

The ASTONISHING LIFE of
OCTAVIAN NOTHING
TRAITOR TO THE NATION
—*—
VOLUME II
THE KINGDOM ON THE WAVES

DEAR READER:

Eight years ago, attending the two hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary reenactment of the battle that opened the Revolutionary War, I found myself confronted by Redcoats, and realized that I had to write a book about it.

The men of my town—Stow, Massachusetts—were some of the first to engage in combat against their own nation's army on that fateful day. As I stood there at the reenactment, watching the terrifying advance of the Redcoats through gun smoke and haze, I asked myself: Would I have been able to stand firmly in the face of this onslaught? What did it mean to be a rebel before the whole mythology of the Revolution was born?

This line of questioning led me to write *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation*, a set of two novels following the fortunes of an unusual boy who has to grow up quickly when he's confronted by the realities of war.

While doing the research for Octavian's story, I came across a fact that startled me, and that became the central event in this second volume, *The Kingdom on the Waves*: During the first year of the Revolution, Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, issued a kind of limited emancipation proclamation, decreeing that slaves who fled their masters and fought for the king would immediately be freed. Thousands escaped bondage; hundreds reached the governor's fleet. He founded a new regiment—Lord Dunmore's Royal Ethiopians—and armed them for battle against Patrick Henry and the Patriot armies of the South.

As I read the scanty sources regarding this largely forgotten chapter of the Revolution, I was deeply moved. Here was a profoundly American story: a regiment, fighting for freedom, in which every soldier—every one—had, by definition, a story of bravery, defiance, and escape. Simply to stand in that regiment, with the words *Liberty to Slaves* emblazoned on their chests—this was a proof of heart-rending heroism.

In writing this section of Octavian's story, I wanted to try to imagine the stories that might have been told by those men and women. My aim was to weave together the scraps that we do know to explore those tales that shall never really be known, those narratives of individual bravery that are lost forever. In doing so, I hope to recapture the spirit of liberty that inspired these forgotten American heroes to fight—to give their lives for a dream that would not be fully accomplished for another two centuries.

Yours,

M. T. Anderson

RECIPIENT OF FIVE STARRED REVIEWS:

★ *Booklist* ★ *Kirkus Reviews* ★ *Publishers Weekly* ★ *School Library Journal* ★ *The Horn Book*

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