



# Clean

*Alex Hughes*

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**A RUTHLESS KILLER—OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND**

I used to work for the Telepath's Guild before they kicked me out for a drug habit that wasn't entirely my fault. Now I work for the cops, helping Homicide Detective Isabella Cherabino put killers behind bars. My ability to get inside the twisted minds of suspects makes me the best interrogator in the department. But the normals keep me on a short leash. When the Tech Wars ripped the world apart, the Guild stepped up to save it. But they had to get scary to do it—real scary. Now the cops don't trust the telepaths, the Guild doesn't trust me, a serial killer is stalking the city—and I'm aching for a fix. But I need to solve this case. Fast. I've just had a vision of the future: I'm the next to die.

## Clean Details

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Author : Alex Hughes

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# From Reader Review Clean for online ebook

## James Knapp says

I really enjoyed Clean. I provided a blurb for the jacket - here is the full review the blurb came from:

Hughes's world is an interesting mix of old and new, a world of flying cars and noir-ish, steamy streets that are a fun blend of Chinatown and Blade Runner. The cat-and-mouse murder investigation between those who can both kill and hunt with the power of the mind is fascinating, and while Hugh knows how to unfold a mystery to be sure she never loses sight of her characters' humanity. She understands the nature of addiction, and has a keen understanding of the human condition with all of its desires, fears, and frailties.

Her take on telepaths and especially 'mindspace' are very interesting (her Guild of telepaths made me think of Bene Gesserit a couple centuries before they went totally mystical) and I thought she did a really good job with the protagonist and not just his abilities but his weaknesses, his hopes, and the quiet way in which he pined for his partner – he never waxed on about her, he just knows every little detail about her because he cares, and he pays attention, and that says it all. Wrap that in a telepathic murder mystery? Good stuff. I look forward to jumping back into mindspace again.

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## Mandi Schreiner says

This world is a dystopian world, kind of light on the sci-fi. Years ago, (in recent enough memory for people to still remember) there was a huge Tech War, where super-viruses split people's minds from the inside, resulting in a huge death toll. Half a century later, no one trusts computer chips. So it may take days to send one email and the now small web is regarded with fear and much respect. Not to say there are no advancements in this world. They have some cars that fly and there are telepaths and telekinetics. Told in our hero's point of view, he is a Level 8 telepath, which means he is really strong and also has precog abilities. Due to an extremely bad drug habit when he was younger, he was kicked out of the Telepaths' Guild. He now works as a consultant for the police department in Atlanta, brought in to interview suspects in custody that won't crack with other investigators. He can get into their mind, make suspects admit guilt and has a high close rate. Due to his drug addiction, he is a regular member of Narcotics Anonymous and meets with his sponsor often. It is a daily struggle for him to stay clean.

His 'partner' for lack of a better word (he is only contracted with the police department) is detective Isabella Cherabino. She goes by Cherabino for most of the book so I'll call her that in the review. She is a die-hard detective, a workaholic and puts up with the hero's attitude, even though she is often exasperated. Currently she has a string of six dead bodies, with no clues to go off of. Having a gut feeling that they are all related, they pull our hero onto the scene of the most recent murder to see if he can gather any clues. He can go into what's called Mindspace, kind of blocking everything out around him, and picking up the mental residue of what was recently left behind at whatever place he is at. So as he stands in this alley where a person was murdered, he can tell if the killers had used 'Ability' or some sort of telepathic means. From here the investigation goes to some dark places and our hero and Cherabino fight to stay one step ahead of the bad guys.

I really enjoyed this book. Our hero and his relationship with Cherabino reminds me a lot of Harry Dresden and Murphy, as he consults with her on cases. The chemistry between is very similar. There isn't romance in

this book per se, but you know eventually these two have to explore that little flicker of interest they have. We learn a lot about Cherabino and her past too. She is a big character in this book. Our hero has such strong telepathic abilities, he is able to be in Cherabino's head...a lot. Much to her frustration. He often answers questions before she verbally asks them, and she punches him in the face more than once for his interference. She is a tough cookie and I really enjoyed her role in this book.

Our hero struggles with drugs and I love how it is portrayed in here. He thinks about his drug of choice, Satin (a drug he experimented with the Guild, until he became too addicted and started his downhill slide into a complete drug addiction) all the time. Daily. Probably hourly. He has been clean for six years, except for one time when he fell off the wagon. Because of that one time, he no longer directly receives his paycheck, nor has any personal belonging he can barter for drugs. Not even a bed – just a worthless cot that no one would want. This is how desperate his situation is. He calls his Narcotics Anonymous mentor daily, and we see him interact with him a lot in this book. He takes it very seriously.

He made me come up with a list of three things I was grateful for every week – I had to tell him three brand-new things at our usual weekly meeting, or he'd give me this look, all disappointed. And the feeling I got from his mind was worse, like "ungrateful" was an insult of the worst order. So, I studied. I thought. And for six years running now – not counting the two weeks I'd missed the last time off the wagon – every week I had three new things. This week I was having trouble.

He really looks to his mentor for approval. Almost childlike (and there really isn't anything else childlike about our hero. He is definitely all man).

I really think his despair at certain points of this book is done really well. It brings a certain humility to our hero. He is this all so powerful telepath, who has hit rock bottom and is learning to rebuild his life. He is learning how to apologize, and how to work through his depression and the pressure of his abilities, to lead a better life. Reading it you know he is a good guy and you root for him to overcome his addiction.

This book moves at a steady pace. I will say the beginning is a little heavy with the world building, and it took me awhile to get a grasp of what exactly our hero is capable of and what the world consisted of. But once we got going, I didn't want to stop reading. At the end of the book, I reflect back and see our hero as someone who has much to give – both professionally to the police with his abilities, and emotionally one day to Cherabino (at least I can hope). We have started with him on a journey of self-discovery that I found really fun. Looking forward to book two next spring.

Rating: B.

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## **He110Ne0 says**

I couldn't finish this book. Approximately 80-90 pages into what should have stayed on someone's desk as a rough outline of a good idea, I wanted to scream at my monitor. I skipped to the end of the book and read the last 3 chapters instead.

Here we have all the elements for a good sci-fi/urban fantasy/destroyed-future concept. Telepaths who answer to a different government known as The Guild, the recovering modern (but future) America after Technology Wars that were based on data corruption and loss of information, and a main character who himself is a recovering addict and full of self-loathing. Written in first person, it fancies itself a futuristic crime-noir thriller but instead trips all over literary cliches, confusing sentence structure decisions, and far

too many emo sentence fragments.

Like I said before - the good ideas are here but they come and go like power in a windstorm. The descriptions of the mental space, the Mindspace, are quite interesting. It seemed that the author was particularly proud of her imagining of that concept and it shows because it is described over and over in growing complexity. The other beacon through the darkness is the building of an addict. Adam, the main character in whose head we rest for the entirety of the book, is recovering from a life lost from being an elite Telepath in service to The Guild due to his crippling addiction to a drug known as Satin. The torment Adam is going through isn't ending anytime soon, and really shows how addiction is not something that can be flipped on and off like a switch.

However this is a complete hodgepodge of ideas. It's like Hughes didn't know which concept she wanted to make the focus of this story - the addiction, the serial killing, or the partnership between Adam and the woman he infuriatingly refers to only by last name even when they've clearly grown a fondness for each other? The most genuine parts for sure are Adam and the descriptions of MindSpace. Everything involving the police station and discussions about the shadow-ops of The Guild made me want to barf. There's an informant named Joey The Fish who speaks with the voice of an Italian mobster you might find in Batman Saturday morning cartoons. There's the NA sponsor who sips coffee, smokes cigarettes, and ends every other sentence with "kid." I expected Morgan Freeman to show up and pat Adam on the shoulder and say "It'll be alright, son." There's the ridiculously and overly tough female cops who not only are the equivalent to their male counterparts, but are assholes about it to boot. Someone please explain to Hughes that you are capable of being a police officer as a woman and not go around punching your consultants in the face or emphasizing the fact that you don't cry?

The final breaking point for me was when Adam breaks down and realizes that the killings that have happened so far need to be reported to The Guild based on the nature of the attacks. In this gigantic organization manned by so many people that run all these super-secret things in America, who does he land up being assigned to as his attache? His ex-fiance. No. Just...no. Since the crime thriller portion of this story was a spark that never seemed to light no matter how many times the author struck the match (and I doubted the story was going to end in a threesome between Adam, his partner, and his ex fiance), I decided I'd had enough cliché set-ups for one book and had to tap out.

If you've read this whole review to this point, good job. You may have noticed at the beginning that I said I skipped to the end of a 250+ book after approximately the 80-90page mark? I was able to almost completely splice together what happened despite how much I skipped. I'm sure I skipped lots of other things along the way, but I guess that's just my loss. I couldn't stand another 100+ pages of needlessly chopped up sentences, fragments of thoughts that were supposed to count as mature conversation, and mental self loathing from a character who never seems to be positive about anything. It becomes such a huge downer that after awhile you'd like to get into the head of someone else even just to get a break. This was not a dark character, this was the literary sketch of one. This wasn't realistic crime drama (even in a futuristic setting), this was fan fiction scribbled down during any number of cop shows. These weren't even fully formed sci-fi ideas, just well spliced bullet points pulled from what-if scenarios that reek of Wikipedia research and an afternoon or two spent at the library after getting a wild notion to "see how brains work."

Yes, this is a series. Yes, this is the first book. However, I can't see myself going back. I have way too many other highly rated things on my TBR list calling for my time.

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## **Jennifer says**

This pleasantly surprised me. It's not high literature, but it hit the spot for me, since I'm out of Harry Dresden, Alex Verus, and In Death books to read. This was an entertaining sci-fi police procedural in a world in which technology connectivity and AI have intentionally been limited, and an organization like "Babylon 5"'s Psi Corps exists to educate and regulate those with psychic abilities. I'm hoping that, like the series I mentioned, that the series gets deeper, and that I fall in love with the characters as they have more books to develop.

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## **Lisa Bouchard says**

This is a great book.

I read a lot of science fiction, because I love the new and different worlds and the problems that are often so different from my own. Clean is different because the best part of this book is the main character. Even with all his problems, he's a guy you want to know and a guy you'd want as a friend if you were in trouble. I love his emotional vulnerability and how he continues to do the right thing, even when the personal cost is very high.

And of course, I still love the hover cars and telepathy and gritty, post-Tech-war world Hughes created

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## **Terence M says**

Audio Book - 1 star - Did Not Finish

I have never really read any fantasy or science fiction books, nor have I been enticed to. When I started Hunger Games Book 1, I did not know it was Young Adult and/or Fantasy, but I did finish the three books in the series and found them enjoyable, I think. I don't know what enticed me to use my precious library's resources to download this book but I did and I really persevered for three and a half hours of a nine hour book, but it's now on the DNF shelf.

Written in the first person, the main character and, can I call her his "love interest", although nothing sparky seemed to emanate from either of them, wander around following the author's script, which wanders around trying to stitch together a story line, which ultimately lead me to say "enough". Actually, I didn't give up on this book because of it being Fantasy or Sci-fi as I was sort of intrigued by the notion of someone being a "Telepath". I think the opportunities for an interesting story were there - they needed to be grasped by an author who could write without wandering and not leaving me wondering.

Edited to add: I have just noticed that I downloaded all four books in the series, so I am going to follow the comments of some reviewers and try Book 2, "Sharp".

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## **Katherine McIntyre says**

So, I got this book as part of the First Reads program and was anxious to give it a try. I love urban fantasy and the story sounded really fun.

The writing is solid and the book contains some interesting and unique worldbuilding. The whole system of telepaths is well thought out and works well within the story.

I had two big issues with this book. First off was that the first half felt very reminiscent to 'Stormfront' by Jim Butcher.

But the biggest problem I had by far were the characters. Cherabino, the love interest, was harsh, which can work with some characters, but since the main character was passive, it just felt like she was being rude and mean over minute reasons. The main character was the reason this book was difficult to get through. He switches back and forth a lot complaining about the weather (too hot, too cold), his headaches, his non-relationship with Cherabino and how he's craving drugs as an ex-junkie. Most of his problems through the book are self made and while I can appreciate a flawed character, he talked really big but didn't actually do a whole lot.

All in all, not a bad read, but I was hoping for more out of the characters.

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## **Susan says**

The world setting is very good -- a bit like NEUROMANCER -- the dark and gritty urban setting that I'm partial to. The characters, however.... The protagonist is more than a little bit of a Gary Stu. He's whiny but a 8 star or something that makes him better than even the "elites" in their system and he can read the minds of 90 out of a 100 people at a time (I kid you not the book says this) (how is he not crazy yet) (oh wait that maybe explains some of this) and the BEST non-official detective there and everyone hates him and is mean to him etc etc (how many tropes have I hit so far?). Officer Cherabino is potentially interesting as a female character except she shows more tendencies of making like Debra Morgan (from DARKLY DREAMING DEXTER the book, not the TV series -- I've never seen the series so I don't know how she is there), meaning the author hints she is a Strong Female but in reality she is cranky and incompetent due to being Clueless. The protagonist spends every spare moment either craving drugs or whining about how hard his life is. A MILLION LITTLE PIECES is, in my opinion, a MUCH better read for a story centered around addiction. Not to mention in this case? I don't care for the protagonist, so I don't care, period, which makes all the whining...annoying.

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## **Felicia says**

Taking a break from the more lady-driven books I've been reading lately, I picked this urban paranormal book up with a male protagonist, solely on the interesting world it seemed to have. And I highly recommend it!

It's a world where tech has collapsed and telekinetics have evolved, and our protagonist is a junkie who

works for the police force. Now, our protagonist (who remains unnamed almost the whole book because it's first person) is not the most uplifting character, but his struggle with his addiction makes for a great character arc (especially since I was quitting coffee while reading this, haha!). The mystery is really interesting, as are the characters and the pressures on the main character. If you like gritty urban fantasy you'll enjoy this new series.

The only thing I didn't love was the love interest character, I just never clicked with her as someone I wanted to root for, but it's definitely set up for a great followup and I'll be there to read it!

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### **Dany Burns says**

I thought this was an enjoyable book to read. At times the characters frustrated me, or I thought the book moved too fast or too slow at some parts but overall it was an enjoyable mystery type novel. The main character whose name you don't know until the end of the book was an interesting character and I thought he had a lot of dimension. He could be frustrating but I think if that adds to the character that's okay. He could be a bit too pessimistic for my taste at times but for him and his life I could understand it. I didn't love the love interest in this book. I thought she was an interesting character and I liked her personality enough but I don't think she went through much character development. I liked the mystery in this book. I thought it was well thought out and interesting. At times there was a lot going on and I got a little lost but only very rarely. I also like the main characters struggle with his drug addiction. I think the author did a good job telling that side of the story alongside the bigger mystery. This definitely wasn't my most favorite book in the whole world but it was very enjoyable and still a very fun book overall.

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### **Aya says**

Mindscape Investigations: 1

This story is told in first-person, which isn't weird except that the reader doesn't find out the main character's name until the end of the book! Seemed like a cheap ploy to have a cutesy end scene. None of the people he interacts with ever calls him by name, not even his off and on partner of six years, with whom he's fallen stupidly in love with. The relationships in this story don't make sense. There is a sense that the main character is close to Isabella, but she is alternatively attracted, repulsed, and violent with him, while he pathetically tries to stay on her good side after mass amounts of abuse. Main character is an over-emotional idiot who keeps making bad decisions. This is not a happy book, it is angst-ridden, depressing, and there's no humor to lighten any of it. I couldn't sympathize with the main character at all, even though he was struggling. There is not even a moment of triumph at the end, bad guys vanquished, no, only more angsty, this time with guilt. Good writing technically, but this book has no heart. I have no interest in continuing this series.

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### **Text Addict says**

I've held this review for over a week now, because I've been trying to explain to myself why it's a five-star book to me. All I've got is this: give me a character who grits their teeth and pushes on through internal and external devastation, back them up with decent world-building and secondary characters and plot, and I am yours, authors. Write more books for me, please.



Our hero - I can't remember or even easily find his name, a hazard of the first-person narrative - regularly attends Narcotics Anonymous meetings. He used to be middle class, a professor at a private college; now he's a county police department consultant.

The overall setting is The Future; this is, in essence, an SF police procedural. Our hero isn't actually a cop, though - he's a former professional telepath college professor in disgrace (having turned into a junkie). So actually it's an SF police procedural with the whole panoply of traditional psi abilities.

The geographic location was a bit of a problem for me, since I hear "DeKalb County" and think Chicago - and the fact that there's a DeKalb County in four other states doesn't help. Adding "Decatur" doesn't really help, either, because there are probably dozens of places called Decatur in the US (one of which is in Illinois). So I kept wondering why it was so hot in Chicago ... Eventually I managed to nail down that we're talking about Metro Atlanta. (But not really Atlanta, because Decatur is a separate city.) This is by way of saying that the author's really very good efforts to identify the place were hampered, for me, by the fact that I know too much geography and too little about Georgia.

At any rate, in this future U.S., advanced computer technology is highly restricted and regarded with paranoia because it wasn't very long ago that millions of people died in the Tech Wars because of their dependence on (and physical connection with) computer-enhanced gadgets that were under "supervirus" attack. Which I think is a clever way of creating an SF setting in which technology doesn't solve all the problems almost instantly. And these issues with tech are woven into the story with aplomb.

There is a Telepaths' Guild - now there's an old psi SF trope. This one was apparently instrumental in holding advanced-region civilization together during and after the Tech Wars and has an uneasy relationship with the regular government, not to mention regular civilians. It's a bastion of wealth and privilege if you're (a useful) part of it. Interesting creative bit: Telepaths are an essential part of getting artificial glands and organs to work with the bodies they're put into. Psi abilities are integral to the plot in lots of ways, too; they're not just interesting SFnal window dressing.

The story revolves around a series of peculiar murders, which (this being a novel) winds up involving the Guild, illegal tech, and our hero's personal history. I think it should've been a little less closely tied to our hero's personal history - it ties together a little *\*too\** closely for my taste - but that's not a fatal flaw, in my opinion. The investigation plot is well done, with a few believable mistakes and misunderstandings keeping things from being resolved too soon.

But for me, it's the main character and his fraught interactions with, well, everybody (including himself) that hold the book together. Some people (a lot of people) are rather hostile to telepaths; his assigned partner has troubles of her own and tolerates him as long as he's getting the job done; he has an ex-wife; and he has to work hard to stay clean.

I did put the book down for a while, because I hate when visions of the future are unalterable. But I had to know what happened, and it turned out that the future *\*did\** change somewhat because our hero knew about it and tried to get people to try to avoid it.

Gritty (I balk at excess grit)? Probably a bit melodramatic (especially toward the end)? Yup. But what can I say, "the only way out is through" is my favorite theme in literature, and the rest of the book supports it just fine, thanks.

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## **All Things Urban Fantasy says**

Review courtesy of All Things Urban Fantasy

CLEAN is a cool book. That's all there is to it. It has the kind of worldbuilding you can sink your teeth into, a damaged anti-hero who falls for an even more damaged anti-heroine, and an investigation to catch a teleporting serial killer.

The procedural aspects of CLEAN are sharp and interesting even for a reader who doesn't normally go for procedurals. The real hook, however, was the worldbuilding. A small percentage of the population has an Ability. They can be telepaths, telekinetics, or teleportors. Some have a small Ability, others—like our protagonist—have a frightening amount of power. That is until he got hooked on an experimental drug that got him kicked out of the Telepath's Guild, living in a closet sized apartment devoid of anything he might hock for drug money, and stuck working as an interrogator for the police.

He's a wonderfully messed up character. Some of the best passages in CLEAN are where he's wrestling with himself about whether or not to get high. He'll plot out exactly how he'll do it, even knowing that it'll destroy his life and irrevocably sever the tenuous relationships he's been building at the department with his boss and also Detective Cherabino. The protagonist (whose name we don't learn until the end of the book) is very much a Harry Dresden type character, and Cherabino is a more angry version of Murphy. There is a romance that they dance around, but there are a lot of pretty significant issues keeping them apart like his drug problem and inability to stay out of her head. But I liked these two messed up characters a lot. I'll be rooting for them in the sequel.

If you like The Dresden Files by Jim Butcher, this series looks to be tailor made for Harry and Murphy fans. Since I can't read Alex Hughes's mind, I'll have to wait for the next book in the Mindspace Investigations series which is titled SHARP and will be published on April 2, 2013.

Sexual Content:

Kissing. Mild sensuality. References to rape

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## **Brandon says**

A deeply-flawed, drug addicted telepath acts as a police consultant to help bring down a serial killer. The stakes are raised when a vision puts him in the killer's path. Can he bring down this murderous monster or will his premonition come sooner than expected?

**I received a review copy from the author in exchange for a fair review.**

Alex Hughes has crafted a compelling universe for her characters to play in. A self-admitted cop show junkie, Hughes mashed her love of police procedurals together with speculative fiction to create Clean, the first novel in her Mindspace Investigation series. The story picks up sixty years after the devastating Tech Wars, an event fought with computer viruses and self-aware machines. If it wasn't for the psychic powered force known as The Guild, we'd all probably end up like Neo, floating in a pink sack powering our mechanical masters.

Where Hughes' talent truly lies is in her world building. She's clearly put a lot of time and effort into constructing the Atlanta of tomorrow. The scenes in which characters descend into Mindspace – a tool used by telepaths to detect changes and abnormalities in our environment undetectable by us normies – were fascinating and easy to grasp (fishbowl analogy was excellent). Given the events of the Tech Wars, the US government has scaled back its overwhelming reliance on technology. Heavy filtering procedures are in force when sending emails, net access is limited and hard copies are once again essential when it comes to paperwork. It's not often you read a novel based in the future featuring flying cars but with reduced levels of technology.

Hughes mirrored a lot of the great hard-boiled protagonists by saddling the telepath with an addiction – a narcotic dubbed Satin – he cannot easily overcome. Knowing he's only one mistake away from finding himself out on his ass, it leads to some intense scenes where he's teetering on the edge without much to keep him grounded. That being said, the only real constant in his life is Swartz, his addiction sponsor, who is determined to keep him on the straight and narrow. While their interactions are minimal, their importance keeps the story moving forward. I would've actually liked a little more between the two.

Aside from his feelings for his partner Isabella Cherabino, he doesn't have much going for him. In fact, my only real gripe involves some of the back and forth between the two. There's clearly some chemistry there, but I found the telepath came across as whiny or annoying when he pined for her. I'm not advocating for the roles to be reversed – I'd dislike it either way – I guess I just wanted less romance; something that while not overwhelming, disrupted the flow of the story.

I'm very interested to see where this goes from here. Luckily for me, I've got the sequel on deck!

**\*\*Sidenote\*\* The telepath does indeed have a name but it's being withheld in this review as it would spoil one of the strongest moments in the novel.**

Check out my interview with Alex.

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**?Misericordia? ~ The Serendipity Aegis ~ ?????? ✿\*♥♥ says**

Q:

When the Telepaths' Guild kicked me out, I had all the tests, all the ratings, all the gold stars a man could get. Level Eight, seventy-eight-P, I was a stronger telepath than most of the elite, and could predict the future correctly better than three times out of four...(c) **A boy wonder telepath working with the police.**

Q:

From the tape they'd given me, I'd pegged Esperanza as a control freak. So I threw the paper down crooked, spilling it everywhere, adding the pencils so they rolled along the table, then slouched back in the chair. I grabbed one of the pencils just before it hit the floor and started tapping it on the table. Tap, tappity-tap. Tappity-tap, tap, tap. Just for fun, I altered the pattern every now and then to keep it grating on her nerves.

(c)

Q:

A bit of advice: if you must throw a telepath off your trail, be nice and recite multiplication tables or something. Concentrating on an out-of-tune rock song like the last suspect had just makes me want to hit you. (c)

Q:

We talked about inconsequential things while her happiness started to bleed over into me. I basked in it—stood under it joyfully like a warm sunbeam on a chilly day.

I loved this, her happiness, her openness—I couldn't name the last time I'd seen it. (c)

Q:

For crying out loud, I could keep a secret. You couldn't be a telepath without being able to keep a secret—well, not and not end up with a lynch mob after you. (c)

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