

## Haunting 'Journey' of a Haunted Man

By Desson Thomson

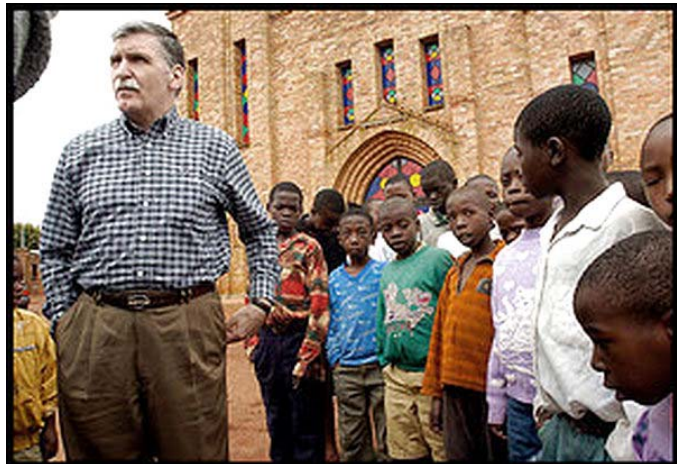
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IF YOU saw the affecting fictional movie "Hotel Rwanda," then "Shake Hands With the Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire," Peter Raymont's documentary about Rwanda's civil war and mass atrocities, will seal that experience with the blood-red stamp of reality.

But there is no prerequisite to appreciating the latest movie, which follows former U.N. peacekeeping Gen. Dallaire as he returns to the country for the first time since he left its burning, corpse-strewn capital in 1994. The tragedy of that affair is plain enough to see.

The year is 2004, and Dallaire is coming back to attend events commemorating the 10th anniversary of the genocide and to visit locations where many of the atrocities occurred. Even now, we see how little attention the West pays the country. The stadium is filled with Rwandans but only a smattering of international political visitors. Yes, former president Bill Clinton issues a collective mea culpa on behalf of his administration, something to the effect of not appreciating enough the seriousness of the situation. But his words ring hollow to Dallaire's ears.



Peace still eludes former U.N. peacekeeping Gen. Romeo Dallaire, returning to Rwanda 10 years after the 1994 massacre in "Shake Hands With the Devil." (By Peter Bregg -- Maclean's)

When the Canadian general came to Rwanda in 1994 with barely 800 men (that's one soldier for every thousand people massacred), he found his pleas for humane intervention from the United Nations, the United States and other powers largely ignored. The United Nations ultimately directed its sluggish machinery to deprive Dallaire of military power and command authority. And other governments removed their troops.

In the end, Dallaire was left with soldiers dwindling to the dozens. And it comes as no surprise that Rwanda became Dallaire's personal war and has haunted him since. In the movie he confesses to a suicide attempt, heavy drinking, taking prescription pills "to stay reasonable," and struggling with the ceaseless weight of collective remorse, grief and anger.

For him, Rwanda is a peculiar odyssey. When he set out for Africa, Dallaire thought he was leaving his home and wife in Canada for a wartime situation. But Rwanda proved so hellishly formative he found himself inextricably bonded with the land. Now Rwanda has become his

troubled home, metaphorically and literally; he tells filmmaker Raymont he will eventually retire there.

Raymont's film, with Dallaire as the main voice and news footage from 1994, lays out a compelling, compact story about a country that was left to destroy itself while one man presided futilely over the carnage. It's a staggering responsibility for one person to bear, and even though he clearly doesn't deserve anything but a moral salute, Dallaire has taken the blame for Western civilization's mass failing. It's a supreme irony that, if and when Rwanda truly heals itself from the past, it will leave behind one of its greatest friends, a man who will reel from the sins of governments for the rest of his days.

*SHAKE HANDS WITH THE DEVIL: THE JOURNEY OF ROMEO DALLAIRE (Unrated, 91 minutes) -- Contains footage of atrocities and emotionally intense material. At Landmark's E Street Cinema.*