



King Shaka: Zulu Legend

Luke W. Molver

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Based on African history, delivered in dramatic style, and intended for middle and high school audiences, *King Shaka* tells the fascinating story of a monarch's life, diplomatic efforts, military campaigns, and death.

From 1816 to 1828, King Shaka ruled over a territory that covered a large part of what is now South Africa. But despite new levels of prosperity for many of his people, Shaka's reign was not a peaceful one. Instead, it was marked by threats to his kingship from his subjects, even from his own family, as well as from Europeans who'd just arrived.

Though fictionalized, Molver's graphic novel is based on thorough research. The book's glossary, notes on culture (indexed to specific pages in the story), pronunciation guide, and discussion questions indicate this. *King Shaka* is also excellent entertainment, weaving the known elements of Shaka's life and times into a story that is propulsive yet inward-looking, reminiscent of the best of Shakespeare's histories. The villains are nuanced, and King Shaka, as depicted, is a noble but imperfect leader facing difficult situations. There's a gripping sense of tragic inevitability as Shaka's well-intentioned decisions lead to his eventual demise.

Molver provides a map and character guide, making it easy to distinguish locations and various players in the story's large cast of characters. The art incorporates key elements of Africa and the Zulu tribe, from clothing to the ochre coloring that's prominent in the book's color palette. Characters are sometimes drawn two-dimensionally, but the artwork mostly lives up to the ambitious script.

King Shaka is educational and enjoyable, illuminating overlooked historical events. It's the perfect addition for school libraries looking to offer new perspectives on the past.

PETER DABBENE (November / December 2019)

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