

გაუნათებელი სინათლე

POWER

TRIP

BY PAUL DEVLIN

Amidst pervasive corruption, high drama, and hot tempers, an American power company tries to keep the lights on in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia.

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Synopsis

In an environment of pervasive corruption, assassination, and street rioting, the story of chaotic post-Soviet transition is told through culture clash, electricity disconnections and blackouts.

AES Corp., the massive American “global power company,” has purchased the privatized electricity distribution company in Tbilisi, capital of the former Soviet Republic of Georgia. AES manager Piers Lewis must now train the formerly communist populace that, in this new world, customers pay for their electricity. The Georgians meanwhile, from pensioners to the Energy Minister, devise ever more clever ways to get it free.

Amidst hot tempers and high drama, Lewis balances his love for the Georgian people with the hardships his company creates for them, as they struggle to build a nation from the rubble of Soviet collapse.

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POWER TRIP

BY PAUL DEVLIN

Power Trip Awards

Berlin Film Festival – International Forum, February, 2003:

**The Berliner Zeitung Reader's Jury Prize (2,500 Euros), and
A Special Mention by the International Confederation of Art Cinemas**

The Florida Film Festival, Orlando, March 2003:

Grand Jury Award for Best Documentary Feature

Hot Docs, Canadian International Documentary Festival, Toronto, May 2003:

Best International Documentary Feature

Transparency International Film Festival, Seoul, May 2003:

Best Documentary (1,000 Euros)

Port Townsend Film Festival, Washington, October 2003:

Grand Jury Award for Best Documentary

Red Bank International Film Festival, New Jersey, October 2003:

Best Documentary

2003 Fieburg Okomedia Environmental Film Festival, Germany

"Golden Lynx" - First Prize for Best Journalistic Achievement

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POWER TRIP

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(Awards continued)

**2003 Berlin Film Festival, International Forum
The Berliner Zeitung Reader's Jury Prize**

Granted by Berlin's daily newspaper, the 9-member jury screened all of the 52 films from 24 countries chosen by the International Forum of the Berlin Film Festival. In awarding their prize to Paul Devlin's "POWER TRIP", the jury made this statement:

"POWER TRIP is a film full of energy, about energy and about what happens when there is a lack of energy, or when it doesn't flow. It's also a film about the reason why supplying energy to Georgia (a former Soviet Republic) is proving so difficult to do. The film distinguishes itself through its dense illustration of the circumstances and complications and through its privileged yet critical insight into the structures and difficulties of a global, profit-oriented company - despite the seeming impenetrability of the complex connections. "Power" is a word with several meanings in English. The unbelievable ingenuity of the residents of the capital of Tbilisi in dealing with daily life and bureaucracy is depicted in an accurate and, ultimately, tragicomic manner."

A cash prize of 2,500 Euros accompanies the Berliner Zeitung Reader's Jury Prize.

**2003 Berlin Film Festival, International Forum
A Special Mention by the International Confederation of Art Cinemas**

"Based on the incalculable availability of electricity in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, Paul Devlin forcefully reveals how fragile (and marketable) commodities no longer considered a luxury have become in times of political and economic upheaval."

This award seeks to bring attention to non-mainstream films that the confederation believes merit release in Art House Cinema.

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POWER TRIP

BY PAUL DEVLIN

Background Notes

- **How did AES get to Georgia?**

AES was founded in the USA in 1981 by two former members of the Department of Energy, Roger Sant and Dennis Bakke (the CEO in *Power Trip*). The founders aimed to change the world by bringing competition to a previously staid sector – electricity – and by building a company organized around a core set of values and a de-centralized system of management. Their phenomenal growth with such an unusual management philosophy created buzz in the business world (http://www.businessweek.com/1999/99_50/b3659121.htm) and by the early 1990s, AES was investing worldwide, and most notably in regions where others feared to tread.

In the meantime, Piers Lewis was working out of San Francisco for a consulting company. He was sent to the former Soviet Republic of Georgia to work with the Georgian government on a pilot project to determine if the vicious cycle of "no payment - no electricity supply" could be broken by implementing a transparent accounting/billing system, remetering, disconnections for non-payment, and improved electricity supply. The project was a success and Piers took this information to Mike Scholey of AES, who had already visited Georgia on a new-investment fact finding tour for the company.

In 1998, Merrill Lynch won a mandate to advise the Georgian government on the privatization of Telasi, the electricity distribution company of Tbilisi. They launched a tender, AES ultimately won the bid, Mike Scholey became General Director of AES-Telasi in 1999 and hired Piers Lewis.

- **How did Georgia get to be such a mess?**

According to classical legend, Jason and the Argonauts came to Georgia to steal the Golden Fleece -- a greasy goat skin lying in a mountain stream which collected passing particles of gold. Many more recent visitors, including the Persians, Turks and Russians came with no better intentions. In 1921 Georgia was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union, where it remained until 1991. When Georgia declared independence from Moscow that year, other republics followed and the Soviet Union dissolved soon thereafter.

In Georgia, chaos, secessionist conflicts, and civil war followed independence, only ending when Eduard Shevardnadze returned from Moscow and restored order, though institutional corruption continued. Not surprisingly during this turbulence the power, gas and heat all went out. By the end of it all, payment deteriorated, and citizens desperate for shuki (power) connected themselves to anything that was live (street lights, tram lines, metro, hospitals etc). This in turn overloaded what was left of the system and caused even more failures.

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POWER TRIP

BY PAUL DEVLIN

(Background Notes – continued)

- **Problems with Russia**

Eduard Shevardnadze was the Soviet Foreign Minister under Mikhail Gorbachev who oversaw the dissolution of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact. This enabled the reunification of Germany, which is why Shevardnadze is still revered in Germany, and respected in the West. But he remains vilified in Russia, and in Georgia the cold war continues – this time over oil. Georgia is a gateway to the west for the oil and gas rich Caspian states to which Russia would very much like to shut the door.

According to some, Russia has been engaging in a systematic effort to gain economic hegemony over its former satellites. In an outtake from *Power Trip*, Akaki Gogichaishvili, anchor of the Georgia's version of *60 Minutes*, describes how Russia would allow energy debts to accumulate and then demand hand-over of strategic assets as payment. This has resulted in a Russian monopoly of the natural gas supply. Whether or not Russia can be blamed for taking unfair advantage of an impoverished, newly independent nation, or the Georgians should be blamed for simply not paying their bills, is open to interpretation.

The result in either case, is that Russia is able to use this monopoly for political leverage against Georgia: After President Shevardnadze threatened to expel Russian troops from Georgian soil, the Russians shut down the natural gas supply. In winter most of the country's electricity comes from gas-powered thermal generation plants, so this resulted in complete shut down of AES-Telasi, and much of the country went dark for several days.

- **Aftermath**

Though AES never participated in energy trading, the scandals of Enron rocked the energy world, and subsequently the instability of Latin America weakened AES such that it could no longer support its Georgian operations.

Although we do not want to reveal the end of *Power Trip* to readers, we will say here that AES put Telasi up for sale, and there was only one buyer – the Russians. UES, a Russia state-owned company, now owns Telasi. Dennis Bakke was squeezed out of AES, but Shevardnadze still clings to power in Georgia.

In November 2003, alleged irregularities in Parliamentary elections caused widespread protests in Tbilisi for several weeks. Protesters eventually stormed Parliament and President Shevardnadze was unceremoniously rushed out the back of the building. He resigned soon after, on November 23rd, and opposition leaders have now inherited a daunting set of chronic problems.

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POWER TRIP

BY PAUL DEVLIN

Production Notes

- **Less than an hour after first arriving in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, director Paul Devlin was robbed by a policeman.**

Entering the country overland via Turkey, Paul hired a car and driver in the Black Sea coast town of Batumi to take him to Tbilisi. In the hills outside Batumi, two policeman pulled the car over and interrogated Paul. They discovered a Turkish customs form that indicated Paul had US\$1600. After a half-hour of haggling, and threats of arrest he handed them the money in his wallet: US\$40. They happily sent him on his way with promises of a safe journey.

- **Piers Lewis, the main character in *Power Trip* is a University of Michigan classmate of director, Paul Devlin. Piers, who had lived in Tbilisi for years and spoke fluent Georgian, pitched the film to Paul, and provided unusual access to AES-Telasi.**

At first Paul felt that trying to portray the transition from collapsed communism to capitalism was too monumental a story with too many complicated abstractions to convey in a movie. Until Piers explained that the reason for his shoulder-length hair was that he refused to cut it until the electricity bill collection rate increased from 10% to 50%. Paul realized that Piers' daily visual reminder to his Georgian co-workers could provide a dramatic structure for the movie – whether or not Piers cut his hair would represent the progress of Georgian electricity reform. After committing to the project, more interesting narrative threads emerged and Paul traveled to Tbilisi 4 more times to shoot, staying 3 to 4 weeks each visit.

- **Rustavi-2 Broadcasting, the popular independent television station in Tbilisi and Georgian co-producer Valery Odikadze provided production support and archival footage.**

Valery Odikadze, a producer/cameraman at Rustavi-2 shot the first footage of illegal lines removal with a Hi-8 Camera Paul sent to Tbilisi. A great partnership developed and Valery was able to shoot important material for *Power Trip* and provide essential historical footage from Rustavi-2 archives. This included archival footage of a rocket propelled grenade assassination attempt on President Shevardnadze, shot by the assassins themselves! The footage was recovered after the assassins' capture. It was emailed by Valery to Paul.

- **Director Paul Devlin worked mostly alone with a single Sony TRV-900 mini-DV camera, and 2 microphones – a wireless and shotgun attached to the camera.**

As a result, much of Paul's shooting was apparently unnoticed by Georgian authorities. He had a scare one night, while shooting cars passing in blackout darkness, one stopped and four large, threatening men emerged, insisting that he stopped shooting. Fortunately, they turned out to be security forces, protecting foreigners from a rash of violent robberies in the neighborhood. During the blackout riots, the most frightening moments came when crowds of frenzied children, attracted by the camera, began pulling at it and Paul.

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POWER TRIP

BY PAUL DEVLIN

Paul Devlin

Producer / Director / Editor

Paul Devlin is the filmmaker of *Power Trip*, which tells the story of chaotic post-Soviet transition in Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia, through culture clash, electricity disconnections and blackouts. *Power Trip* has won top award at film festivals in Berlin, Florida, and Hot Docs in Toronto and is being sold worldwide by Films Transit, International (www.powertrip-themovie.com).

Paul Devlin is also the filmmaker of the award-winning film *SlamNation*, distributed nationally in theaters by The Cinema Guild and recently cablecast on HBO/Cinemax and Encore/Starz (www.slamnation.com). His fiction film, *The Eyes of St. Anthony*, is distributed by Tapestry International.

As a freelance video editor, Mr. Devlin has been awarded four Emmys for his work with NBC at the Olympic Games and with CBS at the Tour de France. His extensive credits as an editor include commercials, music videos, weekly television shows and sports television including the Super Bowl, World Cup Soccer, and NCAA Basketball Championships, among others.

Paul Devlin is also the Producing Editor (or Preditor) on *Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme*, winner of a Special Jury Award for Documentary Filmmaking at the 2002 Florida Film Festival.

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POWER TRIP

BY PAUL DEVLIN

Director's Statement

The former Soviet Republic of Georgia has received international attention recently because of its peaceful “Rose Revolution,” the ouster of President Eduard Shevardnadze, and the election to the presidency of opposition leader Mikhail Saakashvili. My film *Power Trip* provides important context to the recent political unrest in the Republic of Georgia, by outlining its recent history of independence and graphically depicting the frustration of its people with their corrupt political system.

The idea for *Power Trip* came about in 1999 when I was visiting my University friend, Piers Lewis in Tbilisi, capital of Georgia. He suggested that it would make an interesting film to follow the progress of AES in Georgia, the American multi-national which had purchased the electricity distribution company in Tbilisi.

At first I felt that trying to document post-Soviet transition to capitalism would be too overwhelming a task. However, with some coaxing from Piers (who became the main character in the film), I realized that by focusing on this one struggle for electricity in Tbilisi, I had a story that could also communicate some of the larger themes that have resulted from the historic transition from communism to capitalism.

Power Trip illuminates, for example, how American optimism can sometimes be profoundly naïve, because a system that works at home will not necessarily work in a foreign culture without first laying a groundwork of education and rule of law. The film also demonstrates the deep disappointment that independence has been to many post-Soviet states, to the point that some are even nostalgic for Soviet domination. And then there's gradual understanding that electricity is like air to modern civilization — civilization dies without it, and when a society doesn't have it, it will do anything it can to get it.

I realized that the way to get to these big issues, was through all the smaller stories – such as pulling down the rats nests of illegal lines and disconnecting poor old ladies when they don't pay their bills.

Power Trip also provides a window into the lifestyle, culture and music of the Georgian people. Their distinct language (with its own alphabet), its rugged, turbulent history, its amazing natural beauty in the Caucasus Mountains, are all things that the rest of the world knows very little about. Until recently, most Americans had no idea what or where Georgia is.

That is changing, however, as this tiny country receives major geopolitical attention from both the United States and Russia. *Power Trip* tells a compelling story that provides important understanding of this often overlooked, but strategically important nation.

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POWER TRIP

BY PAUL DEVLIN

Paul Devlin – Producer / Director Filmography

Power Trip (2003) – Producer/Director/Editor

Feature nonfiction narrative about an American company trying to solve the energy crisis in Tbilisi, capital of the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, amidst street riots, mafia corruption, political assassination, and US troops in search of Al-Quaeda terrorists.

Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme (2002) – Producing Editor (Preditor)

Documentary on rappers who can improvise their rhymes, exploring the roots, community and spiritual values, as well as the competitive edge of contemporary hip hop. Winner of several festival awards, including a Special Jury Award for Documentary Filmmaking at the 2002 Florida Film Festival

SlamNation (1998) – Producer/Director/Editor

Award-winning feature length nonfiction narrative film on the 1996 National Poetry Slam. Opened theatrically in New York City at Film Forum, NYC summer '98. Distributed nationally in theaters, video, and HBO/Cinemax & Starz/Encore. (www.slamnation.com)

Slammin' (1995) – Producer/Director/Editor

Television pilot, presenting a Nuyorican Poets Cafe semi-final slam as a sporting event. Broadcast in several PBS markets including New York's *Reel New York* & Chicago's *Image Union*. **Nominated for 2 New York Emmy Awards.**

The Eyes of St. Anthony (1992) – Producer/Director/Editor

Fiction film, winner of several film festival awards and distributed internationally by Tapestry International.

EDITING

The Tour De France – CBS Sports, 2001-2003 - **2 EMMY AWARDS**

The NFL Today (preview show on CBS) – 1998-Present

The Road to the Final Four (NCAA Basketball Tournament) – CBS Sports, 1999-Present

Super Bowl – CBS Sports, Tampa Bay, Florida, 2001

Sports Feature & Promo Editor – NBC Sports, 1996-2000

Soccer World Cup, Paris - ABC / ESPN / ESPN2, 1998

Winter Olympic Games, Nagano, Japan - CBS Sports, 1998 (Feature Editor)

Summer Olympic Games, Atlanta - NBC Sports, 1996 - **EMMY AWARD**

Summer Olympic Games, Barcelona - NBC Sports, 1992 - **EMMY AWARD**

Also numerous music videos (Elvis Costello, Cyndi Lauper, Kenny G.), TV series and commercials.

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POWER TRIP

BY PAUL DEVLIN

Film Credits & Information

Paul Devlin: director, producer, editor, camera
Valery Odikadze: co-producer, camera
Claire Missanelli: co-producer
Vince Sherry: consulting producer
Tom Reilly: post-production producer

Audio post-production: Benny Mouthon
Matt Haasch, Caterini Studios
Pat Donahue

Additional editing: Neil Gegna
Valery Odikadze
Walter Schlomann
Darryl Thurston

Assistant editors: Luciana Fernandes
Marie-Paule Jiccio
Karine Baczynski
Mininder Saini
Bill Charlton

Appearing in order: Piers Lewis
Akaki Gogichaishvili
Leeka Basilaia
Michael Scholey

Running time : 85 minutes
Aspect ratio: 1:1.33
Formats: 35mm and DigiBeta
Year of production : 2003
English and Georgian with English subtitles
www.powertrip-themovie.com
International Sales Agent: Films Transit International
514 844-3358, info@filmstransit.com

გაუნათებელი სინათლე

POWER TRIP

BY PAUL DEVLIN



(Docu) A Paul Devlin production. (International sales: Films Transit Intl., Montreal.)
Produced by Paul Devlin. Co-producers, Valery Odikadze, Claire Missanelli. Directed,
edited by Paul Devlin.

By DAVID STRATTON

A first-rate documentary which impresses on a number of levels, "Power Trip" provides unique insights into the role played by a major American company in an impoverished, corrupt, almost Third World country, Georgia. Made with deft evenhandedness, Paul Devlin's accomplished film plays almost like a fictional drama, containing suspense, comedy and some colorful characters. In some territories, theatrical release could prove successful, while television slotting is a must as well as further fest exposure.

In 1999, AES Corp., headquartered in Arlington, Va., and which is the largest owner of power in the world, spent \$35 million to acquire Telasi, Georgia's electricity distribution company, which was formerly nationalized. The Americans couldn't have predicted what they were in for; Georgia, the former Soviet republic, located in the unstable Caucasus region, is almost a basket case. In the years since the fall of the Soviet Union, the country, led by President Edward Shevardnadze, has staggered from one crisis to another, including civil war.

Devlin tells his story from the POV of British-born Piers Lewis, who has lived in Georgia for six years, speaks the language, and, at the start of the film, is strategic project director for AES-Telasi. The first problem the new company faces is that supplies of electricity in the country are a mess, with up to 40% of customers illegally bypassing their meters via homemade wiring. In the Communist era, power was free; now, the user has to pay, and AES-Telasi is determined to improve power supplies and keep shareholders back in America happy. A fortune is spent improving the power lines and metering every customer, but when the company starts sending out bills -- averaging \$24 per month, in a city where the average wage is as little as \$15 per month -- something's got to give. In effect, the customers simply refuse to pay. And when the company begins to cut off power supplies from bad debtors, public unrest grows.

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POWER TRIP

BY PAUL DEVLIN

(*Variety* continued)

While the wily consumers set about finding ways of obtaining illegal power again, AES-Telasi faces more pressing problems from the government itself. Despite the assurances of the president and his Fuel and Energy Minister, government facilities also refuse to pay for their power. In one revealing scene, AES-Telasi decides to cut off power to Tbilisi's airport in order to force payment of a staggering debt.

The company is now losing \$120,000 per day, and everyone's getting edgy. Devlin depicts the increasing tensions between the visiting Americans and the government and people, and, by implication, the tensions between the AES CEO, Dennis Baake, and his shareholders. Baake, who has signed photographs of Mother Teresa and Bill Clinton on his office wall, seems genuinely dedicated to dragging Georgia into the modern world, but the difficulties he and his staff face seem almost insuperable.

Almost as an aside, Devlin depicts the crusading work of a trio of Georgian TV journalists who threaten to expose government corruption; when one of the journalists is gunned down in his home, his funeral brings Tbilisi to a halt, though Shevardnadze refuses to accept that the assassination was political. As the end credits unfold, the viewer is informed that, after filming was completed, an AES-Telasi exec (not seen in the film) was also murdered. Devlin includes interviews with ordinary Georgians, TV commercials for AES-Telasi, Georgian cartoons which mock the Americans' efforts, and newsreel footage which fleshes out the recent history of the troubled country.

What makes "Power Trip" unusually interesting is the fact that Devlin refuses to take sides. He clearly sympathizes both with the people of Georgia and the horrendous problems they face when their power supply is shut down, and also with the generally good-natured, hard-working and amiable AES-Telasi employees. There isn't a hint of "ugly American" bashing in the film.

Shot on video, "Power Trip" plays out as a dynamic and incident-packed 85 minutes, offering insight into seldom discussed problems concerning the former satellites of the Soviet Union.

Camera (color, DV), Devlin, Valery Odikadze; sound, Benny Mouthon, Matt Haasch, Pat Donahue. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (Forum), Feb. 14, 2003. Running time: 85 MIN.

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POWER TRIP

BY PAUL DEVLIN



by Steve Schneider

Power Trip

Directed by Paul Devlin

The more of Paul Devlin's films I see, the more I believe that every documentarian should be forced to work in professional sports before shooting anything of his or her own. A video editor who has generated TV coverage of three Olympics and a Super Bowl, Devlin brought his sportsman's eye to the world of spoken-word poetry in 1998's "SlamNation." In "Power Trip," Devlin applies his kinetic style to a topic with even less inherent visual appeal: the advent of paid electrical power in the former Soviet Union.

Since Georgia declared independence in 1991, the film teaches us, its citizens have had a hard time adapting to the idea that electricity must be contracted on an individual basis, not donated by a communist state. In the capital city of Tbilisi, the energy rights are held by AES Corp., a U.S.-based multinational with the atypical mandates to serve the world and "be the most fun workplace ever." There's little visible fun in AES' dealings with the Tbilisi populace, most of whom cannot afford the company's services and resort to stealing it. A whopping 40 percent of customers have an illegal line -- an epidemic represented in the film by tangles of illicit, potentially deadly cords that snake out of windows and across yards.

The task of normalization falls to Piers Lewis, an idealistic AES manager who has to ensure customer compliance while battling a corrupt government that dispenses free power to favored industrial applications as political patronage. But Lewis is not the film's main character: It's power (both electrical and political), and there's no better testament to Devlin's filmmaking skill than the ease with which he grants main-player status to something you can't see or hear.

Acting as producer, director and editor, as well as operating one of two cameras, Devlin again shows his mastery of sports-TV sensibilities: when to cut, when to bring in music, and when to pan across a static subject to imply movement. The gradual nature of social progress doesn't always suit his game-time storytelling structure, nor does it grant him the kind of sweeping denouement a Sunday-afternoon armchair habitué might expect. But if you're looking to be reminded how much excitement any filmed conflict can and should entail, "Power Trip" is a big event indeed.

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POWER TRIP

BY PAUL DEVLIN

The Hollywood
Reporter.com.

Power Trip

May 08, 2003

By Joe Mader

A Paul Devlin Production

SAN FRANCISCO -- Paul Devlin's wonderful documentary, shown as part of the 46th San Francisco International Film Festival, examines the tribulations of the former Soviet republic of Georgia's newly private (since 1999) power company, AES-Telasi. In the process, he illuminates a whole country. "Power Trip" may have difficulty finding an American audience (it has no domestic distributor yet), but with the right marketing, this film could entrance documentary film aficionados. It's also a natural for PBS.

Devlin lucidly packs an extraordinary amount of information into the film's 85 minutes, weaving a compelling and passionate tale out of the chaos of a country rebuilding itself. Piers Lewis, Devlin's college buddy and regional manager at AES-Telasi, tries to up the collection rate on electricity bills from a paltry 10% to a more acceptable 50%. Georgians, used to subsidized utilities under the Soviets, now resort to stealing electricity any way they can. Flimsy, self-installed wires snake all over the capital city of Tbilisi. Meters are routinely vandalized. Power-pilferers are often electrocuted making connections they shouldn't. (The average monthly power bill is \$25; the average monthly salary ranges from \$15-\$45.) And payments are no guarantee that customers will receive power: Widespread corruption leads to current being diverted from AES to more favored institutions and corporations.

Like Lewis and Devlin, you begin to fall in love with the Georgians, their cynicism, humor, determination to survive, corruptions both charmingly petty and alarmingly criminal and love for their country. It comes as a shock when Devlin relates the devastating violence Georgians have lived under for the past dozen years since their independence: civil war and unrest, assassinations both attempted and accomplished and cold winters with intermittent power. Devlin also introduces us to people at all levels of Georgian society, including the charismatic AES-Telasi general director Michael Scholey, a Brit with an unruly eyebrow, and investigative journalist Leeka Basilaia, who earnestly endeavors to unearth Ministerial misdeeds despite danger to her personal safety.

Devlin portrays the torturous progress in rebuilding and reforming a country, encapsulating both hope and despair in this enlightening film.

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BY PAUL DEVLIN



DOCUMENTARY DAYS:

Power Trip

Oct. 31 - Nov. 6, 2003

By David Chute

In the early 1990s, the American-owned “global power company,” Applied Energy Services Inc. bought the newly privatized state power company of the former Soviet Republic of Georgia. Which may seem an odd premise for a gripping film, until you meet the idealistic techies who are in over their heads in the capital city of Tbilisi, trying to explain to furious citizens accustomed to unlimited free power that they will now have to pay for it.

As corrupt politicians siphon off energy for their relatives, residential customers weave sparking rat’s nests of wires to steal a feed, and the company hemorrhages a steady \$120,000 per day. The triumph of filmmaker Paul Devlin (*SlamNation*) is in finding a narrative through-line that clarifies this horrendously complicated situation without oversimplifying its issues.

AES claims to stand for more than maximizing the bottom line; it wants to “give something back” by helping to restore the city’s infrastructure. The people on the ground make us believe it. The star of the show is AES project manager Piers Lewis, a talkative former non-governmental-organization veteran who was a college chum of Devlin’s. The suspense factor that sets in almost at once is whether the sheer seething chaos will defeat Lewis and his crew of corporate do-gooders.

Devlin is not alone in believing that, in the modern world, the power supply is the basis of civilization. He’s managed to turn the notion into a real-life thriller, with a lot more at stake than a stock price or a few careers.