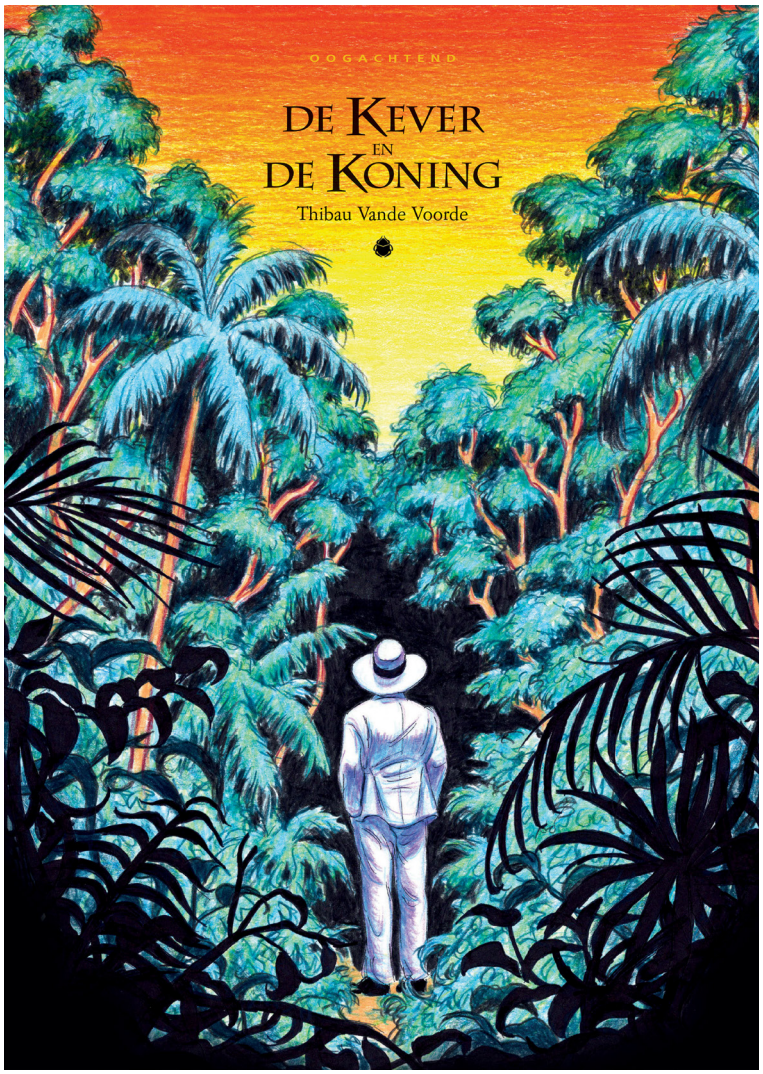


The Beetle and the King

THIBAU VANDE VOORDE

1899. This is the first time Belgian Joseph Lippens travels to the Congo, where his father, one of the main ivory suppliers to King Leopold II, disappeared off the face of the earth several months earlier. It's not long before Joseph's burning ambition comes to the fore, as does his urge to 'civilise'. During the journey through the Congolese jungle, a beetle flies into his ear, which, combined with the heat and his hunger for power, slowly but surely puts him in a feverish trance. Madness takes over.

Thibau Vande Voorde (Leuven, 1995) *is a comic artist and illustrator. His debut De Kever en de Koning (2020), is a reworked version of his master thesis at the LUCA School of Arts in Brussels. At the moment, he is working on a comic-biography of the most infamous Belgian collaborator in the second World War, Léon Degrelle, with support of the Flemish Literary Foundation.*



Visit www.flandersliterature.be for information about translation grants.

"Subtle beauty"

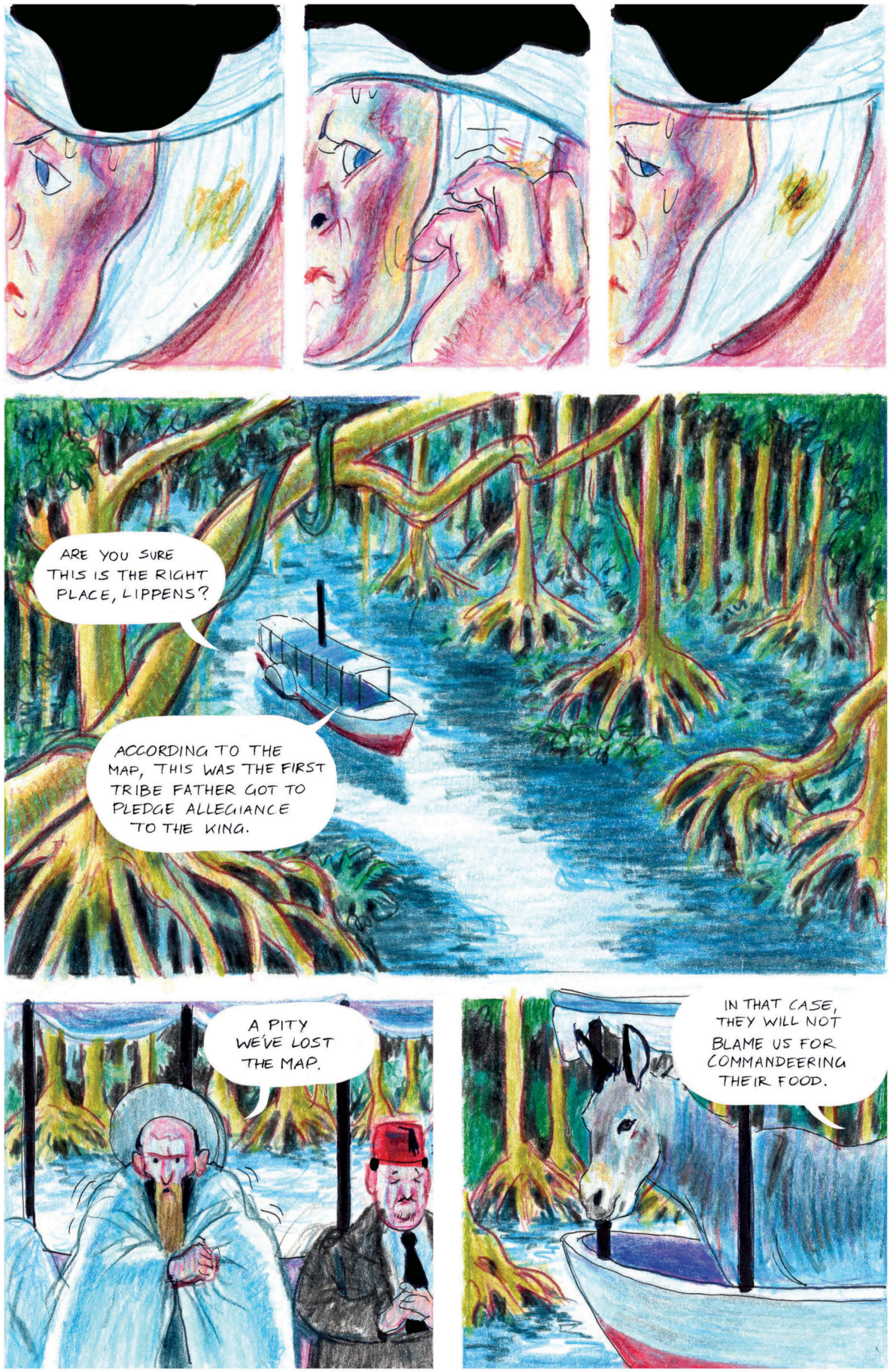
Knack

"Wondrous. Madness in the beauty or beauty in the madness, who's to say?"

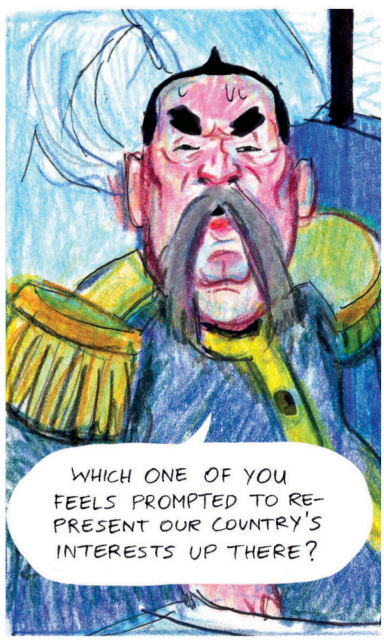
Cutting Edge

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ARE YOU SURE THIS IS THE RIGHT PLACE, LIPPENS?
ACCORDING TO THE MAP, THIS WAS THE FIRST TRIBE FATHER GOT TO PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO THE KING.
A PITY WE'VE LOST THE MAP.
IN THAT CASE, THEY WILL NOT BLAME US FOR COMMANDEERING THEIR FOOD.


ATTENTION, MEN!


WHICH ONE OF YOU FEELS PROMPTED TO REPRESENT OUR COUNTRY'S INTERESTS UP THERE?


I'VE GOT A BACK-ACHE!
THAT'S QUITE A WAY UP!
THERE'S A BIT OF GRAVEL IN MY SHOE!


I'M GOING.


I WILL GUARD THE BOAT!


?!
TOK


WE'RE UNDER FIRE! ATTACK, MEN!
THERE'S ONLY ONE?
BY GOLLY, THESE COONS ARE EVERYWHERE!


WHAT DO THEY HAVE THERE?
WELL, WELL, HIS SKIN ISN'T AS DARK!
THE POOR CREATURE HAS BLUE EYES!
HE'S A MULATTO, THE RESULT OF A WHITE DERELICT WHO INDULGED IN RELATIONS WITH AN INDIGENOUS WOMAN. THE DISGRACE!
HOLD ON A SECOND. HE LOOKS A BIT LIKE...


LIKE LIPPENS!
EXCUSE ME?!
DON'T BE RIDICULOUS! US LIPPENS, WE'VE GOT ONLY THE NOBLEST OF TRAITS ...
BEHOLD MY APPEARANCE. THE ROBUST PROPORTIONS OF THE CHIN.
BALANCED BY THE DELICATELY UPTURNED NOSE.
LIPPENS? YOU KNOW MY FATHER?


DAMN SAVAGES!
WHY ARE THEY ATTACKING US?
THEY ARE ANGRY AT FATHER.
DO YOU KNOW THE WAY TO LIPPENS?
YES.
JUMP IN! WE'RE OUT OF HERE!
TOK
TOK


OUR PROSPECTS AREN'T LOOKING GOOD.
THEY ARE LAUGHING AT YOU.
YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY: ONE ROTTEN APPLE WILL SPOIL THE WHOLE BARREL.
AND THAT POTBELLIED MAN KNOWS IT ALL TOO WELL.


YOU LOOK A LOT LIKE FATHER!
YOU DON'T.
I'VE ALWAYS WANTED A BROTHER!
I DIDN'T.
AND CERTAINLY NOT SOME NIG-NOG WHO DOESN'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A LIPPENS!
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
IT MEANS WE CANNOT REST UNTIL THIS GOD-FORSAKEN COUNTRY HAS REACHED SOME DEGREE OF CIVILIZATION.
A BURDEN YOU WILL NEVER KNOW!

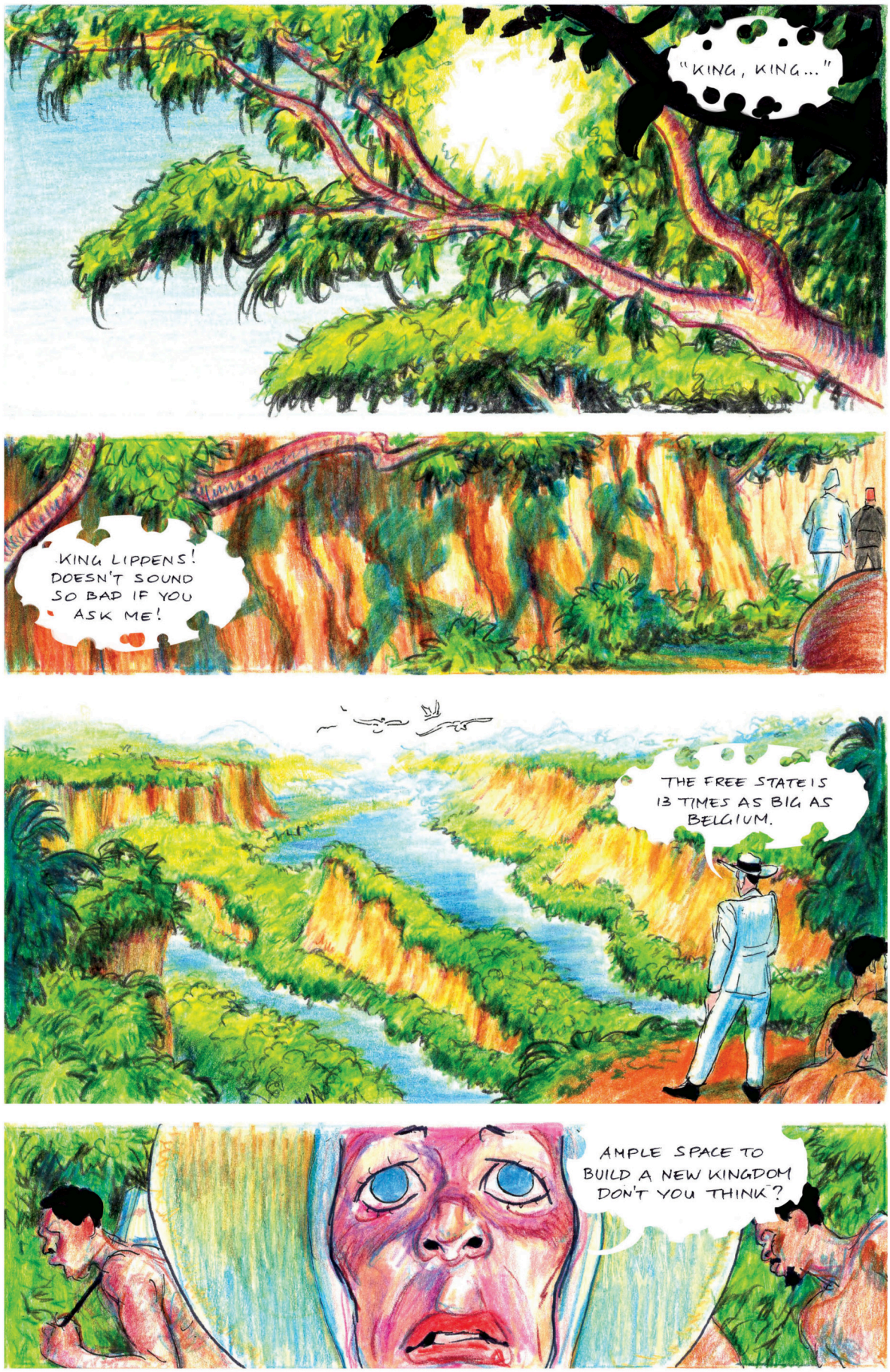

AND UPON OUR RETURN TO BELGIUM AFTER HAVING CARRIED OUT OUR NOBLE JOB HERE TO COMPLETION, WE SHALL BE COMMENDED BY KING LEOPOLD HIMSELF!
BELGIUM MUST BE A VERY MIGHTY COUNTRY, FOR IT TO HAVE SO MANY KINGS!
WHAT?
BEFORE HE SENT ME AWAY, FATHER USED TO TELL ME THAT HE IS KING OF BELGIUM AND THE FREE STATE.


LIPPENS, KING? DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH!
WAIT A MINUTE, WHERE DID YOU GET THIS?
IVORY!
IT'S IVORY!
WHEN I TURNED 13, FATHER SAID HE COULD NO LONGER PERMIT TO HAVE ME AROUND.
HE GAVE ME THE NECKLACE AND TOLD ME TO LEAVE.
THERE'S STILL IVORY UP THERE?
MORE THAN I'VE EVER SEEN ANYWHERE ELSE.


SINCE WHEN HAS LIPPENS HELD HIS CURRENT POSITION?
ABOUT 15 YEARS OF AGE.
AND HOW OLD DO YOU RECKON THE LAD IS?
HE DECLARES HIMSELF KING OF AFRICA AND IS APPARENTLY WELL ON HIS WAY TO CREATE HIS "ROYAL" LINEAGE!
AND MEANWHILE WE GO FOR MONTHS WITHOUT A WORD FROM HIM BECAUSE HE IS SUPPOSEDLY ILL!
I WILL GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS!


GET THE BOAT READY. WE'RE LEAVING!
I WOULD AVOID THE RIVER, THOUGH.
WHAT?
THE TRIBES LIVING ALONGSIDE THE RIVER HAVE RISEN UP AGAINST FATHER, BECAUSE HE SOLD SOME OF THEIR MEMBERS TO THE SWAHILI.
THEY DON'T WANT ANYTHING TO DO WITH ME, AND I CAN ONLY IMAGINE WHAT THEY WOULD DO TO A WHITE MAN.


IF WE TRAVEL OVER THE MOUNTAIN, WE WON'T COME ACROSS ANY TRIBES. I KNOW THE WAY.
ABSOLUTELY NOT! WE WILL STICK TO OUR PRESCRIBED ITINERARY!
IF I MAY, COLONEL COSTERMANS.
I PROPOSE WE TAKE A VOTE. AFTER ALL, WE ARE CIVILIZED MEN HERE, ARE, WE NOT?
HMPF, ALRIGHT.
MOUNTAIN.
IT'S BEEN DECIDED! FORTH, MEN!


"KING, KING..."
KING LIPPENS! DOESN'T SOUND SO BAD IF YOU ASK ME!
THE FREE STATE IS 13 TIMES AS BIG AS BELGIUM.
AMPLE SPACE TO BUILD A NEW KINGDOM DON'T YOU THINK?


THERE'S PERIL ALL AROUND US.
THAT PAUNCHY MAN HAS HAD IT IN FOR YOU SINCE DAY ONE.
HE'S JEALOUS!
IT WON'T BE LONG UNTIL HE TURNS THE OTHERS AGAINST YOU!


THEY MAY BE IDIOTS, BUT THEY 'RE IMPRESSIONABLE IDIOTS.
WE HAVEN'T GOT MUCH TIME LEFT!
THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW!
MAYBE THAT NIGGER COULD BE OF SERVICE AFTER ALL...


OH.
HELLO.
YOUR EAR DOESN'T LOOK GOOD.
IT'S JUST A SCRATCH.
WHAT DO WE HAVE HERE?
MISTER VERMEULEN GAVE ME HIS TIE BECAUSE HE TOOK MY NECKLACE.
LET ME HELP YOU.
I DO WONDER WHAT YOU'LL DO WHEN WE ARRIVE.
HUH?

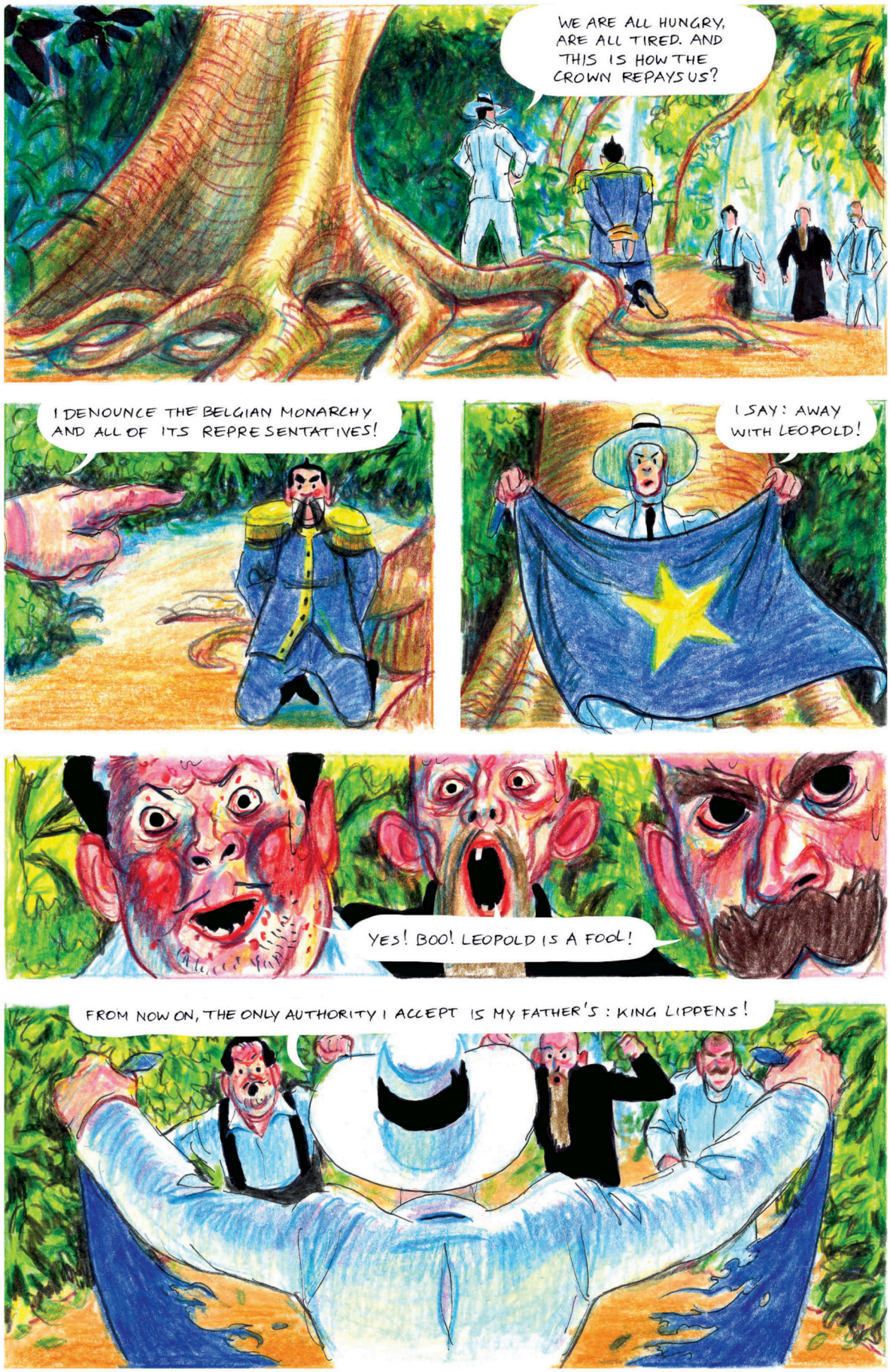

WELL, FATHER ISN'T GOING TO WANT TO SEE YOU, OF COURSE.
...
I COULD TRY TO CONVINCE HIM TO LET YOU STAY.
YOU WOULD DO THAT?
HMMYES. IF YOU DO ME A SMALL FAVOUR, THAT IS.
A SMALL FAVOUR?
ACTUALLY, IT'S QUITE A DELICATE TASK. ONE THAT FATHER WOULD CERTAINLY APPRECIATE.
WHAT'S THE TASK?
WELL, I WANT...
m


!
I CAN'T DO THAT!
YOU WOULD BE DOING FATHER AND ME A GREAT SERVICE ... BROTHER.
I'LL DO IT.
EXCELLENT! AND LOOK HOW WELL THAT TIE SUITS YOU. WE'LL MAKE A GENTLEMAN OF YOU YET!
AND NOW LET'S GET TO WORK!
I'M COUNTING ON YOU!




HE'S WAKING UP!
WHAT DO WE DO?
CALM DOWN COMRADES!
WHAT IN LEOPOLD'S NAME IS THE MEANING OF THIS?!
EXCUSE ME, COLONEL COSTERMANS BUT I THINK IT'S FOR US TO ASK THAT QUESTION.
WHEN REVEREND GILLIS WOKE UP, HE DISCOVERED THAT THE PROVISIONS HAD BEEN OPENED.
PROVIAND


AND A TRAIL OF CRUMBS LED HIM TO YOU.
TRAITOR! JUDAS!
TIE HIM UP!
YOU WILL PAY FOR THIS!


WE ARE ALL HUNGRY, ARE ALL TIRED. AND THIS IS HOW THE CROWN REPAYS US?
I DENOUNCE THE BELGIAN MONARCHY AND ALL OF ITS REPRESENTATIVES!
I SAY: AWAY WITH LEOPOLD!
YES! BOO! LEOPOLD IS A FOOL!
FROM NOW ON, THE ONLY AUTHORITY I ACCEPT IS MY FATHER'S: KING LIPPENS!


RIGHT. THAT JUST LEAVES US WITH THE MATTER OF YOUR PUNISH-MENT.
... MISTER COSTERMANS.
YOU HAVE SEEN THE IVORY! FOLLOW ME AND YOU WILL BE REWARDED WITH ALL THE BILLIARD TABLES, GOLDEN CRUCIFIXES, AND PINTS THAT YOU CAN DREAM OF!
A KINGDOM AWAITS US!