



# **What Is the What( The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng)[WHAT IS THE WHAT][Paperback]**

*Dave Eggers*

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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. William K escapes, but 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. Before they are hidden, they hear the screaming of Achak's aunt, and his mother goes to investigate. Achak never sees her again afterward. 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 are shattered by the conditions at the camp, and eventually they are forced to flee to another refugee camp in Kakuma, after Ethiopian president Mengistu is overthrown and soldiers open fire on them. They make it to Kenya and finally, years later, he moves to the United States. The story is told in parallel to subsequent hardships in the United States.

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