



THE ALLIANCE SERIES
BOOK ONE

ADAMANT

EMMA L. ADAMS

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ADAMANT

Ever since a devastating magical war tore apart Ada Fletcher's homeworld, she and her family have lived undercover on the low-magic Earth. Stuck in a dead-end job in London, Ada has spent her life hiding both her true identity and her forbidden magic from the Inter-World Alliance: the organisation that polices the Passages between Earth and its magical neighbours.

At least until a high-ranking Alliance official is murdered, and Ada is arrested as the main suspect.

Kay Walker, grandson of the Inter-World Alliance's late founder, expects to spend his first week as an Alliance employee hunting rogue monsters in the Passages, not solving his supervisor's murder. However, the main suspect is a fierce young woman with dangerous magic from a world that should no longer exist... and the closer Kay gets to uncovering the truth, the higher the body count rises.

The last thing Ada wants to do is help the infuriating Alliance guard who arrested her, but it soon becomes clear that the Alliance knows too much about Ada's homeworld -- and her magic. More, in fact, than she knows herself. One thing's certain: she's not the only one keeping secrets, and trusting the wrong person might cost more than her life.

ADA

Pulling up my hood to hide my face, I slipped from the fog-shrouded London street into a narrow alleyway between two abandoned buildings, a smile forming at the prospect of breaking the Alliance's rules. Rule number one: no trespassing in the Passages. Rule number two: no leaving Earth without a permit.

Lucky they didn't know about this particular door.

I rubbed my arms, the chill from the alley wall penetrating the thin fabric of my coat. Several feet in, the brick gave way to a fake section of wall which wasn't obvious at first glance. This area was so off-radar, no one would ever come looking for trouble here, not of the magic variety. But my fingers found the familiar cracks between brick and metal, and a gentle push made the fake part of the wall slide away, revealing cold metal.

I didn't know who'd first discovered the Passage here, nor who'd concealed it. The Alliance had logged every single one, including the handful that existed on Earth, but this was hidden even from them. They'd never guess the biggest illegal offworld operation in the Multiverse was in the same city as Earth's main Alliance branch.

Nothing was quite like that first thrill when magic made itself known, buzzing under my skin as my fingers brushed the metal wall. It was icy to the touch and functioned like a sliding panel, revealing a dark corridor. Heart beating fast, I stepped over the threshold.

The Passages were always freezing, no matter the time of day. There was no

sun here, and on the lowest level, where I was, it felt like the inside of a gigantic refrigerator. The lowest level, or “level zero”, was the most dangerous, which was most likely why the Alliance hadn’t found the door. Even Alliance guards could get eaten alive by the monsters down here.

Luckily, this time it was quiet, though the lingering stench of Cethrax’s swamp followed me through the corridors. That world was *not* on my list of tourist destinations. But once I’d escaped the warren of the lower levels via a concealed staircase, I was in the Passages for real. The first-level corridor opened before me, branching out into countless others. All identical—high-ceilinged, ten metres wide, and lined with metal doors like the one that led to Earth. All were labelled with numbers in an order only the Alliance knew, to ensure nobody but them could tell which door led to which universe. There were thousands in total, spread throughout these corridors. Maybe even millions—I hadn’t seen them all.

For me, imagining was part of the thrill. Every hum of the wind in the dark whispered promises of worlds beyond imagining, every door held something new behind its cold metal exterior. I’d come here too many times to count, yet I’d never set foot beyond one of those doors. But god, the temptation was so intense I could taste it.

And then there was magic. You couldn’t really *see* magic on Earth the way I could here, like the shift of a tinted lens, enough to make the world look one degree different. And I could feel it under my skin, like I was plugged into a live wire. Something in the Earth’s atmosphere stifled magic, which was why the Alliance relied so much on their offworld technology. No denying they needed it, seeing as they were the one force standing between Earth and the mercy of a thousand offworld threats. And yet, I’d be at *their* mercy if they found me here. Using an unregistered Passage to help illegal magic-wielders from another world that the Alliance deemed ‘dangerous’ would mean instant imprisonment, if I was lucky.

I walked swiftly, with the occasional glance behind to make sure I wasn’t being tailed. I had long since figured out the pattern of the Alliance’s patrols and could avoid them, but despite having come here frequently since I was eight

years old, I couldn't pretend I knew all the Passages' secrets. They'd been set up by the original Alliance. That was about as much as anyone on Earth knew. Not how they'd put the doors in place, not how they found each world. Classified, Nell had said. The Alliance guarded its secrets well.

My phone buzzed in my pocket. I fished it out and glanced at the screen. "Level 2, Door 65. You're late."

Rolling my eyes, I slid my phone back into my pocket. Delta had been the one to hook up my phone to Inter-World Communications so I'd have a means of contacting him from Earth. A pretty handy extension. Not quite as fancy as the flashy communicators members of the Alliance carried, but it worked for me. I could call anyone within the five neighbouring worlds and the Passages between.

Second level. I suppressed a shiver of unease, and the smile faded from my face. I knew which world I'd be dealing with this time.

The staircase to the top floor was invisible to most people, but I found it, coat whipping behind me in the chill wind of upper level. Shivering, I climbed the twisting staircase and hurried through the corridors, not daring to glance at the doors hidden in the gloom. I couldn't imagine the horrors on the other side. On the top floor, a place restricted even to Alliance employees, these were worlds torn apart by war, worlds barred from ever joining the Alliance.

One of them was my homeworld.

Reaching the corridor I needed, I paused, looking out for the familiar figure. Delta waved at me from a shadowy corner near door 65.

"You took your time." Delta faced me with a smile full of elongated teeth.

"Can't be too careful," I said, mimicking Nell's lecturing voice, and he grinned. His hair stood up like the bristles on a toothbrush.

"Right. There's a family coming through. They should be here any minute now. They've been checked over. No magic, and no weapons training."

I nodded. No magic usually meant it was easier to get away. Not that the Alliance didn't think we'd all start a magical war anyway, given the chance.

"How's it going?" he asked. "Is Nell still being paranoid? I thought she'd locked you up."

"Not going to happen," I said. "She knows I'd break out and come here

anyway. What's she think will happen? I can hardly go swanning off to Valeria without a permit—though I wouldn't turn down an invite," I added, not so subtly.

"Nice try, Red," he said.

"Ugh. Enough with that stupid nickname already." Though my dyed dark-red hair had an even more vivid glow in the Passages. Blue light shone from the walls and ceiling, like an alien nightclub. "Seriously, though. Hover boots? Valeria has actual hover boots now?"

"New patent," said Delta, with another grin. "Not on the market yet, but I'm going to get my hands on some as soon as they are."

"If you don't let me have a go in them, I'll never forgive you," I said, crossing my arms. Delta and I were like weird cousins... who happened to live in different universes. I'd never met most of his family, and all I really knew about them was that the Campbells worked in magi-technology in Valeria's capital, trading with other universes. When they weren't smuggling offworlders through the Passages.

"Sure thing, Red." He ducked as I pretended to aim a punch at him. "How's Gary?"

"Long gone, thank goodness," I said. "He took issue with my—" I made quotation marks with my fingers—"wild lifestyle". I made the mistake of going over to his place after that fight with the selver and he thought I'd been in some neon orgy or something."

Delta snickered. "That's priceless. You went over there with selver drool all over you?"

"I couldn't help it! That stuff doesn't clean off easily. I glowed in the dark for a week! I had to throw away my clothes, Delta. The sacrifices I make for you."

"I'm sure you'll get over him."

"Already have."

Such was the price I paid for a double life. Part-time cashier and part-time assistant at Nell's home business by day. Owner in chief of an illegal shelter for offworlders by night. Any time between, I spent in the Passages. And none of it