

The Pitch

A young filmmaker knocks on the door. An assistant opens it, welcoming him and offering bottled water. He crosses the room and shakes hands with a panel of film professionals waiting to hear him pitch his script, “The Losing End.”

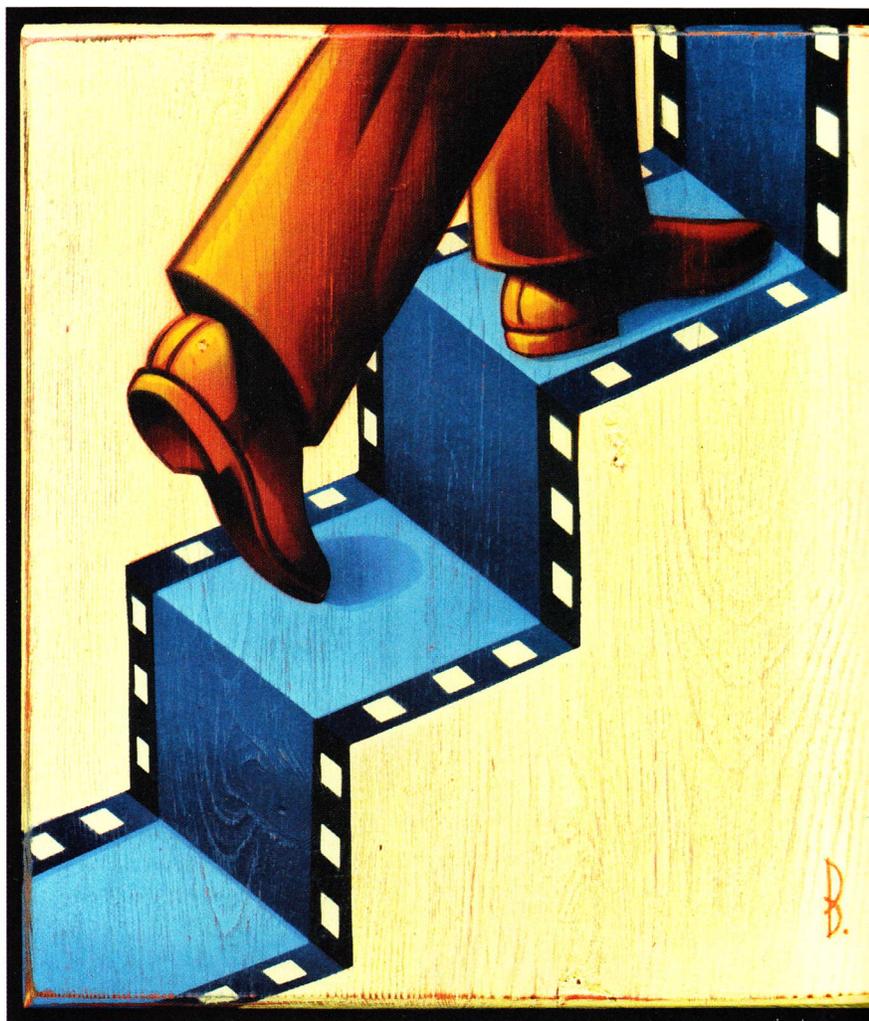
It seems like a standard Hollywood meeting, but it’s not. The setting is Alumni Hall Auditorium. The occasion is the semifinals of a screenplay competition. The door is a prop. The assistant is a volunteer. Sixty eager faces in the audience watch as alumnus Ryan Krumm (A&S ’07) settles into a chair onstage.

Although the office setting is fake, the pitching is real. The panelists really do work in Hollywood. Five hopefuls are attempting to sell their scripts today, vying for an opportunity to have their short films produced. Krumm’s script was one of 108 entered in the Steeltown Film Factory competition, a yearlong project to engage and support aspiring filmmakers in the region. It’s part of the Steeltown Entertainment Project, an organization that’s working to boost the region’s film industry. Carl Kurlander, a faculty member in Pitt’s film studies program and a Hollywood screenwriter, is the project’s executive producer.

Onstage, Krumm delivers his pitch confidently. Set in Pittsburgh in 1984, “The Losing End” follows Mick, a laid-off steelworker toiling as a janitor. As he searches for a more meaningful job, Mick struggles to support his pregnant girlfriend while resisting a life of crime. Kurlander, the panel’s moderator, asks, “Why this story?”

It’s a personal story, Krumm explains. Since graduating from Pitt’s film studies program, he has worked part-time as an editor at the WQED television station near campus. Searching for supplemental work, he has been hesitant to take the kind of menial jobs he did while in school, like meat cutting. “Mick is proud of the work he did in the steel mills, making the steel that built buildings and bridges,” Krumm says about his main character. “Now that it’s gone, he’s unable to find anything to replace that pride. I can relate to that.”

A panelist asks how Krumm will



recreate the year of 1984 on the screen. Krumm distributes a booklet he prepared. It contains photos of nearby Braddock, Pa., where he would film. The borough still hasn’t recovered from the decline that ravaged Pittsburgh in the 1980s, Krumm notes. The panelists thumb through the booklet. Then the session ends, and the assistant shows Krumm out, and off the stage. The next semifinalist knocks at the door.

Although Krumm wasn’t named a finalist, he still feels like a winner: “Getting feedback is the only thing that’s going to make you better,” he says, “so to get it from Hollywood professionals is really invaluable. Where else was I going to get an actual pitch meeting?” Hollywood, it seems, has come to Pitt.

—Adam Reger

Electronica

A dozen students sit together in a wood-paneled room in the Cathedral of Learning. Their leader, a man with a goatee, asks another student, “Was it your first time?” The student nods, his face aglow.

“Tell us about it,” the leader coaxes. The student had his first DJ gig over the weekend, a Relay for Life fundraising event. He panicked when his computer crashed and he had to switch to his iPod, but he recovered quickly. The event went well, and listeners enjoyed his music.

Encouraging murmurs erupt around the room. This is a meeting of the Pittsburgh Electronic Musicians club, led by president Paul Matthews (BUS ’07, A&S ’07), a Pitt alumnus and part-time MBA student. Members include aspiring DJs, producers, musicians, and students