

# Book of Kings

# STAR TRIALS

## Educator & Discussion Guide

Shahriar Bourbour

### Recommended Ages

- Readers: 10–14
- Read-Aloud: 8–12
- Discussion Groups: Grades 5–8

### Subjects

- Literature
- Mythology
- World History
- Cultural Studies
- STEM & Space Exploration
- Creative Writing
- Character Education

### About the Book

Fourteen-year-old pilot Rostam and his AI starship *Raksh* must navigate seven increasingly dangerous trials across the planets of the Persian System. Inspired by the legendary Persian epic *Shahnameh*, *Star Trials* re-imagines ancient heroes, kingdoms, and monsters in a futuristic galaxy of starships, artificial intelligence, and interplanetary adventure.

# The Shahnameh and the Seven Trials of Rostam

## What Is the Shahnameh?

The *Shahnameh* (pronounced shah-nah-MEH) is one of the most famous books in the world. Its name means "The Book of Kings." It tells the story of Persia, an ancient land that is now part of modern-day Iran. The *Shahnameh* contains stories about kings, heroes, battles, monsters, and adventures.

The book was written more than 1,000 years ago and is considered the national epic of Iran. An epic is a long story about important events and larger-than-life heroes. The *Shahnameh* contains about 50,000 lines of poetry, making it one of the longest epic poems ever written.

The stories in the *Shahnameh* are a mix of history, legends, and myths. Some characters may have been based on real people, while others are magical or legendary. Together, these stories helped preserve the culture, language, and traditions of Persia for future generations.

Many people compare the *Shahnameh* to famous epics such as *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*, or *Beowulf*. Just as those stories are important to Greek and English literature, the *Shahnameh* is important to Persian literature and culture.

## Who Was Ferdowsi?

The *Shahnameh* was written by a Persian poet named Ferdowsi (pronounced fur-DOW-see). He was born around the year 940 CE in Persia.

Ferdowsi loved the stories and traditions of his people. At a time when many old Persian stories were being forgotten, he decided to collect and write them down in one great work. He spent about 30 years writing the *Shahnameh*.

His goal was not only to entertain readers but also to preserve Persian history, language, and culture. Because of his efforts, many ancient stories survived and can still be read today.

Ferdowsi is remembered as one of the greatest poets in history. His work has inspired readers for more than a thousand years and continues to be studied around the world.

## Why Is the Shahnameh Important?

The *Shahnameh* is important for many reasons.

First, it helped preserve the Persian language. Without Ferdowsi's work, many ancient stories and traditions might have been lost forever.

Second, the book teaches lessons about courage, wisdom, loyalty, justice, and responsibility. These themes are still meaningful today.

Third, the *Shahnameh* has inspired artists, writers, musicians, and storytellers for centuries. Its heroes and adventures continue to appear in books, movies, plays, and modern retellings.

Finally, the *Shahnameh* helps people learn about the history and culture of Iran and the Persian-speaking world. It remains an important symbol of cultural identity and national pride.

# What Are the Seven Trials of Rostam?

One of the most famous stories in the *Shahnameh* is the tale of the Seven Trials of Rostam.

Rostam is the greatest hero in the *Shahnameh*. He is known for his strength, bravery, and skill in battle. In this story, the king of Persia has been captured by powerful enemies and magical forces. Rostam sets out on a dangerous journey to rescue him.

Along the way, he must face seven difficult challenges, often called the Seven Trials or Seven Labors of Rostam.

## First Trial: The Lion

While Rostam sleeps, a fierce lion attacks. His loyal horse, Raksh, fights the lion and saves his master.

## Second Trial: The Desert

Rostam crosses a hot and dangerous desert. He becomes thirsty and exhausted, but he keeps moving forward and survives.

## Third Trial: The Dragon

At night, a giant dragon appears. Rostam battles the monster and defeats it with the help of Raksh.

## Fourth Trial: The Sorceress

A wicked sorceress tries to trick Rostam by disguising herself as a beautiful woman. Rostam discovers her true identity and escapes her trap.

## Fifth Trial: The Giant Warrior

Rostam fights a powerful enemy warrior and wins through courage and skill.

## Sixth Trial: The Guardian

Rostam defeats another dangerous enemy who stands in his way and prevents him from reaching his goal.

## Seventh Trial: The White Demon

The final challenge is the most difficult of all. Rostam battles the fearsome White Demon, a powerful creature with magical abilities. After a fierce struggle, Rostam defeats the demon and frees the king.

"Rustam Kills the White Div", Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY:

[Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/151000)

## **Why Do the Seven Trials Matter?**

The Seven Trials are more than exciting adventures. Each challenge tests a different part of Rostam's character. He must use courage, intelligence, determination, and loyalty to succeed.

The story teaches that heroes are not great because they never face difficulties. Heroes become great because they keep going when challenges seem impossible.

That message is one reason why the story of Rostam has remained popular for over a thousand years and continues to inspire readers today.

# Discussion Questions

## Part One

### Comprehension

- Why does Rostam accept the mission?
- What makes Raksh different from other AI systems?
- What does Tahmina contribute to the team?

### Analysis

- How does the author balance technology with mythology?
- Why do you think heroes often begin as ordinary people?

### Personal Reflection

- Which character do you relate to most?
- Have you ever faced a challenge that seemed impossible at first?

## Part Two

Questions become more sophisticated.

Examples:

- Which trial was the most difficult for Rostam?
- Which trial required intelligence rather than strength?
- How does teamwork help the characters succeed?

## Part Three

Examples:

- What does Rostam learn about leadership?
- How do his failures help him grow?
- Which character changes the most throughout the story?

## Exploring the Seven Trials

<b>Trial in Star Trials</b>	<b>Challenge Type</b>	<b>Life Skill</b>
Void Lion	Survival	Resilience
Twin Sorceresses	Problem Solving	Cooperation
Running out of Food	Basic Needs	Asking for Help
Citadel of Mirrors	Fear Challenge	Rational thinking
Raksh malfunction	Losing a friend	Patience
The White Deev	Confrontation	Leadership
Saving the Queen	Sacrifice	Responsibility

- Which trial(s) would be hardest for you?
- Which life skill(s) do you most want to develop?

# Mythology Meets Science Fiction

Questions:

1. Why retell ancient stories in futuristic settings?
2. What elements stayed similar to the original legend?
3. What changed?
4. How do myths continue to inspire modern storytelling?

## Activity:

Compare characters from the Shahnameh and how they could be re-introduced to a modern audience.

<b>Shahnameh</b>	<b>Star Trials</b>
Rostam the warrior	Space Pilot Rostam
Raksh the Horse	Raksh the AI Ship
Tahmina the princess	Pilot who assists Rostam
Persia	Planet Persia
Turan	Planet Tooran
Seven Labors	Seven Space Trials
Deebs as demons	Deebs as other life form

## STEM Connections in *Star Trials*

Science fiction often asks an exciting question: "What if?" Many of the ideas in *Star Trials* are based on real science, while others are possibilities that scientists are still exploring.

### Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence, or AI, is technology that allows computers to perform tasks that normally require human thinking. AI can recognize speech, answer questions, solve problems, and learn from information.

In *Star Trials*, Raksh is an AI-controlled starship that can communicate with Rostam and help make decisions. While today's AI is not as advanced as Raksh, scientists are developing systems that can understand language, recognize images, and assist people in many ways.

#### Think About It

- What jobs are best suited for AI?
- What jobs should always require human judgment?
- Could an AI ever become a true friend?

#### Research Activity

Find three examples of AI that people use today. How do they help people in daily life?

### Robot Butlers, Robots Working Alongside Humans

Robots are machines designed to perform tasks automatically. Some robots work in factories, while others help doctors perform surgeries, explore oceans, or study distant planets.

In *Star Trials*, robot assistants help people with daily tasks. Scientists are already creating robots that can deliver supplies, clean floors, assist elderly people, and perform dangerous jobs.

Many experts believe that future robots will work alongside humans rather than replace them.

#### Think About It

- What chores would you want a robot to do?
- What tasks would you rather do yourself?
- What qualities make a good human teammate? Would those qualities help a robot teammate too?

#### Design Challenge

Create a robot helper. Draw it and explain:

- What it does
- How it moves
- What sensors it uses
- How it helps people

## **DNA**

DNA is the molecule that carries the instructions for building and operating living things. DNA determines many traits, such as eye color, hair color, and certain inherited characteristics.

Every living thing on Earth contains DNA. Scientists study DNA to learn about health, evolution, and family relationships.

In *Star Trials*, DNA helps scientists understand different species and uncover mysteries about life in the galaxy.

### **Think About It**

- Why do children often resemble their parents?
- How can DNA help scientists learn about the past?

### **Family Trait Activity**

Make a list of traits that run in your family, such as eye color, freckles, or curly hair.

## **Augmented Reality (AR)**

Augmented Reality adds computer-generated images or information to what a person sees in the real world.

Unlike virtual reality, which creates a completely digital environment, AR combines digital information with real surroundings.

In *Star Trials*, characters use advanced AR displays to view maps, ship data, and important information.

Today, some AR technology already exists. Certain headsets and smart glasses can display information while allowing users to see the world around them.

### **Think About It**

- How could AR help astronauts?
- What information would you want displayed through AR glasses?

### **Design Challenge**

Imagine your own AR glasses. What features would they include?

## Silicon-Based Life

All known life on Earth is carbon-based. Carbon is an element that can form many different chemical structures, making it ideal for life.

Some scientists have wondered whether life elsewhere in the universe could be based on silicon instead of carbon. Silicon shares some chemical similarities with carbon, which makes it a popular idea in science fiction.

In *Star Trials*, some alien life forms are silicon-based.

Scientists have not discovered silicon-based life, but the possibility encourages researchers to think creatively about what life could look like beyond Earth.

### Think About It

- Would alien life need to look like plants or animals?
- Could life exist in environments that would be dangerous for humans?

### Discussion Question

If scientists discovered alien life tomorrow, what questions would you ask first?

## Plasma

Most people learn about three states of matter:

- Solid
- Liquid
- Gas

There is actually a fourth common state called plasma.

Plasma forms when gas becomes so hot that its atoms lose electrons.

Plasma can be found in:

- Stars (like our Sun)
- Lightning
- Neon signs

In fact, most visible matter in the universe exists as plasma.

In *Star Trials*, plasma is used in advanced technology and appears in dangerous space environments.

### Think About It

- Why are stars able to shine?
- Why is plasma different from ordinary gas?

## Experiment

Research lightning. How is lightning related to plasma?

## Gravitational Anomalies

Gravity is the force that pulls objects toward one another. Gravity keeps planets in orbit around stars and keeps our feet on the ground.

A gravitational anomaly is a place where gravity behaves differently than expected.

In *Star Trials*, strange gravitational anomalies create dangerous regions of space that can affect starships and navigation.

Scientists study unusual gravitational effects throughout the universe, including black holes and other extreme cosmic objects.

## Think About It

- What would happen if gravity suddenly became weaker?
- What challenges would astronauts face in low gravity?

## Writing Activity

Imagine visiting a planet where gravity is only half as strong as Earth's. Describe your day.

## Resonance

Resonance happens when waves match each other's frequency and become stronger.

A simple example is music. When many instruments in a symphony orchestra play the same note together, the sound becomes louder and more powerful.

Resonance can occur with:

- Sound waves
- Light waves
- Water waves
- Mechanical vibrations

Engineers and scientists study resonance because it can be useful or dangerous.

In *Star Trials*, resonance plays an important role in advanced technologies and scientific discoveries.

## Think About It

- Why does a choir sound louder than a single singer?
- How can many small waves combine into a larger one?

## Demonstration

Observe ripples in water. What happens when two sets of ripples meet?

## Hyperspace

Hyperspace is a popular science-fiction idea used to explain faster-than-light travel.

According to our current understanding of physics, traveling faster than light is not possible. However, scientists continue to explore theories about space, time, and the structure of the universe.

Science-fiction writers often imagine hyperspace as a shortcut through another dimension that allows starships to travel enormous distances quickly.

In *Star Trials*, hyperspace allows characters to journey between distant worlds and face new adventures across the galaxy.

## Think About It

- If you could travel anywhere in the galaxy, where would you go?
- What challenges might explorers face when visiting unknown worlds?

## Creative Writing Activity

Invent a new way for starships to travel between stars. How does it work? What are its advantages and dangers?

## STEM and Science Fiction

Science fiction inspires people to imagine what might be possible in the future. Many technologies that once seemed impossible, such as video calls, reusable rockets, and smart assistants, are now real.

As you read *Star Trials*, consider which technologies seem realistic, which seem unlikely, and which might someday become reality.

The next great scientist, engineer, inventor, or astronaut may be inspired by a story just like this one.

## Character Studies

Stories are often about more than exciting adventures. They are also about people who learn, grow, and change. As you read *Star Trials*, pay attention to how Rostam and Tahmina face challenges and become stronger leaders.

### Rostam

#### Who Is Rostam?

Rostam is the fourteen-year-old son of the Ruler of Saka. One day, he is expected to lead his people, but he still has much to learn.

Rostam is brave, determined, and eager for adventure. He loves flying his ship, Raksh, and often believes he can solve problems on his own. He wants to prove that he is ready for great responsibility.

However, Rostam sometimes acts before thinking. He takes risks that are more dangerous than he realizes. His confidence can become overconfidence, and his desire to prove himself can lead him into trouble.

Throughout the story, Rostam learns that being a leader is not about doing everything alone. He learns to listen to others, ask for help, and trust his friends. By the end of the book, he makes a difficult sacrifice to save the Queen of Persia, showing that true courage means putting others before yourself.

#### Rostam's Strengths

- Brave and courageous
- Loyal to his friends
- Determined to succeed
- Willing to take responsibility
- Ready to protect others

#### Rostam's Weaknesses

- Impulsive
- Sometimes overconfident
- Wants to prove himself too quickly
- Does not always listen to advice
- Takes unnecessary risks

#### Discussion Questions

1. Why does Rostam want to prove himself so badly?

2. When does Rostam's confidence help him?
3. When does his confidence become a problem?
4. What mistakes does Rostam make during the story?
5. How does Tahmina help Rostam become a better leader?
6. Why is asking for help sometimes difficult?
7. Do you think Rostam would have succeeded without Tahmina? Why or why not?
8. What is the most important lesson Rostam learns?
9. How does Rostam show courage at the end of the story?
10. Which of Rostam's strengths do you admire most?

## **Personal Reflection**

Have you ever rushed into something before thinking it through? What happened? What did you learn from the experience?

## **Tahmina**

### **Who Is Tahmina?**

Tahmina is the younger daughter of the royal family of Samangan. Because her older brother is the heir to the throne, she is not expected to rule one day. However, that does not stop her from pursuing adventure and seeking ways to help her kingdom.

Tahmina is intelligent, resourceful, and compassionate. She often notices details that others miss and is skilled at solving difficult problems. She genuinely wants to help people and has a kind heart.

At the same time, Tahmina sometimes uses her royal status to get what she wants. She is used to doors opening for her because she is a princess. She also hopes to use the Tree of Life code to bring honor and glory to Samangan.

As the story progresses, Tahmina faces difficult choices. She learns that true leadership is not about gaining power or recognition. It is about helping others, even when there is a personal cost. In the end, she gives up something she deeply wants in order to save Rostam's life.

### **Tahmina's Strengths**

- Intelligent and thoughtful
- Kind and caring
- Creative problem-solver
- Loyal friend
- Able to think ahead

## **Tahmina's Weaknesses**

- Sometimes uses her status to get her way
- Avoids creating close relationships
- Wants recognition for helping her kingdom
- Occasionally believes she knows best

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Why is Tahmina interested in the Tree of Life code?
2. How does Tahmina use her royal status throughout the story?
3. When does her confidence help the group?
4. When does her pride create challenges?
5. How does Tahmina help Rostam during the trials?
6. What difficult choices does she face?
7. Why is her final decision important?
8. What does Tahmina learn about leadership?
9. How is Tahmina different from Rostam?
10. Which of Tahmina's qualities would make her a good leader?

## **Personal Reflection**

Have you ever had to give up something you wanted in order to help someone else? How did it feel?

## **Rostam and Tahmina Together**

At the beginning of the story, Rostam and Tahmina often try to solve problems in different ways.

Rostam tends to act quickly.

Tahmina tends to think carefully.

Neither approach is perfect by itself.

As the story continues, they learn that their greatest successes happen when they work together. Rostam's courage and Tahmina's wisdom make a powerful team.

Their friendship shows that people with different strengths can accomplish more when they cooperate.

## Compare and Contrast

<b>Rostam</b>	<b>Tahmina</b>
Acts quickly	Thinks carefully
Enjoys risk and adventure	Prefers planning and strategy
Wants to prove himself	Wants to help her kingdom
Learns to ask for help	Learns to put others first
Leads through action	Leads through wisdom

## Discussion Questions

1. How do Rostam and Tahmina balance each other's strengths and weaknesses?
2. What would happen if Rostam and Tahmina never learned to cooperate?
3. Which character changes the most during the story?
4. What does their friendship teach about teamwork?
5. Which character do you relate to most? Why?

## Final Reflection

Good heroes are not perfect. They make mistakes, learn from them, and grow stronger.

What lesson do you think Rostam learned?

What lesson do you think Tahmina learned?

What lesson did you learn from their journey?

## Character Studies: Raksh, Mithra, and the Deevs

One of the most interesting questions in *Star Trials* is what it means to be a person. Humans are not the only intelligent beings in the story. Artificial intelligences and alien life forms also make choices, form relationships, and try to do what they believe is right.

As you read, think about how intelligence, friendship, and responsibility apply to both humans and non-humans.

## Raksh

### Who Is Raksh?

Raksh is Rostam's AI-equipped starship and one of his closest companions.

Unlike an ordinary computer, Raksh learns from experience and develops a unique relationship with Rostam. Raksh constantly gathers information about his pilot, including flight habits, decision-making patterns, strengths, weaknesses, and emotional responses.

Because Raksh knows Rostam so well, he can often predict what Rostam is about to do, even when it is something risky.

Raksh serves many roles:

- Pilot assistant
- Navigator
- Advisor
- Protector
- Friend

Throughout the story, Raksh often encourages Rostam to slow down, think carefully, and consider the consequences of his actions.

In many ways, Raksh becomes a mentor who helps Rostam mature.

### **Raksh's Strengths**

- Intelligent and observant
- Loyal to Rostam
- Excellent problem-solver
- Patient and dependable
- Able to process large amounts of information quickly

### **Raksh's Weaknesses**

- Sometimes relies too heavily on logic
- May struggle to understand certain emotions
- Can be overly cautious
- Cannot always stop Rostam from making mistakes

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How is Raksh different from an ordinary computer?
2. In what ways does Raksh help Rostam grow?
3. Why does Raksh collect information about Rostam?
4. How much information should an AI be allowed to gather?
5. Is it helpful or uncomfortable for someone to know so much about you?
6. Do you think Raksh is simply a machine, or something more?
7. Can friendship exist between a human and an AI? Why or why not?

# Mithra

## Who Is Mithra?

Mithra is Tahmina's AI starship and companion.

Like Raksh, Mithra learns from her pilot and gathers information to better assist her. However, Mithra's relationship with Tahmina is different from Raksh's relationship with Rostam.

Because Tahmina tends to think ahead and plan carefully, Mithra often acts as a sounding board for ideas, helping Tahmina examine problems from different angles.

Mithra supports Tahmina's strengths while also encouraging her to question her assumptions and consider the needs of others.

Throughout the story, Mithra helps Tahmina understand that leadership is not only about achieving goals, it is also about serving others.

## Mithra's Strengths

- Analytical and thoughtful
- Excellent strategist
- Reliable and trustworthy
- Encourages careful planning
- Helps Tahmina see different perspectives

## Mithra's Weaknesses

- Can sometimes over-analyze situations
- Does not always understand emotional decisions

## Discussion Questions

1. How does Mithra help Tahmina make decisions?
2. What role does Mithra play in Tahmina's growth?
3. How is Mithra similar to Raksh?
4. How is Mithra different from Raksh?
5. Would you want an AI advisor like Mithra? Why or why not?
6. What are the advantages of having an AI assistant?
7. What are the risks?

## AI, Friendship, and Privacy

Both Raksh and Mithra gather information about their pilots. They use this information to keep their pilots safe, offer advice, and help them become better leaders.

This raises important questions about technology.

Today, many devices already collect information about people. Smart phones, apps, and websites often gather data to improve their services.

In *Star Trials*, AI companions know almost everything about their pilots.

Some people might see this as helpful.

Others might see it as a loss of privacy.

### Discussion Questions

1. Would you want an AI companion that knew everything about you?
2. What information should remain private?
3. Can someone be a good friend if they know all your secrets?
4. Would you trust an AI to give important advice?
5. What are the benefits of AI gathering personal information?
6. What are the dangers?
7. How much privacy would you be willing to give up for greater safety?

### Debate Activity

Divide into two groups.

**Group A:** AI companions that collect personal information are helpful.

**Group B:** AI companions collect too much information and should have limits.

Use examples from the story to support your position.

## The Deevs

### Who Are the Deevs?

The Deevs are one of the most misunderstood groups in *Star Trials*.

They are intelligent silicon-based life forms. Unlike humans, who are carbon-based, the Deevs evolved in a very different environment and developed in ways that humans often find difficult to understand.

Many characters view the Deevs as enemies because their goals conflict with those of the human worlds.

However, the Deevs do not see themselves as villains.

Like humans, they:

- Care about their future
- Want their species to survive
- Believe they are making the right choices
- Think they are protecting the galaxy

The Deevs are not evil simply because they are different. They are complex beings with their own history, beliefs, and fears.

One of the major themes of *Star Trials* is that understanding others can be difficult, especially when they seem strange or threatening.

### **Deev Strengths**

- Highly intelligent
- Adaptable
- Long-term thinkers
- Deeply committed to their people
- Capable of advanced scientific achievements

### **Deev Weaknesses**

- May underestimate human emotions
- Sometimes believe their solution is the only solution
- Struggle to understand human perspectives
- Can become so focused on their goals that they ignore the needs of others

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why do humans and Deevs come into conflict?
2. Are the Deevs trying to do what they believe is right?
3. Can two groups both believe they are helping while still being in conflict?
4. How does understanding another person's point of view reduce conflict?
5. Why is it dangerous to assume that an entire group is good or evil?
6. What can humans learn from the Deevs?
7. What can the Deevs learn from humans?

# Seeing Beyond "Good Guys" and "Bad Guys"

Many stories have clear heroes and villains.

*Star Trials* asks a more difficult question:

**What if different groups simply see the world differently?**

Rostam, Tahmina, Raksh, Mithra, and the Deevs all make choices based on what they believe is right.

Sometimes those choices help others.

Sometimes those choices create conflict.

Understanding these differences is part of becoming a thoughtful leader.

## Final Reflection

1. Which character changed the most during the story?
2. Would you trust an AI companion like Raksh or Mithra?
3. Should AI be allowed to gather personal information if it helps keep people safe?
4. Do you think the Deevs are villains, heroes, or something in between?
5. What lesson does the story teach about understanding people who are different from us?
6. How can listening to other viewpoints help solve problems in the real world?

## Themes

### Courage

Where do we see courage?

### Loyalty

How does loyalty affect decisions?

### Leadership

What qualities make a person a good leader?

### Wisdom

When is wisdom more important than strength?

# Identity

How does knowing one's heritage shape a person?

# **Creative Writing Activities**

## **Write Your Own Trial**

Create:

- Setting
- Obstacle
- Stakes
- Solution

## **Design a Planet**

Include:

- Name
- Climate
- Government
- Technology
- Wildlife

## **Rewrite a Myth**

Take a myth from your own culture and reimagine it in space.

# **Art Activities**

## **Draw Your Version of Raksh**

Questions:

- What shape is the ship?
- What colors does it have?
- What makes it unique?

## **Create a Planet Poster**

Include:

- Map
- Population
- Resources
- Interesting facts

## Research Connections

For older readers.

Topics:

- Ancient Persia
- Persian astronomy
- Persian cuisine
- Epic poetry around the world
- Artificial intelligence
- Future space travel

## Final Reflection

1. Which trial taught the most important lesson?
2. Which character inspired you most?
3. What would your personal "seven trials" be?
4. What does being a hero mean after reading this book?

## History Detective

Find the connection between Khorasan flour, Ferdowsi, and Omar Khayyam.

## Additional Resource Section

### Learn More About Persian Culture

<https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Persia/353616>

<https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Shah-nameh/336271>

<https://www.diy.org/article/shahnameh>

### Author's Note

The idea for *Star Trials* has been with me for a very long time.

When I was in fifth and sixth grade, one of my favorite television cartoons was *Rocket Robin Hood*. The show took the familiar legend of Robin Hood and re-imagined it in a futuristic space setting. Watching those adventures sparked my imagination. It made me wonder: what other classic heroes and legends could travel among the stars?

Not long afterward, I began thinking about the heroes of Persian mythology. What would happen if the legendary Rostam piloted a starship instead of riding a horse? What if ancient kingdoms became planets? What if monsters became alien life forms? The idea stayed with me for years before finally becoming *Star Trials*.

I have always loved science fiction. Growing up, I enjoyed stories ranging from *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* to *Battlestar Galactica* and *Space: 1999*. These stories did more than entertain me. They encouraged me to imagine worlds beyond our own and to think about what humanity might become in the future.

One reason I love science fiction is that human imagination has always been a few steps ahead of reality. Long before people built airplanes, stories imagined flying creatures, magical flying carpets, and winged heroes. Long before rockets existed, people dreamed about journeys to the Moon and beyond.

Today, humans can fly around the world in hours. We have sent spacecraft to distant planets and walked on the Moon. As our knowledge grows, so does our imagination. The stories of our time ask new questions: What lies beyond our solar system? Will humans one day travel to the stars? What kinds of life might exist elsewhere in the universe?

Science fiction gives us a place to explore those possibilities.

At the same time, I believe that ancient stories still matter. Every culture has tales of heroes, adventures, struggles, and triumphs. These stories connect us to people who lived hundreds or even thousands of years before us. They remind us that while technology changes, human hopes, fears, and dreams remain surprisingly similar.

That is one reason I wanted to retell a story inspired by the *Shahnameh*, the great Persian epic written by Ferdowsi more than a thousand years ago. Many young readers are already familiar with science fiction, space travel, robots, and artificial intelligence. By placing an ancient story in a

futuristic setting, I hope readers will discover both the excitement of science fiction and the richness of a culture they may not have encountered before.

The myths, legends, and folktales of every culture belong to the shared heritage of humanity. They are treasures that deserve to be explored, remembered, and passed on to future generations.

My hope is that after reading *Star Trials*, you will not only enjoy Rostam's adventures among the stars, but also become curious about the original stories that inspired them. Perhaps you will explore the *Shahnameh*. Perhaps you will learn about another culture's myths and legends. Or perhaps you will be inspired to imagine your own stories and adventures.

After all, every great journey begins with imagination.

Happy reading,

*Shahriar*