

The Gazette

Dallaire's demons: Award-Winning documentary angry, balanced. Two Rwanda films present portrait of extraordinary individual courage and institutional evil

Montreal Gazette

Friday, February 11, 2005

Page: D12

Section: Arts & Life: Preview

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Source: The Gazette

Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire

Rating 4

Starring: Romeo Dallaire.

Playing at: Cinema du Parc.

Parents' guide: horrific images, violence and some language.

In 2004, 10 years after the genocide that saw 800,000 souls perish, a crowd gathered in a Rwandan stadium to mark the anniversary. There were precious few whites in attendance. One of them was Romeo Dallaire.

The Canadian Armed Forces general had been commander of the UN troops responsible for keeping the lid on the powder keg of tribal and political unrest in that little-known central African country in the summer of 1994. Woefully understaffed, his hands tied by a bureaucracy that cared nothing for the country or its people, Dallaire chose to stay, save who he could and bear agonized witness to the slaughter of innocent men, women and children.

Peter Raymont's *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire* is the Sundance award-winning documentary that links the atrocities of 1994 with Dallaire's return to the country a decade on, and the man's personal emotional turmoil in between.

Understandably, it makes for powerful and deeply unsettling viewing. Seen together with *Hotel Rwanda*, a recreation of events taken from the same time, they present portraits of extraordinary individual courage, and monstrous collective and institutional evil.

"Are all humans human?" the film asks. "Or are some more human than others?"

Dallaire was caught in an untenable position in a nightmare scenario as chief of nothing while bands of maniacs with machetes and automatic weapons engaged in 100 days of ruthlessly efficient ethnic cleansing.

Raymond's angry but balanced film shows both the unspeakable violence of archival footage and the transformation a decade can bring to a verdant land. But because Dallaire is pursued by his own guilty demons, he sees only corpses, killing fields and terrified faces. If his visit back to Rwanda was intended as part of the healing process, it comes at a price.

Shake Hands With the Devil makes clear the general did everything humanly possible to alert the great powers in the U.S., Europe and UN to the tragedy in Rwanda. It makes clear they turned their heads away and hung him out to dry.

Dallaire has since suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. He's attempted suicide, and wrestled with devils no one should ever have to face. Agreeing to open himself up for the filmmakers is only the most recent example of bravery in a man whose only crime was to be human when all around had forsaken theirs.

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Idnumber: 200502110008

Edition: Final

Story Type: Review

Length: 422 words