

To all of us comes a moment where we see ourselves clearly. Some of us reach this moment and realize, My God, I *am* awesome. I have improved the world, my jacket exemplifies all I have achieved and my arse is just brilliant. Some of us don't. For those of us who reach this moment and realize, My God, I am *still* like this, this book is for you.

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## POLICE ACADEMY GULU

It was plain to see that I was under surveillance: who would want a brand-new laptop? It was ten o'clock at night but I went to the police station. First things first, I wanted a police report for insurance purposes.

Gulu Police Station was empty apart from a five-inch spider with hairy orange legs shinning down a length of web. Below, someone had kicked a hole in the duty desk. As I waited, I read posters on the wall. The first, about how to run an election: 'Make sure the following do not appear on the voting register! The non-citizens. The underage. The dead.' The second, the official Red Cross laws of war, a list of dos and don'ts for armed combat, illustrated by jolly cartoons of soldiers committing war crimes, stealing goats, burning villages and so on: 'COMBATANTS, REMEMBER! Do not rape!' Oh shit, you're joking . . . Well, can I just finish this one . . . ?

★

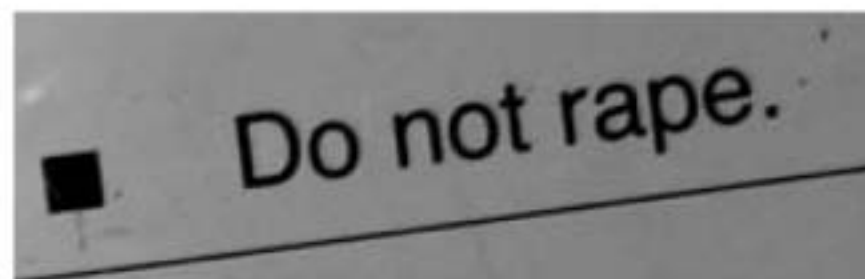
The desk sergeant came in, a skinny cop in gumboots. His stripes were held on his jacket with staples. We both heard a terrible screaming from the cells to his left. Only one of us turned.

'Don't worry, it's the lunatics,' said the desk sergeant. 'Later we give them an injection. Can I help you?'

'Yes. Someone's stolen my computer,' I said.

'Where is he? I'll shoot him in the head!'

'Can I just get a police report?'



'Oh! It makes me so angry!' he said.

'Yes, but I don't want you to shoot him—' I said.

'Then I'll whip him and whip him and whip him—'

'What about my police report?' I ventured.

'Have you got one?' he said.

'No, I hoped you might have . . .'

'Madam,' he said, suddenly strict, 'we've only got one police report and we need it.' He took pity on me. 'Why don't you come back tomorrow? You can take it to the post office and get it photocopied.'

'But . . . why should I have to go?'

'It's only ten minutes' walk to the post office!' he said. Then he calmed down and sunk over the counter on his elbows. 'What I really want is to go to college.' He sighed. 'Madam, would you pay my tuition?'

I was weighing this up when I noticed a member of the public had come in and was standing next to me. He was naked from the waist down. He had quite a large penis for a lunatic.

Another cop came in. This one looked me up and down.

'Madam,' said the new cop, 'have you got children?'

'No,' I said.

'Do you want children?' It was a nice offer but I'd had a busy evening and what I really wanted was to go home. I shook my head.

'Can you not have children?' he said.

'I don't know, I've never tried.'

He picked up an old form, clicked a biro and wrote his mobile number on it, giving it to me with a sexy look. When I turned it over, the form read, 'Does the hymen show signs of tearing?'

I was fighting off an uncontrollable horniness when another policeman walked in. The first two had a screaming

match with him in Acholi. He seemed to have won and shooed the first two away. He noticed I was still there.

'Is there a problem?'

'Is there a problem? Yes, I've come all the way from Los Angeles and SOMEONE'S STOLEN MY CAMERA AND MY COMPUTER!'

A pause. The cop thought about this, analysing the case, mulling over the facts. I relaxed. He reached a conclusion.

'Los Angeles?' he said. 'Can you help me find an agent? Because I've written a novel . . .'

The policeman disappeared and came back with a hand-bound manuscript in a blue plastic cover. On the front was an illustration of what looked like a turd. On the back was a list of people he gave thanks to. Two of them had been crossed out.



JANE BUSSMANN

The policeman's novel was called *Across My Lips: the Burgles of Mortal Dignity*. I promised him I'd do my best to get it to a Hollywood agent and read a paragraph at random. I've reprinted it below. According to the book, this may infringe copyright.

'The brawny sexual abuser was wearing fur. He looked like a mighty chimpanzee with a lean and mean muscular stiffed genitals.'

'If you like it,' said the policeman, 'I have another!'

As I left Gulu Police Station, I got a weird sixth sense – a sort of journalistic intuition – and it told me that these cops might not find my laptop.

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## CARDBOARD BOX

As I walked through Gulu, the St Mary's story honked like a goose. Everything about it felt wrong. One hundred and thirty-nine boarding school girls stolen from their dormitory in a random attack, the papers had said. Except it wasn't random. So I went visiting.



Fig. 16. Dried meat stew

Sure enough, nothing was what it seemed. People wouldn't talk on the record, but in the back room of a dark restaurant that smelled of dried meat stew, an old man gave me an old cardboard box. The box was crammed with thin typing paper yellow with age, blurry photographs, hand-written accounts, famous names, warnings, pleas and threats. Here's what I learned.

For a period in the late 1980s, the school had been attacked nearly every day. The rebels made it crystal clear what they wanted. During the 1991 raid, they had a question for the nuns: 'Where are the girls?' When they only succeeded in looting, they told the nuns, 'We'll be back.' St Mary's was the finest school around, the girls were the finest girls and Kony had ordered them like a special edition Porsche. By 1996, the home guard had been stationed at the school.

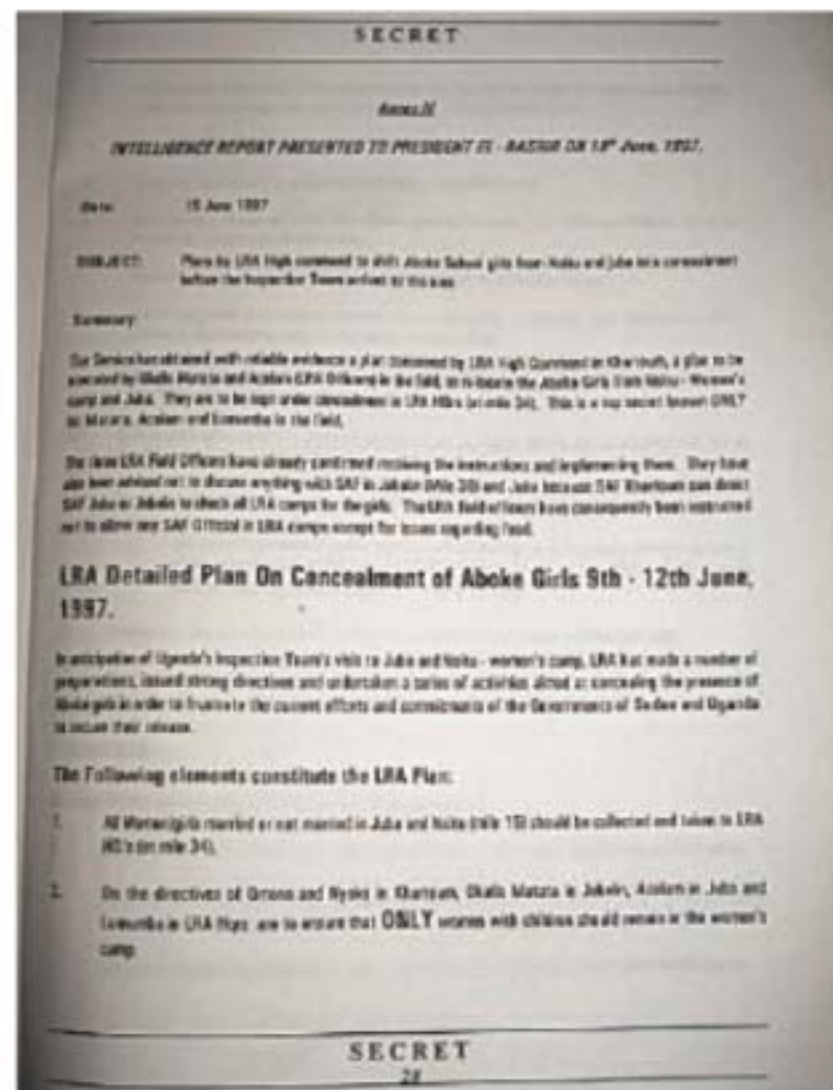
But ten days before the 1996 attack, the home guard was withdrawn without any prior notice, leaving the school undefended. Their fate was sealed: the girls were spirited away to a wilderness across the Sudanese border. Their location would be a mystery to their parents and to the authorities trying to get them back.

Except it wasn't.



This is a map showing the three bases of Kony's City of Children in the Sudanese desert where the girls were kept 'hidden' for years.

Come on, you say. This looks like a treasure map. Johnny Depp made this in his sleep, I've seen *Pirates of the Caribbean II*. But what's this?





Sudanese intelligence services were so well-informed they were able to produce a detailed intel report to Captain Chuckles himself, genocidal maniac President Bashir. As Sister Rachele arrived to get her girls, the report warned that Kony was clearing out the camp and hiding the St Mary's girls, leaving behind a few young mothers who'd been instructed not to tell anyone where they were. Sure enough, officials took Sister Rachele to Kony's camp, only to find it deserted. Some young mothers turned up and told the officials it wasn't Kony's base, it was a refugee camp and they couldn't tell them where the St. Mary's girls were. The officials said, 'Oh, sorry,' and left. Sister Rachele demanded to come back the next day. She found the camp heaving with kidnapped kids, and a Sudanese official lorry parked nearby. One kid, Monica, aged twelve, told them that yes, the St Mary's girls were being hidden in Jabulen, the LRA base. No one would help Sister Rachele rescue the girls, and Monica was killed for talking.

'When your child was taken you weren't supposed to complain, you were supposed to stay quiet,' Laura had told me. But these parents had the means to complain – they weren't peasant farmers who had to spend their day walking miles to pump water. They were middle class, doctors and teachers with access to phones, faxes and email accounts – and they used them. They raised a stink despite threatening letters from the LRA decorated with symbols that named the parents personally.

The St Mary's case became one of history's most famous kidnappings because it had a star. Everyone from Pope John Paul II to Nelson Mandela was moved by the lone nun. Anyone could feel for the small, skinny Italian Sister facing off rebels who would have scared an SAS officer, unable to save all her girls. That one gut-wrenching moment to haunt the rest of your life. But as I sat reading through archives, a batch of

memories came screaming out of the cardboard box. Sister Rachele had done it before: 1996 was the *third time*.

In 1987, she'd cycled 60km into the bush to rescue Dina, a St. Mary's girl who been kidnapped, by a different mob of armed gunmen to the LRA incidentally, but still no government soldiers stopped them, and Dina had been snatched while on her way to hospital with suspected appendicitis. Sister Rachele faced off a gunman who said, 'Do you want me to slaughter you?' before meeting up with another nun, Sister Fernanda. By a complete coincidence, one of the kidnappers recognized Fernanda as his former nurse and handed over the schoolgirl.

In 1989, the raid was in broad daylight. The scene was chaos: hundreds of girls running, leaping the school fences and tearing over 40km to hide in a cathedral. Sister Rachele realised eighty-nine people had been taken - from St Mary's, from the local seminary and from the primary school. Again she followed rebels into the bush unarmed. On her way, she found they'd killed five people and burned more than a hundred houses. She had to stop because government soldiers had found the rebels and started firing. But the soldiers simply fired their guns in the air. Six girls escaped in the chaos. Not Susan. The girls told Rachele they'd all been raped, even the little ones from the primary school. After this incident, not one day went by without the nuns going out on bicycles or tractors to look for children.

Let's cut the army some slack. This is Africa: vehicles break down, parts are impossible to find in a hurry and fuel is constantly siphoned off. But in 1989, according to one account from a witness who hid in an office during the raid, Kony's men had attacked a nearby secondary school in Ngai and left a message that Aboke St Mary's was next. Sister Rachele asked for help days in advance and even gave the army chief petrol money.

Let's cut some slack for the soldiers who were shown where the LRA were camping the evening before the 1991 attack and said they wouldn't take action because 'it's getting late'. Let's say they'd bought lottery tickets and wanted to be back for the draw.

Let's cut the army some more slack and note that on the night of the 1996 abduction, Kony's rebels had attacked and crippled the local barracks at Iceme. Did the army tell the sister 'Sorry, we can't do this - send the girls home'? No. In fact, when the sisters asked, 'Should we close the school?' the army's information officer urged them to keep it open. Why?

Let's cut some slack for the army's intelligence services and say the rebels were fiendishly brilliant. But according to a girl from Dorm Four, one of them stole a stethoscope from the school dispensary thinking it was a Walkman, and later dumped it complaining that it was broken.

Let's cut some slack for the three separate army officers who promised Rachele they'd send troops as that night in 1996 dragged nearer. Let's say they didn't think it appropriate to behave in a hysterical manner over a rumour. But one stated clearly that he knew St Mary's was a main target.

Let's hand the army the entire ball of slack and say they're only human - they were too scared to face the rebels and save the girls. That's cool too. But at that point, it's a little unsporting to call yourself an army. Call yourself a group of similarly-attired young men sitting in a nearby building who happen to have some weapons and ammunition they won't be using. This avoids the outside world mistaking you for people who might defend civilians.