

"Accidents" – Synopsis

(Running time: 14minutes 53 seconds)

Accidents is a tale of masculine relations going wrong in a work gang on a remote and spectacular New Zealand construction site.

Jack, a young city boy, finds himself out of place amongst his hardened work-mates. Chug is charismatic but a bully. Tamati helps Jack but keeps his distance and Ron the boss, although fair, is often absent from the site. When Ron is away things tend to go wrong.

Boredom fuels growing tensions within the gang. A series of accidents escalates these tensions until Jack's desire to take some action to prove his manhood brings about the most fateful accident of all.

The Director of "Accidents" – Paul Swadel

Paul Swadel is one of New Zealand's most accomplished young directors and has carved a niche for himself as maker of visually sophisticated and psychologically challenging films. His first short film, "A Little Death", was a finalist at the 1996 New Zealand Film & Television Awards and played at the 1996 Hamburg Film Festival.

A director of commercials in Auckland, his work also includes internationally successful digital films such as the "Supercollider" series (three 35mm shorts on guns, infection and the future of mankind) which played in film festivals and new media workshops around the world.

At present Paul is in post-production on another short film, "Like an Angel", which deals with the potentially lethal power inherent in sexuality and is producing "Infection", a digital short film he is making in collaboration with New Zealand's James Cunningham. Paul and James' first two digital films, "Deif" and "Blinder" were both finalists at SIGGRAPH and both have television sales to over twenty territories.

A driving force in underground cinema, Paul runs Short Fuse, a monthly screening of new works by local film-makers, and also lectures part time at the Intermedia Department of the Elam School of Fine Arts.

ACCIDENTS

DIRECTORS NOTES: ex paul swadel

Powertools & murder... yeah, - I'm attracted to the pressure-cooker setting of this story - 4 men doing hard labour, ostensibly as a work crew, somewhere in the middle of nowhere, NZ.

And the characters -

Jack, the greenhorn / apprentice / bumboy, ill suited to the job, disaffected youth as an easy target & readymade albatross in a hard man's world. Loyalty & betrayal in the guise of a skinny white boy. Stumbling in his fluoro orange boiler suit that's 10 sizes too big, Jack has the private goal of being a 'man' one day, which is why he sticks it out.

Tamati, the maori crane driver, the seemingly 'good maori fella' who quietly simmers beneath the surface, periodically venting his anger through conspicuous inaction. Urban, quiet, from a generation out of touch with his roots. He's done this sort of work all his life & although getting on in years, still possesses a rough physicality. A strictly tight stubbies & bumcrack man.

Chug, the surfie-esque arsehole, who frightens even himself with the efficiency of his physique, wit, and masterful aggravational skills.... to unfortunate personal effect. Hard edged playfulness on a chassis of undeniable physicality. Chug wears his singlet on his head with the attitude of a street corner window washer. A sunburnt nostrils kind of guy... his insolent swagger is a sign of inner blankness.

Ron, the weathered foreman with a lot on his mind - the blackboard upon which the unpleasant scrawlings of the other characters are written. Ron's the rollie-smoking boss-man, who wears a dark blue overall tightly zipped - a symbol of his transcendence of manual labour. He's been around long enough to think he's seen it all.... Commands respect for being capable of conducting a cellphone conversation while lifting a heavy pneumatic drill with his spare hand.

All horny handed sons of toil, likeable in their own ways but all flawed - a nasty cocktail when push comes to shove.

I'm attracted to the context of 'accidents', a wholly male world where communication is dysfunctional, where the putdown is king, where physicality reigns, where any sign of weakness is an invitation to psychological violence... or worse.

How far is too far? ...morality blurs. Can a murder be 'accidental'?

I envisage 'ACCIDENTS' as an unlikely kiwi version of 'Das Boot' set in the sub Ruapehu wilderness & piquently tinged with Fassbinder-esque idealisation, debasement & all-round abrasiveness. Hot sun, sweaty bodies in close proximity, a knife edge guttural sexuality pervading. Homophobia, bravado, jackhammers, fiery heat, mosquitos, the everpresent power of the river below & the mountains above, & the ridiculously deep hole they're digging as a collective human machine - a common pit for their building raw aggression. Glorious & terrible 'masculine sadistic thrust' that climaxes in a sacrifice.

action, inaction, conflict building to a head & 4 characters who are forced to change their handholds on reality through a humanly revealing collective experience - **ACCIDENTS**.

Visual Treatment:

The spaces the characters inhabit alternate between dense claustrophobia & alienating sparseness. On the one hand the audience & characters are encased in hot corrugated iron (the smoko room an immovably static camera), fire, or torrents of water (out of control handheld). And on the outside, the gorge, melting sun bleaching everything, the haze of rising dust from the worksite - all underpinned psychologically by quietly efficient steadycam - choreographed with ensemble cast blocking. Hellish, paranoid & abrasive.

The only respite for the main character, Jack, is, ironically, 15 metres down in the womb-like space of the shaft, dark, wet, cool - noisy as hell, and dangerous to boot - but free from the weighted glances of the other men. ACCIDENTS is about cabin fever - there's no escape from the elements & no escape from physical proximity or mutual scrutiny.

To pull this off I envisage working with a tiny, very dedicated crew (the tradeoff for a longer shooting period). And back it up with a realistic period of workshop, rehearsal & camera blocking. Accidents is very much the 'hertzog challenge' - harsh location, dawn to dusk shooting, intensive setups, stunt work, & my reputation as a 3:1 ratio man to uphold (8:1, maybe).

SPECIFIC NOTES:

smoko room

- tight little shack with a couple of high dusty barred windows. A single bulb. On the one hand the smoko room is the only respite from sun, dirt & dust. On the other it's a cramped sweatbox.

femenising touches

- the day in, day out absence of women forces the men to draw femininity from themselves & each other. Yeah, there's pin ups & stick books that none of the men want to get caught peering at. There's the naked ladies on the playing cards... but also a floral table cloth. The crane has it's name, Kirsty, painted along the side.

oppressive awareness

- everything has it's double, or correlative. The rail bridge has a road bridge up the river. The river has the sky. The moving camera shifts between image & reflection. A freight train crashes overhead... a distant car leaves a veil of dust. I intend to ironise the shot reverse shot structure, enforcing the possession of the gaze, and intensify the explosive deep space between the men. An ensemble of four allows for every moving wide shot to exclude one person - Chug blagging a fag, Tamati in his crane, Jack skiving, Ron coming & going. Action & inaction, networks of gazes, with the steady-cam a 'stand in' for the excluded watcher in the group. The conflict between identification & alienation will be deployed to breaking point at several junctures.

flash words on masculine imagery

- I've cast across ages so that I can film a whole lot of sweaty musculature without the film seeming overly homoerotic. Who says male sexuality is a preserve for 'gay films' solely? I'm attracted to the Hitchcock credo of shooting 'a sex scene like a murder & a murder like sex scene'. There's definitely a murder in this film, and the lack of women condenses the anxiety and pleasure of sweating, burning & damaged masculine flesh into a state of stultifying tension.

Male sexuality in a male world? All of the male desires are contaminated with aggression, and are explicitly associated with power, domination, violence & death as defining conditions. And there's no redemption - just an abyss of ambivalence... from which there is no escape (not for CHUG, and mentally, emotionally not for the others).

ACCIDENTS in definitely non-utopian, from the workaday master / slave dialectic of ritualized subjugation, & physical idealisation, through to the inevitability of betrayal. CHUG becomes a sacrificed virile monster in this contained male world. The 'intellectuals collude & drop him down a hole in the ground. Any glimpses of self awareness in this dimension make all of the characters extremely uncomfortable & paranoid.

Maybe my interpretation begins to take on the aura of dodgy dealings in the Afrika corps?... ACCIDENTS does have the isolation, pervading personal danger & masculine code of war films or prison films. It is very Genet. The sad fact here is that these guys are trying to make a living. It's a mundane hell. It's a job. etc.

jack bursts into flames (& a turning point ensues)

- this is major scene -
the turning point with ensuing downtime that returns Jack more of a 'man'. On the one hand the horror of the conflagration bonds him with the group - he's been through some shit too now. On the other it suggests a strong psychological change in him. He comes back with the groggy seed of a singular purpose. The fire scene is about creating a psychological space from whence the final murder will be earned.

I can see that Jack in flames will be a difficult & dangerous to effect. I'm not a fan of the 'man who runs in what looks like a burning sleeping bag' cliché.

To this end I've envisaged things slightly differently from John's script - with diesel as the accelerant. So we see Jack freak as black smoke pours up from his smouldering overalls. And it becomes obvious to him, & Chug, that a flashpoint will be reached where he'll explode into flames. The image of Jack running black faced like a smoking brand, then inexorably igniting is at once comic, & at the same time horrific. A beat & he hisses into the gorge below.

In this way he'll be totally smoke blacked but not too seriously injured - the overalls being the sole fatality. Jack returns to the site with a fresh pair, still far too big, but this time with his chest bared & the overall-arms tied at his waist, revealing recently healed flesh.

On the dream sequence. On the one hand I'm loathed to leave the site. On the other I see the convelescent / delerium scene as a pacing device that supports a change in his character. We've talked at length as a team & decided to leave it in, but to lose it in editing if it's not necessary. A delerious burning sun / disembodied voice is a further possibility we've discussed.

CHRONOLOGY**Paul Swadel**

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 new zealand

Paul currently trades as **SUPERCOLLIDER** in partnership with computer animator & Director James Cunningham.

Paul is a TV Commercial Director represented by the **BLACK STUMP FILM Co.** in Auckland.

Film: production slate**Development**

FALLING HELICOPTERS: Director: feature script with Writer Geoff Houtman.

BINARY RACE: Producer: CGI feature script with Writer Glen Standing & Director James Cunningham.

Pre-Production

ACCIDENTS: Director: 35mm theatrical short written by John Cranna. Funded by NZ Film Commission. Exec Produced by MAP: Stuart McKenzie, Miranda Harcourt & Neil Pardington. Prod: Matt Horrocks & James Wallace.

INFECTION: Producer: 35mm computer generated theatrical short directed by James Cunningham. Funded by NZ Film Commission. Exec Produced by Morrison Grieve: Bruce Morrison, Bruce Sheridan & William Grieve. A SuperCollider Production.

Production

LIKE AN ANGEL: Director: 35mm stereo theatrical post produced digitally. funded through Screen Innovation Production Fund. Creative NZ. A SuperCollider Production.

Post-Production

BLINDER & DELF: Producer: 2 x digital 35mm stereo theatricals directed by James Cunningham. Cine-resolution & stereo sound post for national distribution, 1998. NZ Film Commission. Both SuperCollider Productions.

Junkets

1998: attended VIPER - a premiere Electronic Arts & Multimedia Festival in Lucerne, Switzerland where 1996 35mm digital datastorm SUPERCOLLIDER - INFECTION screened in competition.

1997/8: received substantial professional development funding from Creative NZ to attend 4 Media Art festivals in Europe (IMPAKT, TRANSMEDIA & European Media Art Festival - Germany, & WRO'97 Biennale - Warsaw) and undertake an electronic & media arts research itinerary (ZKM : Centre for Media Art & Technology - Karlsruhe, Munich Film Academy, Ex Machina & Ecole de Lumiere - Paris).

1996: attended the 11th Festival Internacional de Arte Electronica in Sao Paulo, Brazil, with 3 'SUPERCOLLIDER' films screening in competition.

1996: selected as an oceania representative to attend 'Visual Arts & Technology in the 21st Century': a global digital programme in Tokyo comprising 56 participants from 42 countries & hosted by the Japanese Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Also one of 6 panellists to participate in the United Nations symposium that closed the programme. (ref article: BOSOZOKU NO SWADCHAN: The Big Picture Magazine, apr. 1997).

1992-3: 5 month research trip to Kyoto, Osaka & Tokyo investigating nonlinear technology. resident artist (digital) on emc2 at Time Space Togi, Kyoto.

selected work: FILM

BLINDER 1998. Producer.

digital 35mm stereo theatrical
international distribution, marketing & post production funding: NZ Film Commission.
a character based CGI animated short directed by James Cunningham.

BLINDER premiered with GODZILLA (Columbia-Tristar) & had a National run w/- IN THE COMPANY OF MEN (Essential Films) 1998. Berlin TRANSMEDIALE, Melbourne International Film Fest. Sydney International Film Fest. SIGGRAPH International, Los Angeles. Prix Ars Electronica, Austria, & Hamburg International Film Fest. 1998. Television sales for 25 territories under negotiation (nzfc).

ref: Pavement, Lava articles & Drum, Backch@t, & Ice Tv items

DELTA (digitally engineered life forms) 1998. Producer.

digital 35mm stereo theatrical
international distribution, marketing & post production funding: NZ Film Commission.
Finalist: 1997 NZ Film & TV Awards (digital category)
a character based CGI animated theatrical short directed by James Cunningham.

Finalist - SIGGRAPH (LA), USVA - 2nd prize (Philadelphia), International Biennale Film + Arc. Graz (Austria). Random Access Memory digital NZ programme - San Francisco, ISEA (Chicago), London Electronic Arts & ARTEC (UK). NZ International Film Fest (Moving Image Centre NZ Shorts & International Animation Progs.) Berlin Transmediale'98. Television sales for 25 territories under negotiation (nzfc).

(ref: Pavement, Big Picture, Prodesign Magazine articles & Max Tv, Ice Tv & TV3 Nightline, Havoc items)

SUPERCOLLIDER 1996.

3 x 'guerrilla' 35mm stereo digital shorts:

SUPERCOLLIDER: GUNS, INFECTION & BOUNDARIES OF MANKIND

producer / director / editor w/- Marc Swadel assisting (Swad Bros.)

generated on avid nonlinear. funded by Creative NZ. Arts Council of New Zealand.

European (digital only) distribution: MedienOperativ, Berlin.

Film distribution: European Media Art Film Workshop, Osnabruck.

(ref: Pavement, Critical Mass, Monica, Art Nz articles & Max Tv, Tv3 'Sunday' & Short Erz series).

1998: Jean Paul Gaultier - New Generation / Chroma. (Melbourne Fashion Week).
VIPER (Switzerland). EMAF International tour (NZ)

1997: WRO97 Media Art Biennale - festival wizualnuch - realizacji oklomuzycznych & broadcast on Telewizja Wroclaw (Warsaw, Poland). IMPAKT Festival - Utrecht: Panorama Programme, cablecast & touring prog. (Netherlands). EMAF. European Media Art Festival - Osnabruck & touring highlights package (Germany).
13 Irresponsible Shorts (NZ tour). Festival du Court Metrage / Clermont Ferrand (France). Hamburg International Short Film Fest., Random Access Memory digital NZ programme - San Francisco, ISEA (Chicago), London Electronic Arts & AFTEC (UK). Festival of new Film - SPLIT (Croatia). International Biennale Film + Arc. Graz (Austria).

1998: NZ International Film Fest. (M. I. C. International Shorts Programme). Mediopolis Festival. (Berlin, Germany). Metropolitan Art Space (Tokyo, Japan). 11th Festival International de Arte Electronica & TVE broadcast (Sao Paulo, Brazil). Filmfestival ANTWERP: KINO-EYE2 Programme (Netherlands).

A LITTLE DEATH 1993/5.

16mm short.

writer / co-director w/- S. Perkins.

James Wallace Production. funded by the QEII Arts Council of New Zealand.

Finalist: 1995 NZ Film & TV Awards (short film category)

NZ Film Commission '5 for 5' programme: Unexpected Encounters.

1996 Hamburg Film Festival. 1996 Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space, Exposures

International Film Fest. Brisbane. American Playboy Channel. Interview & inclusion in Max Tv 'NZ Shorts' Programme, 1997.

(ref: 'Don't skimp on the short ends' article, Planet Magazine #16, also reviewed in Pavement Magazine). Critical Mass, '96.

ZEROGRAPHIC 1990.

16mm short.

co-producer w/- Glen Standing (Dir.) Minute Productions.

funded by the QEII Arts Council of New Zealand.

EROTIC FRIGIDAIRE 1989.

16mm documentary short.

writer / director / dop

funded by the QEII Arts Council of New Zealand.

regularly screened at Henry Moore Foundation, London.

distribution: Ruder-Finn, N.Y. (ref: article Illusions Magazine, # 15)

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Matthew Horrocks, Producer

Matthew Horrocks' credits while at James Wallace Productions (1996-1999) include Co-Producer of *Pacific Ikon*, a TVNZ Work of Art documentary on painter Pat Hanly directed by Stewart Main. In 1998 he was Line Producer of *As Dreams Are Made On* and Producer of *The Day Morris Left*, both Creative NZ short films. In 1999 he produced the 35mm short film *Accidents*, directed by Paul Swadel. *Accidents* has been accepted into the New Zealand, Melbourne and Venice Film Festivals. Outside of James Wallace Productions he has been involved with many other film projects, including Production Assistant on *When Love Comes* and an ongoing involvement with the Moving Image Centre.

Accidents

Opening credits

James Wallace Productions Ltd
presents

A Film Directed by Paul Swadel

Produced by Matthew Horrocks and James Wallace

Written by John Cranna

"Accidents"

End Credits

Screenplay by John Cranna
Based the short story by John Cranna

Chug	Marton Csokas
Jack	Marek Sumich
Tamati	Rawiri Paratene
Ron	Frank Whitten

Production Manager	Alex Cole-Baker
Production Assistant	Katie Flannigan
First Assistant Director	Emma Cross
Second Assistant Director	Tim Hansen
Location Manager	Clayton Tikao
DOP	Phil Burchell
Focus Puller	Dean McCarroll
Clapper/Loader	Raj Patel
Art Director	Justine King
Location Sound Recordist	Mark Swadel
Boom Operator	Jose Lobos
Make Up	Vanessa Hurley
Prosthetics	Tom Merito
Pyrotechnics Advisor	David Howard
Pyrotechnics	Richard Mangos

Unit	Mark Storey & Sharon Boulderson
Catering	Krista Seh
Stills Photographer	Craig Wright
Sponsorship	Natasha Christie
Stuntsman	Victor Beksinski
Continuity	Monique Knight
Editor	Peter Evans
Camera Equipment	Panavision
Laboratory	The Film Unit

Executive Producers
MAP Film Productions Ltd

Funded by The New Zealand Film Commission

© James Wallace Productions Ltd 1999

Accidents

A 15minute 35mm short film funded by the New Zealand Film Commission
Screen ratio: 1:1:85
Sound: Digital Dolby
Film Speed: 24 fps
Tape Speed: 25 fps

Producers: Matthew Horrocks & James H. Wallace
Writer: John Cranna
Director: Paul Swadel

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Boredom fuels growing tensions within the gang. A series of accidents escalates these tensions until Jack's desire to take some action to prove his manhood brings about the most fateful accident of all.

GUERRILLAS IN THE MIST

AN experienced young crew pushed athletic and aesthetic limits to shoot James Wallace Productions' 35mm theatrical short *Accidents* (funded by NZFC) exec produced by MAP).

Shooting in the isolation of Ruapehu's Makatote Gorge, director Paul Swadel paced cast Marek Sumich, Martin Cokas, Rawiri Paratene and Frank Whitten through a week of abrasive action/drama.

Accidents tells of masculine relationships going wrong in a work gang on a remote construction site, and was adapted by writer John Granna from his anthology of short stories, *Visitors*.

"We needed to locate heavy machinery and dig a 6m shaft in the heart of a DoC blue-duck sanctuary," said co-producer Mathew Horrocks, "then push the envelope with extensive pyro in the gorge."

All the paperwork accounted



for DP Phil Burchell masterminded two guerilla units shooting through treacherous weather conditions.

"The final frames rolled through the gate as darkness and rain swallowed us deep in the gorge" said Swadel. "Our main camera had just vacated the viaduct hundreds of feet above and after three minutes of silence, the shadow of a

freight train thundered across.

"At the shoot's end, Rawiri Paratene quietly revealed that the late NZFC kaumātua, Matiu Mareikura, had looked after the viaduct for 15 years, and that he had been praying to him every shooting day, to keep us safe."

Philwood (above) on location in the Gorge. Burchell and Swadel.