

0. THE MAHDI TAKES CHARGE - Story Preface

1. TROUBLE IN SUDAN

2. THE MAHDI TAKES CHARGE

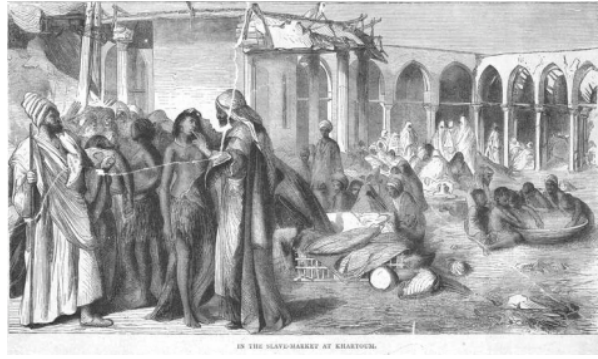
3. GORDON IS BEHEADED

4. DEATH OF THE MAHDI

5. REVENGE: ROUND ONE

6. REVENGE AND DESECRATION

7. A COWARD'S FEATHERS



Slave-trading still existed in the Sudan during the second half of the 19th century. This illustration, created by an unnamed artist sometime between 1876 and 1879, is entitled: "In the Slave-Market at Khartoum." It was included by James Ewing Ritchie in *The life and Discoveries of David Livingstone* (Pictorial ed.), London: A. Fullarton. Online via [NYPL Digital Gallery](#) and [Wikimedia Commons](#).

Egyptian government officials correctly viewed the Mahdi and his movement as a threat to their control over Sudan. As Muhammad Ahmed's popularity grew, his Islamic state was, in many ways, even more restrictive than the [Taliban's regime](#) in Afghanistan.

Unfazed by Egyptian threats, the Mahdi demanded that any Egyptian leaders in Khartoum would be required to adopt his version of Islam. If they didn't, Ahmed said, he would declare a [jihad](#). (The link takes you to a Muslim definition of "jihad.") Egyptian leaders did not heed the Mahdi's warnings.

The Mahdi's committed followers, often called "Mahdists" but known to the British as "dervishes," were a lethal force against the Egyptian soldiers. Several times, over several years, they successfully attacked Egyptian camps and annihilated whomever they could.

Unequipped with sophisticated weapons, like those used by the Egyptians, the Mahdi and his 50,000 followers laid siege to Egyptian-held towns. In one of those towns—El Obeid—the residents were weakened by siege and could not defend themselves against the Mahdists on 17 January 1883. A gruesome scene awaited those who found [evidence of a one-sided battle](#):

- Women and children hacked to death;
- All Egyptian officers executed;
- Surviving Egyptian soldiers press-ganged;
- Relief forces slaughtered at the [wells of Bara](#).

In the ensuing months, several more Egyptian forces—sometimes led by former British officers—were slaughtered. [The Mahdi](#), now in charge, instituted several changes in Sudan:

- The slave trade resumed;
- Anyone who swore or consumed alcohol could face the death penalty;
- Ahmed's followers (called "[Ansar](#)") had to wear a [jibbah](#)—a kind of patchwork smock.

Egypt was forced to leave the Sudan to manage its own affairs. But Egyptian nationals, who still lived in the now-hostile country, had to find a safer place. Government officials persuaded Britain to help with that evacuation process.

People wanted a hero—capable of great accomplishment despite odds of defeat—to direct the exodus. They wanted [Charles George "Chinese" Gordon](#) to take charge. Her Majesty's government agreed and ordered Gordon to [Khartoum](#).

When he arrived, in February of 1884, the British general could not have imagined how his life would be impacted by this new assignment.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-MAHDI-TAKES-CHARGE-Four-Feathers-The>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-MAHDI-TAKES-CHARGE-Four-Feathers-The>

Media Stream



Wells of Bara

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Wells-of-Bara>



Map Showing Bara City

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Map-Showing-Bara-City>



Charles George Gordon

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Charles-George-Gordon>



Jibbah

Image online, courtesy the Durham County Record Office website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Jibbah>



Map Depicting Kartoum

Image online, courtesy cnn.com website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Map-Depicting-Kartoum>