

**Paladin and Unison Films
in association with Radius Films
present**



BOY

Written and Directed by Taika Waititi

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Running Time: 90 minutes

Rating: not rated

Website: boythefilm.com

**BOY
CREDITS**

Writer/Director: Taika Waititi

Producers : Ainsley Gardiner, Cliff Curtis, Emanuel Michael

Co-Producer : Merata Mita

Associate Producer: Richard Fletcher

Production Company : Whenua Films, Unison Films

In Association With : The New Zealand Film Production Fund Trust,
The New Zealand Film Commission, NZ On Air,
Te Mangai Paho.

Running Time : 90 minutes

Starring : James Rolleston
Te Aho Eketone-Whitu
Taika Waititi

Director of Photography : Adam Clark
Editor : Chris Plummer
Music : The Phoenix Foundation
Production Designer : Shayne Radford
Hair and Makeup: Danelle Satherley
Costume Designer : Amanda Neale
Casting: Tina Cleary




BOY

ABOUT THE STORY

The year is 1984, and on the rural East Coast of New Zealand “Thriller” is changing kids’ lives. Inspired by the Oscar nominated *Two Cars, One Night*, *BOY* is the hilarious and heartfelt coming-of-age tale about heroes, magic and Michael Jackson.

BOY is a dreamer who loves Michael Jackson. He lives with his brother **ROCKY**, a tribe of deserted cousins and his Nan. Boy’s other hero, his father, **ALAMEIN**, is the subject of Boy’s fantasies, and he imagines him as a deep sea diver, war hero and a close relation of Michael Jackson (he can even dance like him). In reality Alamein is an inept, wannabe gangster who has been in jail for robbery.

When Alamein returns home after seven years away, Boy is forced to confront the man he thought he remembered, find his own potential and learn to get along without the hero he had been hoping for.



BOY

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Taika Waititi's *BOY* is New Zealand's most successful local film of all time, a low-budget, intimately scaled, and completely independent production that nonetheless managed to capture the imagination of the entire nation, and then went on to win both prizes and acclaim internationally. Set in a rural Maori community in the scenic Bay of Plenty on New Zealand's eastern coast, the film charts the journey of an 11 year-old boy (whose name happens to be "Boy") as he comes to know and understand the adult world he is about to enter. Boy (played by newcomer James Rolleston) invents memories of his long-absent father, Alamein (played by Waititi), and brightens his existence by imagining—and vicariously enjoying—his dad's fictionalized exploits. But, when Alamein returns home, Boy is forced to see his world-- and his hero--as they are, and not as he wants them to be.

BOY is based on Waititi's Academy Award-nominated short film, *Two Cars, One Night* and, like the short, it is somewhat autobiographical. "Like Boy," Waititi says, "I draw a lot of inspiration from true and imagined memories. This story is personal in that I believe you must write what you know in order to create honest art. Some events are true, some true of other people, most are imagined." He continues: "The most important part that is true is that I grew up in a household like that--many kids and not many adults. Apart from that, the rest of the story is made up. A few of the characters are based on people I grew up around but really, no one specific. I'm quite careful not to blatantly steal someone and make them a character. All the adults in the film are mixtures of people and their personalities, including mine."

BOY is more inspired by *Two Cars, One Night*, than it is an adaptation of it. "They really are completely different stories and films," he stresses. "I knew I wanted to make another film in my backyard. I did, however, pay a little homage to the short by taking part of a scene from it and putting it in the feature. I didn't really treat it as an adaptation." Due to the enormous success of the short, Waititi was invited to the Sundance Writer's Lab, where he work-shopped the *BOY* script with Frank Pierson

("Dog Day Afternoon"), David Benioff ("Troy"), Naomi Foner ("Running On Empty), and Susan Shilliday ("Legends Of The Fall"). Of the process, Waititi says, "the labs are a sort of intensified version of asking a friend to read your script and tell you what they think. It's a great place to get focused on the script because there are very few distractions. They lock you away in the mountain resort with a large group of great writers, all with different styles and backgrounds, and make you talk with them about your story. You don't take notes or work on your script, you just chill out and talk, and later you might take a few of the resonant ideas and use them. I didn't work on the script for another year and a half so I'm not sure what I remembered but definitely there were things that stayed with me."

When Waititi says he made BOY "in his own back yard," he is not exaggerating. He filmed it in the very town where he grew up, in the actual house in which he lived. On the surface, it's a location full of contradictions. It's called "The Bay of Plenty," but the people who live there seem to have so little; the natural surroundings are beautiful, but the man-made world is not. In describing the place and how it helped him shape the characters and drama he created Waititi says, "the area where my family lives is what most people in the U.S. would describe as poor, or poverty stricken, but it's not at all. People have money and they get by quite well, but their idea of what is important and the kinds of material things they need are very different."

He continues: "they don't care about Apple products or designer clothes. They are very, very real and down to earth. It's a close community where people help each other and provide for one another. We live off the land and the sea. Most food is hunted or fished or grown. Nobody has expensive cars because there's absolutely no need for them. There's no cellphone coverage either, because we don't need cellphones there. So, life becomes 'simple.' But, there is never a dull moment and people are always busy. It is this amazing world that I wanted to capture and show on screen. It's a perfect backdrop for this story."

In addition to setting BOY geographically in his childhood home, Waititi also set the film in the very era in which he was raised. The film takes place in the summer of 1984, at the height of the Michael Jackson "Thriller" craze, and it is Boy's fascination with Jackson that informs many of his fantasies and, as a result, much of the film's

boisterous and energetic visual style. Waititi confesses that, like BOY, he and his friends were obsessed with Michael Jackson as kids. In describing what this American superstar meant to a Maori adolescent growing up on the other side of the world, Waititi observes, quite simply, that “he wasn't white. It was cool,” he says, “to see someone of color doing amazing things. We could relate to him because we thought he was a bit like us. He also appealed because he created a world for himself that any child would if they had millions of dollars. He had zoo animals and a railroad in his backyard and Pepsi coming out of the faucets and wore crazy clothes. He could also dance like someone from another planet. Why wouldn't you think he was cool?”

In addition to worshipping Jackson, and trying to emulate him--a scene where moves like the singer to impress the girl he has a crush on is particularly funny—Boy also believes that, when his father returns, he will take him to see Jackson perform live. On more than one occasion, he also imagines himself and his cohorts living inside of Jackson's iconic music videos, “Thriller,” and “Beat It.” These musings provide the film with a few extended musical sequences—Michael Jackson numbers as performed by 11 year-old amateur Maori kids with little talent—that are far from the original, but wonderful to watch nonetheless.” More than anything, they speak to the natural think that the natural creativity of Boy, and show how his fantasies and dreams help him survive all the difficulties he faces. “Kids have a way of seeing the world,” says Waititi, “that blends fantasy and reality. Adults do it too but they are more reserved. I like trying to understand how kids reinterpret the world around them, especially if it is within dark scenarios and an adult- controlled environment. I didn't have as defined a fantasy world as Boy's when I was his age, though I was always fantasizing.”

Fantasy also plays an important part in Alamein's life. When we first see him, it is through Boy's eyes, and he is playing a number of roles appropriated from other cultures (e.g., Hollywood adventures, Samurai films.) Since Alamein has been away for years, these images are all Boy has to work with. However, when Alamein returns (from prison, as it turns out), he is every bit the dreamer that his 11 year-old son is, imagining himself the leader of a gang, and harboring fantasies of buried treasure and assorted other get-rich-quick schemes. It's as if the Maori culture has been “colonized,” in ways both good and bad, by the outside world.

As Waititi explains it, “Alamein is based on a generation of people who were bought

up to be ashamed of their culture. They were punished at school for speaking their language and were constantly told that to be Maori meant you were stupid. And so a lot of them moved from the country to the cities and started or joined gangs; clubs where they could congregate and feel like a family. They looked after each other and made each other feel wanted, and as much as gangs have changed and become horrible and embarrassing parts of society, some were originally started with positive intentions. (Incidentally, the origins of the L.A. gangs are very similar.)

“So,” he continues, “all of these guys, and girls too, started living fantasy lives where they changed their names and became less Maori, preferring to identify with outlaws, rebels, and romantic heroes like Gunslingers, Native Americans, famous conquerors, and Samurai. It wasn't because they were hammered with all these influences at the movies or on TV; they read books and sought out people they wanted to be like. Ironically, Maori history has some incredibly strong leaders and heroes, including extremely famous warriors who led armed resistance movements in the 10 year war against the British empire. On a positive note, this gang generation had a huge turn-around in the late 80's and most went back to their Maori roots.”

Given the role's significance, Waititi didn't originally envision casting himself as Alamein. As he recalls it, “a lot of guys, including friends, had tried out for it, and I brought some of them back about 5 or 6 times before deciding to do it myself. The role is very different from what Maori get to play in that it is more of a comic role; the mix of buffoonery and drama meant that a background in comedy was a benefit. I had been an actor for many years before I started directing so I didn't really have a problem doing it. I was also able to direct the kids in the moment, face to face, within the scene, and also adjust their performances or dialogue while we acted. So it actually became an advantage. It's not something I'd do too often because of the strain it places on you creatively. You have to split your brain into 3 different parts, one each for acting, writing, and directing. You're always thinking from one of those directions.”

Working so closely with his young co-stars, both on camera and behindit, Waititi was able to reinforce the similarities between Boy and Alamein—something that is already quite evident in his script. By simultaneously revealing the child’s dawning maturity and the father’s hopeless immaturity, Waititi shows us that Boy is really the man, while his father is really the boy. “It’s a classic dynamic,” he says. “The child who fathers the parent, the adult who seeks direction from the child. I like these sorts of relationships and have always been interested in the ways that families interact and navigate each other. I think we really don’t know our parents and vice-versa. We are aware of them, but we can never know what they are really thinking, their hopes and dreams, and who they really are. I wanted to examine a father and two sons trying to figure each other out.”

Another thing that unites BOY and his father is their sense of loss: Boy losing his illusions about his father, and also losing his beloved pet goat; Alamein never recovering from the loss of his wife (and losing his money more than once); and, perhaps, the Maori people losing some of their heritage and legacy. Waititi agrees that the idea of loss is central to his film. “Everyone has lost something,” he says, “and is trying to replace it with someone, or something else. I think Boy’s journey is particularly interesting in that he has replaced his mother with a pet goat, The loss of his mother has forced him to believe he has always been like his father. In reality, Rocky, who has replaced himself with a sort of dangerous monster because he blames himself for her death, is more like Alamein. Alamein is trying to replace his wife AND children with a cruddy bag of money buried somewhere in a field.”

He continues: “As Boy realizes he is more like his mother, he moves towards her, while Rocky moves towards Alamein. So you have these shifting loyalties and loves. Alamein, in turn, must move closer to the truth that he’s been avoiding this whole time - that he was never there. He also surrounds himself with losers and weaklings in order to make him feel more like a winner and a leader. In actual fact, he is the biggest loser and weakling in the film.”

For all this talk of loss, and despite the fact that the lives depicted are sometimes sad (and, more than once, very much so), BOY is nonetheless a comedy, and has an overwhelmingly light, fanciful, buoyant tone and style. Considering that Waititi roots

are in comedy—he did stand-up and improve at key junctures in his performing career--this may not be too surprising. “I can't really handle depressing films about depressing subjects,” he confesses. “I would prefer to make something that pulls an audience in with a light, welcoming tone, and then bash them with little moments of drama and real, human emotion. This is truer to real life, I believe, that we are all balancing on a fine thread that lies between drama and comedy. You have to have both in your life to keep sane and balanced, and that's why I like to tell stories that reside in both worlds.”

Along with Jemaine Clement and Brett Mackenzie, with whom he collaborated extensively (as writer and director) on the hit television, “Flight of the Conchords,” Waititi is in the vanguard of a new comedy movement emanating from New Zealand. In describing his kinship with his fellow “Kiwi” artists, and characterizing the New Zealand brand of humor evidenced by *BOY* and his other work, Waititi says, “New Zealand comedy has, for many years, been quite dark and sometimes disturbing. We like good ghost stories and funny thrillers. My films are probably more at the lighter end than typical N.Z. stuff, and the “Conchords” even more so.”

He goes on to say that, “there are a bunch of us in N.Z. who have all collaborated in different combinations and continue to do so. I think our style is a development of the influences we had growing up - a mixture of the best of British and American comedy, and to some extent having the ability to look at things from afar, like a tiny country in the South Pacific. When you're an outsider looking in, you develop more of a subjective comic view; which is why a lot of the gags originate in observational comedy. I think we see things that Americans might not. I can't really classify my films in terms of comedy because of the dramatic element. They are comedies that aren't always funny, sometimes poetic and a bit artsy. Maybe it's art-comedy.”

Acknowledging that most of the most successful and highly regarded films exported from New Zealand until now have been heavily dramatic, Waititi observes, “I think that New Zealand as a whole, needs to develop and explore more styles with its films. We have found that a certain style works and have stuck with it for a while. I really didn't want to make a film where a kid dies or gets kidnapped or people seriously abuse each other or everyone is depressed. We have a lot of depression in New Zealand and it's important to talk about it, but there are other ways, and comedy is, in

my opinion, a really effective tool for bringing attention to social issues too. “

Waititi doesn't only leaven the more dramatic qualities of BOY with comedy. He also develops a distinctive visual style that deftly combines sight gags, quick subjective glimpses of his characters' thoughts, full-on fantasy sequences, drawings and animations, to convey the inner life and irrepressible spirit of his protagonists. It is a style reminiscent of such masters of youthful hijinx as Richard Lester in his 60's heyday, early Francois Truffaut, or to cite a more recent example, of Danny Boyle. (In fact, BOY has already drawn comparisons to both “The 400 Blows” and “Slumdog Millionaire”). Explaining his highly visual orientation, Waititi notes, “my background is painting. My father is a painter and when I left school that's what I decided to do. So, I spent most of my twenties making art. I drew all the animations in the movie and some of the other art within the sets.”

“There's no particular style that I'm influenced by,” he continues, “though I guess the beginning of BOY is very similar to the beginning of ‘Jules et Jim --at least in my mind it is-- so I suppose I like things that feed you a lot of information and layers of visual and aural stimulation, but at the same time have a simplicity about them. Although I use things like animation and other visual styles, I think my films are pretty simple. Having said that, I did spend about a month trying to get the first 5 minutes right!”

The extraordinary success enjoyed by BOY, both at home and abroad, attests to the fact that Waititi must have gotten more than its first five minutes right. Asked to account for its success, the writer/director/star can only say, “I think the story is honest and is not pretending to be what it isn't. For instance, we had money set aside to use Michael Jackson songs, including ‘Thriller.’ This is before he died, so it was a little cheaper, but when we looked at the cut, with the music, it didn't feel right, it didn't feel authentic. I think for a small film like this having a gigantic song like ‘Thriller’ or ‘Beat It’ might pull the audience out of the experience. It just felt like we needed to show those Michael Jackson moments with a little more honesty. So I think the film really speaks that way, it's an honest approach to a story about a broken family. But told in a slightly whimsical and child-like manner.”



BOY
ABOUT THE CAST

Boy – James Rolleston

James was 11 when he auditioned for a role in **BOY**. He was originally cast in a much smaller role but when Taika realized his initial choice for the lead had grown up a little too much to play the pre-pubescent Boy, he and the casting director brought James to Waihou Bay for a workshop with a number of the other young cast.

He was cast. On Monday he started acting for the first time in his life. By Tuesday he was asking if lines were believable. He is a natural; smart, open and innocent but with enough experience in his life to draw from for the role.

James is also a talented young sportsman who plays representative rugby.

Rocky – Te Aho Eketone Whitu

Te Aho was born and bred in Minginui, a small farming community outside Rotorua. His hobbies are motorbikes, hunting, fishing and rugby and when he grows up he wants to be Richie McCaw (All Black).

BOY ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

DIRECTOR/WRITER/ACTOR – Taika Waititi



Also going by the surname Cohen, Taika is of Te-Whanau-a-Apanui descent and hails from the Raukokore region of the East Coast. He has been involved in the arts for several years, as a visual artist, actor, writer and director.

Taika's first short film, *'Two Cars, One Night'*, was nominated for an Academy Award in 2005.

His next short, *'Tama Tu'* about a group of Maori soldiers in Italy during World War II won a string of international awards, making it also eligible for Oscar nomination. His first feature, *Eagle vs. Shark*, was released internationally in 2007 after selling to Miramax on the basis of a trailer.

As a performer and comedian, Taika has been involved in some of New Zealand's most innovative and successful productions. He has a strong background in comedy writing and performing and with fellow comedian Jemaine Clement (*Flight of the Conchords*), has won New Zealand's top comedy award, the "Billy T" and also the "Spirit of the Fringe Award" in Edinburgh.

He regularly does stand up gigs around the country and in 2004 launched his solo production; *Taika's Incredible Show* which wasn't that incredible but had a cool poster, which he drew himself. Taika has been critically acclaimed for his dramatic abilities. In 2000 he was nominated for Best Actor at the Nokia Film Awards for his role in the Sarkies Brothers' film *Scarflies*.

Taika also plays Boy and Rocky's father, Alamein in the film.

PRODUCERS

Cliff Curtis



Cliff Curtis is of Te Arawa and Ngati Hauiti descent. Cliff is best known as an actor in both New Zealand and in the U.S.

He had his first taste behind the camera as the Director of *The Rocks* a half hour short film made as part of *Mataku* South Pacific Pictures and Four Winds Productions for television. He later joined with Ainsley to start Whenua Films in 2004 to produce Taika's second short film, *Tama Tu*. Whenua Films have since operated the NZFC's short film initiative in 2005/2006 and have produced Taika's first feature *Eagle vs Shark*.

His interest as a producer is primarily driven by his passion for story telling but he welcomes the opportunity to not have to wear makeup.

Ainsley Gardiner



Ainsley is of Te Whanau-a-Apanui, Whakatohea, Ngati Awa, and Ngati Pikia descent. She began her involvement in film in 1995 with the Avalon Film and TV production course that included work placement with Kahukura Productions. Her 6 year experience with Larry Parr saw her emerge as one of New Zealand's most promising young producers. Ainsley was appropriately acknowledged by WIFT as The Emerging Producer of the Year 2004 and again in 2007 for Achievement in Film.

As well as producing two features before she was 28, she also produced a 26-episode comedy for television and various short films, and worked on commercials, shorts and corporate videos in production and as an Assistant Director for other companies. Notably Ainsley produced the short films *Two Cars One Night* and *Tama Tu* written and directed by Taika Waititi.

She has also written and directed her first short film, *Mokopuna*, funded by Creative New Zealand and the NZ Film Commission.

Emanuel Michael



Emanuel Michael is a founding partner of Unison Films, a production and distribution company based in New York. Emanuel has been honored as one of MovieMaker Magazine's 10 Moviemakers Making A Difference, along with other honorees such as Matt Damon and Natalie Portman. Through Unison Films, Emanuel Michael has produced ten feature films including Taika Waititi's previous award-winning film *EAGLE VS. SHARK* which was released by Miramax Films. Upcoming films include: "360"

written by two-time Academy Award® nominee Peter Morgan (THE QUEEN, THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND) and directed by Academy Award® nominee Fernando Meirelles (CITY OF GOD, THE CONSTANT GARDENER) starring Academy Award® winner Anthony Hopkins, Academy Award® winner Rachel Weisz, and two-time Academy Award® nominee Jude Law; A LATE QUARTET written and directed by Yaron Zilberman (WATERMARKS) starring Academy Award® winner Philip Seymour Hoffman, Academy Award® winner Christopher Walken, and two-time Academy Award® nominee Catherine Keener; and INOCENTE the upcoming feature documentary from the Academy Award® nominated and Sundance Best Director winners Sean and Andrea Fine (WAR DANCE).

CASTING DIRECTOR – Tina Cleary

She has cast award-winning s Tina Cleary has a body of experience working Salmon, *Run* and *Six Dollar 1* in casting on TV dramas and feature films for Albiston, *Mokopuna* by direc more than a decade Peter Jackson. She has been tl development for Warner Bros and Disney and has worked for Producer Barrie Osborne.

Recent projects have included an award winning TV drama *Until Proven Innocent* for director Peter Burger, and the NZ box office hit *Second Hand Wedding*, with director Paul Murphy. She has also recently co-cast *Home by Christmas* for director Gaylene Preston.

PRODUCTION DESIGNER – Shayne Radford



Shayne came to the film industry as a successful hairdresser with three salons and 30 staff. As a hairdresser on Geoff Murphy's *Utu*, Shayne was inspired by the moko work of Bob McCarron.

He moved into special effects work and was part of the now Weta Workshop with Richard Taylor and Peter Jackson.

He has since contributed his art direction and design skills to such iconic Kiwi films as *Once Were Warriors*, *Desperate Remedies* and *Rain Of the Children*, as well as numerous productions for the Bradley brothers.

COSTUME DESIGNER – Amanda Neale



Amanda Neale is an intuitive and resourceful designer who loves the process of creating character identity through carefully considered costume.

She has an impressive and varied filmography, working as a buyer or lead standby on films such as *Lord of the Rings*, *Last Samurai*, *King Kong*, *Avatar* and *The Lovely Bones*.

Her passion lies in costume design and creating a strong aesthetic. She loves working on New Zealand stories, collaborating and giving voice to a New Zealand identity through film. Over the last ten years she has designed the feature films *Scarifies*, *For Good*, *Fracture*, *Eagle vs. Shark*, *Show of Hands*, *Separation City* and **BOY**.

Amanda continues to support short film making and has numerous credits to her name, notably *Fog* which was selected for International Critics week at Cannes Film festival in 2007.

She was nominated for Costume Achievement at the Nokia Film Awards for her work on *Scarifies* in 2000, and in 2005, won the Nokia for her design of *Fracture*.

Amanda first met Taika back in 1999 on *Scarifies* when he was a thin young actor. She still enjoys the professional challenge of trying to get him into tight pants.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY – Adam Clark



Adam is New Zealand's most talented young cinematographer. He has shot both Taika's short films and his feature, and his photography has been integral to the success of those films.

As well as shooting numerous short films and commercials he has been second DOP and operated camera for Alun Bollinger on *River Queen*, DOP on Vincent Ward's feature *Rain of the Children* and 2nd DOP on Peter Jackson's *King Kong* and Gaylene Preston's *Perfect Strangers*.

Although he is already an incredibly experienced DOP, it is not his experience that makes him invaluable to the project. Like Taika, his creative, visual and storytelling talent is inherent and profound.

EDITOR – Chris Plummer



Chris is one of New Zealand's leading film editors. He has worked with many of the new breed of NZ film makers on such internationally acclaimed films as; *In My Father's Den*, *Dean Spanley* and *Black Sheep* to name a few. He helped Vincent Ward bring his personal odyssey *Rain of the Children* to the big screen.

His passion for story telling leads him to help tell stories that have a resonance to audiences no matter what breed or creed they hail from.

During the eight weeks it took to shoot **BOY** on location in the East Coast of New Zealand, Chris was tempted to give up editing and become a big game fisherman. He didn't as he is a better film editor than fisherman.

This is his first collaboration with Taika.