

Origins: The Compound

Noah Kempton

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Origins: The Compound is a gory, gritty fantasy adventure in which a headstrong young man grapples with his sense of duty in the face of unrelenting malevolence.

In Noah Kempton's fantasy novel *Origins: The Compound*, an orphaned boy who was raised by warriors stands against a sinister cult.

In Hyravon, people eke out their livings in tight-knit compound communities. Travel between the compounds is dangerous, as are the raids of a malicious cult, the Bandits. During one harrowing massacre, an ad-hoc organization, Black Flag, discovers a teenage boy cowering in a cave nearby. He has no memories but comes with a collection of arcane symbols and weaponry. A Black Flag elder, Junn, adopts the boy and raises him to be an empathetic warrior.

The boy, dubbed Viper, becomes one of the community's most upstanding members. Later, Viper and Black Flag take to the road and are besieged by Bandits. Junn is abducted, several members of the group killed, and Viper is bound by duty to help usher the survivors back to safety. Junn's abduction lingers over the community until word arrives of his possible location, propelling Viper and his allies to undertake an arduous rescue mission across Hyravon.

Aside from a brief prologue chronicling Junn's discovery of Viper, the narrative is told from Viper's outsider perspective. He was not raised in this community, nor is he at first aware of the threats that haunt the land. Through his eyes, the world is built up in realistic bursts of information as Viper interacts with, and learns from, others. The richness of the warriors' fervor over protecting innocent life, the unsettling violence of the Bandits, and the unique flora and fauna of the world come into focus as Viper grows into a fascinating young man.

The remoteness of Black Flag's compound, combined with Junn's unknown location, help in the development of this intriguing story. Viper cannot race ahead because he doesn't know where to go; rather than wasting time waiting, he begins training under experienced warriors and forges connections with friends and allies. Junn's fate and the machinations of the Bandit cult hang over the entire story, but Viper's growth and adventures result in steady narrative tension too. However, multiple chapter breaks leave Viper unconscious, detracting from the otherwise smooth transitions between scenes.

Throughout, the scenes are vivified by sensory details, including during a gruesome series of violent cult attacks through which Viper faces mortal peril. Nonetheless, Viper keeps working to improve himself, rescue his adoptive father, and survive the cult. Though it feels inevitable, the conclusion is a compelling one that includes a tantalizing hook for future stories.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (August 31, 2022)

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