

END OF THE SPEAR: REVIEW BY CHRISTIANITY TODAY

The story has been told in Christian circles for 50 years. In 1956, five missionaries were brutally murdered in the Ecuadorian jungle by members of the Waodani tribe they went to serve. And then something amazing happened; the killers became Christians.

The martyr's names—Nate Saint, Jim Elliot, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, and Roger Youderian—and their sacrifice galvanized a whole generation of missionaries who headed to foreign fields with the slain Elliot's words on their lips, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Now, a group of businessmen turned filmmakers is hoping the story will create a dialog between Christians and non-believers here at home.



Louie Leonardo as Mincayani

End of the Spear features the events of 1956 from the perspectives of the Waodani tribe leader, Mincayani, a quasi-fictional figure played by Louie Leonardo, and Nate Saint's son, Steve, played as a boy by Chase Ellison and as an adult by Chad Allen. Mincayani is a "composite character" primarily based on the real character Mincaye, who was one of the men who killed the missionaries. Shot in Panama using members of the Embera tribe for all but a few key roles, the movie is a stirring, lush production that elevates the visual storytelling portfolio of independent Christian movies.



Chad Allen played dual roles of Nate and Steve Saint

The story reaches back into Mincayani's childhood to show the violence that shaped his culture and mindset. He was probably around 20 years old when he first saw the yellow "woodbee" that was Nate Saint's small airplane buzzing above the trees. After a series of tentative contacts involving a bucket lowered from the plane by a long rope, Saint and his fellow missionaries decided to land and meet the natives face to face.

In their enthusiasm for reaching out to the Waodani people, the missionaries, especially Elliot, are depicted a bit like frat boys—goofy, exuberant, optimistic. On the beach that would become their graveyard, the men trade quips about their evangelistic efforts and ham it up for the camera that Saint was using to document their encounter. The result is a refreshing take on these men who've become like protestant saints but were, in reality, just young men embarking on a big adventure, albeit a holy one.

The interaction between the Waodani and the missionaries on the beach offers a few laugh-out-loud moments born out of awkward communication, but it inevitably grows grim. *End of the Spear* includes a recent revelation about what motivated the Waodani people to spear the missionaries—a lie told to cover an illicit romance—and doesn't turn its eyes from the resulting violence.



Waodani warriors on the hunt

During the killings, Mincayani seems remorseful for reasons that aren't clear until much later in the movie. In fact, the movie's main weakness is the way it leaves holes in the audience's understanding of some of the characters' motivations. For example, we don't learn the reasoning behind the Waodani's murderous habits until late in the movie. And something as basic as who's related to whom within the Waodani tribe is sometimes confusing. It's likely that some of these holes in the narrative are the result of the many revisions the script went through.

But, some of the holes are by design.