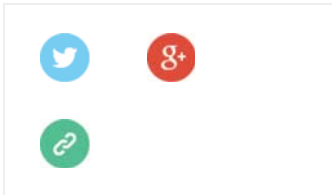


Keep Reading with Stefon Mears

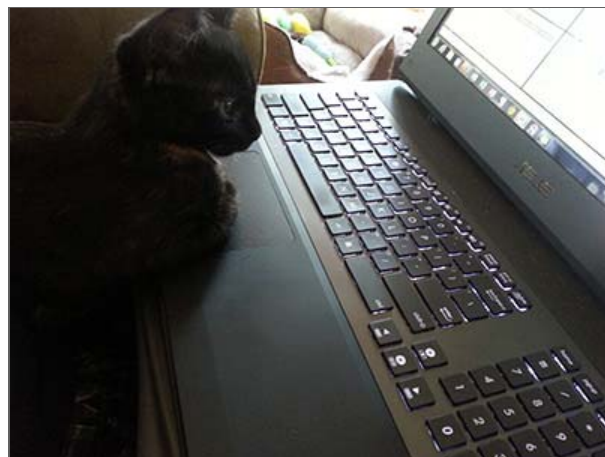
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Here We Go!

First issue! I'm unreasonably psyched right now, I don't mind admitting. I have a new list, and cool things are happening.

1. My agent, Laurie McLean, will be on Twitter today (9/9/14) giving away ten copies of my new novel *Immoral Telepathy*. It's a trivia contest called Foreword Jeopardy, and it starts at 10 AM Pacific Time. Look for #forewordjeopardy or just follow @ForewordLit.
2. I've started drafting a new fantasy novel. It's too early to give you much in the way of details, but I will give you updates!
3. We have a new kitten! Her name is Samba, and she's already charmed the other two cats.



Behind the Scenes

This is an ongoing feature, that will answer reader

questions, give a look at world-building, and comment on the reasons behind some of the choices I make when writing. I'd love to have more questions for this feature, so please feel free to e-mail me your questions at himself@stefonmears.com.

Why Three Coyotes?

When I first started working on [Surviving Telepathy](#), I knew I needed music to be an important part of Rick's life. Goodness knows it was for me when I was graduating high school. Iron Maiden, Beastie Boys, Blue Öyster Cult, and more. To this day it's rare that I'm driving without music playing.

But Rick needed more than music, he needed a favorite band, someone he'd sing along with. My first thought was the Cherry Poppin' Daddies. I consider them an incredibly talented band and have always been impressed by the facility with which they play music from many different genres.

Only one problem – licensing issues. I wanted to be able to quote lyrics as part of the story, but ASCAP and BMI have been known to charge ... somewhat off-putting rates. I could have contacted the band directly – they're based here in Oregon – but I shied away from it.

Instead I decided to make up a band for Rick. And when I did the possibilities exploded! I got to make up album titles and covers. I got to write lyrics for the first time in ages. I could even hear their music in my head. (Honestly, I'm singing "Wildest Night" to myself as I write this.) There's a part of me that wanted to sing lead for a band when I grew up, and Three Coyotes lets that part of me play.

But why the *name*?

Oh, that. Yeah. I guess the rest of I've said so far was pretty obvious, wasn't it?

When Melissa and I lived in Santa Clara, we kept most of our fiction on three, long, wall-mounted and

terribly overburdened bookshelves. On each of those shelves, in the same relative location, we had a small statue of a singing coyote. We used to imagine them greeting us the way the old Three Stooges shorts began, singing hello in harmonizing intervals.

When it came time to name my fictional band, those three singing coyote statues leapt right to mind. I should probably post a picture of them to my website.

The name of Tony's favorite band – The Cold Skankin' Boys – has a much shorter, simpler rationale: Skankin' Pickle was taken.

With a Broken Sword

Rather read this in your browser than your e-mail? Need to catch up on chapters you missed? [You can read the whole story so far here.](#) (The link is password protected, but list members get the password.)

Chapter 1

The morning sun had the temerity to shine down bright and warm from the clear blue sky above. Good spring weather. The rains were days behind them, but their scent still teased in a breeze which was just cool enough to mitigate the heat of armor.

Perfect weather for a just war against Berledth's tyrant king.

Perfect weather going to waste for Ser Colin, who rode with Ser Darren's company of six knights through the rolling fields just east of the mighty river Odeda's snake curves. Miles south of the Berledth front.

Secret missions. Knights riding without their squires and banners. Enough to make Ser Colin spit. Or it would have been, were he not astride his roan steed and clad in his helm and his rings of steel. Spitting was for clearing the mouth of blood or mud in a battle, or of nerves and morning eggs before the battle began. Spitting was for taverns and firesides, not for an armored knight riding in the service of his king, Boris III of Kholast.

Even if that mission were of questionable honor at best.

Follow the Odeda up through the forest Taern to where the Berledth pickets were weakest. Slip through enemy lines and hit three key points in their supply chain, far enough behind the front to be unprotected.

Work for assassins, not knights.

Ser Colin spat anyway. If he was to be given work beneath his station, he might as well act the part.

The sound did not escape the catlike ears of Ser Jane, who dropped out of line to ride beside him and quirk that half-smile of hers. Ser Jane stood a half-head shorter than Ser Colin, but no enemy still lived who ever faced her glaive. Whether twirling its six-foot handle to strike with the butt end, or slashing and stabbing with the single-edged blade at its tip, Ser Jane was equally deadly against both footman and horseman alike.

“Brothers and sisters,” she called aloud, her voice full of humor. “I do believe the youngest member of our company has spat.”

A chuckle rolled through the knights. Even one of the horses nickered as though on cue, and Ser Colin’s ears burned with embarrassment.

“Could it be,” continued Ser Jane, “that the newest member of the Knights of the Morning has another task in mind for his mighty sword? I wonder what he would rather be doing...” She made a show of consideration, tapping the point of her jaw. “Leading the vanguard, perhaps? Or charging in to support the infantry?”

“Are you going to tell me you’re happy about our mission?” The words came out louder than Ser Colin intended, ringing in the morning air. Sparrows took flight from a copse of elm trees atop a nearby rise, as though in protest at his disturbance.

Before Ser Jane could answer, the quiet rasp of Ser Darren took charge, much as the craggy knight himself had done for longer than Ser Colin been alive. “What are the words of our order?”

Trick question. Ser Colin might only have received his arms and standing two seasons ago, but he had worked hard to truly understand the distinction of that question’s answer.

“The words on our banners are ‘king and country.’ But the words we swear to are country and king.”

“And the difference?” said Ser Jane.

“Everyone believes we swear to serve the king, but in truth we serve the people.” Ser Colin cocked his head. “Like the two Berledth dukes who are aiding us against their own king.”

“Those dukes might be aiding themselves,” said Ser Darren. “But rather than fighting at your precious front and covering ourselves with glory like the other orders, I volunteered us for this mission.”

Ser Darren and Ser Jane both smiled at the shock on Ser Colin’s face.

“That’s right,” said Ser Darren. “Now why did I do it?”

Ser Colin gritted his teeth in frustration that the answer did not leap to his lips.

Sers Roderick, Tabitha and Gerald shook their heads, but Ser Darren kept a steady eye on Ser Colin, waiting, and Ser Jane nodded encouragement, as though she too felt he should see the answer.

But just then they heard the rising two-tone blast of a ram’s horn. A Berledth attack signal.

Arrows volleyed down around them from the right. One caught Ser Roderick in the throat. The veteran gurgled and fell from his horse.

From the rise and the copse of elms came thundering Berledth warriors. Dozens of them, armored, and wielding lances, swords and maces.

Another volley of arrows crested the sky...

For weekly updates about Ser Colin, and to keep up with all my other reader exclusives, sign up at stefonmears.com/join.

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