



The Hawaiian Lion: Thunder from the Mountaintop

Jason Louis

Mascot Kids

(72pp)

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The Hawaiian Lion is a lighthearted chapter book in which animal friends overcome their fears and surmount unforeseen obstacles.

In Jason Louis's early reader *The Hawaiian Lion*, a group of animals confront their fears and make a new friend.

The story takes place on Kiwahu, an imaginary island west of Maui. There are depictions of palm trees and mountains to flesh out this Hawaiian setting. Here, Elli the elephant, Tikki the tiger, Zekki the zebra, and Piggie the pig live at the base of Manou Mountain. Unbeknownst to them, Kimo, a lion, makes his home above the mist at the mountain's peak.

Kimo is a smiling, solitary beast who subsists on the fruit that grows toward the middle of the mountain. In the first illustration in which he appears, he is seen chowing on pears and persimmons. He considers attacking and eating the animals who live below, but they never come close enough for him to catch them. When he depletes his fruit patch, however, he is hungry and goes out in search of something to eat. He lacks the bravery to hunt for food farther down, but when he sees the other animals gathering pineapples, mangoes, and bananas, he gets the idea of scaring them into bringing food up to him. He roars out a terrifying rhyme, and the animals at the base of the mountain go into action. Elli, the village chief, suggests that they send a delegate to talk with the lion. If that doesn't work, they will fight him. The animal sent to negotiate will also fill a basket with fruit on the way to offer to the lion.

The story progresses through repetitive scenes in which the animals select who will be the next of them to bring food to the demanding lion. Although mostly told from the points of view of the animals below, the narration switches to Kimo multiple times, defusing its tension. Still, the suspense increases as the story progresses.

In the cartoon-style illustrations, the animals are anthropomorphized; they walk on two legs, wear grass skirts and leis, and live in wooden houses with thatched roofs. The expressions on their faces are a source of humor as they work together to solve their problems. However, because most of the creatures and fruits featured are not indigenous to Hawaii, the book's setting comes to seem too arbitrary. These incongruities combine with superficial and inaccurate depictions of Hawaiian culture, as well as nonscientific and illogical behaviors from the animals, to muddling effect.

With an uplifting message about interspecies cooperation, *The Hawaiian Lion* is a lighthearted chapter book in which animal friends overcome their fears and surmount unforeseen obstacles.

SUZANNE KAMATA (May 9, 2023)

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