

The Director Murdered

Emmanuel Igwaro Odongo-Aginya

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Uganda is exquisitely described in this murder mystery with a dynamic lead.

Emmanuel Igwaro Odongo-Aginya's murder mystery *The Director Murdered*, set in Uganda, has political overtones and a likable lead detective; its dynamic team works at cracking two murder cases.

The story gets right to the point: the director of Uganda's Medical Research Institution has been murdered. In another city, a child is killed by a hit-and-run driver. An everyman detective, Peter Odongkara is assigned to investigate the director's murder; he learns that the death of the child is connected, though technically out of his jurisdiction.

To solve the two cases, Odongkara assembles a team of detectives, including a pathologist, a fingerprint analyst, and a crime scene photographer. Odongkara is himself no slouch when it comes to chasing down leads or breaking cases; a professional bloodhound, he is both determined and charming. However, Odongkara does not have a whole lot of friends in the political and legal hierarchy of Uganda.

At home, Odongkara is mired in a troubled marriage. The trouble comes from his father, who does not like his southern Ugandan wife. This subplot, along with Odongkara's undeniable charms when it comes to the opposite sex, injects melodrama into the murder story. It is, in many ways, superior to the main plot; the mystery itself proves unsatisfying.

The book's prose is clunky. Sentences are short and compact; they are written in a staccato rhythm using unadorned, terse, and even laconic language. Word choices are awkward and sometimes incorrect, and lines are hard to follow. While the investigators are each likable, the sheer volume of character names and titles is exhausting, and many characters needlessly complicate the tale.

Uganda is exquisitely described, from its politics and regional rivalries to its rain-swept mountains and hot, humid summers. Uganda's internal politics—its battles between the populace and the government, its different religions (Christianity and Islam predominately), and the police and the judicial system—are well detailed.

The story functions more as a police procedural than a mystery, with highly detailed passages involving interrogations and forensic examinations. It excels at such details, if not as much at sustaining tension around the murders. Odongkara's conversational skills and his deep understanding of human nature are a pleasure to read through; as he unravels the truth behind the cases, it's his voice that holds interest, not the ultimately pedestrian explanations themselves.

The Director Murdered is a rough-around-the-edges murder mystery.

BENJAMIN WELTON (July 24, 2018)

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