from Oryn's fingers. She turned around facing the executive. She took deep breaths to resist the pain. So much pounding in her head that she could not keep her feet up or her fist curled.

"Alysia come to me." Oryn ordered, her voice rattled Alysia's mind.

The Sentinel's legs buckled closer to the ground. She felt her mind slipping away; her eyes blurred, and withdrawing into a state of oblivion. A memory flashed in a moment where she saw herself floating in the air, surrounded by a spotlight. A strobe light of various colors flickered in her face as her body turned into pure light itself. An unbearable pain that her heart said was humiliating. Her mind, her thoughts repeated over that she did not want to go through this anymore and her knees came close to the carpet floor.

"FIGHT IT ALYSIA!" Reya's tears jumped out of her face as she grabbed the Sentinel's shoulders to keep her up.

Her name spoken by Reya made her heart feel comfort. Alysia gritted her teeth, lifted her legs up, and stood straight. She took Reya's arms with a gentle touch, and unlatched them assuring that she was okay. She stood before Oryn with her wings stretched out gathering a wave of heat. She saw Oryn calm and smiling without any sense of fear as she walked up to the Sentinel reaching around her back for something. Alysia lifted her fist ready to punch but the programming stopped the teen short of striking back. She felt Oryn pull her white and teal hair, forcing her head to tilt back, and the executive revealed a small square flashlight. Alysia's eyes looked right into it and a flash of strobe light covered her face. Alysia screamed unlike anything anyone ever heard.

Reya tried to move her feet to push Oryn off Alysia but her feet froze and her legs shivered just like her friend. She felt helpless as Alysia screams grew louder and horrifying.

"You feel that Alysia." Oryn felt the Sentinel struggle to push her off, fighting back, resisting everything. "That's called pain, scarring

your mind, reminding you that you don't have emotions. It will all go away if stop fighting it."

Alysia's pupils magically disappeared from her teal eyes, her vision blurred. The pain never left he mind and became etched into her memories permanently. She imagined herself huddled in the corner of the dark, her face buried in her knees, hiding from the light, shielding from the pain. Her emotions, the knowledge she regained, all ignored from her vocabulary, and the thought of resisting Oryn, she dared not do ever again.

"NOOO!" Reya watched Alysia's arms fall back lifeless. She took one-step forward trying to break free from her own programming but she looked down at her knees ready to touch the ground. The catgirl looked up, saw the square flashlight aimed at her, and it flashed in her face as she let out a scream.

"Reya, I hope you liked the new adjustments I made for you at therapy." Oryn said as she walked back to her desk and placed the flashlight in the small metal box. She looked back and saw the girls on their knees with their pupil-less eyes glazed out into nothingness. Oryn stood behind her desk crossing her arms.

"Stand before me." Her cold voice commanded and the girls stood to their feet, approaching the desk side-by-side lifeless and emotionless.

"Both of you will go to therapy right now. Afterwards Reya, I want you to go to Level B3. I'm going to undo a mistake I should have corrected long ago."

"Yes Madam Oryn." The girls said with lifeless voices. They turned around, and left Oryn's office together as the executive saw a message on the television screen flashing 'From Vyndor'.

Oryn got her wish.

To Be Continued...

