

Hotel Colonial: The fine art of marketing movies

By Michael Giltz

Beginning today, Oaks Four West will be hosting a special preview of *Hotel Colonial*, the latest film from Hemdale, a small independent company that has been on a roll recently with the smashing successes of *Platoon* and *Hoosiers*.

Gainesville has been selected as a test market for *Hotel Colonial* and the principals involved — Producer Ira Barmak, Associate-Executive Producer Barry Rosenthal, Cinemax Marketing and Distribution and the actors and director — will be closely watching its performance here.

Audience survey cards will be handed out at the evening performances Friday and Saturday to monitor the film's appeal, advertising effectiveness, box office performance, etc.

Based on the results, they will consider refocusing the ad campaign, altering the release pattern, making editing changes or — as with *Platoon* — they will simply marvel at the movie's wild success and quickly open it in many theaters.

A more realistic prospect is that the test marketing of *Hotel Colonial* will allow them to pinpoint an audience and focus their energies on getting these people into the theater.

As Rosenthal said, "The chances of an independent having a *Platoon* — like Hemdale has — are like the chances of winning the lottery. You have a better chance of being struck by lightning."

The movie is about a young Italian-American (John Savage) who travels to Colombia to claim the body of his brother, an infamous terrorist (Robert Duvall).

After becoming romantically entangled with an assistant (Rachel Ward) at the Italian Embassy in



Bogota, he discovers that his brother is alive and soon finds himself caught in a "hellish nightmare of violence and disillusionment."

Though *Hotel Colonial* has the elements of thrillers and action/adventures, it also had substance that attracted caliber actors like Duvall and Savage. Though everyone interviewed was quick to stress that it was not an "art film" (of limited appeal to a general audience), the movie is obviously not standard studio fare.

"Hemdale is an interesting com-

pany," Rosenthal said "because they are filmmakers first and after they've made the movie they figure out how to market it, rather than letting their marketing division tell them what to make.

"An awful lot of studios today are ruled by their marketing division," he said. "They're told horror films are in this week so they go out and make five horror films and by then no one wants to see them."

Still, *Hotel Colonial* was not completely free of that eternal conflict between art and mass appeal.

Barmak, whose vision of the film seems to have been a straightforward action picture, was probably the counterbalance to the more complex aspirations of Italian Director Cinzia TH Torrini.

He calls the end result "serious entertainment" but adds, "It is not the picture I would have made myself, but it is satisfying . . . I think the reason we're bringing it to Gainesville is to show it to a student population who may be more intelligent and patient than I am. They may like the picture even better that I do."