

REVIEWS



The True Story of David Munyakei

Billy Kahora

133p, Kwani? Books

In 2004, David Sadera Munyakei, a former Central Bank of Kenya (CBK) employee who a decade before had leaked crucial documents related to the Goldenberg financial scandal, appeared before a public inquiry investigating the \$1bn fraud. At that point, he was entering a second and, as it turned out, last phase of his life. Munyakei had been hired in 1992 by the CBK's Banking Division, his first job. He soon began to notice irregularities in the processing of export compensation monies to a little-known company, Goldenberg International. And when, after he raised questions about this, he was advised to shut up and toe the line, he smuggled out the documents to opposition MPs. The CBK dismissed him and set the police after him. His mother, traumatised at the news, collapsed and later died while Munyakei managed a shape-shifting escape into anonymity. Billy Kahora spent four months living with Munyakei and produces a story that reads like the best of the new Kenyan fiction. Observing Munyakei at such close quarters, Kahora does not portray him as a well-behaved hero but rather as a contradictory, often embittered man. However, Kahora's main barbs, delivered with only the most sparing authorial intervention, are reserved for the grasping media industry and do-gooder liberal activists. The latter, publicly lionising Munyakei, are often too distant and naïve to really do him any justice. By the time of his death, in penury in mid-2006, his passing was barely noticed. It is, in short, a typical Kenyan story. ●

PARSELELO KANTAI

District 9

Directed by Neill Blomkamp

112 minutes

District 9 is no ordinary sci-fi movie. Shot in mockumentary style, the film tells a moving story about a slum in Johannesburg where one million aliens have been contained for the past 20 years. Multinational United (MNU), a UN-styled organisation, is tasked with moving the aliens to another district because tensions between humans and aliens are mounting. The project is headed by an awkward but likeable Wikis van der Merwe. He becomes infected with a DNA-altering liquid that gives him access to alien weaponry, and he immediately becomes the most valuable specimen on earth. *District 9* is sensationally shot, with direction, cinematography and special effects of the highest pedigree. Crucially, it is a gritty sci-fi flick, soaked with searching questions about nationality, citizenship and the idea of 'home'. It will make you squirm, make you cringe and when you least expect, make you lunge forward with cathartic laughter. ●

AZAD ESSA



Monkeys' Wedding

Netsayi

World Connection



This second album from Zimbabwean singer-songwriter Netsayi comes with a fresh hit of memorable melodies, sardonic lyrics, funk rhythms, all mixed in with Southern African musicality. The songs are stories that weave around universal human situations: love, hate, growing up and relationships. There are lyrical and musical references to both of her homes: London, where she was born and is now based; and Harare, where she lived from the age of seven, when her family moved back after independence. Choice amongst the tracks is 'Money Drum', a song about earning a living, underpinned by the complex rhythm of the mbira, the Shona 'thumb piano'. This is a great African pop album, one that is likely to reach many listeners' ears. ●

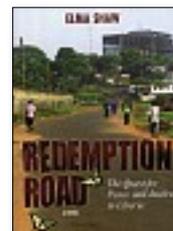
ROSE SKELTON

Redemption Road

Elma Shaw

240p,

Cotton Tree Press



This fictional war memoir is told with drama, pace and compassion. Shaw's first novel, published by Liberian newcomers Cotton Tree Press, launches a project to make story-telling part of the country's ongoing reconciliation with its brutal history. Set during Charles Taylor's post-civil-war presidency, Bendu Lewis, runs her own NGO for female victims of the violence, but is haunted by the year she spent as the wife of a rebel fighter and must battle the liaisons between the former rebels and those in power. Some stilted dialogue aside, *Redemption Road* is a bold first step on the path to creating a new oeuvre for West Africa's post-conflict states. ●

GEMMA WARE