

For the past several weeks, aspiring screenwriters, cynical film students, and reality-TV addicts have been glued to HBO as *Project Greenlight* – “the documentary” -- unfolds^[JSA1]. The series provides an inside look ~~of at~~ the selection, production, and ~~the~~ editing of *Stolen Summer* -- the screenplay that won the Project Greenlight Competition^[JSA2]. This one-million dollar film project, bankrolled by Miramax and produced by Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, and *American Pie*'s Chris Moore, began as an ~~internet~~^{Internet} contest. ~~But now,~~ winner and first-time writer-director Pete Jones ~~and~~ has been thrust into the limelight ~~its winner: first-time writer-director Pete Jones.~~

Every week, *Project Greenlight* ~~–the HBO series~~ shows ~~how at~~^{he} cherubically eager Pete Jones lead^{ing} his troops into the battlefield of independent filmmaking, and, more often than not, ~~how~~ Jones's inexperience costs the project time, money, and the group's sanity. In short, the show becomes a sort of "Survivor for the film set," ~~and as~~ every week ~~a different member or two of the projects~~^{someone on the production team} suffers ~~from~~ the trials of shooting *Stolen Summer*; under the novice direction of its writer. At the end of each show the viewers are left with the satisfi^{ed}~~ing~~ feeling that filmmaking is an insurmountable task best left to professionals, and that poor Pete Jones may be in way over his head, and should best go back return to selling insurance ~~because he may be in way over his head.~~

As I sit in my seat at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival, I feel smug. ~~that I'~~ am one among the first ~~hundred~~ to witness the finished train wreck -- *Stolen Summer*. I had been ~~amongst one of~~ the early nay-sayers of the Project Greenlight competition, and, like thousands of faithful HBO viewers, had failed to give Pete Jones an even break. As the Sundance teaser finished, and the film began I was ready to be my most critical.

Surprise! *Stolen Summer* is an exceptional film; well-written, terrifically performed, and professionally executed^[JSA3]. ~~The screenplay~~ foregrounds-addresses themes of religion, family and loss ~~in an effectively~~^{ly} and emotionally. ~~way, and~~ The end result is a tenderly crafted story of an eight-year old boy on a quest for meaning in an imperfect world. Although the story is not autobiographical, ~~the~~ young Pete O'Malley is not unlike the 31-year-old Pete Jones, passionately trying to do the right thing in a system ~~whose of~~ rules he doesn't quite understand.

In the Q&A after following the screening, Pete Jones is flanked by co-producer Jeff Balis and producer Chris Moore. Moore sports a Cheshire~~–~~cat smile, and freely admits that he's ~~is~~ happy that the *Greenlight* series has lowered everyone expectations. He ~~is's~~ also ~~truly~~ pleased by that the finished product's ~~is such a~~ success. Pete Jones, still looking innocent, no longer sport^{ing}s the bruised expressions of the filmmaking wars, ~~instead he~~ beams with the vindication of one who has persisted and overcome ~~huge~~^{enormous} odds. After the Q&A, Pete Jones is delighted to give an interview to *Creative Screenwriting*, chiming in that he just bought the 2001 Best Screenplays issue at the Salt Lake City Airport.

Two days later, I negotiate the back roads of Park City, ~~in my vehiele,~~ to find the house Miramax has rented for the *Stolen Summer* team ~~while at Sundance.~~ Snow falls hard and

~~deep as the road becomes increasingly steep, and the houses increasingly pricey. It is snowing, the houses are getting bigger, and road is getting steeper.~~ Pete had warned me, “this house is amazing. -It has a heated driveway.” At the top of the hill, in front of a very large house, with a snow-free driveway ~~free of snow,~~ stands Pete Jones. Bundled up, cell phone to his ear, and ~~eovered~~ blanketed in snowflakes, he patiently waits for me outside so ~~that~~ I ~~wouldn~~’t get lost.

The real Pete Jones does not disappoint^[JSA4].

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[JSA1] Would the following be accurate? "...addicts have been glued to HBO's *Project Greenlight*. The series provides..."

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[JSA2] Say when, 2000, 2001?

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[JSA3] How was the directing?

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[JSA4] I don't know what you're trying to say with this sentence. You haven't set up any expectations, so I can't intuit what isn't disappointed. Clarify, so we can optimize the final lead-in.