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BOOKS

Culture vulture

Popular gay author picks over the movies

BY FLOYD SKLAVER

Dennis Hensley loves to trash the movies. And, using his new book, *Screening Party*, which has been nominated for a Lambda Literary Award in Humor, now you can too. What's more, on April 24 the handsome, 38-year-old celebrity profiler and author will share the art of movie mockery during a reading at the Lloyd Center Barnes & Noble. Hensley grew up in Holbrook, a town of 5,000 located in eastern Arizona. It had only one movie theater, he recalls, "and half of the time it was closed." Yet popular culture provided an escape, and Hensley became enamored of celebrity and fame.

"Television was a window into outside things," he says. "It stimulated my imagination and made me want to go beyond where I was."

It also helped him understand his sexuality. "As a gay person, it connected me," the single author says. "No one [in Holbrook] wanted to feather their hair and grab onto the back of a car riding a skateboard like Farrah Fawcett. There wasn't fabulousness around me, but there was on television and in the movies."

After college the star-struck young man moved to Los Angeles, where his first job was "ushering eager audiences into tapings for such shows as *She's the Sheriff* with Suzanne Somers." A year later he landed a job as a singer/dancer with Princess Cruises, where he performed in "many musical extravaganzas with exclamations points in their titles."

In 1990 Hensley sold his first story, an account of his harrowing dance audi-

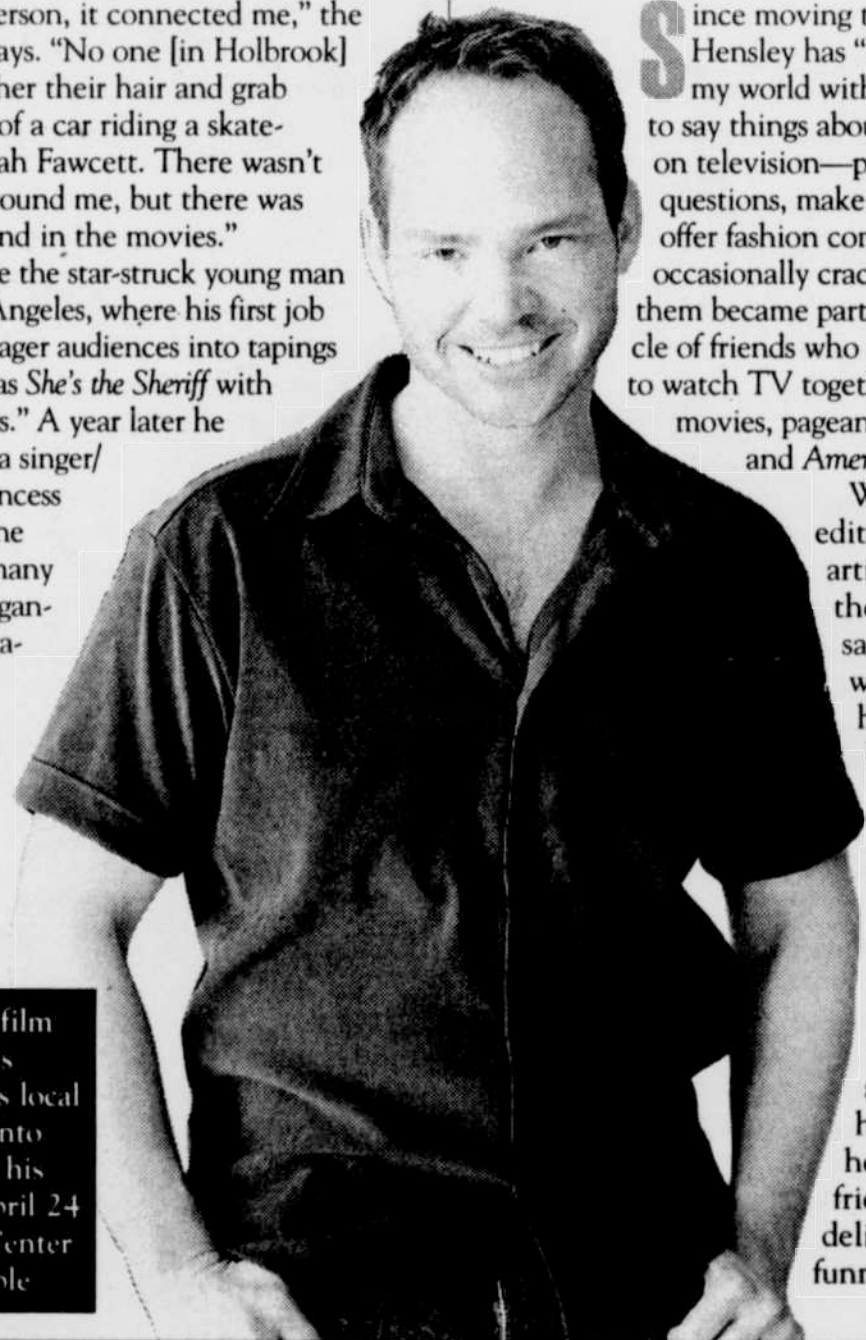
tion for Madonna's *Blonde Ambition* tour titled "Confessions of a Boy Toy Wannabe." A new career was born, and he's since written countless celebrity profiles for *The Advocate*, *Out*, *In Style*, *TV Guide*, *Us* and *Cosmopolitan*.

Screening Party is Hensley's second book. His first, *Misadventures in the (213)*, evolved from a series of fiction columns he wrote for *Detour*. The book wound up on the *Los Angeles Times* best-seller list, and the ensuing publicity landed the author on *The Rosie O'Donnell Show*.

Hensley also co-wrote, co-directed and co-starred in *Evie Harris: Shining Star*, a 13-minute film about a has-been actress trying to locate her star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame. The riotous comedy played at queer film festivals around the country.

Since moving to Hollywood, Hensley has "tried to populate my world with people who like to say things about what they see on television—people who ask questions, make observations, offer fashion commentary and occasionally crack wise." Many of them became part of his inner circle of friends who would come over to watch TV together, including movies, pageants, award shows and *American Idol*.

When one of his editors requested an article celebrating the 25th anniversary of *Jaws*, which Hensley had never seen, he asked if he could watch it with friends and then write about the experience of seeing it for the first time. "It was sort of an experiment," he explains, but he knew his friends "could deliver in the funny department



Celebrity and film profiler Dennis Hensley brings local well-knowns into the act during his appearance April 24 at the Lloyd Center Barnes & Noble




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