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★ Mwikali and the Forbidden Mask: The Intasimi Warriors: Book 1

Shiko Nguru
Lantana Publishing (Oct 11, 2022)
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Rich in Kenyan culture, Shiko Nguru's fantasy novel *Mwikali and the Forbidden Mask* follows as a girl finds her magic.

After years of moving around, Mwikali and her mother move back to Kenya to settle down. Upon their return, they eat fried dough mandazis and ride the crowded minibuses. In the background is Mwikali's knowledge that, after her disastrous experiences at her last school, her mother is desperate for her to lead a normal life with normal friends. However, Mwikali does not feel normal.

As she attempts to blend in, Mwikali realizes that something strange is afoot at her new school. She ends up joining a band of fellow Intasimi descendants. Among them, Mwikali learns about her ancestors and the gifts that they left to her. But her new friends possess powers, too, and Mwikali wrestles with feelings of inadequacy. Still, even as Mwikali learns about her magical heritage, she realizes that being different might enable her to stop an ancient evil and save her friends.

As Mwikali learns to be unapologetically herself, she proves to be a fiery heroine whose greatest battles are not with the monsters who are trying to escape the underworld, but with her own inner doubts. Balancing action-packed scenes with moments of reflection, her story emphasizes the power of creativity: Mwikali's powers are channeled through her sketchbook, and through visions that she recreates in it. Though she rebels against her talents at first, blaming them for making her a "freak," she eventually embraces them. This leads to a sweet family surprise and the promise of more adventures to come.

With its important lessons about self-acceptance and its action-packed scenes of fighting monsters, *Mwikali and the Forbidden Mask* is a delightful fantasy novel.

VIVIAN TURNBULL (September / October 2022)

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