

# HOTEL RWANDA

## Hotel Manager Stands Tall Against Rebels

continued ▲ from Front

wondering what to do next. Fear hung heavily in the air. Paul, a reflective man who had a normal life up until now found himself in the worst crises of his life.

Tatiana, Paul's attentive wife, had a heart of gold and wanted to do more than just help her own family. While her husband was deep in thought about how to handle their frightening predicament, Tatiana had plans of her own. Finally, she confronted Paul with her troubled heart and told him they must "help their friends and neighbors."

A decade later, his face breaks into a big smile when he explains what she meant by their "friends and neighbors." Before he could consider her request that day, 1,200 frightened and confused locals jammed the hotel. Rusesabagina now had a top-ranked hotel full of poor and homeless Rwandans.

Hutu extremists ran from house to house, kicking the doors in and gunning down or taking the machete to all who were inside. Leaving family and friends outside the hotel meant certain death. From this moment on, this humble man would find himself continually arguing and negotiating with the murdering rebels. He bargained and pleaded with them to spare the lives of his guests.

Meanwhile, those in his care battered Paul with questions that he could not answer. Just keeping them fed and alive was a huge task for himself and his staff who felt awkward about treating local poor people as hotel guests.

Stuck alone with thousands of merciless Hutu's at his gates



Rusesabagina's resourcefulness saved the lives of his fellow Rwandans numerous times. At one point he instructed his friends to start calling everyone they knew all over the world. His plan worked. Soon leaders around the globe were responding. Officials from coun-

tries in most major continents pleaded with the rebels to stop and for Rwandan leaders do more than they were to curb all the violence. While the plan took weeks, Rusesabagina kept offering the rebels, diamond, cash, Cuban cigars, whiskey, and anything else he could scrounge up to buy more time. He even had to empty out the hotel safes and collected everything of value in the hotel and on the guests. Every piece of jewelry or bottle of whiskey might keep them alive for a few more hours.

The most chilling of his tales is the day that 10 UN peacekeepers were killed and the rest of the soldiers had to leave the country, along with anyone else who was not Rwandan. Paul's eyes stared out the hotel window as though he was back in Rwanda on that horrible day, when he spoke of it. It was as if he was watching thousands of angry Hutu's with machetes smashing through the glass doors of his hotel.

"They just packed up and left us there, alone to die. Surely they knew we would all be mercilessly slaughtered."

Paul well-remembers locking eyes with the UN leader as they were leaving. The man's head turned, he closed the vehicle door, and disappeared into the sunset. Prior to this, Paul said they felt safe with the UN there. "We were confident that peace would come." After the UN left, the genocide continued. During this time, a Tutsi or moderate Hutu was killed every eight and one half seconds, 24 hours a day for almost 100 days. Before it was over, nearly a million people would lose their lives.

"Bodies were everywhere. The



Don Cheadle (right) and Paul Rusesabagina, the man he portrays in Hotel Rwanda.

smell was so bad. Rwandan women left alive were raped in attempts to impregnate them with Hutu children," he said.

In the end, everyone in the hotel made it out alive.

While he shies away from taking credit or being honored as a hero, there is no question Paul is a very special person. He proved to the world that common, ordinary people can make a huge difference when it counts.

Today, some of his biggest worries are about his people, his country, and his continent. The poverty and health problems facing not only Rwanda, but also all of Africa weigh heavily upon his mind.

"Ten years ago my country adopted the phrase, 'Never Again,' regarding genocide, but now it is happening again in the Darfur region in Sudan," he said. "I also worry about AIDS and the economic crises it is having on Africa. They grow hand in hand and the world is not doing enough about the problems. The time to act is now. If we wait much longer a great deal of Africa will be gone."

## Movie Shines Light on Genocide

continued ▲ from Front

While rich white Europeans enjoy all the amenities of the Mille Collines, a five-star hotel in Kigali, Rwanda, the scene just blocks away was considerably different. Extremist Hutu Rebels began killing their own moderates and local Tutsis.

Soon all the guests and local whites were evacuated, including the United Nations peacekeeping forces. Fear and uncertainty filled the theater, as Nick Nolte's eyes meet those of Paul for what might be the last time. They viewer feels the "Why?" on the faces of those left behind.

The mighty UN troops under the command of Nick Nolte, climb in their vehicles and simply drive away. Nolte's eyes seem to scream back, "I am only following orders. There is nothing more I can do here."

Against all odds Rusesabagina fights for the lives of his hotel

guests on a moment-to-moment basis. Emotions run hot as Paul finds himself arguing, pleading, and negotiating, as he struggles with the UN and top officials from around the world. The Hotel Mille Collines stands alone, like a small boat in a sea of bodies. The film does a superb job of tugging on the hearts and emotions of the viewers.

Paul's wife Tatiana (Sophie Okonedo), a fiery passionate woman, will not let her husband's allegiance to his European employers cause him to forget his friends and neighbors. As soon as the hotel is emptied out, Tatiana brings in the fragile Rwandans who are afraid to return to their homes. Paul complains but soon takes on his newfound duty of caring for local citizens who are now his guests. The problems pile on, keeping the viewer on the edge of their seat.

The United Artists film, opening nationwide on Thursday, is directed

by Terry George who cuts a fine line between both the excitement and reality.


Hotel Rwanda takes us inside the lives of the real people who lived through this horrible act of genocide, as well as the almost million people who lost their lives. Fear grips the audience as minute by minute as the smell of death gets closer and closer to the hotel.

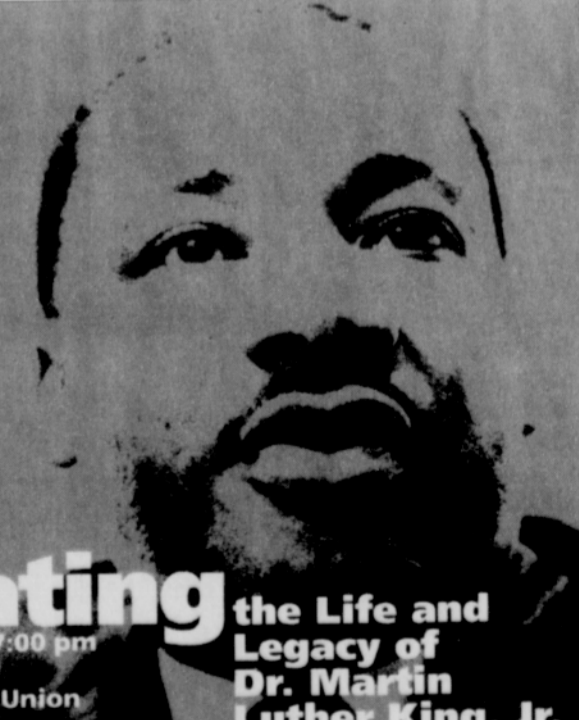
However, in a rare and welcome treat, moviegoers are spared the actual blood. George demonstrates how to create brutality without showing it to the point of turning away viewers.

Getting to see true stories of real life characters developing through the toughest of circumstances are extremely rare. Deservedly, the film has already won two prestigious awards: the American Film Institute's Audience and the People's Choice Award at the Toronto Film Festival.

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