



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

TAYTU BETUL

THE RISE OF AN ITEGE



UNESCO Series on Women in African History





United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

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Editorial and artistic coordination: Edouard Joubeaud

Script and text: Obioma Ofoego

Illustrations: Alaba Onajin

Layout: Dhiara Fasya

The background is a detailed line drawing of a large, multi-arched building, possibly a palace or a significant public structure. The building features a central dome with a cross-like symbol on top. The facade is composed of several large, arched doorways and windows. In the foreground, a crowd of people is depicted as dark silhouettes, some with their arms raised, suggesting a public event or ceremony. The overall style is that of a sketch or a graphic illustration.

TAYTU BETUL

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Taytu Betul and the Rise of an Itege

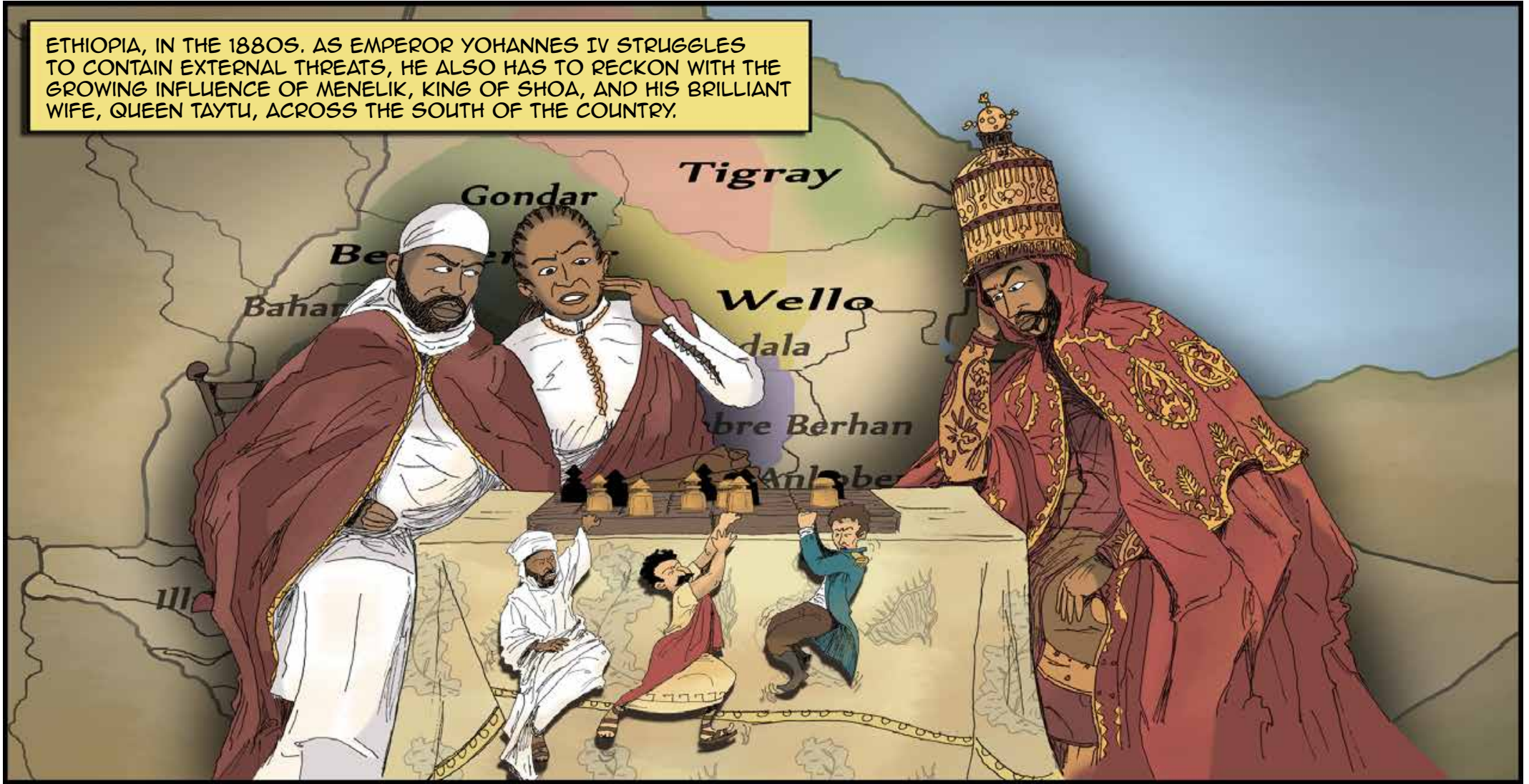
Foreword

The following comic strip is an interpretation of certain periods of the life of Taytu Betul and Menelik II.

The illustrations are based on historical and iconographic research on Taytu Betul, Menelik II and the end of the nineteenth century Ethiopia. They do not claim to be an exact representation of the events, people, architecture, hairstyles, or clothing of the period.



ETHIOPIA, IN THE 1880S. AS EMPEROR YOHANNES IV STRUGGLES TO CONTAIN EXTERNAL THREATS, HE ALSO HAS TO RECKON WITH THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF MENELIK, KING OF SHOA, AND HIS BRILLIANT WIFE, QUEEN TAYTU, ACROSS THE SOUTH OF THE COUNTRY.

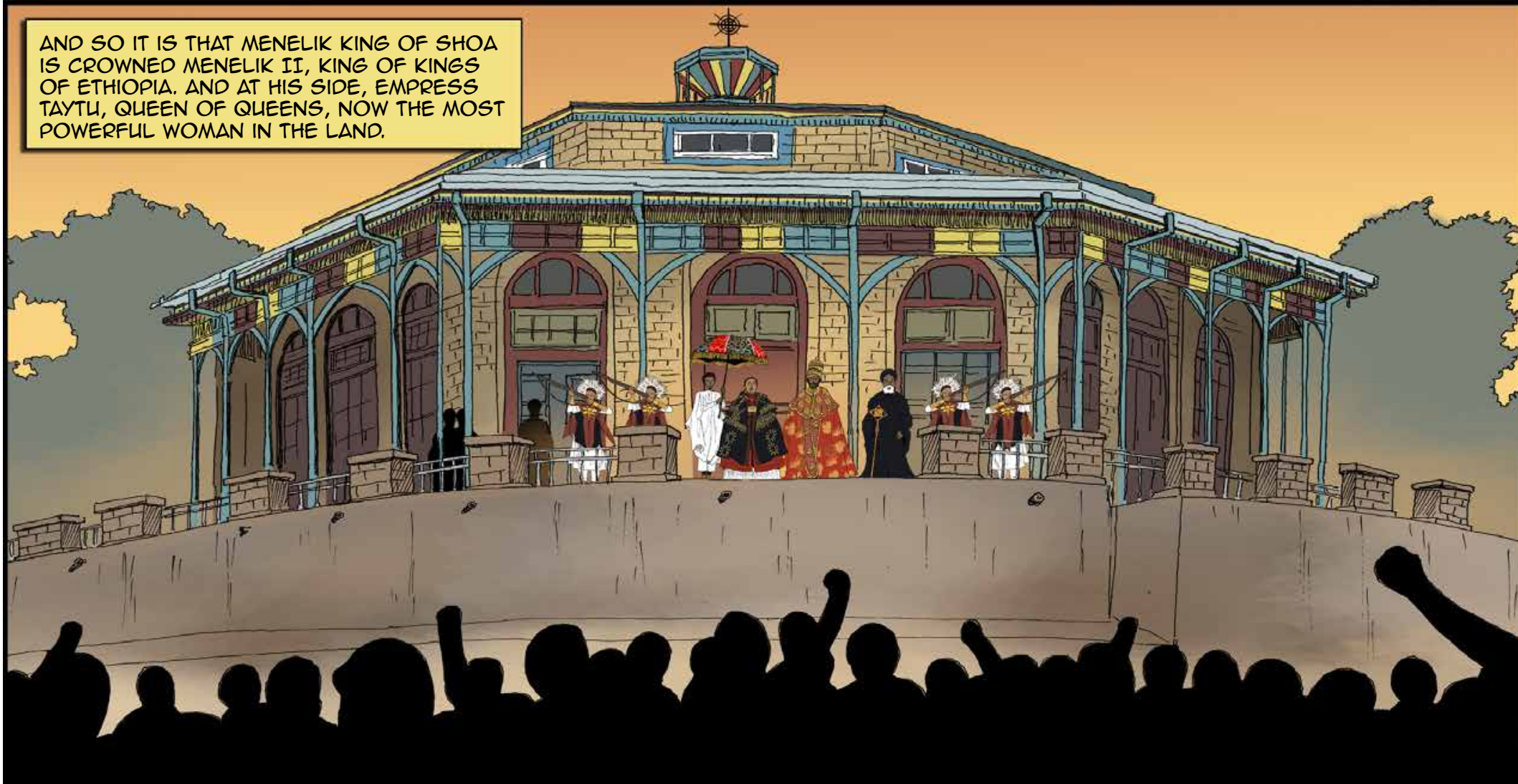




ONE DAY, IN THE YEAR 1889, EMPEROR YOHANNES IV, DESPERATELY TRYING TO PRESERVE THE INTEGRITY OF HIS EMPIRE FROM INVADING MAHDISTS IN THE NORTH OF THE COUNTRY, FALLS FROM HIS HORSE, MORTALLY WOUNDED.

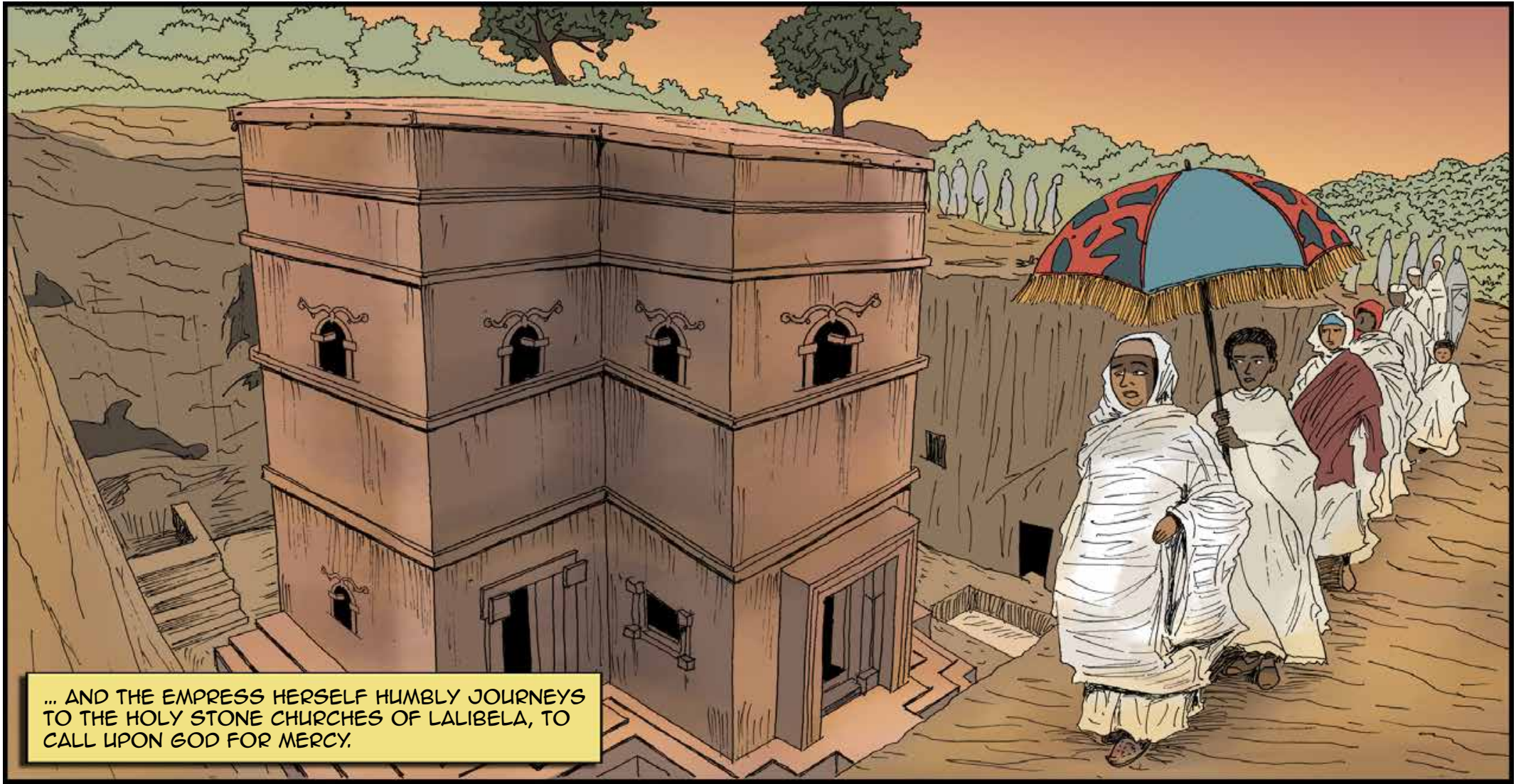


AND SO IT IS THAT MENELIK KING OF SHOA IS CROWNED MENELIK II, KING OF KINGS OF ETHIOPIA. AND AT HIS SIDE, EMPRESS TAYTU, QUEEN OF QUEENS, NOW THE MOST POWERFUL WOMAN IN THE LAND.



AND YET THE LAVISH CORONATION CEREMONY IS FOLLOWED BY YEARS OF FAMINE, WHICH CASTS A PALL OVER THE LAND. ALTHOUGH EMPRESS TAYTU HAD BEEN HAILED AS THE LIGHT OF ETHIOPIA, MANY POOR FAMILIES PERISH ...



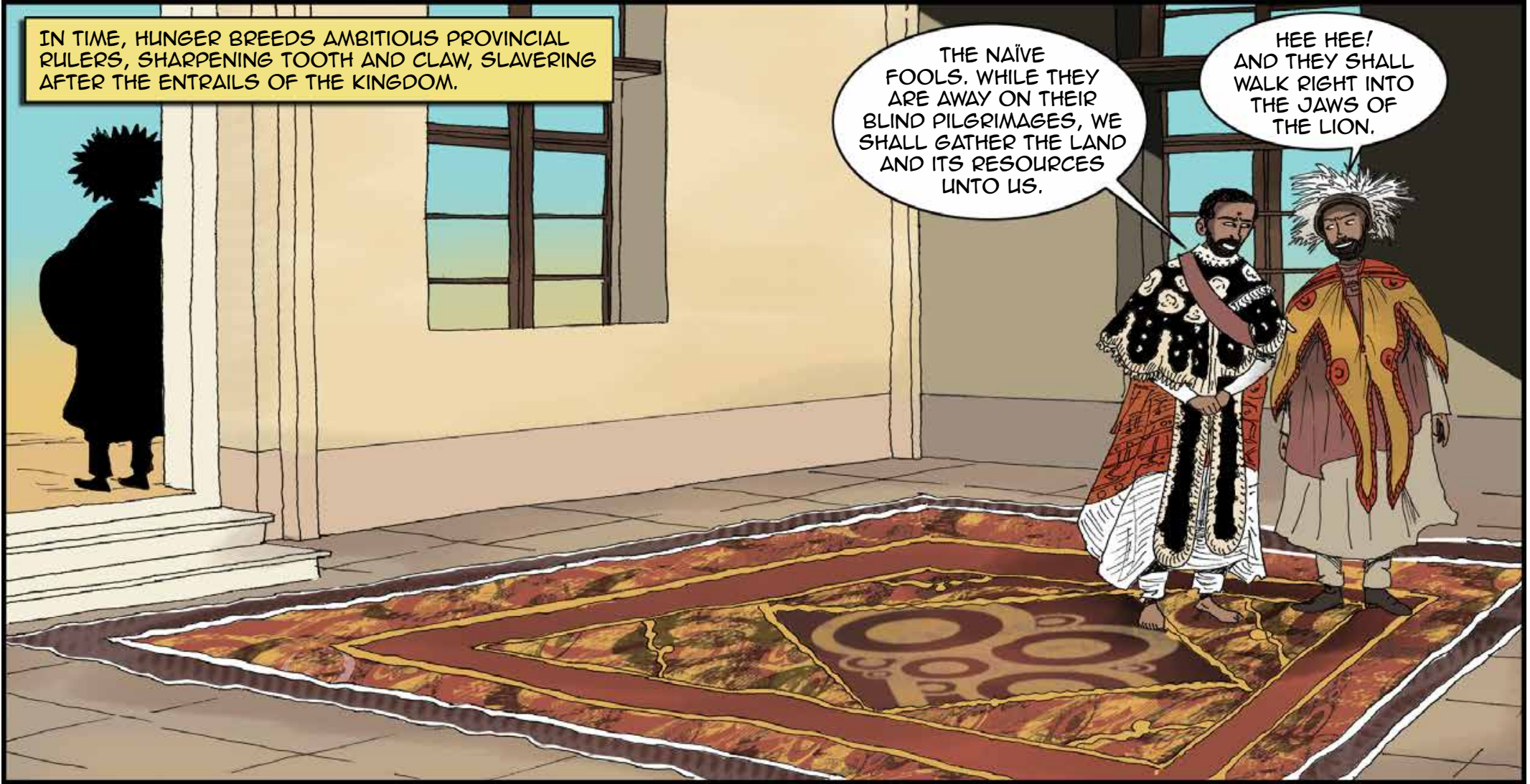


... AND THE EMPRESS HERSELF HUMBLY JOURNEYS TO THE HOLY STONE CHURCHES OF LALIBELA, TO CALL UPON GOD FOR MERCY.

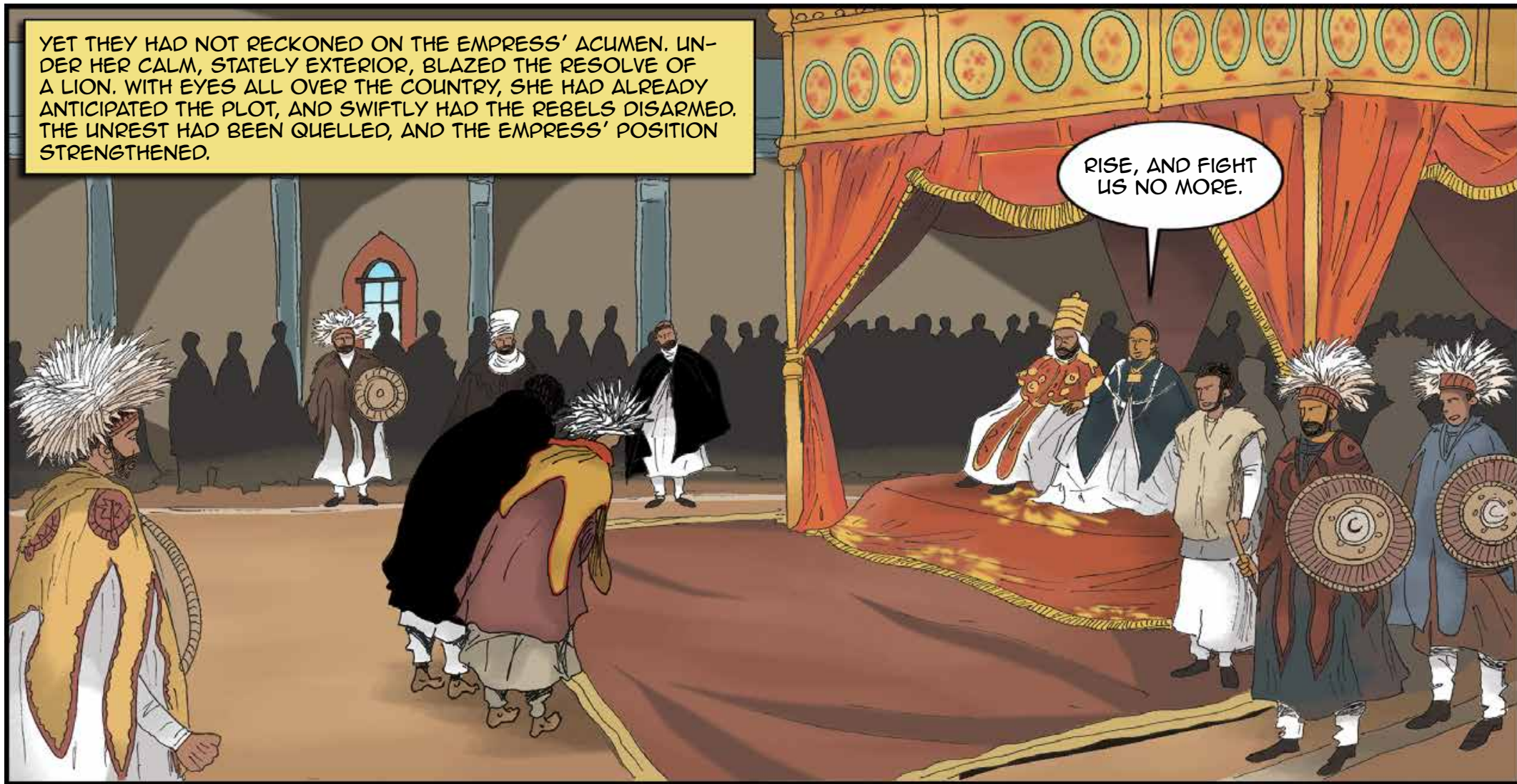
IN TIME, HUNGER BREEDS AMBITIOUS PROVINCIAL RULERS, SHARPENING TOOTH AND CLAW, SLAVERING AFTER THE ENTRAILS OF THE KINGDOM.

THE NAÏVE FOOLS. WHILE THEY ARE AWAY ON THEIR BLIND PILGRIMAGES, WE SHALL GATHER THE LAND AND ITS RESOURCES UNTO US.

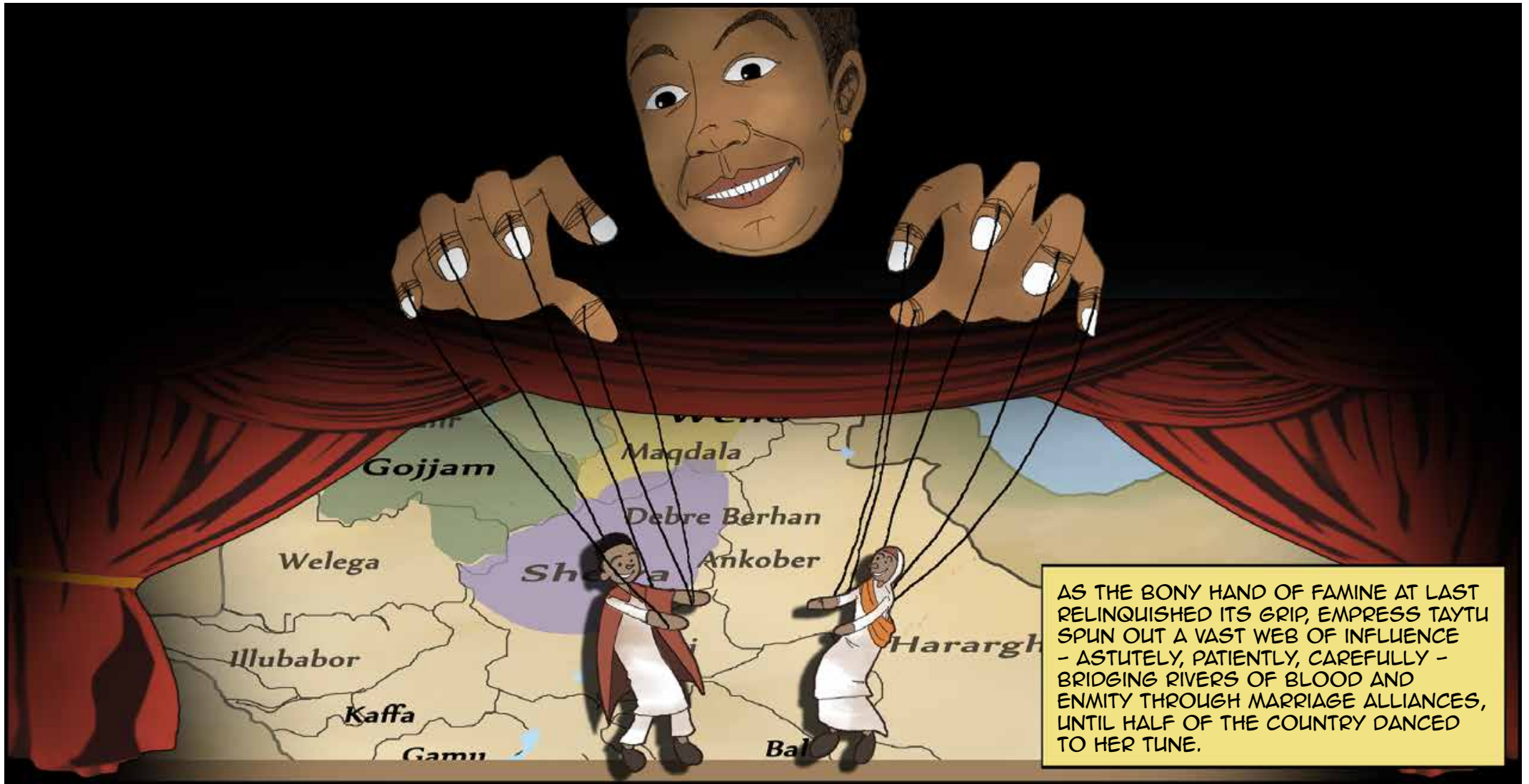
HEE HEE! AND THEY SHALL WALK RIGHT INTO THE JAWS OF THE LION.



YET THEY HAD NOT RECKONED ON THE EMPRESS' ACUMEN. UNDER HER CALM, STATELY EXTERIOR, BLAZED THE RESOLVE OF A LION. WITH EYES ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, SHE HAD ALREADY ANTICIPATED THE PLOT, AND SWIFTLY HAD THE REBELS DISARMED. THE UNREST HAD BEEN QUELLED, AND THE EMPRESS' POSITION STRENGTHENED.



RISE, AND FIGHT US NO MORE.



MEANWHILE, BLIND TO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS IN ETHIOPIA, THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT HAD BECOME DRUNK ON THE FANTASY OF POSSESSING AN AFRICAN COLONY, AND FOUNDED A SECOND ROMAN EMPIRE.



I CAME,
I SAW,
I CONQUERED!

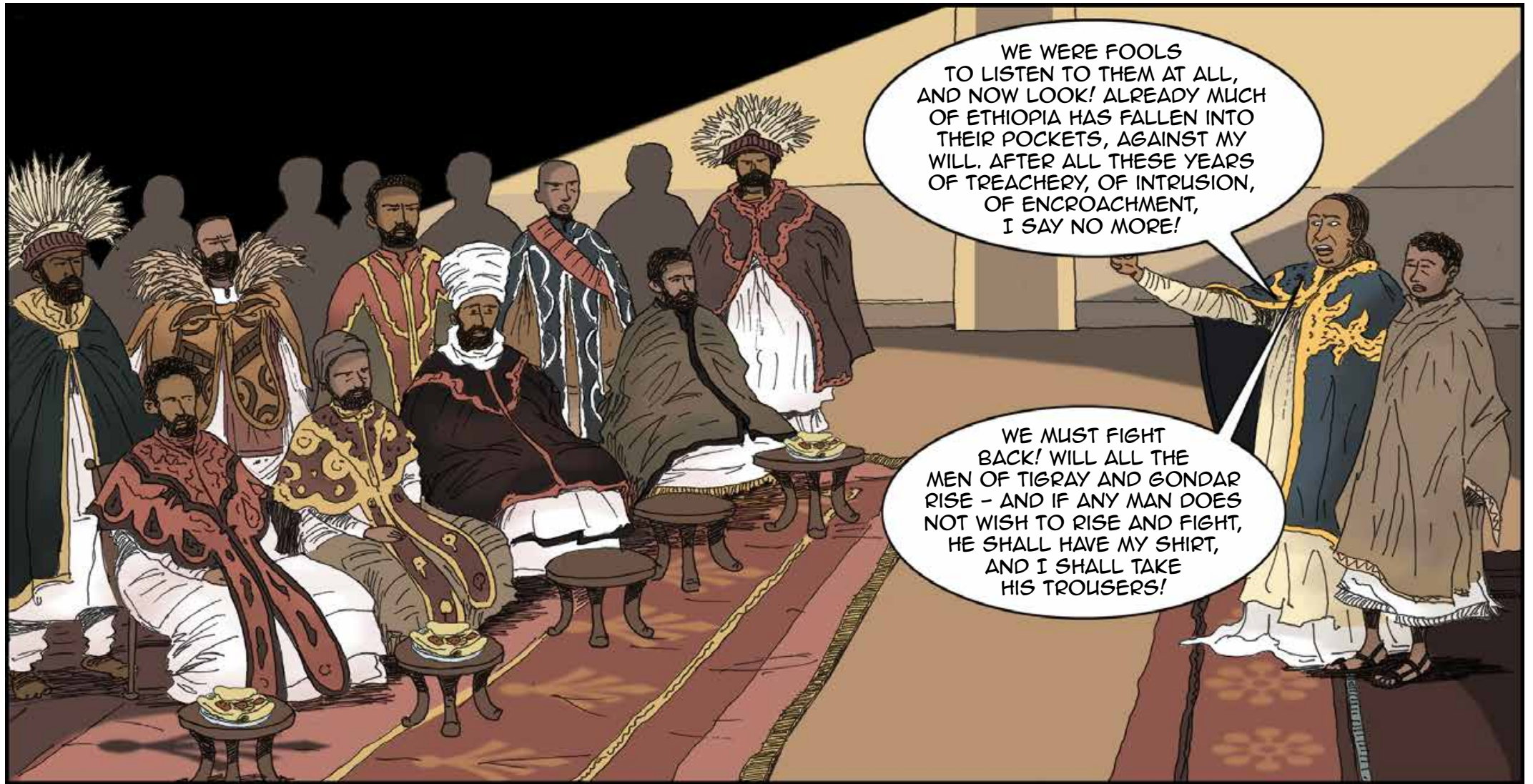


2 MAY, 1889. UNBEKNOWNST TO EMPEROR MENELIK, THE ITALIAN VERSION OF A FRIENDSHIP TREATY SIGNED BETWEEN ITALY AND ETHIOPIA IS CRAFTILY ALTERED, AND CLAIMS TO MAKE ETHIOPIA AN ITALIAN PROTECTORATE.



WHEN THE DECEIT IS UNCOVERED...





WE WERE FOOLS
TO LISTEN TO THEM AT ALL,
AND NOW LOOK! ALREADY MUCH
OF ETHIOPIA HAS FALLEN INTO
THEIR POCKETS, AGAINST MY
WILL. AFTER ALL THESE YEARS
OF TREACHERY, OF INTRUSION,
OF ENCROACHMENT,
I SAY NO MORE!

WE MUST FIGHT
BACK! WILL ALL THE
MEN OF TIGRAY AND GONDAR
RISE - AND IF ANY MAN DOES
NOT WISH TO RISE AND FIGHT,
HE SHALL HAVE MY SHIRT,
AND I SHALL TAKE
HIS TROUSERS!



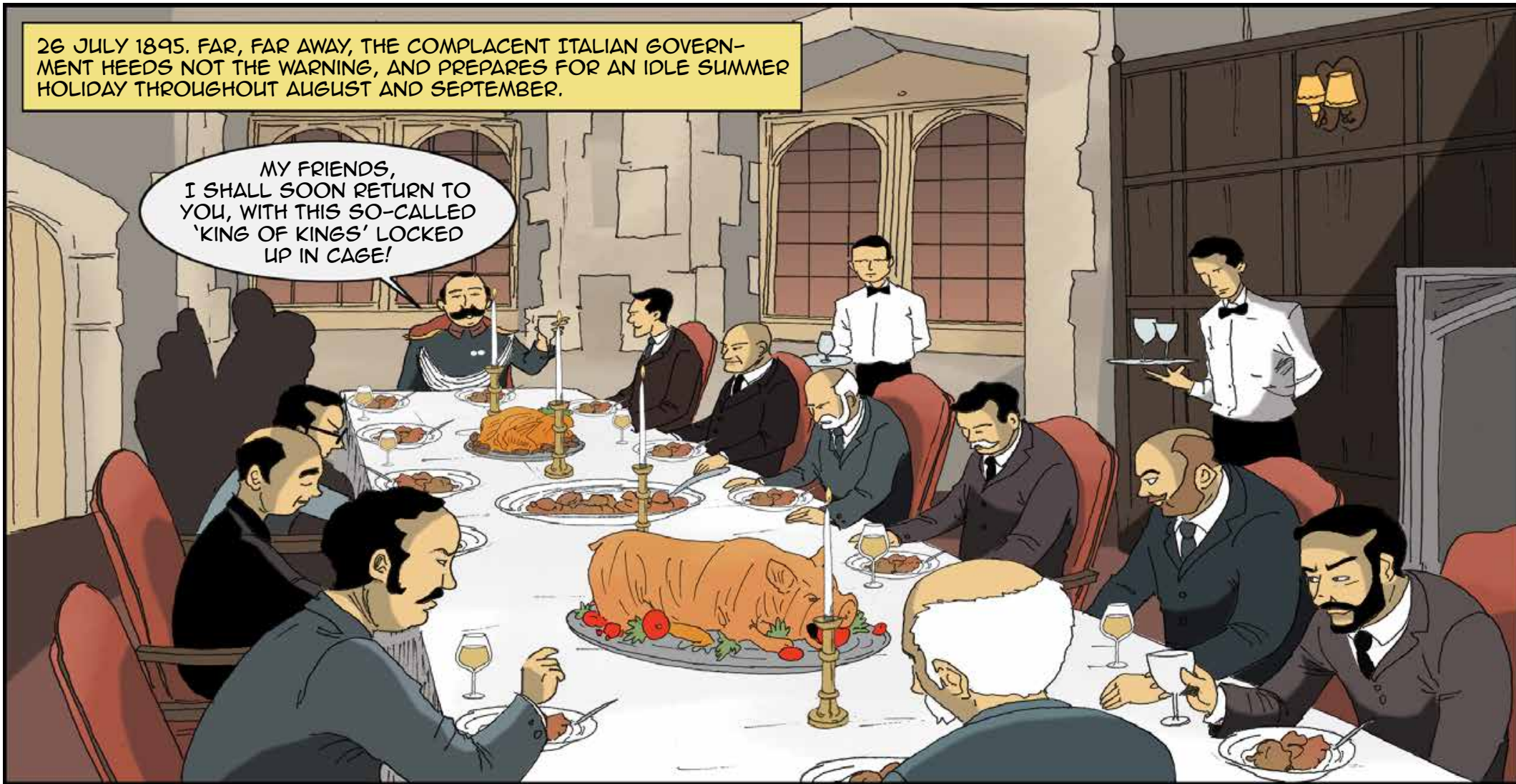
IMBI!
THESE CONDITIONS
ARE UNACCEPTABLE. YOUR
ADVANCE MUST BE CALLED BY ITS
PROPER NAME: IMPERIALIST
AGGRESSION! YOU WANT OTHER
COUNTRIES TO SEE ETHIOPIA
AS YOUR CHILD, BUT THAT
WILL NEVER BE.

SO GO AHEAD WITH
YOUR THREAT OF WAR. THERE
IS NO ETHIOPIAN, MAN OR WOMAN,
WHO WILL NOT PLANT THEIR FEET IN
THE EARTH, AND FIGHT TO PRESERVE
ETHIOPIAN SOVEREIGNTY.
WE ARE READY.

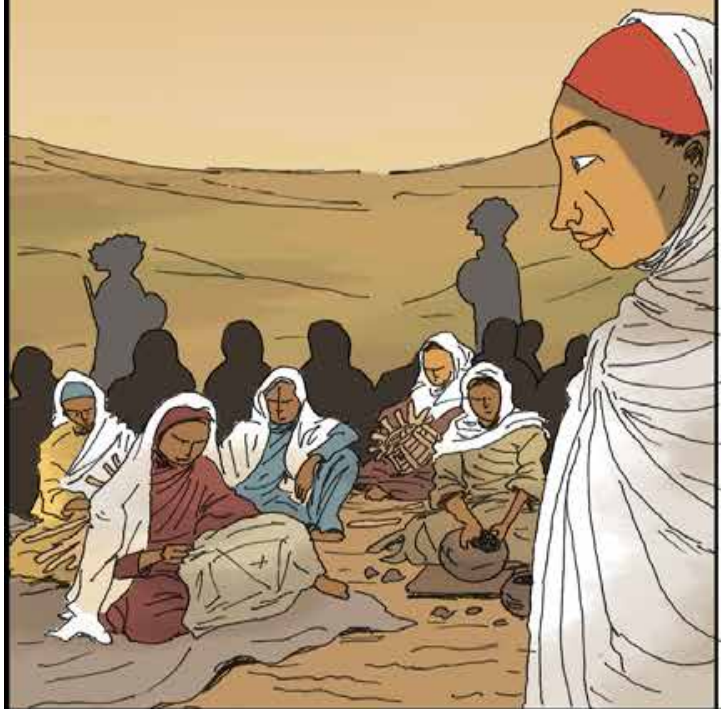
AND SO THE DIE IS CAST: WAR!

26 JULY 1895. FAR, FAR AWAY, THE COMPLACENT ITALIAN GOVERNMENT HEEDS NOT THE WARNING, AND PREPARES FOR AN IDLE SUMMER HOLIDAY THROUGHOUT AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER.

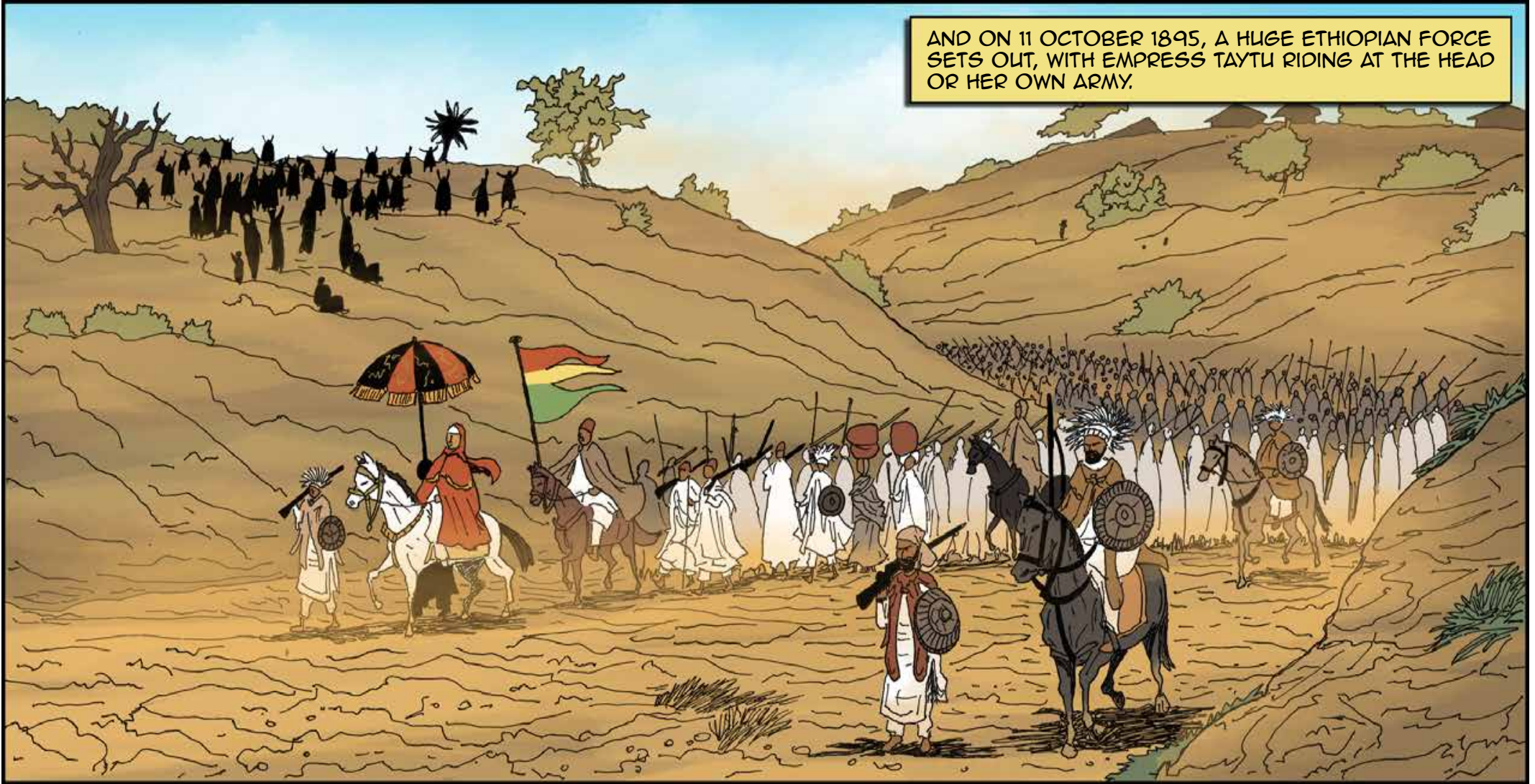
MY FRIENDS,
I SHALL SOON RETURN TO
YOU, WITH THIS SO-CALLED
'KING OF KINGS' LOCKED
UP IN CAGE!



IN ETHIOPIA, HOWEVER, METICULOUS PREPARATIONS FOR WAR ARE UNDERWAY ...



AND ON 11 OCTOBER 1895, A HUGE ETHIOPIAN FORCE SETS OUT, WITH EMPRESS TAYTU RIDING AT THE HEAD OF HER OWN ARMY.

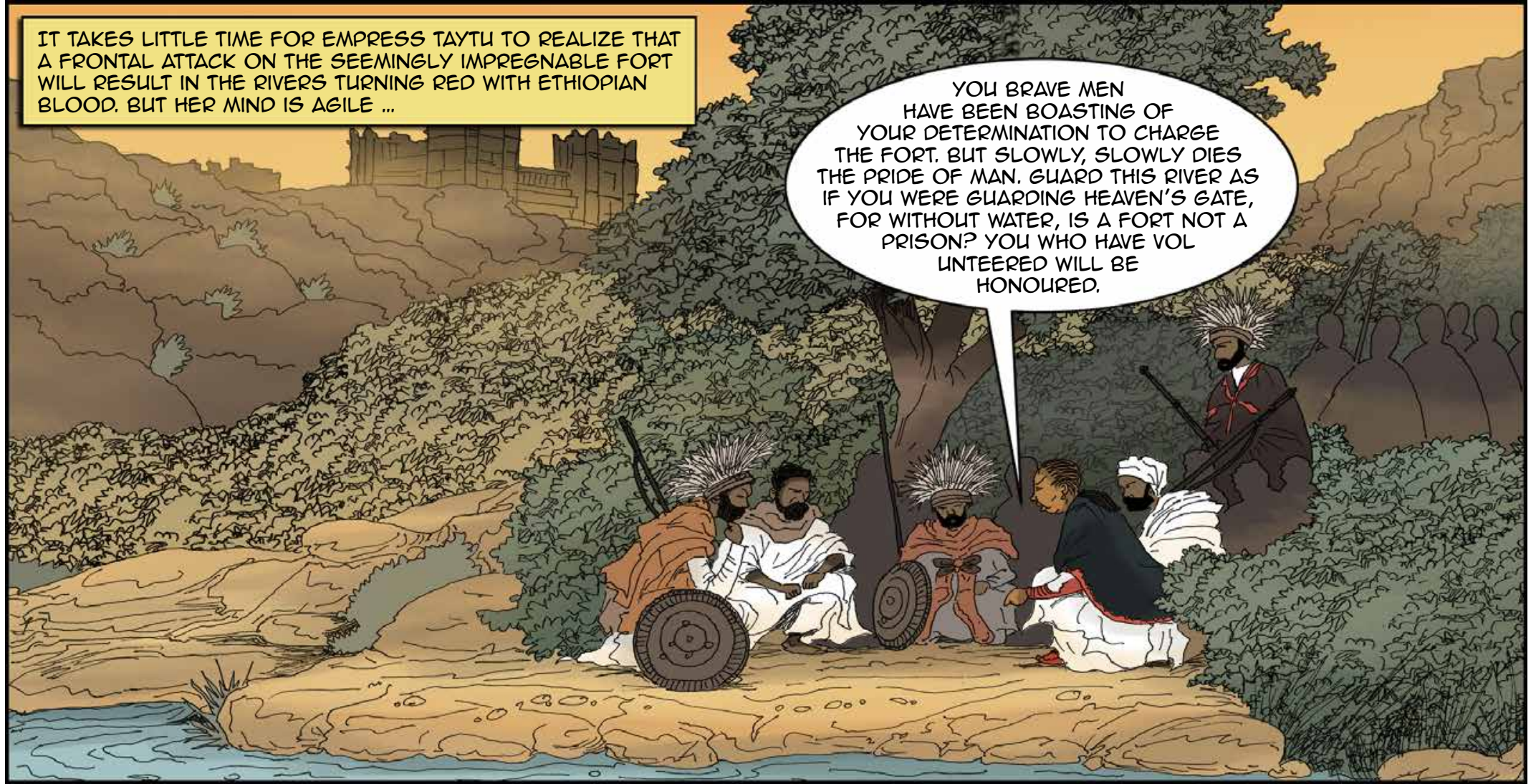




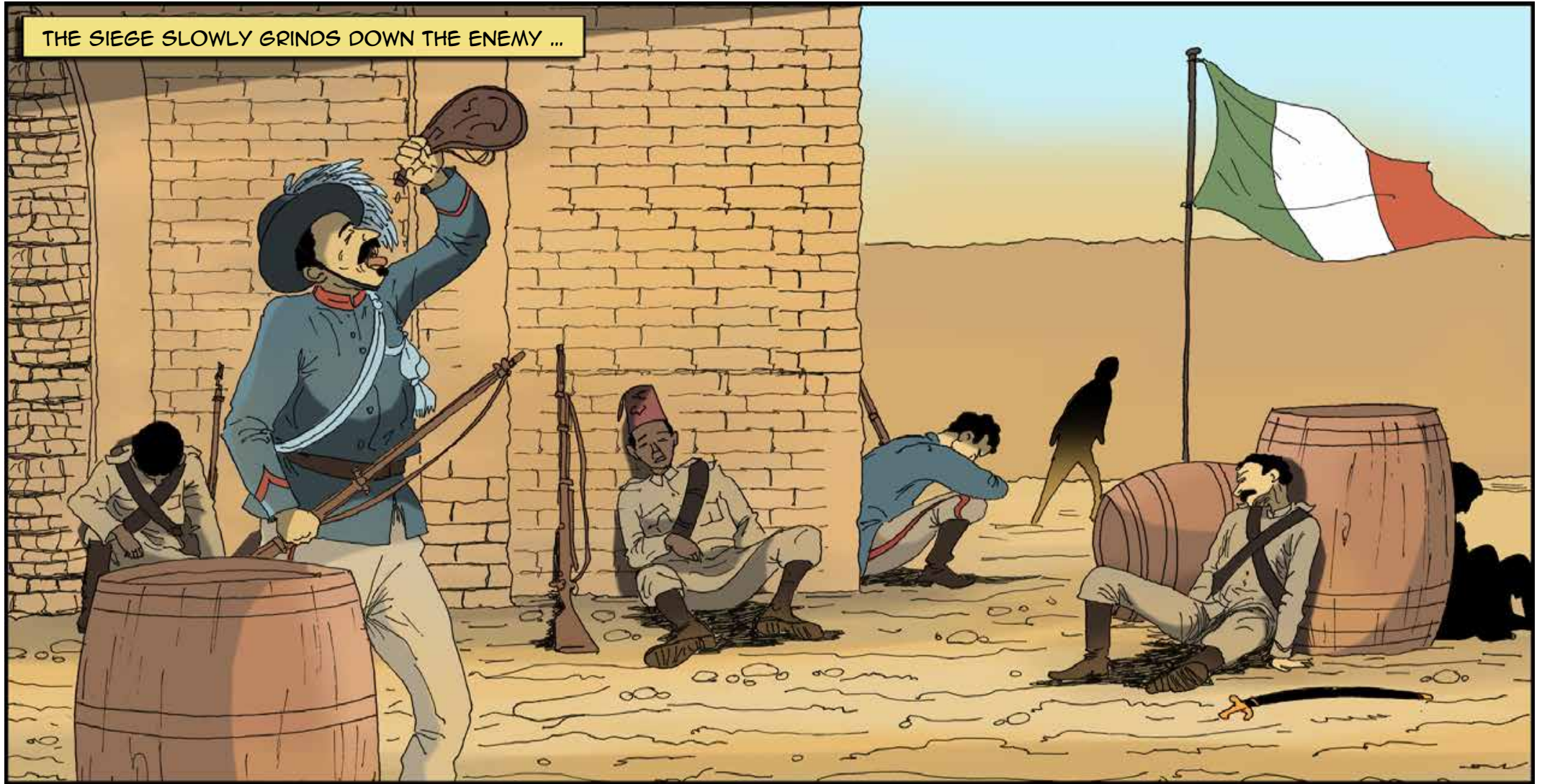
AFTER A LONG, GRUELING MARCH, THEY APPROACH MAKALLE, WHERE THE ITALIANS HAVE ESTABLISHED A FORMIDABLE FORT.

IT TAKES LITTLE TIME FOR EMPRESS TAYTU TO REALIZE THAT A FRONTAL ATTACK ON THE SEEMINGLY IMPREGNABLE FORT WILL RESULT IN THE RIVERS TURNING RED WITH ETHIOPIAN BLOOD. BUT HER MIND IS AGILE ...

YOU BRAVE MEN
HAVE BEEN BOASTING OF
YOUR DETERMINATION TO CHARGE
THE FORT. BUT SLOWLY, SLOWLY DIES
THE PRIDE OF MAN. GUARD THIS RIVER AS
IF YOU WERE GUARDING HEAVEN'S GATE,
FOR WITHOUT WATER, IS A FORT NOT A
PRISON? YOU WHO HAVE VOL
UNTEERED WILL BE
HONOURED.



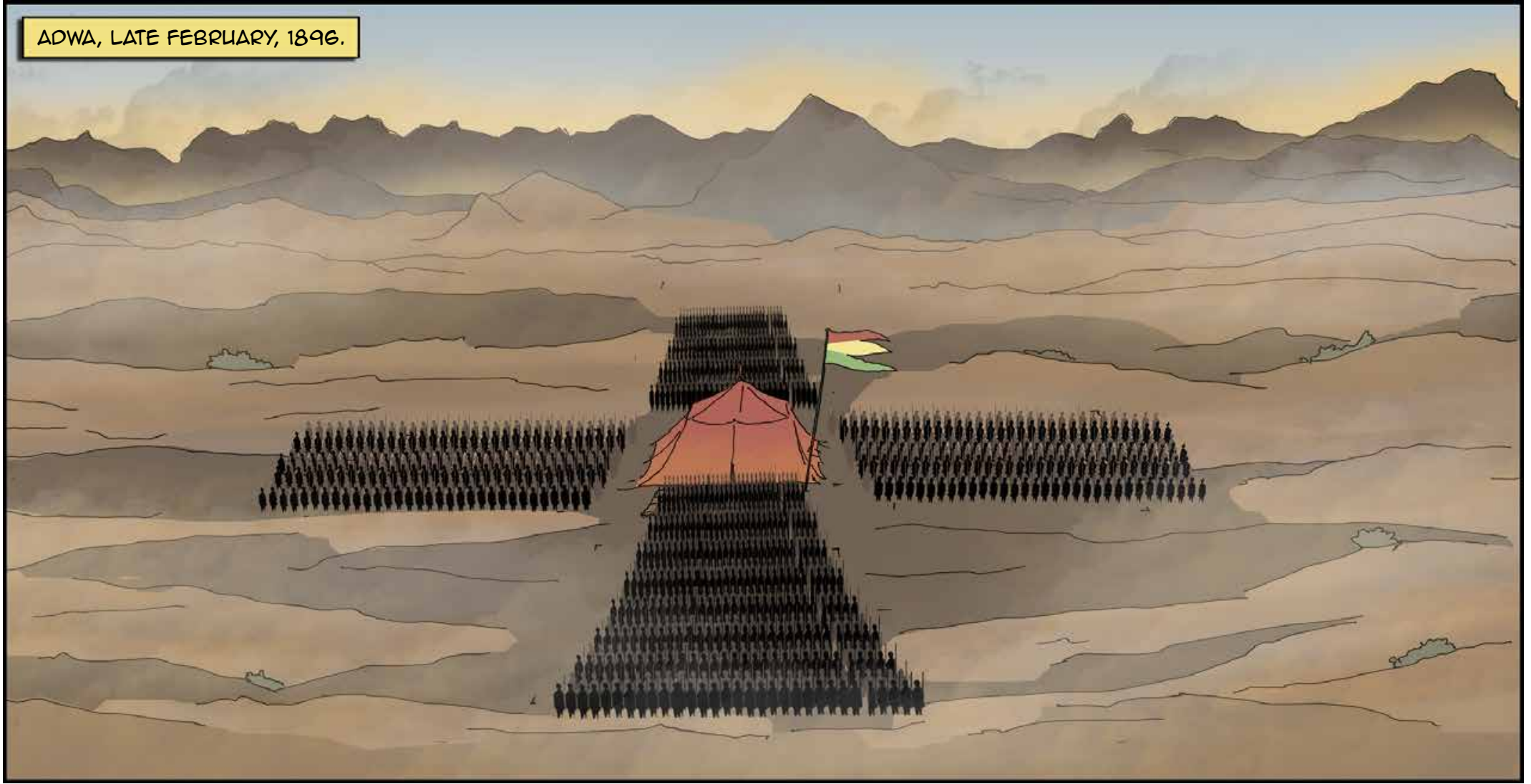
THE SIEGE SLOWLY GRINDS DOWN THE ENEMY ...



... UNTIL THE ITALIANS ARE FORCED TO SURRENDER THE FORT.
BUT THE LARGER BATTLE LOOMS LARGE ON THE HORIZON.



ADWA, LATE FEBRUARY, 1896.



1 MARCH 1896, AT 4 O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING, AS THE EMPEROR AND EMPRESS PERFORM THEIR DIVINE OFFICES, A MESSENGER RUNS IN WITH NEWS OF AN ITALIAN ATTACK ...



THE BATTLE QUICKLY TURNS THE WAY OF THE ETHIOPIAN ARMY, AND EMPRESS TAYTU AND HER WOMEN SOLDIERS ARE TIRELESS IN THEIR EFFORTS.

BRING WATER TO OUR THIRSTY LIPS ON THE BATTLEFIELD! THE ITALIANS ARE IN OUR GRIP - LET US NOT RELEASE THEM!



BY NIGHTFALL, THE ITALIANS LIE DEFEATED, AND ETHIOPIA IS ONE OF THE FEW PLACES TO PRESERVE ITS SOVEREIGNTY AT A TIME OF RABID EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM. BUT IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF WAR, THE HIGH LEVEL OF CASUALTIES IS A TERRIBLE REMINDER OF THE PRICE OF FREEDOM.



NEVERTHELESS, THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ETHIOPIAN VICTORY AT ADWA RESONATED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, AND ETHIOPIA BECAME A SYMBOL OF RESISTANCE FOR ALL PEOPLES FIGHTING RACIST OPPRESSION.

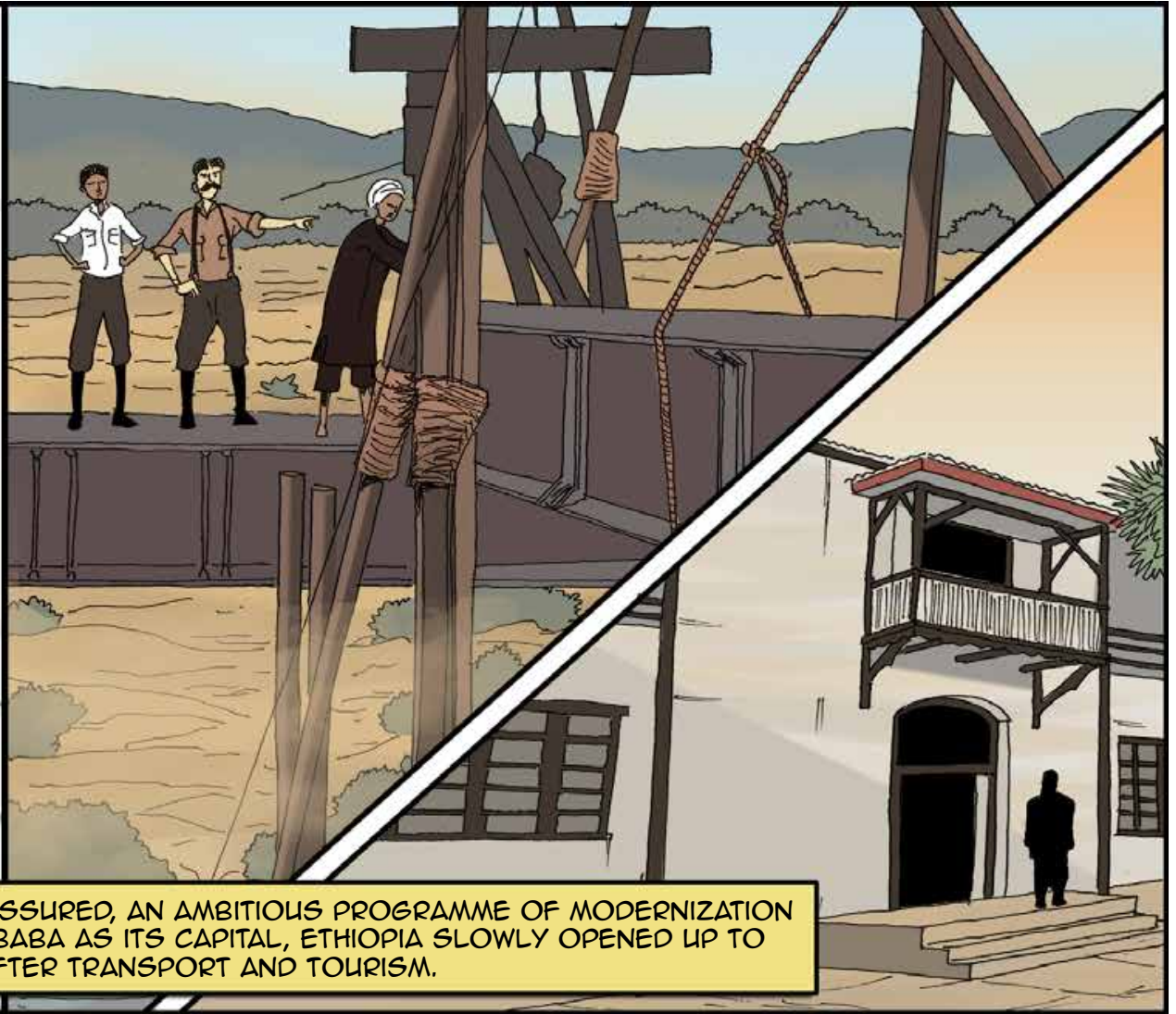
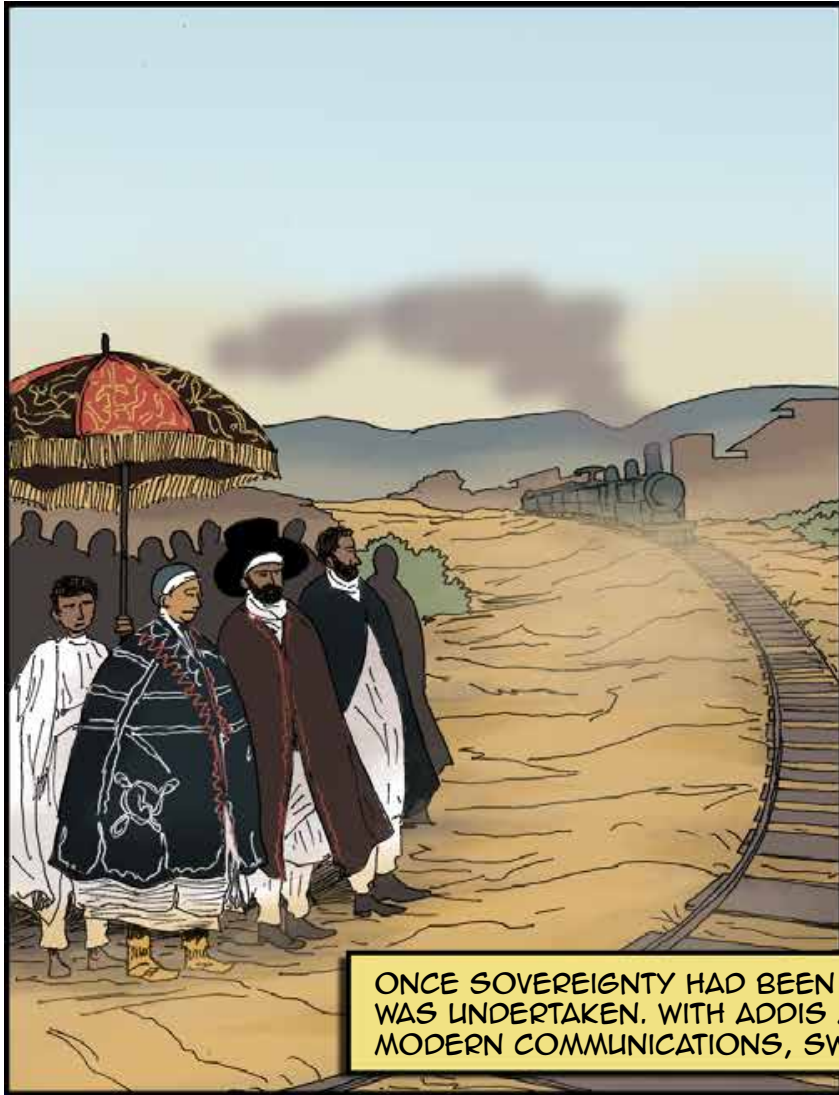
THE VICTORY
IN ADWA IS FOR THE
SONS AND DAUGHTERS
OF ETHIOPIA THE
WORLD OVER!

ETHIOPIA
UNBOUND

LECTURE TOUR:
ADELAIDE CASELY
HAYFORD,
FROM THE GIRLS'
VOCATIONAL
SCHOOL IN
FREETOWN

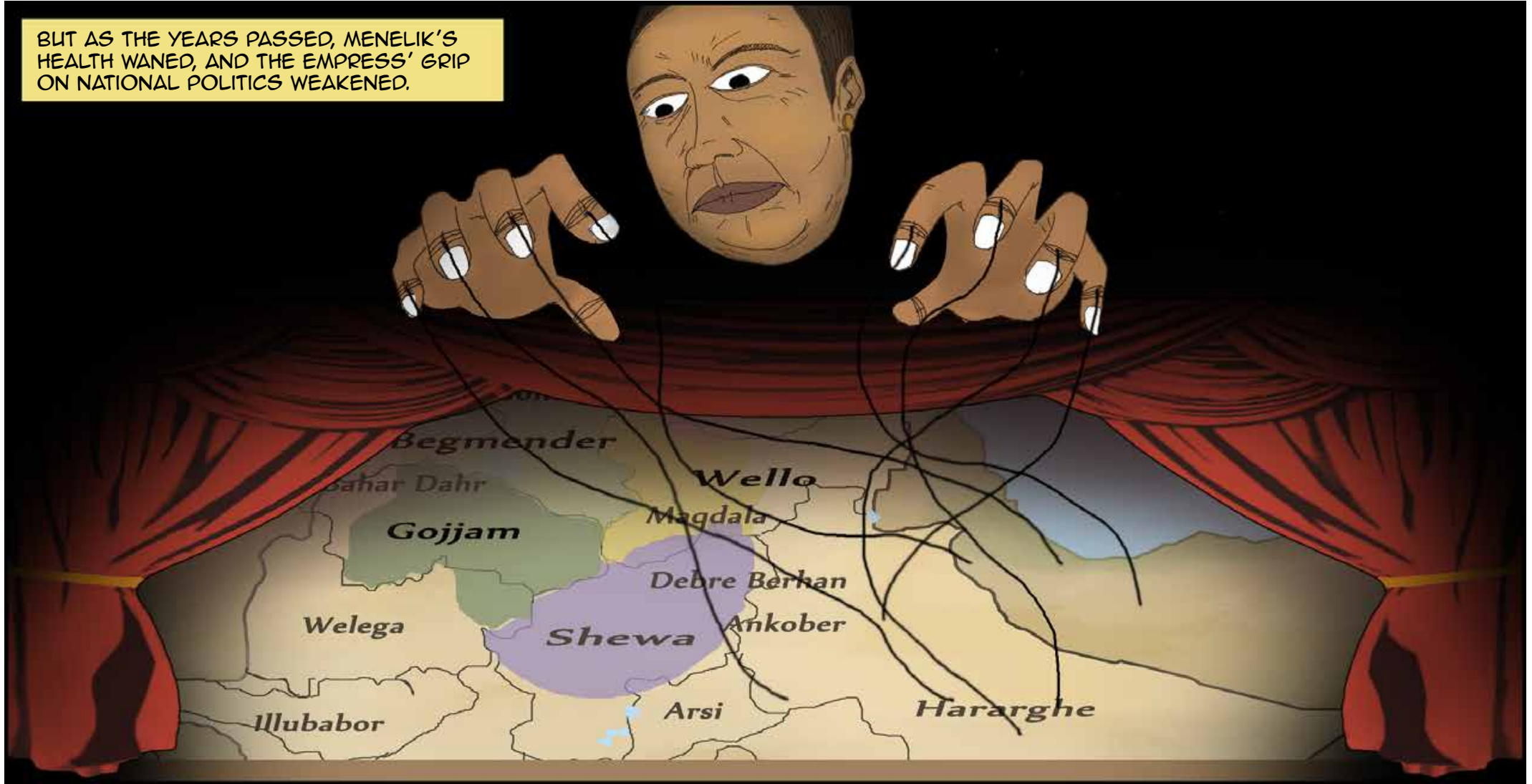
NOR, ALAS, WOULD ITALY FORGET THIS HISTORIC, CRUSHING DEFEAT, TENDING ITS ANGER FOR ANOTHER CYCLE OF VIOLENCE, IN THE DARK DAYS OF FASCISM OF THE 1930S ...

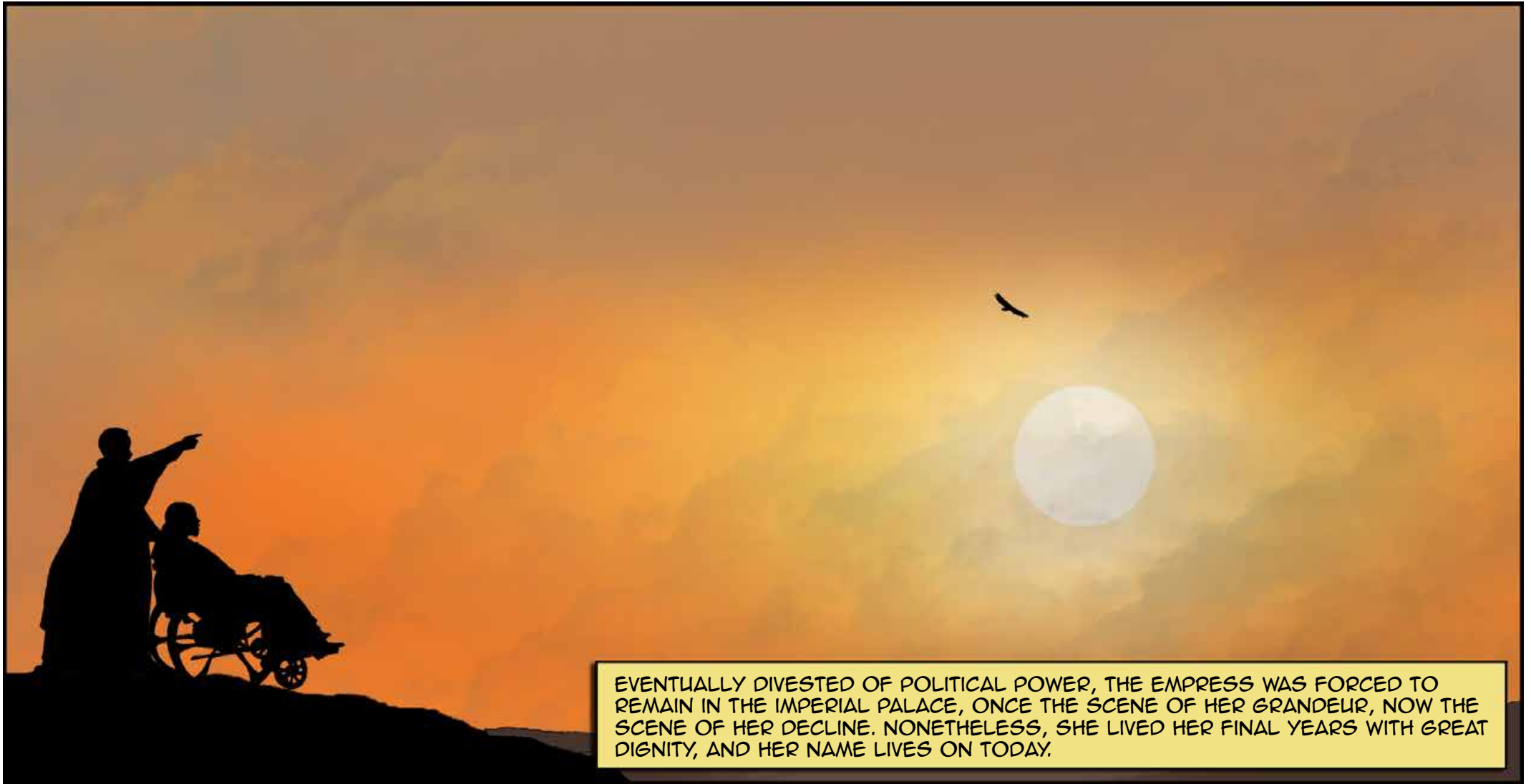




ONCE SOVEREIGNTY HAD BEEN ASSURED, AN AMBITIOUS PROGRAMME OF MODERNIZATION WAS UNDERTAKEN. WITH ADDIS ABABA AS ITS CAPITAL, ETHIOPIA SLOWLY OPENED UP TO MODERN COMMUNICATIONS, SWIFTER TRANSPORT AND TOURISM.

BUT AS THE YEARS PASSED, MENELIK'S HEALTH WANED, AND THE EMPRESS' GRIP ON NATIONAL POLITICS WEAKENED.





EVENTUALLY DIVESTED OF POLITICAL POWER, THE EMPRESS WAS FORCED TO REMAIN IN THE IMPERIAL PALACE, ONCE THE SCENE OF HER GRANDEUR, NOW THE SCENE OF HER DECLINE. NONETHELESS, SHE LIVED HER FINAL YEARS WITH GREAT DIGNITY, AND HER NAME LIVES ON TODAY.

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Taytu Betul and the rise of an Itege

Taytu Betul (c.1851–1918) was a formidable queen and empress of Ethiopia. An astute diplomat, she proved to be a key figure in thwarting Italian imperialist designs on Ethiopia. Later, she and her husband Emperor Menelik II, led a huge army to battle at Adwa, where they won one of the most important victories of any African army against European colonialist aggression.

Women in African History

By way of various artistic and pedagogical resources available online, this UNESCO project highlights a selection of historical female figures, from Africa and of African descent, who have distinguished themselves in the history of the continent in areas as diverse as politics (Gisèle Rabesahala), diplomacy and resistance against colonization (Njinga Mbandi), defence of women's rights (Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti) and environmental protection (Wangari Maathai).

The selection of women figures proposed in the framework of this project is not exhaustive and represents only a small part of the contribution of African women, known and unknown, to the history of their countries, Africa and all mankind.

For additional pedagogical resources, please visit the web site www.unesco.org/womeninafrica

The UNESCO Project Women in African History was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Republic of Bulgaria.



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