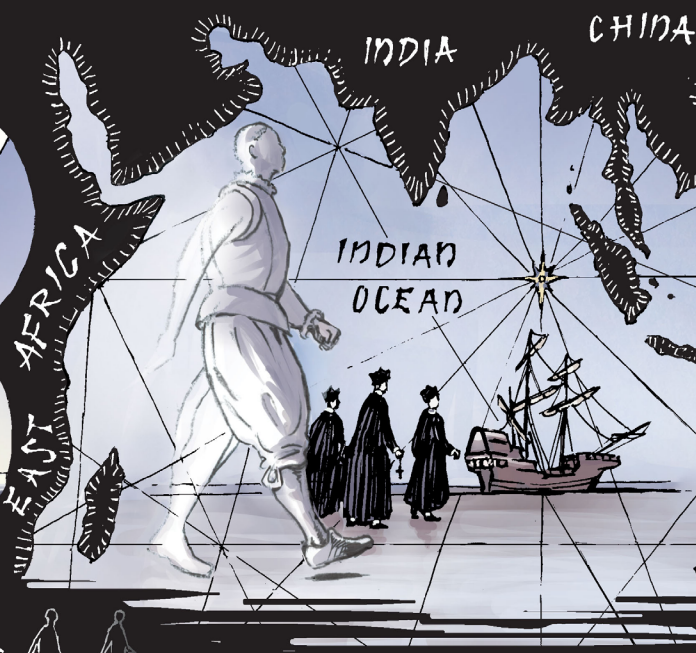
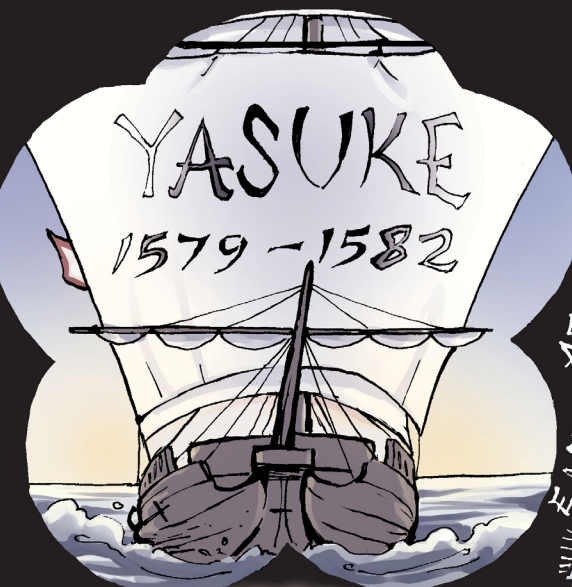
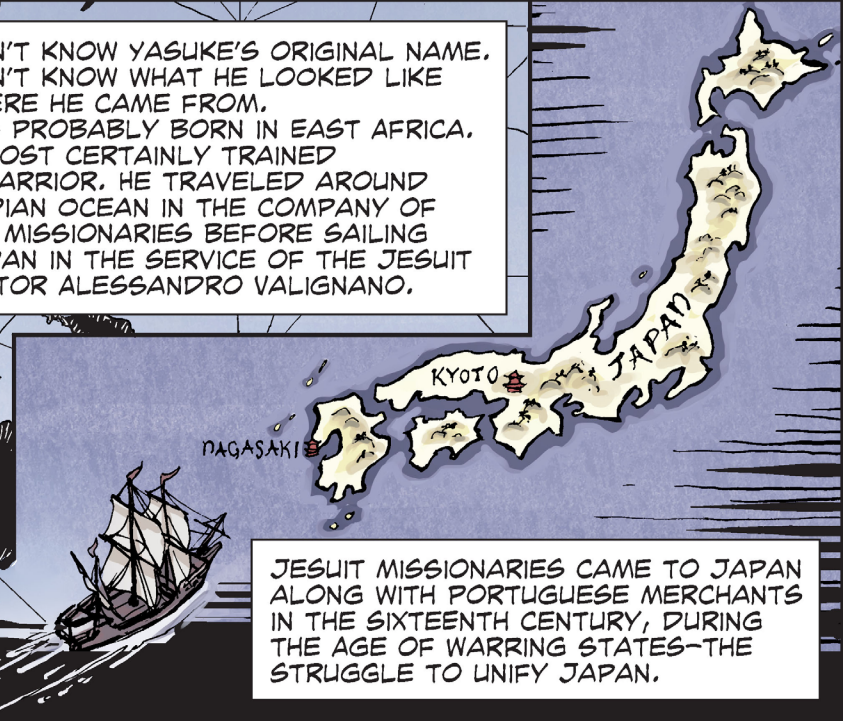


YASUKE

IN 1579, AN AFRICAN MAN ARRIVED IN THE CITY OF KYOTO, JAPAN. WE KNOW VERY LITTLE ABOUT HIM. HE APPEARS IN THE HISTORICAL RECORD FOR LESS THAN FOUR YEARS, BUT IN THAT SHORT TIME, HE BECAME THE FIRST FOREIGN-BORN SAMURAI, BEFRIENDED THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN JAPAN, AND FOUGHT IN THE STRUGGLE TO UNIFY THE COUNTRY.



WE DON'T KNOW YASUKE'S ORIGINAL NAME. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT HE LOOKED LIKE OR WHERE HE CAME FROM. HE WAS PROBABLY BORN IN EAST AFRICA. HE ALMOST CERTAINLY TRAINED AS A WARRIOR. HE TRAVELED AROUND THE INDIAN OCEAN IN THE COMPANY OF JESUIT MISSIONARIES BEFORE SAILING TO JAPAN IN THE SERVICE OF THE JESUIT INSPECTOR ALESSANDRO VALIGNANO.

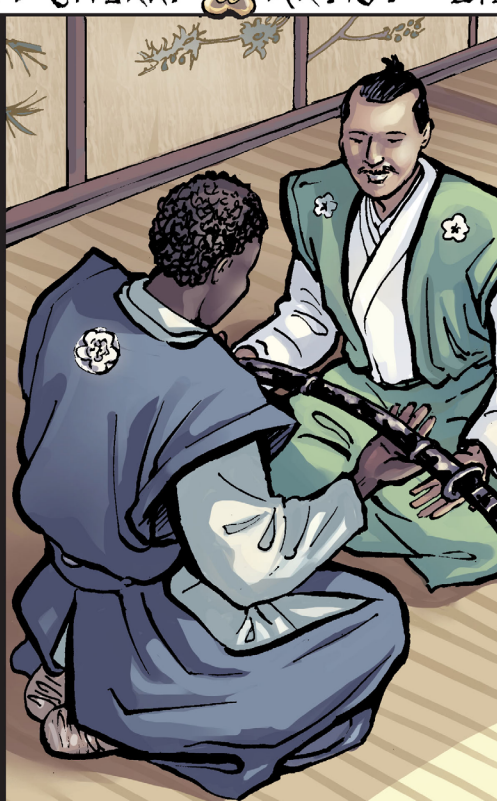


JESUIT MISSIONARIES CAME TO JAPAN ALONG WITH PORTUGUESE MERCHANTS IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, DURING THE AGE OF WARRING STATES--THE STRUGGLE TO UNIFY JAPAN.

AUTHOR-BENNETT SHERRY ARTIST-LIZ CLARKE



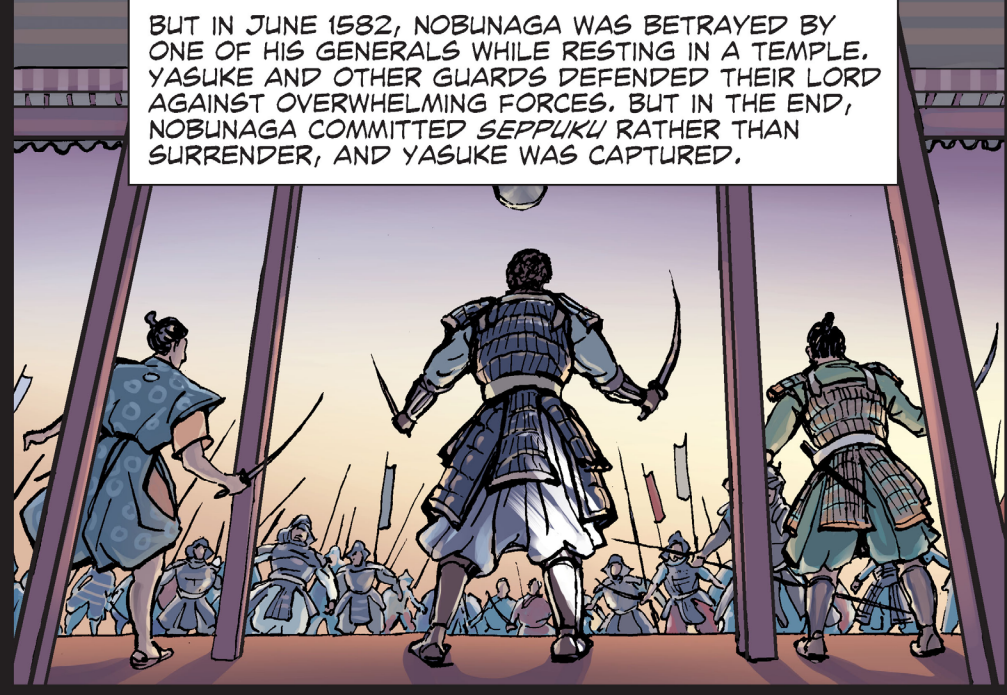
WHEN YASUKE ARRIVED, HIS APPEARANCE GAINED HIM A LOT OF ATTENTION. VERY FEW AFRICANS TRAVELED TO THE PORTS OF JAPAN. YASUKE WAS EXCEPTIONALLY TALL-HEAD AND SHOULDERS TALLER THAN MOST JAPANESE MEN OF THE TIME.



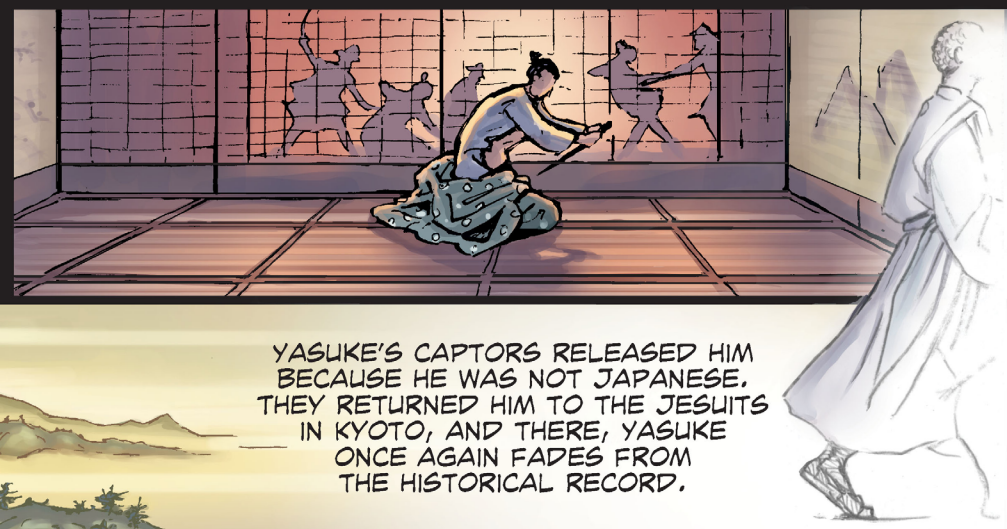
SOON, THE DAIMYO LORD ODA NOBUNAGA CALLED ON YASUKE. FASCINATED BY YASUKE'S STRENGTH, APPEARANCE, AND COMMAND OF JAPANESE, NOBUNAGA TOOK YASUKE INTO HIS SERVICE. THE TWO QUICKLY BECAME FRIENDS, AND NOBUNAGA MADE YASUKE THE FIRST FOREIGN-BORN SAMURAI.



NOBUNAGA IS SEEN AS THE FIRST "GREAT UNIFIER OF JAPAN," AND YASUKE FOUGHT ALONGSIDE HIS LORD IN THE BATTLE OF TENMOKUZAN, WHICH SOLIDIFIED THE ODA CLAN'S HOLD ON JAPAN.



BUT IN JUNE 1582, NOBUNAGA WAS BETRAYED BY ONE OF HIS GENERALS WHILE RESTING IN A TEMPLE. YASUKE AND OTHER GUARDS DEFENDED THEIR LORD AGAINST OVERWHELMING FORCES. BUT IN THE END, NOBUNAGA COMMITTED SEPPUKU RATHER THAN SURRENDER, AND YASUKE WAS CAPTURED.



YASUKE'S CAPTORS RELEASED HIM BECAUSE HE WAS NOT JAPANESE. THEY RETURNED HIM TO THE JESUITS IN KYOTO, AND THERE, YASUKE ONCE AGAIN FADES FROM THE HISTORICAL RECORD.