

# Arcana Magi Memorial - c.2

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The sun in the sky lowered in the horizon. Azure and Sora returned from their afternoon trip into town. Pulling the strap on her bookbag, Azure was all smiles as she climbed up the hill. A smile that was creepy and satisfied. A person would never know that there was another side to her. When she turned that cheer toward Sora, her friend jerked her head back. Sora's eyes lowered halfway, her stare so easily ignored.

"You're freaking me out." Sora said.

"Why?" Azure said as Sora rubbed her forehead.

"Because you bought that skimpy Magi outfit."

"I know. I always wanted to try them on."

"Do you know who wears that outfit?" Sora said as Azure to listen. 'Girls who are not Magi.'

"Didn't they look awesome in it?" Azure's smiled with a wink.

"NO!" Sora said crossing her arms. 'They were tacky, flaky, and a bunch of wannabe Magi. They're running around pretending to cast spells. They have no idea how dangerous this stuff is.'

Sora's eyes grew wide and forgot whom she talked with. Her words only added to Azure's resolve to break her shackles free and inspired her to move forward. Sora lowered her head realizing Azure had reduced herself to a stereotype. Trite and annoying.

"You're really going to wear that in school?"

"Yes."

"That answer was fast." Sora turned in shock as Azure continued up the hill.

"I'm going to have myself a nice collection of these outfits and I'll cast all kinds of spells, looking pretty and awesome."

"You're such a child." Sora said under breath as she followed her friend.

They arrived at the main gate. When they took out their I.D. cards, they noticed there were no security guards around. They paid no mind and figured he just went to the bathroom. With a swipe over the security band, the computer acknowledged their return. With one-step forward, a shade covered their bodies. A shadow veiled over the academy like a cloud blocking the sun. They saw security guards lying on the street ahead. The girls just stood there.

"They weren't there before."

"This must be some kind of spell." Sora looked up at the sky staring at the sun beyond the shade.

"Really?" Azure turned to Sora as her friend nodded.

"It has to be. Some type of illusion spell."

"Come on, let's get out here." Azure led Sora out of the academy. When she got past the gate, her arm struck an invisible field. A black liquid splashed on her right arm. Azure screamed as her purple shackles appeared and glowed. She felt Sora pulling her away and they fell down.

"Are you okay?"

"My arm. It burns." Azure showed her forearm. It was red, and blood dripped to the floor.

"There's a first aid kit inside." Sora took Azure to the security room. They found another security guard slumped over his desk. Without hesitation, Sora found the first aid hanging on the wall. She stood Azure over the sink and washed the blood off. A thin layer of skin peeled off and exposed a layer of black flesh. It looked burned, yet alive. Sora felt Azure's arm shiver and heard her breathe violently.

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Moments later, as Azure sat in a seat looking at the bandage over her forearm, Sora placed her hand on the back of the security guard. She felt his back move up and down. He was breathing, but he was not waking up. Upon closer inspection, she noticed redness on the sides of his pale forehead. There were no cuts on his skin.

"What happened to him?" Azure said.

"I don't know.' Sora pulled her hand away. 'It's like he lost energy. That might be what happened to the guards outside as well."

"I can't believe that this darkness is a spell."

"If you paid attention to history class Azure, you would know that there had been powerful Magi who could do this."

"Yeah... I guess.' Azure looked at the security monitor and flipped a switch as Sora picked up the phone. Neither was on. Even the ceiling lights were off. 'The academy is without electricity."

"The phones are down, too.' Sora flipped an intercom switch. 'We can't even reach the teachers or Madam Mayweather."

Azure picked up her bookbag and stood beside Sora at the doorway. She stared at the shaded sky, as Sora checked around to make sure everything was safe. It was quiet, not even the birds were chirping, or the wind brushing the trees. Since there was nothing around, Sora stepped out into the open raising her hands forward.

"What are you doing, Sora?"

"I'm going to summon Aeros so I can have it fly over the academy. See if it's safe near the infirmary so we can get you to the nurse and check that injury. Maybe even find somebody who can come here and help us get there." Just as Sora veiled herself in mist, strange sounds echoed beyond the bushes across the checkpoint. Yet nothing moved across the way, neither leaves nor shrub. They could not make sense of the noise. It sounded like tapping fingers. The kind people do on a table when impatient. It came from the roof.

Azure stepped outside and stood beside Sora. At the edge of the roof were four legged creatures as big as an adult cat. The best the girls could discern were spider-like with suckers for mouths. Their eyes glowed red. Leaning forward with legs bent. As the creatures jumped at them, Azure's shackles appeared and were colored teal. She slapped the ground as they dove toward them.

"WALL!' A chunk of asphalt and rock shot up from the ground and curved over the girls' heads. The creatures bounced off the defensive spell, each fell on their backs. Azure screamed as the wound reacted to her spell, and her right shackle turned purple. She clutched her arm as Sora pulled her away from the shield and made

her run. They heard the tapping of the creature's feet behind them, like the sound of rain pelting the roof of a car. Ahead of them was the side entrance to the advance class building. They reached for the doorknob and caught it. With the creatures jumping at them, Azure swung her arm, pulling the air with her fingertips. All her shackles appeared purple this time, as she cast her offensive spell. 'GUST!'

As the wind pushed the monsters back, Sora pulled Azure inside and closed the door. Azure dropped to her knees, pounding her hand on the ground. The shackles crushed Azure. She could barely breathe. The wound however, grew from the wrist to the elbow. It went beyond the bandage. She could feel her bone and flesh stretching. The stench of blood and blackened skin affected her thoughts, a state of confusion. Azure wiped the sweat off her forehead as the pain and the shackles went away. When she lifted her head up, she found herself in Sora's arms. The comfort calmed her as she fought the tears and resisted crying.

\* \* \*

Azure sat on the lower steps leaning on the wall. She nursed her arm, practically hugging her waist. All she had on her mind was the pain. Ever since she touched that shadow barrier, it now had an effect on her spellcasting. A simple low-level defense spell made the wound burn her arm. In stark contrast to the expected pain she got from her shackles for using offensive spells. Her nerves unraveled from this knowledge that no matter what she cast, she wound up physically hurt, even if she wanted to protect everyone. Her spells were useless. A flash of light lifted her head up. Without turning her eyes, she saw Sora's magic circle.

It was blue and looked like a circuit board found in a computer. Trace lines, microchips, dials and knobs. In the center were four gears interlocked to each other, rotating perfectly in one direction. Sora tapped her fingers on the surface like a keyboard, and slid her fingers across like a touch pad phone. She touched one of the gears and it glowed as her Mana covered it.

"FLAROS!" A portal appeared behind the circle and a robot wolf, silver and red, jumped out. It was the size of a pony as it sniffed the floor. It turned around and sniffed Sora's mist covered hand. Wagging its tail, it shook its head as she patted its metallic head. It sat upright as Sora tapped her circle giving it commands. With a bark, it sniffed the floor and climbed up the stairs past Azure. A monitor appeared on the circle showing Sora what Flaros was looking at in the hallway above. It was dark and no one was around. Even switched to night vision showed nothing unusual or dangerous.

"Azure." Sora said getting her attention. She reduced her circle to the size of a bracelet on her wrist. Text scrawled on it reading Voice Command Mode on. 'It's time to go. There's nothing in the hallway and Flaros is waiting for us."

"I feel weak."

"It's okay. Your body took a lot of damage from this wound and the shackles."

"No. I mean... I feel like I can't do anything anymore. My spells are worthless."

"I don't know what to say Azure." Sora knelt down and looked her in the eyes. 'What I do know is that you're scared. I'm scared too."

"But you don't feel pain in your body when you cast spells."

"But that's exactly it. I have to watch you go through this and have no way of helping of you. I feel helpless to stop what you're going through. And I'm supposed to be your friend. To be there when you need me."

"Sora... I... I don't..." Azure shook her head and stood to her feet. Staring at her wrists, she knew that she would have to endure this until they found help. She took a deep breath and curled her hands into a fist. Focusing her thoughts, Azure channeled her Mana, and felt the wound and shackles reacting to it. She took in the pain and got used to it as Sora reached out to stop her. Azure would do whatever it takes to stop these creatures even if casting spells would kill her. Azure picked up her bookbag and looked up the stairs. 'I'm ready."

Azure and Sora walked up the stairs and arrived at the second floor. There Flaros sat before the window looking outside. The girls walked past the wolf and saw the sun setting in the sky. The building across the grassy courtyard created a shade that was pitch black. There was no way of knowing what was in the shadow.

"This is bad." Sora said. "When night falls, we'll be blind."

"So we won't be able to get to the infirmary."

"It's okay. If we go from one building to the other, we should be able to get to the infirmary safely."

"Still, we have to be on our guard if those creatures find a way in here."

"True." Sora pressed her hand on the window and slid it open.

"What are you doing?" Azure said trying to close the window but Sora kept it open. "Those things could be outside and I could barely cast spells."

"We need to find someone to help us. Flaros cover me." As the wolf stood up and its ears twitched, Sora enlarged her circle and tapped on another gear. A large robot bird, silver and green, flew out of the portal and screeched in the air. It circled in the air as the monitor switched to night vision. She entered the commands, as the sounds of tapping outside grew louder. Sora and Azure slammed the window, snapping the foot of one of the four-legged creatures. They stepped back as Flaros growled at the twitching limb. "Let's find a way to get to the next building. I set Aeros to find help and bring them to my location."

Azure saw Sora's magic circle turn into a bracelet. A dot blinked on and off. It felt reassuring to know that their chances of finding someone increased. Following Sora and Flaros, she wished that her shackles would act more like the bracelet. Then maybe she would not struggle to cast spells.

The scent in the air was the same as her wound. It got her attention as she looked ahead and saw the lack of lighting in the hallway. The silence was eerie. They wanted to call out to someone, but the idea seemed futile. The first room they entered, students were sprawled over their desks and on the floor. Strange white

strings covered their bodies. When Azure picked up a clump from the hair of a boy, it stuck to her fingers.

"What is this stuff?" Azure said as Sora felt the students breathing.

"I don't know. Everyone seems to have lost their energy like the guards."

"Hey wake up." Azure nudged the boy on his shoulder. There was no response. "Will they be okay?"

"Maybe. We should keep going though. There's nothing we could do."

Azure and Sora continued onward. Each room they passed was the same as the first. Some empty and others with at least a student and a teacher. Only this time, there were more strings with each room. It got darker further in the hallway, they barely could see ahead of themselves. Strings were everywhere, even on the floor. It was like walking through sand with each step they make.

"Flaros, Lights." Sora said and Flaros turned on its lights. Its eyes shined bright, exposing the white strings littered throughout. Among the strings was a large white hill. Sora and Azure stood before it and noticed something strange. There was a hand. The girls stumbled back, and Azure fell to her butt.

"It can't be."

"A coccon?" Sora's eyes grew wide. "no..."

White strings from the ceiling wrapped around Sora's legs and bound them together. She fell down as Azure tried to grab her arms but missed. Flaros shined the light up at the ceiling and there was a giant sized four-legged creature. Its front legs pulled Sora as Azure struggled to crawl over the webbing.

Flaros ran and jumped up at the creature. Its teeth chomped down on the monster's legs. The wolf's mouth glowed, gathering heat, but the creature slapped it to the side, knocking it through the door. Flaros rolled over the webbing and it held the wolf down as it tried to move.

With no light, Azure lost sight of Sora. She heard Sora's screams and she pulled her way through the web as Flaros broke free. Azure

dropped her bookbag and held onto Flaros as it passed by her. Together they ripped through the strings. Climbing over cocoons. Knocking over a mop and a bucket of water. The stale air made it difficult to breathe due to the web covered windows.

Azure noticed Flaros struggling to move forward. The Mana within its body was breaking apart. She knew something was happening to Sora. The light the wolf provided flickered on and off, even as she saw the end of the hallway. A light flashed and the shattered glow of what was once Flaros flew over her. There was enough lighting from it to see it enter a door. Acting as a beacon of light, Azure hurried through the webbing, pushing her way through. Just as the light left, she felt the opened door and fell inside. She only saw red lights. A pair of eyes staring at her. The room was hot due to the thick webbing acting like a blanket. Azure took a deep breath and channeled the heat with her Mana.

"Flare!" A small flame appeared on the palm of her right hand. She felt the wound grow on her arm. Her purple shackles glowed and inflicted pain. She struggled with it as she held the flame up to the creature. Her eyes trembled as the monster hanged upside down on the cocoon. Its mouth opened at the tip of the wrapping, drawing out mist from its victim inside. She held it up to the creature and it back away from the cocoon. The webbing was fresh. She pulled a couple of strings and gasped. There was Sora upside down, her Mana spilling out of her body. Looking up at the creature, it did not move. Unusual since it had no problem moving when Flaros shined its light on the monster.

Azure's Flare spell was dying. The stale air was not enough to keep the flame going, she could barely breathe. Azure walked back while the monster followed her movement, waiting, preparing. She stood by the window, climbing on a chair, and switched the latch to unlock it. Azure struggled to push it due to the webbing. She took some of it off and saw her reflection made by the flame. Her entire arm now covered in darkness, it startled her and she fell over. The spell stopped and the sound of knocking behind her grew louder. Azure slid her hand over the webbed floor and felt the chair.



“Flare.” The chair lit aflame as the mouth of the monster hovered her head. They both stood frozen, the creature staring at the fire, and Azure knowing it was on top of her. Its breath blew Azure's brown hair aside. The smell reeked of ammonia with each fright-filled breath she took. Azure rolled aside and grabbed the legs of the flaming chair, before the fire caught up to the ends. She smashed it over the creature's head. It shattered and spread flames over its body. The monster screamed like a child wanting attention. It struggled to its feet. The creature lay down and burst like a balloon. Mist of Mana floated out of its flaming body.

The oxygen was gone and Azure struggled to breathe. Exerting her strength, she grabbed another chair, and smashed it through the window. The air outside rushed into the room and she inhaled the air in one gulp, coughing to exhale. It was not enough to circulate the room. So she pressed her hand on the wall underneath the windows and activated her shackles one more time.

“aftershock...” She focused her thoughts solely on the windows throughout the building. Everything shook and the glass collapsed throughout the second floor. Air circulated, blowing through the strings, the staleness waned. With aid from the flaming remains, Azure made her way to the cocoon. Her eyes blurred as she pulled the webbing apart. She saw her nails and fingers grew into a claw, even with the shackle activated. The pain of her hand stretching overwhelmed her. As Sora's body fell on top of Azure, a burst of light returned. It was Aeros. Its Mana awoken Sora as Azure wrapped her arms around her friend. Azure whimpered with a tear as the fire burnt out, and the light gave in to the darkness.

“azure...”

To Be Continued...

