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Shake Hands With the Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire

(Docu -- Canada)

A White Pine Pictures presentation in association with the Canadian Broadcasting Corp., Societe Radio Canada, with the participation of the Rogers Documentary Fund, the Canadian Television Fund, Canadian Film or Video Tax Credit. (International sales: Films Transit, Montreal.) Produced, directed by Peter Raymont.

With: **Lt. Gen. Romeo Dallaire.**

By [SCOTT FOUNDAS](#)

A decade after the genocide in Rwanda, a series of films, both narrative and documentary, have appeared to grapple with the legacy of that atrocity. Among them, Peter Raymont's docu "Shake Hands With the Devil" emerges as one of the strongest, returning in graphic, painstaking detail to the scene of the carnage in the company of the man who had been charged with preventing it: United Nations Lt. Gen. Romeo Dallaire. In spite of Raymont's occasionally dry, presentational style, the docu could connect with politically aware audiences in upscale markets. Brisk tube sales are a given.

When the U.N. sent Dallaire to Rwanda to quell escalating Tutsi-Hutu tensions, it did so along with an undersized, ill-equipped force of peacekeepers that would ultimately prove no defense against the machete-wielding extremists. Beyond which, Dallaire had been ordered not to act preemptively and, even more puzzlingly, had been given troops composed largely of Belgian soldiers whose presence in the Rwanda only further enraged the uprising Hutus, whose resentment of the Tutsis dated back to Rwanda's years as a Belgian colony.

Following Dallaire as he travels back to Rwanda in April of 2004, Raymont relies largely on Dallaire's own impassioned words to set the stage, supplemented with startling archival footage in which it is almost possible to smell the stench of rotting flesh in the country's streets. Such images are juxtaposed against those captured during Dallaire's return, in which we see buildings still marred by bullet holes and shrapnel blasts -- at once, a memorial to the fallen and a suggestion that, to some extent, Rwanda remains forever frozen in that horrible moment.

The overall effect makes for a far more resonant film than that offered by concurrent narrative feature "Hotel Rwanda."

"Shake Hands" touches on all the major events of the genocide, from the death of then-president Juvenal Habyarimana in a mysterious plane crash to the call-to-arms supplied by the virulently anti-Tutsi Radio Rwanda to the ultimate failure of foreign superpowers to intervene. Dallaire has harsh words for the French government and the Catholic Church, both of whom, he provocatively and persuasively argues, could have, but failed to take measures that could have stopped the uprising. Considering the source, the words weigh heavily. For despite the fact that he was responsible for saving thousands of lives in Rwanda, Dallaire has carried a burden of guilt these past 10 years -- attempting suicide more than once -- forever haunted by the specter of the hundreds of thousands he feels he failed to protect.

Camera (color, DV), John Westheuser; editor, Michele Hozer; music, Mark Korven; sound, Ao Loo. Reviewed at Toronto Film Festival (Real to Reel), Sept. 10, 2004. (Also in Vancouver Film Festival -- Canadian Images.) Running time: 91 MIN.