



United Nations
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NJINGA M BANDI

QUEEN OF NDONGO AND MATAMBA



UNESCO Series on Women in African History





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Cultural Organization

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Logo of the project: Jonathas Mello
Iconography: Obioma Ofoego, Adriana Balducci

A historical map of the West African coast, showing the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean. The map is overlaid with a grid of latitude and longitude lines. The text 'NJINGA MBANDI' is written in large, bold, orange letters across the center. Below it, 'QUEEN OF NDONGO AND MATAMBA' is written in smaller, bold, black letters. Further down, there are three lines of text in black: 'UNESCO Series on Women in African History', 'Editorial and artistic direction: Edouard Jouveaud', and 'Comic strip'. Below that, 'Illustrations: Pat Masioni' and 'Script and text: Sylvia Serbin, Edouard Jouveaud' are listed. The map includes various geographical labels such as 'Golfe de Guinée', 'R. de Loango', 'R. de Congo', and 'R. de Zaire'. It also features names of explorers like 'Cook' and 'L. de la Roche'.

UNESCO Series on Women in African History
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Njinga Mbandi, Queen of Ndongo and Matamba

Foreword

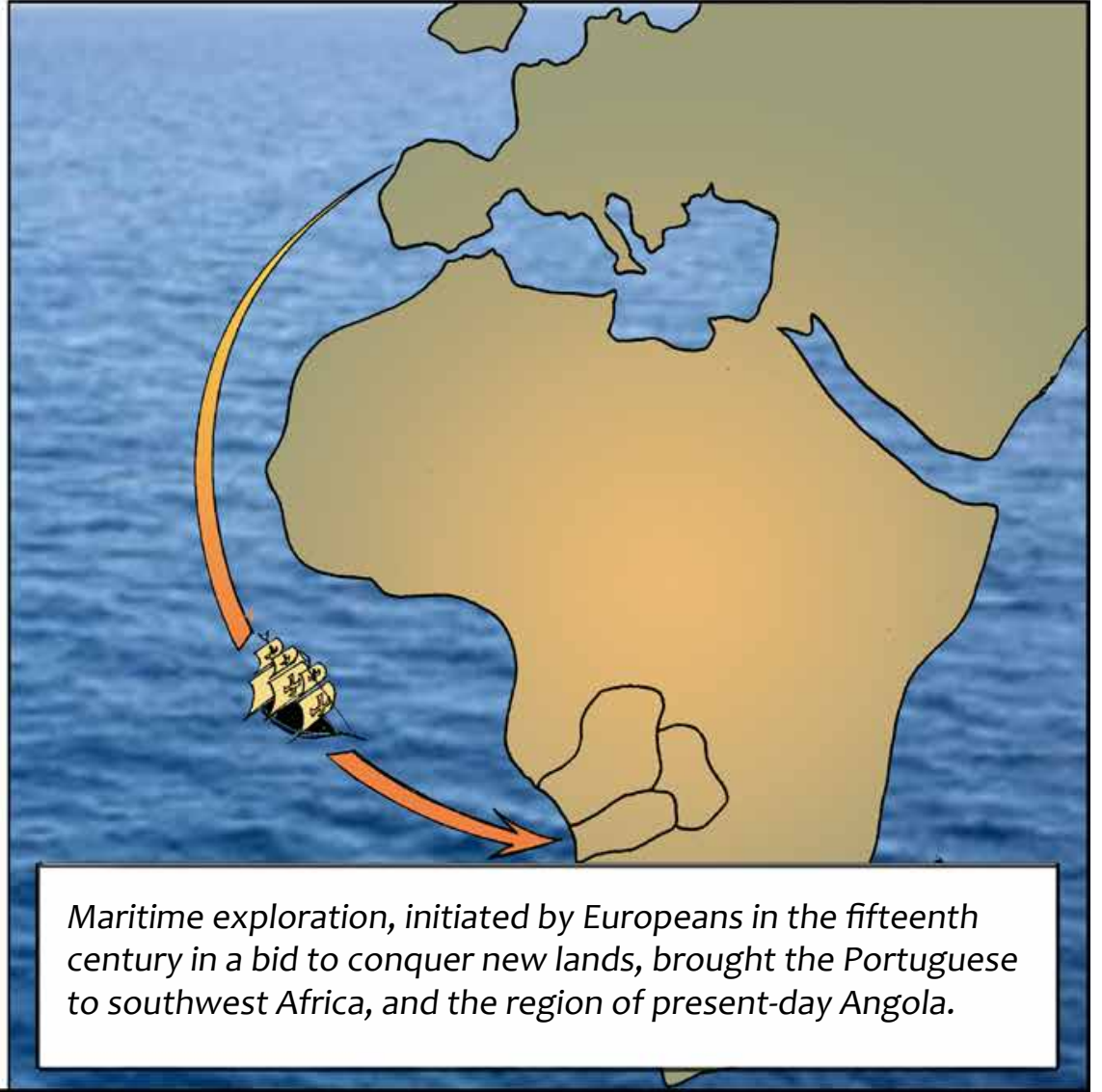
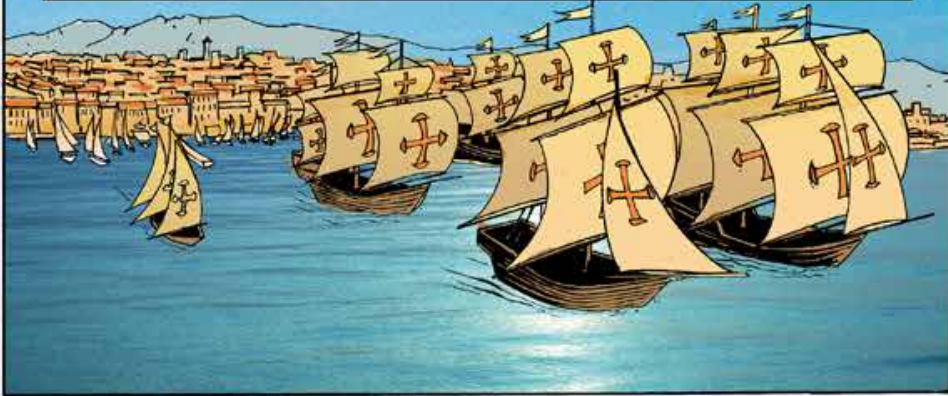
The following comic strip is an interpretation of certain periods in the life of Nzinga Mbandi. The illustrations are based on historical and iconographic research on Nzinga Mbandi and the seventeenth century in Angola. They do not claim to be an exact representation of the events, people, architecture, hairstyles, or clothing of the period.



A key figure in African resistance to colonialism, Queen Njinga defined much of the history of seventeenth-century Angola. An outstanding strategist and skilful negotiator, she defended her country steadfastly until her death in 1663 at the age of 82.

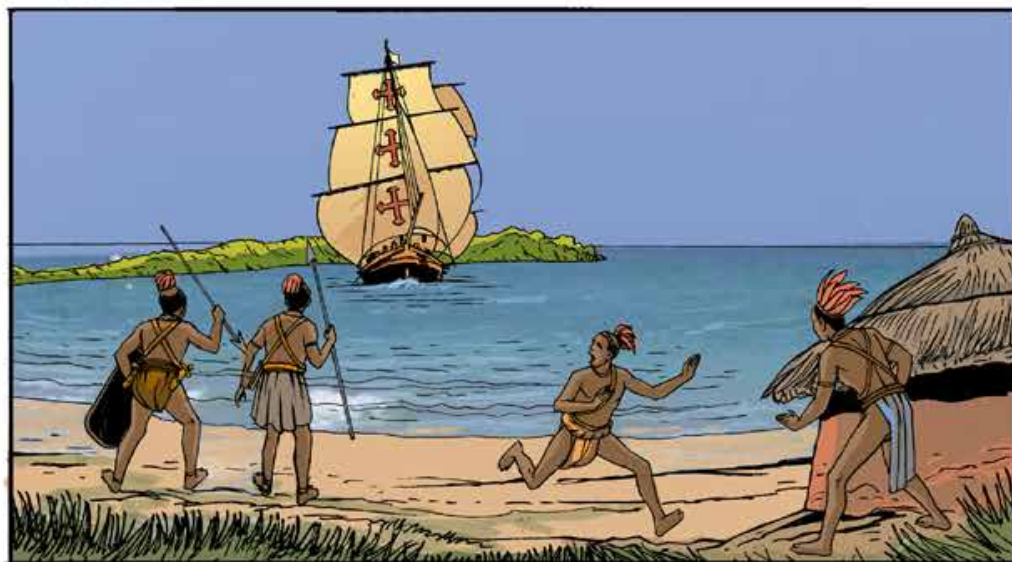
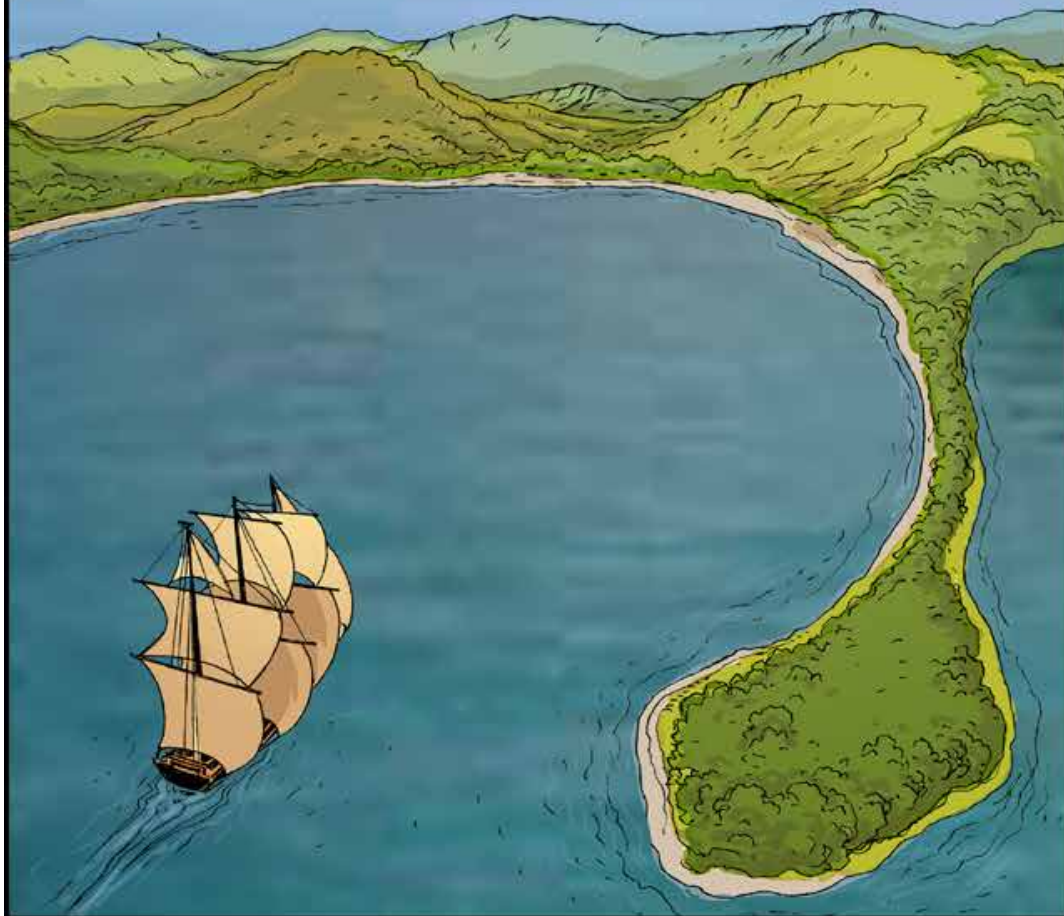


It was the sixteenth century.
The Kingdom of Ndongo was under threat.

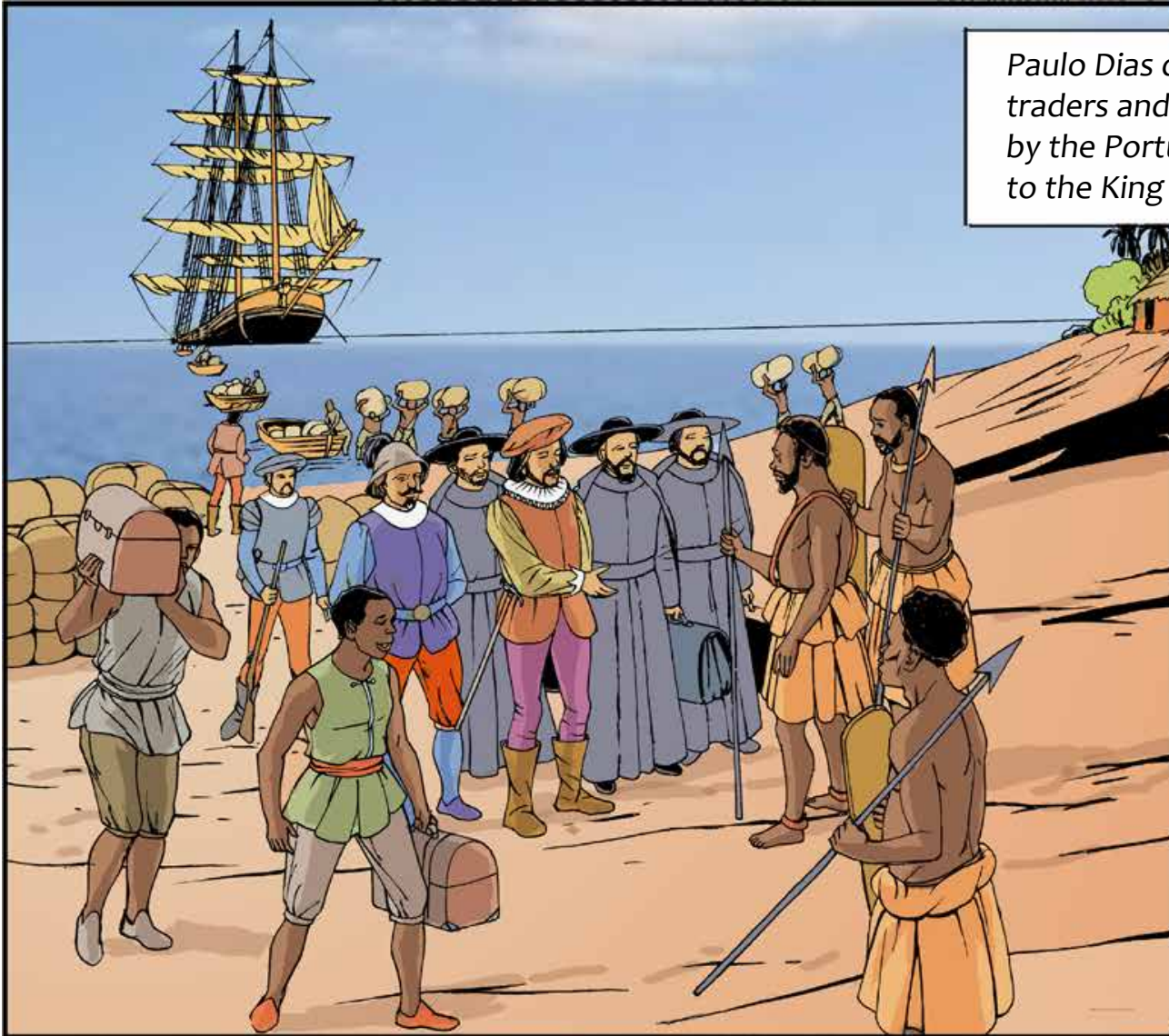


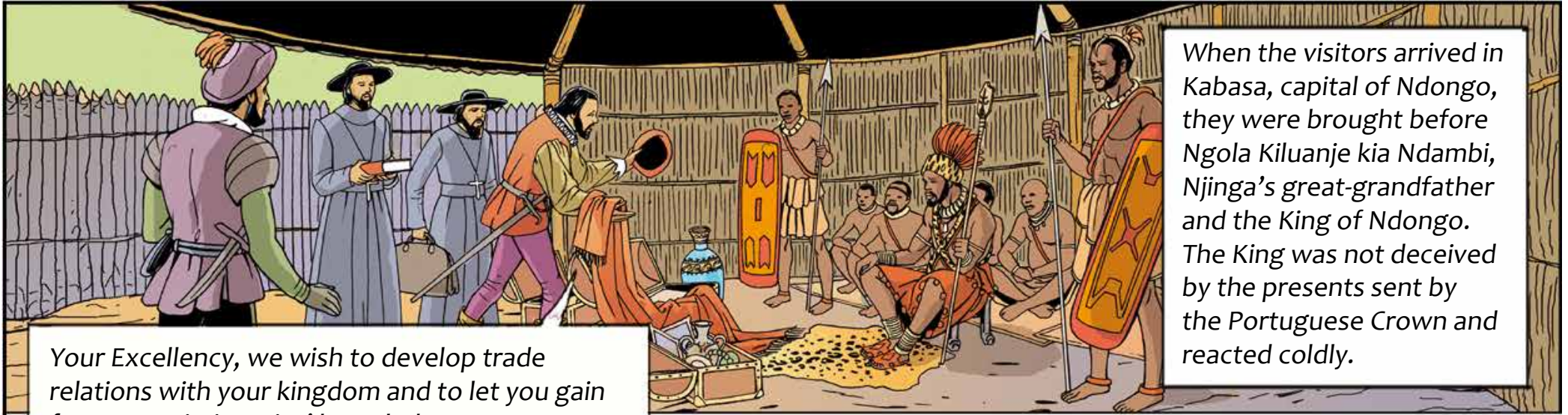
Maritime exploration, initiated by Europeans in the fifteenth century in a bid to conquer new lands, brought the Portuguese to southwest Africa, and the region of present-day Angola.

In 1560, after a long voyage, the Portuguese explorer Paulo Dias de Novais landed on the Ndongo coast, close to the mouth of the Kwanza River.



Paulo Dias de Novais, accompanied by Portuguese Jesuits, traders and dignitaries, announced that he had been sent by the Portuguese Crown and requested to be presented to the King of Ndongo.





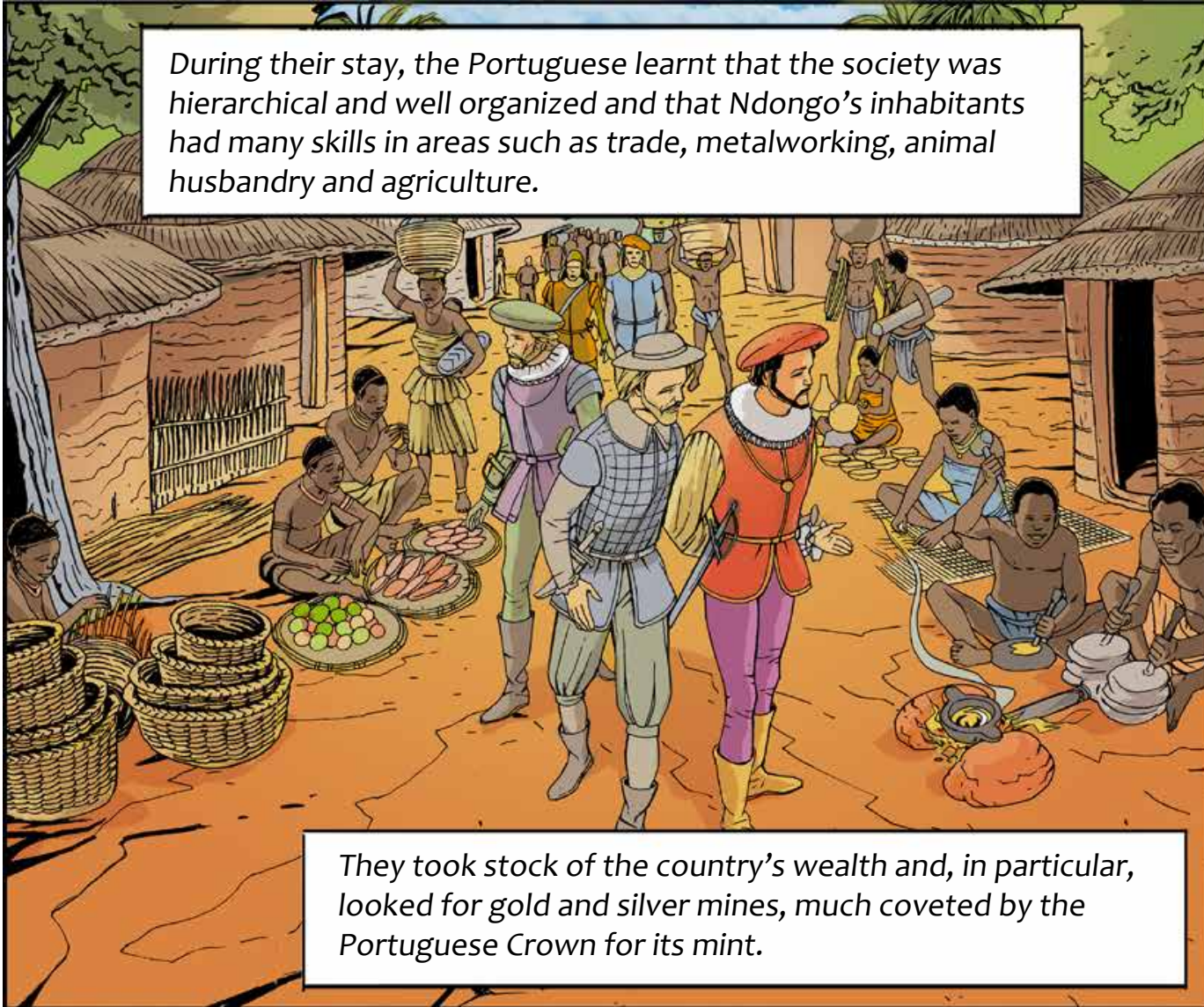
Your Excellency, we wish to develop trade relations with your kingdom and to let you gain from our missionaries' knowledge.

When the visitors arrived in Kabasa, capital of Ndongo, they were brought before Ngola Kiluanje kia Ndambi, Njinga's great-grandfather and the King of Ndongo. The King was not deceived by the presents sent by the Portuguese Crown and reacted coldly.



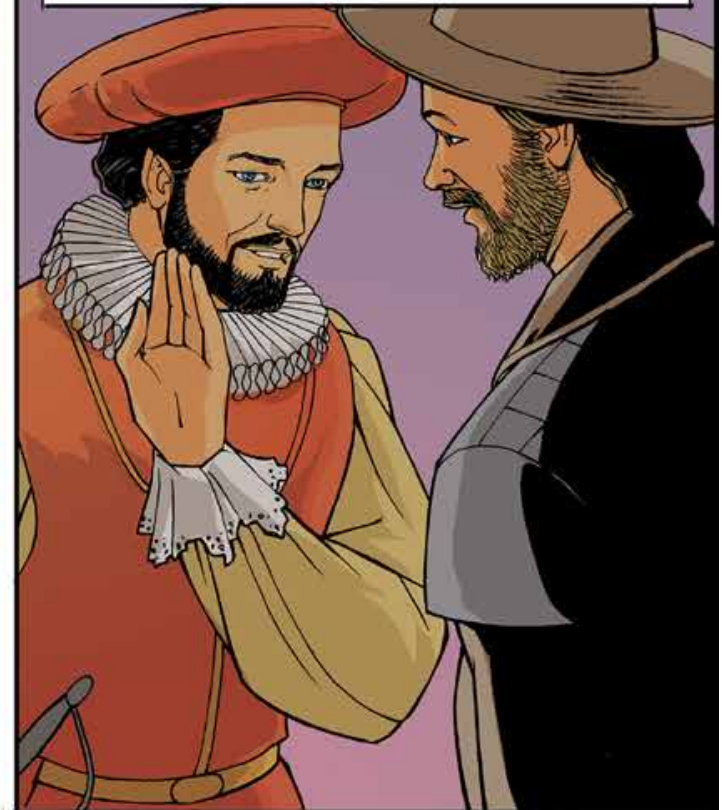
Very well. You may remain in my country and visit Kabasa. Be aware, however, that you will be watched and that you may not leave the town without our authorization.

During their stay, the Portuguese learnt that the society was hierarchical and well organized and that Ndongo's inhabitants had many skills in areas such as trade, metalworking, animal husbandry and agriculture.

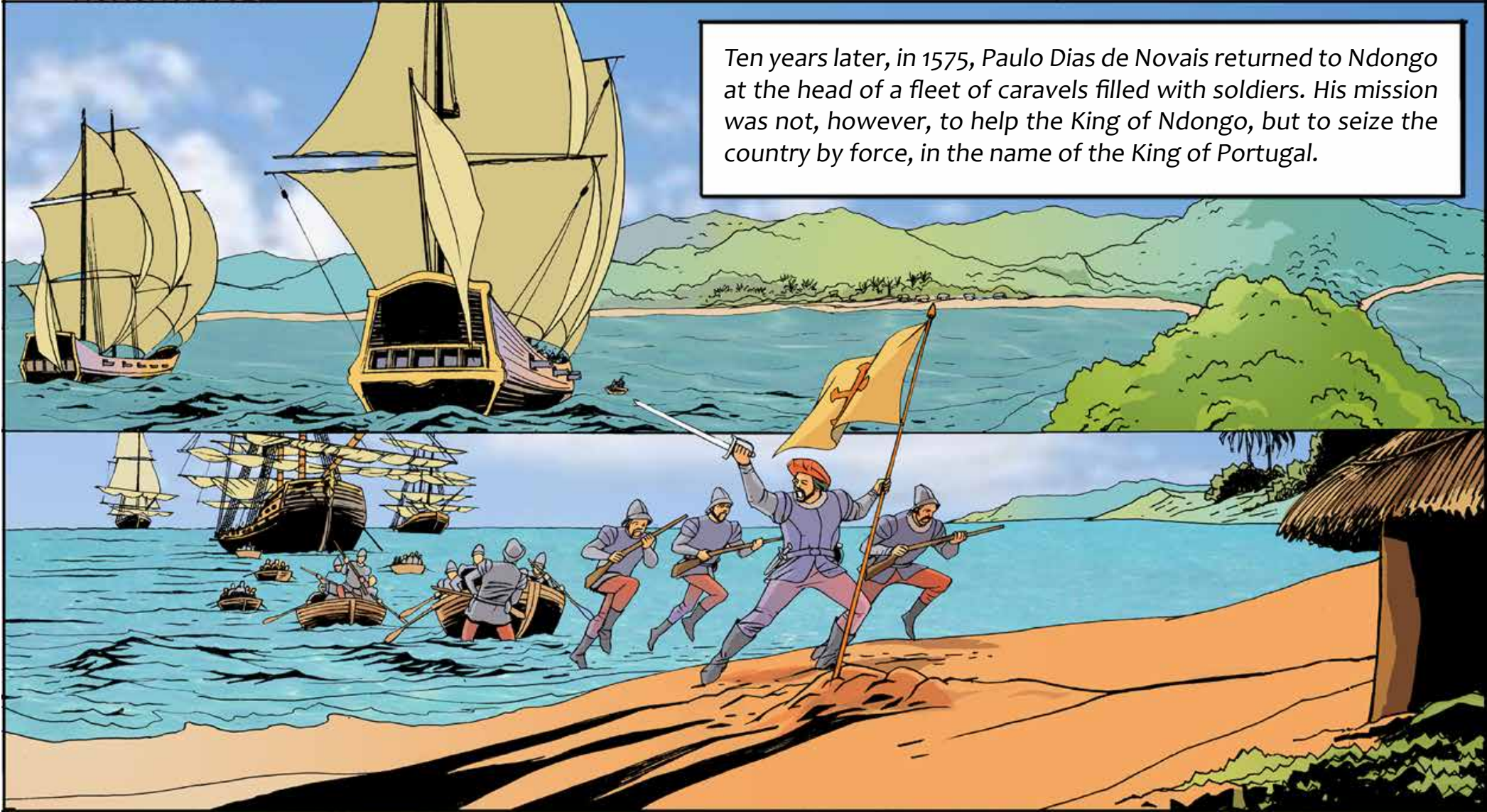


They took stock of the country's wealth and, in particular, looked for gold and silver mines, much coveted by the Portuguese Crown for its mint.

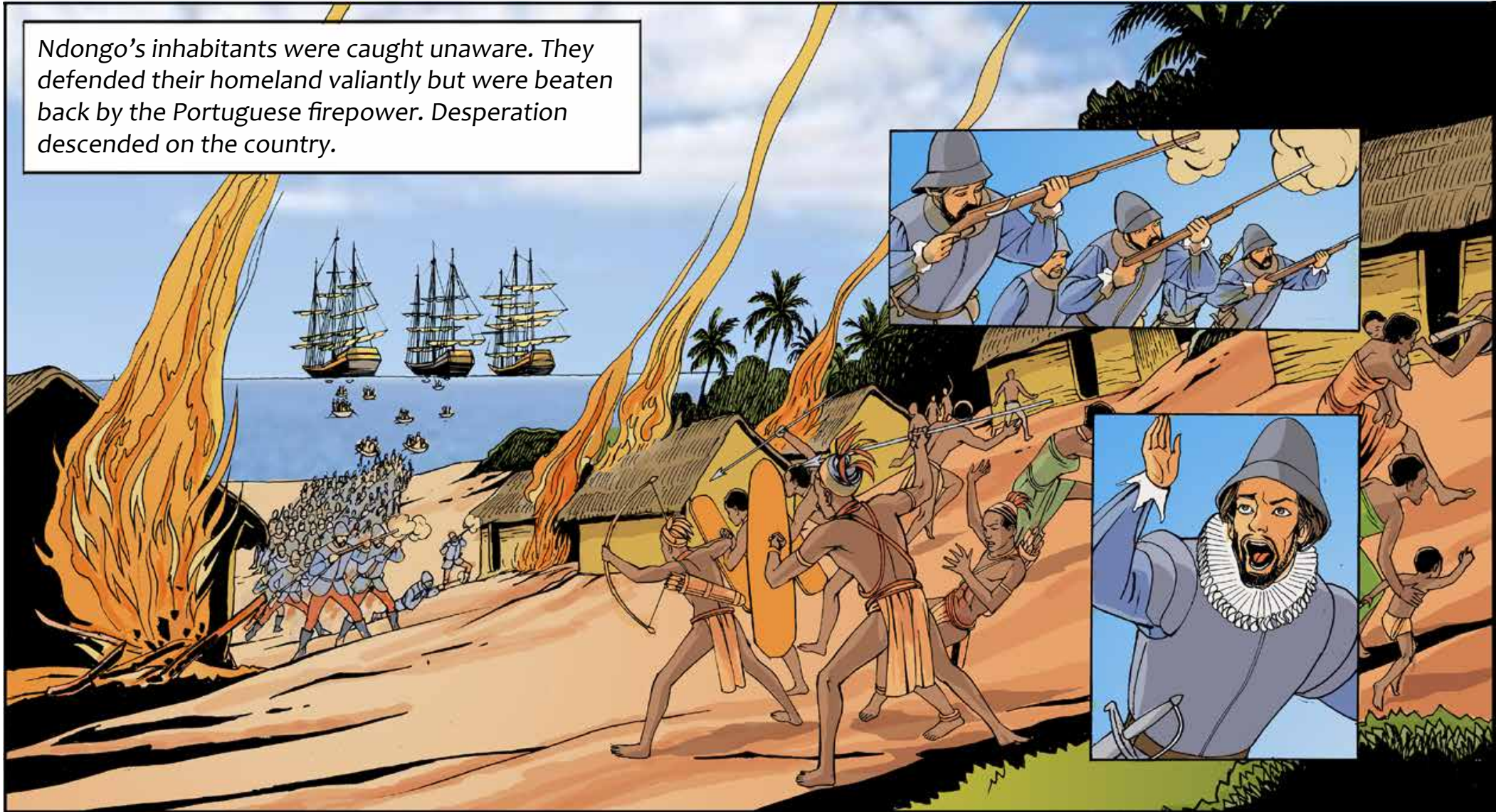
Five years later, Ngola Kiluanje kia Ndambi authorized Paulo Dias de Novais to leave for Portugal, on the condition that he returned at the head of an army, to help the Ngola to fight against neighbouring kingdoms.



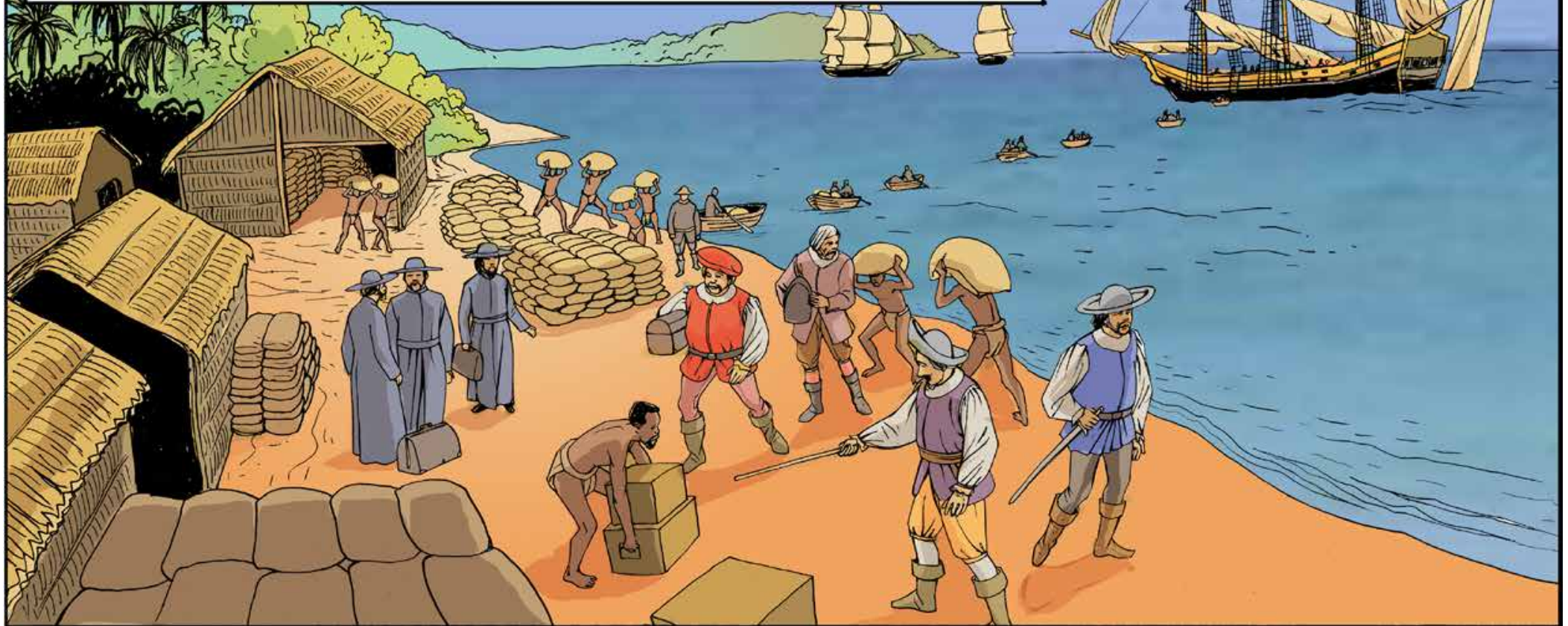
Ten years later, in 1575, Paulo Dias de Novais returned to Ndongo at the head of a fleet of caravels filled with soldiers. His mission was not, however, to help the King of Ndongo, but to seize the country by force, in the name of the King of Portugal.



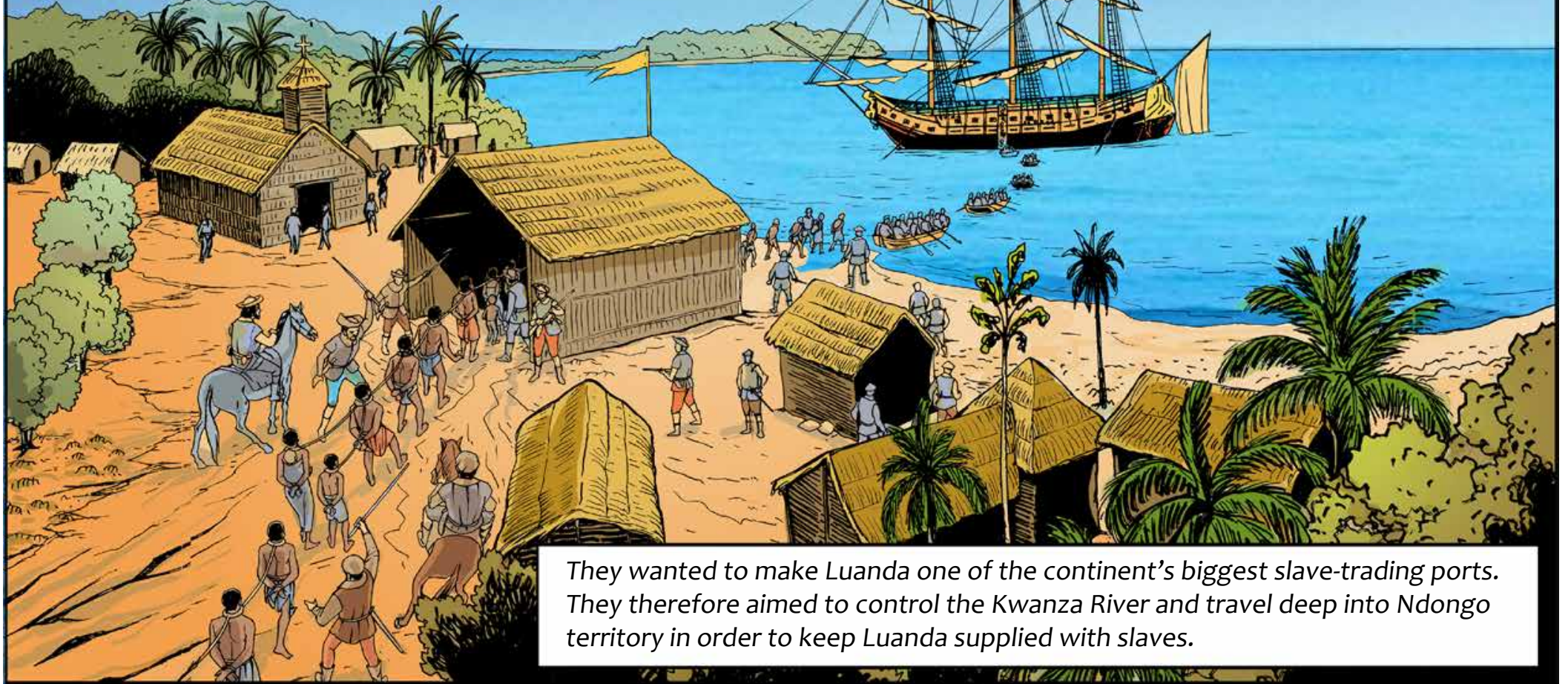
Ndongo's inhabitants were caught unaware. They defended their homeland valiantly but were beaten back by the Portuguese firepower. Desperation descended on the country.



With lightning speed, the Portuguese seized the Ndongo coastal strip and renamed it Angola. The same year, 1575, they founded the port city of São Paulo da Assunção de Loanda (Luanda). The invasion continued. Ndongo's borders were reduced towards the east, while Portuguese migrants, namely missionaries, farmers and merchants, poured into Luanda, and other adventurers acquired land taken from Africans.

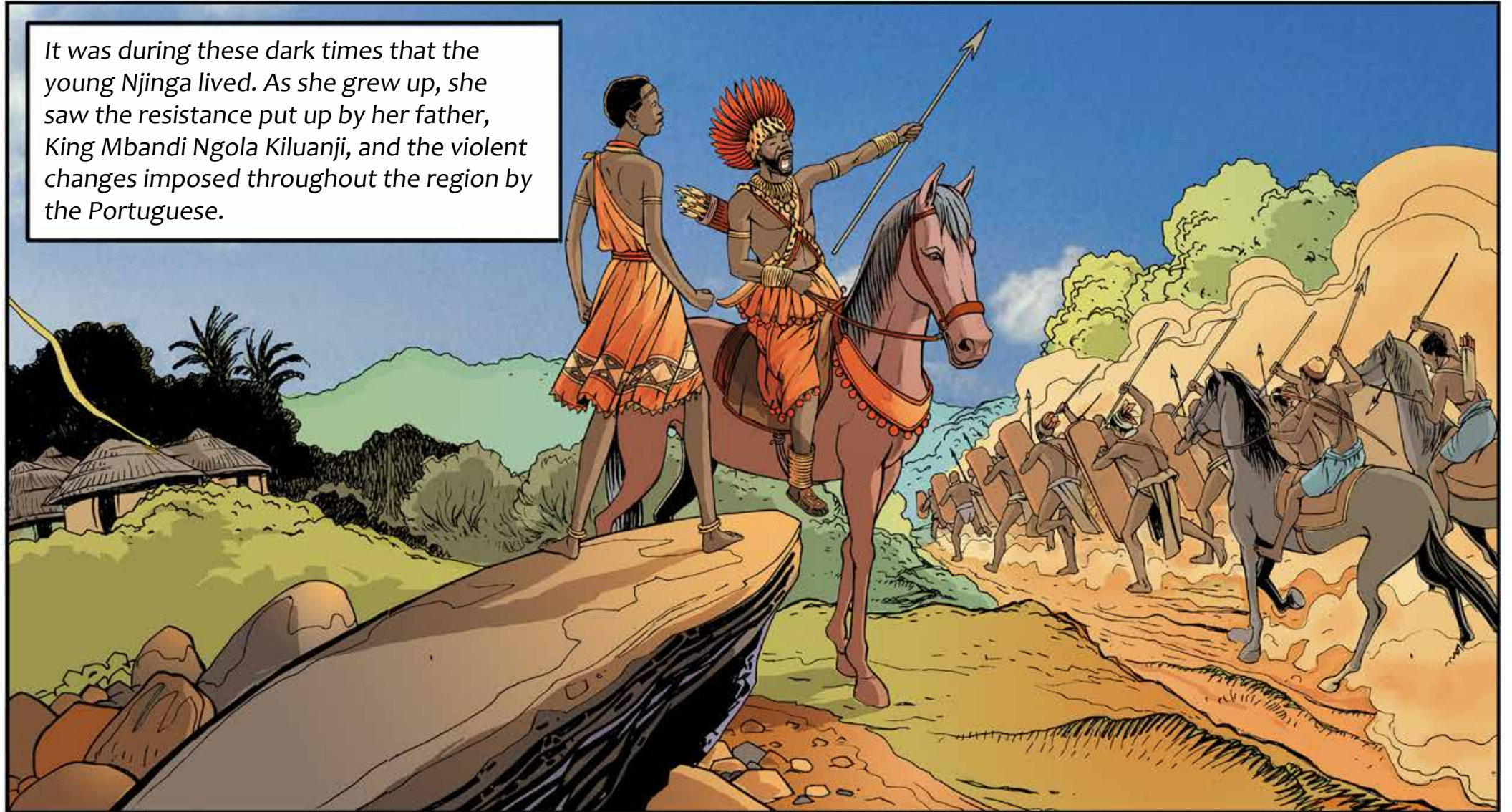


As they found no gold or silver mines, the Portuguese decided to trade in slaves on a massive scale in order to supply labour for the new colony of Brazil.

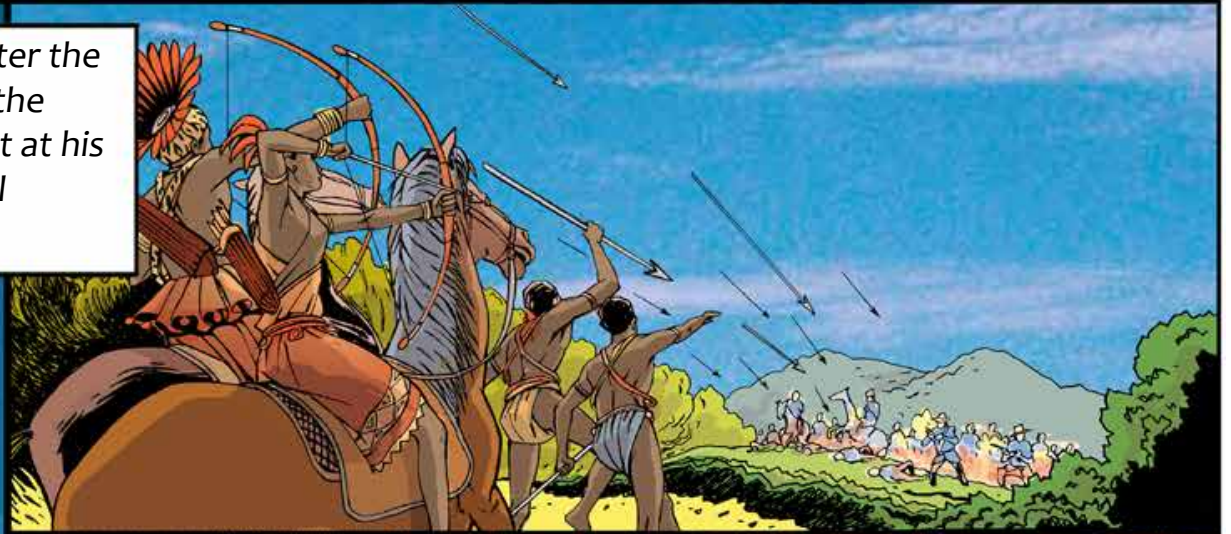


They wanted to make Luanda one of the continent's biggest slave-trading ports. They therefore aimed to control the Kwanza River and travel deep into Ndongo territory in order to keep Luanda supplied with slaves.

It was during these dark times that the young Njinga lived. As she grew up, she saw the resistance put up by her father, King Mbandi Ngola Kiluanji, and the violent changes imposed throughout the region by the Portuguese.



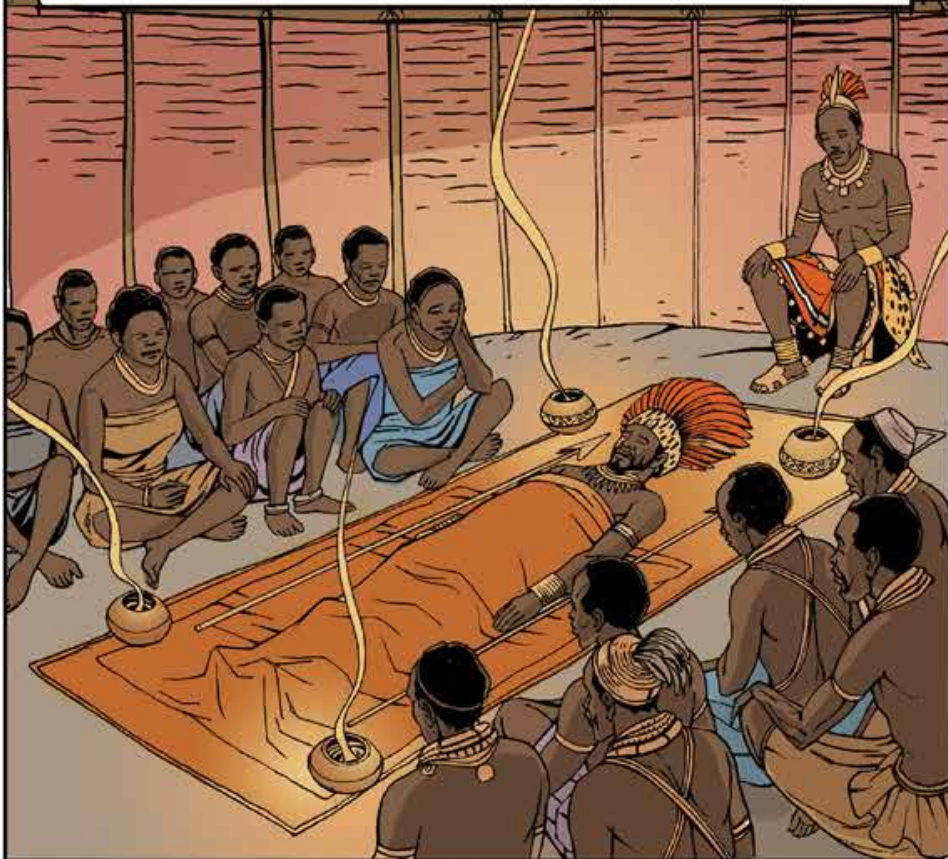
Very early on Njinga's father discerned in his daughter the fiery temperament and proud intelligence that are the hallmarks of heroes. On many occasions, she fought at his side against the Portuguese conquistadors and rival kingdoms in the region.



Njinga had been given a good education and been taught to write by visiting Portuguese missionaries and merchants. However, she would never allow her kingdom to be subjugated by a foreign power.



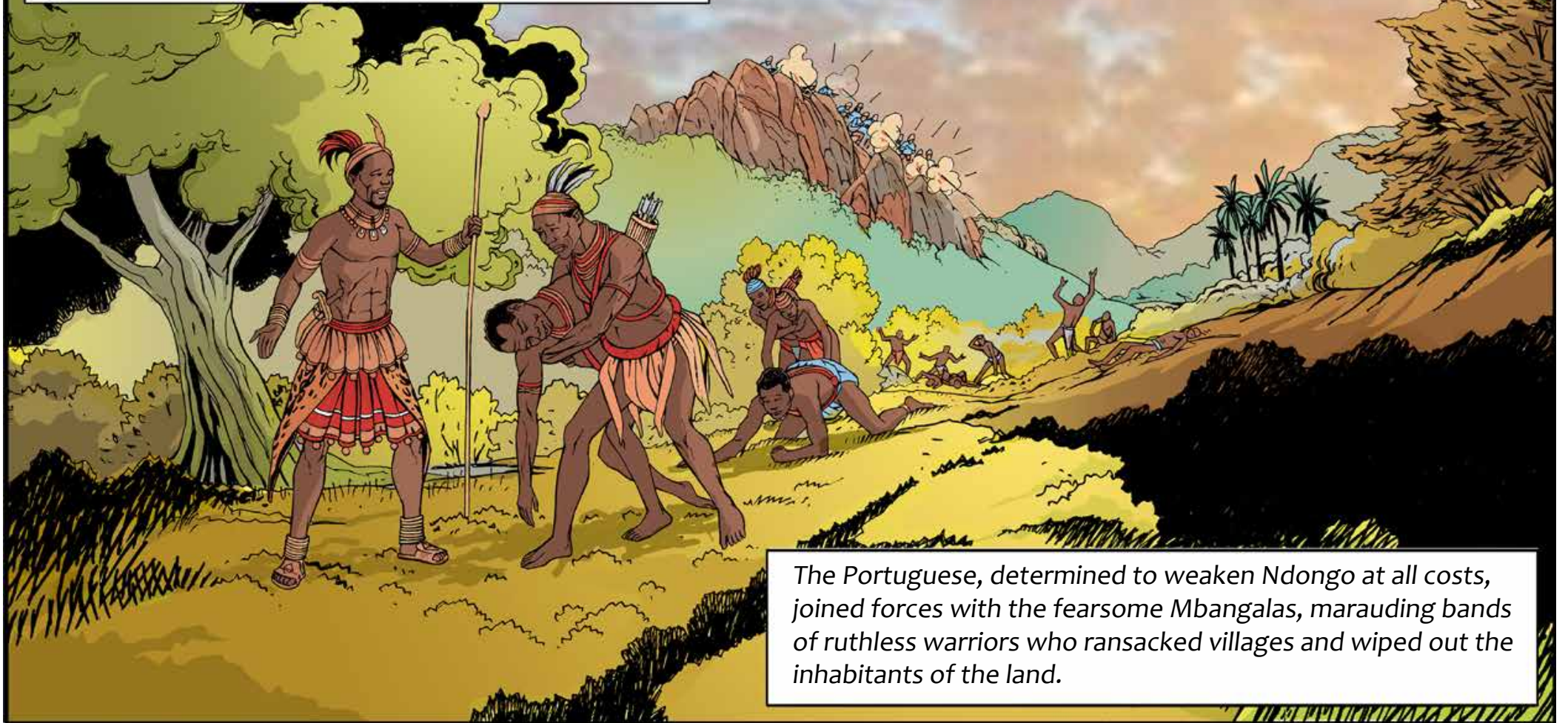
Mbandi Ngola Kiluanji, the King of Ndongo, died in 1617. His son, Ngola Mbandi, took power and became the new king, but he possessed neither his father's charisma nor the intelligence of his sister, Njinga, for whom he felt only hatred and jealousy.



Fearing a plot against him by her entourage, Ngola Mbandi ordered the execution of Njinga's only son, a mere child. Njinga was grief-stricken.

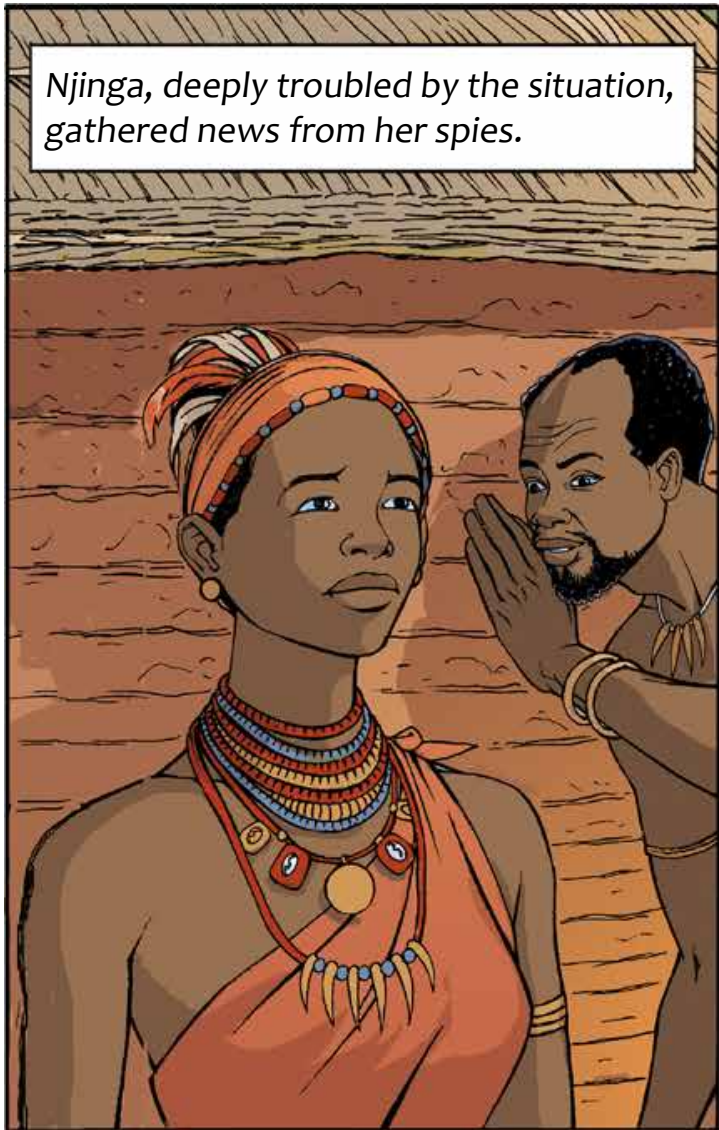


Ngola Mbandi again declared war on the Portuguese but could not repel the enemy's attacks.

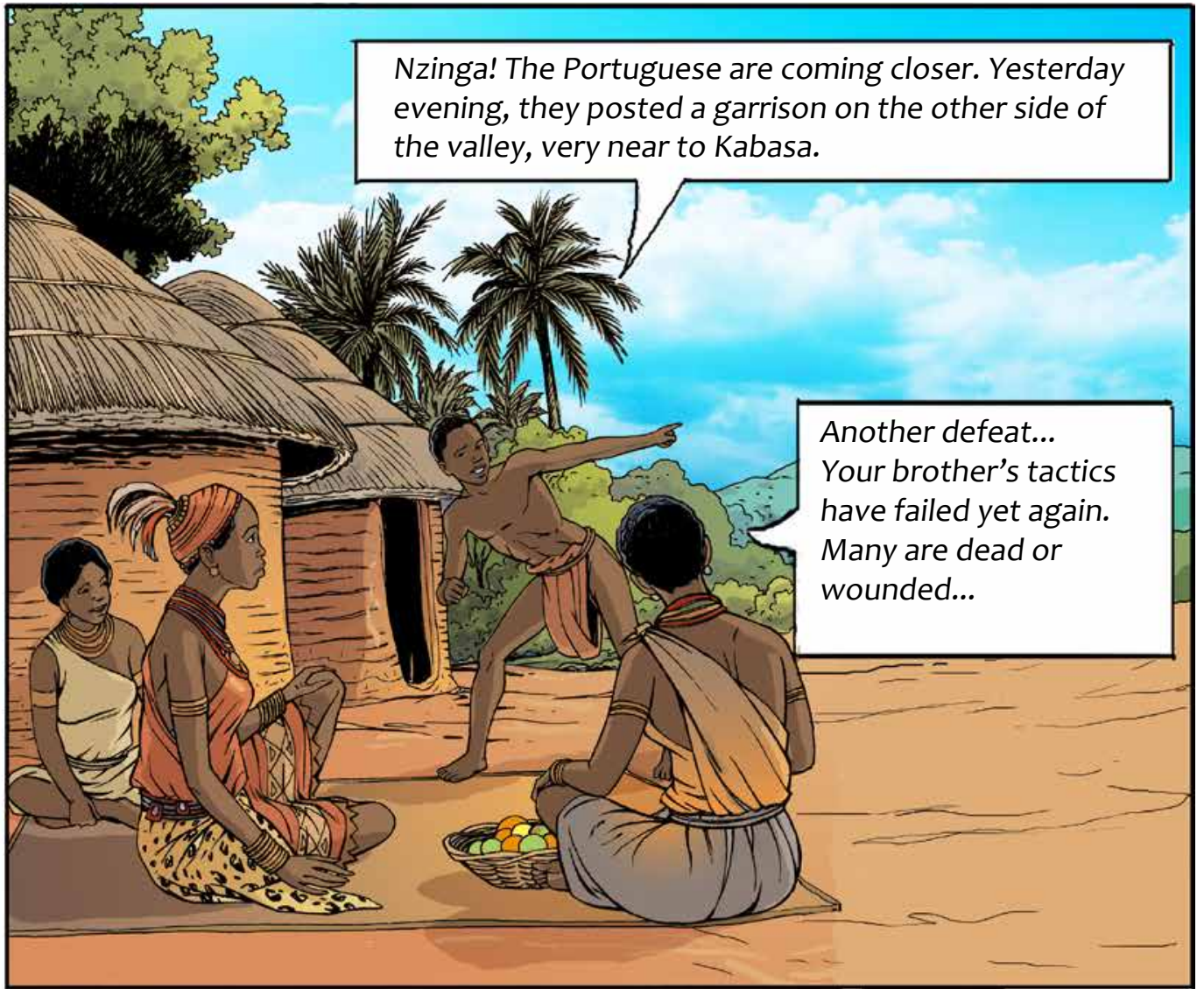


The Portuguese, determined to weaken Ndongo at all costs, joined forces with the fearsome Mbangalas, marauding bands of ruthless warriors who ransacked villages and wiped out the inhabitants of the land.

Njinga, deeply troubled by the situation, gathered news from her spies.

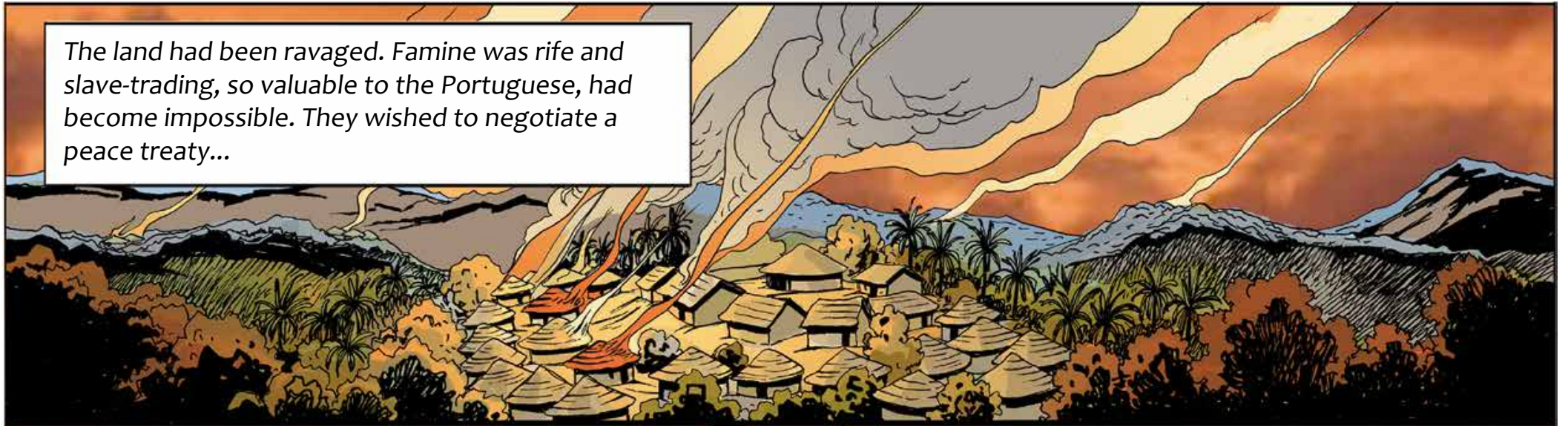


Nzinga! The Portuguese are coming closer. Yesterday evening, they posted a garrison on the other side of the valley, very near to Kabasa.



Another defeat...
Your brother's tactics
have failed yet again.
Many are dead or
wounded...

The land had been ravaged. Famine was rife and slave-trading, so valuable to the Portuguese, had become impossible. They wished to negotiate a peace treaty...



Your sister Njinga! Only your sister will succeed in protecting your interests!

She speaks their language and can stand up to them. Let me lead the delegation and I will keep a close watch on your sister!



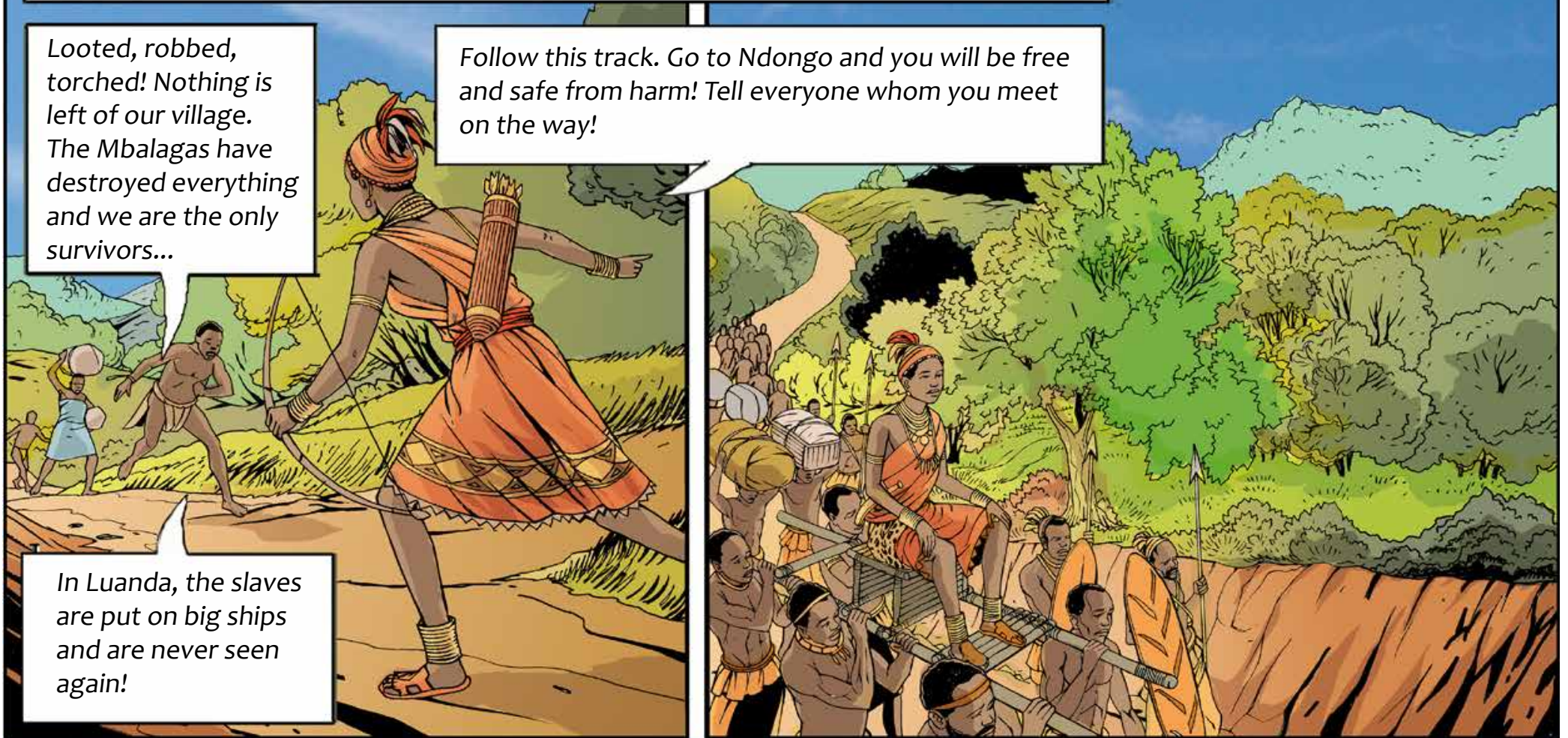
Ngola Mbandi finally accepted the elders' advice and instructed Njinga to go to Luanda to negotiate for peace with Dom João Correia de Sousa, the Portuguese Governor.

Njinga set out immediately, heading across country towards Luanda. On the way, she met runaway slaves and refugee families.

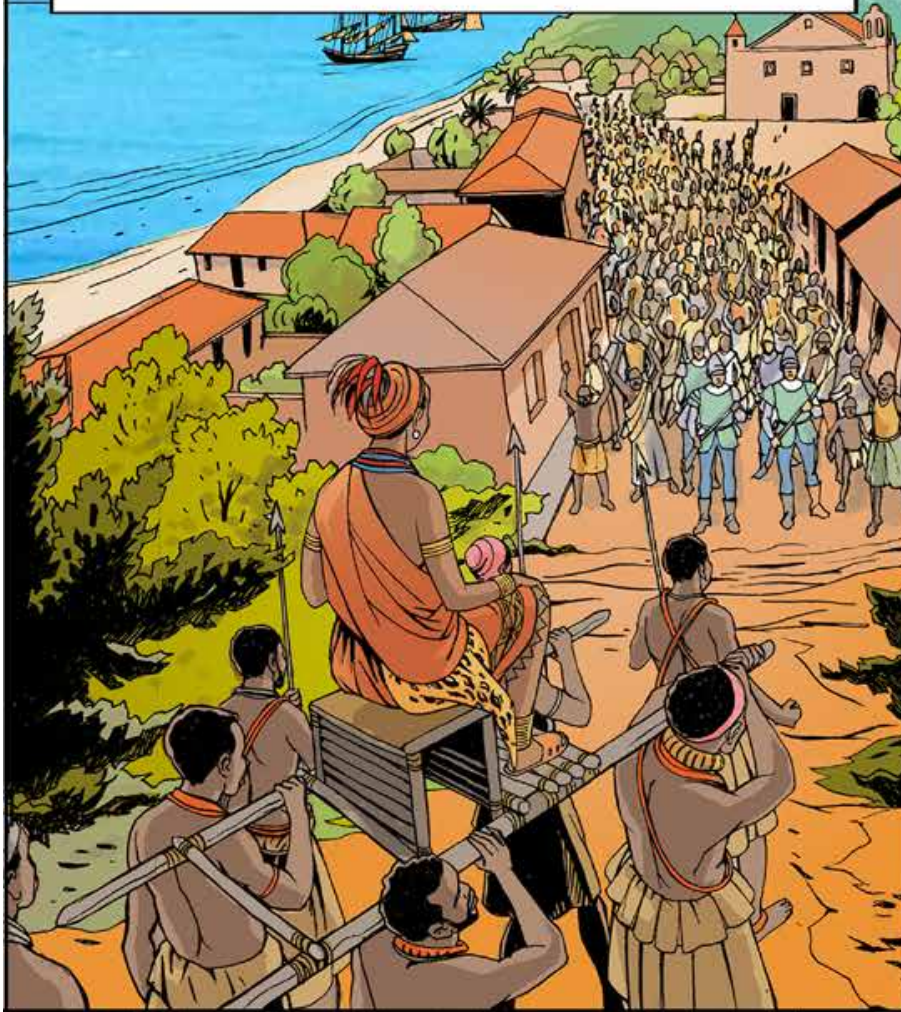
Looted, robbed, torched! Nothing is left of our village. The Mbalagas have destroyed everything and we are the only survivors...

Follow this track. Go to Ndongo and you will be free and safe from harm! Tell everyone whom you meet on the way!

In Luanda, the slaves are put on big ships and are never seen again!



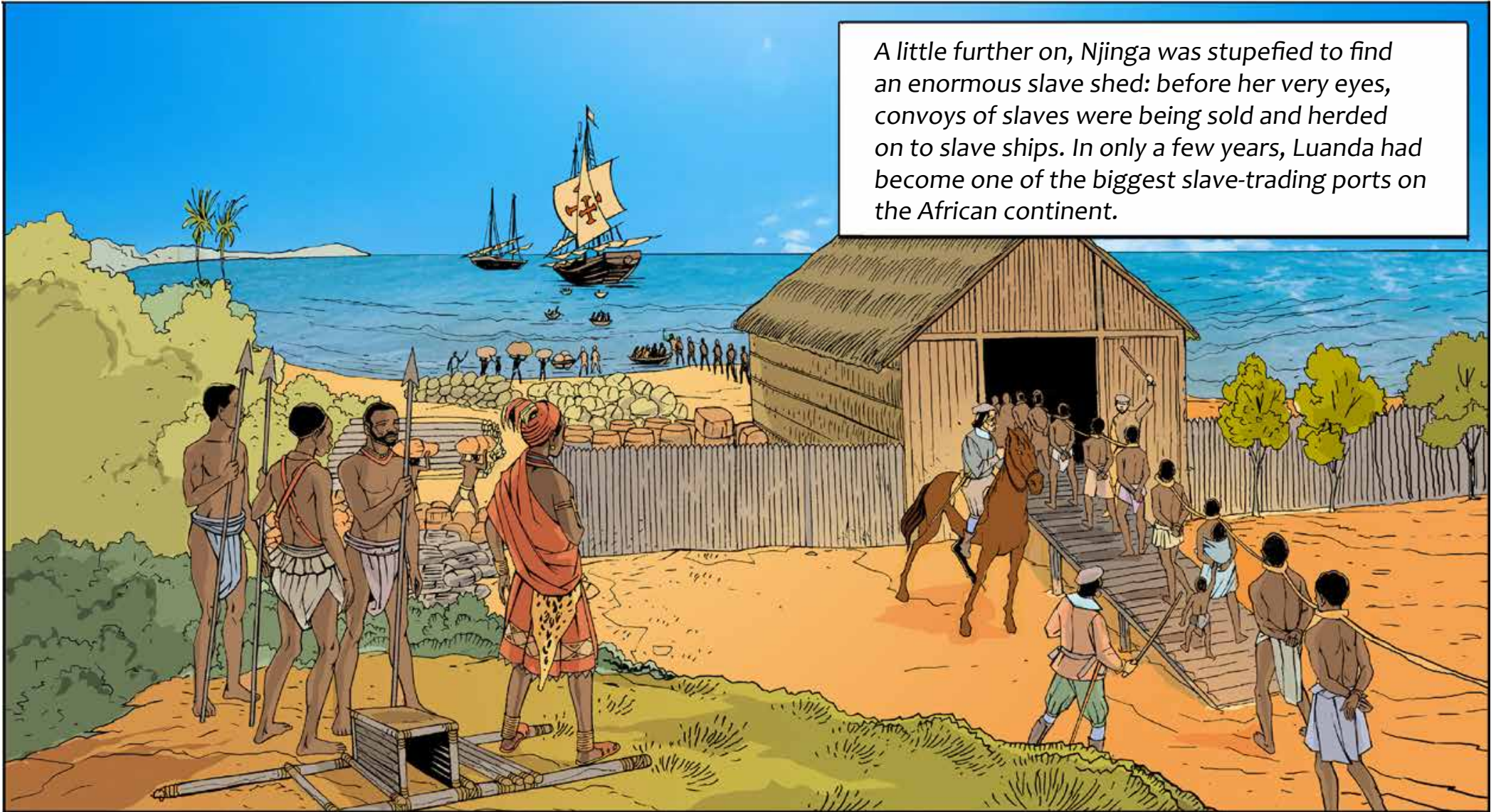
Luanda! Njinga saw the colonial trading post for the first time.



There were many buildings in the old African village and many more inhabitants than in the past – whites, blacks as well as a new population of mixed origin people.



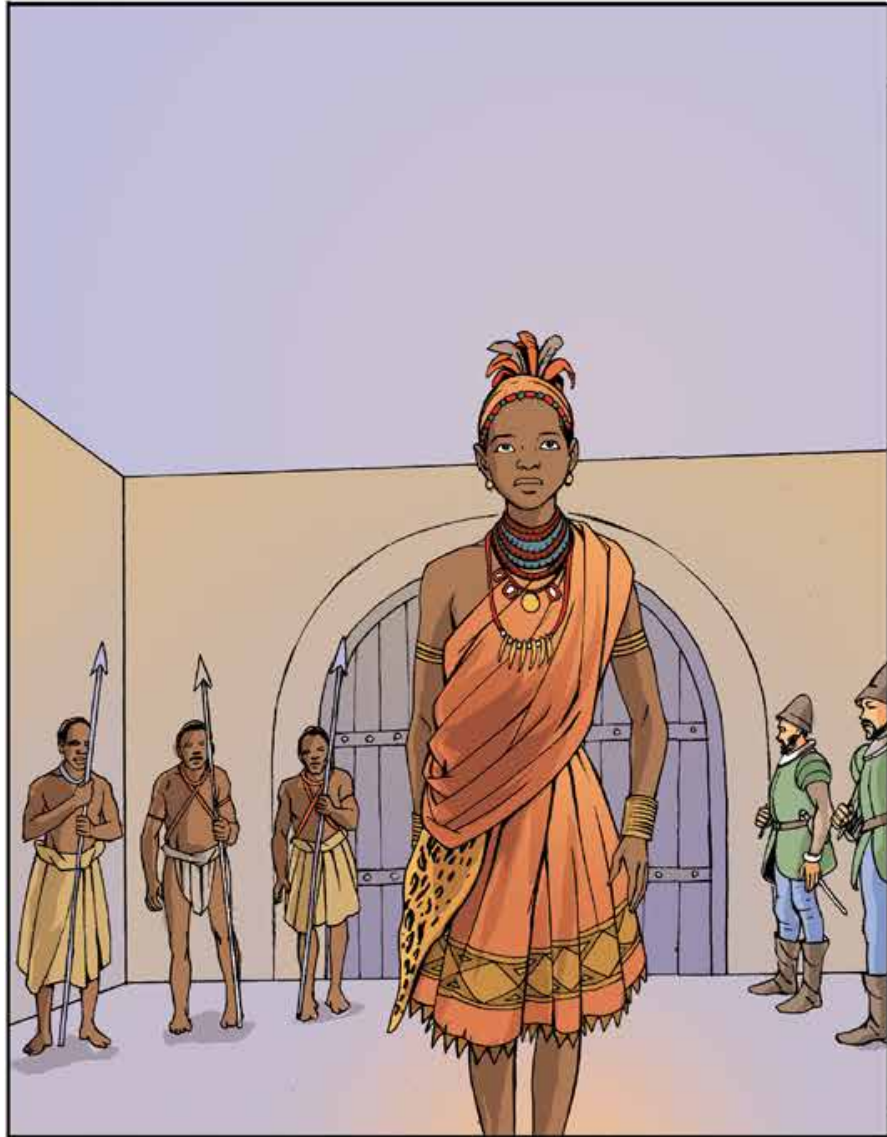
A little further on, Njinga was stupefied to find an enormous slave shed: before her very eyes, convoys of slaves were being sold and herded on to slave ships. In only a few years, Luanda had become one of the biggest slave-trading ports on the African continent.



Shortly after she arrived, the Portuguese welcomed Nzinga graciously and placed a residence at her disposal.



Just before the negotiations, Njinga stood to one side, thinking of the men, women and children on board the slave ships. Where were they going? What did fate have in store for them? She also thought sadly of her son, murdered by her brother a few years before.



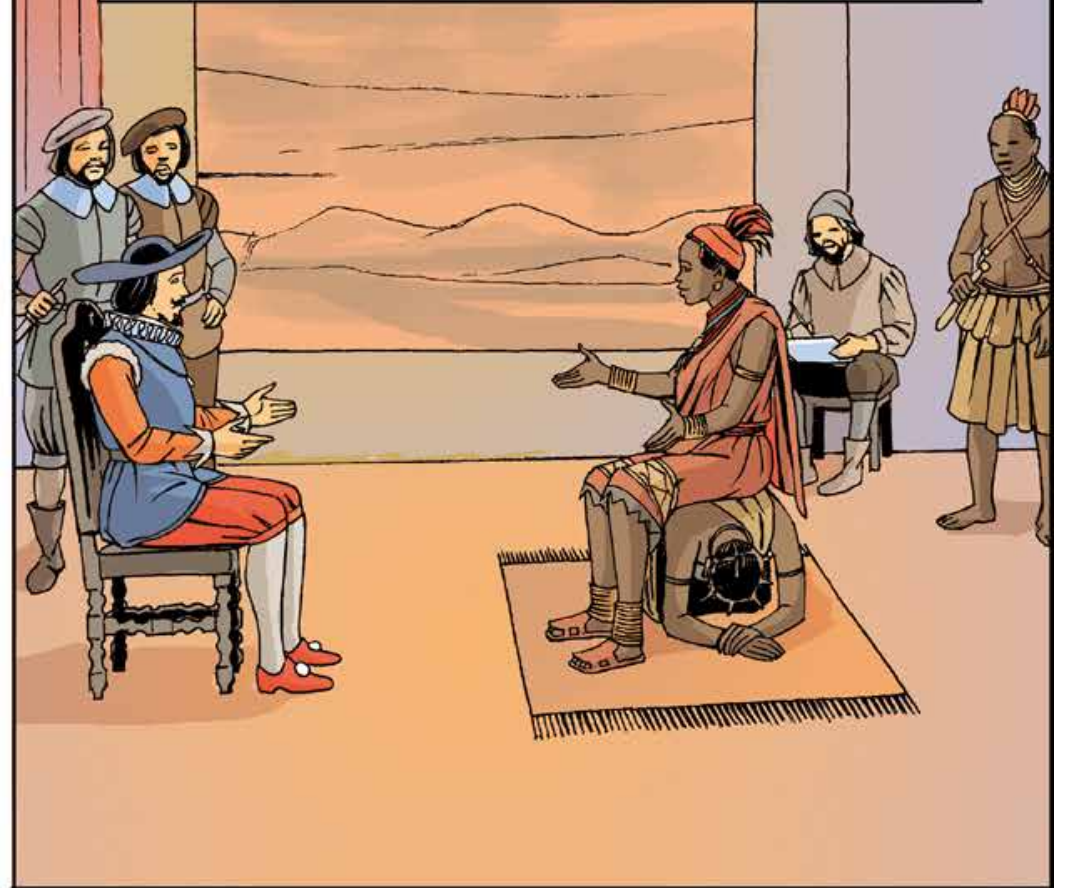
The time for negotiations had come, but when Njinga arrived at the palace, she was astounded to find that she was to sit on a carpet spread out before her in the reception room, while the Captain-General sat in a spacious armchair.



Njinga communicated her wishes to her maid with a mere look: the maid immediately crouched on all fours in front of her so that Njinga could sit on her back.



With that eminently regal gesture, Njinga suggested to the Governor that she had not come to swear allegiance to him, but to negotiate on an equal footing. The negotiations then began.



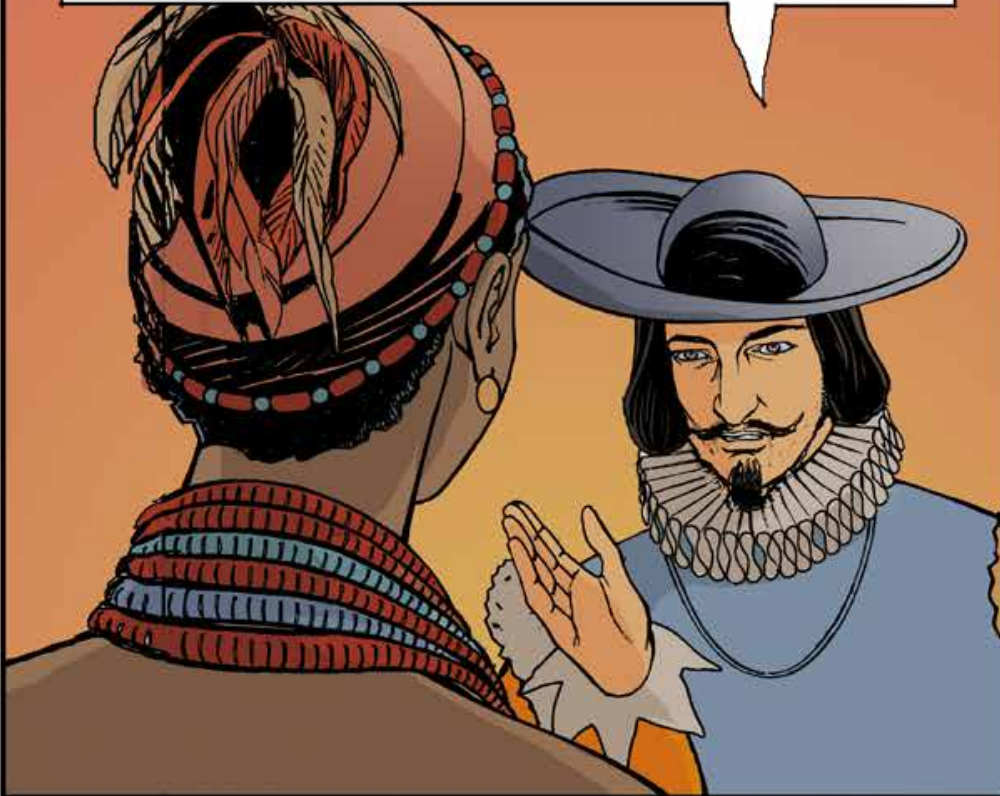
Madam, we offer you peace on condition that all of our prisoners of war are released.

We have no objection to this. It will be done... as soon as you undertake to respect our borders and cease using brute force to occupy our territory.

The negotiations were hard but courteous. The Governor, like the rest of the assembly, was surprised by Njinga's eloquence and her command of Portuguese. He had not expected such a formidable adversary.



Madam, you have our word, Ndongo's new borders will be respected. Furthermore, we are prepared to place your kingdom under the protection of the King of Portugal in return for an annual tribute of 12,000 slaves.

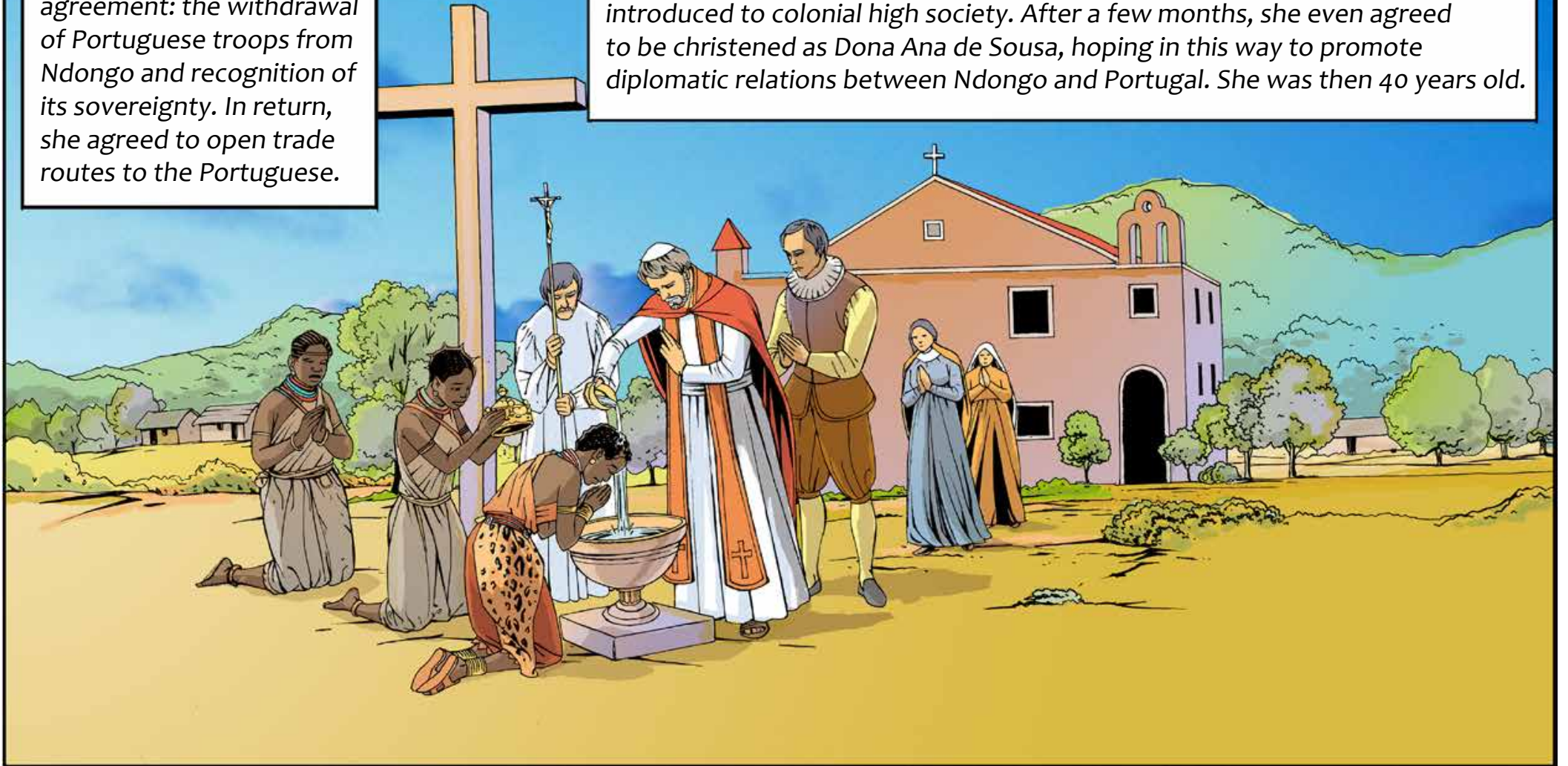


Sir, you are demanding a tribute from a people whom you have pushed to the absolute limit. Surely you know that if we pay such a tribute in the first year, we will declare war the following year in order to be released from it. Do not ask for more than we can grant!

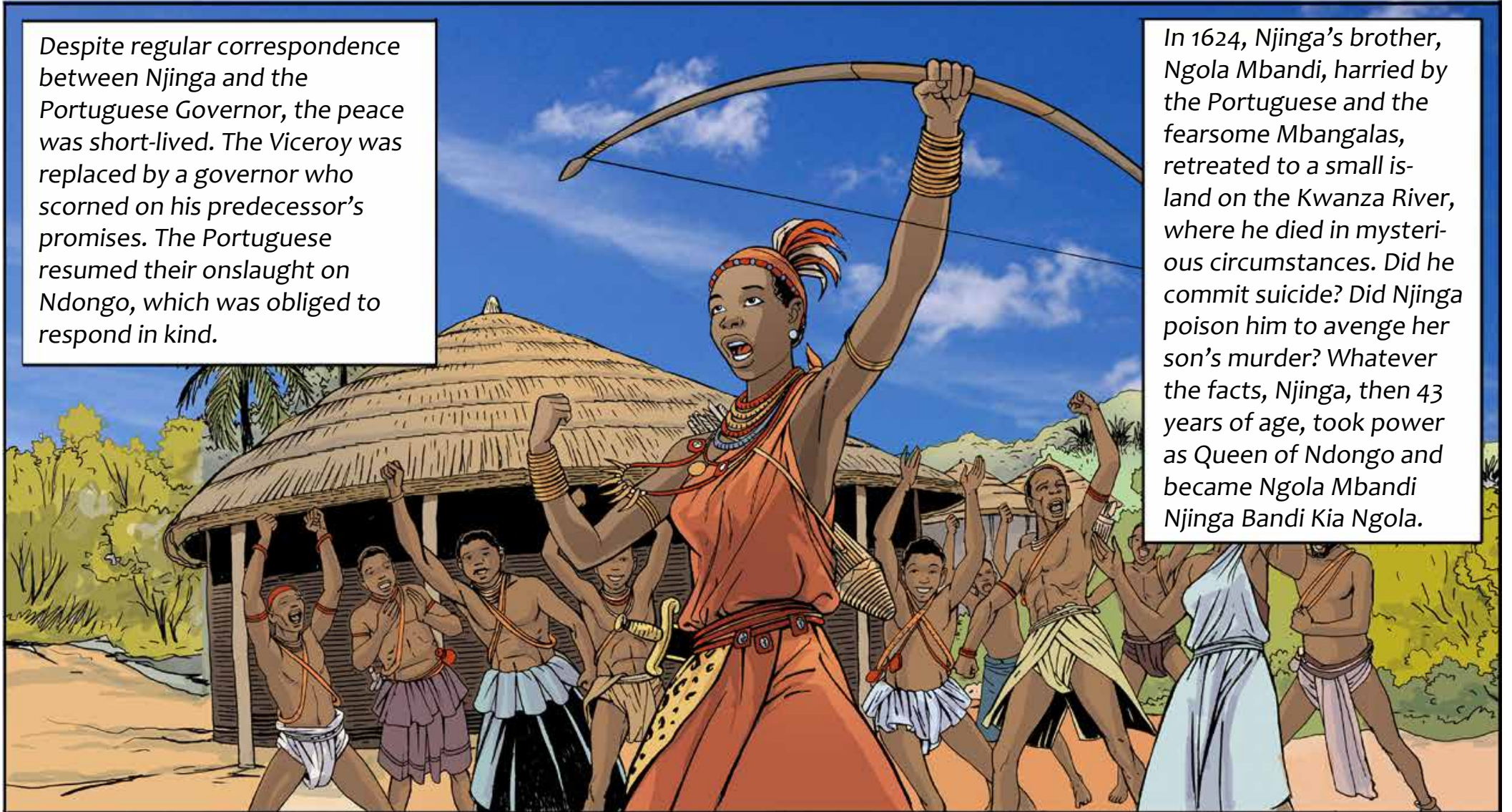


Njinga reached a twofold agreement: the withdrawal of Portuguese troops from Ndongo and recognition of its sovereignty. In return, she agreed to open trade routes to the Portuguese.

At the Governor's invitation, she extended her stay in Luanda and was introduced to colonial high society. After a few months, she even agreed to be christened as Dona Ana de Sousa, hoping in this way to promote diplomatic relations between Ndongo and Portugal. She was then 40 years old.

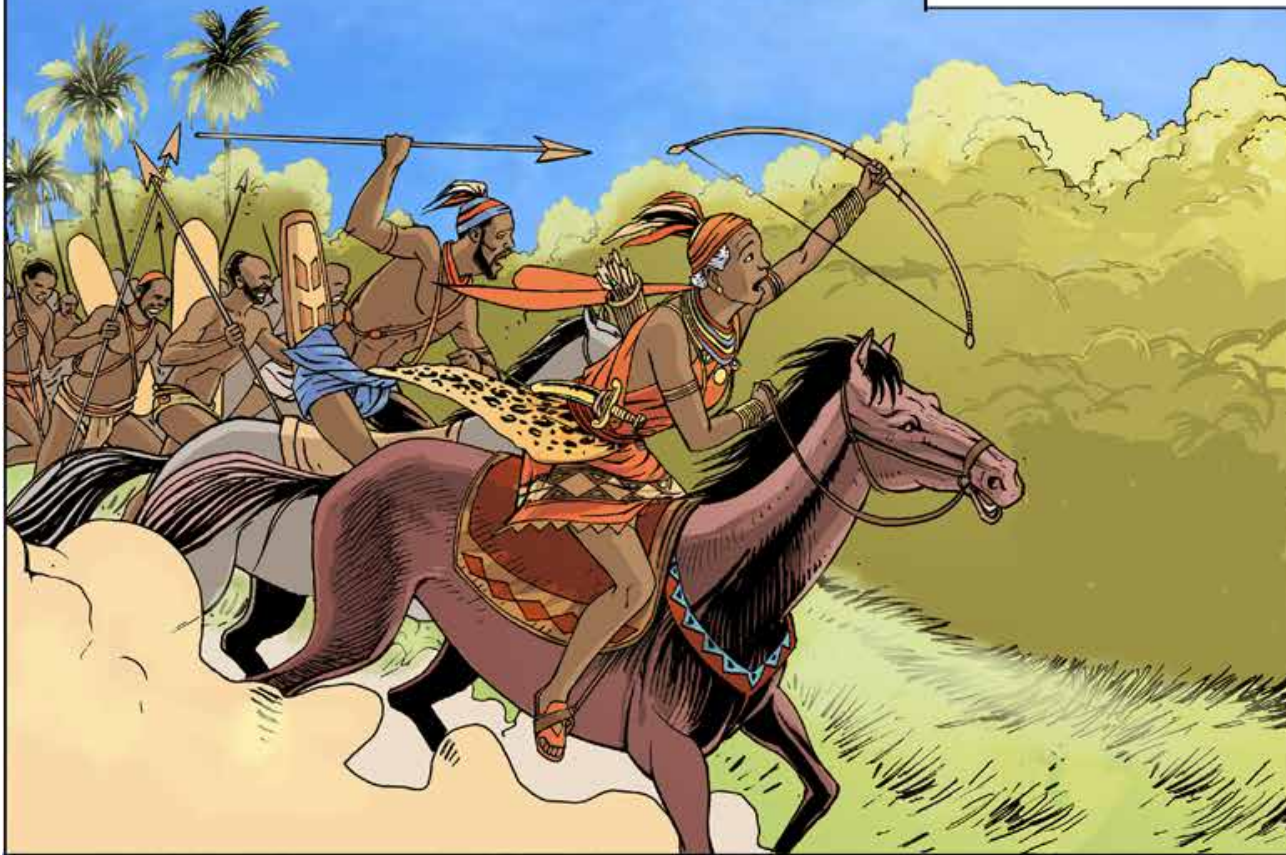


Despite regular correspondence between Njinga and the Portuguese Governor, the peace was short-lived. The Viceroy was replaced by a governor who scorned on his predecessor's promises. The Portuguese resumed their onslaught on Ndongo, which was obliged to respond in kind.



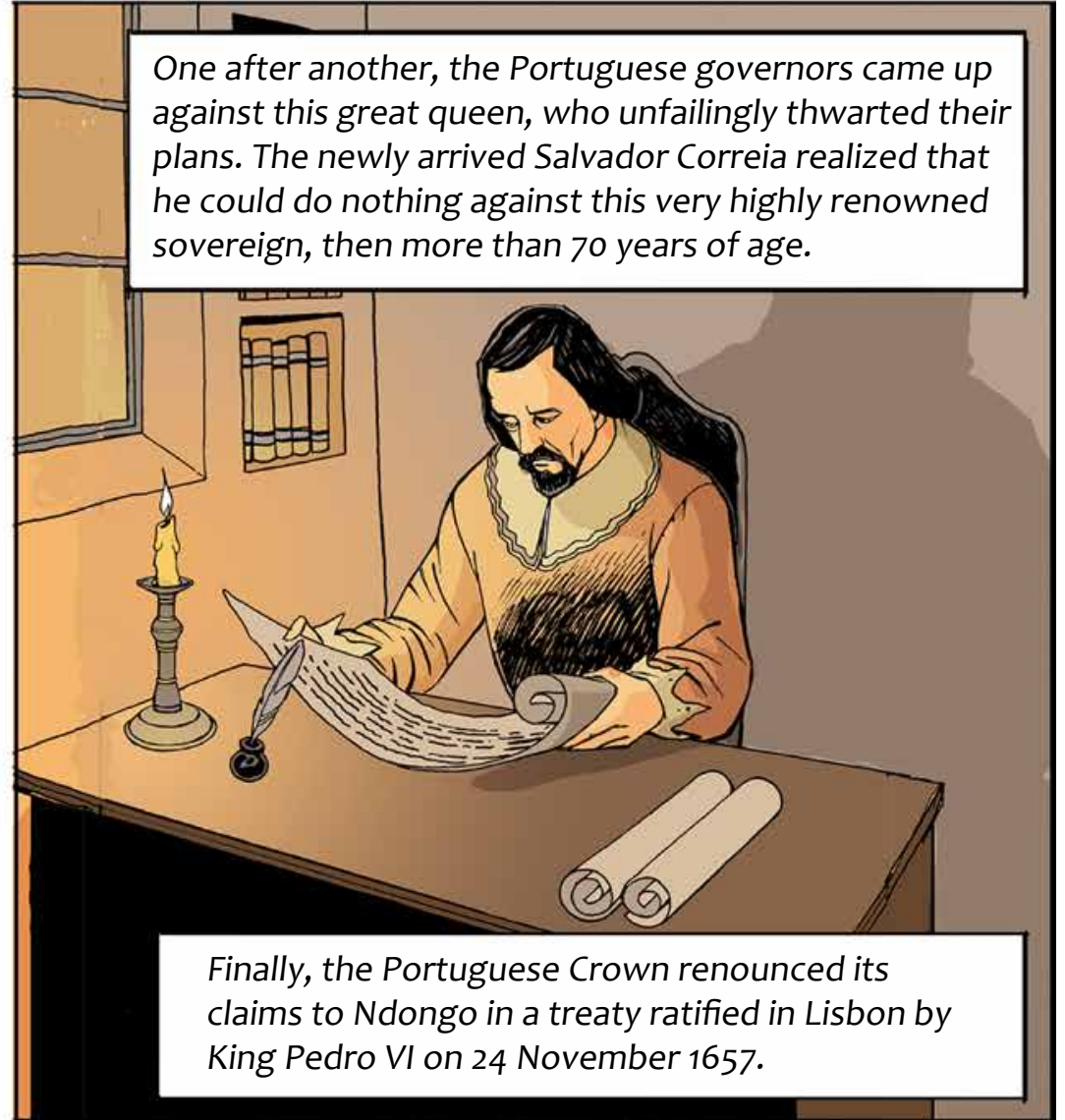
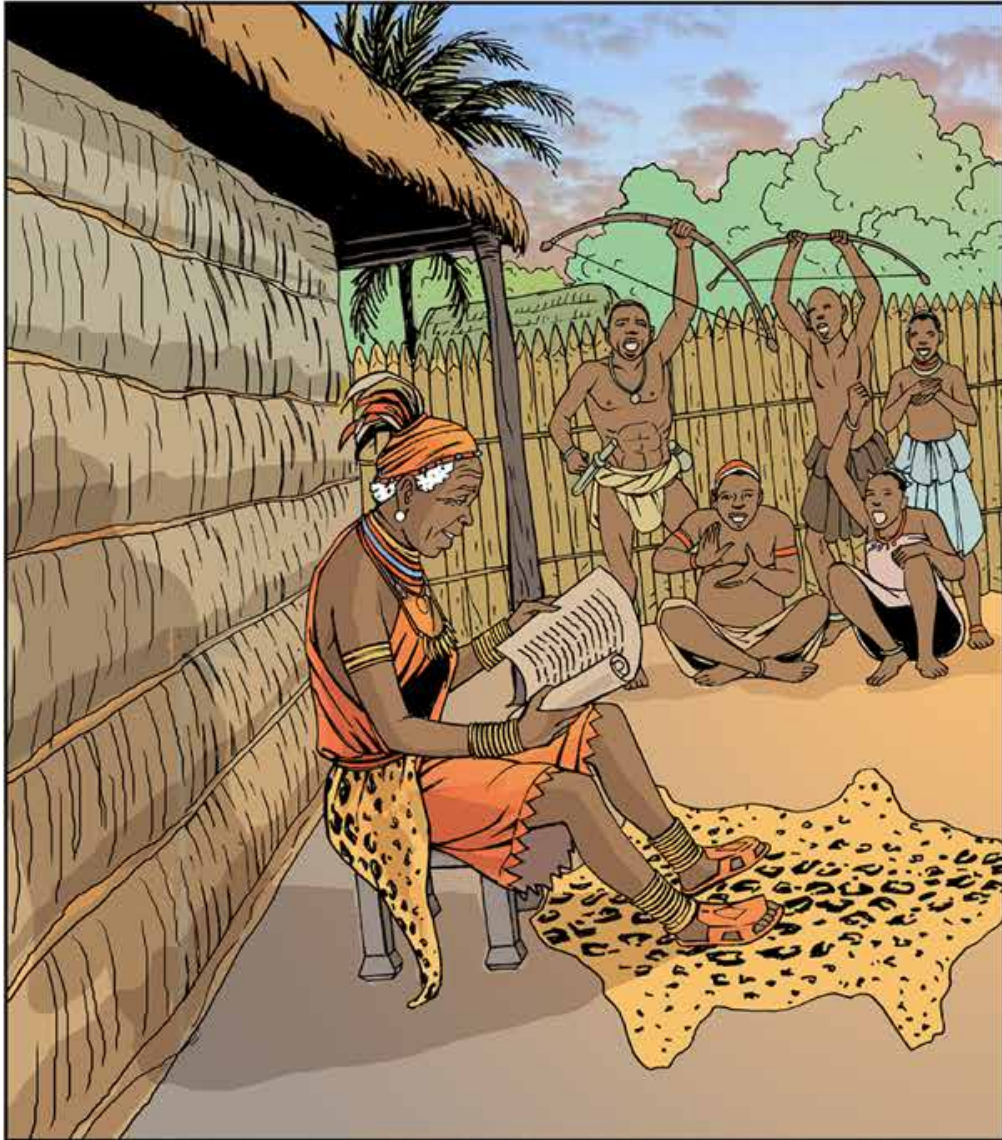
In 1624, Njinga's brother, Ngola Mbandi, harried by the Portuguese and the fearsome Mbangalas, retreated to a small island on the Kwanza River, where he died in mysterious circumstances. Did he commit suicide? Did Njinga poison him to avenge her son's murder? Whatever the facts, Njinga, then 43 years of age, took power as Queen of Ndongo and became Ngola Mbandi Njinga Bandi Kia Ngola.

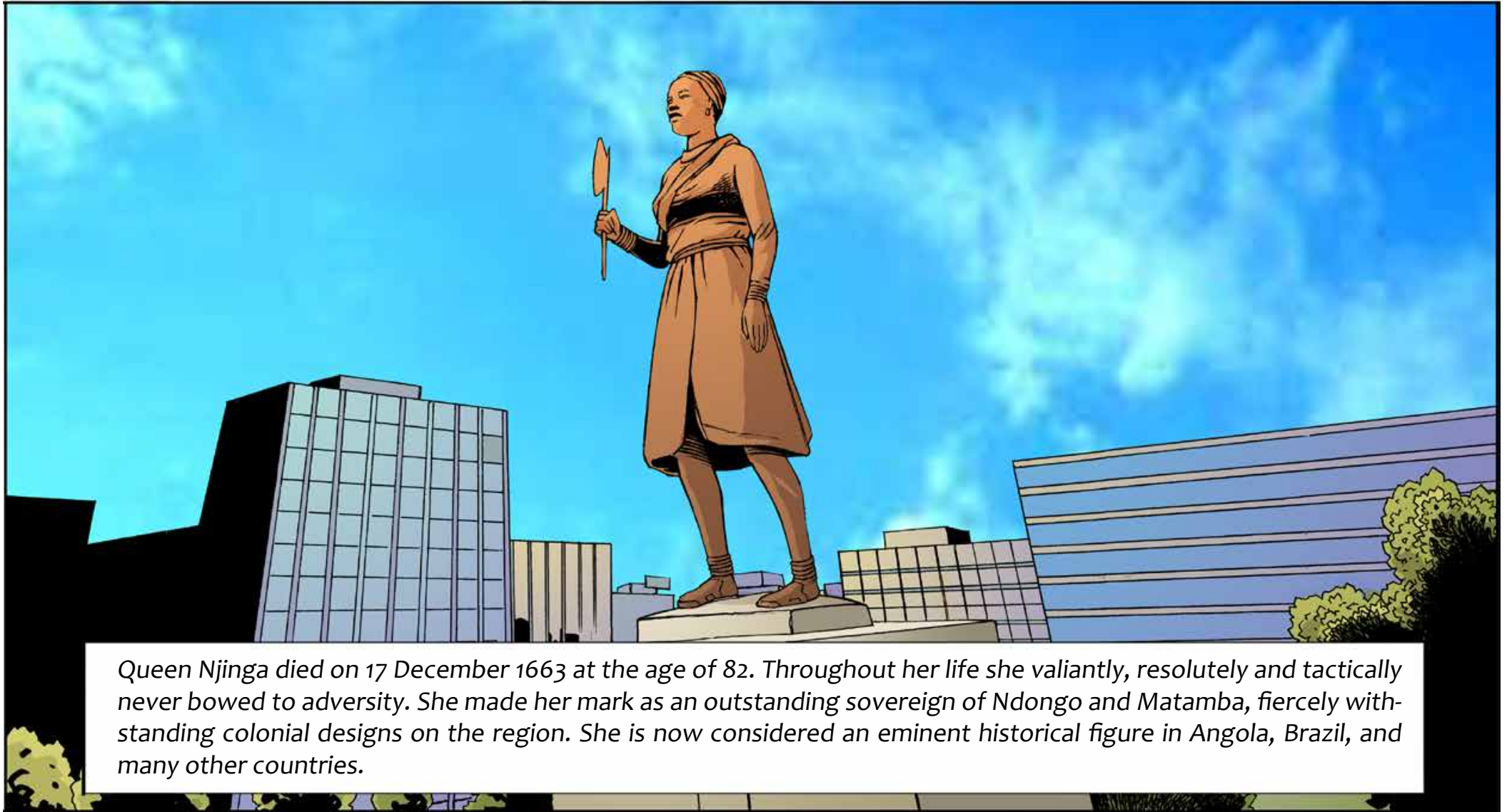
She asserted her authority over the local chieftains, conquered the neighbouring Kingdom of Matamba and staunchly defended her two kingdoms.



During the four decades of her rule, the Queen of Ndongo and Matamba vigorously opposed Portugal's colonial designs, building strategic alliances, maintaining a diplomatic correspondence and often directing military operations in person.







Queen Njinga died on 17 December 1663 at the age of 82. Throughout her life she valiantly, resolutely and tactically never bowed to adversity. She made her mark as an outstanding sovereign of Ndongo and Matamba, fiercely withstanding colonial designs on the region. She is now considered an eminent historical figure in Angola, Brazil, and many other countries.

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Njinga Mbandi, Queen of Ndongo and Matamba

Njinga Mbandi (1581–1663), Queen of Ndongo and Matamba, defined much of the history of seventeenth-century Angola. A deft diplomat, skilful negotiator and formidable tactician, Njinga resisted Portugal’s colonial designs tenaciously until her death in 1663.

Women in African History

Through various pedagogical resources and the use of Information and Communication technologies (ICTs), UNESCO seeks to highlight the legacy of a selection of key women figures of African history and its diaspora. This project demonstrates that African women have always distinguished themselves in the history of their continent in areas as diverse as politics (Gisèle Rabesahala), diplomacy and resistance against colonization (Njinga Mbandi), the defense of women’s rights (Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti), and environmental protection (Wangari Maathai).

This list of 20 women 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 resources, please visit the website www.unesco.org/womeninafrica

The UNESCO project *Women in African History* was realized with the financial contribution of the Republic of Bulgaria.



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