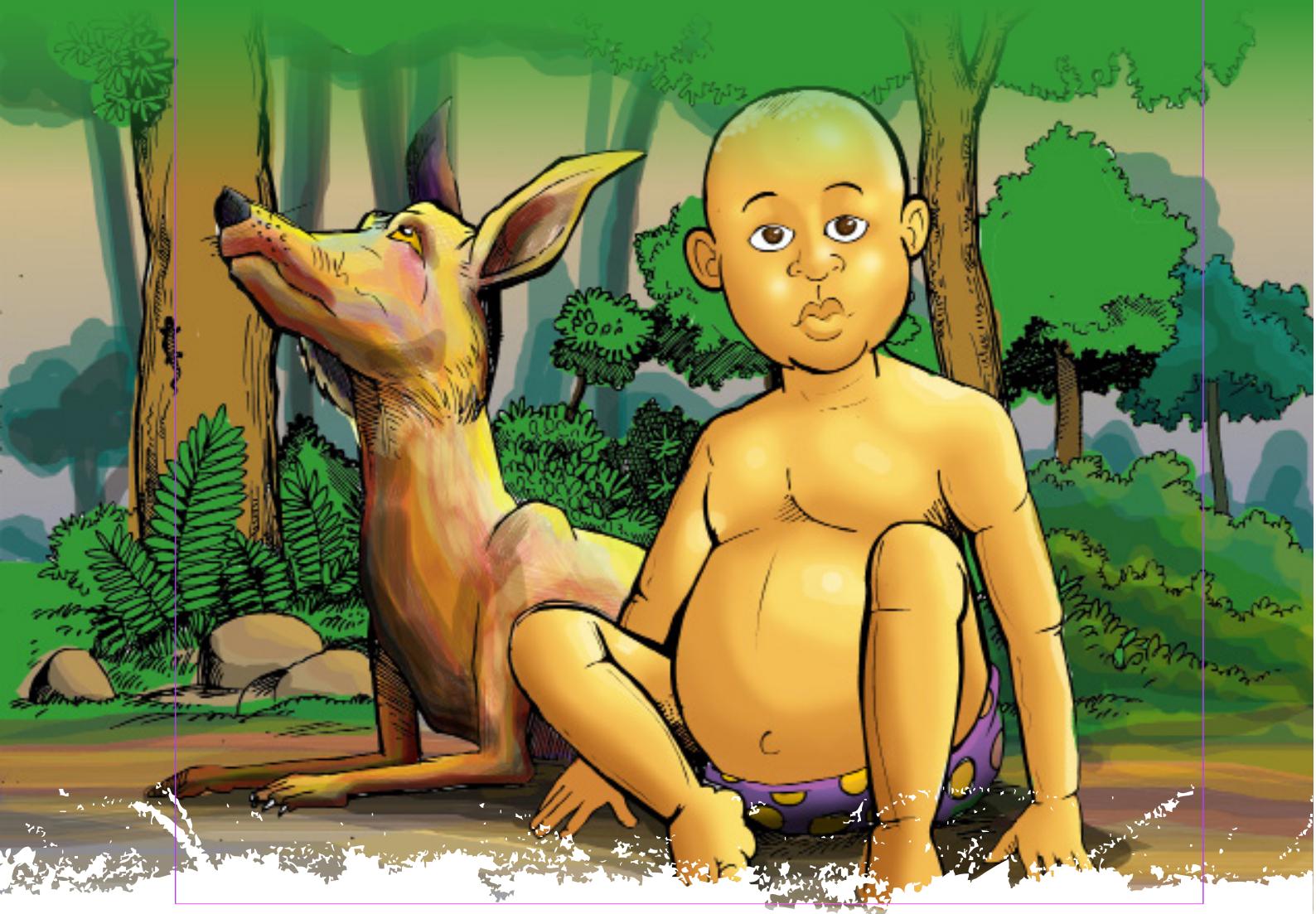


Owinja the forest boy



by Sentamu Aziz

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Pictures drawn by Balikuddembe **Joseph** aka **Joez**

...A dedication to the albino children in
Africa...



Once upon a time, there was a small village called Bwaala at the end of the Mutuba forest.

It was a village full of very happy people. When it was harvest time the chief would prepare a very big feast and the people would eat and dance.

The same happened whenever a new year was beginning. The people of Bwaala were very happy indeed.



In the middle of the forest there was a very small hut that none of the village people had ever seen.



The hut was home to Owinja the albino boy.

During the feasts, Owinja would sneak to the village, climb the big tree outside the chief's compound, and watch in admiration. "I wish I was a village person", he would say.



"I would dance and be happy like them". Then he would silently sneak back to his small hut in the forest.



Owinja's parents had prayed for a child for a very long time. When Owinja was born an albino, the entire village saw him as a curse to the community. "As the Bwaala community we decide that the curse be taken to the forest and left as a meal

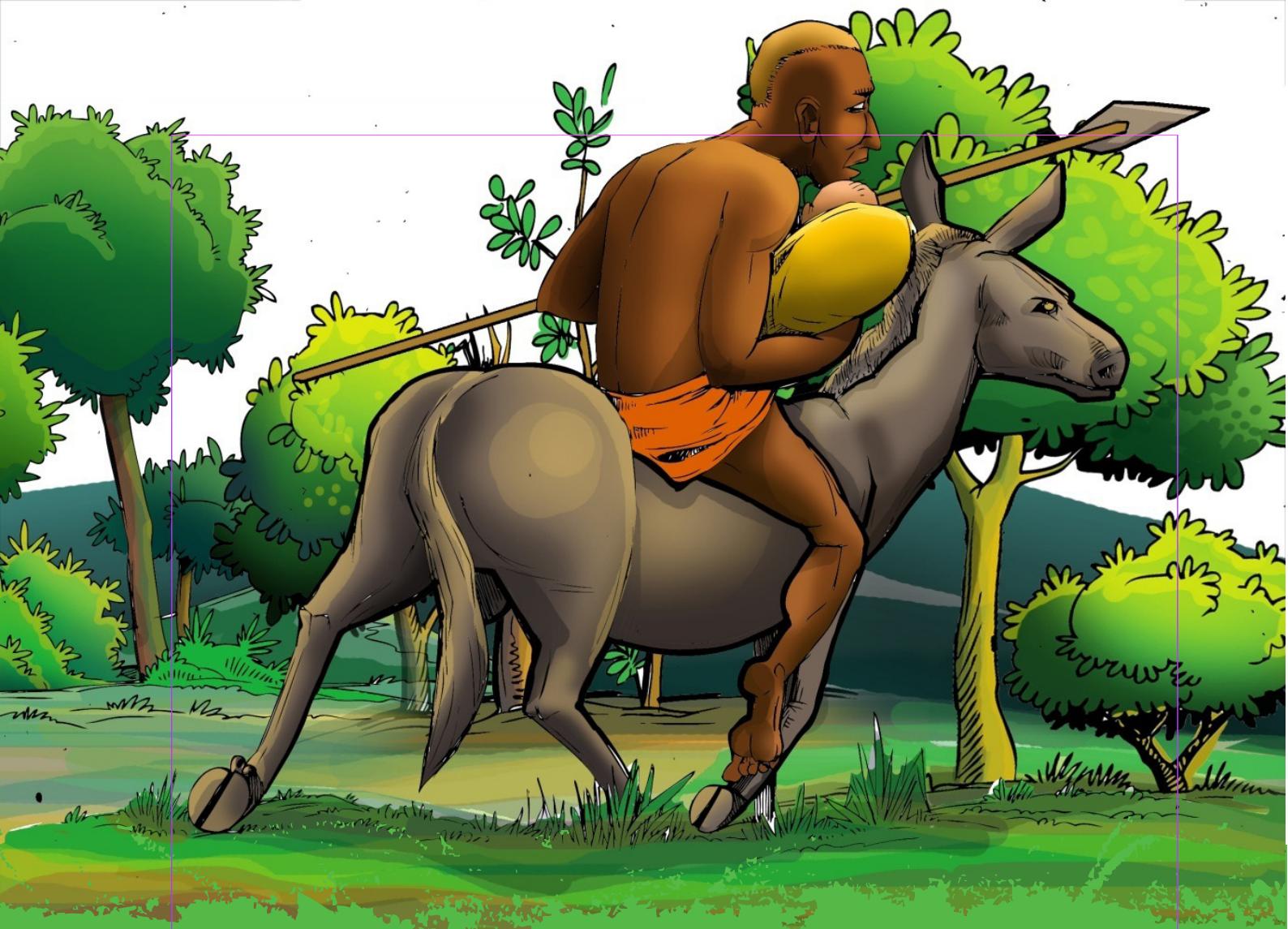
to the wild animals", the chief said. "If not then we risk having famine for his entire lifetime", he added. That night when the whole village was silent asleep, Owinja's parents carried him to the swamp and hid him in the papyrus reeds.



On their way back home, his mother cried painfully for her child. For some time after, she would sneak to the swamp in the afternoons and breastfeed him. "If only the village would accept you my only child", she would speak to him.



However, one day Mama Owinja was seen by Awiyo the chief's guard as she sneaked out to the swamp to breastfeed her son.



Later that evening when no one was watching Awiyo took little Owinja from his hiding place on his donkey and rode into the forest.

Every member of the village feared the forest. Being the strongest man in Bwaala, Awiyo was the only one in the village who would be sent whenever the chief had a message for any of the three village chiefs across the forest.



After riding for hours that night Awijo dropped little crying Owinja in the middle of the forest and rode towards the village. Riding on for some time all became so dark that he could not see where he was going.

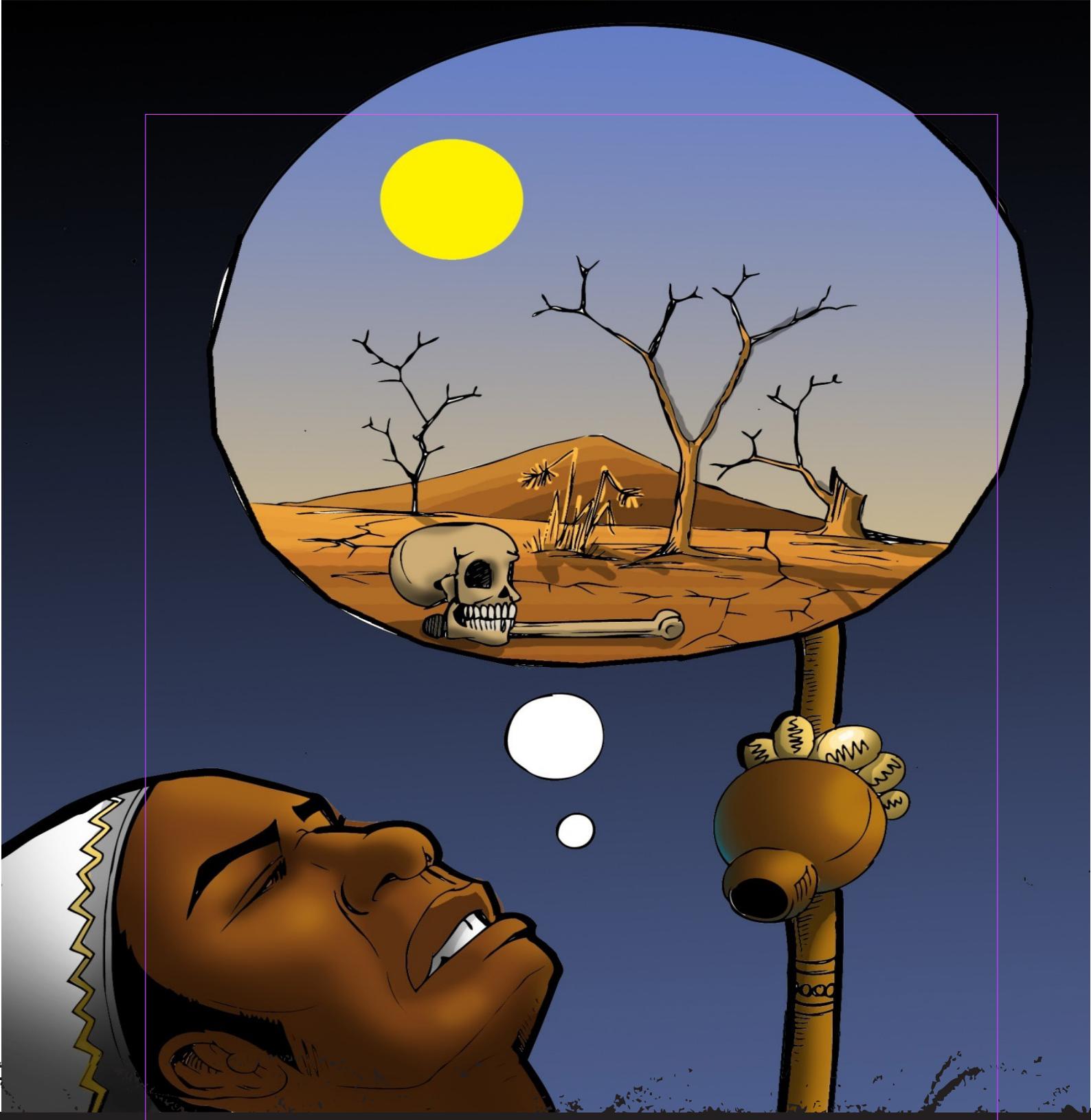
Owinja's cries were very far when Awijo decided to ride back and save him.

He could not trace his exact way back to where he left little Owinja and ended up in a park of foxes that ate him and his donkey.

Owinja grew up all alone with Simmy the only fox that remained when others migrated to another forest miles away.



With Simmy they would go hunting every five days then return to their small hut. They knew every part of the forest. Simmy would always watch over their home whenever Owinja sneaked to the village to watch a feast.



One day, the chief's wise man had a dream that there would be drought and famine for the next two years.

On hearing the dream, the chief called for three strongmen to be sent across the forest to warn the other villages about the famine and drought.

"Sir, since Awiyo disappeared everyone in the village fears going into the forest", said his servant on returning.

The chief sat alone worried under his hut shade all day. Not even his beloved daughter would convince him to eat anything.

As the leader of the village, he had to find a way of warning the village chiefs across the forest about his servant's dream.

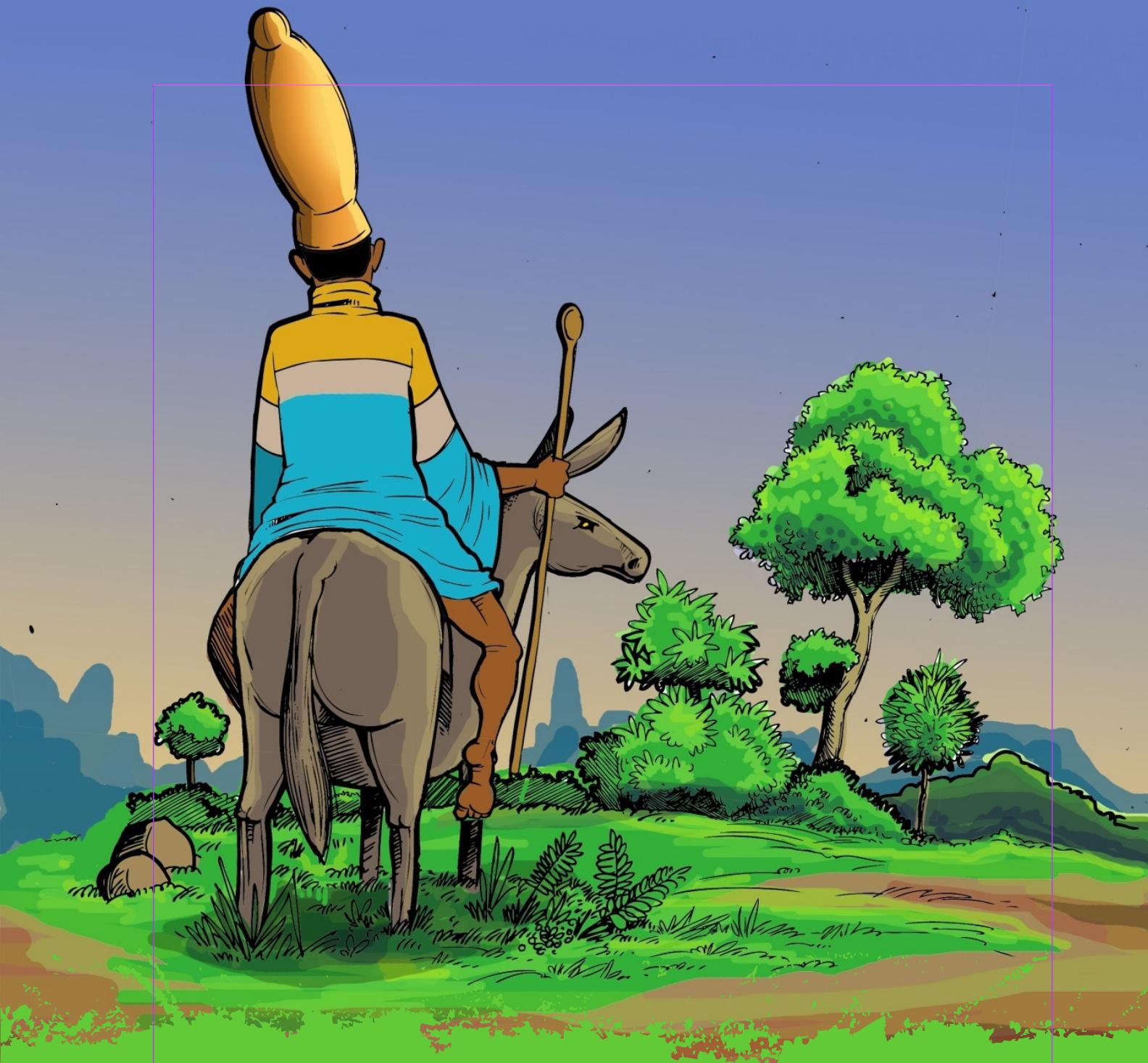


For many days, he sat alone and thought day and night until one day he called all his people. He had decided he would personally be going across the forest to warn the other villages. That afternoon the whole village walked with the chief and his donkey up to the edge of the forest and bade him farewell.



It was a silent evening in the entire village for never had there been a day when the chief left his people. After riding for hours, the chief took a rest and gave his donkey water to drink.

Riding on the forest became so dark that he could not see well where he was going. He decided to rest and ride on the next morning.



The whole night he kept thinking about his people back in the village, which kept him awake and scared as the forest grew darker.

Failing to sleep for hours, he decided to ride on into the dark until he could no longer see where he was going.

Stopping for a while, suddenly his donkey turned and walked towards a shrub. Following closely for a while he realized there ahead, was a small hut with some light inside.



"Hello, anyone there?" he called out. Slowly Simmy went out of the hut and walked around the chief and his donkey then made a sound before Owinja came out. It was too dark as the chief sat and told Owinja about his village and journey.



"I will walk with you up to the end of the forest and wait for you to return from the villages in the evening and then we will continue together to your village", said Owinja.



Walking with Simmy as the chief rode on his donkey they got to the other end of the forest when it was still dark and waited until evening the next day near the end of the forest.

Reaching the villages the chief told the story of his journey and the forest boy and fox who had helped him across the forest.

The chiefs of the three villages were happy that he had managed to cross the forest and tell them about the dream of famine and drought.

Giving him many gifts, they bade him farewell.

It was dark when the chief and Owinja begun their journey back across the forest.

"How are the people in your village?" Owinja asked the chief as they rested at the hut before continuing with the journey.

"My people are very nice people, they will welcome you as a hero", said the chief. "They will love you and give you a permanent home in my village. You will no longer live in the forest anymore", he added.

As they got nearer to the end of the forest Owinja and Simmy were walking far behind the chief.



The chief jumped off his donkey and walked towards the village where he was welcomed by cheers from his people. Followed by his people he walked towards the forest as he talked about his journey and the forest boy and fox who had helped him during his journey.

Sitting with Simmy, Owinja saw the chief walking closer with very many people and got up to walk back into the forest. "No don't go away son, my people want to appreciate what you did for me", the chief shouted as he ran towards him.

The chief and his people finally realised who the forest boy was. They had met during the night all through the journey and he had not realised Owinja was the albino boy they once called a curse to the village. Owinja and Simmy were happily welcomed to the village with a very big feast in the chief's compound and his parents were very happy to see their son again.



The End