'Alive' celebrates triumph of the human spirit

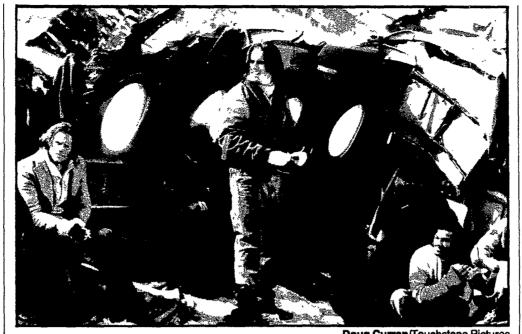
By Gerri Pare Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Based on Pier Paul Read's best seller, Alive (Touchstone) dramatizes a horrific 1972 plane crash that left surviving members of a rugby team from Uruguay stranded high in the Andes for 10 freezing weeks.

Eventually, they were compelled to face the unthinkable: eating the flesh of their dead companions so they could endure until rescued.

As directed by Frank Marshall, the movie downplays its gruesome aspects in favor of stressing the strength of the human spirit and the religious faith of the survivors. Nonetheless, this amazing story is at times gruelling to watch and the inspirational theme comes across heavy-handedly.

Although a few were unable to partake in cannibalism, most justified it, believing they would be risking suicide otherwise and that victims' souls lived on so their bodies should be used



Plane-crash survivors — from left — Bobby Francois (Jack Noseworthy), Pancho Delgado (Michael Tayles), Nando Parrado (Ethan Hawke), Coche Inclarte (Gordon Currie) and Carlitos Paez (Bruce Ramsay) wait to be rescued

for nourishment.

Vincent Spano portrays the rugby team captain who assumed leadership of the 27 survivors before injuries and an avalanche further reduced their ranks.

Ethan Hawke and Josh Hamilton are convincing as the bickering heroes who took it upon themselves to literally walk across the Andes into Chile so the 14 others could be rescued after 72 gruelling days.

Sometimes the movie feels that long, although its stirring climax is hardwon. The footage of the crash is heartstopping and the discreet use of gallows humor helps relieve some of the sheer misery that is so painstakingly depicted.

Due to a violent airplane crash with fatalities and restrained shots of cannibalism, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

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