

# The Great Lakes Independent Film Festival

## Screenings continue today through Sunday

### Friday Events

#### Avalon Hotel Screenings

2:45 p.m.  
"Rainy Season"  
(Narrative Short)  
with  
"Why We Had to Kill Bitch"  
(Narrative Feature)

3 p.m.  
"Relative Dysfunction"  
(Narrative Short)  
with  
"Dirt on Leaves"  
(Narrative Feature)

5 p.m.  
"Saving Grace"  
(Documentary Short)  
with  
"Lustron"  
(Documentary Feature)

5:15 p.m.  
Shorts Program I

7:45 p.m.  
"Heredity Misfortune"  
(Narrative Short)  
with  
"Don: Plain and Tall"  
(Narrative Feature)

8 p.m.  
"In/Out"  
(Narrative Short)  
with  
"The Experiment: Gay and Straight"  
(Narrative Feature)

10 p.m.  
"Tumble Dry"  
(Narrative Short)  
with  
"In the Company of Strangers"  
(Narrative Feature)

10:15 p.m.  
Shorts Program II

12:30 a.m.  
"Rainy Season"  
(Narrative Short)  
with  
"Why We Had to Kill Bitch"  
(Narrative Feature)

### Saturday Events

#### Avalon Hotel Screenings

2:45 p.m.  
Shorts Program III

3:30 p.m.  
"This Is Our Slaughterhouse"  
(Documentary Short)  
with  
"More than Famous"  
(Narrative Feature)

5:15 p.m.  
Animation Program I  
with  
"Invasion: Anime"  
(Documentary Feature)

5:45 p.m.  
"Journey of Hope"  
(Documentary Feature)  
with  
"Brothers on Holy Ground"  
(Documentary Feature)

8 p.m.  
"The Jackpole"  
(Narrative Short)  
with  
"The Utopian Society"  
(Narrative Feature)

8:15 p.m.  
"The Disappeared Ones"  
(Documentary Short)  
with  
"Klezmer on Fish St."  
(Documentary Feature)

10:30 p.m.  
"Getting Out"  
(Narrative Short)  
with  
"The Bachelor Man"  
(Narrative Feature)

10:45 p.m.  
"No Witness"  
(Narrative Short)  
with  
"Fatigue"  
(Narrative Feature)

The award winners will be announced at 8 p.m.

### Sunday Events

#### Best of the Fest Day at the Roadhouse Theatre

Sunday features a re-showing of all the award winning films from the previous days of screenings.

Awards include Best Narrative Feature, Best Narrative Short, Best Documentary Feature, Best Documentary Short, Best Experimental, the President's Vision Award and the Grand Prize Best of the Fest.

Last year's President's Vision Award winner "Out of these Rooms" will also be shown Sunday.

#### Tentative Schedule

1 p.m. Screening  
Intermission  
3 p.m. Screening  
Intermission  
5 p.m. Screening  
Intermission  
7 p.m. Screening  
Intermission  
9 p.m. Performance by Jr.'s Last Laugh's Dueling Pianos.



#### Tickets and Directions

Ticket prices are considerably discounted from the previous year. An all-day pass costs just \$25 with a student ID.

Daily admissions are \$4 for screenings at the Avalon Hotel and \$6 for Roadhouse Theatre Events.

An after-party will take place at 10 p.m. on both Friday and Saturday at Docksider Tavern, 1015 State St.

The Roadhouse Theatre, Avalon Hotel and Docksider Tavern are all located in downtown Erie.

For more information visit [www.greatlakesfilmfest.com](http://www.greatlakesfilmfest.com).

## One bitchin' Pittsburgh filmmaker



Preview by Daniel J. Stasiewski  
A&E Editor

When John-Paul Nickel plastered the Reed Union Building with ads for his film "Why We Had to Kill Bitch," offending people wasn't on his mind.

In fact, the film's tagline is "A Feel Good Family Comedy."

"I took my family to it," Nickel said. The first-time director, however, does have a way of defending his film's title. Nickel's theory, "Doesn't everyone know Bitch?"

A combination mock-documentary/romantic comedy, Nickel said he took "little truisms" from the relationships of the people around him and exaggerated them into a film full of comedic exploits.

Still, "Why We Had to Kill Bitch" is far from a Sandra Bullock, cookie-cutter romance.

"It's a film that both adheres to and defies all the rules of the romantic comedy," Nickel said, quoting a close friend.

Shot in the first-person, the film follows the character Kevin as he uses his digital camcorder to capture a day with his friend Eugene for a film class.

Eugene is, to put it nicely, a big loser who is still lamenting over the breakup with his ex, simply called Bitch. During the day Eugene falls for a new, perfect girl, loses her, and has tries to get her back.

The catch, Nickel said, is Kevin has always filmed his friends, so the narrative is supported by flashbacks of Eugene's life with Bitch, a grand-jury testimony, and "the incident."

The unseen Kevin's voyeuristic personality is just the beginning of a list of quirks and perversions in the large cast of characters. Still, the "random shenanigans" these eccentricities lead to is what gives then film its momentum.

Breaking into an office, stealing a friend's wallet, and, again, "the incident" all lead to calling in a favor from a drug dealer, just to hook Eugene up with a girl other than Bitch.

Stunts like smuggling Canadians over the border and lacing children's ice cream with marijuana also shed light on the moronic misadventures of the licentious characters.

Nickel said at one point the bizarre high jinks almost lead to the title "Oh Shenanigans," which is a running gag in the film.

Besides the digital video camera style, "Why We Had to Kill Bitch" offers more

than just a "Swingers"-like surface story with edgier exploits.

"You can watch the background of the movie and not pay attention to the plot and still crack up at everything that's going on," said Nickel who utilized improvisational humor and lightning fast jokes to reward the audience members that pay attention.

The background story is almost like a film of its own, but the story is still about a group of straight white guys out on the town.

"It's really like a night out with friends," said Nickels who insisted the film isn't overly autobiographical.

Even so, Nickel, a Pittsburgh native, does use his hometown and many of the local entertainment venues for the film's backdrop.

"There's a scene where they're going to The Improv," said Nickel. "It's actually taken from something that happens in Pittsburgh."

The city did had its impact on the film, but "Why We Had to Kill Bitch" also made a historic impression.

When the film premiered at the Loews Waterfront Cinema, it filled a thousand seat theater and became the largest world premiere ever in Pittsburgh. Nickel said he actually needed a second screening to make sure everyone who wanted to see the film had the opportunity.

Now, the film is about to make a substantial move forward appearing at its first film festival in the country, Erie's own Great Lakes Independent Film Festival.

The film is currently schedule for two screenings today at 2:45 p.m. and again at a special Midnight Madness screening at 12:30 a.m. It is one of only a few films to get two screenings at this year's festival. A third is possible pending the awards outcome.

Nickel hasn't visited Erie in 10 years, so he's not sure how the film will do in a city more than three times smaller than Pittsburgh.

"It's a matter of, if you see the title and you laugh, or it piques your interest then people are going to come," said Nickel.

Whatever the reaction, Nickel said "Why We Had to Kill Bitch" is more than just one director's creation.

"The movie is good, and the movie good because I surrounded myself with very talented people," said Nickel, "not because of anything I did."

## Old world 'Order'



Heath Ledger (right) makes a deal with the sin eater (Benno Furman).

COURTESY OF ZAP2IT.COM

Review by Daniel J. Stasiewski  
A&E Editor

The Catholic Church may need a superhero, but I doubt it would have Heath Ledger fill those tight spots. Even as it faces figurative demons in its post-scandal reconstruction, the Church doesn't need a conflicted young priest trained in an ancient form of demon exterminating as its...well...savior.

In "The Order," Ledger stars as a priest who gradually ascends to the rank of comic-book hero with a few tragic pushes along the way. There is a moral conflict and an evil villain, and in its cryptic development it occasionally has elements of M. Night Shyamalan's superhero thriller, "Unbreakable." As far as Ledger's character goes, this is true first issue if I've ever seen one.

Unfortunately, beyond the character, the film doesn't seem to have the style or innovation to make the priest leap tall buildings. The tangled combination of B-movie horror and recycled images from contemporary science fiction makes "The Order" seem as directionless as a drunk, blind man driving a semitrailer.

The film begins with an old priest returning to his gothic abode, where a handsome young man (Benno Furman), who is obviously not a priest, sits waiting for the elderly cleric in the living quarters. The priest enters the room. He slips a pill, and the young man explains it is time. Outside the room, the door appears black with a bright, burning light slipping through the cracks in the frame, the first of many tired images to come.

Cut to New York, where Alex Bernier (Heath Ledger) is serving mass in traditional Latin with his back to the congregation. While handing out communion, Bernier serves the Cardinal of New York

(Peter Weller) who tells the priest to meet him immediately. Following mass, the Cardinal unsympathetically informs Bernier that the young man's mentor had died.

Through the old priest's training, Bernier became a fighter of the unholy in the ancient order of the Carolingians, as well as a pariah among the faithful. He decides it best to go to Rome and investigate the death, but a young woman named Mara (Shannyn Sossamon) who tried to once kill him shows up on his doorstep. Mara has the police after her for escaping from a mental institution, and Bernier, being a compassionate man (okay, mostly a man), takes her with him to Rome.

Upon his arrival in Rome, he examines his mentor's body and sees two unusual marks on his chest. His inquiring mind eventually discovers a link to an ancient absolution technique known as sin eating. A sin eater takes on a dying person's sins, allowing instant access to heaven upon death. Thinking the sin eater killed his mentor, Bernier enlists the help of the only other living Carolingian to hunt down the monster.

Bernier, however, is more prey than predator, and the sin eater uses the reluctant priest's lust for Mara to pull him into a plot that could destroy the traditions of the Church and Bernier's life.

At this point the film goes into a dubious period until the credits roll. Sometimes Ledger comes off as a private detective, sometimes as Mulder from "The X-Files," and still sometimes he's merely as a hotshot cop. Even before leaving for Rome, Ledger's character has the presence of an action hero, not a priest.

Take this sequence. Bernier falls into a sewer drain with a grate him blocking his escape. His sidekick (played by Mark Addy) sees a padlocked entrance to the rushing waterway, and actually uses his cross as a crowbar to pry the lock open, treating the sacred object like a bat-a-rang.

While it's not Ledger's character that time, he does have his hero moments, including saving a hanged man by shooting the rope and sauntering around like the Crow, not a priest.

There's also a scene in a pagan disco that takes its style from a vampire club in "Blade." While the booming rhythms of techno music seem annoying, they are never as evil as the people carnally pounding their bodies together. It's silly, but remember, "Blade" was based on a comic and can get away with some wild foolishness. "The Order" can't pin down whether it wants the camp or not.

Tragically, even the film's most interesting concept, the sin eating, falls victim to the disastrous attempts at serious horror. After one attempt, the sin eating effects were reworked to make the sins look less "funny." As ridiculous as the looked, they couldn't be as bland as the transparent copies of Sentinels from "The Matrix" films. The sins could also be compared to squid or de-formed sperm, but it's better to let the lack of originality prove how not terrifying the effects actually are.

"The Order" was written and directed by the Academy Award winning writer of "L.A. Confidential," Brian Helgeland. Helgeland has been on tumbling ever since his Oscar win, and "The Order" is his lowest point thus far. In this film the cast isn't the problem, and neither is the actual premise. With Helgeland being the only guy thoroughly involved in between, Helgeland might consider taking control of the pen instead of the camera.

"The Order," directed by Brian Helgeland, starring Heath Ledger, Shannyn Sossamon, Benno Furman, and Peter Weller, is currently playing at Tinseltown.

