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FILM FESTIVAL
2010

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SHEFFIELD
DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL
2010

This is the story of the unhealthy meeting of two cultures: an indigenous tribe, the Yanomami and the western anthropologists who came to the Amazon to study them. Over three decades the Yanomami Indians were transformed from the "last Stone Age tribe" so prized by those anthropologists to the most exhaustively documented and filmed tribe on earth.

Napoleon Chagnon built his reputation – and sold over a million books – by claiming to demonstrate the innate ferocity of Yanomami. He dubbed them The Fierce People. He targeted world-famous geneticist Dr James Neel, who literally wanted their blood - he was on the lookout for a 'virgin soil' population and was keen to know how diseases spread through such populations. Coincidentally or otherwise, a serious and deadly outbreak of measles happened during their expedition, killing hundreds in its wake.

Jacques Lizot was a young prodigy and favoured student of the French intellectual icon, Claude Levi-Strauss. Like practically all other anthropologists in the field, they both distributed gifts, in order to ease their way into a tribe's affections. He brings steel tools, machetes, fishhooks and they tell him what they think he wants to hear." Lizot's gifts included shotguns, but his favours were not confined to the academic and his illegal sexual predations amongst the Yanomami were kept secret over years.

A leaked email from two top anthropologists notes: "This nightmarish story - a real anthropological Heart Of Darkness is beyond the imagining of even a Josef Conrad - though not, perhaps, a Josef Mengele."

SECRETS OF THE TRIBE

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