



**PROFIT OF DOOM**  
Phil Heilberg, a former partner at AIG, is now one of the largest private landholders in Africa.

# WILL GLOBAL WARMING, **OVERPOPULATION,** FLOODS, DROUGHTS **AND FOOD RIOTS** MAKE THIS MAN RICH?

## MEET THE NEW CAPITALISTS OF CHAOS

BY MCKENZIE FUNK

**T**HE DAY WE FLY TO JUBA IN AN OLD DC-9, THE sun is out and the clouds are distant puffs, and all we can see is green: the dirty green of the Nile, the dark green of the mango trees, the radiant green of the uncultivated savanna. The land is flat and muddy and empty, and it stretches forever. “Just look at that shit,” Phil Heilberg says, as if daring me to question his genius. “You could grow anything there.”

Heilberg, a former Wall Street trader, is a big man: six feet two, well over 200 pounds, loud and voluble, accustomed to getting his way. Before we boarded the plane in Nairobi for the quick hop from Kenya to Sudan, he’d almost gotten in a fight with another passenger, a middle-aged aid worker, after trying to cut in front of the man’s wife during a baggage check. The aid worker had started yelling at him – something about everyone having to wait in the same line. “Do you want to go?” Heilberg yelled back. “Let’s go! I’m a lot bigger than you!”

A partner at AIG’s commodities-trading unit before he left the insurance giant in 1999 – “I used to be one of the highest-paid guys on Wall Street,” he boasts – Heilberg is now betting heavily that he can profit from Africa’s chaos. He has befriended Darfuri rebels in London, oil-bunkering

militants in Nigeria and ethnic separatists in Somalia and Ethiopia, looking to cash in on any commodity – petroleum, uranium, whatever – that might come his way in the wake of independence. If a country is too combustible for most investors to touch, he’s interested. It’s a strategy he dreamed up early in his career, while he was still working for AIG. “I saw the Soviet Union split up,” he recalls. “Saw it up close. I realized there was a lot of money to be made in breakups, and I vowed that the next time I’d be on the inside.”

Now, looking out the window of the plane, Heilberg is en route to the biggest deal of his life. Last year, he snapped up a lease on 1 million acres of farmland in the war-ravaged savanna of southern Sudan – a tract nearly the size of Delaware – making him one of the largest private landholders in Africa. A map crammed in his computer bag shows where he now hopes to double his holdings: another million acres configured in six rectangular blocks to the east and north, close to the border with Ethiopia, outlined in orange marker. The land is incredibly fertile and safe from drought, irrigated by an offshoot of the Nile, largely free of land mines. There’s no asset more tangible than land, Heilberg insists – and, if he’s right, there will soon be none more profitable.

Photographs by JENN WARREN

**GOING TO THE GUNS** Heilberg confers with Gen. Paulino Matip (left) and his son Gabriel at the general's compound in Juba. "He's a capitalist," Heilberg says. "He understands that I deserve to make a profit."



Heilberg is part of a growing wave of capitalists who are maneuvering to exploit the world's looming food crisis. As the poor riot over shortages in places like Senegal and Bangladesh, investors are racing to corner the market on the world's dwindling farmland. In the past two years, as many as 50 million acres – the equivalent of all the cropland in France, or 10 percent of arable Africa – have changed hands. Rising powers like China, India and South Korea have snapped up millions of acres from Cameroon to Kazakhstan, competing against oil-rich states like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and Wall Street banks like Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley. All are betting that population growth and climate change – with its accompanying droughts and desertification and flooding – will soon make food as valuable as oil. On a planet of melting glaciers, overcrowded cities and millions of climate refugees, those who control the food will control the world.

"I can see it," says Heilberg, laying out what he views as the scientific basis of his

*MCKENZIE FUNK is working on a book about climate-change capitalism. This is his first story for ROLLING STONE.*

investment strategy. "The world needs food. Thomas Malthus talked about the problem of finite land but infinite growth. He's been wrong to date – we can use technology to push out more food. But what happens when technology isn't coming fast enough? I think people will panic, especially those who have no land to grow on."

For Heilberg, going long on the coming age of scarcity means "going to the guns" – ingratiating himself with the thugs, strongmen and warlords who hold the chips in places like Sudan. When our plane touches down in Juba, the capital of southern Sudan, we are met at the airport by Gabriel, the eldest son of Gen. Paulino Matip, the army's deputy commander in chief. During the 1990s, according to Human Rights Watch and other witnesses, Matip's private militias brutally cleared civilians from their homes – torching villages, raping women, executing men – to make way for oil drilling. The violence was part of one of the longest-running wars in Africa, a civil conflict between Sudan's Muslim north and the mostly Christian and animist south that formally ended in 2005. Now, to secure his land deal, Heilberg is banking on Matip to come out on top in

the semiautonomous south's struggle for full independence. Matip is the one who approved Heilberg's lease on the farmland, and the general's son serves as an official partner in the venture. Heilberg makes no apologies for such arrangements. "This is Africa," he says. "The whole place is like one big mafia. I'm like a mafia head. That's the way it works."

Gabriel, dressed in an Armani jacket and armed with three Nokia cellphones, ushers us into an aging Land Cruiser pickup. We speed down one of Juba's only paved roads, passing boys on motorbikes, men tending makeshift kiosks, and shipping containers ringed by guards and concertina wire. The containers, which serve as housing and offices for international aid workers, were driven in on flatbed trucks after the fighting ended in 2005; when and if the violence begins anew, they could be driven out just as quickly. Heilberg is already pressing Gabriel about contracts to sign and meetings to arrange as we reach our destination: the general's heavily fortified compound in downtown Juba, surrounded by machine-gun emplacements and thatch-roofed huts known as *tukuls*, the homes of guards and their families.

Heilberg sits up. The monkey is gone. The guards used to have a monkey. Heilberg, whose family pet is a cockapoo named Cookie Dough, thought the monkey was cute.

"Where's your monkey?" he yells at the guards.

**T**HE GLOBAL FARMLAND GRAB got under way in earnest after the spring of 2008, when food prices spiked worldwide. Soybeans doubled, corn and wheat tripled, and rice quintupled, as the world's stockpiles of food shrunk to a two-month supply. The governments of Vietnam, Cambodia, India and Brazil banned grain exports; hungry rioters took to the streets in the Ivory Coast, Indonesia, Peru, Egypt, Haiti, Yemen and the Philippines. In the Murray-Darling Basin of Australia, once a top rice producer and the world's second-largest exporter of wheat, thousands of farms failed after six years of drought. At Costco and Sam's Club, American shoppers were limited to a few bags of rice each. Experts now describe the crisis as a temporary shock, but many of its underlying causes – climate change, soaring oil prices that jack

up the cost of fertilizer, China's growing appetite for meat, a global population that is racing toward 9 billion – are structural, fundamental. That is, permanent. "It's a fragile situation," says Nicholas Minot, a senior fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute. "If food stocks are low, a small shortfall in production can cause a big jump in price. Demand for food is inelastic. People will always pay to keep eating."

Heilberg looked at the crisis and saw opportunity. "The world is like the universe – ever expanding," he says. "I focus on the pressure points." In Sudan, he has found a point that could be crucial to food security: the largest country in Africa, and 10th-largest on the planet, crisscrossed by rivers, dotted with swamps. The Arab-led government in Khartoum, where the two forks of the Nile meet, has reportedly turned over nearly 2 million acres to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, hoping to make the northern region the breadbasket of the Arab world. But in the southern half of Sudan, where the land is even lusher, what little agriculture exists is mostly small-scale: families with a few cows, tiny plots planted with sorghum and corn. Heilberg imagines the landscape transformed by American-style agribusiness, complete with irrigation and fertilizers and 400-horsepower combines. But such ambitions require a huge gamble. A referendum scheduled for next January could give the south full independence from the north, potentially voiding any previous deals. Or the referendum could be postponed or rigged, sparking outright war. Either way, the risk is too great for most investors to bear.

Not for Heilberg. Instability is not only built into his investment model, it's integral to the equation. "I'm trying to be methodical," he says. "I think mathematically. I do probability trees and all that. I have secession at 90 percent. I've low-

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ered my timetable from five years to four. It could happen in the next 18 months." Besides, he says, political risk is nothing compared to the systemic risk long favored by Wall Street – the kind that took down his old employer, AIG, along with much of the rest of modern capitalism. "World events are making my point for me," he says. "Everything has become a risk asset. Had I stayed at AIG, I would have lost everything. That's AIG, for God's sake. A stable place. A \$200 billion company. Blue-chip. Everything's a risk asset – you just don't realize it."

For Heilberg, the global economic meltdown underscores an essential lesson in capitalism: that no one is actually in control. "When something happens, it happens," he says. Things can be the same for 40 or 50 years, and then they're not. Today is one of those moments when they're not. "We already have a commodities problem," he says. "I would not be surprised if in a day or a week oil goes to \$100 or \$150. Like that: *Boom!* We're seeing the death knell of the financial instrument – of the paper world. We're going to see the rise of the commodity. A bushel of corn can't be \$15."

Before Sudan, Heilberg's path was conventional, if accelerated. The son of a coffee trader, he grew up in New York and earned both a bachelor's degree and an MBA in five years at Wharton. He worked on the foreign-exchange desk at Salomon Brothers, then helped found AIG's commodities-trading unit in Hong Kong. Responsible for all of Asia, he would fly off to Shanghai with CEO Hank Greenberg, off to Tashkent to meet with a dictator. "His star was shining in those days," recalls Nadav Lehavy, a college classmate who succeeded Heilberg in Hong Kong.

For a time, the lifestyle suited Heilberg. "It's constant stimulus, constant transactions," he says. "You're always looking at markets and trying to get an edge. It's like a drug." But after the Asian financial crisis in 1997 – and after scared investors fled emerging markets for the Internet bubble – he quit AIG to strike out on his own, working as a consultant and leasing out his seats on the New York Board of Trade. Then, in 2002, a friend told him about Sudan. Within a year he had signed his first contract there – an oil deal that later fell through. He was stepping outside of the Wall Street establishment; today's generation of hedge-fund managers has barely heard of him. "What we were doing at AIG was institutional in nature," says Lehavy. "Now Phil is there at the source, at the bottom of the value chain."

At 45, Heilberg is exactly where he wants to be – going after value that others don't recognize, or simply don't have the wherewithal to tap. "Wall Street used to be a straight line," he says. "It made people a lot of money. A lot of money. But the mundane bores me. The interest rate on this is

six percent, and you borrow at three percent – anybody can do that. As an entrepreneur, it's never a straight line. When you're an entrepreneur, you have to create something."

**I**F THERE'S A MORAL CODE GUIDING Heilberg in Sudan, it is that of Ayn Rand, his favorite author: Place yourself above all else; get in no one's way, and let no one get in yours; give no charity, and expect none. "Her individualism is extreme – but anything in its purest form is more powerful," he says. "Howard Roark is the hero of *The Fountainhead* because he's pure. He doesn't care about what anyone else thinks – not about social norms, the right clubs, the right people. We all want a bit of Howard Roark in us."

Like Rand's hero, Heilberg has come under attack from all sides, from human rights activists to rival businessmen and European journalists. His land grab in Sudan has been described as "the most scandalous case yet" and "one of the shadiest deals of all." One British blogger accuses him of forging "a wholly new business strategy – hyperdisaster capitalism." But those who know him say that Heilberg is often his own worst enemy. "Phil has not made his own case very well in the way that he's phrased and communicated it, but that's a function of the world he comes out of rather than his objectives," says one former colleague. "He's a straight shooter. My sense is that he is sincerely motivated. For this guy to spend every summer literally hanging around Juba strikes me as something more than a predatory buccaneer."

Heilberg, an avowed libertarian, sees himself as a virtuous capitalist, doing good in the world by remaining faithful to his own self-interest. "I've had to make a lot of personal sacrifices," he says. "I'm funding this whole thing. I've made a bet with my own money that the world will play out like I expect it to. In that sense, what I'm doing is pure."

His plan for the farmland is straightforward: He wants to farm it, not flip it, and to sell crops locally before selling internationally. There's certainly a domestic market for it: Sudan is in the midst of a long-running famine, and aid groups are willing to pay top dollar for food. He knows it will be years before the first seeds can be planted, and he'll need to bring in joint-venture partners for the actual production. Israelis, perhaps: "They have experience in Africa. They've shown an ability to figure out problems." Heilberg also likes the irony of bringing in Israelis to farm what some consider Arab land, a way to give the mid-

dle finger to the Muslim-led government in Khartoum. "Do you know what a *tefillin* is?" he says. "The box and leather strap you put on during prayers? It's a reminder of God bringing us out of Egypt or whatever. I always bring mine to Sudan."

Heilberg won't discuss the terms of his million-acre lease, but he's a long way from making money on the deal. In lieu of salaries, he pays the management team at his investment firm, Jarch Capital, with a stake in the company. Until this year, the vice chairman of Jarch was a man with extensive experience and connections in both Africa and Washington: former ambassador Joe Wilson, the husband of ousted CIA

agent Valerie Plame. Wilson left the firm after vainly advising Heilberg to describe his plans in more diplomatic terms, but other well-connected insiders – including the neoconservative commentator J. Peter Pham and noted security analyst Larry Johnson – are still on board.

To secure a lease on the land, Heilberg placed Matip on Jarch's advisory board and promised to provide jobs for his Nuer tribesmen. In famously corrupt Juba, Matip is one of the few leaders he admires. "He's a capitalist," Heilberg says. "All of the other guys are Commies. He understands that if I put money in, I deserve to make a profit." Such considerations are more im-

portant to Heilberg than Matip's violent past. "There are no white hats here," he says. "It's the Wild West. People get upset when I say you've got to go to the guns. Hell, you had to carry a gun back then. You were a cowboy? You would lose all your horses and cows, your women would be raped, and everything you had would be gone. People take their ideals and try to impose them someplace else. That's colonization to me. I don't do that. This is what it is. I'm not promoting it or demoting it, I'm just part of the system."

In an area that most would describe as anarchic, Heilberg sees hints of a libertarian utopia, one in which even lawlessness has an upside. "My view is that you want government to be as small as possible," he says. "In a sense, Africa can start with a clean slate." Once he gains control of his land, he figures he'll be able to do with it as he pleases. "Listen, I want to control that ground," he says. "I don't want someone saying, 'Thank you for your investment, now get out.' I want a country that's weaker. There's a cost to dealing with strong countries: resource nationalism. People forget that."

At the center of Matip's compound in Juba is a dirt courtyard shaded by mango trees. A crowd of Nuer elders, their faces scarred with tattoos and horizontal cuts, are gathered for an audience. Chickens and a pair of uniformed soldiers with AK-47s shuffle in the background. The general himself wears a tracksuit and slouches in a plastic chair in front of a plastic table with a doily on it. "Ah, Philippe," he murmurs, slowly standing to hug his visitor. Gabriel translates the rest: "The only white man who is good."



is in the general's home state of Unity, and Heilberg has it because the general says he has it. But official approval would reassure potential investors and silence detractors who claim that the million-acre lease violates Sudan's new land law restricting foreign ownership. In Heilberg's computer bag are other documents he wants signed, too – ones he won't show me – which I assume would give him rights to the region's uranium and zinc. Such deals could be worth billions if southern Sudan secedes from the north, freeing Heilberg to export the new country's mineral wealth.

Beyond the signatures, Heilberg also wants to meet with officials who can sell

him more land – the king of the Bari people, a Nuer commissioner in Upper Nile state – and check out new acreage by jeep, helicopter or prop plane. But mostly this visit is about the mundane reality of cutting deals with strongmen in Africa, where waiting is an art. This, in fact, is Heilberg's first principle, the rule that he believes sets him apart from other investors: Do your own legwork. Travel. Find out in person. "There's only so much you can glean without body language," he says. "If everyone has the same information, everyone comes to the same conclusions. A lot of traders didn't understand that."

Heilberg turns to the general's son. Gabriel looks to be in his 20s, but he's actually 34, according to his MySpace page. Or maybe 42, as he later tells me.

"Gabriel, do you have any cows here?" Heilberg asks. Cows are the way to a Nuer man's heart.

"No, no cows here," says Gabriel. "You already moved them? How many cattle do you have in Mayom?"

"Many," says Gabriel.

A soldier brings us bottled water and cans of Coke. The elders leave. The general remains slouched in his seat, his long arms draped over the back of the chair. He is 68, ancient for Sudan. Heilberg considers Matip one of the savviest men he's ever met. But sitting here in the courtyard – his eyes blank, his face expressionless and almost catatonic, devoid of any glimmer of human response – the general gives off the impression of a madman.

"The south has got to give the general control of the purse," Heilberg says, leaning in to flatter his host. "People have been approaching me. A private security firm – mercenaries – they want to come and train the troops. Even the Israelis, they want to sell weapons and training. They want to know if I'll speak to the general on their behalf. Maybe they see something of interest, because the split is coming. Twelve months? Eighteen months? How long? Independence is coming soon. We all know that." The general grunts.

Southern Sudan is a welter of tribes and sub-tribes. Most of the men Heilberg has put on his "advisory board" are, like the general, Nuer. Much of the southern government, meanwhile, is made up of Dinkas. If civil war were to break out again, it might not be just between north and south but between the tribes as well. Matip, whose forces were integrated into the army only after the 2005 peace accord, retains leverage over Salva Kiir, the president of southern Sudan: the ability to revive his Nuer militia. "He can cause rapid-fire ethnic conflagration," says John Prendergast, a human rights activist and former director of African affairs at the National Security Council. At one point, according to Heilberg, Kiir made the mistake of trying to demobilize Matip's forces. "Forty-eight hours later," he says, "Kiir

was on his hands and knees at the general's home. If you want to disarm Paulino, you've got to kill him. You don't disarm a man like that."

Heilberg turns back to Gabriel and gets down to the business at hand. "Now we have the momentum," he says. "We have to hold Salva accountable. If I could go see Salva with your dad – I would like him to honor his word by signing the papers. I would like to get that paper signed. I would like confirmation. Once we have confirmation of the deal from Salva and the agriculture minister, then nobody can say anything. It's confirmed by the government of southern Sudan. I would like Salva to sign and we would then shut up everybody. Because then it's not just your father, it's the two most powerful men in the country. We'll shut up everybody."

When Gabriel finishes translating, the general nods. "OK," he says. "We will talk to the Israelis." The signatures don't seem to interest him – only the mercenaries.

"We will make an appointment at Salva's house and go and meet him," Gabriel adds. He warns that everything is moving slowly: Days from now, a European arbitration court is expected to announce who – the south or the north – can claim the contentious, oil-rich region of Abyei, west of the general's home base. Juba is paralyzed, awaiting a trigger for renewed violence. "They don't multitask here," Heilberg complains.

That night, Heilberg has Gabriel take us to meet another of his board members, Gen. Peter Gatdet, at an outdoor bar on the banks of the Nile. On the way, we drive down a bumpy dirt road lined with dozens of bombed-out tanks, their turrets bent, their tracks missing. Southern Sudan is rumored to have new tanks now, ones it could use to help win independence, even without the referendum next year. Heilberg's business strategy rests, in no small part, on such military calculations.

**HUSTLERS IN RUSSIA ARE SCORING HUGE TRACTS OF FARM-LAND FOR A FEW BOTTLES OF VODKA. "IT WAS A BIG RIP-OFF OF PEASANTS," ONE WALL STREET BANKER EXPLAINS.**

Gatdet, a feared tactician who was recently put in charge of the south's air defenses, sits alone with two bodyguards at a table near the water. Heilberg moves briskly through the preliminaries to the matter at hand. "You have the anti-aircraft now?" he asks the general. "The ones that have the wings that go higher? OK. Good. And the tanks? Where are the new tanks?"

Gatdet points across the river toward the bush, where he spent nine years during the civil war.

"Right here?" Heilberg exclaims. He peers into the darkness.

"How are all your bullet wounds?" he continues. Gatdet had been shot 28 times during the war. "You don't need a bullet-proof vest. You know who's on your side." He points to the heavens. "Always missing the vital areas – that's good. Soon, the south will be independent."

"Yeah," Gatdet says. "The war good for them."

**I**N NEW YORK AND LONDON I MEET other leading investors who, like Heilberg, are stepping away from the paper world to make commodities plays. But unlike Heilberg, they tend to operate at a distance. On the condition of anonymity, one leading Wall Street banker tells me about his firm's recent dealings in Ukraine and Russia. Much of the dirty work, he says, is done by local hustlers who take advantage of the region's poverty to assemble vast tracts of farmland that will appeal to big investors. "Here's the trick," the banker says. "All these collective farms collapsed once they decollectivized them, because they had no capital – the guys couldn't afford tractors. It sort of reverted to pseudo-subsistence agriculture. So you could come to these guys and get thousands of hectares for a bottle of vodka and, like, two months of grain. It was basically a big rip-off of peasants."

The savviest corporate buyers see global warming as a double boon: In the short term, it's a push factor, destroying agriculture in regions such as northern China and the American Southwest, which are becoming too dry to support crops, and causing food prices to spike. In the long term, it creates a pull: Higher-latitude countries like Ukraine, Russia, Romania, Kazakhstan and Canada are becoming more productive, not less, as the climate heats up. "You don't need to be a rocket scientist to suggest that production belts in the Northern Hemisphere are shifting northwards," says Carl Atkin, the head of agribusiness research at Bidwells, the British real estate behemoth. The firm's consulting wing is helping financial clients make a major push into Eastern Europe.

Bidwells' London offices are in a narrow building down an alley off Hanover Square. In an airy fourth-floor conference room, with skylights and hardwood floors, Atkin lays out a world map depicting soil

FROM TOP: JENN WARREN; MAP BY HANISAM HUSSEIN

qualities – the USDA’s “Inherent Land Quality Assessment” – with the richest areas shaded in green. “You’ve got a splotch in North America,” he says. “A splotch in South America. Pockets in the U.K. But the main interest is this black soil going up through Russia and the Ukraine – some of the best soil in the world.” In Atkin’s view, environmental factors – frigid winters and short growing seasons – have helped keep prices low there; a hectare of black earth in Romania is a fifth of the price of a hectare in England. Overlay a climate-change map on the soil map, Atkin says, maybe add population data, and you could make a fortune. He himself has just returned from Ukraine, and Bidwells has been working in Romania for five years, doing what Atkin calls “parceling” – a plot-by-plot approach to the land grab. “We re-aggregate small plots that were reallocated to everybody post-communism,” he says. “You’re getting loads of villagers in a room with the mayor, and the mayor is saying, ‘All right, who wants to sell their plot, and who doesn’t?’”

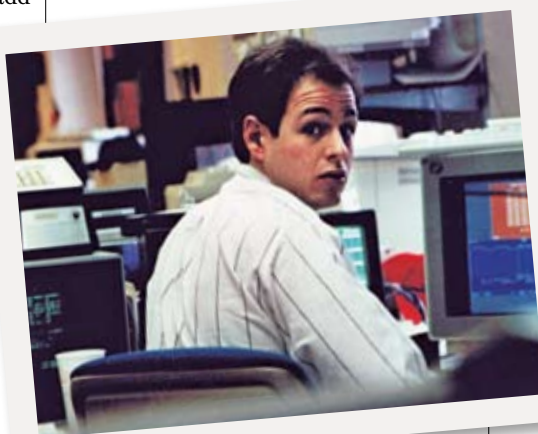
As climate change pushes farming to higher latitudes, the money has followed. Two of the most visible farmland investors – British-run Landkom and Swedish-run Black Earth – have funneled hundreds of millions of dollars into agricultural operations in Ukraine and Russia. BlackRock has invested \$250 million in British farmland, Pergam Finance has sunk \$70 million into former ranches in Uruguay and Argentina, and Agcapita has put \$18 million into Canada’s future corn belt. After Saskatchewan land prices jumped 15 percent in 2008 – the largest increase on record – Agcapita began raising its next \$20 million.

One of the most aggressive climate investors is Jim Slater, the co-founder of British-run Agrifirma, who came to fame writing an investment column for the *Sunday Telegraph* that he signed “The Capitalist.” In one previous venture, Slater made annual profits of 66 percent on uranium and molybdenum in Greenland, where retreating glaciers have extended the range of mining operations. Now, in Brazil, Slater has spent \$20 million to buy or option 170,000 acres and survey another 6 million. Brazilian agriculture will be relatively protected from the ravages of climate change, he insists, because the country has “about 15 percent of the world’s recoverable water supply – 90 percent more than its nearest rival.”

In the midst of such far-flung competition, Heilberg is betting heavily on an area that many Western investors have avoided. “Honestly, I don’t advise anyone to do any farming north of Juba,” says an American consultant close to the Dinka leadership. “You never know whose land you’re standing on. They’re pastoralists. One

group might say, ‘It’s ours and ours alone,’ but you never know. Land isn’t staked out. It’s common. Ownership is seasonal, and fluid. So when you get an individual laying claim to such a large chunk of land, prime grazing land, you’re basically starting another war.”

Still, even the consultant admits that Heilberg’s holdings are good land. According to Atkin’s soil map, the region isn’t quite as fertile as the belt of black earth in Russia – a shade away from perfect. But by some accounts, parts of Africa



**GREED IS GOOD** Heilberg during his early days on Wall Street: “It’s like a drug.”

will get more rain because of global warming, including southern Sudan. Insofar as Heilberg believes in climate change, he believes in the effects, not the causes – the desertification and the fights over water and land that only make his farmland investment smarter. And he sees other upsides to global warming. On his laptop, he keeps a file on mineral-rich Greenland. He’s heard that the country has a secession movement of its own. “Maybe global warming means we can live in the Arctic,” he says. “The Nordic countries seem to have a good bal-

**“I CAN SEE IT,” HE SAYS, EXPLAINING HOW HE’LL PROFIT FROM THE COMING AGE OF SCARCITY. “PEOPLE WILL PANIC, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO HAVE NO LAND TO GROW FOOD ON.”**

ance. They don’t seem to mind being taxed to death. Maybe we can have Greenland – there’s a lot of land there.”

**A**FTER THE INITIAL MEETING with Matip, things in Juba grind to a halt. Heilberg spends day after day in his hotel – two rows of well-appointed prefab containers stacked on top of each other – waiting for word that the president or agriculture minister is ready to meet. To pass the time, he sits in the air conditioning, smoking cigars and playing Texas Hold’em on his BlackBerry. He reads the book he brought along on the trip: *Sailing From Byzantium: How a Lost Empire Shaped the World*.

On the third morning, Gabriel stops by the hotel. It’s beginning to look like nothing is going to happen. No new land deals. No overflights or jeep tours. No meeting with the president. “Let’s go see Dad,” Heilberg suggests. Gabriel tells us that the general’s family compound in Unity state has just been attacked by a longtime rival, part of the endless jockeying for position as the south inches toward independence.

One of Matip’s guards was captured in the assault, and the general is too angry to see anyone.

“OK, so what’s the plan for today?” Heilberg asks. “Have you found anyone for the agriculture?” The minister isn’t available, says Gabriel. “OK, so that’s tomorrow,” Heilberg says, turning the conversation to new land acquisitions. “So we’ll find out about the Bari? What about Upper Nile?”

Soon, there is little more business to discuss. We talk about life. Heilberg tells us that he’s given up diet cherry Pepsi – he worries the artificial sweetener will give him Alzheimer’s. He tells us about the really hot personal yoga instructor he had, a point of domestic tension: “I’m in my living room doing my yoga, and my wife flips out!”

Gabriel tells us that his own wife, who cost him 89 cows, has just run out on him. Heilberg offers him some tea. “We Are the World” blares from the hotel’s speaker system.

“Did you call Dr. Joseph?” Heilberg asks. The doctor – who serves as the south’s minister of health – is another board member. “Call Dr. Joseph, and see if he’s around.” Dr. Joseph isn’t around.

“We Are the World” comes on again – the music is on a loop.

“Is that Bruce Springsteen?” Heilberg asks. We fall silent, listening.

“I think that one is Michael Jackson,” says Gabriel.

“Michael Jackson,” Heilberg agrees. We wait for the next verse.

“That’s Cyndi Lauper,” I say. “Bob Dylan,” Heilberg says next.

COURTESY OF PHIL HEILBERG

FROM TOP: SHAMIL ZHUMATOV/REUTERS/LANDOV; HUSSEIN MALLA/AP IMAGES; PER-ANDERS PETERSSON/GETTY IMAGES

“What’s this guy called, the blind one?” asks Gabriel.

“Uh, Ray Charles... no, Stevie Wonder,” Heilberg says. We wait. “And there’s Ray Charles!”

Gabriel finally secures a meeting with Dr. Joseph for six that evening. Heilberg puts on a dark suit and dark tie; Gabriel sticks with his gold-colored tracksuit. Just before sunset, we climb into Gabriel’s Land Cruiser and bounce along potholed dirt tracks in the direction of the *jebel*, Juba’s landmark mountain, passing an open-air market and a field of huts that have been razed by the government. Now the area is populated by mounds of burning trash.

Dr. Joseph lives in an impressive house surrounded by a thick white wall and attended by a servant, who seats us on plush fake-leather couches below a languid ceiling fan and offers each of us a Coke and a bottle of water. Across from us are three Sudanese dignitaries watching a Nigerian soap opera on a widescreen TV. “Stay away from my wife!” yells one actor. “Which wife?” says the other.

Dr. Joseph has yet to return home. We sink back into the couches. Heilberg begins talking nonstop, filling the silence. At first it seems like he’s keeping up appearances for me. Then I realize that he’s keeping them up for himself. He’s spent five years of his life setting the stage in Sudan. That a supposed ally is too busy to meet with him – that there’s any weakness in his plan – doesn’t fit the heroic Randian narrative.

Heilberg starts counseling Gabriel about his dad. The general refuses to leave his compound until he can discuss the recent attack with the president. “It’s called anxiety,” Heilberg says sympathetically. “Everyone gets it. It builds up in your mind.” Gabriel looks worried. “Have you ever seen the movie *Analyze This*?” Heilberg asks.

“Analyze what?”

“No, no – it’s a movie with Robert De Niro. He’s a mob boss, and he’s getting really angry, and Billy Crystal tells him, ‘You know what I do when I’m really angry? I hit a pillow.’ So he takes out his gun and starts shooting a pillow. Crystal’s like, ‘Feel better?’ and De Niro says, ‘Yeah, I do.’ Your dad needs to feel better. I know the way he is. He can get it all out.”

We wait until 10:00. Dr. Joseph never shows. When we leave, Heilberg looks sick to his stomach. “Are you sure he’s still with us?” he asks Gabriel.

But any hit to his confidence is buried, temporary. The next morning, Heilberg is back to his old self. If any of his allies have been bought off, it’s only more proof that Matip needs to sweep away the rot. If Heilberg’s venture looks tenuous, clouded by political games, it’s only more proof that Juba needs to burn. If an individual’s vision is pure enough, reality bends to it.

# THE GLOBAL LAND GRAB

Countries are racing to buy up farmland across the world, often through government-backed companies. (Figures include pending and failed deals.)

## CHINA

**ESTIMATED ACRES 19 MILLION**  
**TARGETS** Philippines, Kazakhstan, Russia, Cameroon, Australia, Mozambique, Canada, Sudan, Brazil  
**IMPETUS** Has 20 percent of world’s population, but only eight percent of arable land  
**ROADBLOCK** Kazakh protesters took to the streets in January: “Kazakh land is my land!”

## SAUDI ARABIA

**ESTIMATED ACRES 6 MILLION**  
**TARGETS** Indonesia, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan  
**IMPETUS** Effort to farm wheat in the desert drained the country’s aquifers  
**ROYAL BLESSING** Businessmen who delivered first shipment of Ethiopian rice granted audience with King Abdullah.

## SOUTH KOREA

**ESTIMATED ACRES 6 MILLION**  
**TARGETS** Madagascar, Sudan, Mongolia, Russia, Argentina, Philippines  
**IMPETUS** “We can’t eat semiconductors,” says Richard Shin of Daewoo Logistics.  
**ROADBLOCK** Daewoo deal in Madagascar canceled after it fueled a coup d’etat.

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

**ESTIMATED ACRES 4 MILLION**  
**TARGETS** Sudan, Pakistan, Ukraine, New Zealand, Morocco, Cambodia  
**IMPETUS** One of world’s fattest countries; population doubling every nine years  
**SHEEP-CROPPING** Using land in Vietnam to raise and slaughter sheep, then flying them back to the UAE.

## INDIA

**ESTIMATED ACRES 2 MILLION**  
**TARGETS** Ethiopia, Madagascar, Tanzania, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, Indonesia  
**IMPETUS** Unpredictable monsoons, booming population  
**UNINTENDED IRONY** Largest source of leased farmland, Ethiopia, is also the world’s largest recipient of food aid.

**A** WEEK PASSES. WE DRIVE TO Matip’s compound. We drive back. We smoke hookahs at the hotel. We order pizza. We drive to the Nile. We drive back. It begins to seem like a farce. Heilberg either has Juba all wrapped up, or he has nothing but his capitalist ideals and a strange friendship with some Sudanese generals. It will be impossible to know which until the fighting begins.

On one of our last mornings, Gabriel disappears. He doesn’t show up at the hotel. He stops answering his phones. Finally, just before dinnertime, he lopes in. “These guys were following me on the road,” he says. He pulled off on a side street, and one of his pursuers cut around him, blocking his escape. When the man stepped into the road, holding a gun, Gabriel ran him over. The second attacker came up from behind. “I opened the door and hit him, and then he fell on the ground,” Gabriel says.

“What did you say to them?” I ask. “We don’t say anything,” Gabriel says. “I collect their phones, and their guns.”

“And kick them in the nuts!” Heilberg says.

By now, Heilberg isn’t bothering to ask about signatures or meetings. The next day, when the European arbitration court announces a ruling on the oil-rich region of Abyei, it’s not so bad for the south that it causes immediate fighting, but it’s not so good that it calms anyone down. Just in case, the country’s cellphone service is jammed. There’s nothing to do but watch CNN. Heilberg is waiting for Matip to clean house, to drive off his remaining rivals and establish order in the country. He looks at Gabriel. “I was there with your father two years ago, when he told them he would burn down Juba,” he says. “I think this is coming. It is coming soon. It’ll be short.”

We sit with the general once more in the courtyard, guards and elders and wives flitting by in the shadows, a television flickering a few feet away. Matip is still slouching, but this time he looks Heilberg in the eye as he speaks. “What he can tell you is this,” Gabriel translates for his father. “All the things going on here, they are not good. You should go. Go to America, and he will call you. He’s not happy about the way the government works. He will find out what things happen, and why. In a short time, we’ll rise, and put on the Internet, and you will read in America.”

“Thank you,” Heilberg says. “I know you’ll be successful. The way they’re doing things can’t last. History has shown us that’s how revolutions happen. But I hope you will call me back soon, documents in hand, and we will all smile and be happy. Luckily, it’s not all up to us.” He gestures to the sky. “There is a higher power.”

That night, Heilberg goes straight to his room, downs a dose of NyQuil and passes out. The next morning, [Cont. on 82]

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**LAND GRAB**


[Cont. from 65] we are on a flight back to Nairobi.

It's the same view out the window as before. Green. Heilberg's million acres are in the opposite direction, but the soil is similar. Nuer tribesmen like to boast about how fertile the land is. Plant a mango tree, they say, and it will be waist-high in six months. Plant green beans, and the vines will be waist-high in weeks. Plant anything, and it will grow. *A capitalist has to create something.* The world needs food. Heilberg is waiting.

"Which do you think matters more in Africa?" he asks me. "Military power, or political power?" He is sweating in his seat, wearing a baby-blue Lacoste shirt with an alligator on it.

"Military," I say. He nods. "People say it's going to be north versus south," he says. "I say it's going to be a free-for-all. It's going to be a free-for-all for about a week. Mass hysteria. Juba burned to the ground. Khartoum burned to the ground. Then we'll look around and see who's still standing. They'll form a new government. A period of chaos isn't a bad thing. It'll release that tension. You can't escape the physics."

Two months later, Matip's home is attacked again, this time with a tank, and the general declares the president partly responsible. The compound in Juba becomes a fortress. It looks as though Heilberg's bet - on chaos - is beginning, at last, to play out in the streets. In *Atlas Shrugged*, the pillars must fall, the cities must be razed, the looters must be deposed, before a new, braver future can begin. If pure capitalism is good - good for Heilberg, good for desperately hungry Africa - what brings it about cannot be evil.

"The reason I'm so open is so you can see I'm not a bad man," Heilberg tells me. "I'm a guy with a big heart who also wants to make some money." He puts his headphones in. "You know what I give them? I give them hope." 

**SOLOMON BURKE**

[Cont. from 57] chops to cross over.

Burke fit the formula almost too well. He could sing anything, rough or smooth, angry or loving, soul or country-western. The albums had a tempestuous quality, reflecting his relationship with Delores ("Get Out of My Life Woman"), with whom he had 11 children as the two constantly fought and made up. On one song he could croon like Sam Cooke, on another shout like Otis Redding. His hit "Down in the Valley" crossed over so far that he got booked accidentally at a Ku Klux Klan rally. "My drummer was saying to me, 'Will we ever get out of here alive?'" Burke once recalled. "I said, 'Just keep playing until they say we're done.' I think we played 'Down in the Valley' for 45 minutes."

He became famous for his rollicking, cathartic shows where he would play on the "King Solomon" theme, dressing in a purple robe and gold crown, hiding a midget under the robe. He was also notorious for his schemes to make more money. He would sing a show at the Apollo Theater in New York and then set up a stand outside to sell "Solomon's Magic Popcorn" to his fans. On bus tours in the segregated South, he would tote a coffin-size ice chest full of sandwiches. "I had a busload of hungry musicians, and it was hundreds of miles between restaurants that would serve us," he says. "So I'd just sit in back, whipping up the mustard and mayonnaise and bologna. They all had to buy from me eventually."

"Yeah, I had one of his meals," says Sam Moore, of Sam and Dave. "He used to cook on a hot plate in his hotel room after a show when the restaurants were closed. And let me tell you, he didn't give you that much. He gave me one pork chop, one scoop of macaroni and cheese, and one spoonful of gravy. I said, 'Is that it?' And he'd say, 'That's it, brother. I'm doing you a favor, so take it or leave it.' But there will