Nationals bound

Out LGBTQ figure skater Timothy LeDuc and his partner Ashley Cain-Gribble have their sights set on another national championship.

by Coy Covington, Page 9
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Please see Important Facts about BIKTARVY, including important warnings, on the previous page and visit BIKTARVY.com.
Trump extremists stage attempted coup

Thousands of President Trump’s supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday, Jan. 6, in an attempt to stop Congress from certifying the Nov. 3 election results and officially declaring Joe Biden to be president-elect. (Washington Blade photo by Michael K. Lavers)

Trump loyalists breached security on the steps of the Capitol, then stormed further into the building after they scaled walls and broke windows. The Capitol was placed on lockdown after the infiltration, and debate on the Electoral College results certifying the election of President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Harris paused at around 2 p.m.

After a recess of about six hours, the Senate and the House reconvened, and just before 4 a.m., Vice President Mike Pence announced that Congress had finished counting the Electoral College votes and certified the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. Four people died in what is being called an insurrection and an attempted coup. One of the dead was a woman who was shot inside the Capitol building by police; the other three died of “medical emergencies.”

The chaos at the Capitol began after a rally at which Trump encouraged the thousands of people gathered to protest the certification process to march to the Capitol and “protect” the election.

Visit DallasVoice.com for more coverage courtesy of The Washington Blade.

— Michael Lavers & Kaela Roeder

Dems sweep Georgia senate races

Democratic candidates Rev. Ralph Warnock and Jon Ossoff both won their runoff races in Georgia on Tuesday, Jan. 5. The upper chamber of Congress is now half Democrats and half Republicans, which means that any tie votes after Jan. 20 will be decided by Vice President Kamala Harris, a Democrat.

With Democrats in control of the White House, the House of Representatives and the Senate, “real change can happen,” said Tim Boyd, owner and publisher of the Georgia Voice newspaper. “This is a great day for Georgia and the nation.”

There was a lot riding on the outcome of Georgia’s two U.S. Senate races Tuesday. For the LGBTQ community, it was the difference between securing federal laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and watching existing laws ignored, challenged or misinterpreted to enable such discrimination.

Among the first order of business for the new Congress will likely be passage of the Equality Act, which has not been allowed a vote in the Republican-controlled Senate even after it has passed the U.S. House three times.

— Lisa Keen

Paul Allen dies of ‘homicidal violence’

Local musician Paul Allen, 65, was found dead in the passenger seat of his car at his home in West Dallas on Dec. 23.

The cause of death is “homicidal violence” according to the coroner and police say the motive is unknown. Police found the body after responding to a welfare check call. Allen had a heart attack while driving in September and friends were worried he had suffered another one.

Crime Stoppers is offering a $5,000 reward for information leading to an arrest. If you have information, contact Det. Christopher Anderson at 214-671-3616 or c.anderson@dallascityhall.com and refer to case 228617-2020.

— David Taffet

Fort Worth chef competing on ‘Hell’s Kitchen’

Openly LGBTQ chef Jordan Savell of Fort Worth is one of the 16 chefs from around the country competing to win the 19th season of Gordon Ramsay’s reality competition show Hell’s Kitchen, which premiered Thursday night, Jan. 7, at 7 p.m. on Fox 4 KDFW.

Jordan is a former-EMT-turned-chef who previously worked as a line cook at Blue Sushi and as a sous chef at Eddie V’s. She is also about to launch her very own food truck here in the Fort Worth area.

— Tammye Nash
Vaccines: Which are the most important ones for dogs?

Hello, and welcome to a new year! Let’s hope that the symbolism of a new year brings an opportunity to move forward and learn from the past as much as we can. I am excited to welcome 2021 with my first Dallas Voice Woof column of the year. And this time around, I want to discuss the most important vaccines and what they protect our babies against.

I want to start by noting that many doctors have different approaches to vaccines and how often they should be administered. I am a fan of “less is more” and of determining which vaccines are needed based on lifestyle.

We will be focusing on dog vaccines, as there are multiple different ones that are important to address. For my cat parents and cat lovers: Feel free to contact me, and I will gladly discuss cat vaccines in detail. But they are far more simple than dog vaccines.

Let us start with the most common dog vaccine: the parvo vaccine. Parvo is a virus that attacks with rapidly dividing cells, mostly in the digestive system. This lethal virus, transmitted through stools, is given every three weeks until four months of age. Afterwards, it is administered either yearly or every three years, based on age and lifestyle.

The parvo vaccine is typically combined with another very important vaccine which prevents infection with the virus called distemper. This virus, also considered lethal, is transmitted mostly through saliva and sneezing or coughing by an infected dog or another animal that may carry the virus. It affects different systems in the body, especially the respiratory and nervous systems.

As with parvo, there is no cure for this viral infection, and prevention is the most important aspect in keeping our pups from suffering with this horrible disease.

Another important organism that can be prevented from affecting dogs through a vaccine is the bacteria known as bordetella, which causes what is commonly known as kennel cough. This vaccine, however, does not fully prevent kennel cough, as there are other kinds of bacteria and viruses that cause this respiratory disease. It is still considered a very important vaccine for dogs that socialize with other dogs, and it is always strongly recommended.

This vaccine is usually given after 8 weeks of age and, depending on the type of vaccine and the lifestyle of the dog, it is usually repeated every year.

Lastly, we have the rabies vaccine. This one is very important because it is not only a lethal disease that is transmissible to humans, but it is also required by authorities.

According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, dogs and cats are required to be vaccinated against rabies by 4 months of age. In cases where a human is bitten by a dog, it is also extremely vital to have our pups up to date on their rabies vaccines in order to avoid legal issues, and more importantly, avoid our babies from going through challenges that may be stressful or negative for them.

We usually start this vaccine after 3 months of age, and while the first one is typically good for one year, it is usually administered every 3 years thereafter.

There are other vaccines for dogs, but the vaccines discussed here are the most popular ones. Regarding vaccine reactions, the most common ones that are usually not alarming are lethargy and soreness at the injection site. These usually go away within 1-2 days after administering the vaccines.

However, more concerning reactions that can be seen include excessive vomiting/diarrhea, facial swelling, hives and even collapsing. These reactions can be life threatening and should be immediately addressed by your veterinarian. Thankfully, we are seeing less and less vaccine reactions these days, and they are considered to be an exception in the present, even with the strongest of vaccines.

As always, I hope this information I have shared through my Woof column is helpful and cheers to an amazing year! 2020 will not repeat itself, right? Abrazos, my friends. Dr. Josh owns Isla Veterinary Boutique Hospital, 14380 Marsh Lane, Ste. 110 in Addison (next to Tom Thumb). Visit IslaVet.com or call 972-738-1111.
What to expect out of Austin

A glimpse at the next legislative session

JAMES RUSSELL | Contributing Writer
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What do secession, marijuana and flagrant violations of the U.S. Constitution have in common? They’re all topics addressed among the more than 260 bills filed ahead of the 87th legislative session, which convenes next week on Jan. 12. Incumbent and incoming legislators have filed more than 1,000 bills since legislators began to file bills on Nov. 9.

Pre-filed bills include a variety of topics, from one calling for a voter referendum on whether Texas should secede from the United States filed by Rep. Kyle Biedermann, a Central Texas Republican, to a bill abolishing the death penalty filed by Rep. Harold Dutton, a Houston Democrat.

Legislative priorities have not been finalized, but members have filed a range of bills legalizing or decriminalizing marijuana for recreational use, further criminal justice reforms and expanded mental health services.

But the culture wars haven’t gone away. A bill from Rep. Steve Toth, R-The Woodlands, would punish medical providers who provide transition care for transgender children, is at the top of arch-conservative lawmakers’ minds. While there are other members who support his bill, Toth may face an uphill climb: He’s rescinded his endorsement of Gov. Greg Abbott and has filed bills restricting Abbott’s emergency powers as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Angela Hale, Equality Texas’s senior advisor, said Toth’s bill is similar to bills filed in other state legislatures. The attacks on transgender kids are what she called “the bathroom bill 2 or 3.0,” referring to the anti-transgender bills filed across the country in previous legislative sessions, including in Texas, restricting bathroom access for trans people.

While those bills failed in Texas, and even led to election losses for some of their most prominent backers, anti-LGBTQ advocates are not giving up on their efforts attacking transgender people.

“They’re pivoting from bathroom bills and are now going after trans kids again,” Hale said. Transition care includes hormone blockers, a medically-approved process supported by healthcare organizations. Other anticipated bills include some restricting transgender athletes’ participation in sports and religious refusals bills allowing faith-based groups to deny services to LGBTQ people based on religious beliefs.

Still, LGBTQ advocates may have reason to be optimistic this session. Last session, in 2019, many LGBT bills received committee hearings for the first time, including one by Rep. Celia Israel, D-Austin, banning conversion therapy.

Another bill, introduced by Rep. Garnet Coleman, D-Houston, that would have added sexual orientation and gender identity to the state hate crimes’ statute, received a committee hearing as well.

But in a major victory for the progressive factions, Republican legislators last session killed a set of bills considered a priority by business groups and Republican leaders. Those so-called preemption bills would have barred cities from requiring companies to provide certain benefits, including paid sick leave, and from regulating employee scheduling.

Those measures were popular among Republicans, but the original Senate sponsor bucked business groups and other stakeholders by also prohibiting non-discrimination ordinances. So the bills ultimately died, in part due to then-State Affairs Committee Chair Dade Phelan, R-Beaumont. Phelan is now Speaker of the House-elect.

Phelan told the Texas Tribune last year he was “done talking about bashing on the gay community” and didn’t want to push legislation that could be used as a vehicle for discrimination. “It’s completely unacceptable ... This is 2019,” he said at the time.

While Phelan overall earned a C on Equality Texas’s 2019 voting scorecard, Phelan is backed by the Republican caucus and many Democrats, including the

GOOD:

• HB 73 by Rep. Gina Hinojosa, D-Austin, barring the use of one’s LGBT identity against a person in court.
• HB 126 by Rep. Ina Minjarez, D-San Antonio, legalizing needle exchanges.
• HB 191 by Bernal, banning housing discrimination against LGBTQ people.
• HB 198 by Rep. Mary Gonzalez, D-Clint, amending state statute to include same-sex couples under the state’s so-called Romeo and Juliet law.
• HB 338 Rep. Jon Rosenthal, D-Houston, and SB 210 by Sen. Sarah Eckhardt, D-Austin, making it easier for a transgender person to change their names on government records and changing the state’s Romeo and Juliet law to include same-sex couples.
• HB 493 by Rep. Gene Wu, D-Houston, requiring insurance cover HIV testing.
• HB 726 by Hernandez, banning nonconsensual surgery for intersex foster children.
• HB 730 by González of Dallas, repealing the language allowing religious foster agencies to refuse LGBT people, among others.
• SB 129 by Sen. Nathan Johnson, D-Dallas, changing the language in state statute to include same-sex couples and removing the state’s sodomy ban, which was ruled unconstitutional more than two decades ago by the Supreme Court.

BAD:

• HB 68 by Rep. Steve Toth, R-The Woodlands, banning medically-necessary procedures for children 18 and under.
• HB 369 by Rep. Tom Craddick, R-Midland, adding the use of HIV and other communicable diseases in a criminal case to felony law.

—James Russell

Angela Hale with journalist Harvey Kronberg at Equality Texas’ anniversary celebration in November 2019.
Making lemonade—or vodka? — out of 2020

Out U.S. Pairs figure skater Timothy LeDuc and his partner Ashley Cain-Gribble head to Las Vegas prepared to fight to regain their national title

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Some say if life gives you lemons, make lemonade. Or, if life gives you potatoes, make vodka. In either case, it’s an optimistic view; 2020 tossed us a live hand grenade and told us to deal with it.

The 2019 U.S. National Pairs Champion figure skaters Ashley Cain-Gribble and her queer partner Timothy LeDuc were gliding along into 2020 in fine form. They were looking to defend their national title, with an eye on a return trip to the world championships. The top two finishers at Nationals traditionally are chosen for the World team, and in 2020 two teams were qualified based on the top-10 placement of Cain-Gribble & LeDuc at the previous 2019 world competition.

(Only one team qualified in 2018. Got that? It can be a bit complicated.)

But uncharacteristic mistakes by Cain-Gribble and LeDuc at the 2020 Nationals left them as pewter Medalists (fourth place), and their dreams of a return to the World competition were dashed.

Or were they? U.S. Figure Skating, the national governing body for the sport of figure skating in the United States, has the right to name who goes to Worlds (other than the gold medalists, who automatically nab a reserved spot). Based on their superior international experience, Cain-Gribble and LeDuc at the 2020 Nationals left them as pewter Medalists (fourth place), and their dreams of a return to the World competition were dashed.

The 2020 World Championships were set to be an ultra-marquee event. Taking place mid-March in the magnificent destination city of Montreal, all the top skaters were set to compete; the arena was sold out. What could go wrong?

Cain-Gribble (Dallas born and bred) and LeDuc (a native of Cedar Rapids, Iowa) train locally at the Children’s Health StarCenter/Euless under the tutelage of Peter Cain and Darlene Cain (Cain-Gribble’s parents). Prior to Montreal, Team Cain was getting specialized attention in New Jersey at an international team training camp with famed Russian Coach Nina Mozer.

“We were training with many of the top teams that we would compete against in Montreal,” Cain-Gribble recalled. “Every day all the teams came in, were working so hard and putting in all their effort.”

Then the hand grenade detonated. No lemonade. No vodka. Just the explosion heard round the world.

“Then came the day,” Cain-Gribble said, “that the announcement was made that Worlds were canceled. It was almost a blessing, I think, to be surrounded by all those other teams, because everyone understood and felt the same thing. It wasn’t like we were alone in the situation.

“Some of the teams took the news worse than others because it was going to be their first Worlds, and they had worked so hard to achieve the minimal technical score to be eligible to compete,” she continued. “Plus, many were from small nations and had done so much for the opportunity to represent their countries.”

It would have been so easy to let the disappointment define them; some teams retired after the cancellation. But Cain-Gribble and LeDuc are almost preternaturally focused, so it was back home to prepare for what was next to come.

There was no ice in North Texas, but there was the Cain family backyard where they practiced lifts and strengthening and conditioning exercises.

“We did anything we could to move forward,” LeDuc said. “Just because there was no ice didn’t mean that our task was finished. It was interesting and a new experience for us. Actually, it was good for us because we got really strong and put a lot of time into our overall physique, so that when we got back on the ice we were able to move forward very quickly.”

They even roller skated to keep moving.

The “overall physique” work is in obvious evidence. Cain-Gribble (5 feet, 6 inches) and LeDuc (6 feet, 1 inch) have sickening bodies. Often called “the tall team,” they have a gorgeous and commanding presence on the ice. Or in the back yard.

As the days in quarantine grew longer and longer, they continued the forward momentum — still with no ice. “We choreographed the entirety of both our competitive programs on a hardwood floor.
with our choreographer in Michigan via FaceTime,” LeDuc explained.

During quarantine, they weren’t alone. Cain-Gribble had her handsome hubby, Dalton. And LeDuc had his plants. Yep, he’s a gardening master with a massive verdant thumb, so he tended to his apartment arboretum during his spare time.

LeDuc, a vocal activist for LGBTQ issues, was able to continue his advocacy for DFW-Fuse, a group for gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer and questioning guys between the ages of 18 and 35 in the Metroplex with a mission to foster a safe, healthy, and supportive community. LeDuc also serves on U.S. Figure Skating’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force. Ever the passionate ally, Cain-Gribble joins LeDuc on the USFS Athlete Advisory Committee.

The team finally got limited ice time in late May and discovered the hard training had paid off because they were able to land their jumps the first day back. An impressive feat. With impressive feet.

Summer moved forward, and the team trained. There was a little “oops!” along the way when Cain-Gribble clobbered LeDuc with an elbow during an exit from a twist lift which earned him a trip to the E.R. and a broken nose. Such injuries are not infrequent in pairs figure skating which is fiercely challenging and most assuredly a contact sport. LeDuc and Cain-Gribble used the quarantine downtime to work on their physical fitness off the ice.

The chamber’s partisan makeup will be the same as last session’s, with Republicans holding 83 seats to Democrats’ 67. Most of the damning anti-LGBTQ bills were dead on arrival last session, so there is hope the same thing will happen this time around.

At the same time, the chamber ironically became even more conservative after the November elections. That’s when Rep.-elect Ann Johnson of Houston, a lesbian attorney and Democrat, defeated Republican Rep. Sarah Davis, R-West University Place. Davis is a moderate Republican, and the only steadfast backer of LGBTQ rights among Republicans in the House.

She was backed by the Human Rights Campaign and Texas Equi-PAC. Her loss to Johnson makes her party even more conservative, and since Democrats also lost a seat, the House is more conservative as well.

Johnson’s election, however, adds to the ranks of openly LGBTQ legislators in the lower chamber, bringing the total to six.

“Every legislative session, the rights of LGBTQ people are on the line,” Hale said. But while the group and its allies have been on the defense, they want to be on the offense, including working with both parties to advance pro-LGBTQ legislation.

While members of the caucus are focused on advancing pro-LGBTQ legislation, they also have other legislative agendas.

Rep. Julie Johnson, D-Carrollton, has filed eight bills addressing health insurance reforms, including closing the pay parity for doctors who provide telemedicine services. Currently, insurers do not pay medical providers the same rate for telemedical services as they do for physical appointments.

Julie Johnson also filed bills legalizing marijuana.

Rep. Jessica González, D-Dallas, has filed 21 bills so far, including a package of 11 bills addressing affordable housing, the election code and strengthening the habeas corpus process.

“Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, our office has remained diligent in working for House District 104,” Jessica González said. “I am looking forward to the 87th Legislative session so we can continue to serve our community. Protecting and expanding affordable housing is a necessary action to ensure our communities can continue living in their homes and neighborhoods.”

She also filed a bill to repeal the language allowing faith-based foster agencies to refuse LGBTQ people and others based on religious beliefs, otherwise known as religious freedom or religious objections. That rule became law in 2017.

Thousands of bills may be already filed, but many of those may never see the light. The legislature this year also must address a budget multi-billion-dollar budget deficit caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the decennial redistricting process (which will be controlled by Republicans) and the prospect of a short session initially focused on their one constitutional duty: passing a budget.

Many lawmakers have suggested holding a separation session for the required decennial redistricting process once vaccinations have been distributed to the general public. Talks are ongoing, and lawmakers have until the 87th session begins on Jan. 12 to decide.
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I guess the “year from hell” would not be complete for me if it didn’t include the one thing I worked diligently for just over 10 months to avoid: COVID-19. The novel coronavirus decided to take up residence in my and my partner’s bodies as the year was coming to a close, though I suspect I might have had symptoms a day or two before my partner did. The confirmation came while I was preparing Christmas dinner.

I was mincing fresh garlic to rub on the turkey breast I was going to cook. Normally when I am doing this, the kitchen is infused with the aroma of garlic, and my fingers maintain the odor far longer than I would like. But this time as I smashed the last clove, I realized I couldn’t smell it.

I had been having what I thought was my typical seasonal allergy bout, but no amount of congestion has ever masked the smell of fresh garlic. As I began sautéing onions for the dressing, I again noticed that there was absolutely no heady aroma.

I mentioned this to my partner who had already become worried about my sniffling and coughing, and we both promptly went online and made appointments to get tested for COVID. He drew an earlier appointment than I did, and napping. All that was missing was taking it easy for a couple of days.

In just a few hours, we got a call from the pharmacy: He had tested positive. Knowing that, I cancelled mine for the next day. There was no doubt that I had it as well.

What seemed unique, though, was the fact that I never ran a fever, and neither did my partner. We checked our temperatures morning and night, before and after the test results. His went up a tad but never reached what could be called a fever. Mine stayed the same old slightly-under normal it always is. So it seems that fever is not the canary in the coal mine as has been touted. Just because you aren’t running a fever doesn’t mean you don’t have the virus.

There is a lot about this disease we don’t know, so better safe than sorry.

Christmas day was uneventful, except that I felt overwhelmingly fatigued. I spent most of the day cooking and napping. All that was missing was watching football. That night I slept 10 hours — a record for someone like me who rises with the dawn, no matter how late I stayed out the night before.

We both called all our friends and relatives and gave them the news, though both of us had no plans to get together with anyone for the holidays. We were following the CDC guidelines pretty closely. My hands are dry and chapped from all the washing and hand sanitizing, and I have been beyond stir crazy as I worked from home on most days and always stayed away from others and wore my mask religiously.

What I have learned as I have experienced this disease first-hand is that it is not exactly as advertised in the media. For me and my partner, it has been very mild — mainly a persistent cough, a little shortness of breath and feeling much like being hit by a truck. I did have chills one night — but no fever!

What treatment did I get? Well, I did not rush to the emergency room since I understand very well that hospitals are far too overwhelmed to deal with someone with what is, so far, a mild case of COVID. My physician checked in on me once they got my phone message (Remember: It was Christmas Day). They basically told me to drink liquids, rest and take vitamin supplements.

I was already on low-dose aspirin and blood thinners for another condition, and early reports say those things aid in recovery from COVID. Lucky me! Also, because I am asthmatic, I already take an inhaled steroid, and that might actually be keeping me from getting worse.

As I continue to recover, I find I feel compelled to warn people that the loos-ey-goosey measures some people are taking might not be enough to assure you don’t pick up this malady. Wear a mask whenever you go out in public. Stay socially distanced (eight feet is my new standard). Stay away from groups and crowds. If possible, stay home.

Wash your hands and use hand sanitizer. Try not to touch your face. If you have to meet with someone, do it over Zoom or some other online service.

Yes, I did all of that, and I still slipped up somewhere. I probably got over-confident or just let my guard down. The point is, it only takes one little mistake and BINGO! Except this thing has no winners.

Not everyone ends up in the ER or on a ventilator, but going through this mild case so far, I can assure you it is no picnic, and I want it to be over!

May 2021 bring not just the vaccine that beats this disease, but common sense to everyone until that vaccine reaches enough people to provide the much heralded “herd immunity.” I wish you and yours the best going forward.

And oh yes, I also wish Donald Trump will stay in Mar-a-Lago and never tweet again!

Hardy Haberman is a longtime local LGBT activist and a board member of the Woodhill Freedom Alliance. His blog is at Dungeon-Diary.blogspot.com.
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2021 Volvo XC60 recharges its automaker’s reputation

CASEY WILLIAMS  | Contributing Writer
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Volvo has a well-earned reputation for building autos that protect their passengers. But the automaker is now expanding its compassion for humans to include the environment. It has launched its Polestar electric vehicle division and offers an all-electric XC40 compact crossover, but plug-in versions of its traditional models will add juice to the plans, and the 2021 XC60 Recharge Inscription is a great example.

Inscription means it is the upper-level trim with all of the luxury style and gear. The XC60 is already a slick design, fronted by Volvo’s trademark grille with cross-slash logo, smooth flanks, strong shoulders and tail lamps that extend to the roof. But additional chrome, curve-following LED headlamps and 20-inch wheels distinguish our fly ride. Look closer though, and you’ll see a tiny little difference between the XC60 Recharge and other versions: a door on the front fender that hides the plug. Connect to household current or, ideally, a 240v charger to give the wagon 19 miles all-electric range.

Moving inside is to undertake a master class in Scandinavian design. Run your fingers over natural wood on the dash, soft Nappa leather on the seats and laser etched switches for volume, engine starter and drive mode selector in the console. Swedish glass maker Orrefors crafted the crystal gear selector. Volvo seats have always been supportive pillows of comfort, but these hug your sides, extend their lower cushions for support and can be heated or cooled. There’s a heated steering wheel, too. And you can open the panoramic moonroof to let in fresh air.

I’d sell my cat for the Bowers & Wilkins audio system ($3,200 upgrade) with Gothenburg Concert Hall mode. It acts as one big subwoofer that fills the cabin with a cloud of sound. Connect devices with Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and wireless charging pad.

The big center touchscreen looks intimidating but swipes through logical screens to conjure entertainment, navigation and climate controls. Swipe right to select from a full menu of crash avoidance systems: lane-keep assist, forward collision mitigation with pedestrian/cyclist detection, blind spot warning with steering assist, cross-path detection and road run-off mitigation systems.

Out on the road, you realize Volvo sacrificed no driving enjoyment in the pursuit of electrical plugs. In fact, the enjoyment amplified. The heart of the hybrid system is a 2.0-liter turbo-charged and super-charged four-cylinder engine, connected to an eight-speed automatic transmission and electric all-wheel-drive system. Under heavy loafers, the electric system contributes to the combined 400 horsepower and 472 lb.-ft. of torque.

That’s rocket power in a mid-size crossover that makes no pretensions of being a sports car. Even better, it achieves 27 MPG combined burning gas or 57 MPGe during the hybrid cycle.

Drive with abandon.

Beyond ample smooth power, there are other talents. Unlike some competitors’ systems that can feel chattery over bumps, the four-corner air suspension system on the XC60 provides a buttoned ride. Scroll through the drive modes for Pure Electric, Hybrid, Power, AWD and Off-road to adjust the steering and suspension from light to firm and throttle response from easy to spirited. The suspension even adjusts ride height — lower in Power, higher in Off-road.

Beyond all of that wizardry, drivers get information through a colorful flatscreen instrument cluster and head-up display, keeping eyes safely focused on the road.

Volvo didn’t just create a foreshadowing of its electric future, but rather a better Volvo. It’s safer than ever before, but delights owners with a sensibly luxurious interior, streaming power, smooth ride and exemplary fuel efficiency.

Of course, that comes at a price. Base XC60s start at $41,700, but plug-in Recharge models rise from $53,500. An as-tested price of $71,340 reflects all it contains.
When the stars align

Firth deserves another Oscar for this role as a gay man facing his husband’s death

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There are some people (this writer included) for whom Colin Firth’s Academy Award-worthy performance was in 2010’s A Single Man (Firth’s initial gay role), his first such nomination, even though he won the trophy the following year for The King’s Speech. That said, 10 years later, straight Firth is playing gay again, in Harry Macqueen’s Supernova (Bleecker Street), and this time he could potentially snag his second Oscar.

Pianist Sam (Firth) and author Tusker (Stanley Tucci) are a married gay couple who have been together for many years. Their communication consists of playful banter, sweet bickering and loving admiration.

The pair, who live in Sam’s native England, are on a road trip in their caravan with their dog Ruby. Among the plans they have for this journey are revisiting a campsite from years earlier, as well as a stopover at the home of Sam’s sister Lilly (Pippa Haywood), her husband Clive (Peter MacQueen) and daughter Charlotte (Nina Marlin). A recital, marking Sam’s return to concert performance, is also on the schedule.

This voyage, however, has more significance than others. Tusker, who has been diagnosed with early onset dementia, is in rapid decline. For all intents and purposes, this odyssey is a chance for Tusker to say goodbye to people who have meant something to him.

Of course, the hardest farewell will be the one with Sam. Sam, who put his entire performance career on hold to care for Tusker, is in denial. But there’s no refuting Tusker’s condition. Especially when, early in the movie, after a pitstop where Sam leaves him asleep in the caravan and returns to find Tusker and Ruby gone. In a panic, Sam drives down the road for a stretch, only to find Tusker off to the side, standing stock still in a state of confusion.

In terms of acceptance of his condition, Tusker’s approach differs from Sam’s. For example, he didn’t bring his medication with him — not because he forgot it, but because he doesn’t think it helps him, and it would only serve as a reminder of his illness.

Sam and Tusker keep an audio journal on microcassettes as another way to monitor his waning ability to recall, as well as create an audio scrapbook of memories. It’s one of the things that continues to link them, in the same way that looking at constellations through Tusker’s high-power telescope does.

The scenes with Sam’s family bring a lightness to the story. There is a surprise party, and the occasion, which provides some much-needed humor, feels genuine and celebratory. But the bliss is short-lived when Sam makes a series of discoveries pertaining to Tusker’s latest writing project, as well as his plans for the near future.

Road trip movies, including the gay-themed Uncle Frank, as well as Nomadland, made before we were all sheltering in place, have become increasingly popular. If we can’t travel, at least we have the pleasure of watching others do it. In that way, Supernova fits right into the current zeitgeist. In addition to that element of escapism, Supernova also brings dramatic realism to same-gender love and relationships, along with all the heartache that it potentially generates. Rating: A-
Pick, pick, pick.
If you’re patient, that’s how you break big things into very little things. One pebble taken from here, another small stone removed from there — and over time, you undermine the structure. It’s the same for dams, walls, foundations, people and, in the new book Paper Bullets by Jeffrey H. Jackson, it’s the same for wartime operations.

Twenty-six-year-old Lucy Schwob and her lover, 28-year-old Suzanne Malherbe, had never lived apart from their families in Nantes, France. But one day in 1920, they were on their way to their new lives together in Paris. It hadn’t been long since the end of World War I, and life seemed exciting and fresh.

In Paris, Lucy and Suzanne enjoyed cafe society and lives of social leisure, meeting famous writers and artists, ultimately becoming celebrated as artists themselves. Lucy also began a lifetime of political activism, a passion that Suzanne didn’t necessarily share.

By 1935, however, politics were inescapable, and Lucy started thinking about a quieter life, partly because Paris was becoming intolerant of people like her and Suzanne. For her part, Suzanne wasn’t interested in leaving the city. But by 1937, she gave in, and they moved to an estate on Jersey, an island in the English Channel.

Not long after their arrival, World War II broke out, and Jersey was all but abandoned by the British. Telephone lines were cut, soldiers were withdrawn, and the Nazis soon noticed. By 1940, German soldiers arrived, and Lucy wasn’t taking that lying down. She convinced Suzanne to join her in quiet resistance, and they spent many long hours crafting demoralizing messages, furtively leaving them where German soldiers were sure to find them — in uniform pockets, on car seats, on doorsteps, inside books and magazines.

And then one night during dinner, someone pounded on the door.
“It was,” says Jackson, “the moment Lucy and Suzanne had been expecting every day for nearly four years.”

As history books go, Paper Bullets is unique. A small part of this book is biography, though author Jeffrey H. Jackson seems a bit sedate about his subjects. His portrayal of Lucy Schwob is rather stonily detached, as if all we need are the barest facts, and they’re not particularly complimentary. Suzanne Malherbe is treated better but still somewhat impassively. Neither subject seems fleshed-out enough.

Happily, the other, more prominent part of this book is more comfortable and exciting to read. That’s where the heart of the tale lies, in which these two astoundingly courageous women fool the Nazis through literally homegrown resistance, and then, once the jig is up, further befuddle Hitler’s men with the ultimate heel-digging. The last third of the book almost reads like a months-long Hogan’s Heroes episode, only this is no sitcom.

In the end, if you’re in search of something biographical, it’s here — sort of. If history is what you want, though, and biography is incidental, then Paper Bullets is a good pick.

— Terri Schlichenmeyer
SAT 01.09
Dallas Black Dance Theater presents DBDT: Encore!, a program of audience favorites featuring established and emerging choreographers using the Dallas landscape as its stage, with dancers filmed dancing in the East Quarter, Block House and at 2200 Main for the virtual event. Online at 7 p.m.; Tickets are $20 per household, available at DBDT.com.

SAT 01.09
Dallas Public Library’s Queer Reads Book Club will be discussing She of the Mountains, a novel by Canadian trans artist of color Vivek Shraya, at their next online meeting. The book is available on Hoopla (HooplaDigital.com) as an audiobook or an ebook. Registration is required. Online from 6:30-7:30 p.m.; register at DallasLibrary.LibraryMarket.com/events/queer-reads-book-club-0.

SUN 01.10
David Taffet, Patti Fink and Lerone Landis, host Lambda Weekly, the longest-running LGBTQ talk show on the air anywhere, on Sunday afternoon. 1 p.m. on 88.3 KNON-FM and live-streaming at KNON.org.
HAPPY NEW YEAR MY BABIES! We did it; 2020 is over! But I don’t want y’all to think that, just like that, all our problems will be over. I am hopeful that 2021 will be a fabulous year, but shit can always get worse — so, fingers crossed. My biggest fear is that at the end of 2021 we end up saying stuff like, “Remember when we thought 2020 was a bad year, then 2021 came in and fucked us all with IcyHot for lube?”

My point is, let’s not jinx it. Let’s treat 2021 like a huge stray dog: “Who’s a good girl?” — hoping she lets you pet her but knowing at anytime she might rip your arm off.

Some people are so superstitious about New Years Day, and I admit, I cook and eat an abnormal amount of black-eyed peas, just in case. I don’t want to take any chances — like there is some Bean Fairy just waiting to grant you good luck if you eat black-eyed peas, and if you don’t, he sends in his goons to fuck up your entire year.

Still not gonna take any chances: “Looky here Bean Fairy,” as I take a huge bite of the magical fruit.

I have a really good friend who believes that however your new year starts will affect your entire year. So he is super nice to everyone as soon as the clock strikes 12 midnight on New Year’s Eve. For 24 hours he seriously tries to be nice and tries to stay in a good mood, or else, he thinks, he will have a horrible year. If he had a flat tire on New Year’s Day, the year was ruined for him. But if he won $5 on a scratcher, the year would be magical.

I always made fun of him for it — until one year back in the late ’90s.

Picture it: I was the low man on the totem pole as far as being a Rose Room cast member, so I wasn’t working on New Year’s Eve. And my best friend — let’s call him Lee — decides to party in the Rose Room for the countdown. “Three, two, one — Yay!” Everybody yells and screams, welcoming in the new year.

Then, not 10 minutes into the new year, my boss at the time asked me to go downstairs to his office because he had something he wanted to ask me. So I told Lee I would be right back and headed downstairs. (This was in the old Rose Room, so there was only one set of stairs to it.)

My boss told me that, basically, I was getting promoted. He said I was going from working one night every other week to working two nights a week, Wednesdays and Sundays!

That was huge for me! My new year was starting off so good! I was so freakin’ excited, and I couldn’t wait to tell my best friend. So I thanked my boss, left his office and started up the stairs to go back into the Rose Room to share my great news.

Just then, Lee walked out at the top of the stairs and started down the stairs towards me. And that’s when everything went into slow motion.

It looked like the prom scene in Carrie, but instead of Lee being covered in pigs blood from above, he was doused in vomit from the guy behind him. That guy spewed forth lukewarmness in the form of regurgitated alcohol mixed with some kind of pink candy. All I could do was watch as the vomit, in slow motion, splattered on Lee’s baseball cap, the back of his hair and all down his back.

Lee was disgusted — and rightfully so. He is a bit of a neat freak as it is, so I only imagine how freaked out he was. Lee arched his back in a futile attempt to keep the sticky, liquidy mess from dripping down into his pants. I offered to take him into the employee restroom and clean him up, but he just walked, kinda like Carrie, out of the building and down the street.

I, being the good friend I am, followed him. But of course, being the asshole I am, I laughed all the way, randomly yelling out, “HAPPY NEW YEAR LEE!”

Finally, he spoke, asking me to get his keys out of his pocket because he refused to put his hands down — like he was trying with all of his might to keep a river of up-chuck from flowing down into the crack of his ass. I fished out his keys and opened the door. Within seconds he had his shoes off, walked out and was standing fully clothed in the shower.

He showered for a long time — like, a really loooooooong time. I felt so bad for him, but I also couldn’t stop giggling about it. I kept thinking, “He’s gonna have a really bad year.”

Of course, time after time for the next few weeks, I would say what a fabulous year I was going to have, and then I would turn to Lee and say, “How ‘bout you?”

For some reason he just kept flipping me the bird. So rude.

I don’t remember now if I had a better than average year or if Lee had a shitty year. The thing about most New Year’s stuff is that it is so easily forgotten — like resolutions.

Looking back on that time in my life, I felt like I was always broke. But it was also when I had some of the most fun times of my life. Being young and stupid can be such a blessing.

This year I will not make a resolution that I will feel guilty about if I don’t follow through with, but I will set some goals that I will work on. I will also eat some black-eyed peas and hopefully be nicer. I’m gonna help 2021 be a good year as much as possible.

Yes, it can always get worse. But it can also get better. So, if I have anything to say about it, 2021 is going to be fabulous!

Remember to always love more, bitch less and be fabulous! XOXO, Cassie Nova
Vote for your local favorites in nine categories!
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Iconic Kiss

Across
1 Sign of a swollen member
6 Oral votes
10 Site of a Lara Croft raid
14 Horny old goat in the sky?
15 Tombstone lawman Wyatt
16 Milk go-with
17 Farm gear pioneer
18 Author Maupin
20 With 22-Across, she shared an iconic kiss with 60-Across
22 See 20-Across
24 Shakespeare’s ___ Like It
25 What Santa gave, in verse
26 Rudely abrupt
28 Eye-related
32 Sculptor Edmonia
34 Bound gaily
36 Cell stuff, for short
37 “___ ask you!”
39 Plants yielding cinnamon
42 The iconic kiss was in this 1999 teen romantic drama film
46 Like Abner, before Viagra?
47 Curt author Muscio
48 Reel, e.g., to Mauresmo
49 So-so evaluation
51 Dollar bill holder?
53 Lesbian parents
54 Direction from Rick Rodgers
55 Den of Bruins
59 ___ For All Seasons
60 She shared an iconic kiss with 20- and 22-Across
62 Vehicle with treads
63 Stick in the fridge?
64 Name of many gay bars
65 Start of a rhyme about a tiger
66 Cordial, as a handshake
67 Screen siren Garbo
68 ___ For All Seasons
69 She shared an iconic kiss with 20- and 22-Across
71 ___ ask you!

Down
1 Andy Warhol’s ___ (1977 film)
2 Moist ending
3 Stays in the closet, say
4 Woman played by Flip Wilson
5 Tuatara once of the NFL
6 “Uh-huh”
7 A stud leaves it on a lobe?
8 Decision to stop shooting off?
9 Word on Chinese menus
10 Get the bottom line
11 Hershiser of baseball
12 Susan Feniger preparation
13 Foeshadow
19 “Beat it!”
21 Hail Mary path
22 k. d. lang’s “Big Boned ___”
23 U-turn from WSW
27 Treating as a sexual object
29 Foursome after desertions
30 Nuts
31 Pop vocalist Elliot
33 Pyramid and cube
35 Eve counterpart on Lesbos
38 Lush, perhaps
39 Plants yielding cinnamon
40 X-Men creator Lee
41 Odd but not queer
42 Prevailing condition
43 Brown on a book cover
44 Liv of ___ Personah
45 Sex scandal reporter, e.g.
46 Like Abner, before Viagra?
47 Curt author Muscio
48 Reel, e.g., to Mauresmo
49 So-so evaluation
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69 She shared an iconic kiss with 20- and 22-Across
68 ___ ask you!

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