

Susan

DYSTOPIAN NOVEL EXCERPT: *RATARRA: THE LEGEND OF DAMIAN* by Michael W. Schwartz

Book 1 Rise of Offspring

Episode 1

RETURN TO KHALA

Summary: This is an examination of religious fanaticism and clan warfare woven into a superhero dynamic duo action-adventure. The two heroes battle clan zealots for the secrets of a lost civilization which provide its followers with a level of superpower. The fate of the Divine One himself is at stake.

> I had to read a few times.

CHAPTER 1

THE MINES

The boy looked out at the stars from behind the bars of his cell. There was no demonstration happening on the ground below tonight. That enabled him a night of peace. The guards of this prison performed many demonstrations on the prisoners in the area below him for all to see, various tortures and humiliations, all horrible and unthinkable. They called it the 'reinstruction pit.' Kurg, the great Mogoli chieftain of this facility, enforced his strict laws and sought pleasure in making examples out of the disobedient prisoners. On these nights the boy would cower in the back corner of his tiny cell.

And that indeed was the cruel intent of the cell layout here at the Khala slave camp. The prisoner blocks were carved into the sides of the huge U-shaped rock formation on this side of the mountain, closely positioned, directly across from each other, with the cell blocks facing

Comment [s1]: I would make this more personal. Start off with first sentence, and then go right to "reinstruction pit." It's too mechanical the way it's worded. We should feel his terror as he is thinking about this occurrence, experience his viewpoint so that we can immediately identify with him on a personal level. Maybe: first sentence, followed by: No reinstruction pit tonight. The boy shivered. Last night, Kurg had made an example out of the man in the cell next door, a man he'd befriended. It was impossible to block out the images. Blood. The fingernails, first, then... etc etc.

Comment [s2]: The word "tiny" is an example of a word that you don't need, as "cell" implies "tiny."

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inboard. This semi-circular arrangement ~~compelled~~forced the prisoners to witness the horrors not far below. Kurg plainly wanted the effects of his punishments felt by all.

Comment [s3]: Again, second paragraph is good, but follow the first paragraph in terms of making it more personal.

The boy, Damian, had witnessed far more of these than he cared to in his eight years here. Once, a man working in the slaughterhouse not far from the stables where the boy worked each day, bolted and tried to climb the stone wall. He was quickly shot by a guard and staked in the pit. Kurg had released his kelgan steeds and the boy would never forget the man's cries as the beasts ate him alive. ~~On a~~ Another time, when Damian was much younger, a human and an accomplice guard were hung in the pit by their legs all night. Damian later learned the guard sold food to the prisoner for gold he must have found mining. The guard, one of the Hidari race, was later executed. Kurg could not afford for the guards to collaborate ~~collaboration~~ with the prisoners, the result of which would be fatal. Obtaining sympathy and favors from the guards would undermine authority and be detrimental to his purpose. Besides, any gold found here at Khala was strictly for the benefit of their cultish following, the Kunn, and their leader, the great Ahga-Rosh, or Father.

Comment [s4]: How old is he now?

Comment [s5]: Ambiguous as to who the "he" is

Comment [s6]: ambiguous

Comment [s7]: I think this is obvious to the reader; I would delete.

~~Everyone~~ All the prisoners here ~~had bore~~ whip marks. Some even had hideous holes under their back bones from suffering 'atonement'. The Kunn soldiers called it the ruk-mesh, a brutal ritual the clan itself underwent as a rite of admission. Here it was implemented as a punishment for the prisoners. Kelga fangs were driven under the victim's back bones, which were then strung to a wooden beam. The victim was then lifted into the air and hung and left for what seemed like an eternity. Damian himself bore the scars of his own atonement experience. Shortly after his arrival, the starved boy had been caught ~~with~~ smuggled meat from the slaughterhouse. He had lunged at the guard when his food ~~was~~ had been confiscated. Damian was beaten and strung, but watching the guard eat his food and jeer at him while he suffered ~~was~~ had been even more

a lot of good material, but it's told at arm's length (most of it). I need to feel the boy's feelings, reactions - this is too much of a summary.

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painful. ~~The quiet in the pit below tonight was actually somewhat peaceful and Damian tried to find comfort and hope in the stars above on this cloudless night.~~

Comment [s8]: To here, this is too much backstory for me. It doesn't really connect me with Damian. I'd rather one actual account of a scene rather than examples of several.

But ~~h~~ Hope was scarce here at the Khala mines, for this factory was a great source of gold, gems, and metal for the Kunn warlords, in particular a metal called garvonite, which could be found in abundance here. This rare metal was the material of choice for its hardness and unsurpassed resistance to corrosion and decay, and therefore was of great worth and widely coveted. Weapons and gold were in high demand for the Ahga, who was ever-always in need of materials and wealth to sustain his growing power and ranks. The Kunn, which meant 'The Fist' in their old language, relied on steady output from Khala in the form of gold, tradeable stones, metal and meat for profit. The prisoners were not allowed to make usable weapons here, of course, but shipped out the procured goods in raw pieces which they crudely manufactured on site and in turn sold on the market. Withholding of any precious metal or stone was a serious crime, and Kurg and his chief taskmaster and strongman, Belósh, a huge one-eyed half-mog with an evil smile, saw that rules were enforced.

Comment [s9]: Break into two sentences

} again, too much summary - you've got scenes here in the first few pgs that can be drawn out

Comment [s10]: Way too much summary/backstory. This information needs to be woven into the story within action/dialogue as needed and in real time as the story proceeds.

Damian could never forget his first fateful encounter with the Kunn that autumn day eight years ago. He grew up in a farming settlement called Tirien with his father, mother and sister. He was a sturdy but timid boy with dirty blond hair and hazel eyes, and learned the meaning of labor at a very young age. They lived on a farm, self sufficient for the most part and making their way in the world, selling their crops at the local village market. He helped his father on the farm, raising crops, milking the cattle, slaughtering the livestock, storing the harvest and feed, and otherwise assisting with the various tasks, of which there are many. He was, therefore, a bit stronger than other boys, his young muscles accustomed to burden and toil. He excelled at athletics or any other sport or task which required physical strength and stamina, but was

this is almost like an outline that you can use to slowly bring the reader in to the story

after discussion I agree - start here

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markedly humble and generous, seemingly oblivious to the power he possessed over others, and undesirous of such an advantage anyway. His father had given him a young horse of his own and he proved himself to be a skilled rider. He and often rode to the village market on an errand, or to a friend's house when he could. He cherished this horse greatly (name of horse?) and treated it like the gift that it was, earning its respect and obedience in return.

He was returning from such a ride one afternoon in his twelfth year when he saw them—a small troop of Mogoli, green-green-skinned and fanged humanoids, well-statured and muscled, armed and fearsome, bearing the token red bandanas and armbands of the clan known as the Kunn. Their bodies ~~they had daubed and~~ had been daubed and disfigured with paint and cruel piercings to make them look fierce. Stripes were branded into their girthy necks. These strange thugs of the desert countries to the south rode onto the farm mounted on kelgan—fast, fierce, four-legged beasts of the barren lands. His father, Darren, went out to meet them with fear in his eyes.

Comment [s11]: Tell us his age earlier

These clan bandits had been here twice before, he remembered, demanding a portion of the harvest and slaughter. Who? These times Darren had paid them out of fear for his family's safety but this year had brought a drought and the harvest was minimal. The family stood a fair chance of starving before next spring unless they could find work and Darren could not afford the request, or demand this time. His father knew that opposition or defiance to the Kunn would result in death or enslavement. Damian would never forget the terrified look in his mother Loren's eyes as she clutched his ten year old sister, Lilia's, hand as she peered out from the window behind the front porch of their small home. They all seemed to know what would happen as Darren descended the steps and approached the clan chief, called an ulak. This chief was a larger, stronger mog having only one eye and an evil smile, a smile that found pleasure in others' pain, a smile that would torment Damian in sleep and in waking life, a smile that Damian was forced to

new paragraph

> bring all of this out slowly and expand into a play-by-play scene, w/ lots of breaks (not one paragraph)

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see daily for this clan thug was none other than Belósh himself, the taskmaster, the executioner, the genius of torture and pain here at Khala. Damian hesitated on his horse, frozen with fear and uncertainty. Dread weighed down on him like lead as he watched not a stone's throw away in the pasture.

Comment [s12]: Get to this point faster

"I have nothing to give you," stuttered Darren nervously to the ulak, halted before him ~~on horseback~~. The ulak ~~dismounted, offered offering~~ ^{without a} ~~no~~ reply, ~~but~~ ~~dismounted~~. He approached Darren and paused for a moment in front of him. There was a silence, then Belósh motioned to the woman and child in the window. Darren glanced back at his wife and daughter, ~~T~~ ~~and~~ ~~their~~ eyes met. ~~H~~, ~~then~~ ~~he~~ ~~reluctantly~~ faced the ulak again with a desperate look.

Comment [s13]: You don't need this entire paragraph, except the part where Damian sees them approaching, and then give a quick description. Move right into the dialogue/scene. I'm also not sure you need this right now in the story; I'm guessing you could weave it in later, when it's most meaningful.

Comment [s14]: Make it obvious how the ulak approaches, and then step-by-step.

Belósh laughed.

"Please," begged Darren, "we have no food."

The smile on the ulak's face vanished. Such an answer was unacceptable. He drew his sword and beheaded Darren with one swift stroke.

Loren immediately ran onto the porch, screaming hysterically, followed by Lilia.

"NO!" Damian cried from his horse.

"DAMIAN!" cried his mother now, ~~completely overcome with grief and terror~~ ^{inferred}. She ~~reached~~ ^{no need for CAPS} desperately for her son who was beyond her aid. She took a few steps toward him but was arrested by the strong grip of Kunn henchmen. Belósh turned towards Damian, and their eyes met for the first time. He growled, and Damian fled in terror, ~~but~~ ~~the~~ ~~mounted~~ ~~riders~~ ~~were~~ ~~already~~ close on his tail.

Comment [s15]: Make it clear who's approaching.

"Run, Bish, run!" Damian urged the fleeing horse, but it was in vain. The soldiers with loaded crossbows quickly brought the small horse down. Damian fell in the grass and found

Comment [s16]: Better adjective

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himself in the clutches of the villains. He was dragged back, crying violently, delirious from horror, to stand before their leader.

~~, and brought before their leader. Belósh regarded the boy closely for a moment and~~
ordered him tied. The cruel, one-eyed ulak ~~then~~ grabbed Damian by the hair and pulled him close.

“You come with me, Ratarra,” snarled Belósh, and all went dark.

You have a good storyline here. To have more impact, we need to identify with Damian right away. Perhaps start as I mentioned in the first paragraph, and then move him forward into the story, real time, incorporating the horror around him into scenes and dialogue. The rest, to me, is backstory. Bring back the moment of when he was first captured (and his father killed) later in the story, when it is most meaningful to him and has the biggest impact on the reader. Maybe he hears about where his mother and sister are kept, and then he remembers what happened.

DAVE

This is just an example of the early confusion. Here is a list of new terms you expect the reader to absorb and understand: Kurg, Mogoli, Khala, Kelgan, Kunn, Ahga-Rosh, Ruk-Mesh, Kelga, Ahga, Belosh, Mog, Tirien, Ulak, Ratarra. If you were confronted with these terms early in a novel would you continue? I'd guess not.

I made a note on page 3 where I thought the story could start with a better, more hopeful outcome. Think of the story as one of discovery for both Damian and the reader. After all, you're supposed to take us on a trip. Let the various and endless list of terms appear one at a time in an appropriate place as it happens with Damian.

The better part of the first three pages is a muddy jumble of places, situations, and names. It really makes no sense. I realize that the episodes you've portrayed in the first three pages are necessary, but it would be more appropriate and digestible if they could be inserted into the story as they happen.

Don't try to do too much with the first pages other than try to introduce the main character and the major conflict. With clever writing, the reader will become concerned with the main character, in this case a young kid. There's always empathy for a child in danger. Let the imprisonment and torture evolve naturally.

Good luck with this interesting and troublesome place.

Book 1 Rise of Offspring

Episode 1

RETURN TO KHALA

Summary: This is an examination of religious fanaticism and clan warfare woven into a superhero dynamic duo action-adventure. The two heroes battle clan zealots for the secrets of a lost civilization which provide its followers with a level of superpower. The fate of the Divine One himself is at stake.

CHAPTER I

THE MINES

The boy looked out at the stars from behind the bars of his cell. There was no demonstration happening on the ground below tonight. That enabled him a night of peace. The

SUMMARY
↓

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guards of this prison performed many demonstrations on the prisoners in the area below him for all to see, various tortures and humiliations, all horrible and unthinkable. They called it the 'reinstruction pit.' Kurg, the great Mogoli chieftain of this facility enforced his strict laws and sought pleasure in making examples out of the disobedient prisoners. On these nights the boy would cower in the back corner of his tiny cell.

And that indeed was the cruel intent of the cell layout here at the Khala slave camp. The prisoner blocks were carved into the sides of the huge U-shaped rock formation on this side of the mountain, closely positioned, directly across from each other, with the cell blocks facing inboard. This semi-circular arrangement compelled the prisoners to witness the horrors not far below. Kurg plainly wanted the effects of his punishments felt by all.

The boy, Damian, (*an eight year old prisoner- or whatever*) had witnessed far more of these than he cared to in his eight years here. Once, a man working in the slaughterhouse ~~not far from the stables where the boy worked each day~~, bolted and tried to climb the stone wall. *He The boy saw that he* was quickly shot by a guard and staked in the pit. Kurg released his kelgan steeds. ~~and the boy Damian~~ would never forget the man's cries as the beasts ate him alive.

(NEW PARAGRAPH) On another time, when Damian was much younger, (*going back and forth in time is always a danger*) a human and an accomplice guard were hung in the pit by their legs all night. *Damian later learned the guard sold food to the prisoner for gold he must have found mining. (Awkward sentence. Re-word)* The guard, one of the Hidari race, was later executed.

Kurg could not afford collaboration with the prisoners, the result of which would be fatal.

Obtaining sympathy and favors from the guards would undermine authority and be detrimental to his purpose. Besides, any gold found here at Khala was strictly for the benefit of their cultish following, the Kunn, and their leader, the great Ahga-Rosh, or Father. (*Clunky paragraph*)

Everyone (*Guards? Rulers? Be specific who had whip marks*) here had whip marks. Some even had hideous holes under their back bones from suffering 'atonement'. The Kunn soldiers called it the *ruk-mesh*, a brutal ritual the clan itself underwent as a rite of admission. Here it was implemented as a punishment for the prisoners. *Kelga* fangs were driven under the victim's back bones (*spinal column? Ribs?*) which were then strung to a wooden beam. The victim was then lifted into the air and hung and left for what seemed like an eternity. (*Sounds like a torture from the plains Indians. Check out the movie, A Man Called Horse.*) Damian himself bore the scars of his own atonement experience. Shortly after his arrival, the starved boy had been caught with smuggled meat from the slaughterhouse. He lunged at the guard when his food was confiscated. Damian was beaten and strung, but watching the guard eat his food and jeer at him while he suffered was even more painful. The quiet in the pit below tonight was actually somewhat peaceful and Damian tried to find comfort and hope in the stars above on this cloudless night. (*Again, time sequence is important. This para is muddled and cloudy*)

But hope was scarce here at the Khala mines for this factory was a great source of gold, gems, and metal for the Kunn warlords, in particular a metal called garvonite, which could be found in abundance here. This rare metal was the material of choice for its hardness and unsurpassed resistance to corrosion and decay, and therefore was of great worth and widely coveted. Weapons and gold were in high demand for the *Ahga* was ever in need of materials and wealth to sustain his growing power and ranks. The Kunn, which meant 'The Fist' in their old language, relied on steady output from Khala in the form of gold, tradeable stones, metal and meat for profit. The prisoners were not allowed to make usable weapons here, of course, but shipped out the procured goods in raw pieces which they crudely manufactured on site and in turn sold on the market. Withholding of any precious metal or stone was a serious crime, and

Kurg and his chief taskmaster and strongman, Belósh, a huge one-eyed half-mog with an evil smile, saw that rules were enforced.

(The story should start here and let the rest come as a discovery for both Damian and the reader. More understandable and creative.) Damian could never forget his first fateful encounter with the Kunn that autumn day eight years ago. He grew up in a farming settlement called Tirien with his father, mother and sister. He was a sturdy but timid boy with dirty blond hair and hazel eyes, and learned the meaning of labor at a very young age. They lived on a farm, self sufficient for the most part and making their way in the world, selling their crops at the local village market. He helped his father on the farm, raising crops, milking the cattle, slaughtering the livestock, storing the harvest and feed, ~~and otherwise assisting with the various tasks, of which there are many.~~ He was, therefore, a bit stronger than other boys, his young muscles accustomed to burden and toil. He excelled at athletics or any other sport or task which required physical strength and stamina but was markedly humble and generous, seemingly oblivious to the power he possessed over others, and undesirous of such an advantage anyway. His father had given him a young horse of his own and he proved himself to be a skilled rider and often rode to the village market on an errand, or to a friend's house when he could. He cherished this horse greatly and treated it like the gift that it was, earning its respect and obedience in return.

He was returning from such a ride one afternoon in his twelfth year when he saw ~~them~~—a small troop of Mogoli, green skinned and fanged *and well muscled*) humanoids. ~~well-statured and muscled,~~ *(They were)* armed and fearsome, bearing the token red bandanas and armbands of the clan known as the Kunn. Their bodies they ~~had~~ *were* daubed and disfigured with paint and cruel piercings to make them look fierce. Stripes were branded into their girthy *(Is this a word? I*

don't think so.) necks. These strange thugs of the desert countries to the south rode onto the farm mounted on kelgan—fast, fierce, four-legged beasts of the barren lands. His father, Darren, went out to meet them with fear in his eyes. These clan bandits had been here twice before, he *(Damian? If not, this is a POV change.)* remembered, demanding a portion of the harvest and slaughter. These times(,) Darren had paid them out of fear for his family's safety(,) but this year had brought a drought and the harvest was minimal. The family stood a fair chance of starving before next spring unless they could find work(.) ~~and~~ Darren could not afford the request, ~~or~~ demand this time. His father knew that ~~opposition or~~ defiance to the Kunn would result in death or enslavement. *(New paragraph)* Damian would never forget the terrified look in his mother's(,) Loren's(,) eyes as she clutched his ten year old sister, Lilia's, hand as she peered out from the window behind the front porch of their small home. They all seemed to know what would happen as Darren descended the steps and approached the clan chief, called an ulak. **This chief was a larger, stronger mog having only one eye and an evil smile, a smile that found pleasure in others' pain, a smile that would torment Damian in sleep and in waking life, a smile that Damian was forced to see daily for this clan thug was none other than Belósh himself, the taskmaster, the executioner, the genius of torture and pain here at Khala. Damian hesitated on his horse, frozen with fear and uncertainty.** *(Sentence is way too long. Break it up into bite-sized pieces.)* Dread weighed down on him like lead as he watched *from* not a stone's throw away in the pasture.

"I have nothing to give you," stuttered Darren nervously to the ulak, *as he* halted before him. (NEW PARA)The ulak offered no reply but dismounted. He approached Darren and paused for a moment in front of him. (NEW PARA)There was a silence, then Belósh motioned to the

woman and child in the window. Darren glanced back at his wife and daughter and their eyes met, then he reluctantly faced the ulak again with a desperate look. Belósh laughed.

“Please,” begged Darren , “we have no food.”

The smile on the ulak’s face vanished. Such an answer was unacceptable. He drew his sword and beheaded Darren with one swift stroke.

Loren immediately ran onto the porch, screaming hysterically, followed by Lilia.

“NO!” Damian cried from his horse.

“DAMIAN!” cried his mother now completely overcome with grief and terror. She reached desperately for her son who was beyond her aid. She took a few steps toward him but was arrested by the strong grip of Kunn henchmen. Belósh turned towards Damian and their eyes met for the first time. He growled and Damian fled in terror, but the mounted riders were already close on his tail.

“Run **Bish**, run!” Damian urged the fleeing horse(,) but it was in vain. The soldiers with loaded crossbows quickly brought the small horse down. Damian fell in the grass and found himself in the clutches of the villains. He was dragged back crying violently, delirious from horror, and brought before their leader. Belósh regarded the boy closely for a moment and ordered him tied. The cruel, one-eyed ulak then grabbed Damian by the hair and pulled him close.

“You come with me, **Ratarra**,” snarled Belósh. ~~and all went dark.~~

These final paragraphs set up very nicely, a story that has brutality and danger.

Book 1 Rise of Offspring

Jean's Comments

Episode 1

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CHAPTER 1

THE MINES

^{Damian}
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^{played out}
demonstration ^{happening} on the ground below tonight. That enabled him a night of peace. The
^{Khala slavecamp}
guards of ~~this prison~~ performed many demonstrations on the prisoners in the ~~area below him~~ ^{covered? reconstruction pit} for
all to see, various tortures and humiliations, all horrible and unthinkable. ~~They called it the~~
~~reinstruction pit.~~ Kurg, the great Mogoli chieftain of this facility, enforced his strict laws and
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prisoner blocks were carved into the ~~sides of the huge~~ ^{side of the} U-shaped rock formation on this side of
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~~inboard~~ ^{- inboard has to do with a strip of other vehicle} ~~inward~~ ^{no hyphen} This semi-circular arrangement compelled the prisoners to witness the horrors not far below. Kurg ~~plainly~~ wanted the effects of his punishments felt by all.

~~The boy~~ ^{Damian} Damian had witnessed far more of these than he cared to in his eight years here. Once, a man working in the slaughterhouse not far from the stables where the boy worked each day, bolted and tried to climb the stone wall. He was ~~quickly~~ shot by a guard and staked in the pit. Kurg released his kelgan steeds ^{and the boy} and the boy would never forget the man's cries as the beasts ate him alive. ~~On another time~~ ^{On} another time, when Damian was much younger, a human and an accomplice guard were hung ~~in the pit~~ ^{in the pit} by their legs all night. Damian later learned the guard sold food to the prisoner for gold he must have found mining. The guard, one of the Hidari race, was later executed. Kurg could not afford collaboration with the prisoners, ~~the result of which would be fatal~~. Obtaining sympathy and favors from the guards would undermine authority and be detrimental to his purpose. Besides, any gold ~~found here~~ ^{mined} at Khala was strictly for the benefit of their cultish following, the Kunn, and their leader, the great Ahga-Rosh, or Father.

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Are Kelga the same as Kelgan Steeds?

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below tonight was actually ~~some~~ peaceful, and Damian tried to find comfort and hope in the stars above on this cloudless night.

But hope was scarce here at the Khala mines for this factory was a great source of gold, gems, and metal for the Kunn warlords, in particular a metal called garvonite, which ~~could be found in abundance~~ ^{was} here. This rare metal was ~~the material of choice~~ ^{widely coveted} for its hardness and ~~unsurpassed~~ ^{was} resistance to corrosion and decay, ~~and therefore was of great worth and widely~~ ^{Rosh} ~~coveted~~ ^{always}. Weapons and gold were in high demand for the Ahga ~~was~~ ^{was} in need of materials and wealth to sustain his growing power and ranks. The Kunn, which meant 'The Fist' in their old language, relied on steady output from Khala ~~in the form of gold, tradeable stones, metal and~~ ^{mines} meat for profit. The prisoners were not allowed to make usable weapons here, of course, but shipped out the ~~procured goods~~ ^{who?} in raw pieces which they crudely manufactured ~~on-site~~ ^{on-site} and in turn sold on the market. Withholding of any precious metal or stone was a serious crime, and Kurg and his chief taskmaster and strongman, Belósh, a huge one-eyed half-mog with an evil smile, saw that rules were enforced.

You already talk about the gold, gems & metal

Your story starts here → Damian could never forget his first fateful encounter with the Kunn that autumn day eight years ago. He grew up in a farming settlement called Tirien ~~with his father, mother and sister~~. He was a sturdy but timid boy with dirty-blond hair and hazel eyes, and learned the meaning of labor at a very young age. They lived on a farm, self sufficient for the most part, ~~and making their way in the world~~ ^{and sold} selling their crops at the local village market. He helped his father ~~on the farm~~ raising crops, milking the cattle, slaughtering the livestock, storing the harvest and feed, and ~~otherwise assisting with the~~ ^{ed} various tasks, of which there are many. He was, therefore, a bit stronger than other boys, his young muscles accustomed to burden and toil. He excelled at ~~athletics~~ ^{ed} or any other sport or task which required physical strength and stamina, but was

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~~Their bodies~~ ^{their bodies} they had daubed and disfigured with paint and cruel piercings to make them look fierce. Stripes were branded into their ^{not a word} girthy necks. These ^{southern} thugs of the desert countries ~~to~~

^{passive voice} ~~the south~~ rode onto the farm mounted on kelgan, ^{fast, fierce, four-legged beasts of the barren-} lands. His father, Darren, went out to meet them with fear in his eyes. These clan bandits had been ^{there} ~~here~~ twice before, ^{he remembered} demanding a portion of the harvest and slaughter. These

times Darren had paid them out of fear for his family's safety, but this year had brought a drought and the harvest was minimal. The family stood a fair chance of starving before next spring, unless they could find work ~~and~~ Darren could not afford ^{their} the ~~request~~ or demand, this time. His father knew that ~~opposition or~~ ^{of} defiance ~~to~~ the Kunn would result in death or enslavement. Damian

would never forget the terrified look in his mother ~~lora's~~ eyes as she clutched his ten-year-old sister ^{who} ~~lila's~~ hand as she peered out from the window behind the front porch of their small

home. They all seemed to know what would happen as Darren descended the steps and approached the clan chief, called an ulak. This chief was a larger, ^{stronger} mog having only one eye and an evil smile, a smile that found pleasure in others' pain, a smile that would torment Damian in sleep and in waking ^{life}, a smile that Damian was forced to see daily, for this clan thug

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"I have nothing to give you," stuttered Darren ~~nervously~~ ^{nervously} to the ulak, ~~halted before him~~. The ulak offered no reply but dismounted. He approached Darren and paused for a moment in front of him. There was a silence, then Belósh motioned to the woman and child in the window. Darren glanced back at his wife and daughter ~~and their eyes met~~, then he reluctantly faced the ulak again with a desperate look. Belósh laughed.

"Please," begged Darren, "we have no food."

The smile on the ulak's face vanished. Such an answer was unacceptable. He drew his sword and beheaded Darren with one swift stroke.

^{His mother} Loren immediately ran onto the porch, screaming hysterically, followed by ^{his sister.} ~~Litia~~.

"NO!" Damian cried from his horse.

^{DAMIAN} "DAMIAN!" cried his mother now completely overcome with grief and terror. She reached desperately for her son who was beyond her aid. She took a few steps toward him but was arrested by the strong grip of Kunn henchmen. Belósh turned ~~toward~~ ^{toward} Damian and their eyes met for the first time. He growled and Damian fled in terror, but the mounted riders were already close on his tail.

"Run, Bish, run!" Damian urged the fleeing horse, but it was in vain. The soldiers with loaded crossbows ~~quickly~~ ^{quickly} brought the small horse down. Damian fell in the grass and found himself in the clutches of the villains. He was dragged back ~~or hog~~ ^{or hog} violently, delirious from horror, and brought before their leader. Belósh regarded ~~the boy~~ ^{him} ~~closely~~ ^{him} for a moment and

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“You come with me, Ratarra,” snarled Belósh and all went dark.

!
What is
Ratarra?

!
Cliché

JULIE

DYSTOPIAN NOVEL EXCERPT: RATARRA: THE LEGEND OF DAMIAN by Michael W. Schwartz

Book 1 Rise of Offspring

Episode 1

RETURN TO KHALA

Summary: This is an examination of religious fanaticism and clan warfare woven into a superhero dynamic duo action-adventure. The two heroes battle clan zealots for the secrets of a lost civilization which provide its followers with a level of superpower. The fate of the Divine One himself is at stake.

CHAPTER 1

THE MINES

Write a stronger first sentence. Use the 5 senses to describe the setting.

ori enabled him to sleep peacefully

Damian ADVERB

Find SYNONYM

Reminds me of Invisible Man in "The Jungle" Book.

word choice allowed gaze

Move up after sent. 2

The boy looked out at the stars from behind the bars of his cell. There was no demonstration happening on the ground below tonight. That enabled him a night of peace. The guards of this prison performed many demonstrations on the prisoners in the area below him for all to see, various tortures and humiliations, all horrible and unthinkable. They called it the 'reinstruction pit.' Kurg, the great Mogoli chieftain of this facility, enforced his strict laws and sought pleasure in making examples out of the disobedient prisoners. On these nights the boy would cower in the back corner of his tiny cell.

And that indeed was the cruel intent of the cell layout here at the Khala slave camp. The prisoner blocks were carved into the sides of the huge U-shaped rock formation on this side of the mountain, closely positioned, directly across from each other, with the cell blocks facing

JULIE

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inward?
word choice

inboard This semi-circular arrangement compelled the prisoners to witness the horrors not far below. Kurg plainly wanted the effects of his punishments felt by all.

He cared to see none, I'm sure
maybe:
"thru
someone
show U be
exposed to

The boy, Damian, had witnessed far more of these than he cared to in his eight years here. Once, a man working in the slaughterhouse not far from the stables where the boy worked each day, bolted and tried to climb the stone wall. He was quickly shot by a guard and staked in the pit. Kurg released his kelgan steeds and the boy would never forget the man's cries as the beasts ate him alive. ~~On~~ ^{9A} another time, when Damian was much younger, a human and an accomplice guard were hung in the pit by their legs all night. Damian later learned the guard sold food to the prisoner for gold he must have found mining. The guard, one of the Hidari race, was later executed. Kurg could not afford collaboration with the prisoners, the result of which would be fatal. Obtaining sympathy and favors from the guards would undermine authority and be detrimental to his purpose. Besides, any gold found here at Khala was strictly for the benefit of their cultish following, the Kunn, and their leader, the great Ahga-Rosh, or Father.

Everyone here had whip marks. Some even had hideous holes under their back bones from suffering 'atonement'. The Kunn soldiers called it the ruk-mesh, a brutal ritual the clan itself underwent as a rite of admission. Here it was implemented as a punishment for the prisoners. Kelga fangs were driven under the victim's back bones which were then strung to a wooden beam. The victim was then lifted into the air and hung and left for what seemed like an eternity. Damian himself bore the scars of his own atonement experience. Shortly after his arrival, the starved boy had been caught with smuggled meat from the slaughterhouse. He lunged at the guard when his food was confiscated. Damian was beaten and strung ^{JP} but watching the guard eat his food and jeer at him while he suffered was even more painful. The quiet in the pit

↑
tonight
(from P-3)

JULIE

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But hope was scarce here at the Khala mines for this factory was a great source of gold, gems, and metal for the Kunn warlords, in particular a metal called garvonite, which could be found in abundance here. This rare metal was the material of choice for its hardness and unsurpassed resistance to corrosion and decay, and therefore was of great worth and widely coveted. Weapons and gold were in high demand for the Ahga was ever in need of materials and wealth to sustain his growing power and ranks. The Kunn, which meant 'The Fist' in their old language, relied on steady output from Khala in the form of gold, tradeable stones, metal and meat for profit. The prisoners were not allowed to make usable weapons here, of course, but shipped out the procured goods in raw pieces which they crudely manufactured on site and in turn sold on the market. Withholding of any precious metal or stone was a serious crime, and Kurg and his chief taskmaster and strongman, Belósh, a huge one-eyed half-mog with an evil smile, saw that rules were enforced.

Damian could never forget his first fateful encounter with the Kunn that autumn day eight years ago. He grew up in a farming settlement called Tirien with his father, mother and sister. He was a sturdy but timid boy with dirty blond hair and hazel eyes, and learned the meaning of labor at a very young age. They lived on a farm, self sufficient for the most part and making their way in the world, selling their crops at the local village market. He helped his father on the farm, raising crops, milking the cattle, slaughtering the livestock, storing the harvest and feed, and otherwise assisting with the various tasks, of which there are many. He was, therefore, a bit stronger than other boys, his young muscles accustomed to burden and toil. He excelled at athletics or any other sport or task which required physical strength and stamina but was

move ADV

Find a better synonym.

Define earlier in story. 1st mention. p. 2.

important?

sold to whom?

what market?

not useful here
maybe describe his hazel eyes gazing up at the stars
and his dirty blond hair getting dirtier in the 1st pt.

JULIE

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markedly humble and generous, seemingly oblivious to the power he possessed over others, and undesirous of such an advantage anyway. His father had given him a young horse of his own and he proved himself to be a skilled rider and often rode to the village market on an errand, or to a friend's house when he could. He cherished this horse greatly and treated it like the gift that it was, earning its respect and obedience in return.

He was returning from such a ride one ^{afternoon?} afternoon in his twelfth year when he saw them—a small troop of Mogoli, green skinned and fanged humanoids, well-statured and muscled, armed and fearsome, bearing the token red bandanas and armbands of the clan known as the Kunn.

Their bodies they had daubed and disfigured with paint and cruel piercings to make them look fierce. Stripes were branded into their girthy necks. These strange thugs of the desert countries to the south rode onto the farm mounted on kelgan—fast, fierce, four-legged beasts of the barren lands. His father, Darren, went out to meet them with fear in his eyes. These clan bandits had been here twice before, he remembered, demanding a portion of the harvest and slaughter. These times Darren had paid them out of fear for his family's safety but this year had brought a drought and the harvest was minimal. The family stood a fair chance of starving before next spring unless they could find work and Darren could not afford the request, or demand this time. His father knew that opposition or defiance to the Kunn would result in death or enslavement. Damian would never forget the terrified look in his mother Loren's eyes as she clutched his ten-year-old sister, Lilia's, hand as she peered out from the window behind the front porch of their small home. They all seemed to know what would happen as Darren descended the steps and approached the clan chief, called an ulak. This chief was a larger, stronger mog having only one eye and an evil smile, a smile that found pleasure in others' pain, a smile that would torment Damian in sleep and in waking life, a smile that Damian was forced to see daily for this clan thug

Break up long #s!

word choice merged?

word: "was likely to starve"

Julie

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removal?

more physical reaction
Loren crumpled
into a heap
(at his feet)
hid/protected
Lilia
behind her

JULIE

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Meaning
of "Ratarra"?

USE AS MANY OF THE FIVE SENSES AS YOU CAN TO SET THE SCENE OF YOUR OPENING. PAINT A DETAILED DESCRIPTION TO DRAW THE READER IN.

DIFFERENTIATE AMONG HIDARI, KUNN, MOGOLI - physical descriptions, mindsets, alliances, etc.

DESCRIBE THE PRISON CELL - stone, cement?, wood?, furnished with?
his clothing?

WITH WHOM DO THE KUNNS TRADE?
- OR SELL TO FOR PROFIT?

IN YOUR SUMMARY, YOU MENTIONED RELIGIOUS FANATICISM AND CLAN WARFARE. I SEE NO EVIDENCE OF EITHER JUST YET.

I AM NOT A FAN OF FANTASY, BUT I SYMPATHIZE WITH DAMIAN.

connotations

Book 1 Rise of Offspring

Ed

Episode 1

RETURN TO KHALA

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CHAPTER 1

THE MINES

name?

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so, this starts with nothing happening, why?

show us!

And that indeed was the cruel intent of the cell layout here at the Khala slave camp. The prisoner blocks were carved into the sides of the huge U-shaped rock formation on this side of the mountain, closely positioned, directly across from each other, with the cell blocks facing

architecture? not compelling

- we know nothing: carefully define and illustrate every capitali word
- a lot of this reads like a summary, can be turned into scenes with characters, dialog, + ACTION.
- why not start with the farm?

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Handwritten notes and annotations in blue ink:

- How many did he care to? in jail for 8 years? what did he do? how old is he? show us! how old?
- typical place? horses
- carnivorous horses?
- huh?
- show us! not human?
- align? place?
- can't picture
- overhead?
- show us!
- show us!

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repet. like

why? not causal

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more background

what?

why?

-Rosh

new

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vague

? cf: spaceball

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show us!

how old?

zzzz

with

that

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show us!

finally! an age!

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this is a scene!

Each

disturbing

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Yes, will know save it for the end
was none other than Belósh himself, the taskmaster, the executioner, the genius of torture and pain here at Khala. *where is he?* Damian hesitated on his horse, frozen with fear and uncertainty. Dread weighed down on him like lead as he watched not a stone's throw away in the pasture.

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?

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