

MONDAY

# A voyage back into horror

BY JIM BAWDEN

There are some TV programs, good and bad, which I resist screening until the very last minute. It's always been a psychological sort of fear with me, and I experienced it again this week when I popped the VHS copy of Peter Raymont's documentary *Shake Hands With the Devil* into my VCR.

And my fears were instantly realized: The documentary is every bit as masterful as I felt would be, a scary trip back into time with Lt.-Gen. Roméo Dallaire – a decade in fact – to Rwanda and one of the largest acts of genocide in the latter half of the 20th century.

But be advised this is a 57-minute version as opposed to the 91-minute original, which has had a number of theatrical screenings to great acclaim. At press time it was the only Canadian film being shown at the Sundance film festival, where it was competing for the documentary film prize.

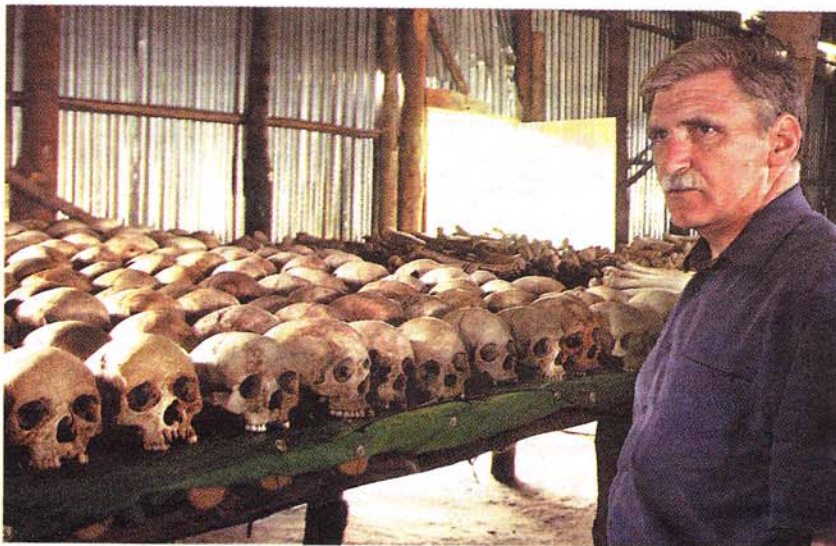
Filmmaker Raymont says CBC requested a taut, shortened film, which it is airing commercial-free, believing TV audiences wouldn't stick with 91 minutes of such material. The full version should pop up later on *Newsworld*.

Speaking on the phone from an Ottawa screening, Dallaire told me he was fully satisfied with the end result. "It was terrifying going back but that needed to be done. We have to keep re-educating people, I guess. While I'm watching TV coverage of the tsunami devastation in Southeast Asia. I'm also mindful that another genocide is going on in Darfur in the Sudan, and once again the world is watching from the sidelines."

Filmmaker Raymont said he tried "for years" to propose a documentary on the genocide but could never get past the people guarding Dallaire. "And he just didn't want to do it at that time," Raymond said. "Then he wrote his book and decided confrontation was necessary. So we followed him as he and wife Elizabeth went back to the capital after a decade of being away."

"It's as if I never left," Dallaire told *Starweek*. "It was something that really hit me as our plane landed. It was like going home. Very emotional."

Raymont artfully combines actual footage taken by news crews in 1994 with newly shot film of the Dallaires as they tour the capital of Kigali, still bearing the scars of war. The drive into town is peaceful, tranquil as contrasted by shots of the same highway in 1994 as



Lt.-Gen. Roméo Dallaire at Bisesero Genocide Memorial, Rwanda, in April, 2004

thousands of bodies lie along the ditches stretching to the horizon.

Raymont says existing BBC archival shots of murders are "incredibly brutal," but the only one we see is at a distance: On a winding road are stacks of bodies and a Hutu soldier lunging at them with a machete, carving and slicing away.

In another scene scarier than any horror movie, the Dallaires visit a genocide museum with thousands of skulls bleached by the African sun stretched out on tables as far as the eye can see. Some carry bullet holes at the top of the cranium where victims were gunned down. It is an awesomely brutal scene.

Front and centre, accepting blame and censure, condemnation and praise is Dallaire. Can the man take it? Yes, he

flinches, but his remarkable comeback from the emotional abyss is one of the stories here. He is back to confront his own devils.

Assigned a United Nations command in 1994 with only a few hundred troops and little in the way of firepower, he had to quickly decide whether to cut and run or stand and take it. In the movie he dismisses thoughts about fighting back as pure Hollywood – "Ramboesque crap."

Speaking on his behalf, such humanitarians as Stephen Lewis, Gerald Caplan praise him. But what could his little force hope to do? In 100 days of brutality, 800,000 Tutsis were slaughtered. The cable news networks were feeding us wall-to-wall coverage of O.J. Simpson's trial. Even the Nancy Kerrigan-Tonya

Harding imbroglio got better coverage.

In one present-day speech Dallaire says the UN was fixated on Yugoslavia and one reason it was more important? Well, the fighters there were white. Rwanda's tribal troubles may have started while still a Belgian colony. Belgian bureaucrats were the first ones to issue identity certificates dividing the Tutsis and Hutus into separate races based on measuring skulls and racial features.

Dallaire is a deeply religious man and believes when meeting the Hutus leaders he was shaking hands with the devil: Peering into those eyes he saw the very essence of evil, and it frightened him. It never occurred to him to cut and run.

With his troops he stayed huddled in a compound, his portable player blasting Stompin' Tom Connors' music while the bombs flew. Nothing in his military manoeuvres had ever prepared him for this: The complete lack of humanity by an enraged enemy and total abandonment by the world community.

A few scenes encourage hope. The Dallaires slip into the massive cathedral, and with the building filled with young people on Palm Sunday the mass is exuberant. And he takes his wife to a green hill between two mountains, describing it as the most beautiful and peaceful in the world, a perfect place to build a home.

As he says, one day he'd like to come to that home, in Rwanda. 9 p.m. on CBC, and Wednesday at 10 p.m., *Newsworld*.

## Silent Bob strikes again

Stunt casting can be a take it or leave it proposition, but asked for our askew view on Kevin Smith's turn on *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, and he gets our thumbs up. Of course, like us, Smith is a geek, (actually, he's the übergeek) and though he's not for some tastes, I must admit that I'm a fan. Yup, even *Dogma*.

So with that out in the open, he's great on *Degrassi* – self-deprecating with many in-jokes for those who know

all the poopshoot on *Silent Bob*.

In real life, Smith has been a long-time *Degrassi* fan and jumped at the chance to be involved in the show. On his episodes, airing over the next three weeks, he plays himself – in town shooting *Jay and Silent Bob Go Canadian, Eh?* He's looking for locations. Like a school. Cue the kids of *Degrassi*, who get to be extras and hang out with Smith, particularly Craig, who Smith gives a couple of keep-your-chin-up-speeches to.

He doesn't travel alone either, bring-

ing Jason Mewes and Alanis Morissette (on Feb. 14) along for cameos, and with the Yank in town he writers take some amusing and some very obvious shots at things Canuck.

Despite Smith's rather large presence, *Degrassi* fans need not worry, there's enough of the usual still remaining, particularly Paige and Manny's feud tonight, which ends up with shenanigans at the prom. And next week, it's Ashley and Craig's relationship. 8:30 p.m. on CTV.

- RAJU MUDHAR