

# TARGETING TELEPATHY

## **Also by Stefon Mears**

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# TARGETING TELEPATHY

Book Three of *The Telepath Trilogy*

Stefon Mears

Thousand Faces Publishing

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*For Melissa, the girl I didn't meet  
until years after college*



*Many thanks to my amazing beta readers*

*Bill*

*Lori*

*Rob*

*Wendy*





# *Berkeley Telepathic Outreach Guidelines*

1) If you pick up a thought without trying, you might as well have overheard it being spoken.

2) Read minds with caution. You're better off not knowing most people's secrets.

3) Control minds with caution. Try not to break anyone.

4) If you do break someone's mind, fix them. You may need help to do so.

5) Don't rely on telepathy for everything.

6) Zero tolerance for megalomaniacs.



## Chapter 1

“**Y**OU’RE CHEATING, AREN’T YOU?”

Some people will complain about anything.

I’m sitting in a field-level seat at AT&T park, right behind home plate. It’s a beautiful June Saturday afternoon. Wisps of glowing white clouds in the pale sky above. The crowd is clapping and chanting, “Beat L.A.!” with that stadium echo like distant thunder. Gentle breezes are coming in from McCovey Cove, carrying the ubiquitous scent of hot dogs and peanuts to contrast the taste of my own garlic fries.

The seats are incredible. I don’t want to think of how much these season tickets must cost. They’re a business perk for my parents, who frequently have to entertain the politically important. Often, when my parents don’t need them, they get passed on to staffers and others as rewards for jobs well done.

And once in a while, like today, I get to claim them and bring my best friend to watch the Giants beating the Dodgers six-to-one in the third.

Correction: the Giants are beating the Dodgers' ace, Clay Kersey, *the Cy Young Award winning southpaw*, six-to-one in the third. What's more, the Giants have runners on first and third with two out, and the heart of the order coming up. The game is paused though, while the Dodger pitching coach is out at the mound trying to figure out what's wrong with his star pitcher.

Meanwhile, in the seat next to me, my best friend Tony Gottschalk has figured out what that poor, beleaguered coach could never begin to guess, and finally gotten around to asking the question I've been expecting since the first inning.

I turn to Tony. He doesn't have a jersey like I do, but he's got his ever-expanding mop of black curls tucked under his Giants cap, and his unlicensed orange and black tee-shirt reads "My team isn't the only thing that's Giant."

"How could I be cheating?" Mock innocence all through my voice. "I'm not even playing."

"Rick..."

I wiggle my eyebrows and draw a long pull from my insanely huge cup of Limon Blast soda.

"Dude!"

"Hey," I say, setting the cup down on the cement, "is it my fault he's having trouble concentrating today? Maybe he can't take his eyes off the knockout blonde ten seats down."

"He pitches in L.A. He's used to seeing *movie stars* behind the plate."

"And yet, I can't help feeling as though his mind isn't quite on the game."

It helps that I've been feeding him psychic static. Not much, just little distractions at key points in his windup. It's really easy, with the excited buzz of forty-something thousand minds around me. Most of them Giants fans, but a sizable enough number of Dodgers fans to provide a good conflicting morass where the gestalt — the merging point of what I think

of as individual fogs of thoughts — clashes.

Well, all right. I haven't quite stopped there. Every so often a Giants batter has also just happens to have a completely accurate hunch about what pitch is coming and to what part of the strike zone.

After all, what's the point of being a telepath if I never let myself have any fun at all?

"I hate the Dodgers as much as any Giants fan," says Tony, "but do you have so little faith in your team that you want them to win like this?"

"Every game? No. Most games? No. But did you read the things this guy said about the Giants in the paper this morning?"

"You still read the paper?" Tony shakes his head at a slight angle as though commiserating. "Still not in in the twenty-first century, huh? Well, don't worry. You'll get here."

"Hey. I like the feel of newsprint."

"You and newspaper publishers. The rest of us have moved on."

"Wait." I narrow my eyes at the subject change. "So you're cool with this?"

"You didn't exactly ask my permission, and I wouldn't do it if I were in your shoes, but of all the ways you could possibly abuse your power, this strikes me as one of the least offensive."

Considering we know of a telepath who re-arranged a married couple's life to suit his own needs for sex and living arrangements, and another who completely shattered a girl's mind by forcing her to fall in love with him, that's damning with faint praise.

Of course, neither of those two are telepaths anymore. I saw to that, personally. Went right into their heads and cut off access to their powers in the most permanent fashion I could muster.

I may not mind messing with a baseball game, but we're talking about people's lives here.

Tony and I put together the Blackhall-Gottschalk Code of Telepathic Conduct to help me avoid abusing people with my power. And with the minds of basically everyone in the world open and available to me, abuses could escalate quickly without some kind of measuring stick to evaluate what I'm doing.

"So you consider this abuse?"

"The reason you just gave violates rule 4.2," says Tony, his voice quieter now, though I can tell that no one sitting nearby is paying attention to us. "You're only doing this for entertainment, which we agreed is not enough reason to mess with a person's mind."

"True, though I am getting a training benefit out of it, which means 4.3 applies."

"How?" Tony's attention is intense, and I wonder if his Zen practice has begun giving him benefits beyond his superhuman driving skills.

I have to think about that for a moment before I can explain, so I stuff a couple of garlic fries in my mouth. They've been sitting there long enough to get soggy, but the garlic is still strong and oily on my tongue.

After I swallow, I lower my voice to just above a whisper.

"The normal way to do this is like when we were playing pool that time. Send images or phrases into his head. Like if I made him think about that blonde." I give my head a slight shake. "I'm trying something different though. I'm feeding him awareness of the conflicts between the amalgamated gestalts of the Giants and Dodgers fans."

Tony blinks fast, surprise all through his aspect. Meanwhile, the umpire has broken up the sermon on the mound, and the pitching coach has retreated to the dugout. In the

background I can see two pitchers up and working fast in the Dodger bullpen.

“Holy shit.” Tony has forgotten to be quiet, but his amazement only draws a little amusement. “You can do that?”

“Apparently. I haven’t done it before. It was just an idea.”

“Well, it’s definitely practice then.” I can feel Tony thinking about this. The implications. “Jesus, Rick. I don’t think I quite appreciated your versatility.”

*It is impressive, says a mind I do not know, which means a telepath I don’t know, making contact. Do you have a moment to chat?*

THE GIANTS GAME IS underway again, but I’m too distracted to get back to messing with the Dodgers’ starting pitcher. Tony can see the shock in my expression at the unexpected telepathic contact, but I wave off any concern with a quick hand-movement.

Tony, being Tony, immediately gets that it’s a telepath thing, and goes back to his garlic fries and watching the game. He settles his skinny frame onto the hard plastic seat like it’s a big, comfy armchair.

What do I know about this strange telepath? Mental voice sounded male, and that’s tough to disguise. No particular emotional subtext to that first sending, which means good control. He also had to have been paying attention to my conversation with Tony without my noticing.

In other words, he’s better than I am.

All right, Rick. Enough with the paranoia.

—*Hi. I’m Rick Blackhall. Good to meet you, and I hope you aren’t a Dodgers fan.*—

I let my subtext convey a slight sense of amused embarrassment. Like a sheepish grin.

*Pleased to meet you, Rick. My name is Hyun-Ki Noh. And honestly I consider sports fandom one step up from barbarism, so it doesn't matter to me if you interfere. I'm just here entertaining a client.*

Blunt honesty underlies his words, but I appreciate that. Most of the telepaths I've met so far have wanted to play games.

I have a sense of where he is now. About three rows behind me, and one section down the first base line. I check myself from glancing.

*I would have settled for focusing the pitcher's mind on that pretty blonde ten seats down from you.*

—*She drew your attention from where you're sitting?*—  
I don't try to hide my disbelieving undercurrent.

*No, but some of the men around you are paying as much attention to her as to the game.*

True. I've noticed that myself.

*And the pitchers can see her clearly over the umpire's right shoulder, so it would have been easy.* An undertone of respect accompanies the rest of his thought. *I like your technique better though. Mind if I steal it?*

—*Help yourself. Just tell me how you tuned in. I didn't pick you up, so you couldn't have been watching my thoughts or Tony's.*—

*I wasn't. I felt the ripples of your interactions with that pitcher and traced them to you. Then I tuned into the heavy-set gentleman sitting behind you, and listened to your conversation through his ears. Don't worry, though. I kept him from noticing you or what you and your friend were saying. I won't do anything to draw attention to you. In return, though I expect you'll want to mention this conversation to your friend Tony, I'd appreciate your keeping my identity out of it.*

—*Of course.*— Time to work in the important part of this conversation. If I can see an easy way to do it. —*You seem*



*pretty casual about finding another telepath.—*

*I can't be the first other you've met.*

Ahoy, Captain! Segue off the starboard bow!

*—Actually, I'm a member of the Berkeley Telepathic Outreach, and I'd love to tell you about our little group.—*

I still think it's a terrible name. But after more than a semester of meetings with Jamal, Mary and Terrence, it was the best we could agree on. We couldn't settle on much in the way of rules either. Mary's too pro-power and Terrence is too anti-telling-people-what-to-do. Hell, even Jamal wants looser restrictions on our members than I do.

But it's a start.

I send Hyun-Ki a memory of the introductory spiel and the guidelines, and give him time to sort through them. In the meantime, the Giants are back on the field and the Dodgers are batting. Two out and nobody on, but I'm a little disappointed that the Giants couldn't continue the rally without me.

Maybe Tony has a point about too much interference being unsportsmanlike.

I'm still not sorry.

"There's another telepath here," I say to Tony while the crowd around us cheers a called strike. "One I don't know."

"Hope he's not a Dodgers fan."

Tony can't help looking around, but I reassure him with a calming hand.

"He's not. And right now it doesn't matter where he is. I sent him the BTO stuff."

"And now, let me guess. He ain't seen nothing yet."

I sigh. "Will you let that go?"

"You're right. You guys are taking care of business. And I mean every day."

"You're being an asshole."

He laughs, completely unabashed. "Dude, you're the ones who came up with an acronym that's been associated

with a classic rock band since the 70s.”

“How do you even know that? Does your car only pick up stations from the year it was made?”

Tony starts to respond, but I lose the thread when Hyun-Ki makes contact again.

*Interesting. Regular meetings, and the opportunity to practice some of the trickier aspects of our gift. I will take your offer under consideration. May I contact you again?*

*—Of course. Take all the time you need.—*

He breaks contact, and I come back in the middle of Tony going on about the power and majesty of Storm Warning, his restored mid-80s Rambler. He’s gotten loud enough that I can feel the irritation of the fans around us. Having their attention “forced” from the game and their other interests to the ranting of a nineteen-year-old bragging about his car.

“Dude!” I say, cutting him off mid-sentence. “I know you and that car are some sort of sublime combination, but someone’s going to call an usher.”

In fact, someone has. I can feel the determined approach of a sixty-something woman with a grandmotherly demeanor and a drill sergeant heart. She only has a warning in mind, but she intends to keep an eye on us after she issues it.

Which is something I don’t need — scrutiny in a public place.

Can’t afford anything as overt as telling her we aren’t the droids she’s looking for. Someone around us would notice...

I’m just considering how to ease her focus off of us and onto someone else when I feel another telepathic contact. This one’s formal. Polite. Like someone knocking on my mind, to see if I have a moment to talk.

I recognize the knock. Jamal. Recent Psychology graduate from Berkeley (where I’ll be a sophomore this fall), and member of the Berkeley Telepathic Outreach. I open my focus.

His thoughts come fast and upset. Steam room moist heat.

*I need you to come to me. Mary's dead.*

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