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The Babadook: how the horror movie monster became a gay icon

Top-hatted ghoulish figure has been hailed as LGBT figure in corners of social media after it was jokingly floated on Tumblr that he was gay

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Queer communities of the internet are embracing an unlikely icon this Pride Month: the Babadook.

The top-hatted monster, from the Australian horror film of the same name, has been hailed as a LGBT figure in corners of social media since the end of last year, when it was jokingly floated on Tumblr that he was gay.

In recent weeks, the Babadook-as-queer-icon has gone from an internet in-joke to a Pride Month figurehead, with remixed representations of the monster he appears in a storybook in the film featuring in celebrations online and off.

“Gay Babadook” was born when a somewhat ironic post to Tumblr in October went viral: “Whenever someone says the Babadook isn’t openly gay it’s like?? Did you even watch the movie???”

The post drew close to 100,000 responses - a jokey back-and-forth about the deeper meanings of Jennifer Kent’s 2014 independent film that prompted one user to complain it was “JUST A MOVIE.”

“A movie about a gay man who just wants to live his life in a small Australian suburb?” replied the original poster, “ianstagram”, from Boston. “It may be ‘just a movie’ to you but to the LGBT community the Babadook is a symbol of our journey.”

In December, a screenshot was posted to Tumblr showing The Babadook listed prominently among “LGBT Movies” on Netflix - more likely to be a doctored image indicative of the meme’s gaining momentum, than a categorisation error.

“The B in LGBT stands for Babadook,” another user responded.

The so-called “Babadiscourse” meme riffed on the strident debate over cultural texts and “author’s intent” that is a cornerstone of online discourse, as well as projections of a queer identity or significance onto public or historical figures in the past.

In the film, “Mister Babadook” is half-acknowledged by a widow and her young son, even as he has undeniable and chaotic impact on their family unit: “If it’s in a word, or it’s in a look, you can’t get rid of the Babadook” is the horror movie’s refrain.

As Karen Tongson, an associate professor of gender studies and English at the University of Southern California, told the LA Times: “Someone was like, ‘How could “The Babadook” become a gay film’ and the answer was readily available. ... For many LGBT people, that’s what it feels like to be in your own families sometimes.”

The Babadook’s status as a symbol of equality was cemented with the beginning of Pride Month in June in the US, with the teeth-baring spectre spotted at rallies in Boston and Washington.

The Massachusetts attorney-general, Maura Healey, tweeted on Saturday the Babadook waving a pride flag: “We believe in equal rights for everyone - and we mean everyone.”

Miles Jai, an LGBT YouTube personality, dressed as The Babadook to the taping of the season finale of the reality television show RuPaul’s Drag Race.



Miles Jai dressed as The Babadook at RuPaul's Drag Race Season 9 finale. Photograph: Rodin Eckenroth/WireImage

Though director Jennifer Kent is aware of the meme, she has not commented on it.

But Tim Purcell, the actor who played the monster in her film, told New York magazine's Select All that the character demanded he wear not only the hat but a heavy jacket, contact lenses, a prosthetic mouth and "crap all over my teeth".

"I didn't feel like a gay icon at the time, I can tell you that much."

Ianstagram, the Tumblr user credited with sparking the Babadiscourse, told Select All that it had "almost become a joke around queer representation in the media" - "a very deep reading on a mindless post I fired out one night.

"It's been fascinating to watch."

Kent's next film is due to be Alice + Freda Forever, a love story about a lesbian relationship in 19th-century Memphis.

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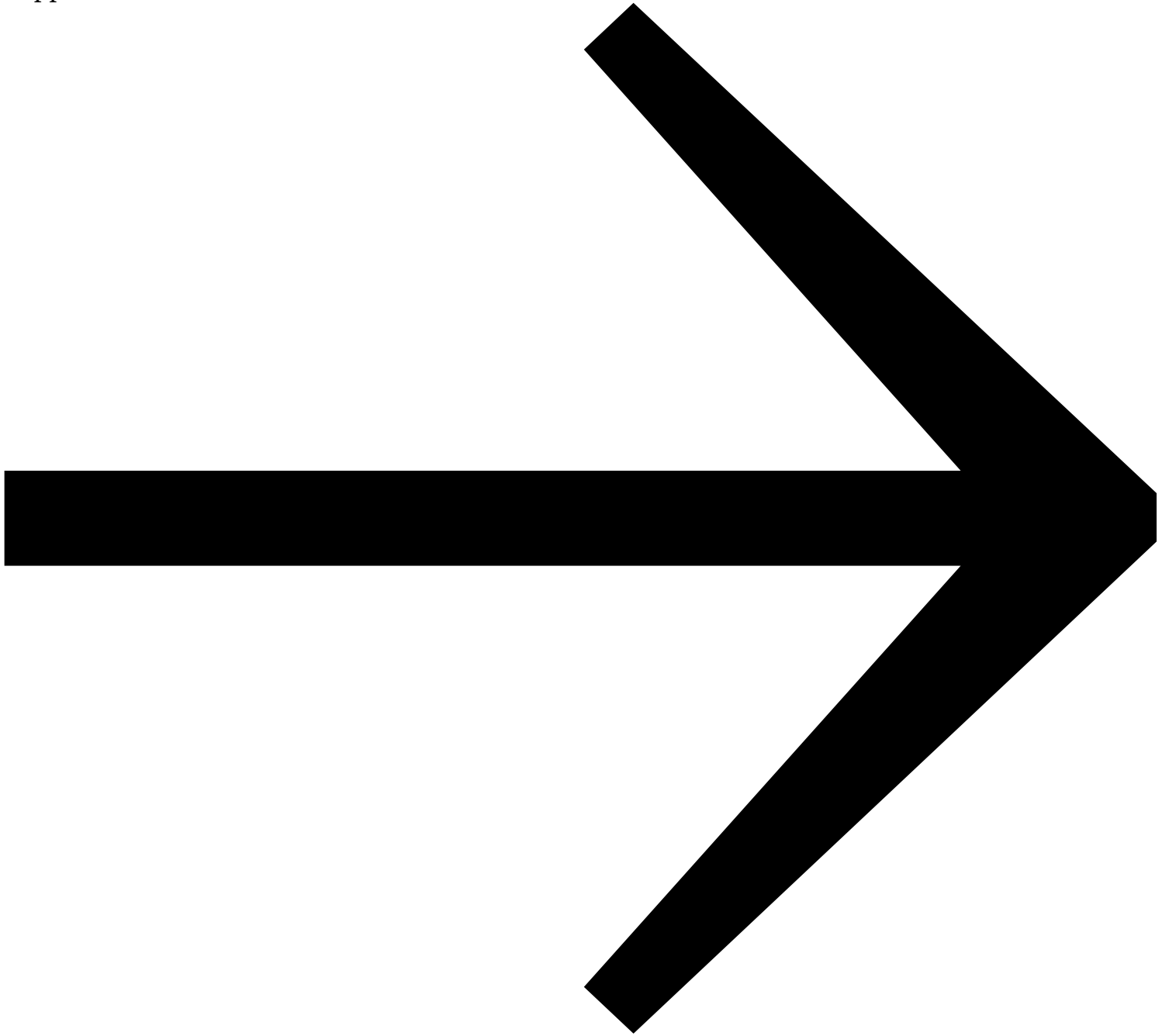
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