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THE HOLIDAY ISSUE



*Support
Queen
Businesses*

*Gay-holiday
Gift Ideas*

*Friendsgiving:
A Microwavable
Feast*

*Free2Luv
a beacon for
LGBTQ+ youth*

*Dia de los Muertos
in B'ham*

*Dog Gone Seattle
brings
pups & people
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SGN

**THE
HOLIDAY ISSUE**

Capitol Thrill



SHOP LGBTQ

*Give some monetary love to these
Queen businesses this holiday season*

BY KALI HERBST MININO
SGN CONTRIBUTING WRITER

I have yet to hear Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas Is You" this year, which means there's at least some time before the frantic gift scramble of the holiday season.

Petrified of leaving the house for Black Friday? Heavily avoiding buying from Amazon? This guide includes local, Queer-owned businesses to support this year in places where the *SGN* is distributed.

Seattle — Capitol Thrill

Anything in the store that isn't owner Jeff Gonzales's original design is curated by him, focusing specifically on other local, independent, underrepresented creators. There's a small section filled specifically with Queer-owned merchandise, called "the little Queer pop-up shop," which is a permanent fixture. Bios of product creators scatter the walls of the area.

Gonzales' favorite item is the Winter Spruce Candle from the Queer Candle Co. That being said, he chose everything in the shop himself, so it was difficult to choose.

"It's all the things that I love," Gonzales said.

There's also a small gallery in the back, which will be used for a show of art costing \$150 and under later in the season. If an original piece isn't in the budget, though, all sorts of clothing and trinkets here cost under \$30 and can be purchased in-store or online. 1205 E. Pike St., # 1D, <https://www.capitolthrill.store>

Tacoma — TheLovesomeDove

The Etsy shop TheLovesomeDove has colorful prints and adorable ceramics (like ghosts with cowboy hats) that cost mostly under \$20. A portion of the profits goes to an organization that focuses on environmental or social justice every month.

Angela Larsen, the arts educator who

created the business, is a muralist interested in accessible art. They started it to integrate art into daily life, and their favorite item is a calendar beautifully assembled with bright primary colors.

"It's so fun to make, and I love to focus on color palettes and themes for the monthly images. The goal with these images/texts is to encourage a bit of reflection and self-love," they wrote to the *SGN*. <https://www.etsy.com/shop/TheLovesomeDove>

Spokane — Atomic Threads

The team at Atomic Threads has brought pin-up and alternative clothing to Spokane's historic boulevard. Every week, the employees make a custom shoe order from their suppliers, so the style enthusiast on the gift list can have a pair that perfectly matches their aesthetic.

The shop is also a venue for a plethora of community events. Workshops titled "Art Across All Mediums" and "Trans Empowerment" can be found on the event calendar. There's also a monthly cabaret show, *The Bombshell Revue*, that includes performances such as aerial arts, drag, burlesque, and comedy. This month's costs \$35 for general admission, and it's perfect for anyone who prefers experiences to physical gifts.

1905 N. Monroe St., <https://www.atomicthreadsinc.com>

Bellingham — Third Planet Boutique

Before becoming the owner of the boutique, Erika Millage was a long-time employee. They're the second person in this guide to recommend the Queer Candle Co., and they also enjoy the store's super soft sweaters.

The impressive collection of jewelry, clothing, stickers, crystals, and other novelties can be purchased in-store and online. There will also be a sale Nov. 24–26



Third Planet

offering multiple discounts, including 20% off body jewelry, 30% off clothes, and 50% off clearance merchandise. There are many items in the catalog under \$30.

It's Millage's tenth holiday season at Third Planet, and they say this year feels extra special.

"I am overwhelmingly proud of the safe and inclusive space we have created here... and really look forward to helping the wonderful humans in our community find the perfect gifts for themselves or others," they wrote to the *SGN*.

200 W. Holly St., <https://www.thirdplanetboutique.com>

Ocean Shores — Snooter-doots

Each little friend created by Gina McCauley has lovable, wonky, recognizable eyes and a unique name and birthday.



Atomic Threads



The Lonesome Dove



Snooter-doots

"They're happy, whimsical, stuffed sculptures made of felted wool," McCauley said. "They're just here to make people happy."

Right now, McCauley is working on snowmen in her Ocean Shores home studio to join her collection of animals, monsters, food, and bugs. Her favorites are the fish-related and insect critters, because she taught an insect class at Edmonds Community College. Each one costs \$70 and under and is meticulously handcrafted for 4-6 hours at a time.

There are plenty of places to buy Snooter-doots. McCauley has a website and an Etsy shop, but they are also available at multiple retailers across Washington, including the Seattle Art Museum.

<https://snooter-doots.com>

DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS IN BELLINGHAM: DRAG EDITION

BY CAMERON MARTINEZ
SGN CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The savory smell of tamales permeated the air while drag queens sporting Día de los Muertos attire lip-synced between tables filled with cheering spectators. This was the scene at Bellingham's El Sueño Brewing Company's Día de los Muertos drag show on the night of Saturday, Nov. 4.

The evening was hosted by Rumor Cabaret's Queer Ass Friday host Rikki Sinsation and featured a cast made up of queens of Mexican descent. Along with performances by Rikki, the talents of Isabella de la Rosa, Isabella Richards, and Kali Vera were also showcased. The majority of the performances included Spanish songs, and the makeup worn by the queens was heavily influenced by the look of a *calavera* (a painted skull that represents the holiday).

The show also entailed a costume competition for the patrons of the restaurant, ranging from cute Barbie outfits to a Michael Myers so committed to the role, he refused to speak.



Isabella Richards



Kali Vera



Rikki Sinsation

El Sueño is a recent arrival to Bellingham, having opened its doors in February. The owners, the couple Osbaldo and Dennis, intend the space to be a community-centered place to celebrate Queer and BIPOC culture. The brewery, which prides

itself on being a Gay- and Mexican-owned establishment, boasts colorful decor and sells "Support Queer Beer" T-shirts.

And yes, El Sueño does have a Queer beer; it's called Un Poco Gay, and it was a seasonal brew created for Pride.

For more information about El Sueño Brewing Company, visit <https://elsuenobrewing.com> or follow its Facebook and Instagram accounts by the same name.



AN APPRECIATION FOR THE RATTILY ORGANIZED FRIENDSGIVING

BY KALI HERBST MININO
SGN CONTRIBUTING WRITER

For this issue, I was looking to report on alternative Thanksgiving gatherings created by young Queer people who couldn't spend it with their families for whatever reason. Maybe they were rejected for their identity, maybe the rising cost of living made affording a plane ticket home impossible, or maybe Thanksgiving's ties to colonization raised ethical concerns that caused them to forgo the holiday. Whatever the reason, I wanted to find these get-togethers and report on all the different ways the feast day could look.

As soon as I started reaching out to groups, however, I found people concerned for their safety as a result of publicly speaking about their celebration, people who knew their

social circle was doing something for the holiday but not exactly what, and people who weren't willing to share due to the private and intimate nature of their event. Put simply, the alternative Thanksgiving gathering was so incredibly personal, it apparently wasn't for a reporter to pry into.

My Friendsgivings have never been well planned and are usually thrown together at the last minute — so it might have been silly of me to assume that anyone else would feel comfortable having their own appear in a newspaper.

I would never let a reporter take photos of the Trader Joe's microwavable feast on my table. I'd never let them interview me about

how my roommate and I rummaged through the near-empty supermarket shelves, taking whatever better-planned gatherings had rejected. My Friendsgiving preparations had me feeling like a rat, scurrying around and picking up scraps that would never fit into the traditional holiday aesthetic.

That rowdy, ratty, rugged event was by far the most enjoyable, though. There was no pressure to make every bit of the day go by a schedule or look like anything perfect, poised, polished, and picturesque. Anything could fit into our Queer celebration — including our preferred pronouns, the binder I wore for the first half of the night, and our shared hope for an inclusive future. We wore

sweats, laughed about opening our third box of ginger soup dumplings, and poured each other cheap (by no means delicious) drinks. It was radical having that amount of appreciation and support in one room.

I'm disappointed that I encountered so many barriers to people sharing about what their Queer gathering looks like. It's so painful to know that these need to be kept meticulously private to protect the safety of their attendees. It's even more gut-wrenching to know that an image of perceived perfection that you always see in Hallmark films — a white family in pretty clothes around a table with a festive tablecloth and immaculately prepared food — has stopped me and others from feeling comfortable sharing about our "imperfect" get-togethers.

Despite my sadness about all the reasons a Queer person might not be able to talk to a reporter about the way they celebrate, I think the private nature of the event is part of what makes these alternative gatherings special. If they're forced to be private, the group truly gets to pick and choose what their holiday looks like. They get to exclude the uncle who has been waiting all year to utter a slur, avoid that one disgusting dish everyone eats as a courtesy, and spend a fraction of the money it would take to have a "perfect" celebration. It's an opportunity to completely reject what's rejected them, and create a deliciously Queer environment of mutual aid.

The reasons why these Friendsgivings can't be shared are despairing, but the event itself doesn't have to be. I encourage readers to keep their secrets and wholeheartedly enjoy their rattily organized celebration. Maliciously comply with the private corner the gathering's been forced into — the unenjoyable, "perfect" one wouldn't get it anyway.

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Clockwise from top left: Cy Paolantonio, Katie Pasbody, Rebecca Cort, and Amelio Garcia. Photos by Sayed Alamy.



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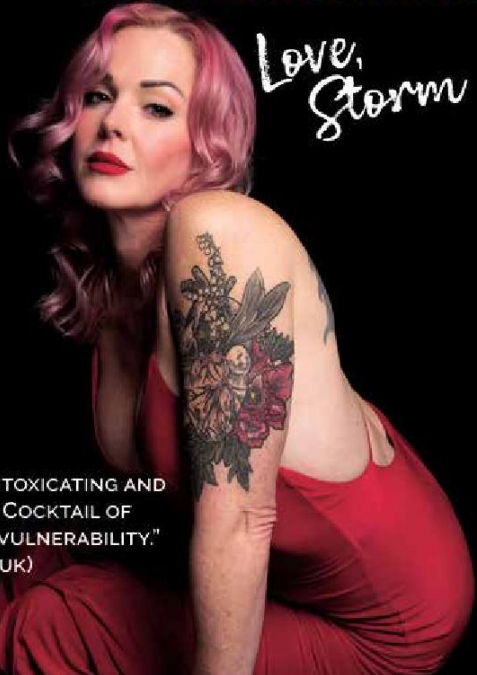

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SGN

THE
HOLIDAY ISSUE

2023 GIFT GIVING GUIDE

BY CAMERON MARTINEZ & LINDSEY ANDERSON
SGN CONTRIBUTING WRITER & STAFF WRITER



Well, somehow it's already mid-November! If you're anything like me, that means you're mentally preparing to break the bank on gifts for family and friends.

But what should you buy? While I can't give you personalized ideas for everyone on your list, hopefully at least one of these gifts is the perfect one for a loved one.

Consumables under \$15

If you're the kind of person who's scared of giving a bad gift, I recommend choosing consumable products this year. The glory of the gift is you'll never know if the receiver consumed it or gave it away or even threw it out, because it is meant to be used until it's gone. These products can also make great stocking stuffers because of their small sizes!

For those who love to snack and don't have a nut allergy, I recommend HBAF, a brand based out of Korea that is guaranteed to make your loved one's taste buds ecstatic. While the signature flavor is honey butter, there's also hot and spicy chicken, garlic bread, wasabi, baked corn, salted caramel, tteokbokki, and much much more. You can find its products online at Olive Young's global store for \$7, as well as on Amazon

for \$10. If you ever find yourself in Korea, I recommend buying a bunch, because they sell for roughly \$3.75 over there.

For those who like good smells, I recommend grabbing a candle from Seattle Candle Company. All are hand-poured in small batches using 100% soy wax, coconut oil, and cotton and paper wicks. The top-selling fragrances are evergreen and cedar, coffee, vanilla and sandalwood, and grapefruit and mint. The cost of a 4 oz. candle is \$12, but larger sizes are offered as well.

For the chocolate lover, I recommend buying some from ROYCE, a luxury brand that started in the Hokkaido region of Japan but has since moved its operations to the United States. The cheapest is a basic-style bar for \$8.99, but the company also sells more unique creations, such as chocolate potato chips, marshmallow chocolate, and an assortment of matcha products.

Subscriptions under \$100

Everyone has a subscription to something these days, so why not get someone another?

For those who spend all of their money on books, I recommend getting a subscription to Book of the Month. Subscribers get

to choose from five to seven new hardcovers or audiobooks each month. If your giftee doesn't read fast or wants to skip a month, it won't cost them more money. They also get to choose books featured in previous months if they don't like the current selection. A three-book membership costs \$59.99.

For those who are addicted to caffeine, I recommend a subscription to the Atlas Coffee Club. Every month, it includes fresh coffee with information and pictures of the country it came from. The country cards even include a history of the coffee about to be consumed, so you know the whole story before drinking. Coffee comes in whole beans, ground, or as a Keurig-compatible pod. Atlas is currently holding a Black Friday sale in which you can get a six-month gift for \$94 as opposed to \$120.

For the wannabe bartender, I recommend a Cocktail Courier subscription. Each shipment comes with full customization based on taste preference, plus recipe cards, ingredients for 6-8 cocktails, and booze. For the classic-sized package that includes the alcohol, it costs \$64.99, but subscribers can save an additional 20% by purchasing multiple months.

Gifts for the naughty person in your life

Looking to stuff something other than stockings this holiday season? Check out Babeland Seattle's hottest sale of the year! Through Black Friday weekend, the store has exclusive online deals (though maybe search these on a private browser). The Life Is Utopia Bundle includes the Utopia Silicone Bullet Pleasure Kit, a Wicked Sensual Aqua water-based lubricant, and Wicked Foam n' Fresh Cleaner for \$47.50, which is 50% off the usual price.

Select BDSM items are also up to 70% off for anyone looking to please their favorite ho-ho-ho this December. Saffron-brand acrylic paddles and Hog Tie and Cuff sets are 50% off the usual price, while the Saffron Love Strap is 45% off, and the Gauntlet Bondage Cuffs are a whopping 75% off.

No partner this season? No problem! Babeland is also offering special online deals on vibrator packs. The One Gold Standard Play collection, which includes the viral One Rose clitoral stimulator, One Wand Vibe, and One Rabbit G-Spot Vibe, usually \$270, is on sale for \$150.

Being nice is overrated. Check out these deals and more for all those on your naughty list. Happy holidays!



FREE 2 LUV A BEACON OF HOPE FOR LGBTQ+ YOUTH

BY LINDSEY ANDERSON
SGN STAFF WRITER

Photo by Shane O'Neal

The holiday season can be hard for LGBTQ+ youth who don't have a robust support group around them. Tonya Sandis understands this strain, which is why she started the organization Free 2 Luv with her wife 12 years ago.

"It was based on the suicide epidemic. We were heartbroken by what was going on," Sandis said.

She and her wife both worked in the entertainment industry and noticed how creativity can help those in need. "We utilized the arts to uplift, engage, and empower young people to be themselves. We provide a safe space for them to express themselves and

talk about whatever is going on in their world in a creative space," Sandis said.

Free 2 Luv started as a way for LGBTQ+ youth to find mentors and embrace the power of music. "Music heals. If you're in a bad mood, it can flip it, or it can help you sit with what you're going through and allow you to deal with what that is," Sandis said. "I knew it's a creative way to have tough conversations, specifically for Queer youth, to say, 'What kind of music expresses where you are at this time in your life? When something happens, what does that sound like?' From that, we do a lot of art and conversations."

Express It journal

Since the pandemic, the organization has expanded to embrace all kinds of art.

When the COVID-19 crisis gripped the nation, Sandis and her wife noticed that LGBTQ+ youth may be particularly affected by mental health issues, and they set out to do something about it. "We worked with youth artists, psychologists, and child behavioral specialists to figure out how we can make something that can be safe, expressive, and be able to communicate any way they want," Sandis said.

The result was the *Express It* journal, a quality sketchbook and journal hybrid featuring original gender-neutral characters. "It walks them through healthy anger versus not healthy anger, or five things that put you in a good mood when you're in a bad mood," Sandis said. "If you're feeling like you want to harm yourself, what are tools you can take, and [know] that there's no shame in asking for help. There's strength in that."

Today, *Express It* is in its fourth edition. Its 72 pages are bound in a leather-like cover and include a space to write song lyrics. The book is marketed toward LGBTQ+ people between 12 and 24, since, though the original concept was to aid teens, Sandis said she's noticed that many young adults also gravitate toward the journal.

"I see it in adult spaces all the time — in universities and such. It turned out to be way more successful than we'd ever imagined," she said.

Free 2 Luv also hosts virtual workshops for people in need of community. Leaders and trained mental health professionals are available to chat, which is one of Sandis's favorite parts of working with the organization.

"The biggest win for me is when someone comes to me and says, 'I'm thinking of harming myself,' and we talk it through. I can give them my cellphone, or if we're DMing, [they can] talk it through and get through it, and they're still here," she said.

Joy and power in moving through difficulty

Sandis has received multiple lifetime

achievement awards for her work with Free 2 Luv, such as the L'Oréal Paris Woman of Worth this year. But the accolades don't compare to the human connection she creates.

"For me, no award is better than the award of a life lived," she said. "We're not always going to have good days, but don't let those bad days get in the way of all your beautiful future and the thumbprint you're going to put on that planet."

Sandis feels that the organization is just as important in 2023 as it was in 2011. "The world is a whole lot of yucky," she said. "One of our major [principles] is finding the joy and power in moving through stuff. Sometimes, it feels almost impossible when you have people who are banning books and passing legislation against Trans youth. It feels like we're in an uphill battle."

"What we're finding is that mental health needs have to be met. *Express It* is a beautiful way to have those conversations. There has to be an open dialogue about how we're feeling. Even as adults, it's tough to know how to express ourselves in this climate."

Free 2 Luv provides free copies of the *Express It* journal and a We Care package to anyone in need. "If you're struggling and you feel like you need a boost, reach out to us, and we will send one of those *Express It* books and a note and some empowerment jewelry that says, 'Hey, we're here for you, and we think you're amazing,'" Sandis said.

The organization has big plans for the future, as well. On November 20, it will host a Trans photo shoot in LA for a future billboard project. The billboards will be up in Washington in 2024.

Sandis hopes to continue to expand the group's outreach in 2024 and encourages anyone who can to donate or promote Free 2 Luv. However, more than money, Sandis asks the community to just be kind.

"It's really easy to be kind and compassionate. We never know what someone is going through. That in itself is a game changer. It's free."



It may be the most wonderful time of the year, but the holiday season can lead to unexpected dangers for our furry friends. According to Google Trends data, “Pet ER” searches spiked between December 15 and January 2. Washington ranked in the top 10 for this particular search.

But the most common holiday-related disasters are highly preventable. Here are some ways to keep your pets happy and healthy all season.

Food safety

Feasts bookend the holidays in America. However, many of our favorite holiday treats can be deadly to cats and dogs. Most dog owners know that chocolate is toxic, but gummy treats often also include an ingredient known as xylitol. When consumed, xylitol can lead to liver failure and, in severe cases, sudden death. This holiday season, keep stockings and all edible Christmas gifts far away from your pets.

Avoid sharing holiday table scraps and leftovers with your pets too. Many common seasonings contain toxic ingredients for dogs and cats. Onions, raisins, olives, and grapes are just as deadly as chocolate

for dogs, so if any of these ingredients find their way into your holiday feast, keep them far away from your pet.

Another common mistake pet owners make is allowing dogs to chew on turkey bones after carving the holiday bird. While raw, uncooked turkey bones can be a fun and healthy snack for dogs, cooked animal bones become brittle and can splinter in a dog’s throat, causing choking and asphyxiation. Consider dog-specific bones and treats as a safe alternative.

Deck the halls

Decorations can also cause danger to pets of all sizes. We’ve seen the traumatic cat scene in *Christmas Vacation*, but unfortunately, the holiday comedy isn’t far from reality.

Christmas trees cause most cat-related holiday disasters. Live trees used in American homes usually include fir, spruce, and pine. These beautiful plants are all mildly to moderately toxic to cats. When ingested, they cause digestive problems. Many tree farms also suggest water additives for live trees to preserve their color until Christmas. These chemicals are deadly when consumed by dogs and cats.

If using a live Christmas tree, keep it in a location your pets can’t access, and avoid toxic water additives.

Festive plants, like poinsettias, are also incredibly poisonous to dogs and cats. If you plan on bringing one of these plants into your house for the holidays, keep them far away from any curious nibblers.

Plastic trees are also enticing to cats, who may try to eat some branches. Animals cannot digest plastic, and consumption can cause dangerous blockages in the intestines.

Tinsel is another tree decoration cats are drawn to, due to its shininess. Vets recommend avoiding using tinsel or other small decorations that cats may try to eat, and never leaving your cat alone with your tree.

Prevent sudden electrocution by indoor or outdoor Christmas lights by wrapping wires in electrical tape or using a wire hider. This will keep young teething pets from exploring extension cords.

Most pet parents know not to leave candles burning around pets without supervision — a wagging tail or curious kitten can lead to a disaster. However, many don’t know that candles release toxins into the air that can irritate pets. When burned

constantly, they can even cause respiratory issues. So look for pet-safe soy blends, and avoid paraffin wax or candles with additives. Unfortunately, most bath and bodyworks candles include paraffin wax, but small businesses, like Paddywack in Mill Creek, carry pet-friendly options.

Gift guide

Young people will spend a small fortune on pet gifts this holiday season. It is important to know which are safest for your animals.

Most dogs love chewing bones, but vets warn consumers to avoid those made from rawhide, as it is the leading cause of stomach blockages and choking. Rawhide doesn’t break down in the stomach like natural treats.

Great alternative chews include bully sticks (but *don’t* google what they’re made of), Chhurrpup Yak Chews (which can be found at Mud Bay), and Northwest Naturals frozen uncooked bones.

There’s nothing cuter than a pet in a holiday sweater, but owners should never leave dogs and cats in clothing without supervision. Prolonged time in sweaters can cause stress and overheating. Outfits can also become choking hazards if your pet attempts to take them off.

Holiday parties

Of course, the holidays are a perfect time for catching up with family and friends, but visitors can cause increased stress for pets, especially those with separation anxiety. If hosting a holiday get-together, assess what your pet will need to be comfortable.

If you have a Houdini, keep them in a safe location where they can’t make a break for it during all the commotion. If your dog or cat is shy around visitors, ensure they have a place to hide, and let guests know they would prefer privacy. Even the most social animals can get overwhelmed with large groups. Make sure guests know and respect your pet’s boundaries, and *always* monitor children when interacting with your animals.

When the holiday season rolls around, we often think about the ones we love the most. Keep your pets safe, happy, and healthy this year. Small changes to your traditions can mean the difference between life and death.



“Home for the holidays” gained a new meaning for Seattle resident Jenny Nordin when she founded her nonprofit, Dog Gone Seattle, seven years ago. Since 2017, Nordin and her team of dedicated pet foster parents have saved over 5,350 shelter dogs from across the country.

As the holiday season quickly approaches, they aren’t slowing down. Since the pandemic, they’ve seen an increased need for dog fosters. “The landscape of dog rescue is so challenging,” Nordin said. “Adoptions have slowed, so many dogs are in shelters post-COVID, even here in our local shelters. They used to have a lot of space, but now they’re full and turning people away when they come to surrender their dogs.”

Animal shelters across the United States are seeing a spike in pet surrenders, especially as many who adopted a “COVID pet” are now returning to work and unable to continue to care for their animals in the same capacity. In July, the Humane Society for Tacoma and Pierce County had over 460 animals in its care. As a result, the shelter waived adoption fees.

Dog Gone Seattle helps alleviate the strain put on shelters by placing dogs in foster homes so they can await adoption in the comfort of a warm and loving environment instead of staying in a cold cage. The program also brings in dogs from high-kill shelters in Texas, Hawaii, California, and Louisiana. These animals are often in dire need of care and medical attention.

One such dog was Ross, a Great Pyrenees mix Nordin helped bring to Seattle from San Bernardino, California. “He was chained to a tree [with] a heavy chain. He was very matted and walked with a limp,” Nordin recalled.

Once Dog Gone Seattle got ahold of Ross, they were able to perform X-rays and found that the dog had experienced a severe break in his tail that was left untreated, resulting in bowel issues. Ross moved in with a loving foster parent, who took him to acupuncture, administered cold therapy, and switched him to a raw diet to help with his digestive system.

“In three months, we went from a dog who was in a lot of pain and a matted mess to a normal, happy, and healthy dog who had none of these issues,” Nordin said. “We found a family who loves him and continues with the raw diet and cold therapy.”

Selfless and rewarding

Finding foster parents is the most important part of Dog Gone Seattle. “If you’ve ever thought about fostering, I encourage it,” Nordin said. “It’s a great way to save a life and meet new people. We cover all expenses and provide supplies, and we will match you with a dog that will be a good fit for your family.”

Dogs usually only stay with DGS fosters for about four weeks before they’re matched with the right forever family.

“A lot of people worry it will be too hard to foster and say goodbye,” Nordin noted. “It is hard to say goodbye to those dogs, but it’s harder to think about them dying in a shelter. It’s a selfless thing to do, to foster, but it’s also rewarding.”

One thing that makes fostering with Dog Gone Seattle special is the community Nordin has worked hard to cultivate. “My favorite part of Dog Gone Seattle is that it allows people to create authentic connections with each other over a shared passion,” Nordin said. Long-time fosters have found meaningful friendships with each other through their work with the program.

Experienced foster parents often have advice for newcomers, and everyone is always happy to see the dogs transform into happy, social beings once again.

Community is at the core of everything Dog Gone Seattle does. While fosters are always there to welcome new shelter pups into their homes, Nordin knows that one of the most essential parts of rescue is preventing animal surrenders in the first place.

“We help the Seattle community through free training programs to help dogs stay in their homes, and we do owner surrenders when people can’t keep their dogs,” Nordin said. This year alone, DGS has taken in 69 local animal surrenders but also helped another 12 dogs stay in their homes, thanks to its free training programs.

“While we still take in dogs from other states, we are focusing on the local dogs in our community,” Nordin said. This year, DGS has helped place 750 dogs in new homes, and Nordin says they have anywhere from 100 to 150 dogs in foster care at a time.

DGS takes in all breeds, ages, and sizes of dogs, but all its intakes have one thing in common: “They’re all at risk of euthanasia,” Nordin said.

The organization’s goal for 2024 is to save as many dogs from being euthanized in overcrowded shelters as it can. DGS is also planning a new community center as a resource for foster parents and adopters.

With that project on the horizon and more and more dogs entering shelters each month, Dog Gone Seattle can use as much help as possible. Anyone interested in donating, adopting, or becoming a foster parent can connect with DGS online at doggoneseattle.com.

Foster parents for DGS have said the organization is a great way to connect with dogs and other humans who love them. “It’s a human program as much as it is a dog program, in that sense,” Nordin said. “While all dog people who do this work would say ‘I love dogs more than people,’ you can’t do this work without the people.”

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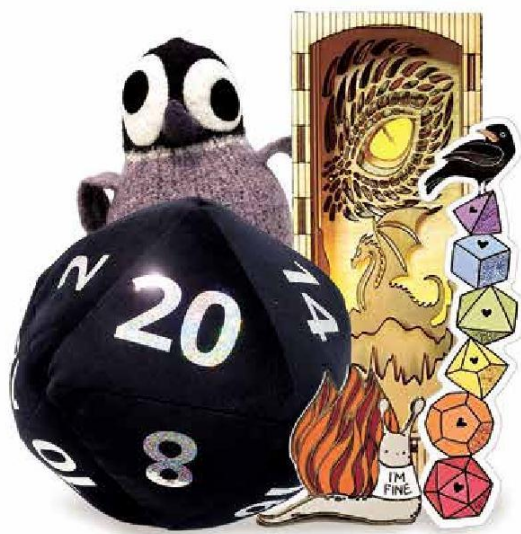
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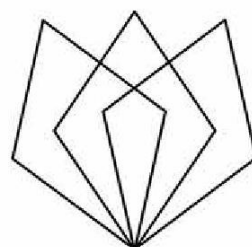
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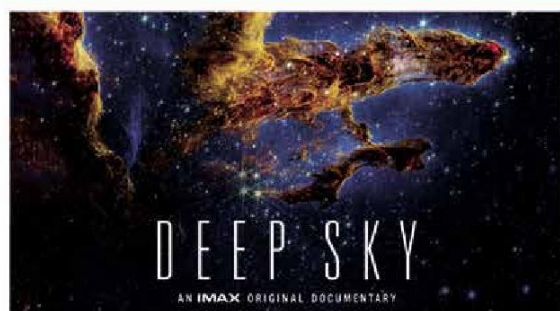


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IT'S A WONDERFUL KNIFE AN UNABASHEDLY QUEER YULETIDE SLASHER GIFT WORTH UNWRAPPING

BY SARA MICHELLE FETTERS
SGN STAFF WRITER

Photo courtesy of RLJE Films / Shudder



MAKING A ROMANTIC, YULETIDE, "CAPRACORN" SLASHER

An interview with *It's a Wonderful Knife* screenwriter
Michael Kennedy

BY SARA MICHELLE FETTERS
SGN STAFF WRITER

Photo courtesy of RLJE Films / Shudder

It's a Wonderful Knife is not so shockingly inspired by the 1946 Frank Capra holiday classic *It's a Wonderful Life* — only with a modern-day, very Queer-friendly, romantic slasher-horror-film twist. It follows Angel Falls high school senior Winnie Carruthers (Jane Widdop), who, on Christmas Eve (the one-year anniversary of her killing of a knife-wielding murderer dressed up like an avenging archangel in all white), states that the world would have been better off had she never been born.

Wrong. Suddenly she's whisked into an alternate reality where the killer lives, some of her most treasured loved ones are dead, and no one in town knows who the heck she is. Teaming up with Angel Falls outcast Bernie Simon (Jess McLeod), Winnie must figure out a way to set things right before she's stranded in this new reality for good. Along the way, she also rediscovers her holiday spirit and maybe even falls in love. It's all a great deal of gorily amusing fun.

Screenwriter Michael Kennedy follow-up to 2020's *Freaky* is another inventive, crowd-pleasing gem that horror audiences are almost certain to adore. I sat down with Kennedy to talk about the film, and he had plenty to say. Here are the edited, semi-spoiler-y highlights from our wide-ranging conversation:



Michael Kennedy — Courtesy photo

Sara Michelle Feters: I get the idea of making a horror film out of *Freaky Friday*. That makes sense to me. But where does one get the idea to do the same with *It's a Wonderful Life*?

Michael Kennedy: There's a couple of reasons, but the biggest one: it was my dad's favorite movie. I thought it was a cool way to kind of play with something he loved. He died five years ago, so it was a nice way to kind of connect with him...

I also love *It's a Wonderful Life*. I think it's so fun, but I also think that it's really

see **KENNEDY** page 19

IT'S A WONDERFUL KNIFE Theaters

On Christmas Eve, mild-mannered high schooler Winnie Carruthers (Jane Widdop) saved her hometown Angel Falls from becoming the murderous landing spot for a psychotic killer dressed like a faceless, all-white archangel, but not before a small handful of people — including her best friend — were brutally slaughtered. A year later, it is as if everyone, including her father David (Joel McHale), mom Judy (Erin Boyes), and star-athlete older brother Jimmy (Aiden Howard), has moved on, choosing to act like the bloody holiday massacre never even happened.

Before you can say "Clarence," "George Bailey," or "Bedford Falls," Winnie finds herself in a surreal situation when, on the anniversary of her slaying the killer and underneath a mystical aurora, she states aloud that the world would have been a better place had she never existed. Overnight, she's thrust into an alternate reality where this lethal angelic demon still exists, no one knows who she is, and, if she doesn't set things straight, she — along with everyone she loves the most — will be on this vicious psychopath's naughty list.

It's a Wonderful Knife is an unabashedly Queer delight. It's another violent lark, inspired by a family-friendly cinematic classic, fresh from the sinister mind of screenwriter Michael Kennedy, and much like *Freaky*, 2020's body-swapping slice of gender-bending carnage, this gory spin on a yuletide staple is equally inventive. But there is an added layer of emotional depth and genuine empathetic catharsis to this goofy genre mashup — a heartfelt warmth that's downright sublime — that sets the film apart from its predecessor.

The central relationship that makes everything work is between Winnie and the town's outcast, Bernie Simon (Jess McLeod). In the alternate reality, the former has to convince the latter she's acquainted with her clueless classmate (even though they were never friends when they actually knew one another). This allows a connection to spark, one that may even blossom into romance.

Widdop and McLeod are divine. They have an instantaneous connection. The pair are entirely on one another's wavelength, and their chemistry is so ferociously pal-

pable that it comes close to melting the screen. They produce the film's biggest laughs, they help augment its most insidious thrills, and — most importantly — they give the project its humanity. There's a line between them near the end that's so beautifully unforeseen that I yelped in teary happiness, this single moment perfectly summarizing all of the themes in Kennedy's script involving community, family, acceptance, and togetherness that he is so deftly attempting to explore.

The other standout performance comes from Justin Long, Channeling Dustin Hoffman as Dorothy Michaels from *Tootsie* by way of one of Donald Trump's angrily egocentric children, he plays the power-mad businessman Henry Waters. It's a larger-than-life portrait of pure, unadulterated, dippy evil that's like something out of a Hanna-Barbera television cartoon. McHale is also quite good, delivering a surprisingly multilayered performance, while Katharine Isabelle pops up and steals her fair share of scenes as Winnie's colorfully deadpan lesbian aunt Gale Prescott.

The final showdown is something of a minor letdown. It feels slightly anticlimactic, and while I loved how key characters join forces to put down evil and free their town from a hypnotic curse, things happen with such matter-of-fact suddenness that the final thrust of the knife into terror's abdomen is underwhelming.

But director Tyler MacIntyre (*Tragedy Girls*) never loses focus. He keeps a zippy pace, and I liked that he does not allow anyone to take all this slasher nonsense too seriously. Yet he also doesn't treat any of these events as farce. There is no winking at the audience, no *Airplane*-style or *Scary Movie*-like inanity to dilute the warmly comforting joy pulsating at the center of all the gruesome butchery. Instead, he makes sure this remains the Winnie and Bernie show, and Widdop and McLeod continually dazzle as they amorously rise to the occasion.

I had no idea what to expect when *It's a Wonderful Knife* came my way. I certainly did not envisage it becoming an instant, holiday-themed, comfort-film favorite. But that's been the case. This grisly gift was a pleasure to unwrap, a ruby red love letter to both the holiday season and a high-concept horror chestnut that spans multiple generations. I couldn't have asked Santa for more.



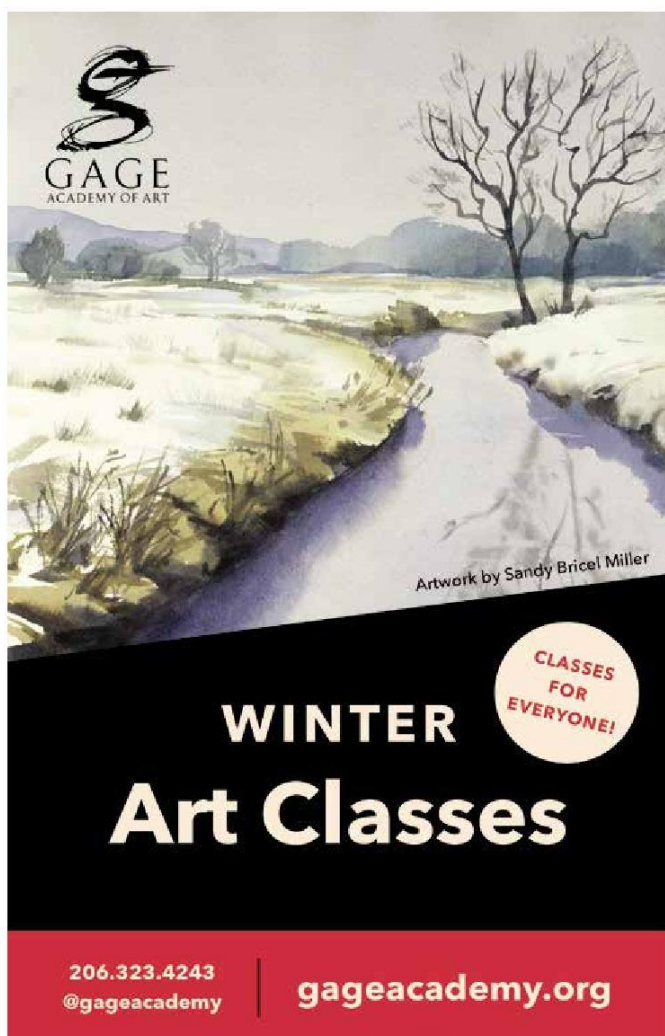
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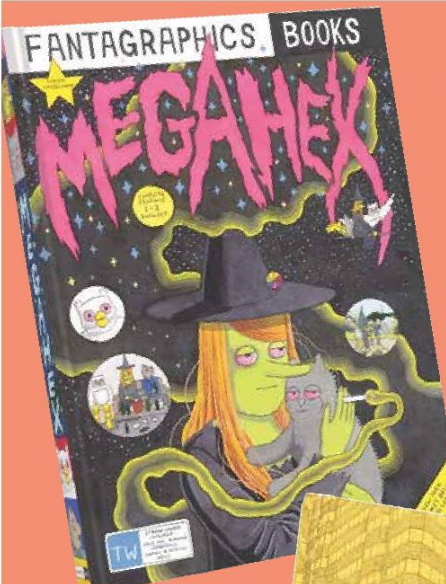
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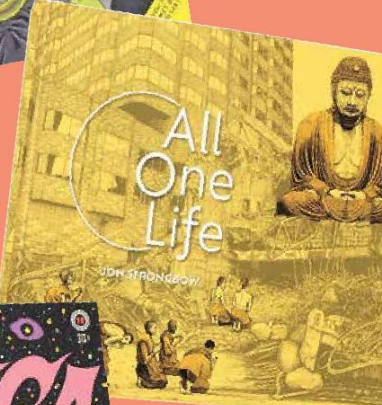
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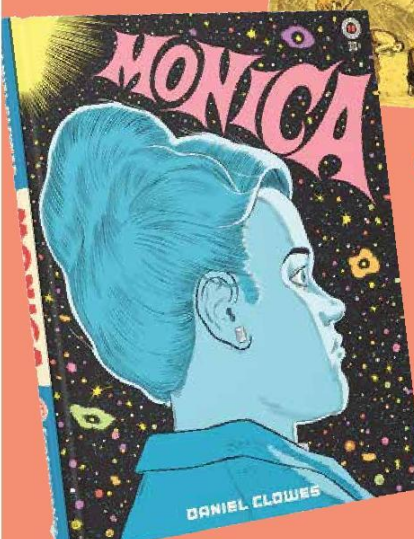

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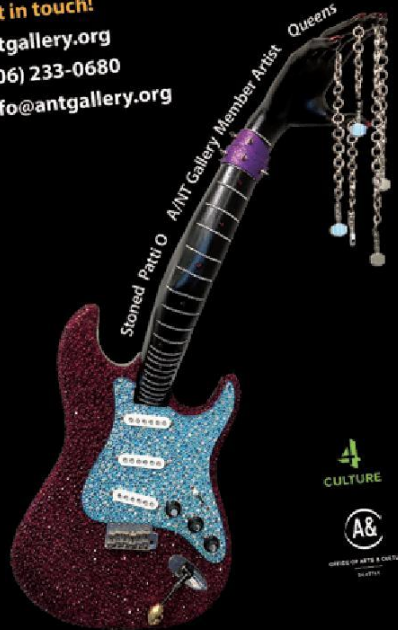
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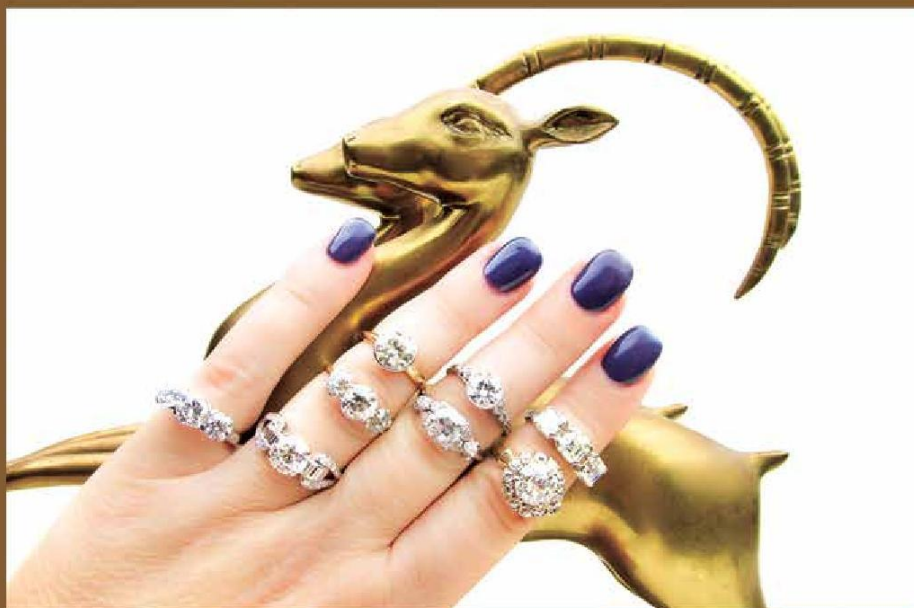
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fucked-up and dark. I was just like, "It already is kind of a horror movie, so let's make it a slasher movie?"

For me, [in] these mashups, I respect those movies so much. I hope people don't think we're making fun of them or I'm making fun of them, because, for me, it's out of love... I would never just do this kind of thing to some random movie that I do not love.

SMF: That's the big thing. With *Freaky* and with *It's a Wonderful Knife*, you can really feel the reverence and respect for the source material. But how do you strike a balance? How do you make it fun and fresh and silly and scary, but at the same time pay homage to and treat the source material with respect?

MK: You just said it. You do it by treating your material with respect.

Chris Landon and I had a lot of conversations before making *Freaky*. I had a lot of conversations on this movie as a solo writer with the producers. With the former, we knew from the start we were not making fun of *Freaky Friday*. Here, we are not making fun of *It's a Wonderful Life*. We're respecting them, because we're respecting ourselves and we're respecting our characters.

Sure, there's some parody, and there's a little bit of satire going on, but it's also true that the emotional current is the most important part of both movies. This goes a long way in the tone and the feel and the look, and all that different stuff we're trying to do. It starts by respecting our own material and respecting what influenced us. I think that's why things feel balanced. We're not making fun of anything. We're not making fun of the situation the characters are in.

SMF: I love that you bring up the emotional respect aspect, because, I think why I am head over heels for this movie is the relationship between Winnie and Bernie. I can relate to both of them, and I wanted their connection to manifest. How difficult was it to get that on the page? At the same time, how much this was due to Jane and Jess bringing these characters to life?

MK: A lot of it is on the page. I always tell people — and I think some people get it when they see the movie — that I'm kind of sneakily writing a movie where it looks like Winnie's the main character, but in some ways it's actually Bernie. I think act two of the movie is Bernie's story, once she starts getting involved and you start learning more about the pain she's feeling, what makes her tick, and what actually is keeping her — quite frankly — alive.

So, the relationship was on the page. I always described it as they are falling in love, whether it's romantically or platonically.

But Jane and Jess brought the rest. They really brought the flirtation. They brought the chemistry. They brought the butterflies. I love the subtleties in some of the scenes, that you just see a look on Jess's face or that slight smile she has when Jane puts their head on Jess's shoulder and they hold hands, that kind of stuff. That stuff you just can't buy. You can't write that. It's never going to feel on the page the way they made it feel on the screen.

SMF: I'm going to tear up, and it's kind of a spoiler, so I don't want to talk about it too much, but: "I wasn't Clarence; you were." My God! That wrecks me just thinking about it again.

MK: Love it! Thank you. That was my favorite part of the movie. It's what I pitched to the producers. I mean, I ended up producing the movie, too, but I pitched it to [Seth Caplan] and kind of played that up a little bit about how it's Bernie's story. But I didn't give him that line, because I wanted him to read it in the script the first time. He called me when he read it. He goes, "That line's the movie."

For me, that was always the most important thing. I always knew writing this movie that Winnie was going to think Bernie was her angel, but it was really the other way around.

SMF: I'd be remiss if we don't talk a little bit about Justin Long. Who in the heck came up with Justin Long channeling Dorothy Michaels?

MK: Justin. [laughs] That was all Justin. It's 100% Justin Long.

It's scripted really with "kill you with



It's a Wonderful Knife — Photo courtesy of RLJE Films / Shutterstock

kindness" type of shit, unfettered capitalism, and stuff like that. But the look, the performance, that's Justin. When we were talking to him about doing the movie, he was... I don't want to say he was apprehensive, but he was a little like, "I want to do this, but I want to do it in this way." He pitched us and — I will be honest — all of us were like, what the fuck?

But then when we heard more and we thought about it — he was literally pitching the physical look — it really clicked for everyone, especially for me, when he said, "Joel Osteen is my template here." Suddenly I got it. I totally knew what he was doing.

No other actor could have made it work. I remember someone at the studio was like, "Is he trying to tank the movie?" My response was, "He's going to do this the way it needs to be done." And that's exactly what he did.

SMF: It's one of the best villain performances of the year.

MK: He's so great. He's really the villain king. People call him a scream king. I'm like, "I think he's the villain king." And I love that the trailer gives away that he's the killer, because we do it 20 minutes into the movie. I'm like, "Why hide that?" I love him, and I think it's drawing people to the movie because it's Justin in this role.

SMF: As a writer, and as the person who created all these characters, when you see actors like Joel McHale and Katharine Isabelle inhabit these people that you've put on the page, or someone like Vince Vaughn in *Freaky* play so fully against type, how does that make you feel, watching them rise to the challenge?

MK: It feels great. It just makes me go, "Maybe I know what I'm doing?" Thinking that people like my work — that feels great.

Vince Vaughn doing *Freaky*: never in a million years! I text my friends from back in college, because we were like a little movie club, and when Vince got cast in *Freaky*, ... they were like, "Are you kidding? You're full of shit." [laughs] And I got to be, no, Vince Vaughn is doing my first movie. That was quite the moment.

Then I got to text them, "Justin Long's doing my second. Joel McHale's doing my second. Katharine Isabelle is doing my second." It's pretty crazy.

For *Freaky*, Vince and Kathryn Newton especially, it is extremely crazy, because we wrote the movie with Kathryn in mind. Later, Chris revealed to me when we got done writing the script that he always had Vince in mind for the Blissfield Butcher. I remember him saying to me, "We'll probably get neither of them, but I'll be happy if we get one." The fact that we got both? So crazy!

So, stuff like this, actors as great as Justin, Joel, and Katherine in this, and Vince and Kathryn in *Freaky*, it feels really great that they want to tackle these roles. It's rewarding and it makes you feel like you know what you're doing.

SMF: How much do you fantasize in the back your mind about making an *Avengers*-style mashup of *Happy Death Day*, *Freaky*, and *It's a Wonderful Knife*? In my head, I fully believe all of these films take place in the same universe.

MK: And *Totally Killer*, too! Don't forget about that one.

I was on another interview earlier, and I said that the way this kind of subgenre is forming now is because of what Chris did with *Happy Death Day*. Then he and I did *Freaky* together, and then I did this. This world's getting a little bit bigger all the time, like with *Totally Killer*.

The leads in these, they're all blonde, too, which is really funny. It all just turned out that way. It was never planned. It was all an accident. Here, Jane was our favorite person for the role, and they said yes when we offered it to them. It was that simple.

But I would love to see the Blonde Avengers, the Blonde Slasher Avengers. That would be so fun. It'd be amazing.

SMF: I know with *Freaky*, COVID pretty much torpedoed that release. I know it wasn't what you wanted or hoped for. But I would imagine that the reception of that film, and now the early reception for this one still has to be really rewarding for you, seeing the love and affection that these films have generated, not just from horror fans but from a wide swath of critics and viewers.

MK: It's been really great. The pandemic did kind of kill *Freaky*'s release, but the plus side of it was hearing people go, "That was the movie I needed at the time." Just

hearing from Queer people, too, especially with *Freaky* — and I'm starting to hear it on this a little bit already — "Oh my God, a movie for us? This was made for us?" That's so cool.

Also, with *Freaky*, I remember Chris telling me the week it came out, [when] we started getting all these really good reviews.... "I know it's your first movie, and there's got to be a disappointment with the fact that we don't get to do the red carpet and we don't get to have a premiere at the Grauman's Chinese Theatre and all these other things, but this critical success we're getting right now? You can't buy that. That's more important than anything else this movie could do."

And he was right. Both of us were kind of blown away, because, for us, it was kind of unexpected. We always thought, "People were going to love it or hate it." We were sure we'd get mixed reviews.

It ended up being this critical success, the industry really loved it, and the doors just opened. *It's a Wonderful Knife* never would [have been] made if it wasn't for that reaction to *Freaky*.

SMF: What do you hope audiences take away from this film? Not just in theaters but when it's out on Shudder later on?

MK: I just hope people feel good. *It's a Wonderful Life* and *It's a Wonderful Knife* both don't shy away from the fact that Christmas can be a really hard time for people. I remember the first Christmas after my mom died: it was traumatic, and being able to go and watch *Christmas Vacation* was so great, because it was like 90 minutes of just laughing and feeling good about life. I hope people take away the joy that I feel like we brought in this movie, and I hope people just walk out or turn it off and go, "That was fun. I had a good time."

I'm not trying to reinvent the wheel. I want people to have a good time. But I also know the movies, as I say, [are] littered with Queer people everywhere. To me, that's also really important. I've already had messages like, "There's Lesbians in the movie. And they're the heroes? I love it. I needed it. Thank you." That alone is just the greatest.

So I do hope there's more of that. I hope people feel good about themselves after they've watched it.

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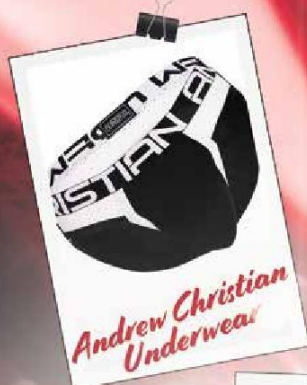
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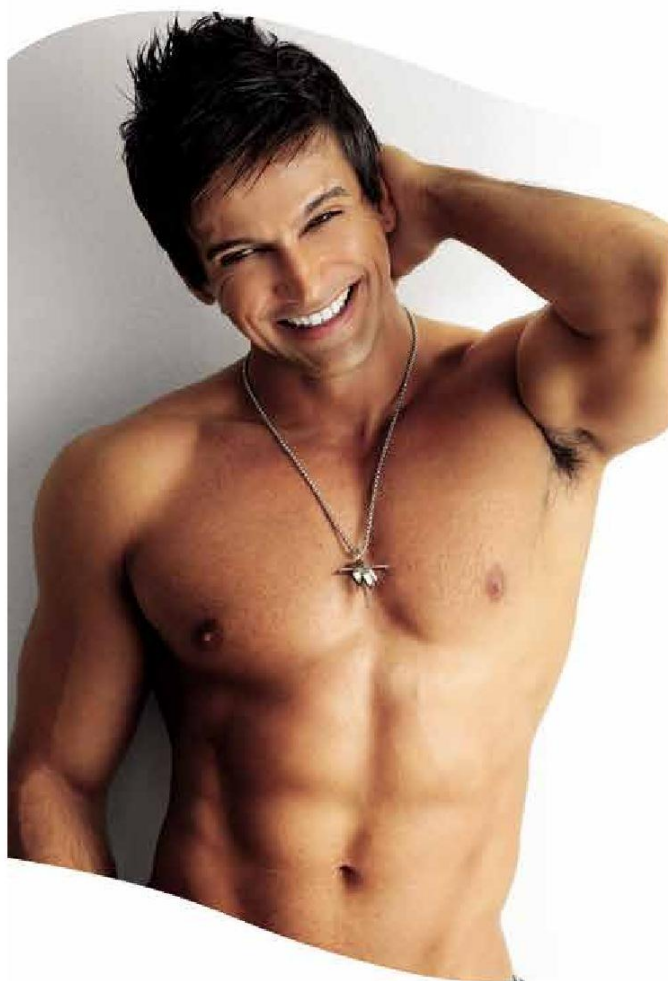
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