

Shaking hands with yet more devils

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There is a sense of déjà vu to *Triage: Dr. James Orbinski's Humanitarian Dilemma*, a movie that is almost identical in theme and presentation to *Shake Hands With The Devil*, the doc about Romeo Dallaire's return to Rwanda.

Like *Shake Hands*, *Triage* features a haunted witness to the genocide of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis at the hands of Hutu neighbours — one of the most horrifying episodes in what was already the most brutal century in history. And as in *Shake Hands*, it follows him more than a decade later to the scene of the atrocity.

But Orbinski's story differs on a couple of counts. Unlike Dallaire, who, as head of the UN peacekeeping contingent,

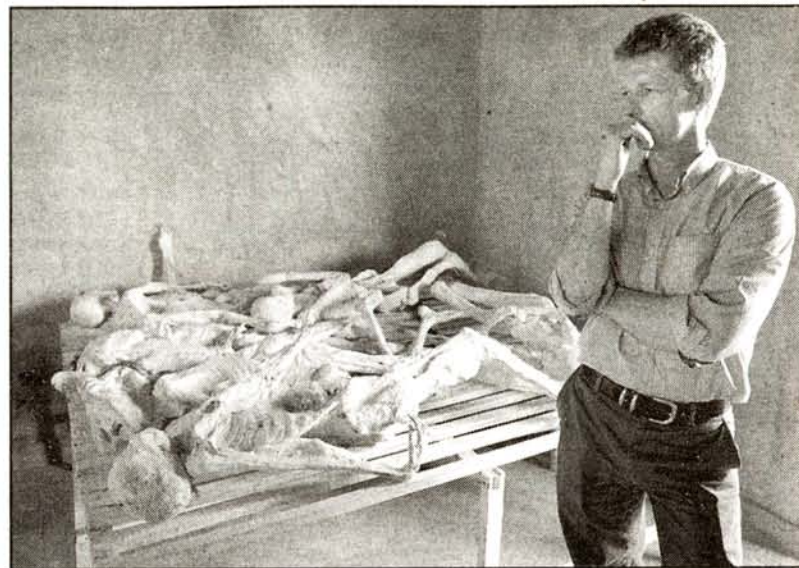
was a soldier trying to reconcile his orders and his conscience, Orbinski was a volunteer.

Moreover, the former President of the International Council of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) had already been exposed to evil in Africa, during a stint in Somalia where he tried to treat famine victims between staring into the barrels of warlord soldiers' guns (he describes one case of soldiers entering the OR, guns drawn, ordering him to stop operating on a woman in favour of one of their own wounded men).

Triage's return to Africa — to Somalia, Rwanda and Goma, Democratic Republic Of The Congo where Hutu guerillas exploited refugee camps as launching pads for

continued attacks on Rwanda — dovetails with Orbinski's own book project. It is not, he protests at the beginning of the movie, "a pilgrimage or purging or catharsis."

The protests notwithstanding, it eventually becomes all these things, particularly in Rwanda, where memories of stitching together a woman who'd had her ears and breasts sliced off suddenly re-emerge. Amiable, but not a chatterbox, Orbinski's recollections seem to emerge like bubbles from a swamp, amid sad-friendly reunions with some of the locals with whom he shared experiences.



In Triage, Dr. James Orbinski returns to horrific scenes he witnessed years earlier across Africa while with Doctors Without Borders.

this movie as does its subject. He is almost the Chorus on the side, giving the less-pained third-person account. He also contributes the geopolitical perspective — how the U.S. and the U.N. pretty much gave up on Africa after "Blackhawk Down."

But given the quagmires of Iraq and Afghanistan, one wonders if Western soldiers would have prevented a massacre or simply redirected it.

Orbinski's story has a happy ending of sorts — we see him receive a Nobel prize on behalf of MSF, and hear how his father helped pull him out of an emotional abyss when he came home from Rwanda.

Of course, the same can't be said of the Africans. Somalia has an all-new hell in Darfur, and the once-starving people we meet still seem a missed meal away from starving again. There'll undoubtedly be other massacres, and if we still have a spark of humanity as a species, other Orbinskis.

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