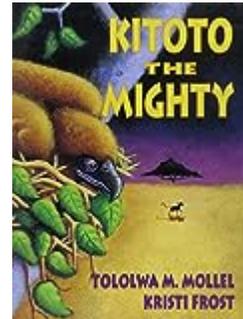
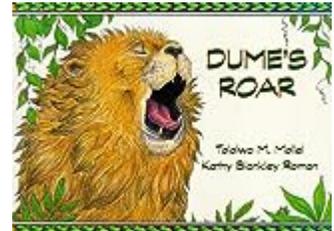




Tololwa M. Mollel. *Kitoto the Mighty*. Toronto and New York: Stoddart Kids, 1998. 32 pp. \$14.95 US, \$17.95 CDN (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7737-3019-9.



Tolowa M. Mollel. *Dume's Roar*. Toronto and New York: Stoddart Kids, 1998. 32 pp. \$14.95 US, \$17.95 CDN (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7737-3003-8.



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Adapting Folktales from Africa and the World

These two books, each highly recommendable for readers aged four and older, continue the impressive series of children's stories produced by the Tanzanian/Canadian writer, Tololwa Mollel. With *Dume's Roar* and *Kitoto the Mighty*, Mollel follows his successful formula of presenting familiar folktales with an original twist.

Of the two, *Kitoto the Mighty* is the more effective. Here, Mollel blends elements of the city mouse/country mouse story with the useful lesson that one can't judge by appearances. Kitoto is a mouse on the savannah who needs protection from a dangerous hawk. To find an appropriate protector, he sets out to find the most powerful

being in the world. He assumes this being is the river, but the river sends him to the sun, who refers him to the wind, who in turn directs him to the mountain. But even the mountain tells Kitoto to find "one far more powerful than I, who chomps away at my roots." This "far more powerful" being turns out to be Kigege, the humble and pleasant mountain mouse. The two mice make fast friends and live together under the shadow of the mountain, out of reach of the hawk.

The story has a smart pace and rhythm, and is well complemented by Kristi Frost's illustrations, featuring lively and optimistic colors with sweeping vistas and contrasting close-ups. The elements (river, sun, and so

forth) are loosely personified, with the most engaging being the wind, who appears in the guise of a bejeweled African woman with long braids. The setting is not explicit, but it's obvious from the geography and the fauna that *Kitoto the Mighty* takes place in East Africa. Although there is no glossary, the two mouse characters feature Swahili names: Kitoto (little one) and Kigego (little tooth).

Dume's Roar features a similar lesson, reminding young readers that those with brawn need help from those with brains. When the creatures of the forest choose a king, the lion Dume (the Swahili name implies manliness) insists that because he has the loudest roar, the job must be his. Kobe the tortoise, who is clearly wiser, is ignored. But when hunters arrive, it is Kobe who cleverly manipulates Dume to use his roar for the protection of the forest animals.

Dume's Roar offers plenty of opportunity for expressiveness in reading aloud, and there is an especially delightful and ironic moment when the animals are tricking Dume into roaring for their benefit. In the end, however, the tale is less satisfying than *Kitoto* because Dume himself fails to learn from his experience.

Tololwa Mollel is a well-established author of children's books. His first story appeared in *Cricket* maga-

zine, and he has published well over a dozen titles during the 1990s. *The Orphan Boy* (Houghton Mifflin, 1995) made the Canadian Bestseller list, and other works have received positive reviews in enviable publications. Until recently, Mollel studied at the University of Dar es Salaam and the University of Alberta; his graduate studies investigated the politics of modern drama in postcolonial Africa.

Although he presently resides in Edmonton, Mollel is originally from northern Tanzania, and some of his stories draw from his Maasai traditions. *Kele's Secret* (Dutton, 1997), for instance, is about a boy growing up (like Mollel himself) on his grandparents' coffee farm in Tanzania. Other of his works reflect a wider interest, drawing on Ibo and Ashanti folktales as well as reworking stories from places like Cameroon and Haiti.

Kitoto the Mighty and *Dume's Roar*, Mollel's latest offerings, take widely-known, even universal stories, adapt them, and place them in an East African setting. It's a felicitous formula, admirably executed; these books are highly recommended.

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