

Paul Rusesabagina is the real-life hero behind the 2004 movie Hotel Rwanda. As manager of Kigali’s luxurious Hotel Mille Collines he sheltered 1268 people from the machetes of the génocidaires of 1994, using nothing but words—and the hotel’s stock of liquor.

In no sense of the word can Paul Rusesabagina be called an ordinary man. If other people were like him, 800,000 people who were massacred in 100 days in 1994 would still be alive. What distinguishes him is the astonishing bravery and coolness with which he confronted each killer, unarmed, and found the soft spot, the weakness which would prevent him from carrying out his deadly intentions. He didn’t expect to survive: he kept a stash of money in the hotel’s safe to bribe the killers to use bullets when they came for his family, instead of hacking them to pieces with a machete.

An Ordinary Man is an absorbing book. Even though, numerically, the people Rusesabagina saved were a tiny drop in an overwhelming ocean, his story is an important one: it shows how courage and resourcefulness can stand up against an apparently remorseless tide of malevolence.