



LL3

**LIVING LEVEL-3:
SOUTH SUDAN**

**THE STORY OF A YOUNG AID
WORKER FIGHTING HUNGER AND
FEAR ON THE FRONTLINE**



**World Food
Programme**

wfp.org

LEVEL-3 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

An L-3 Emergency is the United Nations classification for the most severe, large-scale humanitarian crises. The decision to designate an L-3 Emergency is based on five criteria: scale, urgency, complexity of the needs, and the lack of domestic capacity to respond.

At the time of this writing WFP is responding to six simultaneous L-3s: Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan, Southern Africa, Syria and Syrian Refugees, and Yemen.

Taken as a whole, it is an incredibly taxing time for the global humanitarian community and funding shortfalls threaten a reduction of activities in several severely stressed regions.

For the populations WFP serves, there is no other relief.

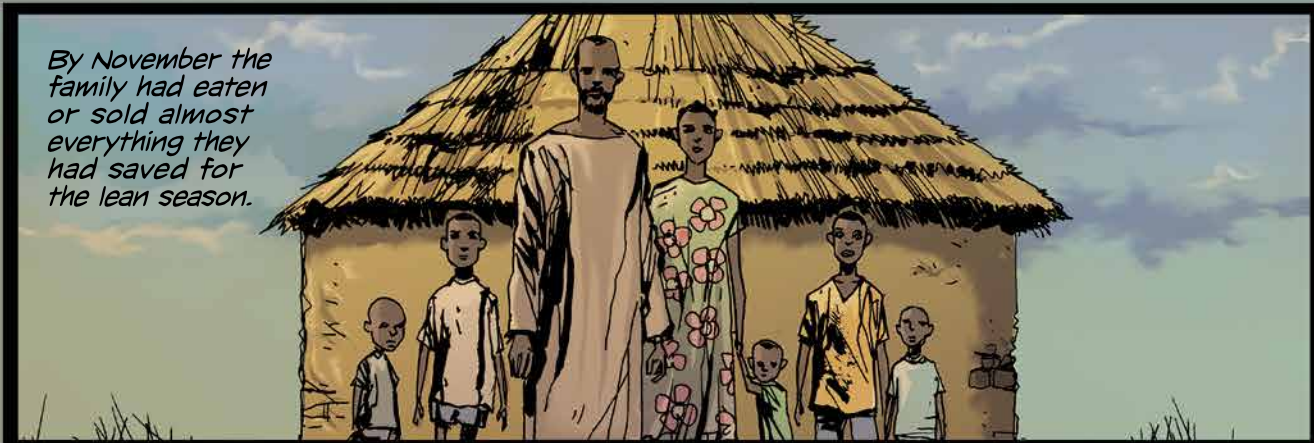


In early April **Adut** and her husband **Akot** had planted the seeds stored from last year's harvest.

But in June, where the rains should be, the sky was white with heat and the leaves on the trees turned a brittle black green.



In July the earth took on the texture and density of a scab and the sorghum crop browned and failed.



By November the family had eaten or sold almost everything they had saved for the lean season.



MAY, 2016.



More than four months without substantial food.



The well is dry.



I DUG UP SOME ROOTS.

THEY HURT MY STOMACH.

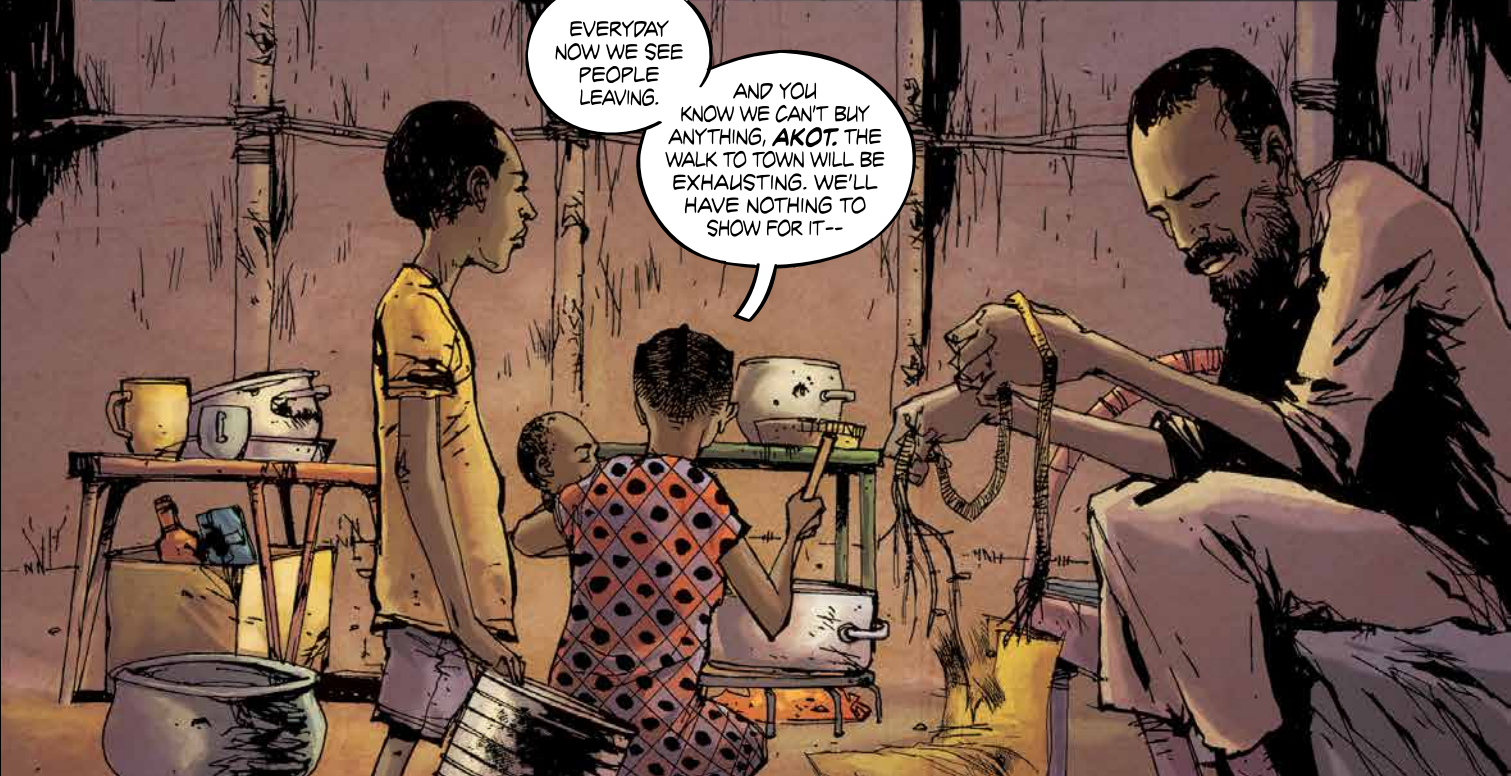
BETTER THAN EATING JUST LEAVES ALL DAY.



...TOMORROW I WILL GO TO TOWN, **ADUT**. SEE IF WE CAN AFFORD ANYTHING IN THE MARKET. MAYBE THEY'VE HEARD ABOUT AID COMING.

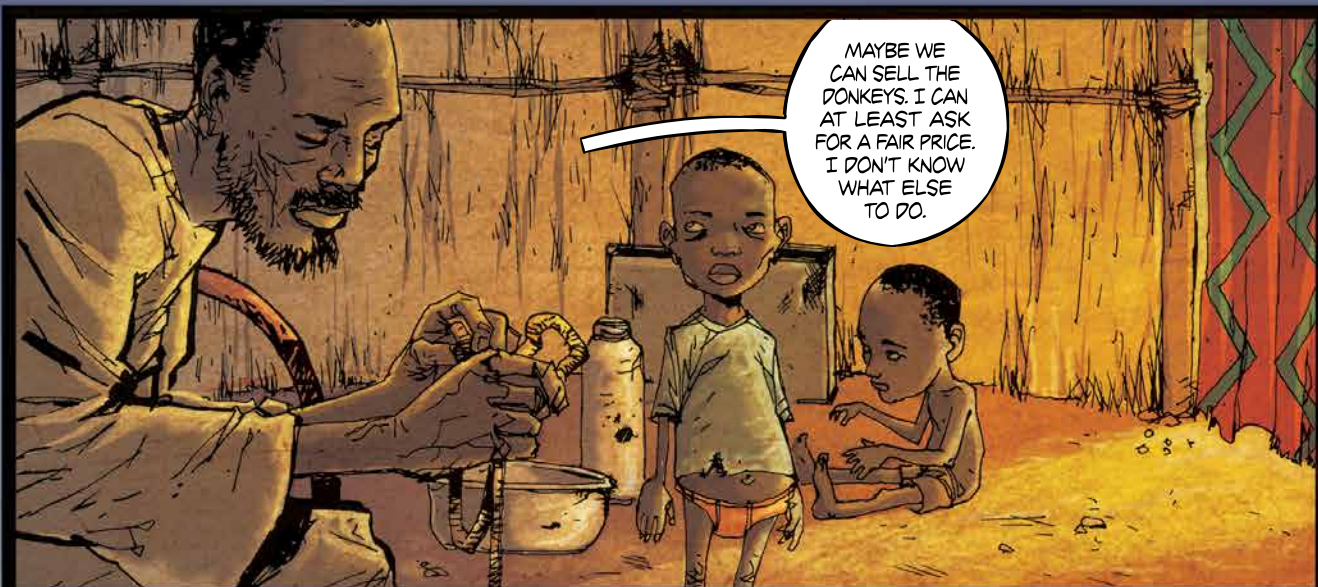


I SAW ANOTHER TRUCK FILLED WITH PEOPLE HEADING TOWARDS THE BORDER.



EVERYDAY NOW WE SEE PEOPLE LEAVING.

AND YOU KNOW WE CAN'T BUY ANYTHING, **AKOT**. THE WALK TO TOWN WILL BE EXHAUSTING. WE'LL HAVE NOTHING TO SHOW FOR IT--



MAYBE WE CAN SELL THE DONKEYS. I CAN AT LEAST ASK FOR A FAIR PRICE. I DON'T KNOW WHAT ELSE TO DO.



AND SO... WHAT ABOUT YOU? WILL YOU BE COMING BACK?
FROM "TOWN"?



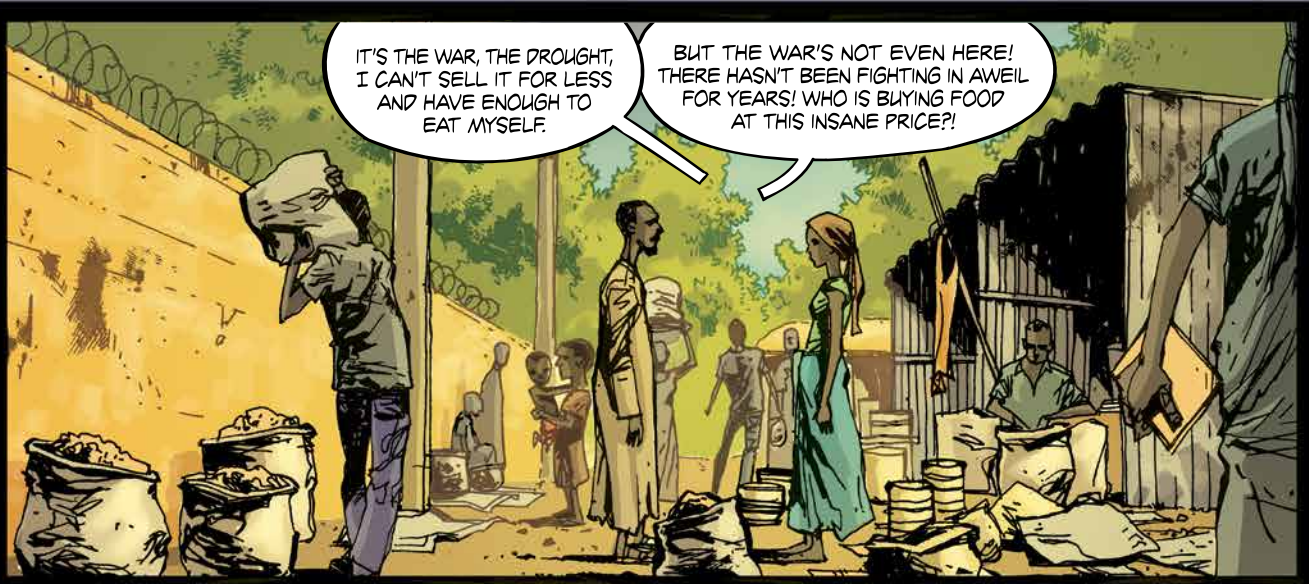
THIS IS NOT ME LEAVING YOU AND THE CHILDREN. I PROMISE. WE'RE FAR FROM THE NEWS OUT HERE. NO ONE TELLS US ANYTHING.

"WE NEED TO KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING..."



ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY SSP*?!

NOTE: SOUTH SUDANESE POUND.



IT'S THE WAR, THE DROUGHT,
I CAN'T SELL IT FOR LESS
AND HAVE ENOUGH TO
EAT MYSELF.

BUT THE WAR'S NOT EVEN HERE!
THERE HASN'T BEEN FIGHTING IN AWEIL
FOR YEARS! WHO IS BUYING FOOD
AT THIS INSANE PRICE?!



MORE
IMPORTANT
PEOPLE THAN
YOU.



PLEASE...
PLEASE...I HAVE
FOOD TO SELL,
LOOK...HERE...
LOOK...



...BUY
MY FOOD...
CHEAP...
PLEASE...



AKOT?!



AKOT, I KNEW IT WAS YOU. MY HUSBAND AND I RETURNED WITH YOU AND ADUT? DO YOU REMEMBER? I'M NYANDENG?

OF COURSE. IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU. HOW IS HE, YOUR HUSBAND?



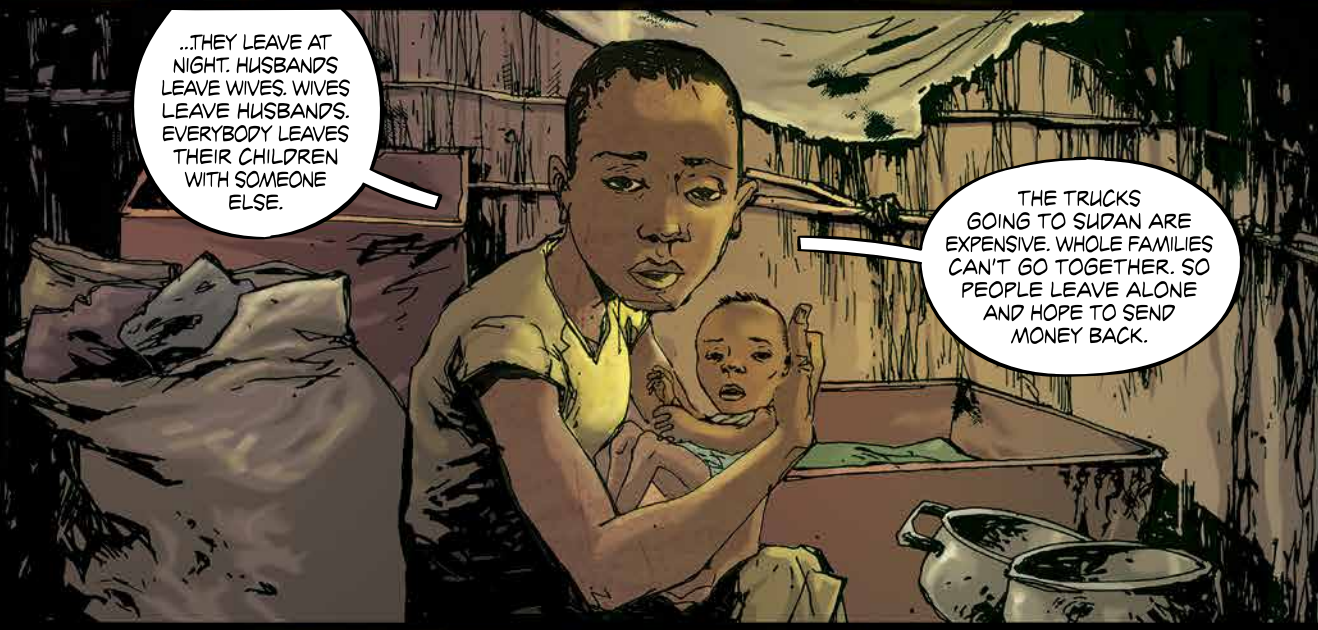
HE IS DEAD.

OH, I-I AM SORRY...



THE VILLAGE, IT'S ALMOST EMPTY.

IT'S NOTHING NOW. THE OLD, THE SMALL, THE WEAK, THAT'S ALL THAT'S LEFT. EVERYONE ELSE HAS GONE. COME ON, SIT IN THE SHADE. REST FOR A BIT.



...THEY LEAVE AT NIGHT. HUSBANDS LEAVE WIVES. WIVES LEAVE HUSBANDS. EVERYBODY LEAVES THEIR CHILDREN WITH SOMEONE ELSE.

THE TRUCKS GOING TO SUDAN ARE EXPENSIVE. WHOLE FAMILIES CAN'T GO TOGETHER. SO PEOPLE LEAVE ALONE AND HOPE TO SEND MONEY BACK.



OUR OLDEST BOY, HE WENT OFF TO JOIN THE ARMY. IT WAS THE ONLY JOB HE COULD FIND. HE SAID HE WOULD SEND MONEY. BUT HE HASN'T.

MAYBE HE IS DEAD, TOO.



WELL, THEY SAY IN TOWN THAT THE WAR MIGHT BE OVER. PERHAPS YOUR SON WILL RETURN NOW.

MY HUSBAND, HIS NAME WAS **KUOL**...IT IS OKAY THAT YOU DON'T REMEMBER...AS HE GREW CLOSER TO DEATH, HE MADE ME PROMISE...



...D-DON'T TAKE OUR CHILDREN BACK TO SUDAN. DON'T LEAVE LIKE THE OTHERS. THIS IS THEIR NATION. WE CAME HERE FOR THEM...

...DARFUR WON'T BE BETTER FOR THEM...



"...PROMISE ME..."

NOW I HAVE NOT HAD A PROPER MEAL IN MONTHS. I CAN'T NURSE, MY MILK HAS DRIED...EVERYTHING AROUND ME IS DYING...



I DO REMEMBER COMING HERE WITH YOU AND KUOL. I DO, NYANDENG. I WOULD NOT FORGET THAT...

"HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF JUNUBIN*, ALL OF US TOGETHER, ONE PEOPLE, ALL COMING HOME... AT LAST..."

NOTE: SOUTH SUDANESE.





"ADUT AND I WERE JUST NEWLY MARRIED. WE CARRIED OUR FIRST CHILD IN OUR ARMS FOR WEEKS."



THE JOURNEY WAS HARD, BUT WE WERE DETERMINED... TO LIVE FREE... TO MAKE OUR OWN FATE...



BUT YOUR PROMISE TO KUOL, NO ONE WOULD BLAME YOU FOR BREAKING IT, NYANDENG. IF YOU MUST GO, YOU MUST GO--

LISTEN TO ME, YOUR FAMILY WON'T SURVIVE HERE. TAKE THE MONEY YOU HAVE LEFT AND GET PASSAGE ON ONE OF THE TRUCKS TODAY. RIGHT NOW.



IT IS TOO LATE FOR US. BUT YOU... YOU CAN SEND MONEY BACK AS SOON AS YOU GET WORK ON A FARM IN SUDAN.

MY HUSBAND WAS A FOOL. I AM TOLD EVERYONE WHO GOES TO DARFUR IS GETTING JOBS.

I-I SEE YOU MEAN WELL, BUT I CAN'T LEAVE THEM--



WHAT WILL YOU DO THEN? DIE? WALK? THE LIONS WILL GET YOU!

YOU WILL DIE HERE OR ON THE ROAD! THOSE ARE THE ONLY CHOICES YOU'RE LEAVING YOURSELF!

I'M SORRY, I MUST GO, NYANDENG... IT'S GETTING LATE.

"AND I STILL
HAVE FAR
TO GO."



YOU
CAME
BACK.

YES. WITH
NOTHING BUT BAD
NEWS. HALF THE
TOWN HAS LEFT IN
THE LAST THREE
MONTHS.

THERE'S
NO REASON
TO BELIEVE IT
ISN'T LIKE THIS
ALL ACROSS
AWEIL.



IT'S TIME
TO FACE IT. IF WE
STAY, WE STARVE,
AND SELLING THE
DONKEYS WON'T BE
ENOUGH TO GET
US ALL ON THE
TRUCKS.

WE HAVE TO
LEAVE SOUTH SUDAN.
WALK, DAY AND NIGHT,
LIKE WHEN WE FIRST
CAME HERE, BUT
THIS TIME, BACK
TO DARFUR.

I...BUT YOU'VE
BUILT US SUCH
AN AMAZING
HOME HERE,
HUSBAND.

IT
WASN'T
ENOUGH.

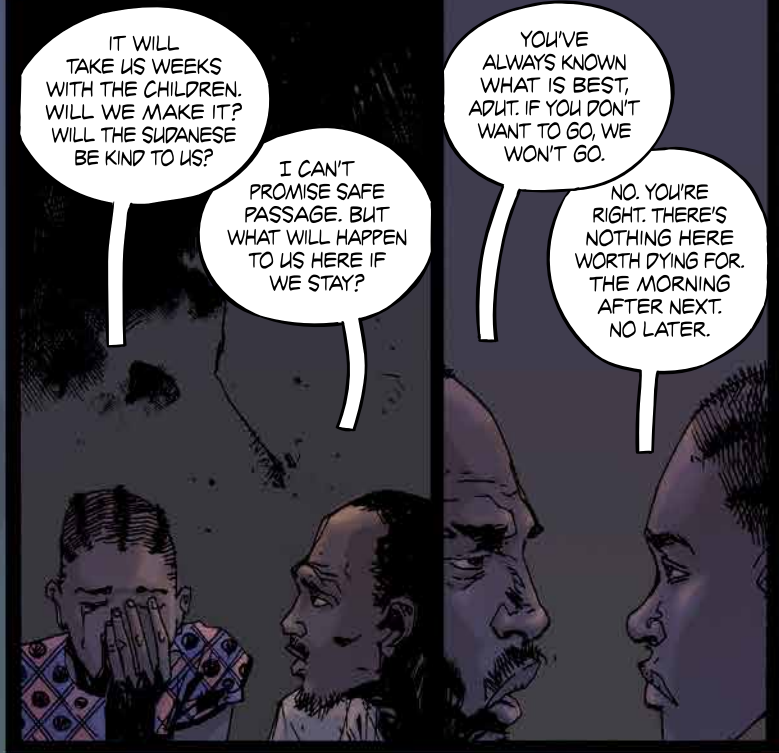
DON'T
SAY
THAT.

...

WHEN?

THE
MORNING
AFTER NEXT.
WE'LL LEAVE
EARLY, WHEN
IT'S STILL
COOL.





IT WILL TAKE US WEEKS WITH THE CHILDREN. WILL WE MAKE IT? WILL THE SUDANESE BE KIND TO US?

I CAN'T PROMISE SAFE PASSAGE. BUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO US HERE IF WE STAY?

YOU'VE ALWAYS KNOWN WHAT IS BEST, ADUT. IF YOU DON'T WANT TO GO, WE WON'T GO.

NO. YOU'RE RIGHT. THERE'S NOTHING HERE WORTH DYING FOR. THE MORNING AFTER NEXT. NO LATER.

They came years ago, from a refugee camp in Darfur.

They were just three among millions.

HERE IS WHERE WE WILL STAKE OUR CLAIM.

All had come to settle their ancestral homeland after decades of war for South Sudanese independence.

They were called "returnees". They were promised land, money, schools for their children...

A life worth living. A nation worth building.



Akot and Adut bent their backs and cleared the earth with their bare hands.

They wrestled the land into submission.



And when the **2011 Independence Referendum** came, they voted to make South Sudan the youngest nation in the world.



It was the first time they had ever participated in a democratic election.



They built.
They cultivated.
They thrived.

But now,
the pressing
question...

When is the right moment to let go of your dreams?



At what point do you make the choice to abandon everything you once believed in and all that you have built?



Hoping against hope that you haven't waited too long, that it's not too late, to save the only thing you ever really had.



Your family.



CHAPTER 2: THE KNOT

JUBA,
CAPITAL OF
SOUTH SUDAN.

900 KM SOUTH
EAST OF AWEIL.
EARLY MAY 2016.

I've been in
country less
than forty-
eight hours.

Yesterday I met
James, Head of
Communications
for South Sudan.

Today we're heading
to the airport to catch a
**UN Humanitarian Air
Service** flight up north.

I'm **Leila Helal**.
From Newburgh,
New York. This is
my second posting
with WFP since
joining in 2014.

I've been longing
for the field. Less
and less home feels
like a real place.



We're just days after the "end" of a three year civil war that tore this country apart.

There are guns everywhere.

I can't talk about who has them or why.



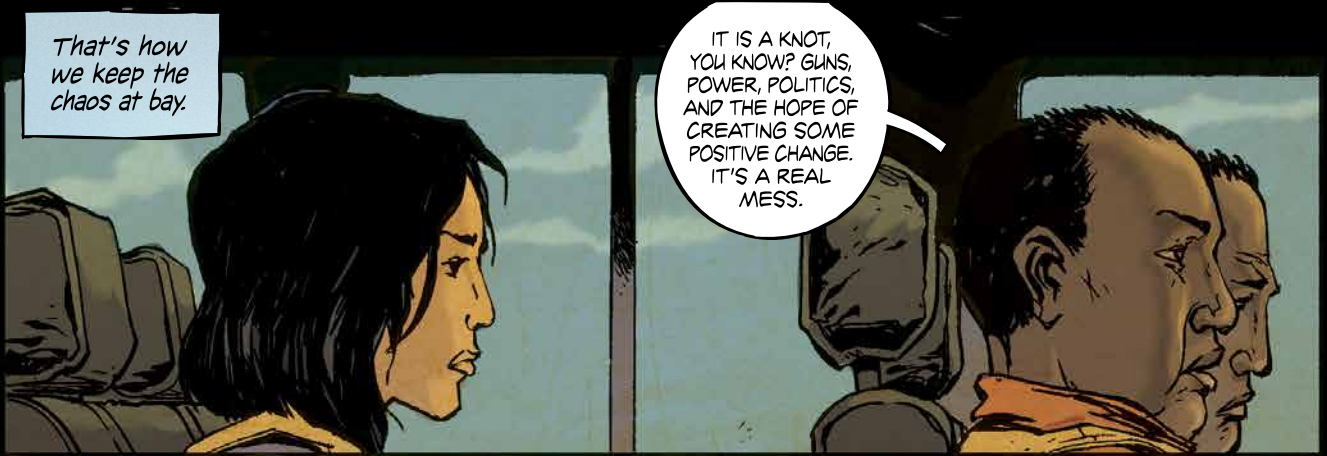
Or the political state of things here, or even the reasons for the struggle.

WFP has a radical neutrality policy. Our only job is **food security**. Make sure people have something to eat...




That's how we keep the chaos at bay.

IT IS A KNOT, YOU KNOW? GUNS, POWER, POLITICS, AND THE HOPE OF CREATING SOME POSITIVE CHANGE. IT'S A REAL MESS.

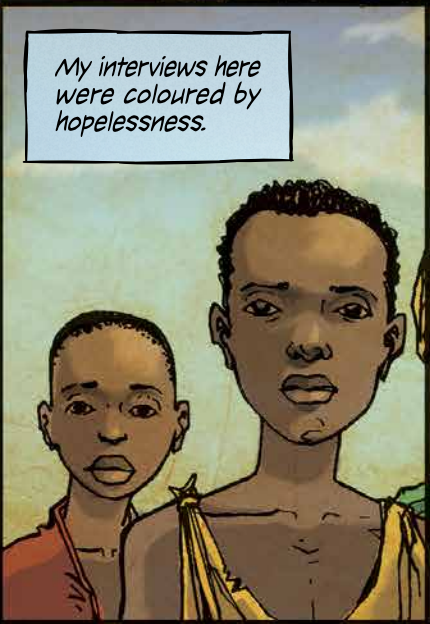


What the current "peace" doesn't mean is that they can just close the "protection of civilians" camps, the "POCs", that still operate here.







I did a prelim tour of one yesterday. These are camps made up of people who fled the massacres on the eve of the 2013 civil war.




My interviews here were coloured by hopelessness.



Even if the current peace lasts and tensions subside, the homes and lands these people fled are now occupied by others.



Eventually I'll be doing more work in one of these POCs, but not today.




A camp like this is complicated. Like a war it is easier to start than it is to end.



Today, James and I fly to Aweil.

Aweil is not a red state, meaning it wasn't an active conflict zone during the civil war...

But the sub-office in Aweil is sounding the alarm and reports of severe malnutrition and migration out of South Sudan are coming in from camps in Darfur.



IF YOU'RE GOING TO **DARFUR** FOR A BETTER LIFE, THINGS MUST BE VERY, VERY BAD FOR YOU.



HEY... THAT GUY, I'VE MET HIM. HE'S WFP. YOU KNOW HIM?

NO, BUT HE'S WITH SOME SECURITY I RECOGNIZE.

TUBA



HE'S GOT THAT "DEEP FIELD" LOOK. THE KIND WHO SPENDS ALL HIS TIME DEPLOYED. I KNOW THESE SORTS. NO OUTSIDE LIFE.

OH, YEAH?

I'm thinking about the "positive change" part of the knot James mentioned.

How to really achieve it, what kind of personal dedication it takes.



HI! I -- I THINK WE MET IN IRAQ A FEW YEARS BACK.

YOU BUMMED A RIDE WITH US FROM DOMIZ ON THE DAY SINJAR FELL. I'M LEILA, WITH VAM*. YOU PROBABLY DON'T REMEMBER ME.

NO. I DON'T.



RIGHT. OKAY THEN... I GUESS THAT'S ALL I WANTED TO SAY.

Take this old ass, for instance. What does he do? Is that what it takes to become an agent of change in a place like this?



Has he lost himself? Abandoned his family? Dedicated everything to the job? This kind of stuff has been on my mind a lot lately.

Lifting above the equatoria plain of Jubek State, the green fertile band of the White Nile falling away, I do what I do best...



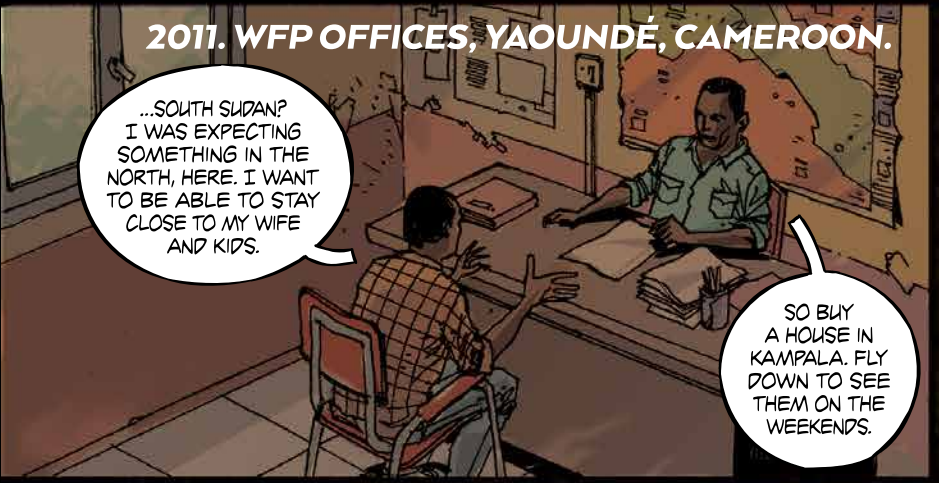
I get James to tell me a story.



I WAS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST IN CAMEROON. THAT'S WHERE I'M FROM. I APPLIED FOR A JOB WITH WFP. LOOKING FOR SOME STABILITY IN MY LIFE.

2011. WFP OFFICES, YAOUNDE, CAMEROON.

...SOUTH SUDAN? I WAS EXPECTING SOMETHING IN THE NORTH, HERE. I WANT TO BE ABLE TO STAY CLOSE TO MY WIFE AND KIDS.



SO BUY A HOUSE IN KAMPALA. FLY DOWN TO SEE THEM ON THE WEEKENDS.

JAMES, YOU'RE A GOOD REPORTER. WE'RE OFFERING YOU AN ENTIRE COUNTRY OFFICE. BUT IT'S MORE THAN THAT...



THIS IS THE CHANCE FOR ALL OF US TO CREATE A NEW AFRICA. THE LESSONS WE'VE LEARNED ABOUT HOW TO BUILD A BETTER NATION...

NOW WE GET TO APPLY THEM.

YOU'LL BE WITNESSING HISTORY.

WELL...A NEW AFRICAN COUNTRY BEING BORN...THAT WOULD BE SOMETHING TO SEE.



AH-HA! YOU SEE? YOU ARE FEELING IT! YES?!

I'M TELLING YOU, JAMES...





"THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT!"

TWO YEARS LATER.
JUBA, SOUTH SUDAN.



KAK KAK KAK KAK

DECEMBER 15, 2013.

"THE NIGHT THE SHOOTING STARTED WE COULD HEAR IT FROM THE WFP COMPOUND AND AS IT CONTINUED, IT SEEMED TO BE GETTING CLOSER.



"THERE WAS A LARGE NEIGHBOURHOOD NEAR US, BUT WE DIDN'T PUT IT ALL TOGETHER UNTIL LATER.

WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME COMPOUND GATE

"PEACE TALKS BETWEEN THE LEADERS HAD FAILED."

LET US IN!!

PLEASE, GOD, OPEN THE GATE!

THEY'RE KILLING US!

"THE ARMY HAD SPLIT INTO FACTIONS AND LOYALIST MILITIAS HAD BEGUN TO SLAUGHTER PEOPLE IN THE STREETS."

"THERE WAS NO POSSIBLE WAY WE WOULD (OR EVEN COULD) KEEP THE PANICKED PEOPLE FLEEING THE GUNMEN FROM BREAKING INTO THE COMPOUND."

"AND NO WAY WE COULD GUARANTEE OUR COMPOUND'S SAFETY IF WE OPENED UP THE GATES."

"**KUAC TABANI**, OUR PROGRAMME OFFICER, GREW UP ON THE STREETS OF JUBA."

OPEN THE SECOND GATE! WE'RE LETTING THEM IN! LET THEM ALL IN!

"I DON'T KNOW WHAT HIS LIFE WAS LIKE BEFORE HE WORKED HIS WAY UP THE RANKS OF THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME..."

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS PLACE IS?

"BUT THAT NIGHT HE STOOD AGAINST THE MILITIA SOLDIERS AT OUR GATE WITH ALL THE PRESENCE OF A WARRIOR..."

"AND SO WE STOOD WITH HIM."

DOES IT MATTER?

THIS IS EXTRA-TERRITORIAL LAND. THIS COMPOUND IS NOT SOUTH SUDAN! IT IS SOMETHING ELSE. SOMETHING SAFE!

THEN YOU ARE A FOREIGN POWER! WHAT RIGHT DO YOU HAVE TO BE HERE? TO MEDDLE IN OUR AFFAIRS?



NO. I AM A JUNUBIN FROM BEFORE YOU WERE BORN. I AM LIKE YOU. I AM A MAN THAT BELIEVES IN THIS NATION. IN INDEPENDENCE.



AND I HAVE CHOSEN TO FIGHT FOR THAT CAUSE BY WORKING HERE.

THE ONES WHO GIVE YOU YOUR ORDERS, OUR LEADERS, THEY INVITED WFP HERE. APPEALED TO THE WORLD TO HELP SAVE OUR NATION.

...



SITTING IN THE PLANE, LISTENING TO JAMES' STORY, I REALIZE ALL THE ELEMENTS OF HIS COMPLEX KNOT ARE THERE. THE GUNS, THE POLITICS...

IF YOU VIOLATE THIS NEUTRAL COMPOUND TONIGHT, IF YOU HARM ANYONE UNDER MY PROTECTION...



...THEN IT IS NOT ONLY GOD WHO WILL DAMN YOU.

IT WILL ALSO BE THE MEN WHO COMMAND YOU, THOSE WHO INVITED THIS ORGANIZATION HERE IN THE SPIRIT OF PEACE. THIS PLACE IS CLOSED TO YOU.



THE TENUOUS INFLUENCE OF SOME GREATER, MORAL POWER...

And the positive change that can come from it, if only for a moment.

YOU TALK GOOD, OLD MAN. WE'LL WAIT. BUT DON'T START FEELING TOO SAFE. IF THE DUST SETTLES AND YOU ARE NOTHING TO NO ONE, WE'LL BE BACK.

IS THIS THE KIND OF PERSON IT TAKES? THE KIND WHO WILL STAND UNARMED AGAINST THE GUN.

AN IMMOVABLE FORCE, NOT OF VIOLENCE, BUT OF REASON?

MOST OF THE TIME COURAGE LIKE I SAW THAT NIGHT IS SIMPLY CUT DOWN, COMES TO NOTHING.

AND SADLY YOU KNOW, WFP'S MANDATE HASN'T ALWAYS STOPPED VIOLENCE AGAINST OUR PEOPLE.

COURAGE ALONE DOESN'T UNTIE THE KNOT. KUAC HAD THE INVISIBLE FORCE OF OUR ORGANIZATION'S INTENTIONS AND CONNECTIONS BEHIND HIM.

INFLUENCE LIKE THAT IS RARE IN PEOPLE WHO WISH POSITIVE CHANGE.

BUT NOW AND THEN, MADNESS DOES SUCCUMB TO SANITY.

ALL THAT NIGHT, AND FOR SEVERAL NIGHTS AFTER, WE HEARD GUNFIRE IN THE STREETS, BUT WE REMAINED SAFE.



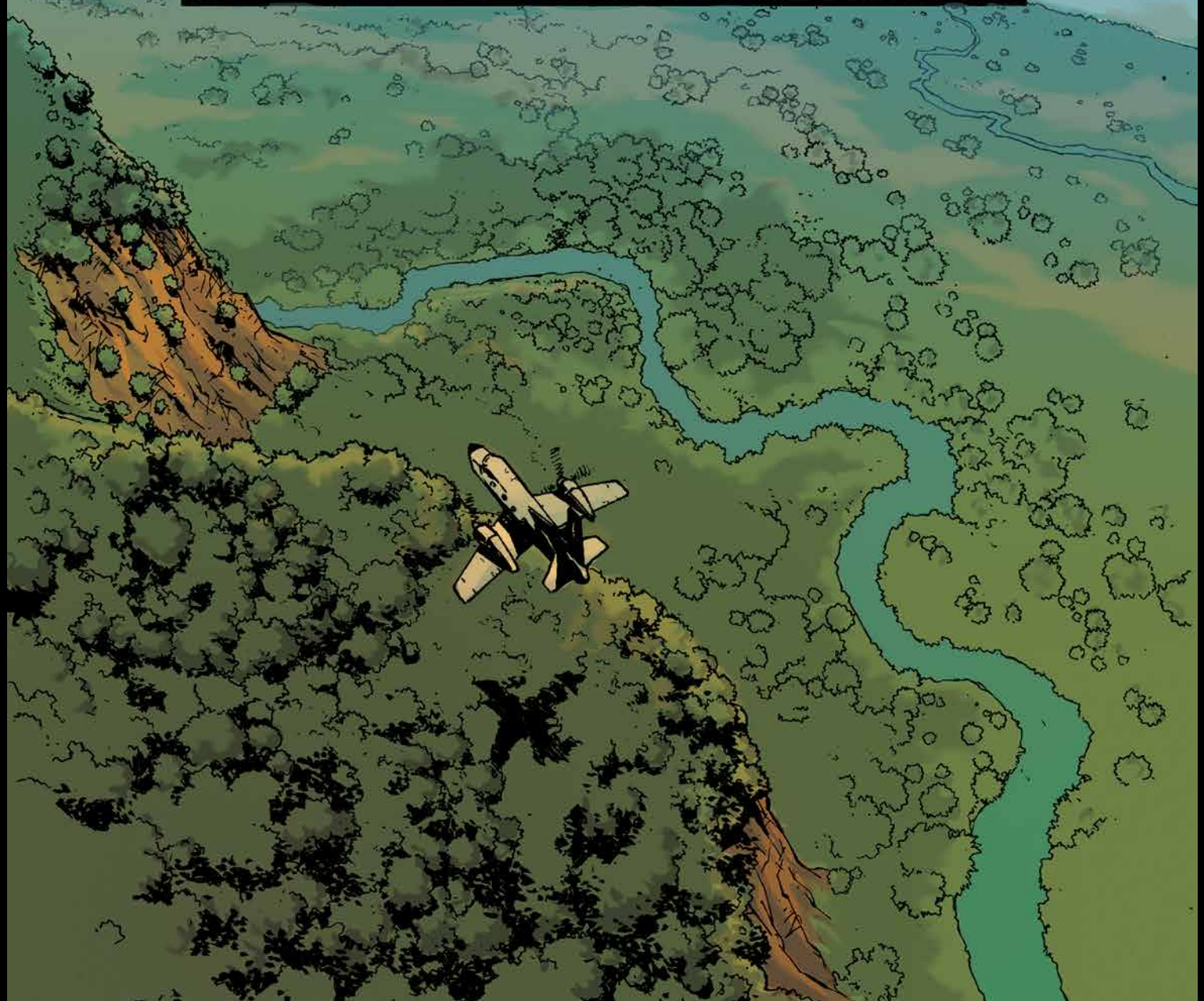
INCREDIBLE.

YES...

DO YOU KNOW THE STORY OF **INDEPENDENT MOSES NUNUH?** THE FIRST FREE CHILD BORN IN SOUTH SUDAN AFTER INDEPENDENCE?

LIKE MANY CHILDREN HERE, HE DIED BEFORE HIS FIRST BIRTHDAY.

AND THAT IS THE WHOLE OF IT. THE END.



CHAPTER 3: GROUND TRUTH

NORTHERN
BAHR EL GHAZAL
REGION.

800 KILOMETRES
NORTHWEST OF JUBA.



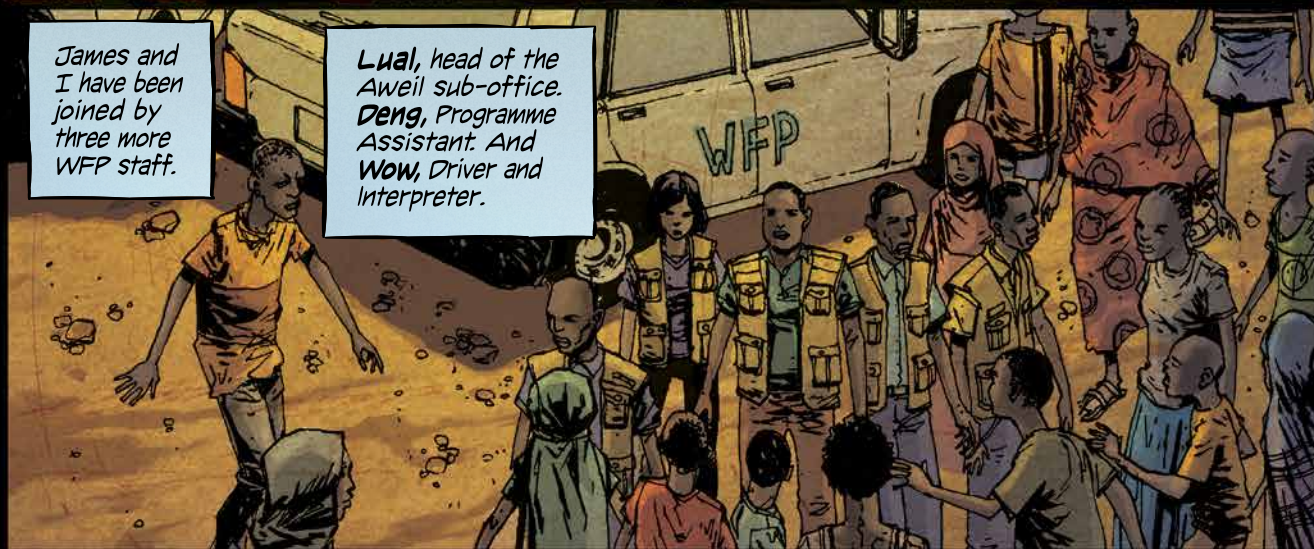
REGIONAL VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT. DAY ONE.

First stop on our first morning here is a village called **Agope**. About an hour outside of Aweil Town.



James and I have been joined by three more WFP staff.

Lual, head of the Aweil sub-office. **Deng**, Programme Assistant. And **Wow**, Driver and Interpreter.



The moment we arrive I can feel the desperation in the crowd.

WHEN WILL YOU BRING FOOD?!

OUR VILLAGE IS PRACTICALLY DESERTED!

ARE YOU HERE TO REGISTER US?!



Many who come to meet us have walked miles to be a part of this gathering.

HELLO...
HALLELUJAH...

HALLELUJAH!

Speaking a Dinka dialect, **Lual** says we're here to listen and to learn. This comforts some, others not so much.

Some don't understand why we didn't just come with food today. Some feel they've travelled here in vain.

I sit in a chair while many sit in the sun with their children. I have "honoured guest" status, and I'm acutely aware of it.

I start to feel a **weight** in my stomach.

The chief, named **Garang Kuch Akwar**, speaks first.

WE ARE HUNGRY. WE ARE ALSO ANGRY THAT IT HAS COME TO THIS, BUT WE'RE GRATEFUL FOR YOUR PRESENCE.

FOUR MONTHS AGO THE CROPS DIED. NOW ALL THE WILD FOOD AROUND OUR VILLAGE HAS BEEN EATEN.

IF WE STAY IT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE THAT MANY OF US WILL SURVIVE THE HUNGER SEASON.

A woman called **Akeer Lok** is introduced as the **female sub chief**.

WE DID NOT FIGHT IN THE RECENT WAR. WE DID NOT TAKE SIDES. BUT OUR SONS GO TO DIE AND OUR HUSBANDS FLEE TO SUDAN.

BOTH DO THIS FOR THE WORK.

TRADE WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD HAS FAILED US. BEING PEACEFUL HAS ACHIEVED NOTHING FOR US.

The meeting opens to the crowd. Passions rise.

WHEAT FLOUR WAS 80 SSP!* IT IS NOW 2,000!

TENS OF THOUSANDS HAVE GONE NORTH! THOSE THAT HAVEN'T LEFT ARE SIMPLY WAITING FOR THE RAINS SO THEY'LL HAVE WATER FOR THE TREK!

WHEN THE RAINS COME, IF WE HAVE NO FOOD TO CULTIVATE OR EAT, THEN NO ONE WILL BE IN THIS VILLAGE. WE WILL ALL HAVE LEFT FOR DARFUR.

IF YOU ARE WEAK YOU STAY AND WASTE AWAY. IF YOU ARE STRONG YOU LEAVE. THAT'S ALL THERE IS.

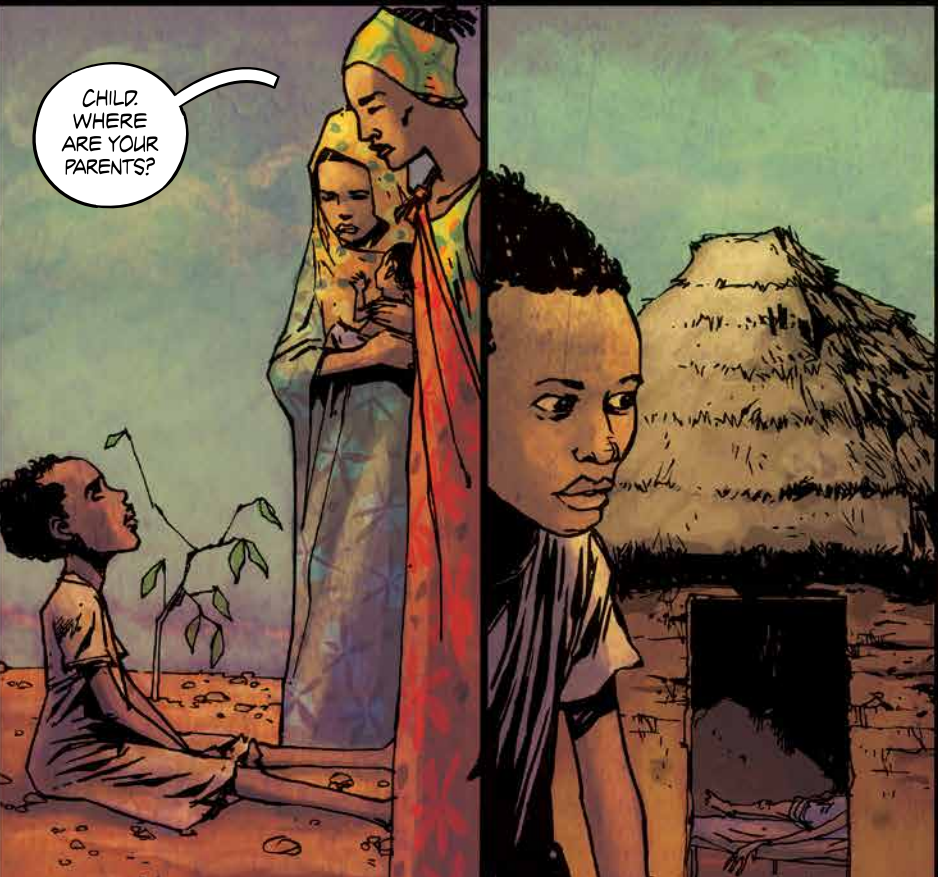
NOTE: SOUTH SUDANESE POUND.

A picture of the crises forms in my mind. Weather killed the crops. War created inflation. Scarcity collapsed the economy.

YOU HAVE SOBERED OUR SUFFERING BY COMING TO LISTEN. MAY GOD BLESS YOU. BUT TELL ME...

WHEN WILL GOD BLESS US?

REGIONAL
VULNERABILITY
ASSESSMENT.
DAY 2.



CHILD,
WHERE
ARE YOUR
PARENTS?

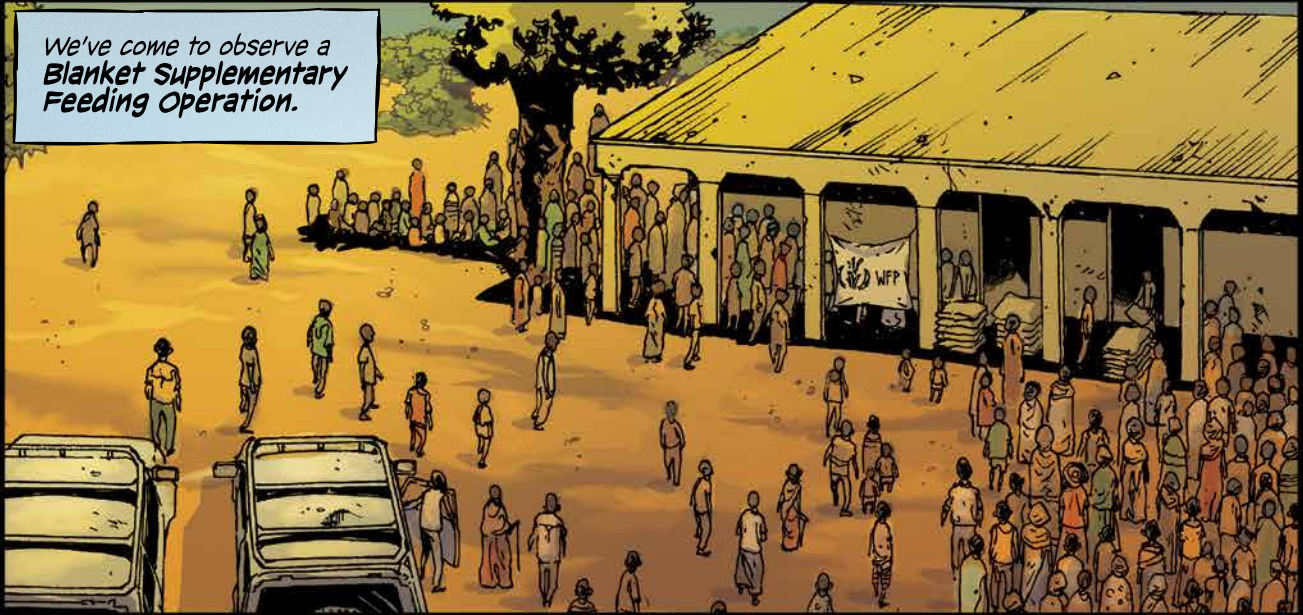


WALK WITH US.
THEY'RE GIVING
OUT FOOD A FEW
KILOMETRES
FROM HERE.

The next day we press further north and to the west.



We've come to observe a **Blanket Supplementary Feeding Operation**.



THIS IS FAR MORE PEOPLE THAN WE WERE EXPECTING.

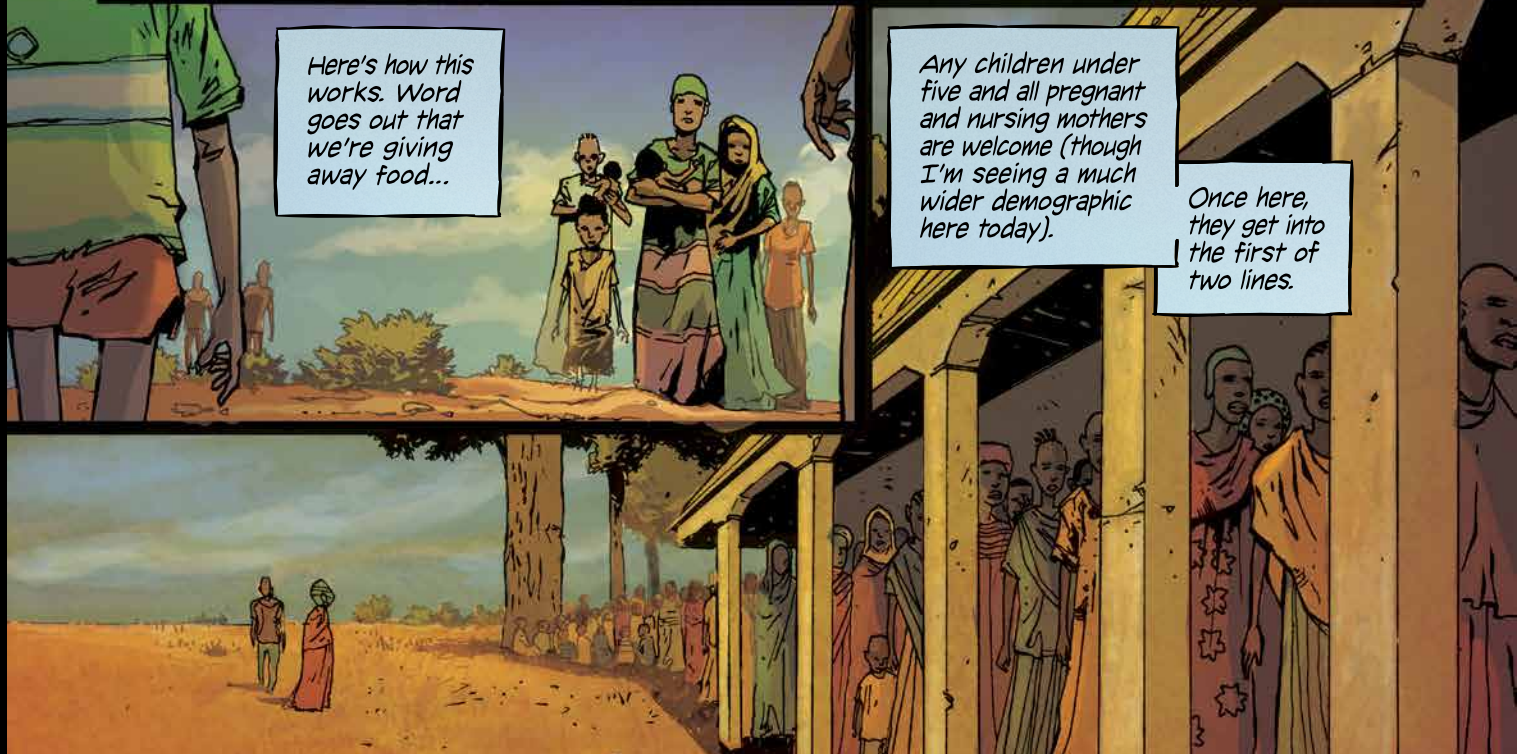



Here's how this works. Word goes out that we're giving away food...




Any children under five and all pregnant and nursing mothers are welcome (though I'm seeing a much wider demographic here today).

Once here, they get into the first of two lines.






At the head of the first line, **Martha**, a **WFP Nutritionist**, measures the circumference of their upper arms.




From this she can determine their nutritional status. Collected, the data will also help us determine levels of malnutrition in the area.

The first boy I watch her measure is deep in the red. **"Severely malnourished"**. He'll be sent immediately to a nearby clinic.



Once measured their hands are stamped and they're given registration cards.

Then on to the second line to receive supplemental food aid.



These are bags of sorghum. One bag can feed a large family for more than a month.



LEILA, LOOK HERE. THIS IS PARTLY WHAT THEY MEAN WHEN THEY SAY "SURVIVAL FOOD". THESE ARE TUBERS, ROOTS, THAT PEOPLE DIG UP TO EAT...



I don't think Deng meant for me to eat it. But it's my job to understand as much as I can.

PARTLY IT SATISFIES THE IDEA OF EATING. CALORIC VALUE, BUT NOTHING NUTRITIONAL. THOUGH IT DID HELP KEEP ME ALIVE DURING THE '98 FAMINE.

The root is bland. It lacks density. The texture is coarse.



EVERY ONE OF THEM...EVERY PERSON IN THIS LINE, EVERY CHILD... EVERY MOTHER... THEY'RE ALL IN THE RED.

What did she say?


My heart starts to skip. I can see the visible concern on Martha's face.



She breaks from the head of the line. I follow.


A group of women and children have sought shade under the only large tree in the area, they haven't lined up. Now I see why.

They've walked for miles to be here. Now they're too weak to stand.




Too weak even to emote. Incapable of smiling or frowning, too dehydrated to cry. This is the stillness of the starving...

The nameless weight that's been in my stomach since yesterday turns to an ache--I ignore it. It means nothing here.




We witness one severely malnourished family after another. Hundreds of them.

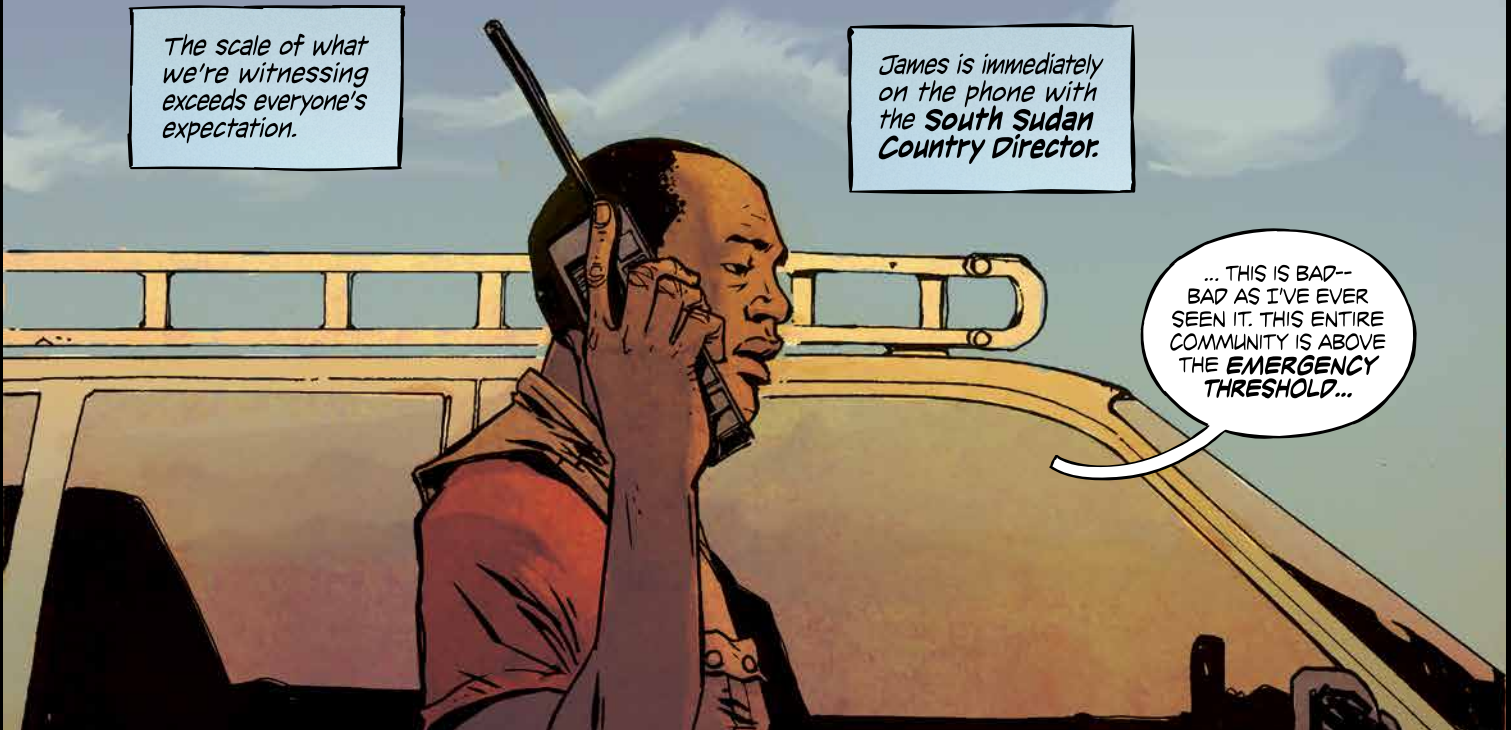
I meet a mother and her five children who tell me they haven't eaten anything substantial in more than a month.



An eighteen-year-old girl, also a mother, who looks like a sixty-year-old woman. Every cell in her body ravaged by malnutrition.



A two-year-old with the body weight of a nine-month old.



The scale of what we're witnessing exceeds everyone's expectation.

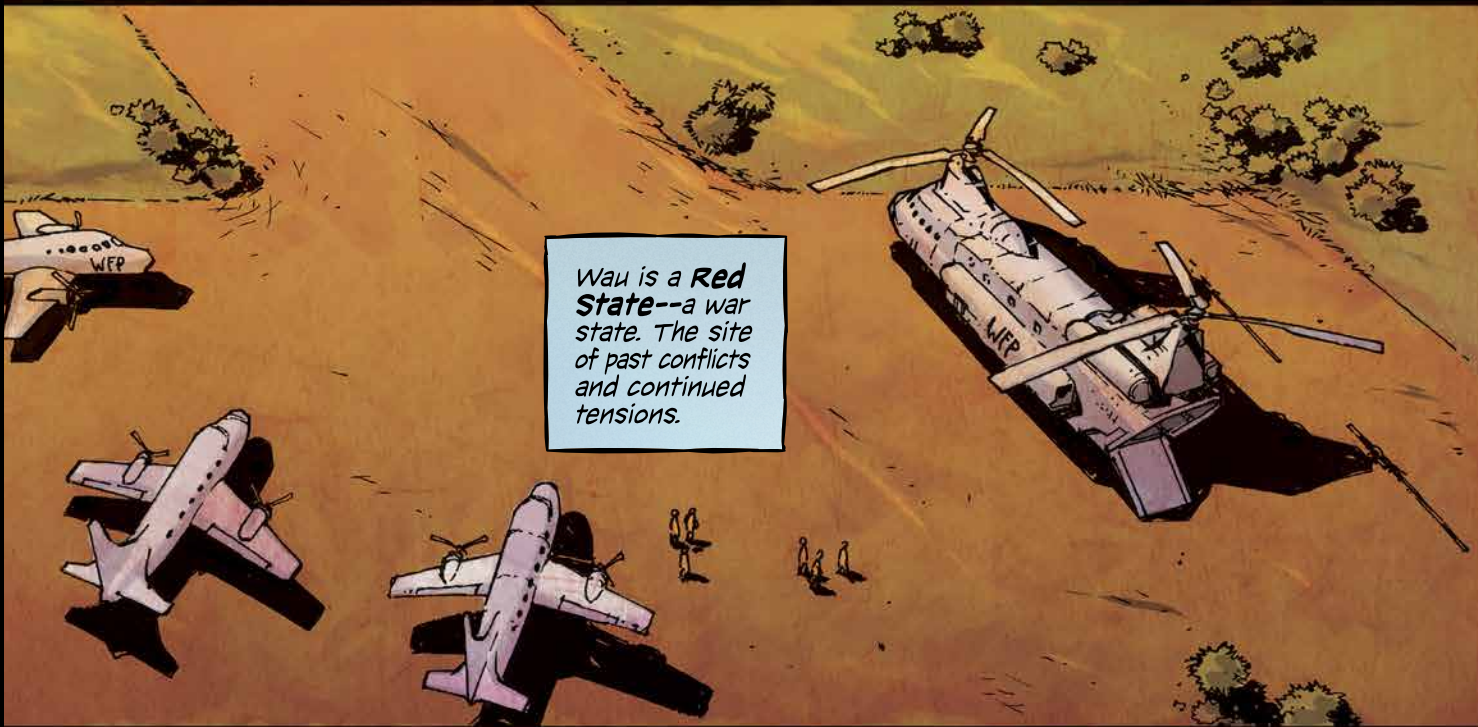
James is immediately on the phone with the **South Sudan Country Director**.

... THIS IS BAD--BAD AS I'VE EVER SEEN IT. THIS ENTIRE COMMUNITY IS ABOVE THE **EMERGENCY THRESHOLD**...

A few days ago, while travelling here, we had a layover between Juba and Aweil, in Wau Town, South Sudan, on the Jur river.



Wau is a **Red State**--a war state. The site of past conflicts and continued tensions.



HARDLY ANYONE IS PRESSING ON TO AWEIL. EVEN YOUR FRIEND, THE MAN YOU SPOKE TO EARLIER, IS GOING SOMEWHERE ELSE.



Aweil is a land currently without war. Yet still...this is a war story.



It's not that there isn't a tremendous amount of aid coming into South Sudan, there is. But almost all of it is dedicated to Red States.

**WFP COMPOUND,
AWEIL TOWN.**

We work late in the small prefab that is Lual's air conditioned office.

The AC keeps the mosquitoes out. Earlier this year every person on base contracted malaria, so it's freezing in here now.

I'VE BEEN PULLING THE MALNUTRITION PROJECTIONS AND COMPARING THEM TO THE REGISTRATION DATA FROM THE LAST FEW MONTHS...

THIS IS TWICE AS BAD AS WE WERE EXPECTING, AND WE WEREN'T EXPECTING GOOD NEWS.

EMAIL ME VERIFICATION ON THOSE FIGURES. I'M PUSHING FOR A FULL FUNDING PIVOT TO THIS AREA.

My last deployment, in Iraq, we knew what we were dealing with. We had mountains of data. We were at the centre of the world's gaze.

Now we're in the most rural place I've ever been. We are the eyes of the world here.

Ugh...MY STOMACH IS F-FLIPPING OUT.

grumble

YOU DIDN'T
EAT THOSE
TUBERS TODAY,
DID YOU?

Back in
my own
prefab...

AHH
GAWWWHAAGH...

I'm pissed
at myself...
I don't have
time for this...
there's too
much work
to do.

That weight in my stomach...
it wants out. Name it. What
am I feeling? Helplessness?
Fear? Horror? No...**shame**.

GHA...GHA...
AHHH...

Shame that I live as
easily as I do. **Shame** of
the consumptive life I've
led. **Shame** that I'm not
good enough at my job.

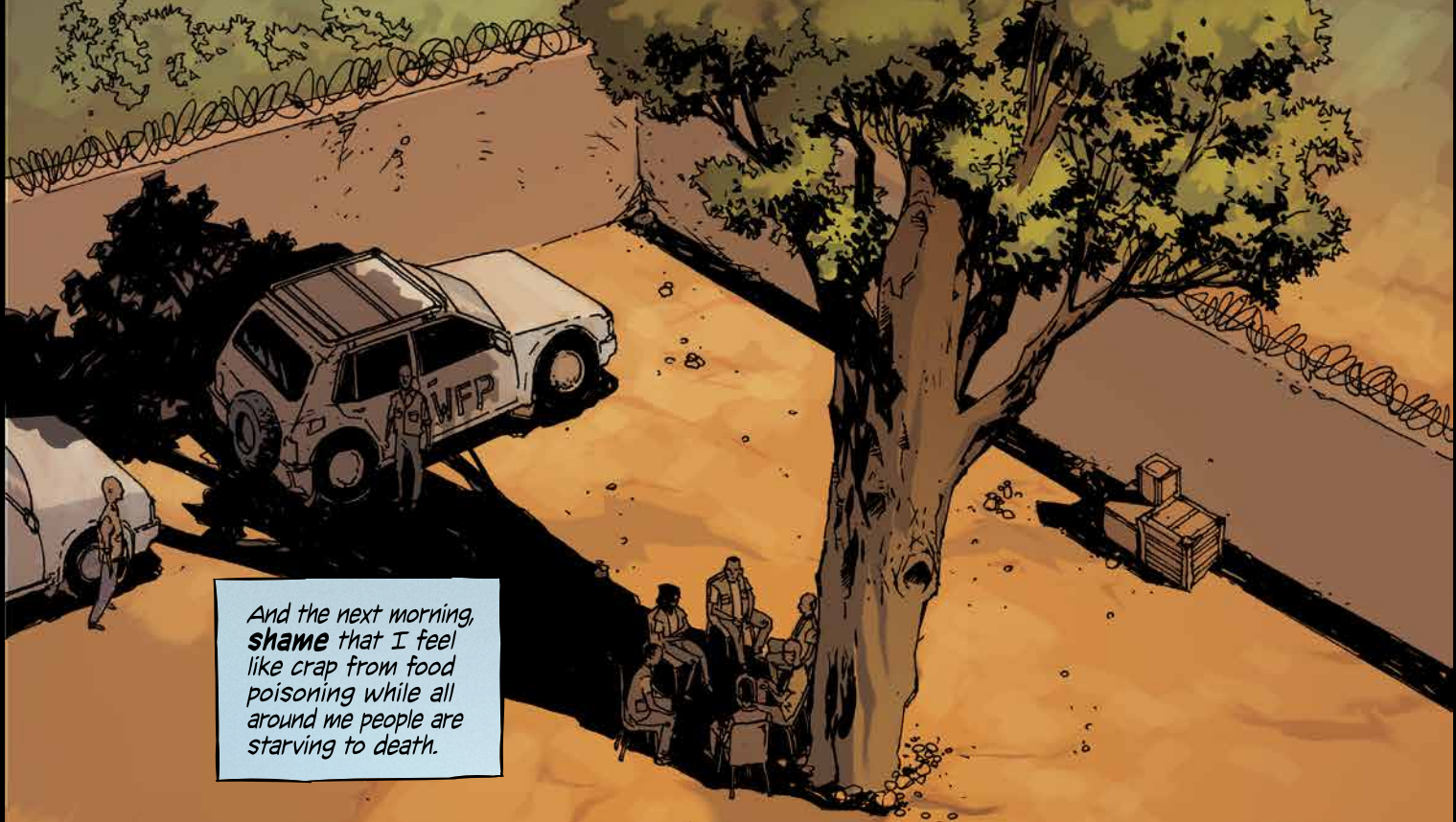
Shame that I think
my **shame** matters.

Shame at feeling anything at
all when what these people
need is not my sympathy, or
my existential doubt...

...but for me
to just do
the work.

PLEASE...
NO MORE...NO
MORE...VOMITING...
INSHALLAH...
PLEASE...

GHAGGHH
H!

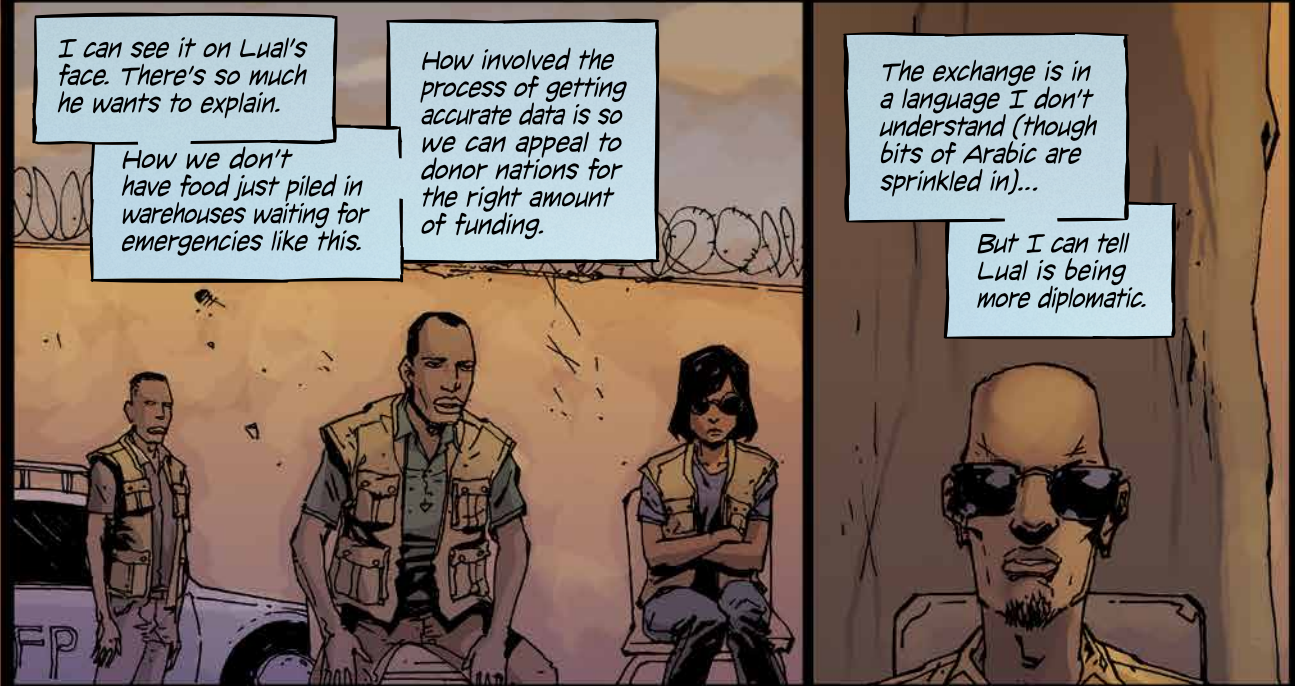


And the next morning, **shame** that I feel like crap from food poisoning while all around me people are starving to death.

**REGIONAL VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT. DAY 3.
MEETING WITH THE COUNTY COMMISSIONER.**



THESE PEOPLE ARE SUFFERING. WHERE IS THE FOOD? YOU SEND IT EVERYWHERE BUT HERE.



I can see it on Lual's face. There's so much he wants to explain.

How we don't have food just piled in warehouses waiting for emergencies like this.

How involved the process of getting accurate data is so we can appeal to donor nations for the right amount of funding.

The exchange is in a language I don't understand (though bits of Arabic are sprinkled in)...

But I can tell Lual is being more diplomatic.



Lual wants to say that, "Of course, even when we do get the aid, we still have to get it here."

He wants to point out that if the current peace doesn't hold we will be driving our food trucks through war zones.

Or if the rains come and destroy the roads, making it impossible to convoy in...

We will have to airdrop instead, which is more expensive, more logistically complicated.

But I know he's not saying these things... he's trying a softer approach.



Regardless of what Lual says, when he's done the Commissioner responds...

James has been documenting everything since we landed. HQ in Rome wants updated images to help galvanize the world's attention.

THE PEOPLE ARE FRIGHTENED, AND HUNGRY STOMACHS HAVE NO EARS.

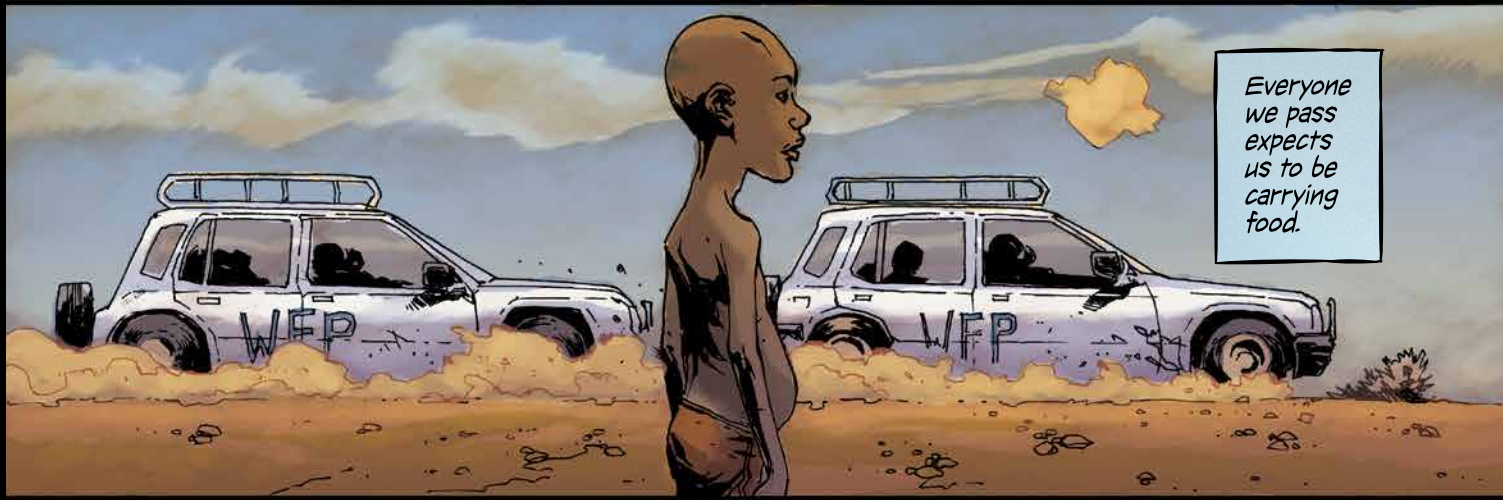
IF YOUR AID TAKES LONGER THAN A MONTH TO GET HERE, THIS WILL BE A LAND OF GHOSTS.

Reuters and AP have already used his first photographs.



But to complete the story, we want to interview people migrating out of Aweil as well. We need to see what that looks like.

So we push on towards the border between **South Sudan** and **Sudan**.



Everyone we pass expects us to be carrying food.

All know the symbol we operate under and what it stands for.

James is in constant communication with the Country Director, and I with VAM's office in Juba.



The way is rough, the road virtually non-existent out here. The screen time doesn't help my jacked stomach at all.



After several hours, with limited daylight left, we approach the **unsecured disputed zone** between the two nations...

A place known as **Mile-14...**

And here we catch our first visual of the **human migration**.



Shockingly,
it's not a
truck full
of people.

It's a
single
family...

And they're
travelling
on foot.



CHAPTER 4: MEETING

It has been five days since **Akot, Adut,** and their four children left their homestead and began walking.

Five days of placing one foot in front of the other.



They've rationed their water and food, more than even back at home...

(Home... there is no such thing anymore...)

The hunger and thirst are deeper than ever.

The youngest is sick.



Almost always, they walk in silence.

DO YOU HEAR THAT? ENGINES.

BLACK MARKET TRADERS?

THEY DON'T SOUND LIKE MOTORCYCLES, THEY SOUND LIKE TRUCKS.

They've taken a route more path than road, hoping to avoid being turned back at the border.

IS IT MILITARY? HAVE WE CROSSED INTO THE CONTESTED ZONE YET?




HELLO!


NGO PEOPLE...

THE ROAD IS LONG, AKOT. WE CAN'T STOP NOW.


I KNOW.



LUAL,
ASK HIM IF
WE MAY FILM
THEM.




Adut tries to imagine the life of the woman with them. She looks Arab, despite the western clothes and uncovered hair.



The two women are around the same age. But the Arab woman looks like a little girl to Adut.

HELLO.

She has probably not even had her first child.



The woman speaks English, so Adut responds with some of the only English words she knows.

OKAY.

HELLO.



WE NEED TO TELL THE WORLD WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE. TO YOU. IS IT OKAY?

Akot knows his wife is anxious to move on, suspicious of these people, concerned for her family's dignity, but he agrees to speak.

Akot wants his story told. He wants to make sure he and his loved ones have a place in the world, are accorded value.

WHY ARE YOU LEAVING YOUR HOME?

WE HAVE NO CHOICE. EVERYTHING HAS FAILED. I DON'T WANT TO LEAVE MY COUNTRY, BUT MY CHILDREN WILL DIE IF I STAY.

WHY ARE YOU WALKING? WHY NOT TAKE ONE OF THE TRUCKS?

WE HAVE NO MONEY. I WOULD HAVE TO ABANDON MY FAMILY TO TAKE A TRUCK.

WE WAITED AS LONG AS WE COULD. MAYBE TOO LONG. MAYBE WE SHOULD HAVE LEFT SOONER, WE WOULD'VE BEEN STRONGER FOR THE WALK.

Akot wants to explain how it feels to hold his child who is losing weight so fast she is noticeably lighter today than yesterday.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

PEOPLE SAY WE CAN WORK ON CATTLE FARMS IN **SUDAN**. OR MAYBE PUSH ON TO **KHARTOUM**, FIND A JOB THERE, PERHAPS IN CONSTRUCTION.

He wants to appeal to God to spare them.

But he must appear strong for his family.

AKOT!
WE HAVE TO GO.

SHE'S RIGHT,
THERE'S MORE THAN A WEEK'S
JOURNEY STILL AHEAD...



I PROMISE. WE'RE GOING TO BRING HELP. THE WHOLE WORLD WILL SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE. I PROMISE.

Akot doesn't understand James' English. It means nothing.



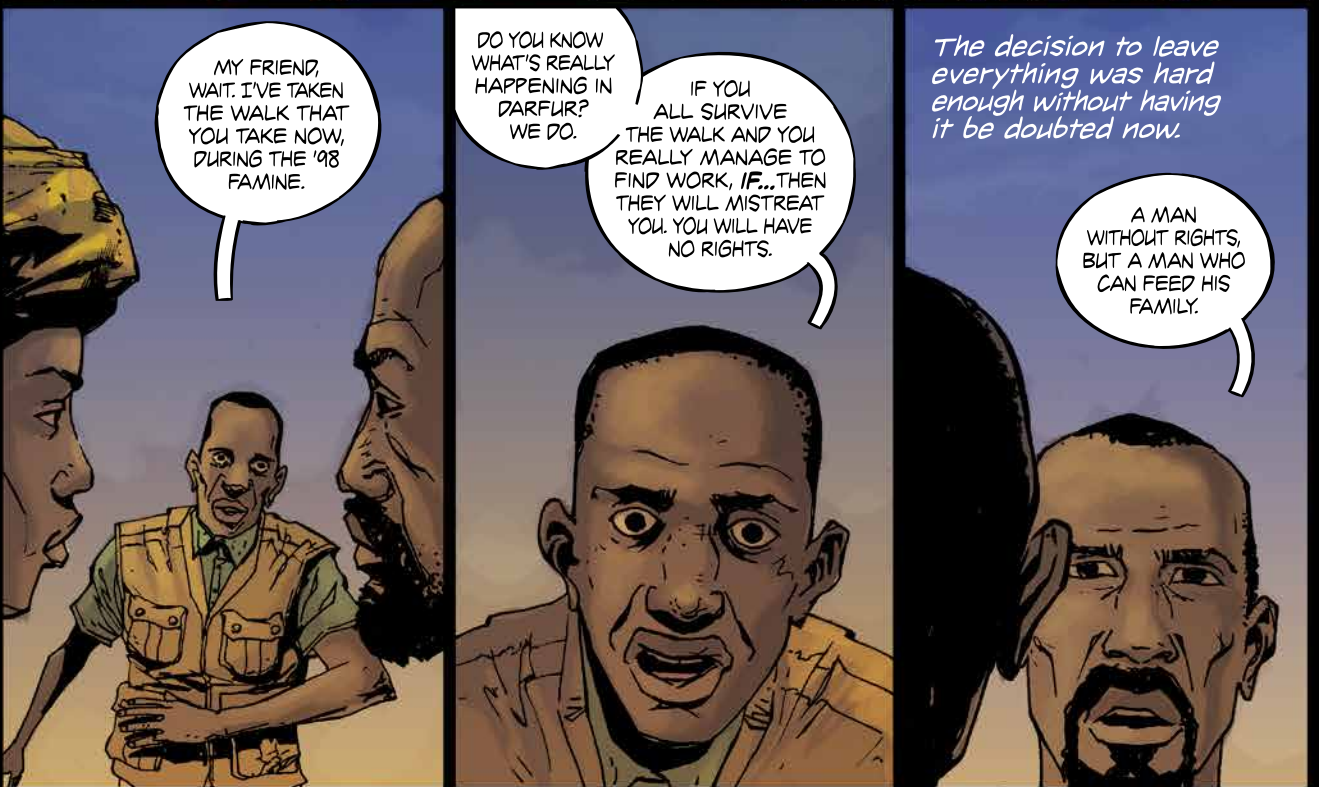
MY FRIEND,
WAIT. I'VE TAKEN THE WALK THAT YOU TAKE NOW, DURING THE '98 FAMINE.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING IN DARFUR?
WE DO.

IF YOU ALL SURVIVE THE WALK AND YOU REALLY MANAGE TO FIND WORK, *IF...* THEN THEY WILL MISTREAT YOU. YOU WILL HAVE NO RIGHTS.

The decision to leave everything was hard enough without having it be doubted now.

A MAN WITHOUT RIGHTS, BUT A MAN WHO CAN FEED HIS FAMILY.



YES, IF YOU GET WORK. WHAT'S MORE LIKELY IS THAT YOU'LL END UP IN AN OVERCROWDED **REFUGEE CAMP** IN DARFUR.

SO WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO? WHAT OPTION DO YOU HAVE FOR ME? WILL YOU FEED MY FAMILY? RIGHT NOW...THIS MOMENT? WILL YOU SAVE US?

WE ARE WORKING TO GET ENOUGH FOOD INTO THE REGION. TO KEEP OUR CULTURE HERE. YOURS AND MINE.


HERE... TAKE THIS MONEY...

I CAN HELP, I HAVE SOME MONEY, TOO...TAKE IT...

TURN BACK. GIVE US JUST A FEW MORE WEEKS. IN YOUR HEART, YOU KNOW YOU WILL NOT ALL MAKE IT. PLEASE, TURN BACK.

GOODBYE.

SO? WHAT DO WE DO NOW?



MAYBE I WASN'T SUPPOSED TO GIVE THEM THE MONEY? I JUST...I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT ELSE TO DO.

I WORRY THEY'LL TURN BACK FOR SUDAN AS SOON AS WE'RE OUT OF SIGHT, THEN THEY'LL BE ROBBED AT THE BORDER.

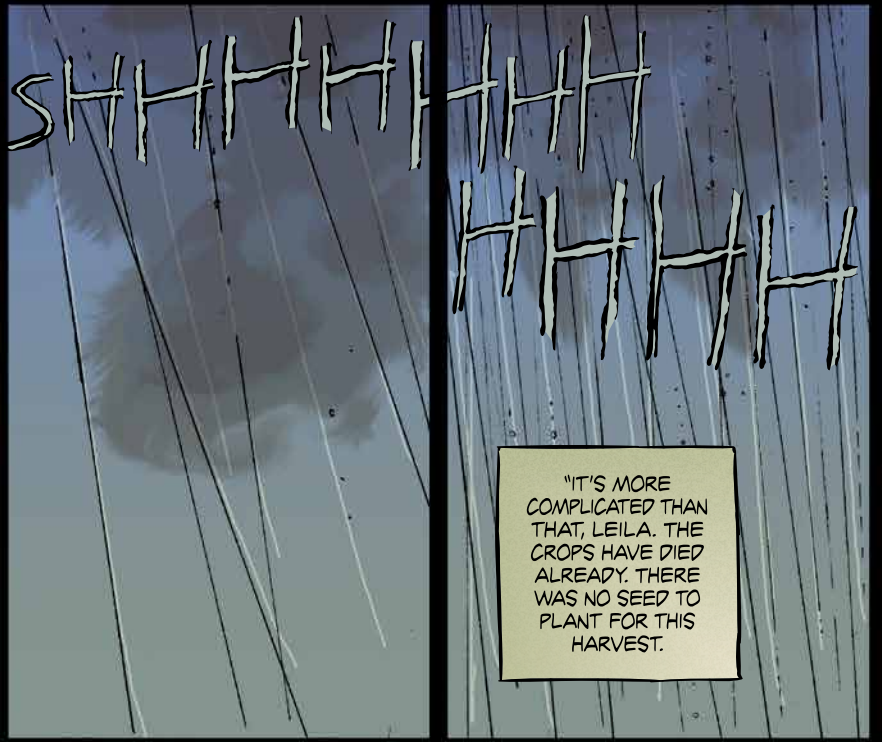


LOOK... IT'S STARTING TO RAIN...




FFFFFFFFSSSSHHHHHHHHHH

"THIS IS GOOD RIGHT?"



HHHHHHHHHH

"IT'S MORE COMPLICATED THAN THAT, LEILA. THE CROPS HAVE DIED ALREADY. THERE WAS NO SEED TO PLANT FOR THIS HARVEST."



"AND BECAUSE THE EARTH WAS NOT TILLED IT WILL REJECT THE WATER. THE LAND WILL FLOOD."

"NOW GETTING THE FOOD,
NEW SEEDS FROM **FAO**,
AND THE **MOBILE UNICEF**
CLINICS INTO THE AREA
WILL BE MORE DIFFICULT.



"PERHAPS
IMPOSSIBLE IN
SOME OF THE
MORE RURAL
PLACES.



"IT WAS TOO LATE FOR THE
RAIN TO MAKE THINGS BETTER
EVEN MONTHS AGO."





EVER SINCE MY FIRST DEPLOYMENT IN IRAQ, I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT MY PRIVILEGE A LOT.

THE ASSUMPTIVE SAFETY. THE LIFESTYLE I HAVE BACK HOME.

OF SHOPPING ALL ORGANIC IN HUGE MARKETS AND INSTAGRAMMING PICTURES OF MY ARTISANAL MEALS MADE WITH LOCALLY GROWN INGREDIENTS.

I TELL MYSELF THAT CULTURE IS RELATIVE. THAT THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH ENJOYING THE THINGS WE HAVE... I TELL MYSELF THAT...



ANYWAY... YEAH... >sigh<...

SO WE SPEND THE NEXT DAY HERE AT THE AWEIL WFP BASE TRYING TO HELP ORGANIZE A FUNDING STRATEGY WITH THE REGIONAL OFFICE IN NAIROBI.

Early that morning the story starts to get traction in the global media.

MALNUTRITION TWICE AS HIGH AS INITIALLY EXPECTED IN NORTHERN SOUTH SUDAN INTERNATIONAL EMERGENCY DECLARED

James is fielding more and more calls from journalists who want a tour of the area.



Two-weeks later Aweil is talked about in the UN Security Council.

That same week an international aid conference at the African Union in Addis Ababa watches Akot talk about sacrificing everything...

They see a man desperate in his hope--not that there might be a better world out there for him...

But just something other than starvation for his family.



Once we're back in Juba, the peace collapses and the fighting erupts again in the capital and across the nation.



Within a month, the first WFP shipments start dropping into northern **Bahr El Ghazal** region and we start saving lives.

The operation continues as of this writing.



In July 2016, WFP warehouses in Juba are raided...food that was meant for more than 200,000 people is stolen or destroyed.



**JUBA WFP COMPOUND.
NOVEMBER 2016.**

*Me, I continue
to do my job, and
not much else.*

*But no matter how
late or how hard I
work, that **ache** in
my stomach...well...*

*I haven't
really been
able to shake
it just yet.*

END.

WFP is the world's largest humanitarian organization and the UN's frontline emergency relief agency.

Each year, WFP assists some 80 million people in around 75 countries.

Currently WFP is assisting almost 5 million people in South Sudan. All are in need of food.

Find out: wfp.org/news/south-sudan-3652

LL3 is a work of fiction based on interviews, observations and research elements gathered during a trip to South Sudan in May 2016.

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LL3 created by WFP and Joshua Dysart.

Enormous thanks to the entire WFP staff at Juba and Aweil, South Sudan

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LL3

**LIVING LEVEL-3:
SOUTH SUDAN**

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