

## The Victors Write History

They never taught me to swim. Swimming was forbidden for ordinary citizens. This year arrived too soon, and with it came the chance of getting drafted—a chance to finally learn the art of water. Father never gave up the idea of me, his son, becoming a marauder. The last four years before my eighteenth birthday passed quickly, and every other guardian felt the same rush of hope for their own sons. For me, these four years were a painful reminder of how vulnerable I was to the marauder draft. I dreaded the slick gray suits, the angular helmets, and the strict insignia of the Estate.

Summertime was upon us, which meant that the days were longer. The streets breathed and sighed heavily, like a working man. At the corner of every sidewalk, dreadfully pale lamp posts were stationed, their drained faces staring off into the distance.

The marauder draft didn't select just anyone, only those who were "deemed proper to take up the role of defending the honor, well-being, and legacy of the Estate." I never understood the true meaning of this statement, but the Law is better left unquestioned. The marauder draft was one of the rare occasions that saw the Estate's populace congregate. Almost everyone flocked to the city for this special day and its festivities, complaining about the urban air heavy with soot and sawdust. This was the life I knew, and this was the air that filled my lungs each day.

Today was the day of the draft. Even the street signs stood straighter than usual and seemed to show reverence for an honored guest. The streets exhaled with life, and crowds gathered as if there were a circus. Two-by-ten formations of young men marched down the street, their limbs stiff against the cold air and their every movement precisely calculated. With

the Estate's insignia emblazoned on their charcoal uniforms, their eyes gazed forward, as if latched onto a distant destination on the horizon.

"Those are proud men who've done a great service for our country," Father mused, nodding in approval as his eyes followed the formation.

"Yes sir," I numbly uttered in response.

To me, the blur of marauder uniforms appeared no different than the dark fog that covers a battlefield before a firefight. Regardless, Father always stated that donning such a uniform is the highest honor possibly bestowed upon any man of fighting age.

"What are you 'yes sir'-ing me for? Put some sense into your words, and look at me when I speak to you! Do yourself a favor, and stand up straight. At least pretend you're enthusiastic. At this rate, you will never deserve to don that uniform."

Father had his own intentions for me. He saw my incompetence as a disappointment, which secretly filled me with relief. I dared not give this away—when Father made up his mind, that was that, and nobody could tell him otherwise. Naturally, someone as stubborn as him would find the concept of marauding to be unquestionably beneficial.

To me, the duty of the marauders was none other than pillaging and murdering—the very prospect made me gag in disgust and horror. The Estate made no effort to conceal the atrocities committed by marauders, and so all the citizens knew of their misdeeds. The sole purpose of the marauders is to collect tribute from the Underwater Conquered Colonies, a confederation that had rebelled against the Estate centuries ago. Ever since their failed attempts, the Estate destroyed their capability to wage warfare and imposed heavy tributes on them. Since these colonies were now powerless and had abundant resources lying around, the opportunistic Estate made the definition of "collecting tribute" increasingly loose. The result was the marauders

diving to the depths of the Underwater Conquered Colonies where they freely ransack the populace, taking whatever and murdering whomever.

“Son, this world is harsh for a reason; it reminds us to prioritize our country’s needs. Your own needs come after. The unfortunate pawns caught up in the process are negligible. Remember this, I will tell it to you many more times.”

“What?” I cried.

I didn’t make the effort to hear what Father had to say, for I had little interest in his patriotic fanaticism. I wearily eyed the marauders marching down the street, wondering if they were like my Father, or if they sometimes had the thoughts I did.

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That evening, the whole population of the Estate tuned into the government radio station, eager to find out who the Estate Council had chosen as the new marauders.

“Should you have the honor to be chosen, you have twenty-four hours to pack necessities. After this time, you are obligated to report to marauder headquarters.”

Leaning forward in his seat, Father made no effort to hide his hopeful excitement. Sitting opposite him, my thoughts were clouded and my mind was racing. Every crackle of the sleek, silver radio made me flinch.

“Five men of fighting age have been selected from each county. We shall commence with North County. Ellis, Reed, Inman, Collins, and Zimmerman. Congratulations, marauders.”

My heart was pounding, and the radioman’s humdrum voice seemed to tease me. East County would be announced within seconds and the possibility of being chosen lurked in the

back of my head. I had no clue who these young men were, yet I dreaded the possibility of serving the Estate alongside them.

“Next is East County. Gilbert, Robinson, Allen, Nichols, and Turner.”

All I recall was that Father exploded into laughter, which quickly became tears of joy. Suddenly, I was furious. And then I was sobbing. My dread, horror, and hatred conjoined into one dark blue waterfall gushing from my eyes.

“My son, my son, it’s happening! You are a marauder, my son! Oh, how you shall carry on the honor of our family name! My son, my son, my son...”

Father clearly did not understand. The real history associated with our surname was already enough to despise. Any remaining pride was now consumed by the disgust of becoming a marauder. Centuries ago, during the rebellion of the Underwater Colonies, General Abram Turner led the Estate in its counter-attack. For Father, the family name evoked the utmost blazing pride, fame, and glory. But for the residents of the Conquered Colonies, the name would cause them to shake in fear and spit in disgust; they would spew unforgivable curses upon this family of plunderers.

Father cast a surprised look on me. “Why do you laugh?”

“I couldn’t say,” I shrugged. I stifled a chuckle and stared down at my feet.

What did the man expect me to say? That my laughter was because of excitement, joy, or even adrenaline? For just a moment, I no longer felt resentment towards Father, but rather pity—pity for the man himself, and pity for his love of the marauders.

The cold, monotone voice of the radio suddenly sliced through my thoughts.

“Congratulations to the chosen men. It is mandatory to follow the given instructions, or else severe punitive action will be taken. Remember, the only thing we have to fear is

incompetence in serving our country. All hail the marauders and long live the Estate they nourish!”

The radio cut out and crackling static filled the living room. I was so greatly distressed that I unintentionally ignored the latter portion of the announcement. The names of the South and West County marauders were unbeknownst to me, but it was of little importance. Twenty-four hours later, we would train and prepare ourselves for what lay far below the sea’s surface. In the end, we would all surely succumb.

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“*A Letter to Posterity: Swimming*. Well, then,” Captain Das said, gently closing the soft leather book. The dust on the cover shook off onto his neatly tailored black pants, which would have been overly formal on anyone else. His dress elegantly reflected his demeanor; after all, nothing less would be expected of a marauder captain.

“It’s quite the story, isn’t it? And it was only, what—100 or so years ago? It’s quite marvelous to see how far humans have changed...” He quickly added, “For the better, of course.”

Sitting across from him was his daughter, who shared his sharp eyebrows and piercing gaze. He realized that even the way she sat emulated him—her presence was felt in the room, in a way that was almost disconcerting. She sat there for a moment, not saying a single word. Her eyes blazed with the youthful freedom of curious thought. “What happens in the end?”

“Couldn’t say. That’s all that there is to this old book, I suppose that was the end.” He awkwardly looked down at his perfectly polished shoes.

“Oh.” The disappointment was evident in her voice, though she tried hard to hide it. “You don’t really believe any of that, do you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well.” She gazed thoughtfully at the red book and took a deep breath. “To me, the whole thing is outright ridiculous. How can swimming be forbidden to the ordinary citizen? And what, it’s only taught to people who are then forcefully sent off as pillagers? Think about it—it’s silly to think that a basic human skill can effectively be made illegal.”

“I wouldn’t call it pillaging, necessarily. I mean, they learn to swim for the purpose of—”

“Murdering innocent natives, taking their belongings, and then they call it a resource expedition necessary for a thriving economy. It’s old news, and I know the truth. Am I really supposed to believe that this is how people lived just a few generations ago?”

The Captain gaped at his daughter, speechless, turning over her fuming words in his mind. He had never come across someone like her before—no one else seemed to interrogate him as she did now. He was supposed to be the one in control; his leg bounced furiously, and suddenly he realized how uncomfortable he was in his rough uniform. His left hand subconsciously shook, and in his right, he twirled a pencil. The two sat in silence for a while, neither willing to carry on the conversation. He glanced up at her only to see her furrowed brow and large frown, her eyes intense and distracted.

“I see. It doesn’t make any sense to you—there’s no reason behind it. But you’re over scrutinizing... everything eventually comes to the point where you have to believe! Have faith—”

“So be it! I’ve had enough! I’ll not tolerate this anymore; this rubbish is ridiculous and hardly skims the surface of reality. You read me this foolish story and expect me to believe it—you might as well call me a fool if you decide to treat me like one!”

She shot up and stormed out of the attic, leaving him all alone. He was about to call after her but thought better of it. He sighed contentedly and stretched out his legs onto her now vacant chair.

“Only time will tell if it’s possible to change people like her—it’s a father’s duty, after all. How shockingly close, though, I was to doubting myself. How often is it that one comes across someone that makes even the unquestionable seem questionable?” The captain grimly smiled as he talked to the empty room, his only audience the cobwebs. In his right hand, his pencil had been pocketed, and in its place was a sable black badge imprinted with the insignia of the Estate.