

Arcana Magi Cross - c.3

by H-M Brown

As Ai held onto Manami's shoulder, there were questions she wanted to ask. How did Manami know where to find her? Who were these girls she was with? How long have they known each other? None of them would be answered any time soon for the situation changed. She overheard Tori explaining the situation with the necromancer. It was difficult to hear but Ai managed.

"The necromancer is using unstable Mana to wake the dead. Whenever a dead person bites or scratches a living person, the unstable Mana is then transmitted into the bloodstream as poison, therefore causing death. And with the spell tethered to the necromancer, the newly dead person rises and is added to his army."

As Tori talked about what happened with their encounter with the necromancer, Ai slipped in and out from the exhaustion. Her muscles burned and head hurt. She moaned attracting the girl's attention. They looked to each other knowing they have another problem. Ai lifted her arm up and Manami grabbed her hand. With a smile, she introduced herself.

"My name... is Ai Hino. Please... to meet you."

"Ai, don't push yourself." Manami said propping her friend up to keep her standing. "We're going to see my mother. She'll have medicine you need relax your muscles and let the Mana flow through you easily."

"Okay." Ai leaned forward. The world nearly turned dark. When she opened her eyes, she saw the fences moving and enflamed cars passing by. Ai thought she was flying at first, but she felt herself leaning on something. Before she could figure out what was happening, her eyes closed again, and had a short dream. She held a fireball in the palm of her right hand and a pair of wings emerged. At first, she thought it was Tori, but it actually felt like herself. Her fingertips pressed on the surface of the flame. Warm as it was, it never burned her, but a mouth did open up, and chomped on hand.

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It felt like water, and her reached out to the bottom of a lake. Ai's heart beat so fast from the idea of being eaten, her eyes blinked once.

Ai saw a ceiling and her arm stretched out as though she was reaching for something. She turned her hand and saw that it was okay. Ai pressed that hand on her chest feeling the red bead, reflecting on her dream. She sat up finding herself on a couch. It was the living room and she recognized where she was.

"Manami's home."

"You're awake." Tori said.

"How did I get here?"

"Manami carried you. We were heading for the purification clinic, but along the way we stumbled onto the street that led to Manami's house."

"Is her parent's home?"

"No." Manami said by the opening where the kitchen was visible. She approached Ai carrying two pills and a glass of water. "I think they're at the purification clinic helping emergency services during the attack. I can't reach them right now. The phone lines are busy and they're not answering their cell phones."

"How long have I been out?"

"We just got here five minutes ago. Katarina and Melinda are using the phone to reach their families. Don't worry. I called your home. Everyone is fine and I told them you're okay."

"Thank you." Ai took the pills and water from Manami. After she ate them, she lied on the couch and looked at her friend.

"Alright then." Manami sat on the floor leaning her back on the couch. "I found Kame six months ago. Do you remember the hiking trip I had with my parents?"

"Yes."

"Well I found Kame by the river. At first, I thought he was just a turtle. That was until I saw a little boy from a nearby camp get swept away by the currents. He told me what happened and that's when I learned about the kindred spirits."

"You told me this. The boy was... rescued."

"That's how I became an Avatar. There wasn't enough time and that boy was going to die."

"That's amazing." Ai said shocking Manami. "So you have been fighting guys like the necromancer all this time?"

"Yes." Manami turned around sitting on her knees. "Magi to monsters to criminals. I'm seeing a lot. Even death. They're also dangerous and I feared that if they found out about my family, you, or our friends, these guys would get to me through any of you. That's why I never said anything."

"You could have told me at least. That's not fair."

Before they could continue, Melinda and Katarina arrived. Ai sat up as they approached her and Manami. They sat down on the seats across the living room with news.

"Melinda what did your father say?"

"He says that he will send a patrol car to check up on us and search the area. Once he gets in touch with my brother, we should expect Mystic Intelligence to swing around to pick us up so Ai can tell them about the necromancer and get medical attention."

"Okay. We'll wait for them. In the meantime, I guess it's time for introductions."

"I'll go first." The blonde haired girls said. "My name is Katarina Eisenberg, Avatar of Neko."

"Hello Ai." Neko said through the flashing yellow bead. "Tori it's great to see you again."

"It's been a long time."

"I'm Melinda Aviator. And this is Ryu." She looked at the green bead and there was no response. "He never likes to talk."

"Ryu," Tori said. "you're being a pain as usual."

"We're wasting time." Ryu said through the flashing green bead. "Make these introductions quick."

"We know." Melinda said. "But we have to give Ai time to recover and give her a crash course in channeling Mana and spellcasting."

Everyone became quiet at a harsh realization about Ai. She was not a Magi and they knew. With her lack of knowledge and

possessing Tori's spells, they were not sure if their newest member could handle such power. No one really had anything to say regarding that.

"I'll try calling the clinic again to reach my parents." Manami stood up and left the living room. "I'll be back."

"So." Ai said watching Manami leave her sight. "How did you two become Avatars?"

"I guess I'll start." Katarina said. "I have been an Avatar for five months now. I have been a Magi since I was born. My family owns a farm and my father taught me how to hunt and fish. I also love to dance, learning ballet, tango, and tap. I want to become an actress some day. And I also go to Memorial Academy studying spellcasting. One day I found Neko in an animal shelter and adopted her. During a hunting trip a bear almost killed my father and I became an Avatar saving his life."

Everyone turned to Melinda and she rubbed her hair hesitating to talk about herself. With a sigh she looked away.

"I've been an Avatar for seven months." Melinda faced Ai and saw her waiting for more. "I became a Magi when I was ten, channeling Mana kind of just happened. My father is a policeman. My brother and sister are agents for Mystic Intelligence. So I wanted to follow their footsteps and got into Memorial Academy. When I found Ryu injured, I nursed him back to health and agreed to become his Avatar since I wanted to fight crime."

"I like studying history and archeology. I found Tori being chased by a stray cat and rescued her early today. I let her fly off, but it seemed that she went out of her way to find me again. I decided to help Tori and the kindred spirits out by recording all their history. Neko, Ryu, I hope you guys would tell me your stories."

"You want to hear our stories?" Neko said.

"Yeah." Ai looked over at the kitchen waiting for Manami to return. She had another question that came to mind for Katarina and Melinda. "How did you two meet Manami?"

"Well." Katarina said. "The three of us met at Memorial Academy. It wasn't until a few weeks into the new semester four

months ago that we learned about each other. We all live in Harriman House as neighbors and never knew."

"The coincidence is disturbing," Melinda said.

"It could be fate," Katarina said.

"Don't start that again. It creeps me out."

Ai giggled at the argument and the girls turned to her. They all smiled and all tension relaxed.

"I have an idea." Ai said with her the palms of her hands pressed to each other. "We should have our picture taken together. All the Avatars. Manami is very good with a camera. Has she shown you her photos she took of the forest animals?"

"Yeah," Katarina said. "They're very good."

"Meh," Melinda said. "I'm not exactly a picture person. I don't like the idea of having my picture taken in this outfit either."

"No no." Ai said. "We'll be in our regular clothes holding our kindred spirits so everyone will be in the picture."

With a nod, Katarina and Melinda agreed. The decision made Ai happy for a moment, but it all changed when she raised her hands and looked at the mist around her hand.

"So this is what Mana feels like. Like water and air. But why does it burn?"

"It's natural," Melinda said. "Your body is not used to Mana. You just need to relax your muscles so the Mana can circulate inside your body. By the end of the day you'll feel nothing and channeling Mana will be like riding a bike."

"Okay," Ai smiled at Melinda and leaned back on the couch taking a deep breath to relax.

Manami returned with her hands to her hips. Her eyes told everyone she was worried for her parents, and she had did not know what to do. Manami sat beside Ai, leaning back on the couch. She rested her head looking up on the ceiling with a deep breath. As everyone waited to hear Manami had to say, she shifted her eyes to the window and saw the neighbor's houses upside down. It looked unusual. There was movement throughout the street. A group of shadows shuffled along slowly. Manami turned around and a pair of

hands slapped the window. She stumbled back, falling on the floor.

Ai turned around and she saw the undead creature just standing there looking inside. She noticed its eyes shifting side to side then locked onto her. As Katarina helped Manami up, Ai stepped to the side and watched the eyes follow her.

"Manami?" Ai said. "Does a necromancer have the ability see through the eyes of the undead?"

"Oh no." Manami pulled Ai back.

The undead creature roared a hideous gurgling sound and attracted the attention of the others. It broke the glass, flopping inside while the others approached the house. Without hesitation, Melinda raised her arm up and gathered the air around her left hand. She formed a ball on the palm.

"FORCE WIND!" Melinda flung her arm at the undead creature and knocked it back outside. She looked past the window where a small army grew. As Melinda prepared to channel her Mana, Katarina stepped up to the window with her arm aimed down.

"RISING WALL!" A large wall of dirt shot up through the ground. It sent the first undead creature up into the air and covered the opening to keep out the rest. But it was not enough, for the sound of more glass breaking in another room got their attention.

The girls made their way to the dining room and found more undead spilling inside through the windows. Suddenly they found all the possible exits covered with corpses trying to force their way in. The front door fell over behind them with the creatures limping into the house. The path to the second floor was gone. They soon realized the dead enveloped the house. There was too many to fight now and very little room to cast heavier spells to push them back in the numbers. Their only chance was to get outside and regroup. The only way to go was the basement. Manami opened the door and let Ai through first. After Melinda and Katarina stepped inside, Manami saw something she did not expect.

"Mom? Dad?" Manami stood there watching a man and a woman, both pale and decayed with bite wounds all over. Approaching Manami with arms outreached, her thoughts vanished,

and Ai's voice from below did not reach her. She just stood there trying to comprehend how the creatures bit her parents. "This is not happening."

Manami repeated that phrase over and over. Her only thought was that they were not real and they were at the clinic helping people. Yet there they were reaching out to her. Manami's mind conflicted with reality. She raised her hands envisioning them alive wanting to hug her. A cascading waterfall of memories of her parents reduced her to emptiness. She took a step forward and only to feel a tug. Her body pulled away, she screamed trying with all her might to grab her parent's arms. Kicking and struggling, she watched Katarina closed the door. The last image of her parents moaning out to her.

Ai wrapped her arms around Manami, struggling to calm her. She watched Melinda stand before another set of stairs leading upwards to outside and cast her spell pushing a force of wind to burst the door open. Melinda ran up the stairs and Ai led Manami outside.

Outside, they found some of the dead on the ground, struggling to stand up, the path ahead wide open for escape. With the sound sirens echoing nearby, the Avatars ran into the bushes climbing over the fence to a neighbor's yard. Ai looked up and watched a police car pull up. She waved for the officer on the passenger side to hurry over while the driver called for back up. As Ai hurried Manami to the back seat of the car, Katarina spread her arms wide open drawing in an enormous amount of Mana.

"Katarina!" Neko said. "That's too much energy too handle."

"CHASM!" The ground spilt in half underneath the undead. Each one fell down the gap, large enough to keep them getting around the hole with ease. Katarina's eyes blurred and felt herself pulled back by one the officers. She watched the herd become smaller as the distance grew wide between. With the undead too far to attack, Katarina nearly collapsed but Melinda was there to keep her from falling. They both looked over to Ai walking Manami in her arms comforting her.

Ai fell down when Manami collapsed to her knees. When more police cars showed up, accompanied by black unmarked cars, she held Manami tight stroking her hair listening to the cries of her friend, calling out for her parents. Ai shed tears for Manami, trying to figure out what more she could do. Looking up at Melinda and Katarina, without a word spoken, her eyes told them that she wanted to fight back.

TO BE CONTINUED...

