

CONFIDENTIAL NOTES #1

THE CURTAIN FALLS: CHOOSING WHICH CATS WOULD DIE

Of all the Erins, I, Vicky, am the chief executioner; I get to decide which cats join StarClan during the course of a story, and which survive to see another title. I always knew there would be a veritable feast of bloodshed in the final battle, but the only cat that I knew absolutely had to die was Firestar. Once I started to think more carefully about how important this book was as a conclusion to the twenty-three preceding stories, I realized that each death would be far more significant than just one more admission to StarClan. The fate of each character during the battle had to Mean Something, and also reflect on the rest of their life leading up to that moment.

As a result, far fewer cats died than I originally expected. (I can hear your sighs of relief!) But those that did died because their deaths play a part in the overall story—not just in this this book, but in the journey that began with Rusty's first steps into the forest. For a small number of cats, it somehow seemed right that they should die in this terrible, apocalyptic battle. Hollyleaf had to go heroically, saving the life of another cat and thus proving that she would make the ultimate sacrifice to save her Clan. My sympathy for Hollyleaf meant that I couldn't bring myself to let her secret out and have her accused of murder by her Clanmates, but she couldn't really stay in ThunderClan for a happy-ever-after—not after killing Ashfur. She also made a worthy opponent for Hawkfrost, who needed to kill a

significant character to show just how evil he had become. I know you're going to ask what happens when Hollyleaf meets Ashfur in StarClan; I have my fingers crossed that their paths won't intersect!

I decided on Spottedleaf's death quite early on because I wanted to bring out the very best side of her character—and what better way than to have her give up her StarClan life for the sake of Sandstorm? I think I judge Spottedleaf more harshly than you do for always hanging around in Firestar's dreams. She should have let him get on with his life! Her final act is absolutely selfless and loving, because it ensures that Firestar's mate survives. And yes, it does make things a bit tidier, knowing that Spottedleaf won't be in StarClan when Firestar arrives.

You have yourselves to blame for Ferncloud's demise! I've had a lot of complaints over the years about the way Ferncloud skulks in the nursery, churning out kits and never taking part in anything dangerous or difficult outside the camp. Well, all along I knew she was capable of fighting as fiercely as any warrior when it came to protecting the young of the Clan, so I put her in the thick of the battle to defend the nursery. And she got killed! Poor Ferncloud.

Finally, Mousefur deserved a fabulous ending because I've kept her hanging on for so long. She's had whitecough, greencough, ticks, bellyache, and stiff joints, and still she survives! She has seemed so frail recently, after Longtail's death, and at times I was afraid she had given up on life. But when her Clan was attacked, her warrior spirit triumphed and she fought alongside her former denmate as if they were both young and strong. She died peacefully, more from tiredness

and acceptance of her destiny than from any terrible wounds. Good night, beloved Mousefur. I have enjoyed writing you so much!