As Lyongo grew in perfection, he became a mature man, he was a true man and his beauty of appearance increased...

The sultan said to them, praising him (Lyongo) to these men of Galla (Kenya), even though a hundred men press upon him, they cannot overcome him and they flee away

The Song of Lionogo
an Indian Ocean Mythological Remix

Written and illustrated by
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Foreword by
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Smithsonian National Museum of African Art
This graphic novel is part of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art’s multiyear series of programming, Connecting the Gems of the Indian Ocean: From Oman to East Africa.

http://africa.si.edu/50years/oman
CALLING ALL HEROES AND HEROINES...

WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE TO BE A MYTHICAL SWAHILI HERO, OR HIS DAUGHTER, OR HIS ENEMIES? HOW CAN CONTEMPORARY ART CONTRIBUTE TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION? THE FOLLOWING CHARACTER STUDIES AIM TO PROVIDE YOU WITH THE TOOLS TO LAUNCH YOUR OWN IMAGINATIVE SOJOURN INTO THE MOVEMENTS OF PEOPLES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN WORLD. THE PURPOSE OF THE GRAPHIC NOVEL FORMAT IS TO OFFER AN ORIGINAL MEDIUM THAT COMBINES VISUAL ART, STORYTELLING, AND HISTORICAL INSIGHTS.

THE LEGEND OF LIONGO IS BASED ON A REAL PERSON WHO LIVED AROUND 1300, ALTHOUGH THE EXACT DATES ARE NOT KNOWN. FAMOUS FOR HIS BATTLE PROWESS AND MASTERY OF POETRY, HIS LEGEND HAS MOSTLY SURVIVED THROUGH ORAL TRADITION. THE HISTORICAL LIONGO WAS PROBABLY OF PERSIAN DESCENT AND THE BROTHER OF A LOCAL CHIEF. CONDEMned TO DEATH, THE LEGEND GOES, FOR OVERRACING HIS AUTHORITY, LIONGO COMPOSED A MESSAGE CODED IN SONGS TO HIS MOTHER, HATCHING A PLAN FOR HIS RELEASE. SWAHILI POETRY AND ORAL CULTURE HAVE PRESERVED LIONGO'S STORY UNTIL TODAY, INCLUDING MANY POEMS THAT ARE ATTRIBUTED TO LIONGO HIMSELF.


IN THIS GRAPHIC NOVEL, WE USE LIONGO AS A LAUNCHING POINT FROM WHICH TO CONSIDER THE INTRICACIES OF EAST AFRICAN CULTURE AND HISTORY. WE HOPE THAT THE FOLLOWING HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND GRAPHIC NARRATIVE WILL INSPIRE YOU TO CREATE YOUR OWN STORY OF A SWAHILI HERO AND HIS ADVENTURES. SUBMIT YOUR ORIGINAL STORIES TO US ON THE SMITHSONIAN WEBSITE, AND ADD YOUR VOICE TO THE LEGEND OF LIONGO.

WHAT IS THE INDIAN OCEAN WORLD?

LIONGO AND HIS COMPANIONS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION REPRESENT A RICH COSMOPOLITAN SOCIETY THAT BOTH FLOURISHED AND STRUGGLED IN THE PRESENCE OF A CACOPHONY OF LANGUAGES, RELIGIONS, AND CULTURAL PRACTICES LONG BEFORE EUROPEANS BECAME THE DOMINANT PRESENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. INDEED, THE PATTERNS OF EXCHANGE BETWEEN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA AND EAST AFRICA ARE ALMOST AS OLD AS HUMAN HISTORY ITSELF. AT LEAST TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO AND BEFORE THE ADVENT OF ISLAM, ARABS Sailed TO THE SWAHILI COAST IN SEARCH OF IVORY TO CARRY TO CHINA AND INDIA AND WOOD FOR THE DESERT COMMUNITIES OF ARABIA. IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE IN THESE COMMERCIAL EXCHANGES, THEY LEARNED LOCAL LANGUAGES AND DEVELOPED, IN COOPERATION WITH THEIR AFRICAN PARTNERS, ACCEPTED PRACTICES OF DECORUM AND TRADE THAT WOULD FACILITATE ONGOING CONNECTIONS. SWAHILI WORDS LIKE USTAARABU (CIVILIZATION), LINGWA (GOOD WILL, GOOD MANNERS), AND HESHIMA (RESPECT) REPRESENT NOTIONS OF THE SHARED CULTURAL VALUES THAT SUPPORTED THESE RELATIONSHIPS.


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WHAT IS THE INDIAN OCEAN WORLD (CONT.)?

Coastal populations suffering from a scarcity of natural resources have long turned to the sea, seeking greater fortunes on new horizons. Such was the case for various OMANIS, MADRASI, BAKUHSI, KASHMIS, GUJRATIS, and others of the coastlines around the Indian Ocean. When they established trading communities along the richly endowed East African Coast, The葡萄牙人, DUTCH, FRENCH, AND ENGLISH who traversed the Indian Ocean conducted trade relying on the force of guns, soldiers, and armed fortresses. The merchants who were indigenous to the Indian Ocean region, however, did not have the resources to militarily dominate the region, and sought to fit in with local culture, forge new relationships, and even settle in a new continent for several generations in pursuit of advantageous trade.

OMAN AND EUROPE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

The integration of the Indian Ocean region into the world economy and its emergence as an area of contention in European politics developed over the course of several centuries. The葡萄牙人, many of whom settled for several generations, became prominent in the Indian Ocean at the beginning of the sixteenth century and built fortresses in several port cities around the region, including MUSCAT, MOZAMBIQUE, AND MOMBASA. In the seventeenth century, OMANIS, in the midst of political and social changes at home, seized the opportunity of Portuguese decline to strengthen their own presence in East Africa. After the OMANIS had expelled the Portuguese from Muscat in 1650, some local communities called on them to combat the Portuguese in East Africa. In East Africa itself, Swahili merchants alternately allied with and hindered these advancing OMANIS, depending on the nuances of their local interests and relationship to the Portuguese presence.

OMAN POWER FLOURISHED IN EIGHTEENTH- AND NINETEENTH- CENTURY EAST AFRICA FOLLOWING THEIR EXPULSION OF THE PORTUGUESE IN THE MID-SEVENTEENTH CENTURY. DURING THIS PERIOD, MERCHANTS AND THEIR LOCAL TRADING PARTNERS PENETRATED INTO THE AFRICAN INTERIOR IN SEARCH OF THE IVORY, FOOD GRAINS, AND MANGROVE POLES THAT MAINTAINED THE VITALITY OF THE INDIAN OCEAN ECONOMY. MERCHANDISE THAT DEPENDED ON LABOR FOR PRODUCTION, ESPECIALLY CLOVES, WERE BOOMING IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY. AS A RESULT, IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURIES, ELITE OMANIS INVESTED HEAVILY IN PLANTATIONS IN ZANZIBAR. AT FIRST THIS SEEMED SO SUCCESSFUL THAT THE OMANI SULTAN SAID BIN SULTAN EVEN MOVED HIS CAPITAL TO ZANZIBAR IN 1840. FOLLOWING HIS DEATH IN 1856, BRITISH AUTHORITIES OVERSAW THE PARTITION OF ZANZIBAR FROM OMAN, OFFICIALLY SEVERING THEIR POLITICAL UNITY.

LET'S WRITE A NEW STORY...

In the following story of catastrophic betrayal and epic courage, the Swahili hero LIONOGO SETS OUT TO SAVE ZANZIBAR FROM ITS ENEMIES AND REDISCOVER HIS OMANI ROOTS. BUT LIONOGO NEEDS YOUR HELP IN COMPLETING HIS STORY: HOW MUCH POWER CAN ONE MAN OR WOMAN HAVE IN THE FACE OF ECONOMIC BOOM AND BUST AND POLITICAL INTRIGUE? HOW WOULD THE SPIDER HAVE EXPERIENCED THE LONG ABSENCE OF HER FATHER, OR ENVISIONED HER ROLE AS A BRAVE YOUNG WOMAN FROM OMAN? STUDY THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERS, AND OPEN YOUR IMAGINATION TO THE REGION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN...

5 sheriff, slave, spice & ivory in Zanzibar, 1842.
6 sheriff, slave, spice & ivory in Zanzibar, 8.
7 sheriff, slave, spice & ivory in Zanzibar, 22.
REMIXING MYTHOLOGY: THE CREATION OF A HERO

IN THE SWAHILI STORIES I READ OF LIONGO, HE WAS PORTRAYED AS A SCOUNDREL; A BULLY ARROGANT AND RUDE BLESSED WITH STRENGTH AND NEAR INVULNERABILITY, A THORN IN HIS PEOPLE’S SIDE. IN MANY WAYS, HE DESERVED TO BE DEFEATED BY THE COPPER NEEDLE. HE HAD IT COMING...

THAT WAS MY FIRST IMPRESSION WHEN I STARTED CREATING THIS PROJECT. AS I WAS READING THE INITIAL RESEARCH SENT, THE STORY OF LIONGO KEPT SPEAKING TO ME. I COULDN’T AVOID IT. HE KEPT CREEPING INTO MY THOUGHTS, SINGING THE SONG HE SANG TO HIS MOTHER SO THAT HE COULD BE LIBERATED FROM CAPTIVITY. HE BEGGED... NAY... DEMANDED THAT HIS STORY BE TOLD.

WELL, I CAPITULATED AND ALLOWED HIM TO TELL ME HIS TALE... SO, HE DID. AND, WHEN HE WAS FINISHED, I COULD ONLY THINK OF ONE THING:

A CHARACTER LIKE THAT IS NOT A HERO. A CHARACTER LIKE THAT IS NO ROLE MODEL FOR CHILDREN MUCH LESS ADULTS. A CHARACTER LIKE THAT DOES NOT INSPIRE OTHERS TO BE BETTER THAN THEY ARE.

BUT, LIONGO WANTED TO BE A HERO. I WANTED HIM TO BE A HERO. THE WORLD NEEDS MORE HEROES. THIS TALE WILL PORTRAY LIONGO AS A HERO.

THE WORLD OF LIONGO IS INFLUENCED BY THE EAST AFRICAN REGION, WHICH WAS INFLUENCED BY THE CROSS POLLINATION OF CULTURES FROM ACROSS THE INDIAN OCEAN, ESPECIALLY THE COUNTRY OF OMAN AND THE ARABIC INFLUENCE ON THE EAST AFRICAN REGION. HOWEVER, THE NOTION OF A HERO, A REAL HERO, IS UNIVERSAL. AND, AS I SAID, LIONGO NEEDED TO BE A HERO.

SO, I TOOK A SECOND LOOK AT LIONGO’S TALE AND TOOK KEY ELEMENTS THAT I THOUGHT WERE CRUCIAL TO THE CHARACTER (I.E. HIS RELATIONSHIP TO OMAN, THE RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS MOTHER). I DID NOT WANT TO RE-TELL HIS TALE, BUT RATHER CREATE A SEQUEL TO THE ORIGINAL STORY. I WANTED TO RE-SHAPE, RE-MIX THE MYTH, AND USE THAT RE-MIX TO CRAFT AN ORIGINAL TALE.

IN THIS TALE, THE LANDS OF ZANZIBAR AND OMAN WOULD TAKE ON A MAGICAL QUALITY IN MY TALE. BECOMING REALMS OF FANTASY AND WONDER.

I MADE LIONGO A LEADER OF HIS PEOPLE, HE BECAME A MAN WHO JOURNEYED FROM THE VELDT TO UNITE AND SAVE THIS NEWLY FORMED BANTU NATION FROM A GREATER THREAT. HE BECAME A MAN WHO SACRIFICED WHAT WAS PRECIOUS TO HIM, HIS COMPASSION AND HIS FAMILY, TO SAVE A WORLD. THAT SORT OF SACRIFICE WOULD PAY A HEAVY TOLL. THAT SORT OF MAN WOULD BECOME COLD. IN SOME WAYS, THAT SORT OF MAN WOULD BE PERCEIVED AS CRUEL...

IN SHORT, HE WOULD BECOME THE HARD MAN.
REMIXING MYTHOLOGY: THE CREATION OF A HERO

BUT, THE MEASURE OF A HERO IS OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES BEFORE HIM. AND, A GREAT HERO, NO MATTER HOW POWERFUL, WOULD NEED HELP IN CONQUERING HIS ENEMIES AND TO RECLAIM THAT WHICH HE HAD LOST...

WHO BETTER TO ASSIST SUCH A MAN THAN HIS OWN CHILD... HIS DAUGHTER?

AS DON QUIXOTE HAD SANCHO PANZA, AS SHERLOCK HOLMES HAD DR. WATSON, AS BATMAN HAD ROBIN, THE HARD MAN WOULD HAVE HIS SUNBIRD. AND THAT SUNBIRD, WHO WOULD COME TO BE KNOWN AS REHEMA WOULD PROVE TO BE THE LYNCHPIN THAT WAS MISSING IN MY STORY.

FINALLY, LIONGO’S NAME WOULD NEED AN UPGRADE AS WELL. LIONOGO WOULD BE THE EVOLUTION OF LIONGO, THE FINAL TRANSFORMATION FROM SCOUNDREL TO HERO.

SO, WAS LIONGO A Jerk? YES. BUT, HE HAS GROWN. HE HAS MATURED. HE HAS EVOLVED. HE HAS BECOME LIONOGO, THE HARD MAN...

AND, THE HARD MAN IS A HERO THROUGH AND THROUGH.

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Jiba Molei Anderson is the owner of Griot Enterprises and creator of its flagship property The Horsemen. He has also written the educational text Manifesto: The Tao of Jiba Molei Anderson, and maintains The Afrosoul Chronicles, a blog dedicated to the discussion of race, politics and the business of popular culture.

Currently, Mr. Anderson is a professor at Chicago State University, teaching courses in Animation, Video Game Design and Multimedia. He is also the Creative Director for young adult publishing company Cedar Grove Books, and speaks across the country promoting comic books and graphic novels as tools for education in the exploration of race, culture and identity.

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THE SWAHILI COAST

THE WORLD OF LIONOGO

East Africa has a rich history of kingdoms and trade networks that are known to historians. In fact, it is home to one of the earliest known kingdoms in the world—Nubia (also known as Karmah and Kush). Other kingdoms that developed in East Africa include Aksum (about 1st to 10th century CE), the Buganda Kingdom (14th to 20th century CE), Rwanda (15th to 19th centuries), and the Swahili coast city-states (11th to 16th century CE).

Nubia, located in the Sudanese Nile river valley, is the earliest of these kingdoms, dating back to 5,000 years ago. It was a region well-known to the Egyptians, rivaling the early Egyptian civilizations in power and wealth.

Aksum was a large empire that was located in what is today Ethiopia and Eritrea. It is remembered for its splendid gold coins, stone monuments (some surpassing those of the Egyptians in size), and elaborate palaces. During the 4th century, King Ezana adopted Christianity as the religion of the empire. Later in the 6th century, Aksumite kings extended their empire as far as southern Arabia for a time. Aksum was an important part of extensive international trade networks.

Historians say that Arab commerce with the East African coast could go back as far as the 2nd century BCE. East African trade with India came later, around the 7th century CE. As a consequence of the international trade that developed in this region, markets became focused on urban centers along the coast with concentrations of wealth and power. Some of the most prominent market towns that developed are Mogadishu, Shanga, Kilwa, and Mombasa. The merging of African, Arab, and Indian peoples along the East African coast (from southern Somalia to northern Mozambique) produced a unique language (Kiswahili) and culture (Swahili), which still exist today. Swahili is spoken today throughout East and Central Africa, but the majority of Swahili speakers reside in Kenya and Tanzania.

From: http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curriculum/en19/activity1.php
DRAMATIS PERSONAE
Lionogo, The Hard Man

Lionogo is the ancient hero of Swahili myth. His mother is Deviganzu, the elder of the Earth, where he derives his strength. He is a mighty warrior, incredibly tall and nearly invulnerable.

Lionogo sacrificed his compassion for the power of the elders, the voice and the song. He was able to defeat the magic and free the Bantu nation from the grip of Jok, the Serpent, and his Bulungu hordes.

The saga calls him the hard man whose heart is stone.

His envious nephew, Hemedi, wounded him with a copper needle dipped in poison. As the poison burned in Lionogo’s veins, he knelt, leaning against his bow so that his death would not be seen.

However, Lionogo was not dead, merely sleeping, as a son of the Earth, so long as his feet touched ground, he could not truly perish.

Now, the serpent strikes again, reviled by Ruhama, the Sunbird. Lionogo must find his voice and sing the song that would free Zanzibar and the Bantu nation from the serpent’s clutches.

He must return to the land of Oman to reclaim the voice that will bring salvation to both worlds.
REHEMA, THE SUNBIRD

She was an orphan, a beautiful little gem from the fabled land of Oman. No one knew her name when she appeared at the gates of Zanzibar. She had none. Still, the elders welcomed her with open arms and they called her beloved.

She became handmaiden to Devaguru, the Earth Mother, who treated her more like a daughter than a servant. She was ready to lay down her life for her mistress when the Malaya stormed the gates of Zanzibar, and Jok, the Serpent, seized the bridge. But, Devaguru had a different destiny in mind for her young charge.

The Earth Mother gave the young Sunbird a vial, a bow, quiver of arrows and a scimitar, all of the weapons were enchanted, all of them belonging to Lonogo.

"Go to my son's resting place," Devaguru said, "pick the contents of the vial down his throat. Tell the hard man that his mother has need of him.

And so the Sunbird embarked on her mission, narrowly escaping as Bait Al-Azib, the House of Wonders, was breached and the forces of the Serpent overwhelmed the elders. She descended into the Bantu Nation, already changing from the Serpent's victim in Zanzibar.

She does not know that this quest would give her a name, Rehema, her name will be more than just the little Sunbird's identity. It will be the world's salvation.
JOK, THE SERPENT

Jok was a sorcerer of great knowledge and immense power. He tamed the wylie-beasts, the bullwhips, and created a fearsome army. Yet, this was not enough. He wanted more.

He discovered the power of the Garin, the blackest of magics, and became its master. With the power of these sinister forces at his fingertips, he set out to conquer the Bantu nation and Zanzibar, the realm of wonders.

The Serpent and his Bquentin attacked the Bantu region laying waste to all that opposed him. Only a hard man with the voice of the swamps and the horn of Nsai was able to turn the tide by limiting the Bantu nation and Zanzibar. Ionogo defeated the Maji and cast the Serpent out of Zanzibar and the Bantu nation to the dark lands of Kadiban, cursed to slither the earth as a shadow for eternity.

Though now only a shadow, the Serpent is still very powerful. Jok is the dark thoughts that rest deep within the soul. He will re-enter Zanzibar and shape it in mid-wage. He only needs to find a mortal whose hate matches Jok’s own black heart to shape into the weapon by which the Serpent will conquer the Bantu nation and Zanzibar.
THE MAJJI

His name was Hemedi, the nephew of the great Liongo, the hard man of the Soga and defender of the bridge between worlds. What did that name Hemedi he would never walk through the gates of wonder as a hero of Zanzibar. This made the boy very jealous of his uncle.

And so it happened that the Jok, the serpent, approached this envious young man in the garden of dreams and made a proposition: destroy Liongo. And Hemedi would be hailed a hero delivering the Soga from the stern hand of the hard man.

Hemedi fashioned a copper needle dipped in poison to scratch his uncle. With that, the young warrior sought to poison Liongo while he slept.

But Liongo had very good ears and was awakened to the sight of his nephew standing above him.

A fight ensued, but Hemedi was no match for Liongo’s strength. However, he managed to keep his grip on the copper needle. The young warrior scratched his uncle’s arm with the copper needle and staggered out of Liongo’s bedroom.

The Soga council arrested Hemedi for the crime. He was beaten in the city square for all to see and cast out of the Khoisan nation.

Hate gave him the strength for his journey. To the lands of Khoisan in search of his savior, his new dark master that came to him in dreams.

It was on this road that Hemedi became the Majji, the great elephant beast that would shake the foundation of the worlds.
THE ELDERS OF ZANZIBAR

THE ELDERS OF ZANZIBAR ARE FOUR EXCEPTIONAL MORTALS THAT WATCH OVER THE BANTU NATION AND ZANZIBAR, THE REALM OF WONDERS. EACH ONE A MASTER, CONTROLLING A DIFFERENT ELEMENTAL ASPECT OF CREATION. THROUGH THEIR PERSONALITIES ARE REPRESENTATIVE OF THEIR STATION, THEY ARE GENERALLY BENEVOLENT AND HELP GUIDE THE WORLDS. THEY ARE:

MUNUME: THE CLOUD MAIDEN
She can be warm and soft like a gentle breeze or as hard and fierce as a hurricane tearing through the world. Munume controls the winds that help the show on the Indian Ocean that separates the Bantu Nation and Zanzibar from the Fabled Land of Oman.

ILAI: THE LORD OF STORMS
Blustering, boisterous, loud, gregarious and mercurial. These are some of the words used to describe the Lord of Storms. Powerful of build and a fierce warrior in his own right, Ilai is master of the rain that nourishes the Bantu Nation and provides safe passage between the worlds.

WAI: THE SUN KING
Intense of gaze and of little humor, Wai controls the power of the sun that shines over the Bantu Nation and Zanzibar. He ensures that light reaches the crops so that they may grow and warm the bodies of the worlds so that they may enjoy the beauty of creation.

DEVASURU: THE EARTH MOTHER
Devasuru is the elder of the earth providing nourishment to the worlds. Giving the trees that bear fruit a place to rest and grow. It is her duty to birth heroes that will protect the worlds from the forces of darkness. This is why she gave birth to Lonwo...

He is not done with protecting the worlds.
THE SOGA & THE MALAKIA

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN THERE WAS NO BANTU NATION. THERE WERE DIFFERENT VILLAGES EACH WITH THEIR OWN CULTURE, THEIR OWN WAY OF LIVING IN THE WILDERNESS. THE LAND WAS LUSH AND GREEN, THE HUNTING WAS PLENTIFUL AND THERE WAS NO NEED FOR WAR...


TOGETHER IN ARMS, THE TRIBES BECAME THE MIGHTY BANTU NATION AND, WITH THE HELP OF THE HARD MAN, KNOWN AS LIONGOO, DROVE THE SERPENT AND HIS MINIONS BACK TO THE DARK LANDS OF KHOYSAN.

THE MALAKIA, ALSO CALLED THE SUNBEARS BY THE BANTU, ARE AN ORDER OF WARRIOR ANGELS DEDICATED TO PROTECTING THE BRIDGE BETWEEN WORLDS, HOME OF THE ELDER OF ZANZIBAR. THEY ANSWERED LIONGO’S CALL AND FOUGHT WITH THE SOGA AGAINST THE FORCES OF THE SERPENT.

FROM THAT MOMENT ON, THE SOGA AND MALAKIA FORMED AN EVERLASTING ALLIANCE WITH THE SOGA PROTECTING SHANGA, THE BANTU ENTRANCE TO THE BRIDGE BETWEEN WORLDS WHILE THE MALAKIA DEFEND BETH ALAAMU, ZANZIBAR’S ENTRANCE TO THE BRIDGE.
THE BOLTINGIN

The lands of Ahoi-san are home to the Boltingin, the half-hyena monsters that are the stuff of nightmares.

These treacherous beasts are the foot soldiers of Jok, the Serpent, Master of the Gabin.

Now, a Boltingin is a savage and crafty thing, though wiry. It is very fast and strong.

Its claws and fangs are natural tools of destruction. It is a weapon, such as a mamba or ruingu in their hands. The average man would stand little chance against such a creature.
THE SONG OF LIONOGO
Lionogo, leader of the Boga and keeper of the horn of Nsal, was gone.

The son of Swahlu that sacrificed his compassion for strength...

The hero who returned from Oman with the key to the world’s salvation...

The warrior who unified the worlds against jok, the serpent and the boultingin horse...

The hard man that defeated the Maji and made the Bantu nation strong...

Was laid low by a young boy with a poisoned copper needle.
THE SOTA CAST OUT THE CULPRIT, HEMEDI, KIN TO THE HARD MAN, CREDITED FOR LONDGO’S DEMISE.

THEY HAD BEATEN HIM IN THE CITY SQUARE AND LEFT HIM LIKE SO MUCH REFUSE OUTSIDE THE GATES OF SHANGA.

I WAS CAST OUT BY THOSE WHO SHOULD BE CALLING ME A HERO...

I WOULD STORM THE GATES OF ZANZIBAR ITSELF AND DEFEAT THE ELDERS, FORCING THEM TO OBEY MY WILL!

I WILL BRING THE WALLS OF SHANGA DOWN AROUND MY ENEMIES.

Broken, wracked with pain, Hemedi traveled the veil to the lands of Karijan, home to the Boultingin and their master, Juk, the serpent.

His mate, the fuel, that allowed him to endure.
I would give my very soul and pledge unending allegiance to one that could grant such a wish.

That is the correct answer.

The Serpent raised his left hand to the air and began to sing in a low and ominous voice, calling upon his dark power.

Rage kept the boy alive as he felt the dark power surge through his body.

Bones cracked and reformed as muscles swelled, almost bursting with power.

His skin turned grey, tough and hard enough to fend off arrow, spear and sword.

His screams became a thunderous bellow as tusks burst through the skin. Ears flattened, growing long and his nose became an imposing trunk.

Hemedy, the boy, was no more.

Only the Aal, the Great Elephant, remained.
NOW, THE SERPENT HAD HIS SPEAR...  
HE POINTED HIS WEAPON TOWARD SHAUNGA.

WITH LIONOSO GONE, THE SOGA WERE NO MATCH FOR THE AMAJ AND THE BOWLINGPIN HORSES.

THE SWARM OF TERRORS TORE THROUGH THE SOGA’S DEFENSES LIKE SO MUCH OLD AND BRITTLE DRUM SKIN.

JOK HAD HIS ARMY, LED BY HIS GREAT BEAST, TO STORM THE GATES OF ZANZIBAR.
The forces of the serpent stormed the bridge between worlds.

The elders of Zanzibar sent the Malaka, the angelic warriors also known as sunbirds, to defend Zanzibar.

The sunbirds fought valiantly, but it was to no avail.

The serpent means to take Zanzibar!

The worlds still have a champion.

Tell the hard man that his mother has need of him.

Dzivagururi handed the sunbird a vial filled with a potion.

She also gave the young girl a bow, silver of arrows, a bimtar and lidogo’s treasured omani khanjar dagger. All of the weapons were enchanted.

I am ready to lay down my life for Zanzibar and my omani heritage!

She descended into the realm of the Bantu nation, already corrupted by the serpent’s victory in Zanzibar.

She had to hide her identity as this new and frightening reality held neither refuge nor solace for her.
The Songbird travelled the treacherous terrain arriving at Lionogo's final resting place.

She came upon Lionogo's body, perfectly preserved.

The Songbird pulled the vial from her robes, poured the golden liquid down the sleeping warrior's throat and waited for what seemed like an eternity. Still nothing.

As she turned to walk away, a strong hand gripped her arm. The eyes of Lionogo, staring with a piercing gaze, greeted her.

You have been asleep for a very long time.

The elders have need of you.

Will you honor their request, or must I return with news that you are still the hard man of legend we were warned about?

Lionogo and the Sunbird emerged from the tomb to step into a world he fought so hard to prevent.

He tasted the serpent's influence in the air. It was bitter. Though Lionogo witnessed the dark place with eyes of steel, he resolved...
Create a comic book page!

How will The Serpent try to stop our heroes?
What is the secret Lionogo is hiding from The Sunbird?

Create a comic book page!
The sunbird awoke in the middle of the night to a melody she had not heard since she was a child.

The voice was raspy and struggled with a note or two, but still so beautiful, so sad.

We must go home to Oman...

This was a beautiful place once,

The world, the sky, the sea, the plains, the Bantu people... it was a place of wonder and joy, the gem of the Indian Ocean.

This was a world that needed to be protected, and I would sacrifice anything, everything, to keep this world safe.

At the time, I thought it a small sum to be a great warrior and to defend my home.

I became harder, crueler, my wife was carrying my child and my cold demeanor pushed her away...

My wife was Oman, our daughter, would be of Oman as well...

I sing for them...

I sing for you... my renema...

You gave up so much for this world.
The rocks shimmered before the sunbird’s eyes.

The pebbles began to fall away like the sweat from a cool drink, growing in intensity as stone flowered like water and drained into the ocean.

A majestic dhow sat in the dock, sails unfurled, ready for travel.

Ah, my little sunbird...

You should know by now that anything is possible.

Unknown to the heroes, Jok discovered their mission...

While in the water, the dhow was attacked by the serpent’s foul magicks...
Lionogo and The sunbird are attacked! Who, or what, attacks them?
Lionogo needs the sunbird to be free... What does he give her to escape?
He gave her a name... as any father would to his child.

She opened her eyes as if it were the first time that she saw the world.

Liongo was gone, lost in the attack.

I turn not my back if evil is before me.

And my heart faces it and seeks evil wherever it is.

I will strive for rank. Having rank, striving against wrong and wrong, 'tis my soul meets its fate.

And, I will not fail you, father.

He allowed himself to be taken to make sure that Rehema would be safe. He sacrificed himself to bring her home.

Oman.

Rehema knew what she had to do.

Rehema journeyed to Aybut al Aliwai, the birthplace of her ancestors.

Once there, she repeated the song of Liongo, the song she heard during their travels.

The ancestors heard their daughter's voice and blessed her with the power of Ngai...

Rehema became the horn. She was now the voice of compassion.

You are the key to the world's salvation. You are the song that must be sung.
Lionogo awoke, peering through dungeon bars.

The hard man was brought to Zanzibar by the serpent's troops, locked in the depths of Beit Al-Ajaib.

His sunbird, Rehema, was nowhere to be found.

It wasn't the first time he had been imprisoned, but this was different.

He wasn't worried for his own life or the world's salvation.

At the moment, the hard man was concerned with one thing...

I sing for your safety and your success, my child.

Never give up when you are nearing the end.

The safety of his newfound daughter.
How does Rehema, the sunbird, free Lionogo, her father?
Rehema entered the Halls of Bet al-Ajab, ready to do battle with the Serpent.

Jok was shocked, enraged that his plans could be thwarted by one so young.

A person who relies on his relative’s property dies poor...

Taste my venom, Serpent!

And with that, Rehema, Sunbird to Zanzibar, the compassion of Oman, began to sing.

Such defiance! Such spirit! Such bravery in the face of utter futility!

There is no one, who does not kneel in supplication! What dares to defy me, a little girl?

Creation is mine to shape! The worlds bow at my feet!
Liono faced the monster that once was the boy who laid him low.

Oh, Hemed!... You foolish little boy...

It did not matter how large or powerful the beast was that stood before him...

He who listens not of his elders, his leg breaks!

The hard man would have satisfaction.
How does the story end? Only you can complete the saga!

Create a comic book page!
Glossary

Muscat:
Current capital of the Sultanate of Oman and the historic seat of the Sultan in the Southern Arabian Peninsula, its natural bay is one of the biggest in the world.

Shanga:
Historic Swahili port city off the Kenyan coast in East Africa, part of the Lamu Archipelago. In the song of Lionogo graphic novel, this is the city of the bridge and of Lionogo himself.

Zanzibar:
Independent city-state of the Tanzanian coast in Eastern Africa. The city was for decades an integral part of the Omani Sultanate in East Africa and for many years seat of the Sultan’s government. In the song of Lionogo graphic novel it is the city of the elders.

Strait of Bab el-Mandeb:
Straits between Djibouti and Yemen that separates Africa from the Arabian Peninsula (Asia) and grants entry into the Red Sea.

Indian Ocean:
Third largest ocean in the world, connecting the Asian and the African continents.

Bantu:
Major culture and language of inland Eastern Africa. Bantu peoples is used as a general label for the 300 - 600 ethnic groups in Africa who speak Bantu languages. They inhabit a geographical area stretching east and southward from Central Africa across the African Great Lakes region down to Southern Africa. Bantu is a major branch of the Niger-Congo language family spoken by most populations in Sub-Saharan Africa. There are about 650 Bantu languages by the criterion of mutual intelligibility.

Swahili:
Major culture and language of Eastern Africa. Also called Kiswahili, it is a widely used lingua franca throughout East and Central Africa. It is a member of the Bantu group of the Niger-Congo family, originally spoken in Zanzibar, and has a large number of loan words taken from Arabic and other languages. The Swahili littoral area encompasses Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Mozambique, as well as the adjacent islands of Zanzibar and Comoros and some parts of the DRC and Malawi. They speak Swahili as their native language.

Swahili culture is the product of the history of the coastal part of the African Great Lakes region, an area that has been influenced by Middle Eastern, Indian, Persian and Portuguese cultures. As with the Swahili language, Swahili culture has a Bantu core that has been modified by those foreign influences.

Arabic:
Semitic language that developed from the language of the Arabians during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, now spoken in countries of the Middle East and North Africa, including Oman.
GLOSSARY

Siwa:
The Siwa Blow Horn is a traditional sign of power, authority and strength in East Africa. Nevertheless, the origin of the Siwa Horn can be traced back to the Assyrian Peoples of Mesopotamia in the Middle East.

Dhow:
The Dhow ships have sailed the Indian Ocean for over 2,000 years. The origin of this ship is disputed between the Omani Arabs, the Swahili and the Indian sailors. During the Golden Age of Swahili commerce, the Dhow would sail as far as Indonesia and China to trade precious African goods such as cloves and ivory for Asian made porcelain. Dhows traditionally have one triangular sail and in many cases are fabricated without the use of a single nail, but rather the wooden pieces are sown together with ropes.

Mission:
Important goal or purpose that is accompanied by strong conviction.

Compassion:
Feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune.

Graphic novel:
Fiction book made up of comics content, this original medium combines visual art, storytelling, and historical insights.

Hero:
Person of distinguished courage or ability, admired for brave deeds and noble qualities.

Elder:
An aged and influential member of a community, a chief.

Hyena:
Doglike carnivore found in Africa and Asia that has large teeth, feeds on carrion and travels in packs.

Ngai:
A spirit in the stories of the Kamba and Kikuyu of Kenya who lives on the mountain Kirinyaga. According to legend, the origin of humanity was fashioned by Ngai from a single tree which split into three pieces.

Magic:
An attempt to understand and exploit supernatural forces, using rituals, symbols, actions, gestures and language. The result of a universal sympathy where some act can produce a result somewhere else, or as a collaboration with spirits who cause the effect. The belief in and the practice of magic has been present since the earliest human cultures and continues to have an important spiritual, religious and medicinal role in many cultures today.
PENCILS

The Elders of Zanzibar
PENCILS

The Maji
We tell great stories...

We have seen many great African American superheroes in comics, but we never saw an iconic African American superhero team. We didn’t have our Justice League, our Avengers. We, as comic book fans of color, young and old, didn’t have a universe where our heroes reside...

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