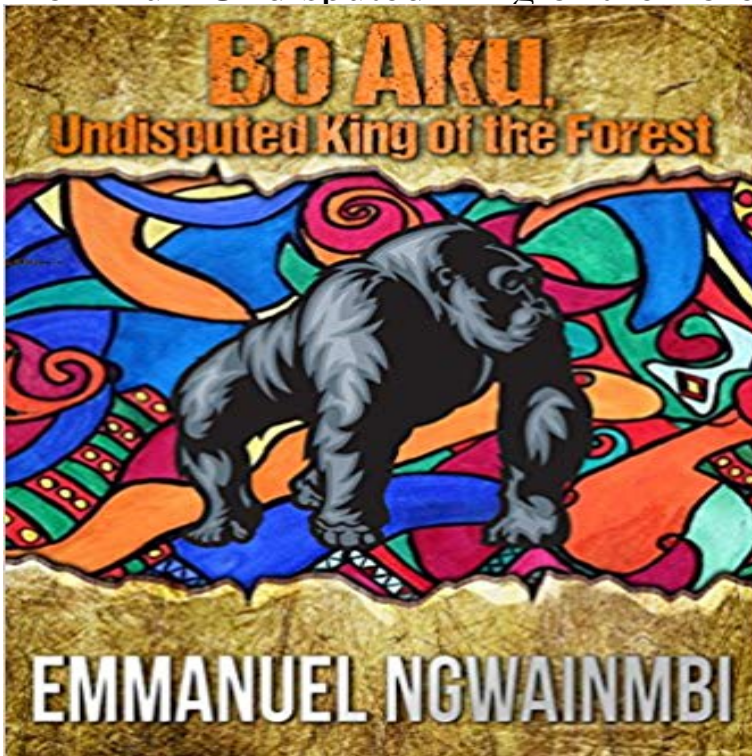


Bo-Aku - Undisputed King of the Forest: Tales from West Africa



Bo Aku, King of the Forest and other Stories is an adaptation of some sixty myths and legends collected in Africa with a research grant from the Southern Education Foundation. The stories describe the experiences of children and parents confronted by a gorilla and lion in the African jungle. They are eclectic, rich in moral values, humorous, suspenseful, and contain wisdom. They seek to enlighten the reader about Bantu African mythology and other ways of reasoning. They open the door to an enchanted universe where the child learns that every evil phantom has its opposite that is more powerful and worth imitating. The legends and folktales are set against the backdrop of Bantu culture, steeped in mysticism and logical reasoning that date back to the 12th Century A.D., when interdependent villages existed in the grasslands and mountains of the black tribes in the Benue and Adamawa regions, a part of what is known today as West Africa. Chad, Gabon, Nigeria, Benin, Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Mali are among the twenty-two countries in northwest Africa. The Kingdom of Ba, situated in the northwestern Africa has a diverse and rich culture. Events, dates, and artifacts bear special meaning to the people. Story telling is a centuries-old family-oriented educational experience. For the African family, it is like watching a movie with great suspense on a family channel. Whether they have been invited or not, strangers from the neighborhood pick a home they want to visit. They arrive early in the evening and chit-chat with the family members until dinner is served. After dinner, the older people tell folktales to lure children to sleep. Parents would ask their children to put out the fire in the hearth and get into their beds and close their eyes. Their parents and older people would then begin to tell tales. Some children would quickly fall sleep. The narrator uses humor and good voice

management skills to sustain the audiences concentration until the end. Like the main actor in a movie, the narrator must be able to use stunts, engage the audience in the action, sing, raise, or drop his voice according to the pace of the characters action. Ninety-nine percent of the heroes and villains in the stories are animals, so the narrator must imitate their sounds and actions, to convince the audience that he is in fact the animal. The narrator starts with a question: Mogana? (May I tell a story?), and the listeners reply Sun ngayn (Yes, you may). From the response, the narrator knows who is still awake. The call-and-response approach suggests not only the participatory experience between the storyteller and listeners, but, most importantly, it engages both parties in a educational activities wherein the keen listener prompts, redirects, or corrects the teller when he omits a section or uses a term not known to the audience.

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