

TELEVISION

by **Stephen W. Smith**

The general and the Canucks

Vastly different Canadian stories make their way to the small screen

Previews

SHAKE HANDS WITH THE DEVIL: THE JOURNEY OF ROMEO DALLAIRE

The Passionate Eye

Monday, January 31

CBC

CRAZY CANUCKS

Wednesday, February 2

CTV

This Monday, CBC TV is choosing to show a documentary on *The Passionate Eye* without commercial interruption. Having had a chance to preview the film, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire*, I know the CBC has made the right call. The movie, which succinctly deals with aspects of the brutal slaughter of more than 800,000 people in the African nation of Rwanda a decade ago, is not the sort of thing that should be interrupted by those cream cheese commercials with the ditzzy angel.

Shake Hands with the Devil, inspired by Dallaire's book of the same title, documents the return of the now-retired Canadian lieutenant-general to Rwanda 10 years after he and his tiny contingent of UN peacekeepers were caught in the middle of a nightmarish bloodletting they were unable to control, let alone stop. In the film, Dallaire talks openly about the images of death forever burned into his memory. He also admits to tremendous feelings of guilt, not only for the many Tutsi people he was unable to save, but for 10 captured and executed Belgian soldiers that were under his command.

To see such regret, fragility and anger at the apathy of superpower nations in a career military man is an unforgettable experience. It forms the heart of a masterfully rendered film produced and directed by Gemini Award-winner Peter Raymont. Just days before its initial CBC screening, *Shake Hands with the Devil* makes its debut at this year's Sundance Film Festival. Even though the documentary is the sole Canadian entry in this year's Sundance competition, it's hard to imagine how our nation could be better represented.

Also coming to television is a tale derived from a much lighter Canadian experience.

Crazy Canucks, premiering Wednesday on CTV, is a film produced by Calgary-based Alberta Filmworks and shot entirely in Austria. It takes place during the World Cup ski seasons of the mid-1970s, when five members of the Canadian Men's Alpine Team shook things up in Europe with their unconventional, risk-taking style. While the competitive success these *Crazy Canucks* achieved was impressive, the film documenting their rise to prominence is not.

The movie boasts outstanding ski footage, but it also contains many off-the-hill moments that completely fall flat. Actors Lucas Bryant and Robert Tinkler do a nice job in their respective roles as Ken Read and Dave Irwin, but Sandy Wayne Robson is a disaster as the bombastic ski icon "Jungle" Jim Hunter. In the scenes where Hunter is jealously arguing with his rising-star teammates, Robson's unconvincing sputtering of juvenile lines of frustration is simply awful.

Meanwhile, castmates Kyle Labine as Dave Murray and Curtis Harrison as Steve Podborski are left to do little more than bleat things like, "Come on, guys" in the film's most dramatic exchanges.

Then there's the godawful soundtrack, which twice features that vastly overused Bachman Turner Overdrive tune "Takin' Care of Business." We also get The Guess Who's "No Time" and just about every other played-to-death vintage Canadian rock song.

Crazy Canucks points its skis towards telling a poignant story of brotherhood and beating the odds, but instead it bounces off many moguls in its execution before crashing hard.