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In the mid-1980s, Emmanuel Jal was a seven year old Sudanese boy, living in a small village with his parents, aunts, uncles, and siblings. But as Sudan's civil war moved closer with the Islamic government seizing tribal lands for water, oil, and other resources, Jal's family moved again and again, seeking peace. Then, on one terrible day, Jal was separated from his mother, and later learned she had been killed; his father Simon rose to become a powerful commander in the Christian Sudanese Liberation Army, fighting for the freedom of Sudan. Soon, Jal was conscripted into that army, one of 10,000 child soldiers, and fought through two separate civil wars over nearly a decade.

But, remarkably, Jal survived, and his life began to change when he was adopted by a British aid worker. He began the journey that would lead him to change his name and to music: recording and releasing his own album, which produced the number one hip-hop single in Kenya, and from there went on to perform with Moby, Bono, Peter Gabriel, and other international music stars.

Shocking, inspiring, and finally hopeful, *War Child* is a memoir by a unique young man, who is determined to tell his story and in so doing bring peace to his homeland.

War Child: A Child Soldier's Story Details

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From Reader Review War Child: A Child Soldier's Story for online ebook

Thomas says

An at-times horrifying read, but in the end a truly inspiring biography and a great portrayal of the awful ways war affects children and young adults.

"War Child" is not for someone inclined to freak out at explicit descriptions of violence and misery, or famine-level poverty, hatred (at times racial hatred) and frustration. Jal has lived through a lot and here he does not shy away from describing any of it, from the blood and guts to the racial tension and hatred.

Jal was a child soldier with the SPLA (antigovernment rebels, at the time predominantly Christian/Animist) in Sudan and witnessed the rape and murder of members of his family. After the war despite the kindness of several strangers, he had a ROUGH time getting "rehabilitated," finding his behavior was affected in all sorts of ways by his past; he had a tendency toward violence, an automatic impulse to steal when he could, an inability to concentrate. I imagine that from the perspective of anyone who's ever worked with the children of trauma or immigrant populations, this book would be invaluable. It's also just an amazingly human story. The author's style is stilted and clearly colloquial at times, which means you'll be learning many terms from the languages of Sudan (often terms that are cobbled together from several languages, or have an unclear meaning). That, and the book's snapshot of village life in Sudan even outside of the context of war, add up to a book that is absolutely not to be missed.

Also, the last fifth or so of the book has a lot to do with Jal's music career; indie artists are advised to check it out. Because he could not get play from Nairobi radio stations, against all odds Jal and his friends got a grant and released his album and one of his friends', self-produced, self-promoted, basically no help from any music industry sources until Peter Gabriel gave him a vote of confidence at Africa Calling. At one point Jal describes giving well-attended concerts in London and then sleeping on park benches. Good to know it's not just the U.S. where the corporate music promoters are brain-dead sleazebags who wouldn't know good music if it bit them on the ass.

Jal is a Christian (raised a Christian, became an atheist during the war, then was "saved") and I am most emphatically not (though I was raised Roman Catholic). Jal's faith is critical to his rescue from despair, but he doesn't especially preach. Descriptions of his music necessarily carry some expression of Christian joy, particularly his early work which was more explicitly Christian -- before he started writing about his war experiences. If you can't handle that, you probably won't like the last part of the book. I think one of the strongest messages Jal presents is how he learned to not be prejudiced against Muslims, after a lifetime of hating them with all his heart (the war in Sudan was for all intents and purposes a war against Islamic and Christian/Animist populations, though its roots go deep into OIL). So avoiding his faith would have been thoroughly disingenuous, and I'm glad he's been honest about it here. It also means that if you ARE Christian, there will be a lot for you to like about the last part of the book, which ends on a SERIOUS up note and an inspiring sense of hope despite the fact that there is some HARROWING reading preceding it.

Zachary Burgess says

War Child was a memoir of a child soldier named Emmanuel Jal who grew up during the Second Sudanese Civil War. Growing up in a Christian family in Sudan he was always running from war. Running from village to village with his family for most of his childhood, to escape government forces that wanted to kill or enslave all of the Christians in Sudan. The Arabs ran the country and believed that all Christians should be enslaved because Allah wanted that. After many months of running from war Jal's mother was killed in one of the raids. This caused complete agony for Jal who loved his very much. After hearing the news Jal's father Babba sent away Jal to go to a "school" so that Jal could get an education and help out his country in the future. Jal was sent to Ethiopia with many other boys through the desert of Sudan. What Jal later came to find out was his dad had sent him to a refugee camp because he did not want Jal to be with him. Jal became one of the 10,000 Lost Boys of Sudan. At Pinyudu life was very hard because necessities like food and water were hard to find. Disease and starvation killed many boys at Pinyudu. Eventually Jal became a child soldier after enlisting in the army at a camp. He fought the Anuyuaks and some of the Ethiopians during their civil war but realized he would never be satisfied until he got to kill some of the jallabas(Arabs). Eventually Jal got his opportunity fighting in the battle at Joba in Southern Sudan. Jal's dream of killing the jallabas was what he wanted but his thought of war was totally different from reality. War was horrifying not glorious. The death was depressing and he didn't want imagine what death and being shot was like. After the battle Jal was again sent away on a long journey across the desert in Sudan. This time to get to the village of Waat where Riek Manchar lived.

Over the long journey across the desert many of Jal's friends died of starvation. Jal almost died but his faith in God and his destiny he believed kept him alive. In Waat he met a British Aid worker who wanted to help Jal get an education. This person was Emma McDune the wife of Riek Manchar. Emma allowed Jal to come with her to Kenya to live at the Peace House and go to one of the best schools in Kenya. Here is when Jal's life started to turn around. Then Emma was killed in a car accident and Jal's life turned again for the worst. He stopped listening in school, he got into more fights, and worst of all the hate for the jallabas which had subsided with Emma around came back. Instead of giving up hope because he couldn't afford to go back to school he turned to music. He started to write gospel music about Jesus and rap about his time in war. Eventually he gathered enough money and support to go to England where he studied. Although his life was almost thrown off the course it was on again when he got back to Sudan and realized he didn't have enough money to go back to England. Again he relied on music to keep him from falling back to his previous life. This time his music was a massive success making him famous around Africa. Not only did his songs reach number 1 in Kenya, but he also gained fame in Sudan for writing about the struggles of the war. Now Jal is still going with his music because it helps him cope with the depressing moments of his life. He wraps to support himself and tell the story of his life and how we need to prevent these things from happening to other people.

Puoch Dit says

I feel the same way when I read the previews of Emmanuel Jal or Jal in short in Nuer language book. I knew it has been a long journey toward the peace process in Sudan, but hope is what generate me days and nights for my 21 years of waiting for the peace to pop up in Sudan, which indeed happened in 2005. As a former child soldier myself, I knew how hard it is to live and go through the process of bad things. I couldn't agree more on Jal is reflections on those things that happened to him during the struggle for self determination in the South Sudan. The whole stories he just told were all true through my memoirs. I used to lived in the same camp Emmanuel used to be in, but because there were so many children in that camp we happened not to

knew each other. I cannot wait to read the full text from his book and reflects back on all the things that occurred and saluted the lost ones along the way too.

All I can say as of now Jal is thank you Jal for sharing this fascinating story by letting the whole world known about our struggle and how we lost our love ones while searching for the place to settle our fate. One again Jal you are my hero for doing this for the past heroes, and the incoming ones as well.

Thank you
By former lost boy from Panyindu camp child soldier

Puoch Ruot Dit

Max Cohen says

An eye opening first hand account of the war that ripped apart Sudan in the 1980s. Emmanuel Jal puts his experience as a child soldier into words. He describes the pain, misery, and hardship that was his childhood and the recovery that led him to his life today. This book had many great lessons such as the value of friendship, and the power of hope. The imagery was superb and aided in the delivery of the story. Symbolism and metaphors were also prominent throughout the book. However the word choice was rather simple in my opinion. I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys stories of war and memoirs. I would not recommend it to anyone who cannot handle extreme violence and it is definitely not for children.

Kaley says

This was such a great read! Tragic, but I love how it's a redemption story! There was some language issues for sure, but this book wasn't made for the faint of heart to begin with. At least the foul language isn't prevalent. It's books like these that make me want to be a better person and help my fellow man. Everyone in America needs to read this book and just see how privileged we really are and stop complaining about absolutely nothing of worth. Definitely an eye opener!

Saira R says

4.5 stars

Lisa Shamchuk says

A moving story about a Lost Boy of Sudan who then uses music to help his country heal.

Trupti Dorge says

This book is the second book I've read on a Child Soldier. War Child is about 7 year old Jal or Emmanuel from Sudan who gets caught up in the war between Northern Sudan and Southern Sudan. His entire family is displaced, he gets sent to the Ethiopian refugee camp, gets recruited as a child soldier in the South Sudan Rebellion and eventually escapes war by getting to Kenya.

All I can say is I probably couldn't endure even half of what this kid has endured and come out of it sane. It's harrowing, heartbreaking and honest. Always honest. I'm surprised that he could even talk about some of the events in his life.

After he escapes to Kenya, his life is not a bed of roses suddenly. He describes how difficult it is to assimilate these aimless Lost Boys of Sudan to normal life. I'm amazed by his dedication towards the cause. The fact that he could perform in a huge concert, earn a decent amount of money and still have no place to sleep at night because he has donated all the money to the organization is what blows me away.

This book made me angry. Why can't people just stop killing each other? Is money, power, oil, religion, pride so important that it turns them into killing machines without a thought of what they are doing to their countries and their own families? Jal doesn't have any answers to those either. But he still has hope that if people work together they can achieve peace.

Keen says

“Excitement rushed into my veins as I sang. I was a soldier now. I could sleep with one eye open and stop myself from crying out even when I was beaten until p!ss and sh!t ran out of me. I knew there were eleven ways to attack a town; how to open, fuse, and throw a grenade; how to load and fire an AK-47; how to raise a machete and hack at an enemy or use stones as a weapon when my bullets ran out. There was nothing to be afraid of.”

This all sounds intense enough, but considering these are the words of a child soldier, makes it all the more extreme. Sudan has well over 500 groups speaking over 400 languages and dialects. Jal belonged to the Nuer tribe, who joined up with the Dinka, (when they weren't fighting each other) as part of the SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army), in order to fight against the Sudanese Arabs (by far the most dominant group) from the north, who wished to impose Sharia Law on the whole country as well as get access to all the country's oil.

Jal's journey is certainly quite an incredible one, with very few of the more gruesome details spared. What he had to endure and for how long, would scar anyone, to do so at such a young age, must inflict an immense amount of suffering. This a highly readable account about a highly volatile part of the world, where well over 2 million people have been killed so far, in a series of on-going wars that show no sign of ending soon.

Sky says

I don't have the background in Sudanese (and regional) history to judge the veracity of everything in this book, but even if it was only 1/2 true, it would still be an astonishing story.

I haven't had much luck reading autobiographical books lately, so it was nice to finally finish one that was good.

Wendy Butler says

Such a good book. Having met Mr. Jal I was already impressed, but his insightful writing and his ability to be both genuine and introspective about the lessons of war are tremendous.

Richard says

see my Blog on War Child at: Millerstime.net or go to

<http://web.me.com/Samesty84/MillersTi...>

In the last several years there have been a number of books about the horrors of child soldiers and the horrors occurring in various parts of Africa, including the best seller *A Long Way Gone* by Ishamael Beah (Sierra Leone), *Emma's War* by Deborah Scroggins, and *What Is the What* by David Eggers.

Now comes one from Emmanuel Jal, one of the Lost Boys of the Sudan. It is excellent and deserves a wide audience.

Jal tells his story of his journey into hell, beginning approximately at age seven. It's not clear to me how much of the book is his own writing and how much has been told to co-writer Megan Lloyd Davies. But that probably doesn't matter as the authenticity of Jal's journey is never in doubt

Born in Sudan in a time of peace, Jal's life quickly turns wretched as the civil war between northern and southern Sudan develops (largely over oil). Jal's family moves further and further south to avoid the devastating effects of the war. Within a short period of time, he loses his father, who leaves to train with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), witnesses the rape of his aunt, and becomes permanently separated from his mother and siblings. He is then sent to Ethiopia, supposedly to go to school. There is no schooling, and a two year period of almost unimaginable struggling for survival begins for this now nine year old.

Jal is filled with hatred, both by what he has been told by the adults in his world as well as what he has seen and experienced. Before long he finds himself training to be a child soldier. He is not forced into the child soldier role but chooses it (to the degree a seven-nine year old has free will) as he wants revenge for what the northern Muslims have done to his family and his world.

Jal wants to kill Muslims, but his first taste of war as a 'soldier' comes when the Ethiopians turn on the Sudanese orphans and rebels and begin to expel them. His life then gets worse, if that is possible, as the southern Sudanese rebels begin to fight amongst themselves as the Nuer and Dinka tribes turn against each other. Forced marches, food deprivations, betrayal by friends and witnessing man's inhumanity barely describe what Jal experiences. He carries an AK47 which is bigger than he is. And when he finally does kill, it does not seem to quell his anger or hatred.

At one point Jal almost turns to cannibalism simply to survive, but according to War Child, he has a vision of Jesus and chooses not to go down that road. Shortly thereafter an English aid worker, Emma McCune (the same Emma from the book Emma), takes him into her home and seeks to rescue him from the life of a child soldier. And thus begins a long and rocky exit from his world of child soldiery, if not from the hate and emotional destruction he has experienced. When Emma is soon killed in an auto accident, Jal is without a sponsor. He is in and out of schools, lives on the streets in Kenya, meets other individuals who seek to and do help him. But it is not an easy journey from the hell he has lived.

Jal begins to mix music with his attempts at schooling. He and several other lost boys form a singing group and a society to help others in similar condition. Eventually he makes his way first as a gospel singer and ultimately as a hip-hop artist. At first he is successful in Kenya and ultimately internationally. His music takes him around the world as he uses it both to sooth himself and as a way to bring attention to what is happening in Sudan.

As unlikely an odyssey as this sounds, from the depths of depravity to the hopefulness of his recovery and achievements, War Child amazes. That an individual can survive what Jal has experienced and go on to devote his life to peace, for me, puts him in a category that has very few equals.

There are parts of the book that are beautifully written, if that word can be used for his graphic descriptions of the horrors of what Jal saw, experienced, and perpetrated. Certainly War Child deserves to rise to the top of the list of books on child soldiers and on what is continuing to happen in Africa today

Paula3 says

A first person account from one of the Lost Boys of Sudan that will leave you saddened, yet hopeful. Emmanuel Jal truly explemplifies the resiliency of the human spirit and how one never knows how we can affect the lives of those we meet. Jal provides very vivid and detailed accounts of the atrocities of war and the disturbing way young children are trained to become soldiers. As much as this book broke my heart, it also reminded me that there are so many areas in our world where people, especially children, struggle on a daily basis in ways I can not even fathom.

Victoria says

3.5 stars.

I have known of Emmanuel Jal for several years now and have been wanting to read this and see his documentary. I did see his acting in The Good Lie as well when it came out. I finally got the book. It was really a lot to take in and was very good. I loved learning his story and feeling what he feels while reading it. I can't imagine the hardships within his mind that he suffers still to be exposed to such painful things early on in life (my dad has PTSD from being in war, but to suffer even young would make this harder, I would imagine).

This book begins by focusing on Jal's upbringing and the memories of his mother in Sudan. He talks about the attack on his village where his family was separated.

One of the hardest parts to read was his trip to Ethiopia where so many children died along the way. Once there, he lived in a refugee camp and struggled to survive, eventually being led out by soldiers who recruited him. There he fought when so young.

Emmanuel Jal received a chance of living life in Kenya and received an education, as hard as that was. It leads up to his career of being a recording artist.

I loved learning his struggles with his belief in God, but ultimately seeing how He helped him, leading him to Christianity.

There is bad language in this book and graphic violence. Definitely not a book for kids, but it is important to teach your children about what he went through.

Kathryn Aitken says

Unbelievable. This is an important book to read. GO to his webiste and see how Emmanuel Jal is using his horrific experiences to create a positive change. He is an amazing public speaker...if you have the chance to go and see him, you should do it. If you have high school age children, contact your school to see about having him come and do a presentation for the students.
