

1: This Hungry Owl: So What is the "What" in "What is the What?"

What Is the What is the epic novel based on the life of Valentino Achak Deng who, along with thousands of other children – the so-called Lost Boys – was forced to leave his village in Sudan at the age of seven and trek hundreds of miles by foot, pursued by militias, government bombers, and wild animals, crossing the deserts of three countries.

Valentino suffers hunger and disease as, with thousands of others, he walks through his war-torn country to refugee camps in both Ethiopia and Kenya. The book opens with Valentino answering his a knock on his apartment door to an African-American woman. She says she wants to use the phone, but moments later, a man appears and forces himself through the door and ties Valentino up while the woman robs the apartment. From this compromised position Valentino tells the reader the first part of his story. Valentino was born in Southern Sudan in a village called Marial Bai. He speaks of his upbringing with fondness, surrounded by a good family and friends. Compared to many people in the area, he had a privileged background. His father owns a series of shops and is likely to hand them over to Valentino when he retires. However, the Sudanese government renders such plans impossible. In an attempt to oppress the uprising of the rebel army SPLA and bring the whole country under Islamic law, they order the destruction of Southern Sudan villages. Back in America, the robbers knock Valentino unconscious. When he wakes up, he is bound and gagged in his own apartment with a young boy named Michael left to guard him. Valentino begins his walk to Ethiopia. The walk is treacherous in the extreme – wild animals, soldiers and disease threatening his life. Valentino reunites with his boyhood friend, William K. They keep each other alive, both experiencing signs of madness and disease, until William K dies just before they reach Ethiopia. The robbers have now gone, and Achor Achor unties his friend and calls the police. When a policewoman finally arrives, she shows no sign that either she cares about the robbery or that she will take the investigation any further. Disillusioned, Valentino and Achor Achor visit the local hospital. They expect a doctor to see Valentino quickly, but after many hours they are still waiting. During the wait, Valentino continues his story. They cross the border into Ethiopia and set up a refugee camp in Pinyudo near the Gilo River. More children join their ranks, and the elders organize them into groups. Valentino is head of his group, which he names the 11 because it consists of 11 boys. Slowly the elders build schools and begin to educate the children. Their idea is to develop a new generation of educated Southern Sudanese, who can continue to the fight. The rebel army oversees camp development and honors the refugees with visits and speeches from rebel leaders, most notably the SPLA founder, John Garang. It is not long, though, before the SPLA begin recruiting boys into the army. Valentino is just reaching the age of recruitment when the Ethiopian army drives the refugees away from the area. The soldiers force the refugees into another treacherous journey into Kenya. In Kenya, they build another refugee camp in Kakuma. Unfortunately, foreign aid is less forthcoming, and they have to survive on one meal a day. Nevertheless, life becomes relatively comfortable. Valentino lives with a family, goes to school, plays basketball and meets his future girlfriend, Tabitha. Valentino is very popular and camp leaders give him a job as youth leader and the opportunity to visit Nairobi. However, when it comes to getting out of Africa and to the promised land of America, the authorities overlook him. Back in America Valentino decides to give up waiting for a doctor and goes to work. In his now downbeat mood, Valentino thinks about his girlfriend Tabitha. They started their romance in Kakuma, but it ended prematurely when Tabitha moved to Seattle and found a new Sudanese boyfriend. When Valentino moved to Atlanta, they got in contact again, and soon afterwards Tabitha broke up with her boyfriend. Her ex-boyfriend became jealous and murdered her. The authorities finally choose Valentino to immigrate to America. He has his doubts because he wants to see his family again and gets contact with his father. His father tells he must go to America and come back a successful and educated man. In , in the wake of the terrorist attack in New York, Valentino flies to Atlanta. This section contains words approx.

2: What Is the What Quotes by Dave Eggers

What is the What, by Dave Eggers, is a docu-drama-type "novel" based on the real life of Valentino Achak Deng. At the age of seven (maybe eight) he watches his Sudanese village be attacked and destroyed by government-sponsored militia.

What did it mean? How does one invest meaning in such an unstable signifier? But instead of seeing it as a static unit of meaning, thinking about it lead me to understand how the symbolic significance of the What constantly evolves throughout the novel. At first, the What is described as the key element in the Dinka creation myth. In the creation myth, God offers a Dinka man and woman two choices; they may either choose the cow, or they may choose the What, an unknown. God was testing the man. Here the What is associated with Dinka superiority precisely because they chose correctly. They chose what was before them rather than the unknown. However, the What is re-characterized throughout the novel in a number of ways. As the What is unmoored from its association to Dinka prudence, it functions less as a negation than as an affirmation of Dinka possibility. The very evacuation of a specific meaning in the What points toward its function as an empty placeholder for possibility and agency. Throughout the novel, Eggers describes Valentino as trapped within systems of dependency in the refugee camps. The children are educated, but the hope in using this education remains dim when it does not directly translate into an eventual material change. In the beginning, the What possesses a stable meaning. It is the symbol of Dinka prosperity and prudence, and this is reflected in the peaceful village of Marial Bai. However, as the novel progresses, the What becomes ambiguous. Valentino first questions this when he encounters the mysterious man in the forest during his long walk away from what was a world of security and meaning. He asks, what is the what? The mysterious man asks for his ideas. Valentino suggests the What could be the horse the symbol of the Arabs , the Ak war , airplanes modernization , or education Western liberal discourse of development. However, the passage I really wanted to talk about was the one where Valentino speaks to Daniel of the importance of being brave, of taking risks in the hopes of claiming a better, albeit unknowable future. Our people, I said, had been punished for centuries for our errors, but now we were being given a chance to rectify all that. We had been tested as none other before had been tested. We had been sent into the unknown once, and then again and again. We had been thrown this way and that, like rain in the wind of a hysterical storm. Now we can stand and decide. This is our first chance to choose our own unknown. In this way, attempting to answer the question of the novel "what is the what" implicitly refers to the quest for agency, a solution to the seemingly overwhelming problems. What is the meaning of hope itself? This has particular salience to human rights literature since this form of hope becomes critical in sustaining hope itself. However, this points not to the debility of human rights, but to an approach that privileges a sentiment and momentum for change while acknowledging concrete specificities remain a challenge in realizing the oftentimes ambiguous of hope of human rights. The prevention of Valentino to exercise agency fosters a sense of despair that haunts the entire novel; indeed even Valentino seems to note how loyally calamity follows him. This parallels the numerous other scenes where Valentino denies the likelihood of change, such as when Noriyaki successfully orders the laptop, or when Tabitha derides Valentino for lacking the courage to run away, to make a better life for themselves.

3: What Is the What - Dave Eggers - Google Books

What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng is a novel written by Dave Eggers. It is based on the life of Valentino Achak Deng, a Sudanese child refugee who immigrated to the United States under the Lost Boys of Sudan program.

The liberties and devices of fiction dialogue, voice, characterization and so forth enable the writer to take us into the mind and heart of a person not unlike ourselves who talks to us from a distant period and place, and so becomes our guide to its sights and sounds, its sorrows and satisfactions. Huck compels us to believe him, which means that we are obliged once again to acknowledge that we live in a country in which ordinary citizens actually bought and sold human beings like Jim. He then concocted this novel, approximating my voice and using the basic events of my life as the foundation. Ah, the Lost Boys of Sudan, we say. The phrase has instant name recognition for many Americans who, I suspect, might then need to pause to retrieve the details if such a retrieval ever occurs of how and why those boys got lost in the first place. In fact their diaspora began during the second Sudanese civil war, which lasted from to and displaced tens of thousand of children. Driven from their ruined villages, they wandered through a war zone to resettlement camps and, for the lucky ones, to safety. You know precisely who the boys were because you have experienced their mass migration and the mass murder that occasioned it through the eyes, and in the compelling voice, of Valentino Achak Deng. The book opens in Atlanta, where Valentino works at a health club and attends a community college—and where, in the first chapter, his apartment is broken into by thugs, thus confirming his growing awareness that violence is not an exclusively East African problem. Bound and gagged, held captive by a boy not much older than he was when his peregrinations began, he recalls his tranquil childhood among the Dinka tribe in the village of Marial Bal. There his most serious quandary involved the question of when to remove the plastic wrapping from a new bicycle, and there too his father, who owned a shop, used to tell the story that gives the novel its title. But others picked, and continue to seek, the mysterious, unnamable, destructive and possibly unattainable What. Soon the consequences of that mythic decision come crashing down on the unfortunate Dinka. Marial Bal becomes a battleground, fought over by government and rebel armies; the village is strafed by army helicopters, invaded, burned, occupied. And Achak who will take the name Valentino only later in his tale narrowly escapes: But I was too loud. When I ran through the grass I seemed to be begging the world to notice me, to devour me. I tried to make my feet lighter but I could not see where I was placing them. It was black everywhere, there was no moon that night, and I had to run with my hands rigid in front of me. As with any book we enjoy and admire, we keep turning the pages to find out if everything will turn out all right in the end. It gives me strength, almost unbelievable strength, to know that you are there. I will fill today, tomorrow, every day until I am taken back to God. All the while I will know that you are there. How can I pretend that you do not exist? It would be almost as impossible as you pretending that I do not exist. Dave Eggers has made the outlines of the tragedy in East Africa—so vague to so many Americans—not only sharp and clear but indelible. It deserves a wide audience for two reasons. First, it is beautifully written and explores all the deepest aspects of human life: The second reason people should read *What Is the What* involves a world bigger than book publishing. Eggers puts a human face on what is happening in Africa today, specifically in Sudan and the conflict between the Muslim North and the Christian South. What is not specifically about Darfur, but it helps the reader understand the roots of that conflict. In *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, his memoir about rearing his little brother after the death of their parents, Eggers established that he is the most interesting young writer working today. *What Is the What* confirms and enhances his reputation within the literary world. Without being a political diatribe, *What* makes comprehensible the jumble of news stories and TV reports about refugee camps, orphans and boy soldiers. It also examines in detail the complicated and often unnerving experience of being an immigrant to the USA in the 21st century. The unusual element is contained in the title, subtitle and author credit: *What Is the What: Eggers and Deng met in* In the preface, Deng explains how the book came together. Born in a village in southern Sudan, Deng was the cherished son of a comfortable storekeeper from the Dinka tribe. The

village was being punished for the activities of Sudanese rebels. And the voice of the book is a revelation, too. Instead, it belongs to a southern Sudanese boy, forced to flee his village when only 6 or 7 years old, after his people, the Christian Dinka, are attacked by soldiers of the Islamist government of Khartoum and its tribal allies. In Atlanta, he tried to pursue his dream of getting a college education, with the idea of eventually bringing some of the benefit of his luck back to Sudan with him. But his luck ran bad as often as it ran good. Eggers may be using docu-drama methods here, but the book sings like a novel—a novel in which every phrase falls with exquisite, revealing precision and the themes of the story play out as satisfyingly as in a large-scale symphony. I miss the yellow nothing of Ethiopia. Deng, with Eggers as his channeler, clearly intended the telling of his story to be a prompt to action. All proceeds from the novel are going to The Valentino Achak Deng Foundation, dedicated to helping Sudanese refugees in America, rebuilding villages in southern Sudan and funding humanitarian aid in Darfur with some going to the college education Deng is still pursuing. With its perfect blend of epic sweep and small, intimate moments, it stands worthily alongside the best work of Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri. How much is fact and how much is fiction. The explanation goes like this: Introduced to Deng in early and deeply engaged by his story, Eggers set out to write a conventional biography. But he kept getting stuck. By labeling the book a novel, Eggers says, he freed himself to re-create conversations, streamline complex relationships, add relevant detail and manipulate time and space in helpful ways—all while maintaining the essential truthfulness of the storytelling. There was only one hitch. Author and subject grin at the memory. Deng, in a black shirt and jeans, is tall—as the Dinka people tend to be—with a warm, gap-toothed smile. I pictured her in yellow, yellow like an evening sun, walking down the path. It seemed to me that to die I needed to clear my mind of all thoughts, all visions, and concentrate on passing on. She lifted him up and got him walking again. Lost Boys is a name attached to thousands of young refugees from the civil war in southern Sudan, which broke out in the mids and continued until peace was finally negotiated in Marial Bai, the home town from which Deng was driven in fear of his life, is farther south. But the boy knew nothing of the complex history behind the conflict. Arab militiamen on horseback overran Marial Bai. Deng saw his home town burned, his friends and neighbors killed or abducted. The horrors of that walk cannot be easily summarized. Once across the border, a refugee camp became a recruiting ground. How he finally got to the United States is an epic in itself. Being scheduled to fly on Sept. Plunked down in Atlanta, he got to know the founder of a nonprofit called the Lost Boys Foundation. Her name was Mary Williams and she came to view him as an especially articulate spokesman for his Lost Boy peers. One day, he says, Williams asked about his long-term goals. Williams read up on Eggers and was impressed. The idea was a long shot at best. But Eggers, as it happened, was already intrigued by the long march of the Sudanese refugees. So he flew to Atlanta to check things out. He bonded with Deng right away and began taping interviews. Later, they wangled their way onto a plane delivering aid to Sudan—"we sat in the cargo hold with the grain and the bicycles and stuff," Eggers says—to do a little firsthand research. In all, they spent thousands of hours together. When Eggers raised the idea, he feared that Deng would angrily reject any re-imagining of his real story. Do anything you want! Back and forth they go, deferring to each other, holding forth on their shared narrative. What does the future hold for Deng? Will he stay in his adopted homeland, where he is attending Allegheny College? As for that mysterious title: God, it seems, made the first Dinka man tall and strong and the first Dinka woman beautiful. When he was done, he offered his creations a gift. But God refused to answer. The choice was a test. The Dinka could go for the cattle, which they knew would allow them to live well, or they could take a chance on the unknown. Except —! The stable, solid universe in which that decision made sense is gone. And in the Lost Boy world of strife and stress and endless change that has replaced it, embracing the unknown—as Valentino Achak Deng can tell us better than anyone—looks like the only choice there is. November 9—November 15, At the opening of this fictionalized memoir, Valentino Achak Deng lies on his living-room floor, bloodied and beaten. A man and a woman are robbing him blind, and though his pistol-whipped head is cloudy, one thought persists: This is not the worst of my suffering. Deng is a flesh-and-blood Lost Boy of Sudan, one of the thousands of refugees who fled the African country after years of civil strife, walking through desert and jungle and eventually landing across the globe. Over the course of several years, Eggers interviewed Deng about his escape and his life in

America, and the result is this odd hybrid of the real and unreal. In essence, Eggers channels Deng and the horrors suffered by the Lost Boys for pages.

4: What Is the What by Dave Eggers | www.enganchecubano.com

Valentino Achak Deng is a Sudanese refugee living in Atlanta. One night, he opens his door to an African American woman who says her car has broken down. She asks to use his phone but to keep the door open since it will only take a few minutes. After she enters, an African American man walks into.

Plot summary[edit] As a boy, Achak is separated from his family during the Second Sudanese Civil War when the Arab militia, referred to as murahaleen which is Arabic for the deported , wipes out his Dinka village, Marial Bai. During the assault, he loses sight of his father and his childhood friends, Moses and William K. However, Moses is believed to be dead after the assault. Achak seeks shelter in the house of his aunt with his mother, who is frequently identified throughout the book with a yellow dress. Achak never sees her again. He evades detection by hiding in a bag of grain, and credits God for helping him stay quiet. He flees on foot with a group of other young boys the "Lost Boys" , encountering great danger and terrible hardship along the way to a refugee camp in Ethiopia. Their inflated expectations of safety and relief are shattered by the conditions at the camp. After Ethiopian president Mengistu is overthrown and soldiers open fire on them, they flee to another refugee camp in Kakuma , Kenya. There he encounters a new set of trials. The account runs in parallel to his story of subsequent hardships in the United States. Reception[edit] In the preface to the novel, Deng writes: I told [him] what I knew and what I could remember, and from that material he created this work of art. By classifying the book a novel, Eggers says, he freed himself to re-create conversations, streamline complex relationships, add relevant detail and manipulate time and space in helpful waysâ€”all while maintaining the essential truthfulness of the storytelling. Lee Siegel sees as much of Dave Eggers in the novel as Deng, unable to tell the two apart, saying [3] "How strange for one man to think that he could write the story of another man, a real living man who is perfectly capable of telling his story himselfâ€”and then call it an autobiography. I was still taking classes in basic writing at Georgia Perimeter College. Very early on, when the book was in a more straightforward authorial voice, I missed the voice I was hearing on the tapes. I could disappear completely, and the reader would have the benefit of his very distinct voice. Macalester College required all incoming freshmen to read it in The University of Maine required first-year students in its Honors College to read the novel in

5: What Is the What Summary and Analysis (like SparkNotes) | Free Book Notes

"What Is the What" tells a devastating story but never plays for sympathy. Instead, the hope, complexity, and tragedy of the situation take center stage. Valentino's story stands alone as powerful and worth reading and Eggers' superb writing compellingly brings Valentino's voice and story to life.

Page 4 of 4 Discussion Questions 1. When he is in the United States, Valentino says that he wants everyone to hear his stories. Through Eggers, Valentino has found a way to send his stories into the world. Are they powerless to alter the suffering he and his fellow Sudanese have endured? What powers do they possess? Why would Eggers make this narrative choice? In what ways do they shape his character? What enables him to survive these ordeals and even excel in the refugee camps? Does the novel point to a solution to this riddle? At the end of the novel, Valentino addresses the reader directly: How can I pretend that you do not exist? Why would Eggers and Valentino choose to end the novel in this way? What is Valentino saying here about the power of the imagination and the power of storytelling? Explore the irony of Valentino escaping from Africa and the terrible violence there to being beaten and robbed in Atlanta. How are his struggles in the United States both different from and similar to his struggles in Africa? In what ways do SPLA forces behave just as brutally as the murahaleen and government forces they are fighting? And we occupied the lowest rung on the ladder. Is this desire for hierarchy intrinsic to human nature or is it always historically conditioned? What Is the What is about war and displacement and the struggle to survive. In what ways is it also a novel about friendship, love, and family? What moments of compassion stand out in the novel? Questions issued by publisher.

6: What Is the What - Discussion Questions

The lyricism, the detail and, most important, the absolute specificity of these sentences are what make "What Is the What" so persuasive. It's a real high-wire act, yet Eggers manages to.

These Are the Saddest Phrases in English used interrogatively to inquire as to the worth, usefulness, force, or importance of something: What is wealth without friends? What does it cost? I will send what was promised. Say what you please. He said what everyone expected he would. They are just what I was expecting. We should each give what we can. He went to the meeting and, what was worse, insisted on speaking. Shall we go or what? An unusual chap, what? Show More noun the true nature or identity of something, or the sum of its characteristics: Show More used interrogatively before nouns: What clothes shall I pack? Take what supplies you need. Show More adverb to what extent or degree? What does it matter? What with storms and all, their return was delayed. Show More used in exclamatory expressions, often followed by a question: Show More Older Use. He helps me what he can. Show More Idioms but what, Informal. Who knows but what the sun may still shine. Would you repeat that? What are you doing that for? You want that package now? If he stays out late again, his parents are going to give him what for! What if everyone who was invited comes?

7: What Is the What Summary & Study Guide

What Is the What is a story of real global catastrophe—a work of such simple power, straightforward emotion and genuine gravitas that it reminds us how memoirs can transcend the personal to illuminate large, public tragedies as well.

In America, where he had finally been transported by charity, he was working to put himself through college. The first weekend they met - they had been put in touch by Mary Williams, founder of the Lost Boys Foundation - Achak and Eggers went to a birthday party and a basketball game. They watched *The Exorcist* and they talked non-stop. Eggers, who made his name as a writer with his eccentric memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, was something of a minor league Lost Boy himself: He travelled to Sudan with Achak to witness the remains of the life he had left behind and he became determined to write his story. In an introduction, Achak explains: He then concocted this novel, approximating my own voice and using the basic events of my life as the foundation. As well as bearing witness to genocide, *What Is the What* serves another purpose: Given this extraordinary publishing energy, it is no surprise that Eggers characterises himself as a man who likes to say yes, to new ventures and adventures, to possibility. If the writing that Eggers produces and publishes has had a message, it seems to have grown out of that knowledge: His memoir both satirised that fact and employed it to full advantage. He made himself a sort of performance artist whose chosen media were irony and pathos. The guiding emotional intelligence was that of Salinger: Was there something manipulative about this? Was it affecting all the same? The tone was schizophrenic to the point of absurdity: The short stories, *How We Are Hungry*, that came next, were in a similar vein; tricky, disaffected, laced with postures of liberal guilt. There was a sense in both of these books that Eggers was in danger of disappearing up his own irony. However much he wanted to care, his literary defence mechanisms and his slightly uncomfortable celebrity placed him at several removes from the world. It is easy to see how meeting Valentino Achak Deng might represent a way out of that dead-end. He could do away with smartness and ennui, the apparatus of self-promotion and self-deprecation. He could tell a heartbreaking tale and not bother with the staggering genius. It seems important work; the effort of privileged literary America to get inside the head of the voiceless and displaced. At times, though, it is undone by its exhaustiveness, its earnestness. In place of that kind of vision, Eggers offers doggedness. No land is promised. He - and the book - are saved by love: Where news reporters fly in and out of humanitarian camps, and give an impression of temporariness, Eggers attempts to show the true horror of these places, their permanence. Achak is lucky to have found Eggers to tell his tale; Eggers is fortunate to have it to tell.

8: What - Wikipedia

What Is the What by Dave Eggers. Hamish Hamilton Â£, pp Five years ago, Dave Eggers met a Sudanese refugee living in Atlanta, Georgia, called Valentino Achak Deng.

I have no tiny round window to inspect visitors so I open the door and before me is a tall, sturdily built African-American woman, a few years older than me, wearing a red nylon sweatsuit. She speaks to me loudly. I am almost certain that I saw her in the parking lot an hour ago, when I returned from the convenience store. I saw her standing by the stairs, and I smiled at her. I tell her that I do have a phone. Behind her, it is nearly night. I have been studying most of the afternoon. I do not know why she wants to call the police for a car in need of repair, but I consent. I begin to close the door but she holds it open. It does not make sense to me to leave the door open but I do so because she desires it. This is her country and not yet mine. I tell her my cell phone is in my bedroom. Before I finish the sentence, she has rushed past me and down the hall, a hulk of swishing nylon. The door to my room closes, then clicks. She has locked herself in my bedroom. I start to follow her when I hear a voice behind me. His face is not discernible beneath his baseball hat but he has his hand on something near his waist, as if needing to hold up his pants. I sit and now he shows me the handle of the gun. He has been holding it all along, and I was supposed to know. But I know nothing; I never know the things I am supposed to know. I do know, now, that I am being robbed, and that I want to be elsewhere. It is a strange thing, I realize, but what I think at this moment is that I want to be back in Kakuma. In Kakuma there was no rain, the winds blew nine months a year, and eighty thousand war refugees from Sudan and elsewhere lived on one meal a day. But at this moment, when the woman is in my bedroom and the man is guarding me with his gun, I want to be in Kakuma, where I lived in a hut of plastic and sandbags and owned one pair of pants. I am not sure there was evil of this kind in the Kakuma refugee camp, and I want to return. Or even Pinyudo, the Ethiopian camp I lived in before Kakuma; there was nothing there, only one or two meals a day, but it had its small pleasures; I was a boy then and could forget that I was a malnourished refugee a thousand miles from home. In any case, if this is punishment for the hubris of wanting to leave Africa, of harboring dreams of college and solvency in America, I am now chastened and I apologize. I will return with bowed head. Why did I smile at this woman? I smile reflexively and it is a habit I need to break. I have been humbled so many times since arriving that I am beginning to think someone is trying desperately to send me a message, and that message is "Leave this place. This new posture has me standing up and speaking to the man in the powderblue coat. The powder man is instantly enraged. I have upset the balance here, have thrown an obstacle, my voice, in the way of their errand. Powder tilts his head to me and raises his eyebrows. He takes a step toward me and again gestures toward the gun in his belt. He seems about to use it, but suddenly his shoulders slacken, and he drops his head. He stares at his shoes and breathes slowly, collecting himself. When he raises his eyes again, he has regained himself. The simple robbery had been, in a way, acceptable. I have seen robberies, have been robbed, on scales much smaller than this. Until I arrived in the United States, my most valuable possession was the mattress I slept on, and so the thefts were far smaller: All of these were valuable, yes, but now I own a television, a VCR, a microwave, an alarm clock, many other conveniences, all provided by the Peachtree United Methodist Church here in Atlanta. Some of the things were used, most were new, and all had been given anonymously. To look at them, to use them daily, provoked in me a shudder-a strange but genuine physical expression of gratitude. And now I assume all of these gifts will be taken in the next few minutes. I stand before Powder and my memory is searching for the time when I last felt this betrayed, when I last felt in the presence of evil so careless. With one hand still gripping the handle of the gun, he now puts his hand to my chest. An apple-faced white woman wearing a tie-dyed shirt brought it the day Achor Achor and I moved in. The people from the church were often apologizing. I stare up at Powder and I know who he brings to mind. The soldier, an Ethiopian and a woman, shot two of my companions and almost killed me. She had the same wild light in her eyes, and she first posed as our savior. We were fleeing Ethiopia, chased by hundreds of Ethiopian soldiers shooting at us, the River Gilo full of our blood, and out of the high grasses she appeared. Come to me, children! I am your mother! She was only a face in the grey grass, her

hands outstretched, and I hesitated. Two of the boys I was running with, boys I had found on the bank of the bloody river, they both went to her. And when they drew close enough, she lifted an automatic rifle and shot through the chests and stomachs of the boys. They fell in front of me and I turned and ran. Come to your mother! I had run that day through the grasses until I found Achor Achor, and with Achor Achor, we found the Quiet Baby, and we saved the Quiet Baby and, for a time, we considered ourselves doctors. This was so many years ago. I was ten years old, perhaps eleven. The man before me, Powder, would never know anything of this kind. He would not be interested. Thinking of that day, when we were driven from Ethiopia back to Sudan, thousands dead in the river, gives me strength against this person in my apartment, and again I stand. The man now looks at me, like a parent about to do something he regrets that his child has forced him to do. He is so close to me I can smell something chemical about him, a smell like bleach. He takes the gun from his waist and raises it in an upward backhand motion. A blur of black and my teeth crush each other and I watch the ceiling rush over me. In my life I have been struck in many different ways but never with the barrel of a gun. I have the fortune of having seen more suffering than I have suffered myself, but nevertheless, I have been starved, I have been beaten with sticks, with rods, with brooms and stones and spears. I have ridden five miles on a truckbed loaded with corpses. I have watched too many young boys die in the desert, some as if sitting down to sleep, some after days of madness. I have seen three boys taken by lions, eaten haphazardly. I have watched a close friend die next to me in an overturned truck, his eyes open to me, his life leaking from a hole I could not see. And yet at this moment, as I am strewn across the couch and my hand is wet with blood, I find myself missing all of Africa. I miss Sudan, I miss the howling grey desert of northwest Kenya. I miss the yellow nothing of Ethiopia. My view of my assailant is now limited to his waist, his hands. He has stored the gun somewhere and now his hands have my shirt and my neck and he is throwing me from the couch to the carpet. The back of my head hits the end table on the way earthward and two glasses and a clock radio fall with me. Once on the carpet, my cheek resting in its own pooling blood, I know a moment of comfort, thinking that in all likelihood he is finished. Already I am so tired. I feel as if I could close my eyes and be done with this. These words sound unconvincing, and this gives me solace. He is not an angry man, I realize. He does not intend to kill me; perhaps he has been manipulated by this woman, who is now opening the drawers and closets of my bedroom. She seems to be in control. She is focused on whatever is in my room, and the job of her companion is to neutralize me. It seems simple, and he seems disinclined to inflict further harm upon me. I close my eyes and rest. I am tired of this country. I am thankful for it, yes, I have cherished many aspects of it for the three years I have been here, but I am tired of the promises. I came here, four thousand of us came here, contemplating and expecting quiet. Peace and college and safety. We expected a land without war and, I suppose, a land without misery. We were giddy and impatient.

9: About What Is the What. - McSweeney's Internet Tendency

What is the What is written as an autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng, but authored by the American writer, Dave Eggers. Mixing fictional and non-fictional elements, Eggers tells the story of Valentino's long and arduous journey from his hometown in Southern Sudan to his present home in Atlanta, Georgia in the USA.

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