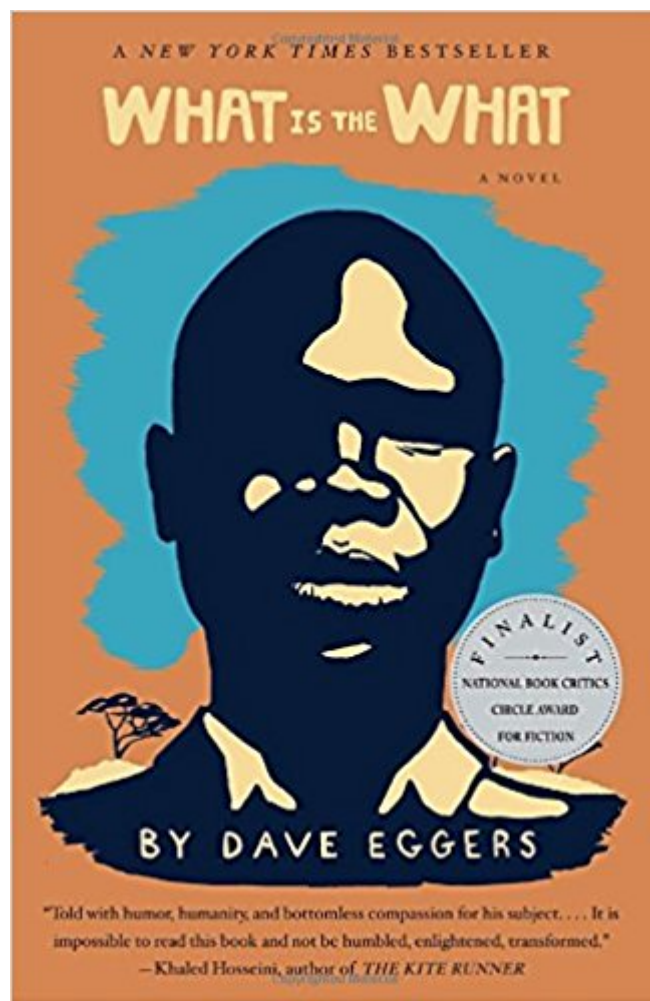


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# What Is The What



## Synopsis

New York Times Notable Book New York Times BestsellerWhat 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 to find freedom. When he finally is resettled in the United States, he finds a life full of promise, but also heartache and myriad new challenges. Moving, suspenseful, and unexpectedly funny, What Is the What is an astonishing novel that illuminates the lives of millions through one extraordinary man.

## Book Information

Paperback: 560 pages

Publisher: Vintage (October 9, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307385906

ISBN-13: 978-0307385901

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 467 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #37,216 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #190 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Biographical #203 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Biographical #3594 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Literary

## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Valentino Achak Deng, real-life hero of this engrossing epic, was a refugee from the Sudanese civil war-the bloodbath before the current Darfur bloodbath-of the 1980s and 90s. In this fictionalized memoir, Eggers (A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius) makes him an icon of globalization. Separated from his family when Arab militia destroy his village, Valentino joins thousands of other "Lost Boys," beset by starvation, thirst and man-eating lions on their march to squalid refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, where Valentino pieces together a new life. He eventually reaches America, but finds his quest for safety, community and fulfillment in many ways even more difficult there than in the camps: he recalls, for instance, being robbed, beaten and held captive in his Atlanta apartment. Eggers's limpid prose gives Valentino an unaffected, compelling voice and makes his narrative by turns harrowing, funny, bleak and lyrical. The result is a horrific

account of the Sudanese tragedy, but also an emblematic saga of modernity-of the search for home and self in a world of unending upheaval. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Dave Eggers is best known for *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000), and here he shows that he is as adroit at telling another person's biography as he is narrating his own. Over three years, he conducted 100 hours of interviews with Deng and visited Sudan with him in "synergistic collaboration" (Time). Labeled as a novel, this work nonetheless has a historical basis and lends a personal face to the brutality of civil war, squalor, and the struggle for survival. A few critics questioned where Deng's story ended and Eggers's literary license began, and the book as a whole could have been better edited. While visceral and heartrending, Deng's and Eggers's joint story is ultimately a powerful tale of hope. When both *People* and the ever-glum Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times* rave, how can one resist? Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I remember very well the night of September 10 2001, when I sat crying over the story of the Sudanese "Lost Boys" that aired on TV. How sad the story of these children walking through the desert of a warring Sudan. How beautiful that they were given the chance to start a new life in the USA. I woke the next morning to the horrific news about the terror attacks in the east, and had a moment of pause when I thought of the story of the Sudanese refugees I saw the night before. I thought that their plight would then go unnoticed, being overshadowed by the advent of certain war. From then I noticed these elegant men arriving in my city and wondering at their stories, their strength, and with time, triumphs. We are proud to read of our new residents accomplishments. I have always remained curious about their stories. Thankfully, now I have read this account of one "lost boy's" origin, which has given me a better framework of understanding the stories of these victims of war. I applaud the courage of the refugee, the immigrant and the power of hope that has transformed their lives. Thank you for sharing this story

When I say that this book changed me irrevocably, I am not overstating. I read this book first back in high-school in my senior year in 2007. This book is so intense and meaningful to me, I can't really describe it. As someone who grew up upper middle-class my whole life in America, the experiences of Valentino Deng, ghost-written by Dave Eggers (one of my favorite authors), are profound in their

intense despair, incredible hopefulness, and heart-breaking authenticity. I feel like I became a better, more worldly, more humble and more introspective person after having read this book. I also have a much greater appreciation for the plights of others from around the world. I literally knew next to nothing about Sudan and the refugee crisis before reading this book. I probably still know very little, but I feel closer, none the less, to such a profound and mass human experience.

Maybe if I was more well-informed and less ignorant about the Lost Boys of Sudan and what went on there, I wouldn't have thought this book was so amazing. But I barely knew anything about what transpired in the Sudan during the late 20th and early 21st centuries before reading this and therefore was blown away by this book. Unfortunately most Americans (and the developed world in general) only pay attention to what affects them, and what was happening in the Sudan was easy for us to ignore. I hope more and more people read this book.

I've been meaning to write a review for months now! Here it is: This novel took me on a long journey. Although it was quite long, I was glad that I read it and there was never a dull moment. Because of the similarity in the struggle of survival in countries such as Sudan and Congo, this story had lots of information to help me with my own writing. It talked about the struggles of a Lost Boy from Sudan during the Civil War in Africa. This story is about a young boy named Valentino Achak Deng. Valentino, along with many other boys of his age, some younger and older, walk for months to flee to Ethiopia after the rebel soldiers destroy the village of Marial Bai and other villages in South Sudan. Valentino is forced to leave his village, as well as his family. Now he's alone with a bunch of boys he doesn't know, and his family is probably dead. During his journey, he walks with more than 400 boys through the forest of South Sudan. On that journey, they encounter many obstacles. Many boys die of diarrhea, famine, while others are killed by lions, crocodiles etc.. Valentino is one of the few boys who makes it to Ethiopia. Although they make it to the safe land, they are quite disappointed with Ethiopia. There is no clean water. There is no food. There is no home. There is nothing. More groups of young boys, girls, and elders join them in Ethiopia and they make a home out of Ethiopia for three years until they are kicked out of the country by Ethiopians. Now they're back to walking. For a year they stay in the desert of Sudan, and then finally make their way to Kakuma, Kenya where he remains for more than 10 years in a refugee camp with thousands of other refugees. In the book, the author Dave Eggers goes back and forth from the past to the present. In the present, Valentino is living Atlanta, GA and has just been robbed and assaulted. He was promised that America would bring many great things for him and that he would even be able to

obtain a college degree. Life isn't exactly how he thought it would be. Instead, he just lost the love of his life who was brutally murdered by an ex-lover. He's been at a community college for 6 years and is struggling financially. To top it all, two Americans have just robbed him from everything he owned to the very last penny in his wallet. I loved this book. It is now one of my favorite books. Sometimes when you come from a third world country, you believe that living in the United States couldn't possibly be as stressful or bad. Although it is not anything close to living in an over populated refugee camp or walking in the desert or forest of South Sudan without food or water, you will still encounter problems. New problems are always presented whether we want them or not. Valentino had such a calm spirit. He handled every situation in a way that I wouldn't be able to. After 16 years, while he was still living in Kakuma camp, he finally received news about his family and is told that his parents are still alive. I shed tears of joy for him. I was happy because at last, he had something to look forward to. At last, he could be happy and hopeful about the future. So many bad things seemed to be happening to him. There were four people who marked his life greatly who passed away: Childhood friend William K: He made the story more interesting when he was still alive. He gave Valentino hope for Ethiopia and fantasies about how soon they will all go back home to see their parents. He died while they walked to Ethiopia. Deng: a walking boy who later became Valentino's friend. He wasn't very educated, but always had something interesting to say. He also died before they made it to Ethiopia. Tabitha: The love of his life and girlfriend who was killed by her ex-boyfriend. He knew her since Kakuma camp. Now that they were both in the states, him in Atlanta and Tabitha in Seattle, it was difficult to have a long distance relationship so they decided that they would focus on school first, and then see about their relationship later. "If I ever love again, I will not wait to love as best as I can. We thought we were young and that there would be time to love well sometime in the future. This is a horrible way to think. It is no way to live, to wait for love." Noriyaki: A young Japanese man who came to help out and shape the youth program at Kakuma camp. He gave Valentino his first job and died during a car accident while leaving Kakuma camp for a Basketball tournament. It seems like everyone he loved, left him. In the book, he often says, "God has a problem with me." I began to wonder myself and couldn't disagree. This book really shows you how so many horrible things can happen to one person in one lifetime. Such a moving tale and the fact that it is based on true events is even more fascinating. The language was somehow lyrical at times and had much power to affect and touch a soul. I was deeply moved by the story. "Sometimes the teeth can accidentally bite the tongue, but the solution for the tongue is not to find another mouth to live in." Eggers did such a great job at writing the story in Valentino's voice. It was believable, strong and impacting. It was written in first person point of view, which

worked great. I don't think the book would've had much success had it been written in a different point of view. I'm glad that I read this book. There are many things from this book that I learned, but the most important one is that bad things happen to everyone and everywhere--not just in Africa.

I had heard of the lost boys' story and that there was a documentary about it. This book, based on the story of one of those boys paints a picture of such unbelievable challenge, hardships and amazing resilience. For children to live through such events and then be thrust into a life in the States is quite unfathomable to me. The story and events is one thing but the execution and writing is another. I love how it was written. How it moved back and forward in time. It's a big book, make no mistake, but I never found it cumbersome. It kept my attention from start to end.

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