

# Shake Hands with The Devil turns out to be life-affirming

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On one level, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire* is a quiet, modest documentary record of one man's personal odyssey through the heart of darkness.

On another, more important level, it's a passionate, stirring allegory about finding inner peace, as well as an unflinching look at the 1994 genocide in Rwanda in which 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu moderates, including countless women, old men and children, were murdered, many of them hacked to death by machetes, in little more than 100 days.

In early 1994, Lt.-General Dallaire was appointed commander of a United Nations peace-keeping mission in the tiny Central African republic of Rwanda, an astonishingly beautiful land of mist-laden hills and agricultural terraces nestled between the western highlands of Lake Victoria and the eastern slopes of the Ruwenzori mountains, the fabled "Mountains of the Moon" and home to one of the world's last remnant populations of mountain gorillas.

In his compelling book *Equator*, the noted travel writer Thurston Clarke described Rwanda as the model African state, in which Hutus and Tutsis had learned to set aside cultural and political differences and live in harmony. That was 1993, this was 1994 — and as Dallaire was to learn, the surface tranquility masked generations-old hatreds split between tribal divides.

*Shake Hands with the Devil* is neither a straight historical record nor is it a political tirade. It is instead a deeply heartfelt account of one man's return to his past, and a brave attempt to put a logical explana-



**Romeo Dallaire: an odyssey through the heart of darkness.**

*John McKay/TC*

## FINE TUNING

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tion on illogical, completely inexplicable events. It opens with Dallaire, still wracked with guilt and suffering the ripple effects of post-traumatic stress syndrome and lingering depression, as he returns to Rwanda in April, 2004, on the 10th anniversary of the genocide.

Dallaire is a reluctant returnee — the sound of birds singing along the side of the jungle road is enough to stir unpleasant memories — but he feels obligated to face his inner demons and stand before the people he feels he failed.

"God travels the earth during the day, but comes and rests in Rwanda at night," Dallaire says softly at the end of the film. "Here, I want to show you, in all this, I could find myself and I could find the solace and be one with my soul, my heart, my being."

Don't let the grim subject matter put you off. In a strange, almost surreal way, *Shake Hands with the Devil* is genuinely life-affirming. Dallaire has a world-weary integrity to him, a spirit and soul and humanity that shines through the darkness, and there are images and moments here that are virtually unforgettable.

The film itself has been directed with great grace, dignity and style by veteran Canadian filmmaker and journalist Peter Raymond, with some of the most haunting and emotionally stirring background music I've ever heard in a documentary film.

*Shake Hands with the Devil* was screened last week before an appreciative audience at the Sundance Film Festival, and its debut tonight on Cob's documentary showcase *The Passionate Eye* is an auspicious occasion, not just the film's world television premiere but also its first opportunity to reach a wide audience.

Do give it a try. My guess is you won't regret it. (9 p.m., CBC)

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