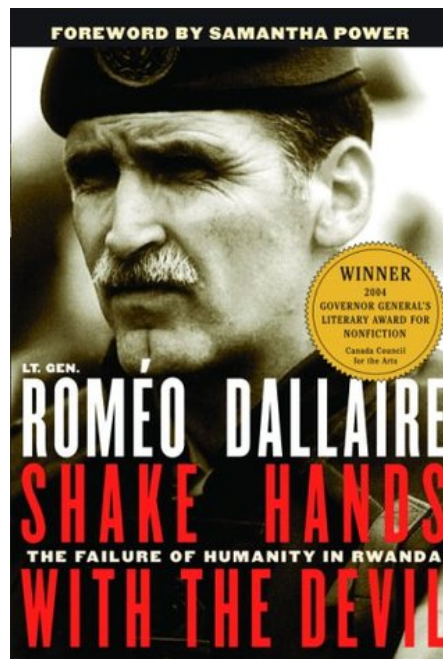




Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda

Roméo Dallaire , Samantha Power (foreword)

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On the 10th anniversary of when UN peacekeepers landed in Rwanda, Random House Canada proudly publishes the unforgettable 1st-hand account of the genocide by the leader of the mission. Digging deep into shattering memories, Dallaire has written a powerful story of betrayal, naïveté, racism & international politics. His message is simple, undeniable: Never again.

When Lt-Gen. Roméo Dallaire was called to serve as force commander of the UN intervention in Rwanda in '93, he thought he was heading off on a straightforward peacekeeping mission. Thirteen months later he flew home from Africa, broken, disillusioned & suicidal, having witnessed the slaughter of 800,000 Rwandans in 100 days.

In *Shake Hands with the Devil*, he takes readers with him on a return voyage into hell, vividly recreating the events the international community turned its back on. This book is an unsparing eyewitness account of the failure by humanity to stop the genocide, despite timely warnings. Woven thru the story of this disastrous mission is his own journey from confident Cold Warrior, to devastated UN commander, to retired general engaged in a painful struggle to find a measure of peace, hope & reconciliation.

This book is a personal account of his conversion from a man certain of his worth & secure in his assumptions to one conscious of his own weaknesses & failures & critical of the institutions he'd relied on. It might not sit easily with standard ideas of military leadership, but understanding what happened to him & his mission to Rwanda is crucial to understanding the moral minefields peacekeepers are forced to negotiate when we ask them to step into dirty wars.

Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda Details

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Author : Roméo Dallaire , Samantha Power (foreword)

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From Reader Review Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda for online ebook

Vanessa says

This is such an important book, but a very tough one to get through because it is filled with stuff that will make you want to tear your hair out in frustration, hang your head in shame, and boil your brain in bleach to remove the terrible images seared into it. It is no wonder that General Dallaire is still traumatized after this experience, and he has my admiration for mustering his strength and courage to write it all down, just as he has my admiration for refusing to turn his back on the people of Rwanda even though he was unable to motivate the UN and the world to intervene in the civil war and genocide. By bearing witness to the horrors of Rwanda and by exposing all of the decisions and roadblocks made by the UN and western governments that hogtied him (and his brave troops), Dallaire may have helped to prevent this dark page of history from being repeated in another country. One can hope.

My only quibble with this book, and it is extremely minor, is that Dallaire gives us an overview of his life in the military before his assignment to Rwanda, which slows the pace a bit and which is perhaps not really essential to know in order to approach the subject at hand. Rwanda first appears on page 40, and even then it seems to me the true "story" only really begins in chapter 3. However, as I said before, this complaint is extremely minor and should not dissuade any interested party from reading this book.

A recommendation to the potential reader: the Frontline special, *Ghosts of Rwanda*, is an excellent supplement to this book, giving a general overview of the Rwanda tragedy as well as interviews with "power players", perpetrators, victims and onlookers, including General Dallaire himself. And a warning - if you plan to pick up this book, steel your spine first.

William Cline says

I read this shortly after reading Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families*, which was fortunate. *Shake Hands with the Devil* is clear and well-written, but it doesn't supply much context. What it offers is a blow-by-blow of the Rwandan genocide from Dallaire's perspective. Dallaire commanded the military side of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), which was meant to be a straightforward peacekeeping mission monitoring a peace agreement between the government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), who had just fought a civil war. Neither Dallaire, nor his bosses in the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), nor the UN's member states were prepared for the Rwandan government's plan to murder both its political opponents and an entire ethnic group, hatred for whom it had made a cornerstone of its political power.

Dallaire could tell that something was wrong in Rwanda, but he wasn't able to figure out what until the genocide had already begun. While some nations had intelligence officers and military advisors embedded among the Rwandan forces, their information wasn't shared with the UN or Dallaire. The head of UNAMIR, Jacques-Roger Booh-Booh, did an unenthusiastic and sometimes incompetent job of managing the political side, and Dallaire did not get along well with either him or his staff. (For what it's worth, Booh-Booh has written a rebuttal to Dallaire's book.)

Both before and after the killings began, Dallaire faced seemingly every possible obstacle, including an

obstructive UN procurement apparatus, a shortage of critical staff, and a DPKO who considered UNAMIR a sideshow alongside more “important” conflicts like Yugoslavia. As with most UN matters, he was also hamstrung by the member states. The United States and other countries refused to officially acknowledge the genocide for what it was until after the fact. France actively supported and armed the Rwandan government right up to (and possibly including) the start of the genocide and the resumption of the civil war. Once the war restarted, the United States quibbled over its price for leasing armored personnel carriers to the UN — even as the killing happened — and said APCs eventually arrived in Africa stripped of radios, ammunition, spare parts, or even operating manuals. Belgium was the only rich nation to supply a significant troop contingent, but some Belgian troops’ colonial attitudes caused problems with the Rwandan locals, and Belgium pulled out as soon as it suffered casualties. Bangladesh supplied troops, but they arrived under-equipped, poorly trained, and expecting an easy, risk-free tour of duty; Bangladeshi troops sometimes sabotaged their own vehicles to avoid missions, and their commanders countermanded Dallaire’s orders when they thought a mission was too dangerous.

The list goes on.

As an account of UNAMIR’s military role during the genocide, *Shake Hands* is very good. As its subtitle indicates, it’s also an enumeration — a very long one (see above) — of the failures of the UN, our governments, and ultimately ourselves. Dallaire’s subtitle calls it, literally, a “failure of humanity”; we failed to see the Rwandan people as humans whose slaughter presented a moral imperative to act.

Where I had trouble with the book was in understanding Dallaire’s mental and emotional experience during the approximately one hundred days of the genocide. He tells his story as a straightforward linear narrative, with no digressions or anecdotes to break up the action or supply context. Consequently, the book has no rhythm. I say this not to fault Dallaire, but rather to caution would-be readers that this is not an easy book to get through.

The writing is clear but spare; it engages the reader on a mostly intellectual level, even when relating events that ought to inspire the strongest emotions. Because Dallaire doesn’t try to *tell* the reader how he should feel, and because Dallaire doesn’t dwell on each individual horror he witnesses — had he tried, he would have quickly run out of superlatives — reading *Shake Hands* is an exercise in empathy, which I think is actually appropriate given how badly humanity failed to empathize with Rwanda in 1994.

As a detailed, first-hand account of an event in recent history, *Shake Hands with the Devil* satisfied some of my curiosity and supplied another take on some of what Gourevitch covered in his book (mentioned above). In particular, Dallaire is highly critical of Paul Kagame, the RPF military leader and now president of Rwanda. Gourevitch paints him as a righteous rebel leader fighting for democracy against a murderous and racist regime, but Dallaire casts aspersions on Kagame’s motives and argues that Kagame’s military campaign was executed in such a way that it had the side effect of prolonging the genocide.

Where I’m left now is mainly curious about the international politics surrounding the Rwandan genocide, which neither Gourevitch nor Dallaire address except in how their end result affected the situation on the ground. Fortunately, *Shake Hands* includes an extensive bibliography.

Saleem Khan says

My review, published in Metro, February 2004.

Shake Hands with the Devil

Lt. Gen. Roméo Dallaire

If there was any doubt about the nature of Lt. Gen Roméo Dallaire's Shake Hands With The Devil, let me be clear: This is not casual reading.

At 562 pages, this is an eyewitness account of the story behind the story of how at least 800,000 Rwandans were brutally slain at the hands of their countrymen in an orgy of killing through the spring and summer of 1994.

As the force commander for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) peacekeeping mission, Dallaire describes in painstaking detail the actions of the players and the nationalist, political, bureaucratic, diplomatic, military, espionage and personal intrigues that plagued UNAMIR and ultimately doomed it to failure.

The book would have benefited from tighter editing, but the content itself is riveting.

Dallaire is not afraid to place blame squarely where it belongs. He paints a distressing picture of how decisions by careerist, indifferent and excessively cautious bureaucrats and diplomats more concerned with their status, working hours and lifestyle frustrated his attempts to bolster a shaky peace accord between Hutu and Tutsi political and paramilitary factions.

He details how Western governments refused to contribute even meagre resources to support the chronically understaffed, underequipped, undersupplied and underappreciated mission. The reason: Rwanda was deemed to hold no strategic interest for the West.

While Dallaire places the greatest responsibility for the genocide with the Rwandan génocidaires who planned and carried out the massacre, he also criticizes a number of countries — including Canada — for failing to give adequate support (if any) to UNAMIR.

France and the United States are singled out as two of the key actors whose actions led to the Rwanda genocide. France “moved in too late and ended up protecting the génocidaires and permanently destabilizing the region”, and the U.S. government “actively worked against an effective UNAMIR.”

For example, the U.S. repeatedly denied it knew anything of what was going on in Rwanda but occasionally supplied the UN detailed intelligence about the players. And once the killing began, U.S. officials refused to call it a genocide to avoid any legal consequences of avoiding intervention.

But Dallaire reserves the greatest criticism for himself: “As the person charged with the military leadership of UNAMIR, I was unable to persuade the international community that this tiny, poor, overpopulated country and its people were worth saving from the horror of genocide.”

He also warns that Rwanda should be an object lesson for the West.

“Human beings who have no rights, no security, no future and no means to survive ... will do desperate things to take what they believe they need and deserve.

“If we cannot provide hope for the untold masses of the world, then the future will be nothing but a repeat of Rwanda, Sierra Leone, the Congo and September 11.”

Words worth heeding.

Shourie Bannai says

This is more of a indictment document rather than a book. The accusation by an unassuming, innocent, devoted army man who was helplessly put into his position to bear witness to the ugliest face of human cruelty on an unimaginable scale. I am still at loss of words how this brave man has survived after all that he has been through, when just reading the book has made me unimaginably melancholic, at loss for emotions. This book is not for those carefree souls and who cherish that attitude because it might very well lead anyone into that spiral of never ending guilt. Just don't god damn read this book, only understand we humans failed to protect and stand up for 8,00,000 of our brothers and sisters when they were being slaughtered , most of them probably thinking at last that how lucky they were to die and get rid of the misery around them, when their fellow humans had abandoned them to their fate. And this poor general who was told that it was his duty to save all these people, bears the burnt of our failure. I can't really put my feeling together, I am not sure I am feeling anything anymore. God damn whatever it is.

Paul Bryant says

I imagine many copies of this bestselling book lie around unread or abandoned. I did not read all 548 pages. It's huge and vastly detailed and extremely narrowly focussed on what Romeo Dallaire did on a day to day hour by hour basis during the terrible period of the genocide.

This is what the whole heart and soul of the book is about - it's not about WHY the genocide happened, and how some Rwandans could slaughter 800,000 of their fellow citizens, it's about how the rest of the world, having been informed of the ongoing mass killings, didn't respond. This is from page 240:

The extremists had taken their cue from the grim farces of Bosnia and Somalia. They knew that Western nations do not have the stomach of the will to sustain casualties in peace support operations. When confronted with casualties, as the United States was in Somalia or the Belgians in Rwanda, they will run, regardless of the consequences to the abandoned population.

So much of this book is about Dallaire rushing about trying to get more resources for the pitiful UN peacekeeping force he was commanding, trying to do deals here and there, like a guy frantically trying to prop up a roof which is visibly caving in by cellotaping chopsticks together. It's just pitiful.

Here's where I stopped reading. Page 406 - at the height of the genocide:

That night I wrote a sharp letter of protest to Kagame over the mortar fire at the crossroads.

This is what the poor guy was reduced to. Sharp letters of protest, while the bodies piled up in the killing fields.

uh8myzen says

This is an absolutely stunning insider's look at the travesty of the Rwanda genocide and the United Nations mission led by General Romeo Dallaire.

The book explores two stories. The first being General Dallaire's personal journey from a strong, confident warrior to the broken, suicidal man he became upon his return to Canada. A man consumed by the guilt and the horror of a genocide that very well could have been prevented had his warnings to the United Nations been heeded and had he been given the resources he required.

The second story is that of the genocide itself and the refusal of the world to recognize the atrocities that were being committed and the UN's complete failure to act in any constructive way to stop it. Both stories are interwoven masterfully as we see the brave General's refusal to abandon his mission and the people of Rwanda in the face of overwhelming odds and his countless attempts to make the world pay attention. He repeatedly risks his own life in pursuit of that goal.

This is a profoundly important piece of modern history that needed to be brought to the fore for so many reasons, and General Dallaire does that in this wickedly honest, no holds barred biography. It was both haunting and captivating, and above all, it was honest.

General Romeo Dallaire is a forgotten hero who deserves to be remembered for all he tried to do in the face of overwhelming odds. It is a rare person capable of such a feat.

Read this book... you will never forget it.

Steve Wehling says

An excellent chronological view of the Rwanda genocide as seen by the Canadian general in charge of UN security in the country. Ostensibly this assignment was for him to take a skeletal force of UN troops from a few nations and provide security for the implementation of a peace agreement and the installation of a transitional government. A great keyhole view into the problems of UN peacekeeping. I admire his tenacious adherence to his duty in light of absolute chaos and terror going on around him, and the courage of his troops that were ridiculously outnumbered and under-equipped. The book makes a strong case that France, Belgium, the UN and the US could have easily taken actions that might have prevented the genocide (if the UN mission had been properly organized and equipped with the soldiers, supplies, vehicles, and perhaps most importantly, the correct mission parameters), or squelched it soon after it began instead of letting it run its bloody course. It also outlines several twists of fate that contributed to the circumstances of the genocide, such as the US involvement in Somalia which curbed US interest in getting involved in central African conflicts, or the rotation of the Rwandan ambassador to the UN onto the Security Council just at the moment when the Security Council needed to have an independent, objective, viewpoint of Rwanda's situation. Rwanda signaled that world powers will not intervene (at least not quickly) into these conflicts. A lesson not lost in Sudan or the DRC today.

Ryan says

I've never read a book that made me so angry.

The author is Romeo Dallaire, the Canadian who was the force commander of UNAMIR, the UN mission charged with steering Rwanda through the Arusha Accords. In this memoir, Dallaire recalls in detail the day-to-day struggle of UNAMIR to accomplish its mission, from the time he landed in Rwanda in September of 1993, through the 100 day genocide beginning in April, all the way through the conclusion of his tour in August.

For me, the book was a page turner. I appreciated Dallaire's style.

I understand, firsthand, the frustration of having a job to do, without having the tools necessary to do it well. What I can't fathom, is how it would feel to be in Dallaire's place, entrusted with keeping the peace between two belligerents, while being denied the resources necessary to do the job - and then having to try to protect a country of 8 million from slaughter with a force of 250-500, many of whom were under trained and all of whom were under equipped. This only begins to describe how inadequate UNAMIR was to the task of protecting the Rwandans.

What Dallaire makes evident to the reader is the indifference of the rest of the world to the violence in Rwanda. Shaharyar Khan, who headed UNAMIR from early July 1994 onward, wrote "The fact is that never in living history has such wanton brutality been inflicted by human beings on their fellow creatures...even the killing fields of Cambodia and Bosnia pale before the gruesome, awful depravity of massacres in Rwanda." Unfortunately, this was soon after the Battle of Mogadishu, where 19 American troops died. The West was still recovering from this shock when the genocide began in Rwanda, and was gun shy about sending troops into Africa again. That's the excuse, anyway.

Dallaire believes those who committed the atrocities in Rwanda are most to blame - Bagosora, the Interahamwe, and other extremists in the government. After them, he ranks France and the U.S. together, as having exacerbated the situation by protecting the perpetrators, and obstructing aid to the country, respectively. He also mentions Paul Kagame and the RPF, since winning the war was more important to them than saving innocent lives.

He is critical of the UN's bureaucracy - extremely wasteful in some places and ridiculously frugal in others - and the incredibly slow pace at which things happen there. He places more blame, though, on the countries that comprise the UN, especially the permanent members of the security council, and more especially the U.S., which has more power than any other member of the council.

To his credit, Bill Clinton has publicly acknowledged his "personal failure" with regard to Rwanda.

My hat's off to everyone at UNAMIR who stayed in Rwanda beyond their mandate to protect the innocent, when they could have left.

Orsodimondo says

SOMETIMES IN APRIL

Grande personalità il generale Romeo Dallaire: lucido e appassionato al contempo, si porta dentro un senso di colpa e un classico disturbo post-traumatico da stress che gli hanno cambiato la vita per sempre e che riesce ad arginare solo con l'uso di psicofarmaci, che comunque non hanno impedito che tentasse il suicidio. Era lì durante il genocidio in Rwanda, avrebbe voluto e potuto fermarlo prima ancora che si scatenasse l'inferno: ma l'hanno lasciato impotente ad assistere alle carneficine.

A Dallaire sono dedicati un albero e un cippo al Giardino dei Giusti di tutto il Mondo di Milano.

Roy Dupuis che interpreta il generale Dallaire nel film di Roger Spottiswoode del 2007, stesso titolo del memoir di Dallaire. Esiste anche un documentario con lo stesso titolo che fu girato durante le commemorazioni del 2004, quando Dallaire tornò in Rwanda per la prima volta dopo il 1994. Le due foto che seguono sono di quei giorni.

L'altra sera parlavo con un amico, uno di quelli illuminati, di quelli che se il mondo fosse abitato solo da gente come lui sarebbe senz'altro un posto migliore, e gli ricordavo un frase di Diop, che entrambi abbiamo avuto il piacere e la fortuna di conoscere: "Il Rwanda è forse l'unico paese africano dove non esiste problema etnico".

E di fronte alla sua sorpresa, ho dovuto ribadire concetti che credevo ormai scontati: hutu e tutsi sono due etnie inventate dai missionari belgi, imposte con la forza, con metodi lombrosiani, con la prevaricazione del padrone colonialista; hutu e tutsi potrebbero al massimo essere due categorie diverse di lavoratori, agricoltori i primi, allevatori i secondi, e quindi forse anche due diverse classi sociali; hutu e tutsi hanno convissuto per secoli in un minuscolo paese (poco più grande della Sicilia), fianco a fianco, condividendo lingua e religione, sposandosi, incrociandosi, mischiandosi; hutu e tutsi, in base alle tipologie fisiche stabilite dai missionari belgi, sono difficili da riconoscere nelle tante foto che a distanza di un paio di decenni affiancano vittima e carnefice.

Il generale Dallaire insieme al rettore dell'Università di Butare nell'aprile del 2004.

Il genocidio iniziò proprio oggi, la sera del 6 aprile 1994, e il giorno dopo esplose.

Quello che segue è l'inizio dell'articolo pubblicato su Internazionale online pochi giorni fa (3 aprile) scritto da Daniele Scaglione, autore del più esauriente testo su quei fatti e sulla loro genesi ('Rwanda: Istruzioni per un genocidio', pubblicato del 2003 dalle Edizioni Gruppo Abele, e poi di nuovo nel 2010 da Infinito Edizioni con una prefazione di Ascanio Celestini):

A distanza di 23 anni, la conoscenza del genocidio compiuto dagli estremisti hutu contro i tutsi – di cui sono state vittime anche numerosi tra i cosiddetti hutu moderati – non è ancora diventata patrimonio comune. Il trascorrere del tempo, in teoria, potrebbe avere una funzione positiva: l'enormità del massacro, la sua dinamica complicata, la storia precedente e le cronache successive, richiedono studi e analisi approfondite. Ma la sensazione è che il passare degli anni giochi contro la costruzione di una memoria collettiva di quel genocidio. La stessa giornata istituita dalle Nazioni Unite per ricordarne l'inizio, il 7 aprile, sembra appassionare sempre meno.

La gente ascolta il generale Dallaire che all'Università di Butare racconta la sua versione dei fatti. Aprile 2004, decennale del genocidio. Per molti presenti fu la prima volta che sentirono da un occidentale, per di più coinvolto negli eventi, come l'ONU se ne lavò le mani e si voltò dall'altra parte.

Inizialmente, mezzi d'informazione e leader mondiali raccontarono quel genocidio come lo scoppio di una violenza improvvisa e imprevedibile. Poi, nel novembre del 1995, il quotidiano belga De Morgen pubblicò estratti di un fax che Romeo Dallaire, capo dei caschi blu a Kigali, aveva mandato ai suoi capi all'Onu, la notte dell'11 gennaio 1994.

Da quel documento risultava chiaro che si stava preparando un massacro. Ma Dallaire, che si apprestava a requisire un deposito di armi, ricevette l'ordine di non fare nulla. Fu la prima di una lunga serie di decisioni vergognose. Dopo l'omicidio del presidente ruandese – l'hutu Juvénal Habyarimana, ucciso il 6 aprile 1994 – e le violenze che ne seguirono, Dallaire chiese rinforzi, ma il Consiglio di sicurezza rispose riducendo il contingente a sua disposizione da 2.500 a 270 caschi blu.

Qui il link all'articolo:

<http://www.internazionale.it/notizie/...>

Il miglior film sul genocidio del 1994, dell'haitiano Raoul Peck, 2005.

Yvonne (It's All About Books) says

Finished reading: December 17th 2012

“The global village is deteriorating at a rapid pace, and in the children of the world the result is rage. It is the rage I saw in the eyes of the teenage Interahamwe militiamen in Rwanda, it is the rage I sensed in the hearts of the children of Sierra Leone, it is the rage I felt in crowds of ordinary civilians in Rwanda, and it is the rage that resulted in September 11. Human beings who have no rights, no security, no future, no hope and no means to survive are a desperate group who will do desperate things to take what they believe they need and deserve.”

(view spoiler)

P.S. Find more of my reviews here.

Mikey B. says

A personal and heart-rending account. This is definitely a ‘boots on the ground’ rendition of the terrible tragedy in Rwanda in 1994.

We sense Romeo Dallaire’s naiveté when he arrived in Rwanda in late 1993. As he was learning about the intricate political groupings surrounding the Arusha Peace Agreement so, he to, was being assessed – particularly as to the level of commitment of the U.N. to Central Africa. This was shortly after the Americans had lost troops in Somalia. How much was the West (and the U.S.) going to invest in commitments for this ‘Peace Agreement’?

Mr. Dallaire’s central theme is that the West is not interested in sacrificing lives to prevent genocide in a country like Rwanda. There is no resource payback; like in Kuwait. It is highly likely that 5,000 well trained troops would have saved the lives of most of the 800,000 who were slaughtered during the genocide. These 5,000 troops are far less than what was dedicated to the liberation of Kuwait in 1991.

Mr. Dallaire’s description of the genocide and the continued ineptitude of the U.N. are most poignant and excruciatingly sad. Rwanda, at the time, was on the Security Council and did much to thwart the efforts of Mr. Dallaire and others to inform the world that Rwanda was soon to reach a breaking point with the region erupting into a holocaust of violence if the Peace Agreement were broken. The U.N. in Rwanda had several warnings from their contacts within the community that lists were being prepared, weapons were at the ready

and that a countdown was imminent.

Despite the fact that the writing style can be at times cumbersome with numerous “I” references and constant use of acronyms – the depiction of events during the genocide is unparalleled in their searing emotion.

This is a book that needs to be read to understand recent world events and why the West needs to intervene to establish some form of civil authority; otherwise events cascade into an apocalypse. We can no longer blind ourselves to the poverty and lack of infra-structure that exists in many Third World countries.

Julie says

Dallaire's powerful memoir is important, graphic, and undeniable. It is, however, a tough read because of the disturbing events he describes and the even more disturbing lack of action on behalf of Rwanda's victims. Its historic importance and brutal honesty earns it five stars.

Michael Blackmer says

This is a must read if one wants to understand just how badly the leadership of the world let Rwanda and UN Peacekeepers down during the Genocide. I had to put this book down several times and then return to it because I would get so angry and disappointed in how support was nonexistent for people being exterminated in Rwanda and for the multi-national peacekeepers who put their lives on the line (or lost their lives) to do what they could in spite of the lack of support from headquarters in New York (UN Headquarters).

Nathan says

One feels compelled to excuse any shortcoming this book might have, in light of General Dallaire's unquestionable heroism in the face of unbelievable horror. On the human level, this book is excellent, both as a warning against the evils of genocide and as a reminder that there are people still dedicated to justice and peace, even at great personal cost. On the literary level, and on the personal level, this book sucked. The flow of events is alternately dizzyingly fast or numbingly slow; the human element of the story obscured by logy politicking; the hero of the story an irritating saint who is all too aware of his saintliness. I am glad that a man like Dallaire exists; I wish someone else had told his story.

NormaCenva says

Sorry guys, but to be honest with you - I still do not understand why they didn't do anything!

Marissa Pineda says

I have started several reviews for this book and I am simply at a loss for words for how to describe my feelings about it. I was profoundly affected by Dallaire's experience. His story changed my perception of the world, of government, and of myself. Dallaire feels he failed in his mission, he was undercut and thwarted on all sides. He could have walked away, turned his back on Rwanda the way the rest of the world did. He knew he couldn't succeed in preventing the genocide, from ending the apathy of the UN and the USA, but he never, never, never gave up. He is, in my opinion, among the very best examples of humanity, courage, and loyalty to a righteous cause. The book is extremely graphic and difficult to read and internalize. Dallaire personally dealt with so much gore it's nearly impossible for me to fathom. In fact, I put the book down for months, too cowardly to continue, but I couldn't get Rwanda or Dallaire out of my head. I figured if Romeo Dallaire was willing to relive the hells and horrors he and his beloved soldiers and Rwandans faced in an effort to prevent such evil from happening again, I was honor bound to finish the book and make a difference in humanity myself.

Liesel says

This book, though heavy in military jargon and very long, was absolutely one of the most stunning books I have ever read. It was gripping, and completely chilling. It is the deeply personal story of Romeo Dallaire, the head of the UN Peacekeeping mission for Rwanda during the genocide/war and how he witnessed, literally, the abandonment of humanity by humanity.

It is worth your time to read this book. I plan to read it again soon.

Igor Ljubuncic says

Phenomenal, infuriating, disgusting.

This is a sad masterpiece.

The whole book is one giant j'accuse.

It's a personal story of General Dallaire, a French Canadian, who briefly shares with us his early life in segregated Quebec before going into his tribulation, day by day, through the genocide in Rwanda. One hundred days where he tried to prevent the catastrophe, while he tried to juggle the political, humanitarian and military mess surrounding him and his small team of UN peacekeepers.

The book is horrifying - it has visual descriptions of mutilations, rape, torture, dead bodies, personal tragedy, anguish, despair, loss, and futility of this whole story, and there's no happy ending either. The general came back to Canada with a deep sense of guilt, suicidal, unable to cope with crowds, scarred for life by his inability to make a change while the big powers watched with indifference as 800,000 people, including 300,000 children were killed with machetes.

The book provokes deep rage and hatred - not for the belligerents - but for the "world" community, the UN bureaucracy machine, the colonial powers that decided the lives of some Africans weren't worth the bother of sending their own troops in.

Some examples of j'accuse:

France, which airlifted and harbored the genocide government representatives safely in Paris, twice propped the RGF from being defeated by the RPF, tried to stop the defeat of the genocide government, and then prevented the return of two million refugees from Zaire back in Rwanda, sparking the Zaire war that eventually killed about 10 million people over the next decade.

Belgium, which tucked tail and fled after 10 of its soldiers were killed - the ex-master of Rwanda with deep racist culture - Belgian soldiers refused to salute "colored" officers, including officers from other UN contingents (like Ghana and even Bangladesh), soldiers that beat Rwandan journalists for writing bad things about them, soldiers that took in prostitutes despite strict orders against fraternization against the locals.

The US, which had the logistic power to move in quickly and stop it all, but decided that after Somalia it wasn't going to risk the lives of its soldiers to the exact tally of - one American life being equal to 85,000 Rwandans. Moreover, the US promised help many times over and then simply didn't do anything.

The UN political representative in Rwanda, who was more concerned with his furniture and used a helicopter for personal needs than have it used to ship MILOBs where they were desperately required.

The Bangladesh contingent, which were there for a free ride, refused to help any non-Europeans, often fled from any conflict area, and ran to their planes when the time for their evacuation finally came.

The UN leadership in New York, which dallied, played wording games, and stalled for as long as it could while tens of thousands of people were being massacred.

And the list goes on and on.

In the midst of it all, Dallaire had 400 observers, most of them unarmed, they ate expired German combat rations, and had to watch helplessly as people were machetted to death inside churches and sanctuaries.

And the humanity sat and watched. Fast forward 25 years, we've learned nothing as a race. Morality is relative to the mineral and fossil fuel wealth as well as the intimate strategic interests of the great powers.

This is a very difficult book - but it's an important read.

Igor

Hannah says

This book reminds me of the scene in Amadeus in which Emperor Joseph II tells Mozart that there were "simply too many notes."

This book has simply too many words.

I believe that Dallaire's perspective and insight about what happened in Rwanda in 1994 needs to be shared. However, I'm not sure that it needed to be shared for more than five hundred pages. The sheer length of the text is prohibitive for many readers, and Dallaire may have been able to reach a wider audience with his message had there been more effort in editing and refining his writing.

If one is looking for gruesome accounts of the genocide, this is not the book to read. If one is looking to learn about the structural and systematic failures that contributed to the genocide in Rwanda, this is the book for you.

I kept at reading this book (very slowly) despite its verbosity and the laborious nature of the process because I had seen Dallaire speak. I get the sense that writing this account may have been a cathartic process for him, a way to come to terms with his own presence and role in Rwanda. This book sometimes read as a man trying to justify to himself that he had done what he could and what he thought was best at the time.

If not a good writer, Dallaire IS a man haunted by the indifference (of the first world, especially) to the horror and extreme violence which humans inflict upon each other and the lack of western interest in those who live in places which do not have needed resources to exploit.

Sylvain Reynard says

Those interested in military or African history will find much of interest here, as will those who are interested in the inner (and outer) workings of the U. N. and its peacekeeping missions. Dallaire shows the failure of the UN and Western nations to intervene adequately in the Rwandan genocide. But history is not without its witnesses, and Dallaire and his soldiers provide a record of the nation of Rwanda's descent into hell. This descent includes the gang-rape and murder of children and the use of child soldiers.

This book is not an easy read, but a necessary one. If all human beings are created equal, then the genocide of any people is a tragedy. Just as we should intervene if we see physical violence on the street, so we as human beings should intervene when one group targets another for slaughter. It's easy enough to feel outrage from the comfort of our homes, but the next time we hear of ethnic cleansing on the other side of the world will we change the channel? Or will we do something?
