

Watching the terror begin: Tatiana (Sophie Okonedo) and Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle).

Abandoned

Reluctant hero learns a bitter truth.

HOTEL RWANDA: Directed, produced and written by Terry George. Co-written by Keir Pearson, in consultation with Paul Rusesabagina. Produced by A. Kitman Ho. Executive producers, Hal Sadoff, Duncan Reid, Martin F. Katz. Cinematographer, Robert Fraisse. Editor, Naomi Geraghty. Production design, Johnny Breedt, Tony Burrough. Costumes, Ruy Filipe. Composers, Rupert Gregson Williams, Andrea Guerra, Afro Celt Sound System. Starring Don Cheadle, Sophie Okonedo, Nick Nolte, with Joaquin Phoenix, Jean Reno, Fama Mokoena, Desmond Dube, Cara Seymour, Mothusi Magano and Leleti Khumalo. United Artists, 2004. R. 121 minutes.

Filmmaker Terry George is not neutral about the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. More than 800,000 Rwandans were brutally murdered in 100 days, while the West twiddled its collective thumbs. And George puts it out there just that bluntly. The Hutu waged war with machetes against the Tutsi, especially targeting children. If you don't believe these facts, George's film, *Hotel Rwanda*, will persuade you. I was reduced to angry, ashamed tears, and perhaps you, too, will weep. Few people will leave this film unaffected, although some (but not I) may feel manipulated.

George is a very efficient, no-nonsense director who knows what he's doing. His central characters are vulnerable and idealistic, like many of us in the audience. We experience the unfolding human tragedy primarily through the eyes of Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle), in a quietly brilliant performance. In an early scene, Paul tells his wife's brother and wife the U.N. peacekeepers would not allow to happen the indiscriminate butchery they have heard is planned. He tells them not to worry. He lives to regret his words.

Paul's wife, Tatiana (Sophie Okonedo), worries about safety in their neighborhood after they watch a man beaten and taken away by armed men. Paul puts a good face on things and reassures her it was a mistake that will get settled in the morning. But when they drag their oldest son home covered in blood from the next-door neighbors' yard, Paul realizes his only recourse is to put up his family in the upscale hotel, Mille Collines, where he works as the house manager.

Paul is a peaceful Hutu; his wife is Tutsi. Worried about losing his job, Paul's reluctant to take in friends and neighbors. When the Westerners pull out of Kigali, essentially leaving an open field for the Hutus to rampage and kill with impunity, Paul is appointed by the Belgian hotel owner (Jean Reno) to be in charge. Based on a true story, *Hotel*

Rwanda makes the most of such ironies.

As an ambitious businessman, Paul has cultivated powerful men among the Westerners as well as Rwandans, plying them with Cuban-made cigars and precious single-malt Scotch. Once violence breaks out, Paul bribes a local military leader (Fama Mokoena) with Scotch and money from the

hotel safe. The hotel owner does what he can from Europe to help, and a Red Cross aid worker (Cara Seymour) asks Paul to take in orphaned children. Paul's relationship with U.N. Colonel Oliver (Nick Nolte) officer offers him some comfort until orders from above stop Oliver's efforts. Nolte's piercing, passionate performance here is galvanizing.

Set against a background of a city gone mad, the excellent soundtrack from composers Afro Celt Sound System, Rupert Gregson Williams and Andrea Guerra, also includes snippets of chilling, hate-filled radio broadcasts from a Hutu-controlled station directing the armed mobs roaming the streets to places where Tutsis are hiding. As in the former Yugoslavia's ethnic cleansing, the media plays an ignominious role in the bloodbath. Without U.N. protection and no hope for evacuation, Paul is left with few choices and fewer resources to keep alive the more than 1,200 refugees he has taken in.

The effects of one individual against overwhelming events cannot give the viewer a larger picture. That must wait for another time, a different story. But if this is the only film you watch about Rwanda's nightmare, you will not be misled. Paul Rusesabagina idealized the West, but he learned what victims from other recent conflicts have discovered: No one on a white horse is coming to rescue you.

Filmmaker Terry George comes by his passions honestly. Born in Northern Ireland, George spent time in a British prison, which fueled his trio of screenplays for *The Boxer*, *Some Mother's Son*, which he also directed, and *In the Name of the Father*.

Hotel Rwanda is now playing at Cinemark and Cinema World. Very highest recommendations. **CW**

I was reduced to angry, ashamed tears, and perhaps you, too, will weep.

Synthetic Charms

The Yellow Pages man

THE WEDDING DATE: Directed by Clare Kilner. Written by Dana Fox, based on Elizabeth Young's novel, *Asking for Trouble*. Produced by Nathalie Marciano, Michelle Chydzik Sowa, Jessica Bendinger and Paul Brooks. Executive producers Scott Niemeyer, Norm Waitt, Jim Reeve, Steve Robbins. Cinematography, Oliver Curtis. Editor, Mary Finlay. Production design, Tom Burton. Costume design, Louise Page. Composer, Blake Neely. Starring Debra Messing and Dermot Mulroney. With Amy Adams, Jeremy Sheffield, Sarah Parish, Jack Davenport, Felix Adler, Holland Taylor and Peter Egan. Universal Pictures, 2005. PG-13. 88 minutes.

If you've seen the trailer as many times as I have, there's little left to discover in Clare Kilner's romantic comedy, *The Wedding Date*. The primary roles are played by television veterans Debra Messing (as Kat Ellis) and Dermot Mulroney (as Nick Mercer). Messing as Kat runs hot and cold toward the escort she's hired to accompany her to a wedding in London, and her dithering becomes annoying. For his part, Mulroney isn't sleazy enough to play a sex-worker; he comes off like a reluctant male model, who uses his ersatz sexuality to provoke rather than to please.

Now I've been to a wedding in England, and what I recall is that the bride and all other women at the wedding itself have to wear hats. I don't remember whether the wedding guests in the movie wore hats or not, but I can confirm the requisite tonnage of liquor was sloshed around at the parties and reception. Excessive booze is consumed by all participants, hoping, perhaps, to make palatable the unconvincing emotional attachment between the bride, Kat's half-sister Amy (Amy Adams), and groom, Edward (Jack Davenport).

Kat's actual reason to take a gigolo to a family wedding is to incite jealousy in her ex-fiancé Jeffrey (Jeremy Sheffield), Edward's best man. It turns out Jeffrey's moral sense has been eroded by his bad behavior, but Kat has to learn that tidy piece of gossip for herself.



Kat Ellis (DEBRA MESSING) and Nick Mercer (DERMOT MULRONEY), in the romantic comedy "The Wedding Date".

Some of the minor characters are disarming, including Kat's mother, Bunny (Holland Taylor), and step-father Victor (Peter Egan), both of whom care terribly about Kat's happiness. Taylor and Egan are recognizable from their lengthy television careers in Britain and the U.S. as well as from movies. Most recently, Taylor played the grandmother in the two *Spy Kids* movies, and Egan was in the PBS series, "The Inspector Lynley Mysteries."

Like most wedding movies, *The Wedding Date* promises more than it delivers. And like the wedding guests, I was glad when the whole affair was over so I could go home and sit around in my pajamas. Let's get real, people. This wedding fluff is pure, commercial fantasy. No stars for this film, which is now playing at Cinemark. **CW**