

STAR WARS

FATE OF THE JEDI

IMPRINT



Christie Golden

Welcome to the Star Wars Fan Club!

The Fate of the Jedi, the new nine-book hardcover series being published by Random House/Del Rey books, is set two years after the Legacy of the Force series. The first book, OUTCAST, was published March 24, 2009, so chances are you may already have that one on your bookshelf. OMEN, the second book in the series, will be available June 23, 2009 and introduces a previously undiscovered group of Sith who had been stranded on the technologically bare world of Kesh some 5,000 years earlier.

As our thank-you for joining this exceptional group of Star Wars folks, Christie Golden, author of OMEN, wrote a short story that takes place before the events of the Fate of the Jedi series and features this lost tribe of Sith. Vestara, the main character of the story, appears on the cover of OMEN and will have a major role in the series when these "lost" Sith become space-worthy and meet Luke Skywalker and his son, Ben.

This story is available only in this Fan Club Membership Kit

Thanks again for supporting the Star Wars publishing program.

Warm regards,

Sue Rostoni

Executive Editor

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By Christi Golden

It was summer on Kesh, and at this latitude, that meant bright sun, heat, and aridity. Vestara Khai, Sith Tyro, dabbed surreptitiously at her glistening brow and upper lip and did her best to think cool thoughts.

It was the first day of Presentation—a month-long opportunity for the native Keshiri to present themselves for inclusion among the Sith Tribe—and she was in the capital city of Tahv. The entire city had a festival atmosphere about it. Cooking aromas filled the air from various vendors, making Vestara's mouth water. The streets reverberated with the sounds of street musicians. Sections of the city were closed off to make way for the various petitions, auditions, and examinations to be held. Presentation, for the pale purple, exquisitely beautiful indigenous people of this world, meant hope.

But Vestara and her father, Saber Gavar Khai, had no interest in these goings on. Nor, unfortunately for the hungry ten-year-old-girl, were they heading to the ashkar vendor or the tal-toori vendor for roasted meat carved from a spit or fresh baked pastries. They made their way through the crowded streets with a single destination in mind—the pens of the soon-to-be-hatched uvaks.

Vestara stood straight and tall, as befit a Sith Tyro and the daughter of one of the most well-respected Sabers in the order. Beneath the heavy black robes that tradition demanded she wear, she was sweating profusely. Her training lightsaber was clipped to her belt. Her light brown hair was pinned up in a bun to help keep her cool in the hot weather. Her fair skin was protected by a thin layer of ray-blocking cream. Her dark brown eyes darted back and forth, and her full lips—they would be without flaw, as the Tribe so admired, save for the tiny scar that extended her mouth slightly and made it appear as though she were constantly smiling—turned up happily.

"Don't get too excited, Vestara," her father warned. "There are never enough uvaks to meet the demand.

"I know," she replied. "But I will come home with one." She shot her father a grin. He returned it and ruffled her hair.

Uvaks were winged reptiles, tamed by the Keshiri for millennia. They were much sought after as mounts, and competition for them was fierce. Very few who were not actively able to utilize the Force owned one, and those were usually received as gifts or as rewards for exceptional service to the Sith.

They had reached the pen and stood in line with the others who were competing for the rare creatures. There were several Keshiri as well as human Sith there today, Vestara noted, as well as many children, most around her own age, as ten was the required age to compete to own an uvak. A few were older, though, marking them as ones who had likely tried before... and failed.

For all the confidence Vestara displayed, her stomach was in knots. She was the daughter of a Sith Saber. She had the Khai family reputation to uphold. She could not fail, not in front of everyone. Her father was loving and gentle, but she had no wish to disappoint him — or herself. She would leave here today with a newly-hatched uvak in her arms. She would. She had to.

Vestara and Gavar passed through a covered walkway and into an open area. In front of them was the pen—bare ground, surrounded by a fence. Outside the perimeter of the fence were dozens of seats for the families of the competitors and the general public; it was a highly popular event. Vestara swallowed hard.

"Make me proud, daughter," Gavar said, bending to kiss Vestara's forehead.

"I will, Father. I shall not fail."

He nodded to her and turned away, ascending to take his seat. Vestara turned back to the pen. There was a large pile of cushions in a box to one side. She took one in a hand that trembled, and entered the fenced area.

Competitors were to sit around the perimeter of the circular pen on the cushions. Anyone who moved off his or her cushion would be disqualified. Heat and dust rose off the hard-baked soil. Vestara walked to a spot at random, placed the cushion down, sat cross-legged on it, and waited.

Several minutes passed. Others filed past, darting glances at Vestara, sizing her up as competition. Fifteen minutes later, the ring was full. After a few more minutes, a door was raised and an incubation droid rolled into the arena-like pen. Dome-shaped and shining, it came to a stop in the center. Vestara was barely breathing as the dome rolled back, revealing only a dozen leathery uvak eggs. An arm extended from the side of the droid and carefully placed the eggs down in the center of the pen, then the droid closed itself up and rolled back out.

The large melon-sized eggs, Vestara knew, had been gathered from the mothers and carefully tended so they would all hatch at the same time. Even as she watched, they began to move, ever so slightly, bulging here and there with the little lives encased within.

When should it start? Other children were leaning forward, their faces intent, and for an awful moment Vestara thought it might already be too late. Which one should she pick? Her throat closed up and she felt tendrils of panic tracing up and down her spine. She pushed the feeling down ruthlessly, closing her eyes to aid her composure. When she opened them, her gaze was fixed on a single egg that had rolled slightly away from the others.

That one.

Vestara narrowed her eyes, concentrating on the egg, letting it fill her mind. She resented having to blink, so intensely did she focus. The egg casing bulged, then dimpled, as the uvak shifted. One claw pierced the shell.

That's it, little one. Come on. Free yourself, and bond with me...

Her hands clenched hard as the little creature's claws sliced downward, tearing a rip in the shell. A beak poked through, opening and closing as the uvak took its first breaths of

air. Then it shoved its head through. Its skin would darken to a lustrous gold as it matured, but now it was a pale yellow hue, glistening with moisture.

Yes... that's it... how strong and brave you are. You should be mine. I will be a Sith Saber one day, like my father...

or maybe even a Master. You will be proud to bear me...you want to bear me....

All around her, Vestara knew, everyone was doing the same thing: Imposing their Sith will upon the still-hatching creatures so that the little reptiles would imprint upon them. There were at least five or ten Sith for each uvak...only a few would walk away successful today.

Come to me...my...

What would she name it? Names were important. Names enabled one to have greater control over another. Fresh sweat broke out on Vestara's forehead. The egg she was watching so carefully kept rocking as its inhabitant stuck out another claw and pawed at the air. It kept opening and closing its beak with a clicking sound that, to the young Tyro, seemed the loudest thing in the world: Tikk...tikk...tikk...

"Tikk," she whispered softly. She lifted a hand and extended it to the creature. The rules forbade her from assisting it in its hatching, but as long as her gesture did not take her off her cushion she could reach out and manipulate the creature's mind.

Tikk. Cast off your shell. Be born. Come to me. You want to hear my voice praising you, you want to feel my gentle touch patting your skin. Come and serve.

With a final shove, the creature...

Tikk!

...was through. Its wings, tiny yet, were plastered to its back, and its eyes were closed. Its—his—sides heaved and his beak still clicked. He lifted his head on his little stalk of a neck. It wobbled, as if the neck wasn't quite strong enough to support it, and let out a squawk. His eyes opened and a brilliant green gaze fastened on Vestara.

She felt herself smiling. Oh, you are beautiful, aren't you? That's it, Tikk...

Vestara jerked as she felt the other intrude. Tikk's wobbly head turned in another direction, and Vestara saw the perfect, purple features of a male Keshiri youth curve into a smile

of triumph. The gaze he shot her was full of superiority and malice. Vestara's own eyes narrowed in determination.

He was strong in the Force, a powerful presence of cold strength. But he would not have Tikk.

Again Vestara reached out to the beast, her long, slim fingers extended almost imploringly. You are mine. I will take good care of you. Come to me, Tikk. Come to me.

The head swung back in her direction, the green eyes locked with hers. She beckoned, gently, and out of the corner of her eye saw the Keshiri youth frown. Then the hatchling winced, as if in pain, and cawed plaintively. Sudden anger rushed through Vestara and she turned her attention on the boy.

Stop hurting him!

She could not communicate telepathically—no one could, as far as she knew—but her anger and outrage and concern for the creature was clear. The boy started and stared at her, his control over Tikk momentarily broken. In that brief space of time, she again directed her attention to the hatchling and locked eyes with him. Tikk...

And he was hers. She had claimed his attention sufficiently long enough to force him to imprint upon her. She felt the little creature's confusion turn to clarity, and although it was not yet strong enough to walk, it began to crawl determinedly toward her.

Emotions surged through her—triumph, smugness, joy. Her arms went around it and she hugged it tight. It crooned and bit at her ear. She jumped at the pain, then laughed. Of course—it was hungry!

She gathered Tikk in her arms and looked up at the sea of people. Her father was on his feet, applauding, smiling. Proud of her. She felt his affection wash over her, warm and comforting, and fought back tears.

Four years in the future, Ahri Raas, the boy with whom she had struggled for Tikk, would be her best friend. She would yearn to grow in the Force, and they would embark on the greatest adventure their world had ever seen.

But for now, with the heavy weight of Tikk in her arms, Vestara Khai, Sith Tyro, was more than content.



Dear Star Wars Fan:

This new fiction story by Christie Golden, along with more exclusive surprises inside this 2009 Membership Kit, are yours for being a part of the Official Star Wars Fan Club.

Since Bantha Tracks first appeared for Fan Club members in the late 1970s, the newsletter and the membership kits kept fans connected to the world of Star Wars even when there was no movie in the theaters, or no such news source as StarWars.com.

Now, we are lucky to have *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* on television weekly, and we have fresh news, blogs, shopping, and downloads on the official website. But Bantha Tracks and the Official Star Wars Fan Club still deliver a true inside fan experience.

Bantha Tracks offers fan news, and features that include art from all ages, humor, and even a few outlandish fan obsessions. It's available at StarWars.com for Fan Club members only, and in Star Wars Insider. The Fan Club kit, as you have already discovered, gives you exclusives like a patch and membership card from The Clone Wars, a letter from George Lucas, gifts from Star Wars licensees, and more.

It seems there's no end in sight for Star Wars, and certainly no diminishing of the Star Wars fan community. We look forward to hearing from you for years to come at banthatracks@starwars.com.

Mary Franklin

Editor, *Bantha Tracks*