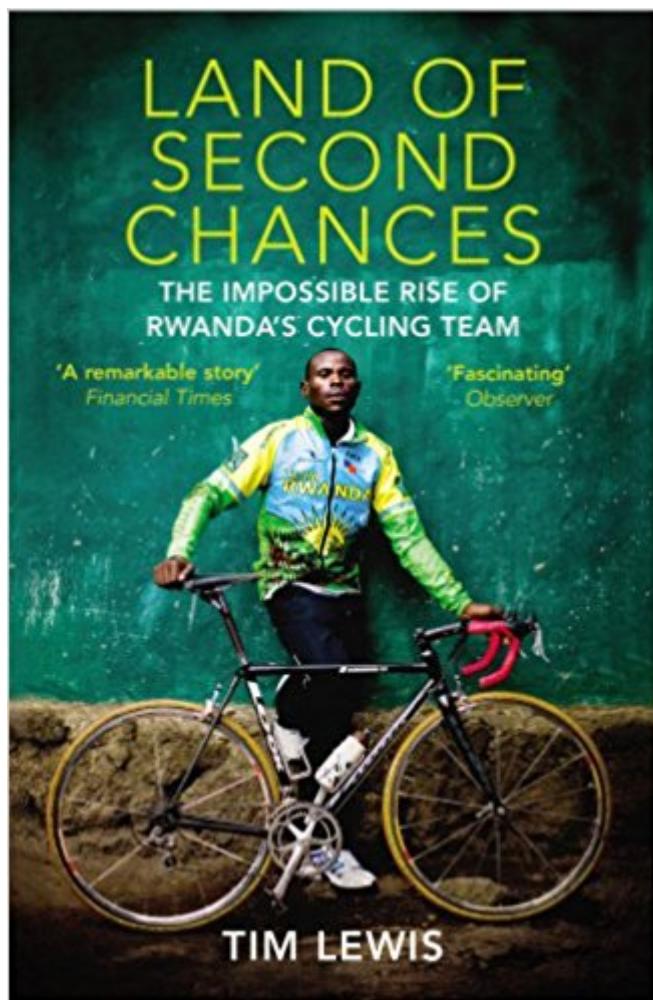


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# Land Of Second Chances: The Impossible Rise Of Rwanda's Cycling Team



## **Synopsis**

The astonishing true story of the Rwandan Cycling Team. Where there is hope there can be redemption. Meet Adrien Niyonshuti, a member of the Rwandan cycling team. Adrien was seven years old when he lost his family in the 1994 genocide that tore Rwanda apart. Almost twenty years later he has a shot at representing his country at the Olympics. Meet Jock Boyer, the coach of Team Rwanda. One of the top American cyclists of all time, Jock recognises the innate talent for endurance that the Rwandans possess. A man with a dark past, Jock is in need of a second chance. Meet Tom Ritchey, the visionary inventor of the mountain bike and the U.S. money man looking to recover from a profound personal crisis. In *The Land of Second Chances*, Tim Lewis charts the incredible true story of the Rwandan cycling team as they overcome impossible odds to inspire a nation.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

In 1994, a boy named Adrien Niyonshuti escaped the Rwandan genocide that claimed the lives of one-tenth of the small African nation's population. In 2012, he became the first Rwandan to race in the men's mountain-bike event at the Olympics. Observer writer Lewis details what it took to get there in this thorough account. Wide-ranging stories converge along the way, including those of a mountain-bike pioneer in the midst of a midlife crisis and a coach dogged by his sex-offense conviction. Lewis notes the fascinating details of Rwanda's resurgence after tragedy, unpacking the single-minded quest of President Paul Kagame to build up the nation. Well sourced, with encyclopedic references to those in the cycling world, the book is set on the cusp of an

extraordinary moment in the sport, with Africa poised to start producing contenders. Lewis avoids falling into the trap of making this a "Hollywood-friendly sports-comeback tale. It's infinitely more interesting than that, with its many setbacks, personality clashes, and disappointments. Like Rwanda itself, it's complex, and the story is not over yet. --Bridget Thoreson --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"Fascinating... not a typical rags to riches, triumph against adversity tale... Lewis does a fine job of unpicking a tangled narrative" Observer "A remarkable story... attempts to import the Lycra-clad, precision-engineered world of the Tour de France into rural Africa from the heart of this absorbing book...Team Rwanda's story could have been edited into an uplifting tale of unlikely success, with Niynoshuti's Olympic appearance as the rousing finale. Instead this is a more complicated, darker, account." Financial Times "It's a book that successfully melds many facets and characters. At times deeply shocking, always moving and occasionally very amusing, The Land of Second Chances is ultimately an uplifting story of hope" Wheelsuckers "His meticulously researched work merits a wider audience than appealing to devotees of the biking fraternity - and will surely get one... A good cycling tale and this one is a cracker" Birmingham Post "An eloquent and compassionate tale by Observer author Tim Lewis. Perfect for: sport lovers after a leftfield underdog story" -- Sam Dansie Bike Radar

The second chances in the title of this book refer to three stories that come together in the Rwandan cycling program. The biggest story of course is Rwanda's own comeback from the genocidal horrors beginning in 1994. The Rwandan cycling program, built upon the riders who survived that period as young children, is impressive in so many ways. It's unimaginable what these still young riders have been through -- witnessing the slaughter of family members, escaping, hiding, and now trying to be part of the country's excruciating attempt to deal with its past and rebuild. The cycling program was jumpstarted by the efforts of two Americans in need of a fresh start themselves. Tom Ritchey was an extremely successful cycling innovator, but with a hollow personal life. Ritchey came to Rwanda to help with the "coffee bike," a bicycle he designed to withstand the rigors of muddy, rutted roads, endless hills, and the hundreds of pounds of coffee that Rwanda's farmers needed to transport quickly to maintain quality. Ritchey also recruited Jonathon Boyer, the first American to race in the Tour de France, to become coach of the new Rwandan cycling program. Boyer's story cannot evade his conviction as a sex offender, the outcome of his relationship with a 12 year old girl after his cycling career. What a mess. And what you want is a feel-good story in which everyone is

redeemed and succeeds beyond anyone's expectations. You don't completely get that. The riders come from everywhere, riding everything. These are not European or American kids growing up on progressively more sophisticated and expensive bikes. They often ride makeshift, dangerous contraptions, serving sometimes as bicycle taxi services. And Boyer faithfully coaches Rwanda's cyclists to respectability in the cycling world, demanding sacrifices and dedication from himself that many of us would envy. But, in the end, the Rwandan cycling program doesn't reach the real heights. The riders show promise, but they plateau. The jury may still be out on Adrien Niyonshuti and others, but no international champions have emerged from the program, and Boyer has moved on to coach elsewhere in Africa, still in search of champions in the rough (although see Kimberly Coat's review here -- Kimberly Coats is currently on Team Rwanda's staff and reports that Boyer is still coaching the team). Ritchey's coffee bike program has hit hard times as well. The bikes were great, but they were expensive, maybe too expensive for Rwanda's recovering economy. But none of that is to say that Rwanda, Boyer, and Ritchey are not redeemed. Success in a context like this shouldn't be measured in race results. These are people, and a country, whose trajectories are very different now than they were before they came together and built upon each other. Since the book's publication, Adrien Niyonshuti's new team, the South African team MTN-Qhubeka, has earned an invitation to the Giro d'Italia, the first African team to participate. From what I've read, there's no mention of Adrien among the likely riders to represent the team there.

I found this book through an interest in cycling development in Africa. I could not have found a more thorough introduction into the who's who of the various efforts to find the Great Black Hope of cycling (Tour de France 2013 winner Chris Froome of Kenya doesn't count!). In addition to the story of Team Rwanda and the characters involved in that project, the stories of the Kenyan Riders and South African Team MTN-Qhubeka are also covered. This book is really well written (by a journalist .. it shows) and is a natural page-turner. Like another reviewer, I hope to see a follow-up in a couple of years, especially now that the original Team Rwanda coach has headed to Ethiopia, where many great middle-distance and marathon runners are born and run. Highly recommended!

Yeah, I like bicycling. I think that bicycles are really important for commerce and development for third world countries--bicycles represent an ecologically sound technology. First there is the Hutu vs. Tutsi business--you will be as confused as ever but you will at least feel that you know enough to feel justified in being baffled. In the USA we had the Civil War--do you really understand that? Then there is the matter of the actions and the policies of Western powers towards third world countries.

Why does Rwanda get this amount of attention? The primary guys who worked with the cycling team were Christians and were able to connect with other Christians to recruit supporters. In general I feel that Christian institutions have done a lot of harm in our world but these cycling guys were well intentioned and worked directly with people, good on them!

More than just a book about biking. It includes the backstories about the genocide, examines the Rwanda culture, and describes the amazing healing process that President Kagame implemented after the troubles. It includes personal interest stories of the coaches, promoters, and bicyclists who brought about the national bike team. A good read for anyone who has an interest in Africa, who enjoys competitive bike racing, or enjoys sports.

Very interesting and well told story of Rwanda's cycling team. The author paints the history of Rwanda with broad strokes while engaging the reader in the story of one man's journey.

Fantastic read and very well written. A mix of elation and emotions. I thought this book really captured the differences between cultures which is very difficult.

A good read. Enjoyed the book. Having been to Rwanda and familiar with the places I found the book interesting and will recommend it.

Based on some web descriptions, there might be some inaccuracies in the book - but that said, it is still a good read and quite effectively transported me away from my "first world bike club ride spandex and bright bike jersey" world to a place far far away where bikes are patched together and riders half my size ride twice as fast for hardly any pay... and enjoy it more.

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