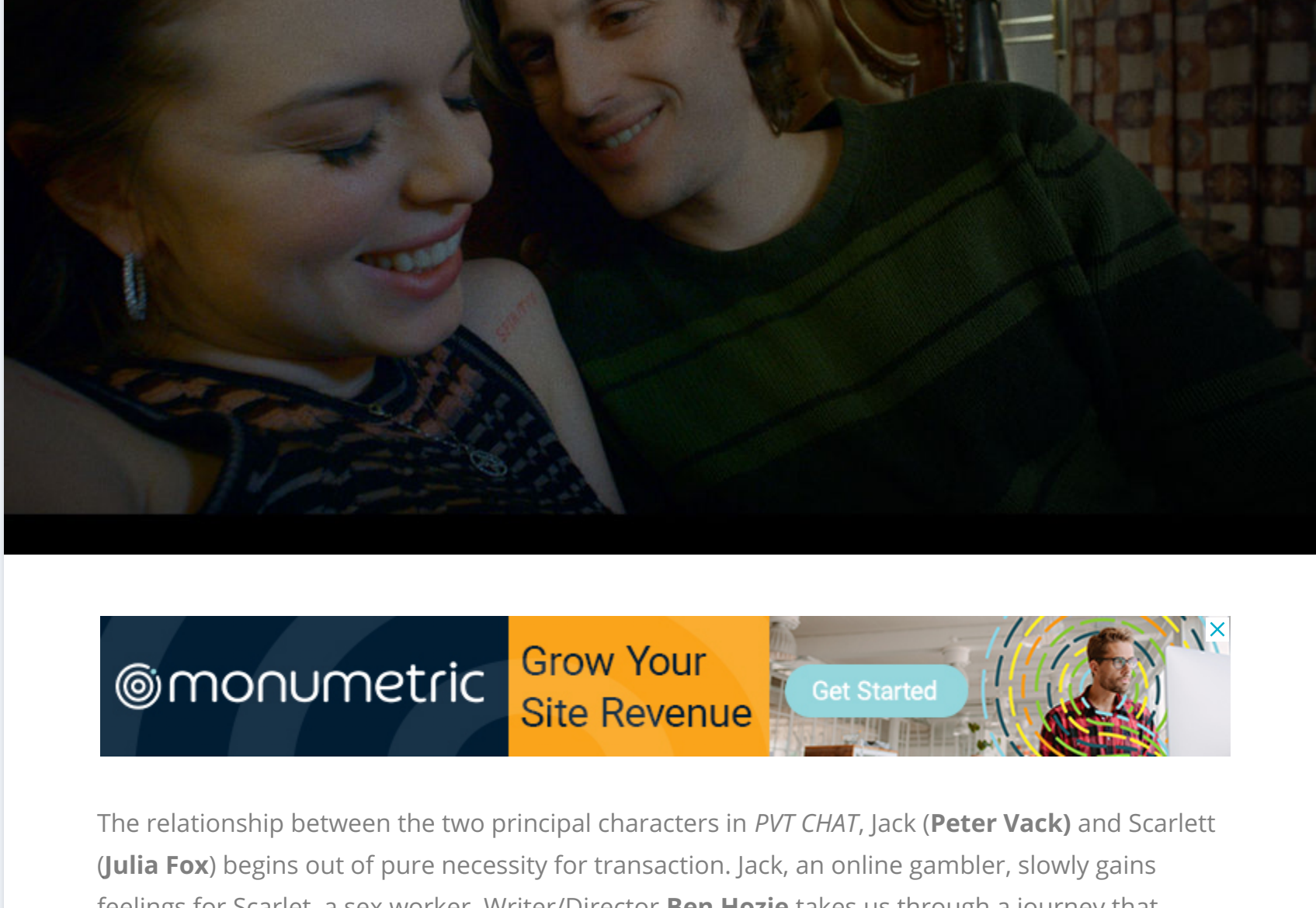


INTERVIEW: Writer/Director Ben Hozie Of PVT CHAT

Posted by Murjani Rawls | Feb 1, 2021 | Editorial, Featured, Interviews, News | 0 | *****



The relationship between the two principal characters in *PVT CHAT*, Jack (**Peter Vack**) and Scarlett (**Julia Fox**) begins out of pure necessity for transaction. Jack, an online gambler, slowly gains feelings for Scarlett, a sex worker. Writer/Director **Ben Hozie** takes us through a journey that shows the audience that appearances aren't always what they seem. That if you're willing to dig deeper behind the mask, there are intricacies that make us who we are. Also, the movie sets out to break down the shame of sexual pleasure and the myth of what sex workers embody as a whole.

Shot during January-February 2018, *PVT CHAT* may feel as poignant in the current time because of our change in interactions. More than ever, we rely on things like Zoom and FaceTime, even dating apps to find some connection. Even one that purely online could turn into something concrete. We spoke to Hozie about the film, how relationships can develop through electronic devices, and how he wanted to invoke a sex-positive image in his film,

Spoilers for the film ahead!

Jack is an online gambler. At first, he has a monetary relationship with Scarlett, who is an online sex worker. It progresses into something more than that. In some ways, relationships can become stronger through constant conversation. I know PVT CHAT wasn't made with the current state of things in mind, but do you see the evolution of how we connect to each other?

Ben: Yeah, definitely. I actually think things were already this way, or that people were already living more and more online. We're going to be living more and more online in the next 10 years. Regardless of what happens to the pandemic. The pandemic is interesting because it revealed a way we've already been living. It's like you might forget you have a toe, but when you stub it, you realize it. The pandemic is the stub, and the toe is really realizing how much we already live online. So, it's a bizarre set of circumstances.

I feel when Jack he talks to Scarlett; he humanizes her in finding out how you know who she is. A substantial relationship, but also a borderline obsession. There's a part in the film where a woman named Emma invites Jack to an art gallery. She tries to connect with him, but he just can't let go of Scarlett.

Yeah, I think that's precisely what I really had in mind. It might be like a 19th-century theatrical trope in *The Comedy of Errors*. I've always liked those kinds of plots where there's always a bunch of characters, and they all are obsessed with the wrong person. Emma's obsessed with Jack, but unfortunately, he's obsessed with Scarlett. You can almost play that game where things loop around. I find real-life relationships where sometimes the tragedy is just that someone loves another person more than that person. I thought it was more realistic for me to say that, well, Jack is obsessed with Scarlett. It isn't as if no one, in reality, is interested in him.

I didn't want him to kind of be like an incel-type character who isn't able to have any friendships in actual life. I wanted to show that he's a pretty good-looking guy. He's kind of he's lost, but he has his own sort of charms. There's an interesting young girl in him in real life, but for whatever reason, that's not what he wants. That felt like a bigger statement to me than a sentiment of a guy who just can't meet anybody in real life, so he has to meet somebody online.

I think you're absolutely right. Many of the relationships in our minds are far more real than the ones we need day-to-day. Anytime I'm hanging out with people now, they've been on their phones. They maybe they're physically with me there. However, their mind is really with whom they really want to be within that moment. There's something not so nice about that.

I really like the intimacy in how this movie is framed. There's a lot of close-ups. As far as the sexuality of the film, things are not glossed up. This takes place in apartments in New York. There's also a found footage style that follows Jack in moments of panic. How did you want to approach PVT CHAT in this realistic format?

Yeah, I mean, part of it is out of just necessity, making a low-budget movie. You take what you can get, but also part of the sensibility. I like movies that are fiction, but feel like documentaries. It certainly is a documentary of my life, in a way. Not necessarily what happened in the plot, just the world. Jack's apartment is just my apartment. So, I'll always have this movie as a sort of reminder of what living there was like.

The subway that he goes to is the subway right next to my house. The gallery show is still with many of my friends and peers. I'm a musician, a lot of bandmates and things like that. So it captures my world as the New York that I know. I think even if I wanted to make some kind of glossy Hollywood thing, I wouldn't be able to do it. So, it's kind of making an aesthetic out of what you got.

Normally, society thinks of sex work in a negative connotation. You add layers to Scarlett's character. She's an artist. She's also in a relationship where her boyfriend almost uses her for her work. However, Scarlett gains her own sense of pleasure as well outside what she does. How important was that for you to destigmatize thoughts about who sex workers are?

There are indeed a lot of sad stories where people are forced to do it. They may need the money and to raise a family or something like that. I didn't want to make a movie like that. We've seen that in cinema before. I would call like a middle-class freelance sex worker. They choose to do it, primarily because they enjoy it. It's something they're good at. It's people that have a skill. They're more comfortable with their sexuality, at least, than most people are. With that, they recognize they have that talent. Almost like an excellent actor who has a talent and performs. They choose to make a living that way, and that may not be a permanent thing.

I wanted to show a very sex-positive story of a sex worker. I mean, it is more conflicted than that. Scarlett is not necessarily 100% happy with what she's doing. She's also enjoying it and is important for me to show that. This is a book that I read, called 'Sex Radicalism.' It has this theory that if a movie to be feminist in a radical way, it has to show a woman receiving pleasure for the sake of just pleasure itself. It can't be for the plot. Not only that, but it can't be subtle. A plot point like "I'm sleeping with this guy for information because he's a spy." Or "I'm sleeping with this guy to signify that I'm now in a level partnership that's going to lead us into the third act." Then we're going to go on this journey together.

I wanted to have a scene where I show her getting pleasure just for the sake of pleasure itself. You know, so many movies that have sex in them aren't about sex at all. I wanted to do that, in some ways, about the psychology of sex and masturbation. To show how I think it actually works for a big part of the population.

I think there's a very cool parallel in the film about appearances. Especially in the lines of work Jack and Scarlett partake in and maybe Jack's delusions of grandeur. While trying to do something noble for a friend, his obsession becomes his downfall. Do you feel as though there is something to how we reveal ourselves online versus actual life?

Yes, well, I think it's more complicated that I don't know if there is anybody under the surface. The more I think about identity, I think it's always shape-shifting. We have this idea that "oh, I may put on a mask when I'm with these people." When I'm with family members, I'll act this way. That act changes when I'm with my friends, other filmmakers, my girlfriend, etc. Somewhere underneath it all, there's a true authentic self-governance idea. I don't know if it actually works that way more. In each situation, you become a different person. There's something kind of liberating about them. Also, something a little troubling about that because human beings are inherently chameleon-like. The ways we adapt psychologically to whatever situation we're in. So on the internet, we can really do that.

When Jack's lying about starting an app, he's definitely not doing that. He's aspirational. He's becoming a better person. That's one thing in the movie where Jack thinks spending time with Scarlett has made him realize the better man in himself. I mean, that's like the main trope of romance movies. That's why I like romance movies because there's almost a self-help quality of them. When you find a suitable partner, they help you actualize your better self. I don't know if it's revealing something that was hidden prior.

There's something about the internet allowing you to put on a mask. That's the mask you would prefer to wear. I love movies where characters act one way in one situation and another way, in another situation, it's difficult to do in drama because you need a character to have behavioral consistencies. I like it when characters make that switch because it may reveal how people actually are.

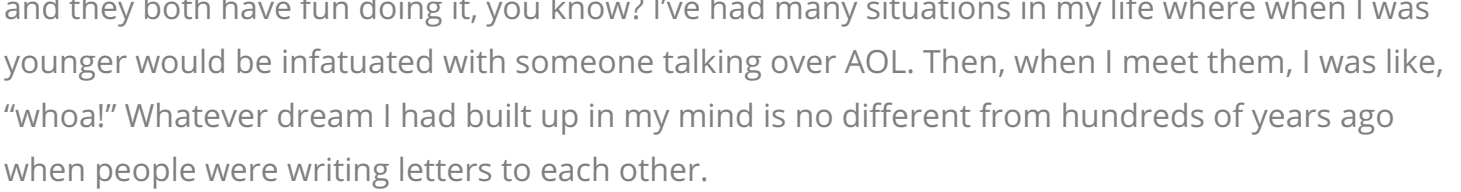
In the end, they finally get together, but they can only become intimate with that invisible barrier. It's a happy ending in the sense that they find what works for them. Not just by some regular physical standard.

There's a certain person who agrees that the ending is sort of cynical. Then, there's another person who might see it as a celebration of kink. This is how Jack can get off. They learn, they do it, and they both have fun doing it, you know? I've had many situations in my life where when I was younger would be infatuated with someone talking over AOL. Then, when I meet them, I was like, "whoa!" Whatever dream I had built up in my mind is no different from hundreds of years ago when people were writing letters to each other.

Dark Star Pictures will release the psycho-sexual thriller *PVT CHAT* in theaters on February 5, 2021, followed by a VOD and Digital HD release on February 9, 2021.

Photo Credit: Dark Star Pictures

SHARE: RATE:



< PREVIOUS

NEXT >

Florida Star Lunchmoney Lewis Does The "Money Dance" For New Single

SUNDANCE 2021: 'Coming Home In The Dark' Is A Vicious Road Movie

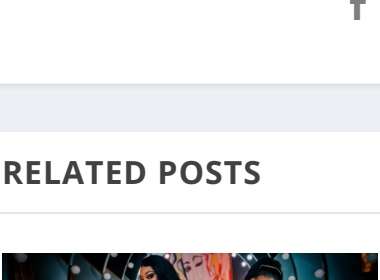
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



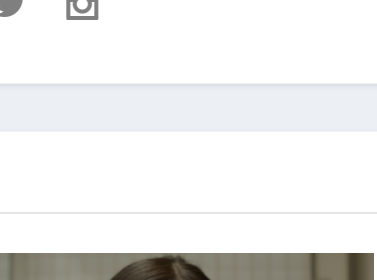
Murjani Rawls

Journalist, Self-published author of five books, podcast host of The War Report and The Deadscreen Podcast, and photographer since 2014, Murjani "MJ" Rawls has been stretching his capabilities of his creativity and passions, Rawls has as a portfolio spanning through many mediums including music, television, movies, and more. Operating out of the New York area, Rawls has photographed over 200+ artists spanning many genres, written over 700 articles ranging displaying his passionate aspirations to keep evolving as his years in media continue.

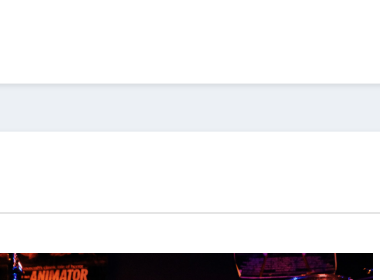
RELATED POSTS



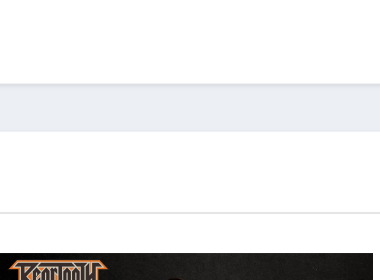
Megan Thee Stallion team up for new song, "Diamonds"
Jan 10, 2020



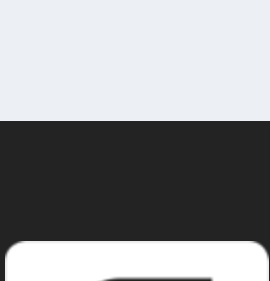
SUNDANCE 2021: 'Marvelous And The Black Hole' Is A Magical, Life-Affirming Story
Jan 31, 2021



Maggie Lindemann is fed up with third-wheeling in new video 'Friends'
May 29, 2019



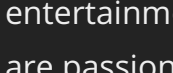
BEARTOOTH B-SIDES GIVEAWAY
May 21, 2019



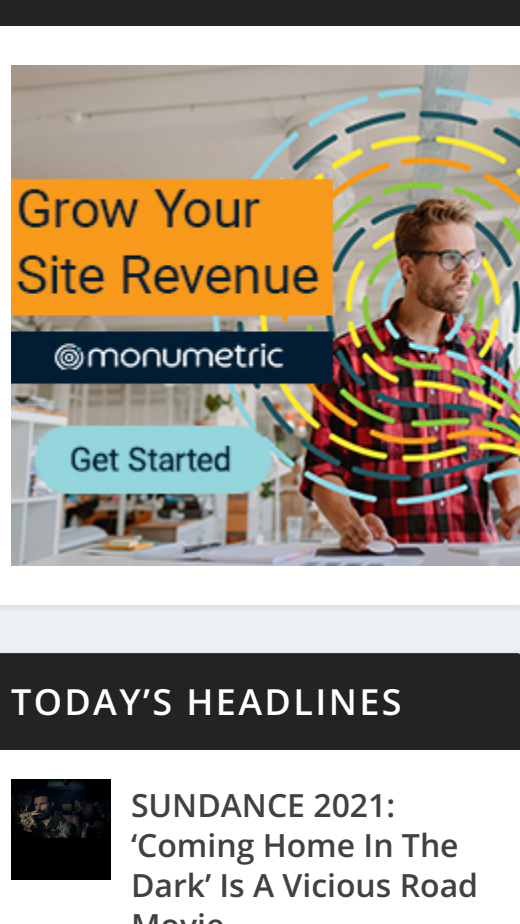
ABOUT US

Substream Magazine is a forward thinking lifestyle and media outlet that focuses on discovering and sharing the best in new music, film, pop culture, and entertainment. Since 2007, Substream has helped break artists and launch cutting edge content. Our writers and staff are located all over the world and are passionate about music and pop culture.

FOLLOW US



VENDOR AD HERE



TODAY'S HEADLINES

SUNDANCE 2021: 'Coming Home In The Dark' Is A Vicious Road Movie
Feb 1, 2021 | Featured, Film, Film Reviews, Movies, News, Reviews

INTERVIEW: Writer/Director Ben Hozie of PVT CHAT
Feb 1, 2021 | Editorial, Featured, Interviews, News

Florida Star Lunchmoney Lewis Does The "Money Dance" For New Single
Feb 1, 2021 | Streams

REVIEW: Neil Marshall's 'The Reckoning' Offers A Joyless, Dull Witch Hunt
Feb 1, 2021 | Featured, Film Reviews, News, Reviews

SUNDANCE 2021: 'First Date' Delivers The Wildest Ride Of Your Life
Jan 31, 2021 | News

FOLLOW US

RECENT REVIEWS

SUNDANCE 2021: 'Coming Home In The Dark' Is A Vicious Road Movie
SCORE: 80%

REVIEW: Neil Marshall's 'The Reckoning' Offers A Joyless, Dull Witch Hunt
SCORE: 50%

SUNDANCE 2021: 'Land' is a deeply affecting exploration of grief
SCORE: 80%

SUNDANCE 2021: 'Marvelous And The Black Hole' Is A Magical, Life-Affirming Story
SCORE: 95%

Sundance 2021: 'Knocking' is a thrilling, star-making moment for Cecilia Milocco
SCORE: 80%