



Magic Rises (Kate Daniels)

By Ilona Andrews

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Mercenary Kate Daniels and her mate, Curran, the Beast Lord, are struggling to solve a heartbreaking crisis. Unable to control their beasts, many of the Pack's shapeshifting children fail to survive to adulthood. While there is a medicine that can help, the secret to its making is closely guarded by the European packs, and there's little available in Atlanta.

Kate can't bear to watch innocents suffer, but the solution she and Curran have found threatens to be even more painful. The European shapeshifters who once outmaneuvered the Beast Lord have asked him to arbitrate a dispute—and they'll pay him in medicine. With the young people's survival and the Pack's future at stake, Kate and Curran know they must accept the offer—but they have little doubt that they're heading straight into a trap...

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for the Kate Daniels novels:

“Splendid...An edgy, dark fantasy.”—Patricia Briggs, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“[A] vividly drawn, kick-butt series.”—*Monsters and Critics*

“Fans of urban fantasy will delight in Ilona Andrews’s alternate-universe Atlanta.”—*Fresh Fiction*

About the Author

Ilona Andrews is the pseudonym for a husband-and-wife writing team. Together, they are the coauthors of the #1 *New York Times* bestselling Kate Daniels urban-fantasy series, including *Magic Rises*, *Magic Slays*, and *Magic Bleeds* and the romantic urban-fantasy novels of the Edge, including *Steel's Edge*, *Fate's Edge*, and *Bayou Moon*. They currently reside in Texas with their two children and numerous pets.

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Chapter 1

I spun the spear. “One mOre argument and I’ll

ground you.”

Julie rolled her eyes with all the scorn a fourteen-year-old could muster and pushed her blond hair away from her face. “Kate, like when will I ever use this in real life?”

“You’ll use it in the next five seconds to keep me from impaling you.”

In my twenty-six years, I’ve held many jobs. Teaching wasn’t one of them. Mostly I killed people in bloody and creative ways. But Julie was my ward and my responsibility, and practicing with a spear was good for her. It built muscle, reflexes, and balance, and she would need all three when we moved on to the sword.

Several decades ago magic returned to our world, crushing our technological civilization and whatever illusion of safety we had with it. Magic and technology still fought over us, playing with the planet like two kids tossing a ball to each other. When one functioned, the other didn’t.

The cops did the best they could, but half of the time the phones didn’t work and all available officers responded to important emergencies, like saving schoolchildren from a flock of ravenous harpies. Meanwhile, with resources scarce and life cheap, people did a fine job preying on each other. Smart citizens didn’t go out at night. If the lowlives didn’t get you, the magic aberrations with giant teeth would.

Every person was responsible for his or her own safety, and we relied on magic, guns, and blades. Julie’s magic was rare, and highly prized, but useless in combat. Seeing the colors of magic wouldn’t help her to kill a vampire. My best friend, Andrea, was teaching her to handle guns. I couldn’t hit an elephant with a gun at ten feet, although I could probably bludgeon it to death. Melee weapons, that I could teach.

I struck at Julie's midsection, moving slow like molasses. She rotated her spear like an oar and slapped mine, knocking it down.

"And?"

She gave me a completely blank look. Most of the time Julie took practice seriously, but on days like this some switch malfunctioned in her head, disconnecting her brain from her body. There was probably some way to snap her out of it, some right "mom" words I could say, but I had found Julie about a year ago on the street and the whole parent thing was still new to me. My mother died before I could form any memories of her, so I didn't have any experience to fall back on.

To make things worse, I'd used magic to save Julie's life. She couldn't refuse a direct order from me, although she didn't know it and I was determined to keep it that way. I'd slipped up a few times and learned that intonation had a lot to do with it. As long as I gave her instructions instead of bark-ing commands at her, she had no problem ignoring me.

Around us the Pack woods teemed with life. The after-noon sun shone bright. Leaves rustled in the breeze. Squirrels dashed to and fro on the branches, completely undeterred by several hundred werecarnivores living next door. In the dis-tance the faint sound of chainsaws rumbled—the narrow road leading to the Keep was in danger of becoming impassable and a team of shapeshifters had been dispatched this morning to cut down some of the trees.

A yellow butterfly floated up. Julie watched it.

I pulled my spear back, reversed it, and stabbed her in the left shoulder with the butt.

"Ow!"

I sighed. "Pay attention, please."

Julie made a face. "My arm hurts."

"Then you better block me, so I don't make something else hurt."

"This is child abuse."

"You're whining. We're doing oar block."

I spun the spear business end forward and stabbed at her again, in slow motion. Julie pinned my spear with hers and stayed there.

"Don't just sit there with your spear. You have an opening, might want to do something about it."

She raised her spear and made a halfhearted attempt to stab me in the chest. I gave her a second to recover, but she didn't move. That was it. I'd had it.

I turned the spear and swept her legs from under her. She fell on her back and I drove the spear into the ground a couple of inches from her neck. She blinked, pale blond hair fanned out wide from her head.

"What's your deal today?"

"Kevin asked Maddie to the Moon Dance."

Maddie, a werebear, was Julie's best friend. The Moon Dance was the Pack's way of letting the teenagers blow off steam—every other Friday evening, provided the magic was down, the shapeshifters hauled the speakers out and blasted dance music from the Keep's battlements. Being invited to the Moon Dance by a boy was understandably a big deal. It still didn't explain why two months of lessons and spear practice had vanished from my ward's head.

"So?"

"I'm supposed to help pick the outfit for tomorrow," Julie said, lying there like a slug.

"And this is more important than practice?"

"Yes!"

I pulled my spear out. "Fine. Go do your thing. You'll owe me an hour on Saturday." No force on the planet could make her concentrate when she got like this, so making her practice was a waste of time anyway.

The slug-child turned into a nimble gazelle and sprang to her feet. "Thank you!"

"Yeah, yeah."

We headed out of the woods. The world blinked for a second and a tide of magic splashed us, drowning the woods. The chainsaws sputtered and died, followed by loud cursing.

The official name for the phenomenon was post-Shift resonance, but everyone referred to it as magic waves. They'd come out of nowhere and roll across the world, snuffing out electricity, killing internal combustion engines, strangling guns, and spitting out monsters. Then the magic would vanish, the electric lights came on, and firearms once again became deadly. Nobody could predict how strong a wave would be or how long it would last. It made for a chaotic life, but we persevered.

The trees parted, revealing a vast grassy field. In the middle of it the Keep rose like a gray man-made mountain, an example of what happened if several hundred deeply paranoid and super-humanly strong people got together and decided they needed a safe place to crash. From one angle, the Keep resembled a modern fortress, from another, a medieval castle. We approached from the north, which gave us a view of the main tower, and from here the place looked like a grim, foreboding high-rise, complete with a penthouse, where Curran and I made our lair.

It wasn't always this way. We hadn't started out by looking at each other and instantly deciding we were soul mates. When we met, he thought I was a reckless merc who defied authority because I felt like it, and I thought he was an arrogant bastard who had enough issues to fill the Keep from top to bottom. But now we were together. He was the Beast Lord and I was his Consort, which put me in a position of authority over fifteen hundred shapeshifters, the largest pack in the South. I didn't want the responsibility, and given the choice, I would run as far as I could away from it, but it was the price I had to pay to stay with Curran. I loved him and he was worth it. He was worth everything.

We circled the Keep and passed through the wide, open gates into the inner courtyard. A group of shapeshifters worked on one of the Pack's vehicles, a modified Jeep, its hood bloated and misshapen by the need to contain two engines, one for gasoline, another for enchanted water. They waved at us as we walked by. We waved back. The shapeshifters accepted me, partially because I fought for my position and gave them no choice, and partially because while Curran was fair, he also had a very low tolerance for bullshit. We didn't always agree on things, but if the appeal had been made to me directly, he wouldn't overrule me,

and the Pack liked having the option of a second opinion.

The reinforced steel door stood wide open. Late May in Georgia was hot and the summer would get hotter. Trying to air-condition the Keep was a losing proposition, so every door and window was open in an effort to create a breeze. We went through into a narrow hallway and started up the enormous staircase that was the bane of my existence. I started hating it the first time I had to climb it, and a knee injury only made my hate stronger.

Second floor.

Third floor. Stupid stairs.

“Consort!”

The urgency in the voice made me turn. An older woman ran toward me through the third-floor hallway, her eyes open wide, her mouth slack. Meredith Cole. Maddie’s mother.

“They’re killing them!” She grabbed onto me. “They’re going to kill my girls!”

Every shapeshifter in the hallway froze. Putting hands on an alpha without permission counted as assault.

Tony, one of Doolittle’s assistants, rounded the corner, running down the hallway toward us. “Meredith! Wait!”

Doolittle was the Pack’s medmage. Dread washed over me. There was only one reason the Pack’s medic would ever kill a child.

“Kate? What’s happening? Where is Maddie?” Julie’s voice spiked into high pitch.

“Help me!” Meredith clenched my arm. My bones groaned. “Don’t let them kill my babies.”

Tony halted, not sure what to do next.

I kept my voice calm. “Show me.”

“This way. Doolittle has them.” Meredith let go of me and pointed down the hallway.

“What’s going on?” Julie squeaked.

I marched down the hall. “We’ll find out in a minute.”

Tony caught on and fell in behind us as we passed by him. The hallway brought us to the medical ward.

“He’s in the back,” Tony said. “I’ll show you.”

He took the lead and we followed him through the hospital wing to a round room. Six long, narrow hallways led from the room, concrete gray tunnels. Tony picked the one straight ahead. A steel door with a telltale silver sheen waited at the end. We walked to it, the sound of our steps bouncing off the walls. Three bars, each as thick as my wrist, guarded the door, for now unlocked. My heart sank. I didn’t want to see what was behind it.

Tony grabbed the thick metal bracket that served as the door’s handle, strained, and pulled it open, revealing

a gloom-shrouded room. I stepped through. To my right, Doolittle stood next to some chairs, a black man in his early fifties, with dark skin and silver-salted hair. He turned to look at me, and his usually kind eyes told me everything I needed to know: my worst fear was true and there was no hope.

To my left two Plexiglas prison cells sat side by side, drenched in blue feylantern light. Steel and silver bars wrapped around each cell. I could see no doors. The only access to the cells was through a vending machine-style drop in the front.

Inside the cells two monsters waited. Misshapen, grotesque, their bodies twisted into a horrible nightmare of semi-human parts, oversized claws, and patches of dense fur, they cowered in the corner, separated by the Plexiglas and bars, but huddling together all the same. Their faces, with oversized jaws and oddly distorted teeth, wouldn't just stop you in your tracks, they'd give you a lifetime of flashbacks.

The monster on the left raised its head. Two human blue eyes looked at us, brimming with terror and pain.

"Maddie!" Julie dropped by the bars. "Maddie!"

The other monster stirred. I recognized the shock of brown hair. Maddie and Margo. Julie's best friend and her twin sister were going loup.

Every shapeshifter had to face a choice: to keep his or her humanity by imposing order and strict discipline and practicing constant restraint or to surrender to the violent cravings generated by the presence of Lyc-V, the shapeshifter virus, and become an insane loup. Loups murdered, tortured, and reveled in the pain of others. They could no longer maintain a pure human or animal form. Once a shapeshifter went loup, there was no turning back. The Pack put them down.

During times of extreme stress, Lyc-V exploded in huge numbers within the shapeshifter's body. Adolescence, with its hormone fluctuations and emotional roller coasters, was the most stressful time a shapeshifter faced. A quarter of the children didn't survive it.

"Tell him," Meredith pleaded. "Tell him not to kill my children."

Doolittle looked at me.

The Pack had a complicated way of figuring out the probability of loupism based on the amount of virus in the blood. "What's the Lycos number?"

"Two thousand six hundred for Maddie and two thousand four hundred for Margo," he said.

Over a thousand was pretty much a guarantee of loupism.

"How long have they been like this?" I asked.

"Since two o'clock last night," Doolittle said.

It was over. It was over fourteen hours ago. We were just trying to put off the inevitable. Damn it.

Julie held on to the bars. My heart constricted into a painful hard ball. A few months ago, she had looked just like that, a mess of human and animal, her body ravaged by the virus. I still had nightmares where I stood over her while she growled at me, strapped into a hospital bed, and when I woke up, I'd walk down to her room in the middle of the night to reassure myself she was alive and well.

“Please, Consort. Please,” Meredith whispered. “You made Julie get better.”

She had no idea what she was asking. The price was too high. Even if I would agree to it—which I wouldn’t—purging the virus from Julie required the magic of a full coven, the power of several pagan priests, and my near death. It was a onetime thing, and I couldn’t replicate it.

“Julie recovered because of her magic,” I lied, keeping my voice gentle.

“Please!”

“I’m so sorry.” The words tasted like crushed glass in my mouth. There was nothing I could do.

“You can’t!” Julie turned to me. “You can’t kill them. You don’t know. They might still come out of it.”

No, they wouldn’t. I knew it, but I glanced at Doolittle anyway. He shook his head. If the girls had any chance of a recovery, they would’ve shown the signs by now.

“They just need more time.” Meredith grasped onto Julie’s words like a drowning man grabbed at a straw. “Just more time.”

“We will wait,” I said.

“We would be only prolonging it,” Doolittle said quietly.

“We will wait,” I repeated. It was the least we could do for her. “Sit with me, Meredith.”

We sat together in the neighboring chairs.

“How long?” Doolittle asked quietly.

I glanced at Meredith. She was staring at her daughters. Tears ran down her face.

“As long as it takes.”

I Checked the CLOCK On the wall. we had

been in the room for over six hours. The girls showed no change. Occasionally one, then the other, would rage, pound-ing on the Plexiglas, snarling in mindless fury, and then they would drop to the floor, exhausted. Looking at them hurt.

Doolittle had left for a couple of hours, but now he was back, sitting off by himself near the other wall, his face ashen. He hadn’t said a word.

A few minutes ago Jennifer Hinton, the alpha of clan Wolf, had come into the room. She stood, leaning against the wall, cradling her stomach and the baby inside with her hands. Her face had a haunted look, and the anxiety in her eyes verged on panic. Approximately ten percent of werewolves went loup at birth.

Meredith slipped off her chair. She sat on the floor by the Plexiglas and began to sing. Her voice shook.

“Hush, little baby, don’t say a word . . .”

Oh God.

Jennifer clamped her hand over her mouth and fled out of the room.

“Momma’s gonna buy you a mockingbird . . .”

Margo stirred and crawled to her mother, dragging one twisted leg behind her. Maddie followed. They huddled together, the three of them, pressed against the Plexiglas. Meredith kept singing, desperate. Her lullaby was woven from years of love and hope, and all of it was now dying. My eyes teared.

Julie rose and slipped out of the room.

I listened to Meredith sing and wished I had more magic. Different magic. I wished I were more. From the time I could remember, my adoptive father, Voron, had honed me into a weapon. My earliest memory was of eating ice cream and hold-ing my saber on my lap. I had learned dozens of martial arts styles; I fought in arenas and sand pits; I could walk into the wilderness and emerge months later, no worse for wear. I could control the undead, which I hid from everyone. I could mold my blood into a solid spike and use it as a weapon. I’d learned sev-eral power words, words in a language so primal, so potent, that they commanded the raw magic itself. One couldn’t just know them; you had to make them yours or die. I fought against them and made them my own. At the height of a magic tsunami, I had used one to force a demonic army to kneel before me.

And none of it could help me now. All of my power, and I couldn’t help two scared girls and their mother crying her heart out. I could only destroy, and kill, and crush. I wished I could make this go away, just wave my arms, pay whatever price I had to pay, and make everything be okay. I wanted so desperately to make everything okay.

Meredith had fallen silent.

Julie returned, carrying a Snickers bar. She unwrapped it with shaking fingers, broke the candy in half, and dropped each piece through the slits.

Maddie reached out. Her hand with four stubby nubs of fingers and a single four-inch claw speared the candy. She pulled it to her. Her jaws unhinged and she took one tiny bite of chocolate with crooked teeth. My heart was breaking.

Margo lunged at the glass, snarling and crying. The half-a- foot-thick Plexiglas didn’t even shudder. She hurled herself against it again, and again, wailing. Each time her body hit the wall, Meredith’s shoulders jerked.

The door opened. I saw the familiar muscular body and short blond hair. Curran.

He must’ve been out of the Keep, because instead of his regular sweatpants, he wore jeans. When you looked at him, you got an overwhelming impression of strength. His broad shoulders and powerful chest strained his T-shirt. Carved biceps bulged on his arms. His stomach was flat and hard. Everything about him spoke of sheer physical power, con-tained but ready to be released. He moved like a cat on the prowl, graceful, supple, and completely quiet, stalking the Keep’s hallways, a lion in his stone lair. If I didn’t know him and I saw him coming in a dark alley, I’d make myself scarce.

His physical presence was alarming, but his real power was in his eyes. The moment you looked into his gray irises, you knew he would tolerate no challenge to his authority, and if his eyes turned gold, you knew you were going to die. In a fit of cosmic irony, he had fallen in love with me. I challenged his authority on a weekly basis.

Curran didn't look at me. Usually when he entered the room, our stares would cross for that silent moment of connection, a quick check of *Hey, are you okay?* He wasn't looking at me and his face was grim. Something was seriously wrong. Something besides Maddie.

Curran walked past me to Doolittle and handed him a small plastic bag filled with olive-colored paste.

Doolittle opened the bag and sniffed the contents. His eyes widened. "Where . . ."

Curran shook his head.

"Is that the panacea?" Meredith spun toward him, eyes suddenly alive again.

The panacea was produced by European shapeshifters, who guarded it like gold. The Pack had been trying to reverse engineer it for years and had gotten nowhere. The herbal mixture reduced chances of loupism at birth by seventy-five per-cent and reversed midtransformation in one third of teenagers. There used to be a man in Atlanta who somehow managed to smuggle it in small batches, which he sold to the Pack at exorbitant prices, but a few weeks ago the shapeshifters had found him floating in a pond with his throat cut. Jim's security crew tracked the killers to the coast. They had sailed out of our jurisdiction. Now Curran held a bag of it. *What have you been up to, Your Furry Majesty?*

"There is only enough for a single dose," Doolittle said.

Damn it. "Can you get more?"

Curran shook his head.

"You must choose," Doolittle said.

"I can't." Meredith shrunk back.

"Don't make her pick." How the hell could you choose one child over the other?

"Split it," Curran said.

Doolittle shook his head. "My lord, we have a chance to save one of them . . ."

"I said split it." Curran growled. His eyes flashed gold. I was right. Something bad had happened, and it wasn't just Maddie and Margo.

Doolittle clamped his mouth shut.

Curran moved back and leaned against the wall, his arms crossed.

The paste was split into two equal portions. Tony mixed each into a pound of ground beef and dropped it into the cells. The children pounced on the meat, licking it off the floor. Seconds crawled by, towing minutes in their wake.

Margo jerked. The fur on her body melted. Her bones folded on themselves, shrank, realigned . . . She cried out, and a human girl, naked and bloody, fell to the floor.

Thank you. Thank you, whoever you are upstairs.

“Margo!” Meredith called. “Margo, honey, answer me. Answer me, baby.”

“Mom?” Margo whispered.

“My baby!”

Maddie’s body shuddered. Her limbs twisted. The distortion in her body shrank, but the signs of animal remained. My heart sank. It didn’t work.

“She’s down to two,” Doolittle said.

The shift coefficient, the measure of how much a body had shifted from one form to the other. “What does that mean?”

“It’s progress,” he said. “If we had more of the panacea, I would be optimistic.”

But we didn’t. Tony hadn’t just emptied the bag, he had cut it and rubbed the inside of the plastic on the meat and then scraped it clean with the back of the knife. Maddie was still going loup. We had to get more panacea. We had to save her.

“You can’t kill her!” Julie’s voice shot into high pitch. “You can’t!”

“How long can you keep the child under?” Curran asked.

“How long is necessary?” Doolittle asked.

“Three months,” Curran said.

Doolittle frowned. “You’re asking me to induce a coma.”

“Can you do it?”

“Yes,” Doolittle said. “The alternative is termination.”

Curran’s voice was clipped. “Effective immediately, all loupism-related terminations of children are suspended. Sedate them instead.” He turned and walked out.

I paused for half a second to tell Julie that it would be okay and chased after him.

The hallway was empty. The Beast Lord was gone.

Users Review

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