

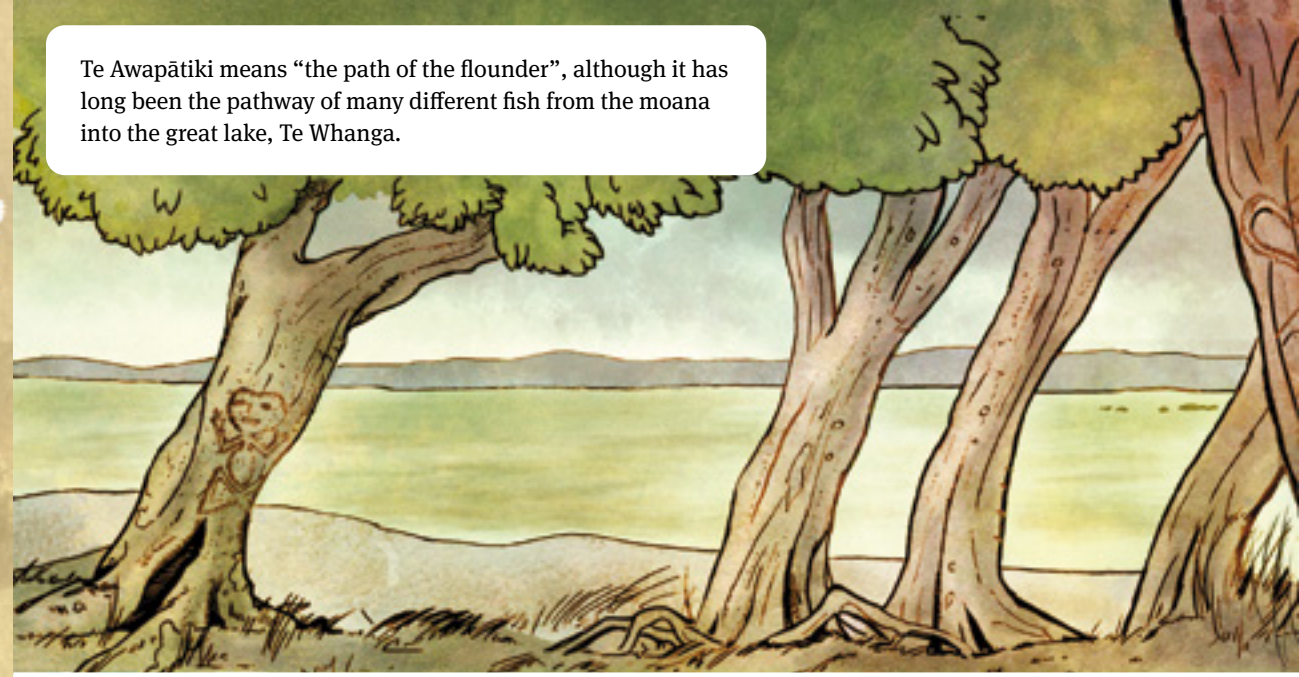
Three Days at Te Awapātiki

by Kiwa Hammond

Our people called this meeting place Te Awapātiki. It is **tchap** – sacred to our **karapuna**.



Te Awapātiki means “the path of the flounder”, although it has long been the pathway of many different fish from the moana into the great lake, Te Whanga.



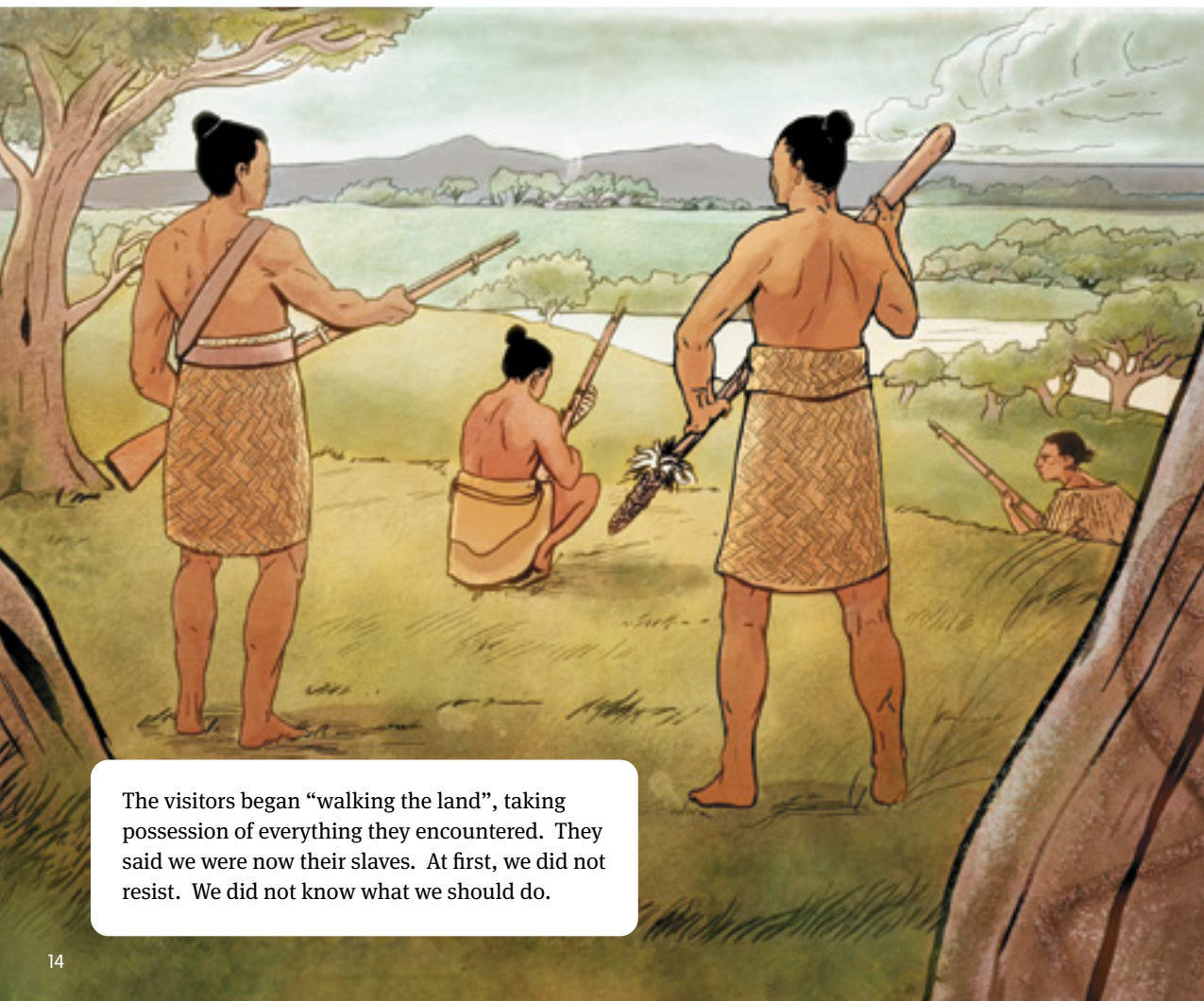
The sea also brought others. The **ko re kau o paorangi** came on their ships for our seals and to trade. We welcomed them and lived together in peace according to our **toho**.



Then one day a ship arrived carrying a new group of visitors. And because it is our custom, we welcomed them too. Many were ill when they came ashore. We gave them food and shelter and nursed them back to health.

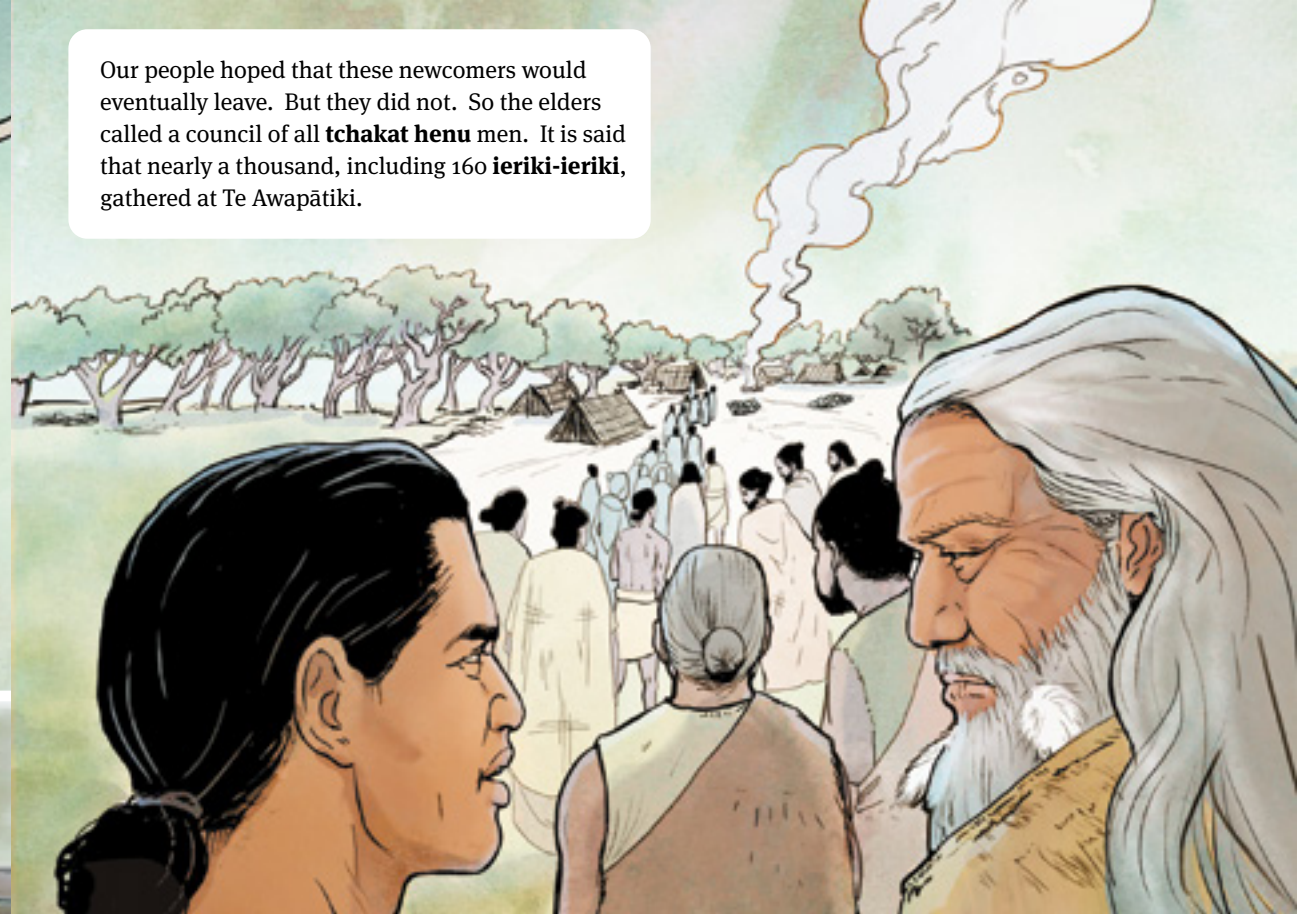


They called themselves Ngāti Tama, and with their carved faces like the **hokoairo** on our kopi trees, they showed no fear. Not that they had need to fear us. And then yet more visitors arrived: Ngāti Mutunga.

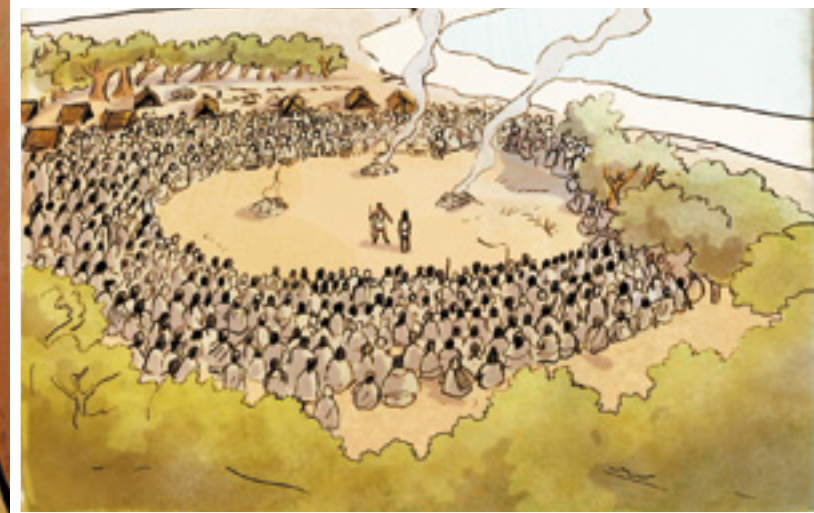


The visitors began “walking the land”, taking possession of everything they encountered. They said we were now their slaves. At first, we did not resist. We did not know what we should do.

Our people hoped that these newcomers would eventually leave. But they did not. So the elders called a council of all **tchakat henu** men. It is said that nearly a thousand, including 160 **ieriki-ieriki**, gathered at Te Awapātiki.



A large gathering like this had not been seen on Rēkohu for a long time. Our people only met in this way to discuss matters of the greatest importance. Now was such a time. Under the shelter of the kopi trees, the solemn meeting began. The younger men were the first to speak.

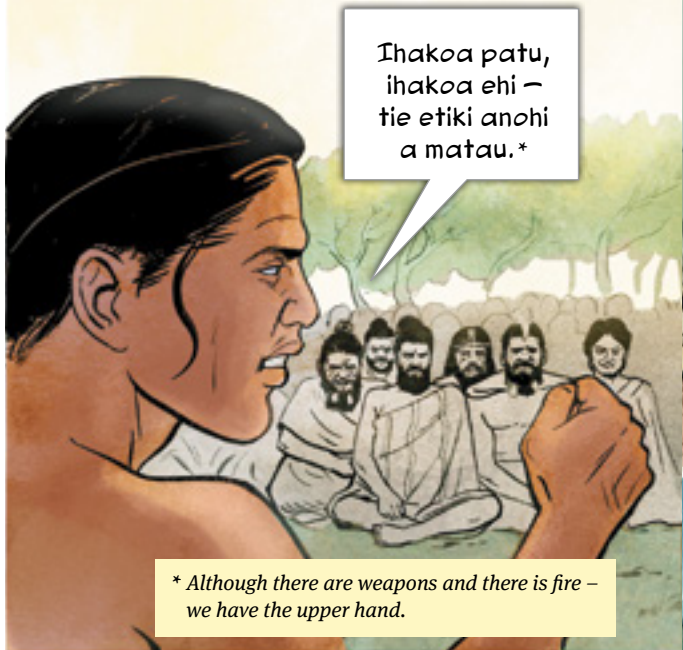


Even though our people had been living a peaceful existence, many of the young men were still strong and adept in our traditional forms of single combat. They knew how to fight, although for hundreds of years Moriori had chosen not to – at least not to kill. That was the law.

The invaders were armed, but they were still few in number, and the young men argued that while our people would suffer casualties, we would prevail because we were many. The young men wanted to repel the **mata hore**. They wanted to fight!

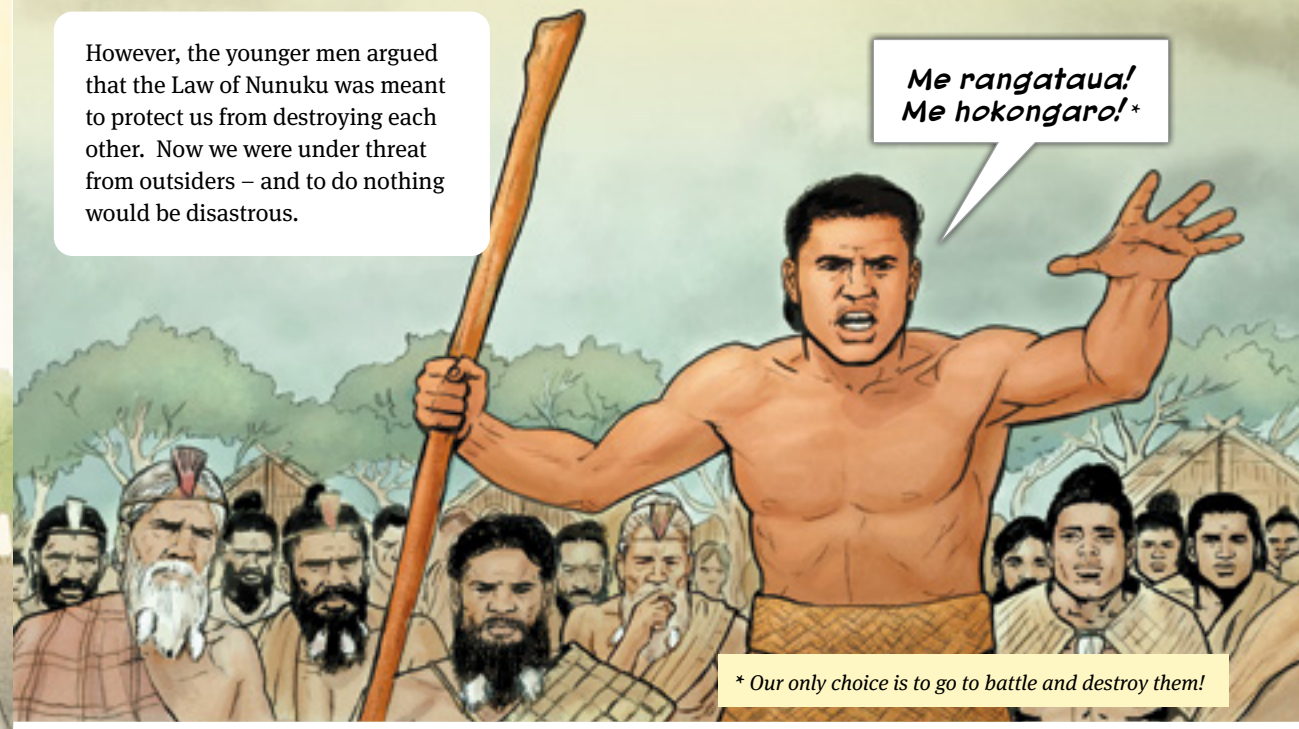
However, the younger men argued that the Law of Nunuku was meant to protect us from destroying each other. Now we were under threat from outsiders – and to do nothing would be disastrous.

*Me rangataua!
Me hokongaro!**



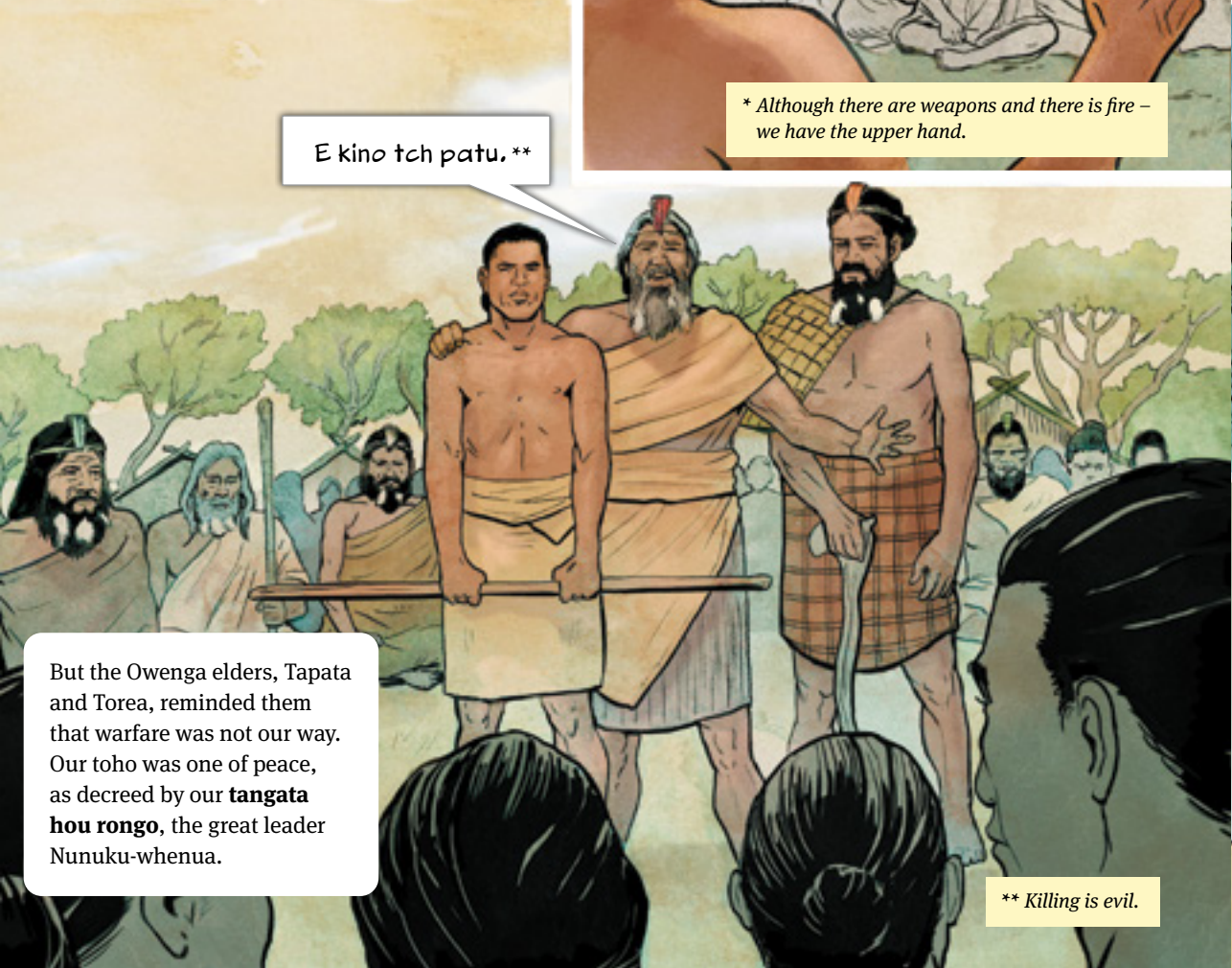
*Ihakoā patu,
ihakoā ehi –
tie etiki anohi
a matau.**

** Although there are weapons and there is fire –
we have the upper hand.*



** Our only choice is to go to battle and destroy them!*

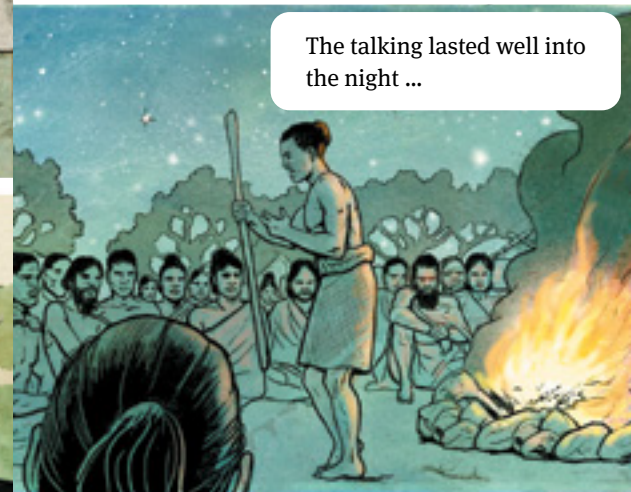
*E kino tch patu.***



But the Owenga elders, Tapata and Torea, reminded them that warfare was not our way. Our toho was one of peace, as decreed by our **tangata hou rongō**, the great leader Nunuku-whenua.

*** Killing is evil.*

The talking lasted well into the night ...



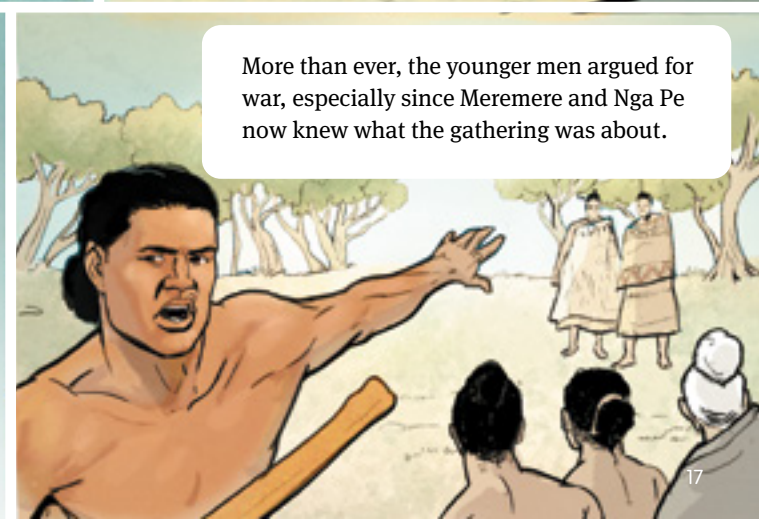
... and throughout the following day, with many voices adding to the discussion.



During this time, two unexpected visitors – Meremere and Nga Pe, chiefs of the invaders – arrived at Te Awapātiki.



More than ever, the younger men argued for war, especially since Meremere and Nga Pe now knew what the gathering was about.



But the elders would not allow the chiefs to be harmed, and so Meremere and Nga Pe continued on their way.

*Kai a te kurī! **

** Food for the dogs!*

The talk continued for one more night, and by the next day, the elders had prevailed. It was agreed that our people would not attack the new arrivals. Instead, we would share our food and land with them.

*Tangata hou rongo tatau! Me rongo! ***

*** Let us be peacemakers! Let there be peace!*

We were unsure of what was to come. Nevertheless, we were certain of one thing: we would remain true to the ancient law of peace.

Therefore, the men returned to the villages – and together with the women and children, they met their fate. You may wonder: why did we still not fight back? Because in time, when all the wars have been fought and there is no one left to fight, peace does prevail. **Me rongo.**



illustrations by Lawton Lonsdale and Andrew Burdan

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by Kiwa Hammond

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