

Arcana Magi Cross - c.5

by H-M Brown

Ai. Melinda. Katarina. No more words spoken. No more tears shed. Just cold eyes. No emotion of any type expressed. Standing in the lobby floor. All exits blocked off by the undead. For some reason the restless monsters stood by. Not a single one moved. Katarina approached the crater in the wall made by the necromancer after Melinda's spell struck him. She saw the direction the debris on the ground pointed and Ai walked ahead leading the Avatars, leaving behind Kame at the nurse's station.

The Avatars reached a corner. Ai leaned her head around and saw a cluster of undead before a door that read restricted access. It appeared obvious to her that the necromancer was there, or else he would have been long gone while the Avatars were busy. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Her muscles numbed by the pills she took. She leaned her back against the wall and waved her friends to do the same. Ai watched Melinda lean on the wall across from her, and Katarina took the point to help Ai conserve her strength.

The undead looked up and moaned, unaware of any Mana channeled. They limped and slogged toward the Avatars. Their mouths wide open spilling blood and thick green drool. Rotted teeth and flesh dripping about, the stench moved forward and enveloped the Avatars. The sight of purple mist cascading from their wounds shocked the girls. Unstable Mana. This was entirely new to the Avatars. Something they did not expect. They could tell that the necromancer set this all up to slow them down if not kill them outright. Combat was futile at this point. Retreat looked like an only option. As Melinda and Katarina took one-step back, Ai took one-step forward.

"Katarina." Ai said with a cold mature voice. "Rip the floor open."

Without hesitation, Katarina gathered Mana around her hands and simulated grabbing an object. Focused on the floor under the

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dead, she cast her spell.

“SEISMIC TEAR!” Katarina spread her arms outward, in a ripping motion. The building shook as if an earthquake attacked it. The look of fingers imprinted on the floor, and broke it apart. The dead fell into the hole taking the unstable Mana with it. Katarina moved her hands toward each other making the earth close up. She received a pat on the shoulder from Ai and followed her over the floor of moaning dead.

The Avatars walked through the door and approached a freight elevator. It only went down, and Melinda noticed something on the buttons. A bloody fingerprint. They looked at each other and remembered that Manami struck the necromancer with her Ice Blade spell. There was an aura of confidence, an opportunity to fight the necromancer in an injured state. A chance that may never come again.

Ai pressed the down button and stood before the freight elevator. She felt her hands held by her friends, tightening and shivering. Ai held her emotions down, wanting to keep their morale up, but it was not morale they wanted. It was not even payback.

“For Manami.” Melinda and Katarina whispered reaching Ai's ears, and Ai's handgrip tightened once the elevator arrived.

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The Avatars left the elevator and the hallway was cold. They approached more dead, but the monsters struggled to move. Even the unstable Mana barely made its way out of the wounds of the deceased. This made it easy for the girls to navigate their way around the mob without fear of bites, scratches, or poisoning. On the floor was a card key, stained with blood. The name Doctor Daniel Chu appeared on it. They stood before the opened door, where cold vapor seeped out along their feet and chilled their bodies. The Avatars figured this was what the necromancer used to get inside.

The Avatars stepped through the door and found themselves inside a storage room, as big as a house. They found themselves on a frost-covered catwalk. The lights made the entire facility look like a snowy day in the winter, and the vents along the ceiling seeped cold

air to the floor below. The girls walked down the stairs, approaching rows of large canisters. Each one marked 'Biohazard-Unstable Mana' and dated for disposal. The sound of a clang caught their attention. They immediately ducked for cover. The Avatars spread out crouching along the aisle, until they saw movement.

Ahead of them was the necromancer, his left arm covered in blood. He struggled to lift up a canister, placing it onto a flatbed cart. The girls looked to each other curious of what he was going to do with them. They were not sure whether to wait or make a move, but the necromancer made their decision for them when a burst of wind blew them all back onto the floor.

When Ai sat up, she felt a hand around her neck and her feet no longer touching the ground. She slapped the necromancer's arms. Her legs swung back and forth trying to kick him. Her eyes locked onto the wound on the left side of his chest where Manami struck him. Ai jabbed her fingers into the opening and applied pressure to it. Neither conceded to the pain inflicted toward each other. It was a battle of attrition that came to an end when Ai planted her free hand over his eyes.

"FLASH BURST!"

The necromancer released Ai and left her gasping for air. She watched him stumbled over the canisters, swinging his arms around to find his bearings. Ai struggled to her feet and bumped into Katarina. Her eyes blurred a little despite not feeling any pain in her body and for a moment, she thought about that dream she had, when the ball of flame bit her arm. With her sight restored, she looked at her right arm, and never released the image from her dreams.

"Now is our chance Melinda." Katarina said. "Ai stay back, we'll finish this."

Ai did not hear what Katarina said. She just stared at her arm. The Mana in her body emerged around her hand. It was no longer difficult to channel, but was overwhelming.

"Ai." Tori said. "Your Mana is flowing better now. Ai?"

With the mist of Mana in the palm of her hands, she looked up at her friends and watched them beat down on the necromancer. It

appeared they have him on the ropes until she saw him shielding his hands. With a closer look, she realized what he was doing.

“He's going to cast a spell. GET BACK!”

It was too late. The necromancer spread his arms apart and a blast of energy sent Melinda and Katarina flying back. He blinked his eyes and saw Ai before him holding Mana in her hand. The necromancer took one-step forward, but his eyes shifted to the left at the sound of a moan. There was Melinda standing up, with blood dripping from her leg. He smiled with confidence and turned his attention to Ai. The necromancer appeared before her with a speed that stunned her and made her stumble back.

“AIR FROST!” Melinda swung her arms forward, sending a blast of cold air at the necromancer. As he reached out to Ai, he felt his body slow down. A layer of ice formed over him and he came to a complete stop.

Ai saw Katarina with her eyes closed and a bruise on her right arm. When she opened her eyes, there was a force of Mana thrusting down her body. Ai jumped out of the way when Katarina lifted her left leg up.

“EARTH SHATTER!” Katarina stomped the ground sending a force of energy along the ground, ripping it apart. It reached the necromancer knocking him into the air. When he struck the ground, the ice around his body shattered like glass, but his body remained intact.

The Avatars just stood there watching their opponent stand up to his feet. Unstable Mana from the spilled canisters covered his body, and Melinda and Katarina just stood there in a defensive position. Cold, exhausted from using high level spells, and injured, they prayed that he was not healing himself with the poison.

Ai on the other hand, was tired of seeing him. The smile he shared to them sickened her. It was as if he was telling them there was no hope. A wave of heat surrounded her body. It gathered at the palm of right hand. The red bead on her chest glowed and the necromancer no longer smiled. She looked to her friends who shielded their eyes, and the frost in the room melted.

"Ai." Tori said. "What are you doing?"

"I don't know. I'm just thinking about this. I can see it in my mind. I can feel it in my heart."

The necromancer gathered the unstable Mana around the metal canister, transforming it into a poisonous sword. He took Ai seriously and wanted to end this for good. So he rushed at Ai very fast. When he reached her, the heat around her body was too intense for him to get close. When he swung the sword, it grazed the left side of her forehead and she just stood there. The necromancer stumbled back and the sword became hot burning his hand. Once he dropped it, he looked up and his eyes grew wide at what he saw.

Ai held the fireball in her hand and its mouth opened wide. It ate her arm and spread up to her elbow. A large claw of flames stretched past her hand, and a pair of wings spread out from her forearm. It was an amazing sight to see, as the spell lit up the room.

The necromancer's hands shivered. He shifted his legs ready to run away but he fell to his knees. When he looked down, he saw his legs covered in a block of ice and stone, bounded together. He turned around and saw Melinda and Katarina with their arms up taking deep breaths. He gathered the unstable Mana around his body to shield himself but it was too late. The necromancer felt the intense heat burning his skin.

"SCORCHED HEART!"

The image of Manami smiling at Ai flashed in her thoughts and Ai rammed her flaming arm right into the chest wound Manami made. Her hand physically reached inside and in one motion, ripped out the necromancer's heart. She held the beating organ in the palm of her flaming hand, and with cold eyes, she stared at the necromancer while his heart slowly turned to ash. Her hand snapped closed with the blink of an eye, the dust plumed into the air, and the necromancer dropped to the ground.

The spell ended and Ai collapsed to the ground. She placed her hand over the wound. Ai could not tell if her head was in pain or not. She opened her eyes surrounded by Melinda and Katarina. They all

looked at the necromancer's corpse, and Ai whimpered in tears. Manami was all she had in her mind now.

* * *

One week had passed. The sun rose up in the ocean horizon. The Avatars held their kindred spirits in their arms with Kame on the sand looking out into the sea. The only sounds were the crashing waves, and the bird in the sky. Tori, Neko, and Ryu gathered around Kame. To give their last goodbyes.

"Good luck Kame." Neko said nuzzling his cheek.

"Be careful." Tori said.

"I will."

Ryu looked away for a moment. He opened his mouth but could not find the words to say what he wanted. Ryu just nodded and Kame nodded in kind.

"Where will you go?" Melinda said.

"Where the currents take me."

"Do you have to go?" Katarina said.

"I have to find a new Avatar, and it may take me a year. It's very important that I do this."

Kame looked at Ai. She just stared at him, almost as though she was blaming him. There was no expression or reaction from her, and he never knew what to say to her. The memory of her crying out for Manami, blaming herself for Manami's death was painful enough. He felt it was best not to say anything and turned around making his way to the ocean. Suddenly the sand became distant and he found himself in Ai's hands.

"It was not your fault." Ai said with a whisper.

"Nor was it yours."

Ai walked at the oceans edge. The water splashed her feet. She knelt down and waited for the next wave. It was then she heard Kame whispered one more thing to her. When the ocean swept Kame away, Ai's tears slid down her cheek. She took a deep breath and stood to her feet. Ai looked up at the rising sun. The cool breeze, the warm heat, the shifting sand, and the soft wave. It brought a moment where she thought Manami stood beside her and said

everything was all right now. She lifted her arms up and felt the Mana in her heart waiting to be unlock when she transform. Tori landed on her shoulder and nuzzled her cheek, and she turned around facing Melinda and Katarina, both waiting for her to lead them.

* * *

Ai sat in a chair, with her hair grown down to the shoulders. She looked around the office saw the trees outside the window until a door behind her opened. Ai followed the woman walking past her with a folder in hand and sat behind the desk with the name Dean Karyn Mayweather set at the front edge.

"Your transfer papers are in order, and your scholarship is approved. All that's left is your signature, and we'll have your dorm room at Harriman House assigned to you."

Ai took the application and signed it. She handed it back to Madam Mayweather and smiled.

"Welcome to Memorial Academy Ms. Hino."

"Thank you." Ai stood up trying to hold back her cheers. She hurried out of the office where, Katarina and Melinda waited for her and they gathered with a squeal. Ai followed her friends out of the administrative building and they made their way down the road toward Harriman House.

Once inside, Ai followed Melinda and Katarina to the third floor. She walked past Manami's dorm, now occupied by another student. Ai stopped for a moment and thought about the time they both had together. She felt a nudge from Melinda. Katarina pounced her laughing. All three took a moment of silence for their friend.

"Let's go." Ai said leading the girls away. "Tori and the other are waiting for us. We have to plan a counterattack on the Lancers before they hurt another person."

THE END.

