

2018 Hero Poll Interview

Kitty: I am here today with four of the top K. M. Shea heroes. We have, of course, Merlin, who took first place this year, Emerys, Farrin, and Friedrich.

Friedrich: Where is Stil? He took second place, didn't he?

Kitty: Yes...about that.

Sobs are heard off in the distance.

Kitty: He's around, he's just not coherent.

Merlin: Took it rather hard I so resoundedly, soundly, and fully beat him, did he?

Kitty: Yes, although your constant preening over it might not have helped things.

Friedrich: Why is he so upset? The poll is fun, but I already *know* I'm amazing.

Kitty: Yes, but he always used it as proof to show Gemma how he is "cool" and "popular."

In the far off distance...

Rumpelstiltskin: I'm still handsome! People love me!

Friedrich: Poor man.

Kitty: Mmmhmm. Okay, so let's start with the questions! Merlin, I have a question for you from **Lucy**. She's wondering how the other knights responded when you, Nymue, and Kay told them you were traveling to the future.

Merlin: They were worse than a herd of rabid sheep. Everyone wanted to come with, Lancelot's blasted cousin Lionel goaded five different knights into declaring duels to fight for the right to come as well, Ywain actually *cried*, it was traumatic.

Kitty: You watched Britt get stabbed before your very eyes, and you call *that* traumatic?

Merlin: Bodwain felt so strongly about it he tore his tunic in half. I have seen things I can't unsee....

Kitty: And in the interests of keeping this PG rated, we're moving on! Friedrich, **Kaitlin** has a question for you. She wants to know why you suffered through Cinderella's intentionally boring tours for so long before the assassination attempt that made you decide on her for good.

Friedrich: I suffered because my beautiful, lovely pet wouldn't talk to me—or even meet with me—outside those tours. I kept meeting her because I was trying to get a better grasp of her character.

Kitty: Ahh, yes, I remember. You were trying to see if you thought she could ever love you—or more importantly love your country. So when she warned you, it was the gesture you were looking for, right?

Friedrich: Exactly. I stuck it out as long as I did because I was already aware of the drastic measures she was taking to save her duchy and her servants. I knew out of all the candidates she had the biggest capacity to love, but I wasn't entirely sure she would be able to love *me*. I mean, Erlauf.

Kitty: Sure, "Erlauf." Okay, Emerys, you're up! **Sophie** is wondering how your people met the Black Swan Smugglers.

Emerys: A lucky accident. They happened to be on their way back to Kozlovka after making a delivery. Night fell and they needed water for their transformation, and they saw the river by Brandy Crest. Since none of them are from Farsset they didn't know it was taboo to enter the woods, so they plopped down and transformed. We elves were already there for the forced celebration.

Kitty: Why weren't they swept up into the curse?

Emerys: **snorts** I imagine it's because they already *were* cursed so they were smart enough—or paranoid enough—not to eat or drink anything. They spent the whole night watching us with slanty, suspicious eyes. But once they figured everything out—mostly through observation—the Swan Queen herself offered to help us, which is how they ended up becoming our suppliers for the philtre.

Kitty: Right. Farrin, you haven't had a question yet. I have a good one for you from **Isabelle**. She's wants to know if the Verglas Assassin's guild used to be Phile's thieves' guild.

Farrin: ...No comment.

Kitty:like...no comment at all?

Farrin: No comment.

Kitty: Okaaaay. Merlin, back to you! **Tiffany** wants to know what you and the others did to pass the time while you were stuck in the cave, waiting for the future—besides ducking out of the cave every once in a while.

Merlin: Ugh, that cave. I have vowed to never spend another day of my life in a place where I cannot see the sunlight. If I could have lived in a hermitage alone while we waited for Britt to grow up I would have done it—even our mansion is too small after all that "*quality time*" together.

Kitty: So what did you do?

Merlin: I was getting to that! Foremost, whenever we left the cave we would stock up on material goods—books and such. Those materials kept *me* busy—and perhaps a few of the knights—as it gave me the opportunity to study, learn new languages, adjust to new scientific finds and so on. For the first few months the knights fought each other for the “fun” of it—though most of it was them ganging up on Lancelot.

Kitty: Didn't Britt say she forgave him?

Merlin: She might have, but he was still responsible for her near-death experience. We weren't just going to let him waltz around like an innocent lamb after that. Anyway, once they grew sick of that sport, they began to collect works of fiction—plays and such—and I think Grifflet and a few others learned how to play an instrument or two. We all also grew quite good at playing various card and dice games. Bedivere—despite his wholesome appearance—is a card shark.

Kitty: I imagine it got worse the closer you were to Britt's time?

Merlin: Yes, but at least by then we were able to start planning out her modern kingdom. Even Lionel—who is barely more than a dunce in terms of culture and reading intelligence—was willing to read the tour guide book she left behind so we could profit from our knowledge of the future.

Kitty: Emerys, you're up! **JD** has a slew of questions for you, so for the sake of time I'm just going to pick a few of them. What was your first impression of Angelique and how did it change when you saw her 'true' personality? What were you thinking when you saw Quinn clothed in your colors the first time? And what is the biggest animal form you've ever managed?

Emerys awkwardly scratches his chin.

Emerys: When Alastryn dragged Quinn out in my colors I was...that is...

Kitty: Yeees?

Emerys clears his throat.

Emerys: That was the first time I really *saw* her—or saw her as a possibility...

Kitty: *wriggles eyebrows* a possibility for what?

Emerys: You chose this embarrassing question on purpose!

Kitty: And what if I did?

Emerys: Fine! It was the first time I really saw how beautiful she is and she moved my heart. Happy?

Kitty: Yes! Angelique? **Lyn** was also wondering what you thought of her true personality.

Emerys: I always knew she was hiding some kind of edge to her, even when Evariste first showed her off and she acted like a dewy-eyed, soft-spoken creature of innocence. Evariste warned me—just short of using violence—that she had an unhappy existence at the academy, though, so I figured her sunshine-and-rainbows act was a result of that. Seeing her shed that skin was reassuring. If she didn't have that ruthless edge to her personality, her magic would have eaten her alive by now.

Kitty: That is probably true. Okay, what next...

Friedrich: But he didn't answer the last question—what's the biggest animal you can turn into?

Emerys: Oh. I've gotten a lot better at transformations now that I have my magic at full power, and I've had a fair bit of practice. I transformed into a war elephant once—but Alastryn called me fat and Quinn started getting ideas about using me as a convenient climbing tree to shoot arrows off of, so I'm never doing that again.

Friedrich: What's your favorite animal, then?

Kitty: **Nina** asked that as well.

Emerys: Probably a wolf or a large cat—like a snow leopard. Want to see?

Kitty: No, that's okay.

Friedrich: Yes!

Merlin: I would enjoy witnessing a display of elven magic.

Farrin:...

Kitty: No, really. It's unnecessary—

Emerys: Here we go!

A popping noise is heard as Emerys activates his magic. The Elf King disappears as a fuzzy feline the size of a house cat with white fur and black spots tumbles head over feet, sprawling on the ground.

Friedrich: When you said a large cat, I thought you meant a fully *grown* large cat.

Emerys Mewls.

Emerys: Quiet!

Merlin: I must say, I think the faerie folk from ancient Britain are more powerful than your elves, Kitty.

Kitty: Nah, you can't judge them all by Emerys' incompetence in shape shifting.

Emerys: I'm going to rip you to shreds!

Friedrich: Will that be before or after you pounce on a ball of yarn?

Emerys: You'll be first, *Fred*.

Kitty turns from the bickering to the only silent member of the interview.

Kitty: Farrin, why are you so untalkative?

Farrin: *shrugs* Rakel isn't here. There is really no reason to speak.

Kitty: *rolls her eyes* Yes, because heaven help us if your wife isn't around to make you interact socially. Fine, I have some great questions for you from **Ravi**—though, again, in the interest of time I've selected just a few of them. If you and Rakel were to go head to head—no outside help—who would win? Also, who is your least favorite member of Rakel's posse, and what advice would you give mages of the future.

Farrin: If Rakel and I fought, I believe it is most likely we would tie.

Kitty: Why? You can totally beat her with one arm tied behind her back. I mean, she's waaay more powerful than you, but your specific set of magic means hers doesn't work very well on you.

Farrin: Yes, but I would never hurt Rakel.

Kitty: It's a hypothetical situation.

Farrin: That matters not. I would *never* hurt Rakel, so I would never win—even though, as you said, my powers can counter Rakel's, so she wouldn't win either. Thus, a tie.

Kitty: *squints* You are obnoxiously loyal, has anyone told you that?

Farrin: As for the least favorite question, I don't really have one. General Halvor and Oskar have my respect, as does Steinar. Phile is perhaps the only one I don't always approve of, though personally I consider her a friend.

Kitty: I don't get it, how can you disapprove of her and consider her a friend at the same time?

Farrin: Because unlike Halvor, Oskar, and Steinar, Phile does not hesitate to drag Rakel into dangerous situations.

Kitty: You do have a point.

Farrin: As for mages of the future, I would like to say: don't get cocky. But I suppose it is already too late for that.

Kitty: What do you mean?

Farrin: It was their inattention and dismissal of small and seemingly unimportant threats that lead to the conflict my co-interviewees are dealing with. Because they were over confident, they allowed cracks of darkness to get through. Rakel never would have allowed such a thing because she would not have been content to rest on her laurels, so to speak.

Friedrich: I'm starting to see what you mean, Kitty. He is obnoxiously loyal.

Kitty: Thank you! **Cassandra** has some good questions for you, Friedrich, so let's go with you next.

Friedrich: Of course! No one can resist my charm.

Emerys—still as a snow leopard cub: Pretty sure Queen Cinderella would disagree with you there.

Friedrich: You—Elf King—are a kitten. You have no room to criticize me.

Kitty: **Cassandra** is wondering what your mother is doing now that she's no longer queen, why your brother isn't in the military and what he spends his time doing, what do you think of Lucien after his frog transformation, and finally, do you know where the goblins are coming from?

Friedrich: There's always been pockets and smatterings of goblins around in mountains, forests, and caves across the continent. Usually they stick to the less populated areas so as long as you lived near a city or village you were fine. We've never seen them in numbers as we have recently though—which is troubling because we have no idea how they hid their forces.

As for my bratty little brother, he never had an interest in the military or in being a leader. This meant my father would die before putting him in the ranks. He may be a prince but the Erlauf military is a serious organization and we will not senselessly promote men who don't belong.

Kitty: Yes, that's why you're still a colonel even though Cinderella is queen.

Friedrich: Johann used to lounge around and socialize mostly, but Cinderella put a stop to that. She uses him as an ambassador and messenger now. She sends him around to the other countries whenever we need someone of rank to show their face. He doesn't seem to hate it—which is a surprise to me. I thought he had a foundational objection to doing anything useful.

Mother is pleased with the change in him. She admits she never thought to use him as Cinderella has, and it's one of the many reasons why it's just as well she stepped down. She serves as an advisor to Cinderella, but Cinderella also sends her out to various parts of Erlauf to show support for some of her newer ventures—like adding Trieux soldiers into Erlauf military units.

Kitty: It's amazing that she's willing to let herself be a chess piece for Cinderella.

Friedrich: Mother's main concern has always been Erlauf. Since Cinderella was crowned, she's brought far more unity between Erlauf and Trieux and has drastically cut down on our debt and spending. Mother would likely sail across the ocean if Cinderella asked because of that success.

Kitty: How very admirable. And Lucien?

Friedrich: Ahh yes, the frog prince. I had much more respect for him after he uncovered the Chosen as our enemy. He can't match Severin in tactics, but his ability to see patterns in history and politics is a great skill to have on our side.

Kitty: Yeah, those two brothers are a real monster when they combine their talents.

Friedrich: Yes. It might be what wins the war against the Chosen for us, but it also makes me glad Cinderella is Queen. She'll keep Loire from eating us alive when peace returns and—in the hopefully far off day—Lucien is eventually crowned King.

Kitty: Yes, speaking as an outsider it's interesting to watch all the continent's countries—well, everyone except Zancara anyway—pull together, but still keep in mind that when you all separate you'll have to stand on your own feet. There are checks and balances, though. While Loire will remain a massive world power, Arcainia will hold the chain of the financial world, Verglas will always have the most peaceful country because of the Snow Queen's Powers, Sole will be wildly respected because of their magic knights, Farset has the elves, and so on. It's all about balance.

Merlin: Yes, that's all very fine and dandy, but can we get back to the interview?

Farrin stares at Merlin.

Merlin: What? We don't *all* live in your world!

Kitty: Merlin is right, it's time to get back to the questions. And actually, we need to start wrapping things up, so I'm gonna throw a few questions at you in one go. First up, **Emma** wants to know what your favorite book is, Merlin.

Merlin: That is a difficult question, particularly because I am so well read and have such good taste!

Kitty: Only because you were stuck in a cave for years.

Merlin: That is besides the point! Regardless, I must confess I have a rather childish fondness for the children's' picture books "The Way Things Work." Picture books, like that one, were actually extremely useful when we emerged in Britt's century. Kay and I spent months at local libraries, reading up. If we're talking fiction, then I regret to say I don't particularly care for most King Arthur books. They make Britt seem like a dashing but brash leader who was honorable but a bit of a dunce.

Kitty: Along that same line of thinking, **Claire** is wondering what you think of the various ways you've been depicted in Arthur books, movies, and TV shows.

Merlin: I find them to be a combination of insulting and complimentary. The particularly insulting stories—like the ones in which I brainlessly fell for Vivien's painfully obvious tactics—I usually have Kay to thank. Bedivere and Griflet usually spread the nicer ballads around about me. Specifically speaking of the Sword in the Stone, I'm rather fond of that Merlin, and I feel his pain in dealing with a bunch of muscle-headed, impulsive knights.

Kitty: And you'll forever be happy with the BBC Merlin just because he's young, right?

Merlin: I can't say exactly what I think of it because I haven't finished watching it yet, but I *do* approve that they did not make me an old man.

Kitty: Next, **Sarah** wants to know what's something that especially annoys you from current times.

Merlin: The noise. Everything is so noisy in modern times—there's always cars going by, or alarms, or fans, and everyone is forever playing music because God forbid we have more than five seconds of silence. The knights and I actually have three different country homes that we retreat to when we cannot take the constant rumblings of the city—though the mansion is secluded given the large acreage we purchased to assure our solitude.

Kitty: Yeah, I can understand that it would be a bit of a shock. Even in Camelot with marketplaces, horses, and lots of people, it wouldn't have had nearly the same noise level. Okay, **Megan** is wondering what you think of Lord of the Rings, and how you keep busy now that you don't have to unite Britain—and obviously she means *now*, also, in that you don't have to do all the research and catch up on modern times.

Merlin: I don't have to catch up on technology and the like, but I still have to stay focused, so I read a lot and dabble in various industries. Of course I support Britt in her new position as CEO of Avalon. We aren't looking to unite Britain anymore, but now we have the world as our target, which is a much bigger area to play in—so to speak.

Kitty: But you do have date nights with Britt.

Merlin: Yes, we go horseback riding, visit the countryside, and I watch her beat the other knights black and blue in combat—she's become quite skilled in jousting now as well. Under Britt's influence, we have also subscribed to the wonders of Netflix, and she has worked to get us comfortable with pop culture—though we did see Lord of the Rings before we met up with her again.

Kitty: Really?

Merlin: Indeed, we saw it in theaters at Griflet's and Lionel's insistence. Those two are, surprisingly, quite the nerds, and Bedivere is always happy to drag the rest of us to fantasy movies as well.

Kitty: That is rather unexpected! To finish up, **Hazel** and **Sophie** both want to know what was the "thing-that-shall-not-be-named" from your childhood.

Merlin: Don't even try! You are contractually obligated *not* to share the details of that experience!

Kitty: But the fans want to know!

Merlin: Contractually obligated! Our lawyers will take you for every penny you're worth!

Kitty: Fine, fine. Spoil sport. Emerys, I've got the last few questions for you. **Rebecca** has a funny one—though you might not think so. She wants to know how you managed to eat with the mask glued to your face.

Emerys: Out of all the questions, *that's* the one you ask?

Kitty: It's legitimate!

Emerys: Shrew. Fine! For starters I didn't eat as much as I normally do—elves don't have to eat every day—and I was limited in what I could eat. I could jab stuff like dried jerky or small carrots under my mask, and I could use plant stems like straws to drink liquids and soups. Happy?

Kitty: Sure. **Tiffany** and **Cassandra** are both wondering if you ever told Angelique about Evariste's involvement in your curse.

Emerys: Yep. We had a big conversation about it before she *stole my fiancée* and headed to Mulberg.

Kitty: You'll be able to read about it, *Champions*, in the second book of Angelique's trilogy...when I write them...next year. Ahahah. Okay! **Anna** is wondering if you can tell who the statues in Jasper Circle are—one is the Snow Queen, but what about the others?

Emerys: They're people who are important to elven history, so the Snow Queen is there because she inspired us to sail across the sea. The other two—

Kitty: **stage whispers** You better not give too much away! I'll tell Quinn!

Emerys: Fine! I'll just say that *one* of the three is the person responsible for our settling in Farset and the other is—

Kitty: End of that question! We are not opening another can of worms when I'm still struggling to close this one! Last question for you, **Sophie** was wondering if you had any comments about coming in third.

Emerys: I wasn't surprised. I'm a powerful, dashing elf king. What's not to like?

Kitty: *I* was surprised. It's pretty rare for new characters to rank so high in the poll. It makes me really happy! Up next, Friedrich. Let's take it home!

Friedrich: Yes, I'm ready!

Kitty: **Jacqueline**—who says you are her favorite hero—

Friedrich: Naturally! And thank you for the honor.

Kitty: ...uh...yeah. She's wondering what was your first thought in being told you should marry someone you had never met.

Friedrich: I wasn't really told or ordered, it was more that I could see what was happening and knew what had to be done. My parents married out of love, and I knew if I really wished it they wouldn't *make* me marry for the country, but the threat of goblins was too much. I knew if we didn't bind Trieux and Erlauf together in some way, it would be disastrous. I did have several options, and I was able to observe them without them knowing who I really was, so it wasn't completely beyond my control. I was able to choose who I felt was best suited for the role and for me.

Kitty: When you were first going over the candidates, did you think Cinderella was your best bet?

Friedrich: She was the most appealing, and she was the closest to being able to forgive Erlauf, so I had hopes, but reports are one thing. Seeing people with your own eyes—or eye in my case—is very different. She greatly exceeded my expectations, and I fell helplessly in love with her.

Emerys: I can't believe you proclaim that so freely.

Friedrich: Why should I hide my passion and love for Cinderella? I'm very proud of my choice.

Kitty: Oh, that's a perfect segue! **Lenni** was wondering what your first impression of Cinderella was.

Friedrich: She was far more of a spitefire than I was expecting—and I didn't *really* believe that she was doing everything my field agents reported.

Kitty: In other words you thought she went to the market stall, but you didn't think she really involved herself in the work?

Friedrich: I'm afraid to say it, but yes. I didn't think a Trieux noble would be so willing to get their hands dirty. That was partially why I was kept coming back even when it was obvious she was trying to dodge me. I am *so* attracted to her strength—it makes me glad because I'm obviously weak willed and take after my Father.

Merlin: *snorts* You're as weak willed as a mule.

Friedrich: Why thank you!

Kitty: Okay, Farrin. It's time for your last questions **Leo** is wondering what went through your head when you and your army ambushed Rakel, only for Rakel and her allies to escape behind a giant wall of ice. Leo says "I get the feeling you had all underestimated the extent of her abilities up til then and that it came as a shock."

Farrin: We did underestimate her, terribly so. But intel on Rakel was hard to come by, and it was very difficult to fathom such power, even if she had been succeeding in taking towns and villages back.

Kitty: That's true. Rakel was always careful not to use too much magic—she didn't want to scare anyone.

Farrin: Yes, so seeing her great power was shocking—but also awe inspiring. It also served to make me question my own actions. Rakel was quite possibly the most powerful magic user I had ever met—even beyond Tenebris. And yet she refused to join us and let herself be corralled on her mountain for so many years. It is a testament to her character.

Emerys twitches his cat tail.

Emerys: Wow, have you ever got it bad.

Friedrich: Less than five minutes ago you were huffy about Angelique taking a trip with your fiancée, kitty-cat.

Emerys: Watch it or I'll bite you!

Kitty: And next question—Oh, this is fun! Farrin, **Alicia** asks, if you were stuck on an island with one other character from a different book (so no one from the Snow Queen books) who would it be and why.

Farrin: Rakel.

Kitty: No, she said no one from your books.

Farrin: Still Rakel.

Kitty: That's not answering the question.

Farrin:...

Kitty: Okay, pretend Rakel will eventually come to rescue you—with Oskar and Halvor and everyone. Knowing that, who would you prefer to be stuck with?

Friedrich: I think you should say Emerys.

Emerys: I *am* powerful.

Friedrich: Because you could make him shape shift into a whale and take you back to shore.

Emerys: WHAT?

Merlin rubs his eyes.

Merlin: I am so glad I play the role of magical advisor to Britt and not the lot of you. You're worse than a bunch of unruly monkeys.

Kitty: Your answer, Farrin?

Farrin: I would choose either Severin, Gabrielle, or Dylan.

Kitty: That seems like a really weird trio, why them?

Farrin: If Severin was with me, Prince Lucien would tear the world apart to bring Severin—and me by default as well—back. If I were with Gabrielle, Prince Steffen would act in the same manner.

Kitty: And Dylan—ohhh...

Farrin: Yes, Dylan would be able to control the ocean and bring us back to shore.

Kitty: Well that was overly tactical and not quite the fun I had pictured.

Farrin: You wouldn't let me say Rakel.

Kitty: ...I can't decide if I should be charmed by your loyalty or aggravated by your pigheadedness. But okay. Last question for you. **TJ** wants to know what Gerta and Kai were like as they grew up.

Farrin smiles and relaxes some.

Farrin: Rakel and I officially adopted Kai, and though we had other children we always considered him our eldest. He was a fine brother, and quite talented in his magic. Though he usually lived with us in the palace, he often spent his summers with Gerta and her family, though often Phile whisked him, Gerta, and Rakel away for an “*adventure*” mid-summer every year. Kai and Gerta grew up to be fine adults and they did marry and have children of their own.

Kitty: Excellent, I have a final question for all of you but let me just take a last glance at these questions...

Kitty flips through papers.

Kitty: Oh, looks like we have a few questions for Stil... *Turns around and still hears dramatic sobs in the distance* But he's still indisposed so I'll try to answer it myself. The big one is from **Cora**. She is wondering how Stil found out he's a craftmage and how long he had to train to master his magic. Stil actually found out because Angelique and Enchanter Evariste plucked him from a city in Baris, and Evariste correctly identified Stil's magic as Craft Magic. You can read about it in the extra "[A Magical Meeting.](#)" As for school, Stil whipped through his time at the academy far faster than the average mage. (The time you spend at the school depends on what sort of mage you are training to become—Enchanters and Enchantresses have usually at least double or triple the years of training.) He also had an apprenticeship, which he again finished rather early. It's why he's considered a genius in addition to his extra strong powers.

Merlin: You said you had a final question for us?

Kitty: Yes! Technically it's not for you, Merlin, but we'll include you, too, just for the fun of it.

Merlin: Your giving nature astounds me.

Kitty: Try not to be catty.

Merlin: You better tell that to your elf king.

Emerys: Watch your mouth, fake wizard!

Merlin: You insolent—

Kitty: OKAY! Here's the question: **Foxinsocks** is wondering "out of all the heroes in the Timeless Fairy Tales, who would be your best friend?"

Friedrich: I like Severin quite a bit. He's an admirable commander, a brilliant tactician, and he's a good foil to Lucien. Working with him has been a pleasure—or as much as it can be given the grim circumstance we're dealing with. But Stil is a pleasant fellow, and I've a feeling Emerys and I could be good drinking buddies, though we haven't interacted in the series, yet.

Emerys: Yeah, I like your lack of overdone manners and stiffness. We *should* get a drink sometime.

Kitty: Besides Friedrich—and Evariste since he already is your best friend—who do you think you would like, Emerys?

Emerys: Angelique.

Merlin: Does she count? She is a heroine, and I was under the impression her story has not yet been told.

Kitty: I'll allow it, but I'm curious...why Angelique? Is it because she's Evariste's student?

Emerys snorts.

Emerys: No! It's because Quinn likes her so much.

Friedrich: I don't get it, what does that have to do with you being friends with Angelique as well.

Emerys: If she's going to make it a habit to swipe my fiancée, I'd rather be her friend and thus be included on the adventure as well.

Farrin: Calculating—and smart.

Emerys: Thank you!

Kitty: Farrin, how about you?

Farrin: Isaia.

Kitty: Really? Isaia? Why?

Farrin: I sympathize with his loyalty and deep and fathomless passion for Briar. I imagine we have much in similar.

Kitty: Yeah, now that you mention it that is true. The two of you are by far and away the most quietly passion about your heroines. I mean *everyone* knows Steffen is like a rabid dog when it comes to Gabby, but the two of you are more likely to stand in the shadows so you can better stab anyone who comes near.

Farrin: Precisely.

Kitty: And Merlin, what about you?

Merlin: Callan, I think.

Kitty: Dylan's husband? Why him?

Merlin: Because he is a smart fellow who is more likely to sit at home and enjoy what he has then stupidly push forward and pick fights like the rest of you.

Friedrich: That would be hurtful, if it wasn't true.

Merlin: After dealing with Britt's knights for so long, I would much prefer to befriend a man who can appreciate peace and quiet.

Kitty: Great! I think that just about wraps it up...

Stil appears suddenly, stumbling into the group and pointing at Merlin.

Stil: I'm going to beat you next year—just so you know! I'll have my spot back!

Merlin: Don't be so sure.

Kitty: He has a point—you might have been excessively popular this year because your series finished.

Merlin: Oh, I wasn't saying I would beat him. By then Emery's will have been out and about for over a year, so there's a greater chance he will beat him.

Stil: I'm the most popular K. M. Shea hero. I *have* to be!

Kitty: You can't tell me the title actually affected Gemma at all.

Stil: It didn't make her admire me, but it made her laugh with me all the time!

Friedrich: I wouldn't be so sure she was laughing *with* you.

Stil: Anyway. All of you mark my words, next year.

Kitty:...Okay?

Stil nods.

Stil: Good. So. ...Who is up for a round of my guessing game?

Merlin: Guessing game?

Kitty: And I'm ending this before I get roped in! A huge thank you to the lovely Champions who submitted questions. I'm sorry we weren't able to get to all of them. Also, an even bigger thank you to all the Champions who voted in the various hero polls. I appreciate your support, and I'm so glad you've come to love my characters with such passion! Thanks for reading!