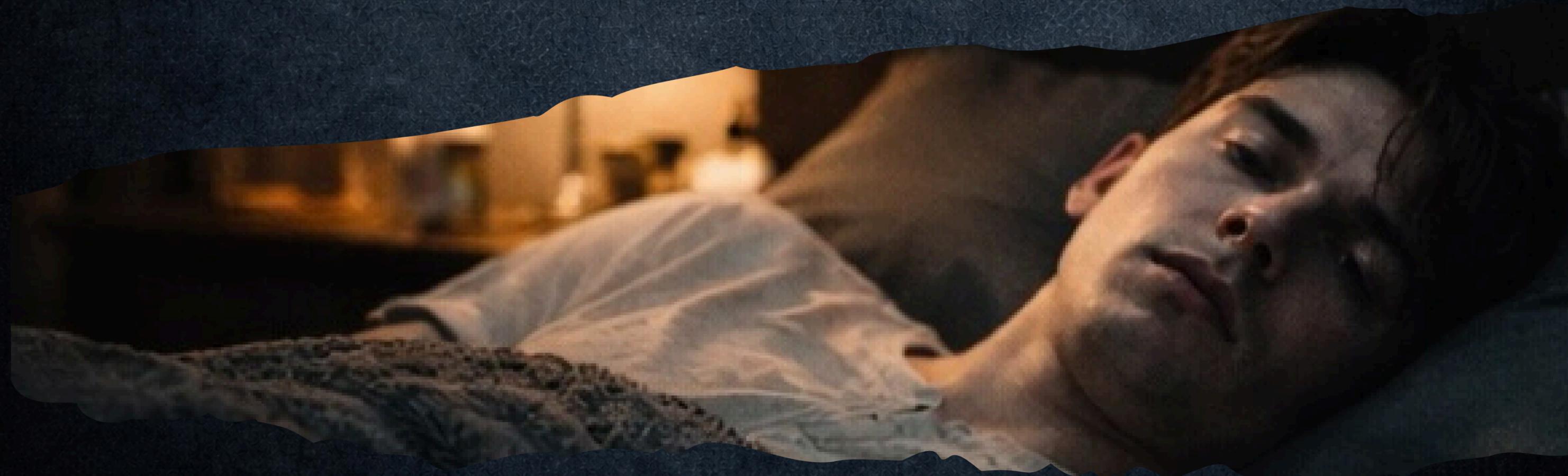A short film by Ariel Butwyna

SAFE

You don't escape the danger.
You live with it.

A contained psychological horror thriller
exploring trauma, control, and identity.

Logline

While preparing to leave the London home he once shared with his husband, a traumatised man becomes convinced his abuser has returned, until a final confrontation reveals the threat is bound to blood, memory, and buried guilt.

Synopsis

SAFE opens with Alex exchanging wedding vows with his soon-to-be husband Jack, before violently cutting to what seems to be the aftermath of a domestic assault. Now, apparently divorced and traumatised, Alex retreats into their London house, preparing to leave it behind.

As insomnia, medication, and alcohol distort his perception, Alex begins to notice unsettling disturbances: alarms malfunction, objects disappear, and a hooded figure appears in the house.

Convinced someone is breaking in, Alex seeks reassurance from his friend Sarah, who subtly attributes his fears to trauma and alcohol abuse, distorting his reality. The house becomes a psychological maze where photographs, memories, and a mysterious safe hint at buried secrets.

The tension escalates into a brutal confrontation that reveals the intruder is Adrian, Alex's identical twin and Jack's real husband. In a final inversion of victim and aggressor, Alex survives by assuming the identity he managed to erase.

SAFE closes on the chilling realisation that safety is not protection from harm, but the illusion we create to survive it.

Writer's vision

As a queer writer and actor, I was interested in exploring the gap between how safety is presented and how it is actually experienced.

SAFE grows from the desire to examine how trauma distorts perception, and how unprocessed pain reshapes memory, behaviour, and identity, until threat and protection become indistinguishable.

The idea of twins became a central metaphor for this fracture: two people who appear identical, yet are fundamentally not the same, reflecting the split between the self we show the world and the self we struggle to face, a tension that can feel especially present within queer identity.

Told through a subjective lens, *SAFE* uses misdirection not as a narrative trick, but as an emotional process. The twist is designed to feel inevitable rather than surprising, revealing that the truth was always present... waiting to be acknowledged.

Writer & Lead Actor

Ariel Butwyna is an Argentinian/Spanish writer and actor based in London, working across television, film, stage, and voiceover in both the UK and Spain.

His screen credits include Hollyoaks (Channel 4), The English Retreat (winner of Best Short Film at the Greece International Film Festival 2024), La Encrucijada (Sitges 2014), and Bollywood Made in Spain (Goya nominee). On stage, he has worked with the Royal Shakespeare Company and performed at the King's Head Theatre and Arcola Theatre.

He is also the voice of Young Antón Castillo in the audio series Far Cry: Rise of the Revolution.

Alongside his acting career, Ariel develops original screen projects centred on psychological drama and genre storytelling. He completed the Curtis Brown Creative course "Writing an Original TV Drama Serial" in 2022, and his original TV pilot The Lies I Know was officially selected at the Filmmatic TV Pilot Awards (Los Angeles).

He is attached to play the role of Alex in SAFE, aligning the writing and performance at the core of the project.
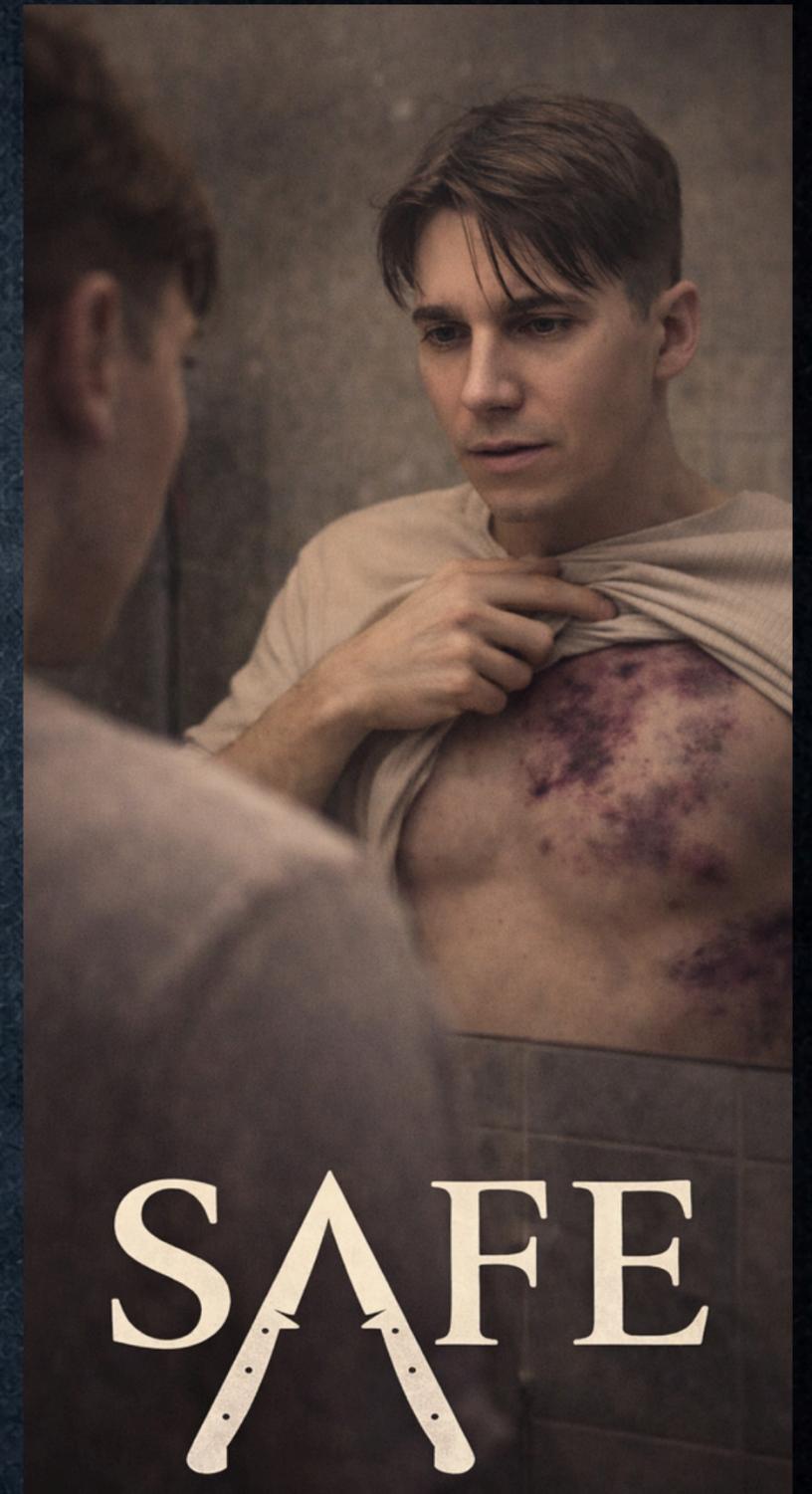
Genre, tone & style

Genre

- Psychological Horror / Thriller

Tone

- Intimate, tense, and emotionally raw. The horror is not supernatural, but personal, familiar, and human.

Style:

- Minimalist locations.
- Controlled, escalating tension.
- Violence is sudden, close, and deeply uncomfortable rather than stylised.
- Reliance on performance, sound design, and spatial storytelling over spectacle.

Characters

Alex (30s)

Emotionally articulate, intelligent, and deeply traumatised. A survivor whose need for safety manifests as control over space, narrative, and identity.

Sarah (30s)

Practical and empathetic. Represents rationality and care, but also society's tendency to minimise trauma when fear becomes inconvenient.

Characters

Detective Rivera (40s)

Measured and professional. Communicates through procedural empathy and institutional caution. Grounds the story in reality.

Adrian (30s)

Alex's identical twin. Values autonomy and boundaries after a lifetime of being pulled into Alex's emotional gravity. Misread as the threat when he is, in fact, resisting erasure.
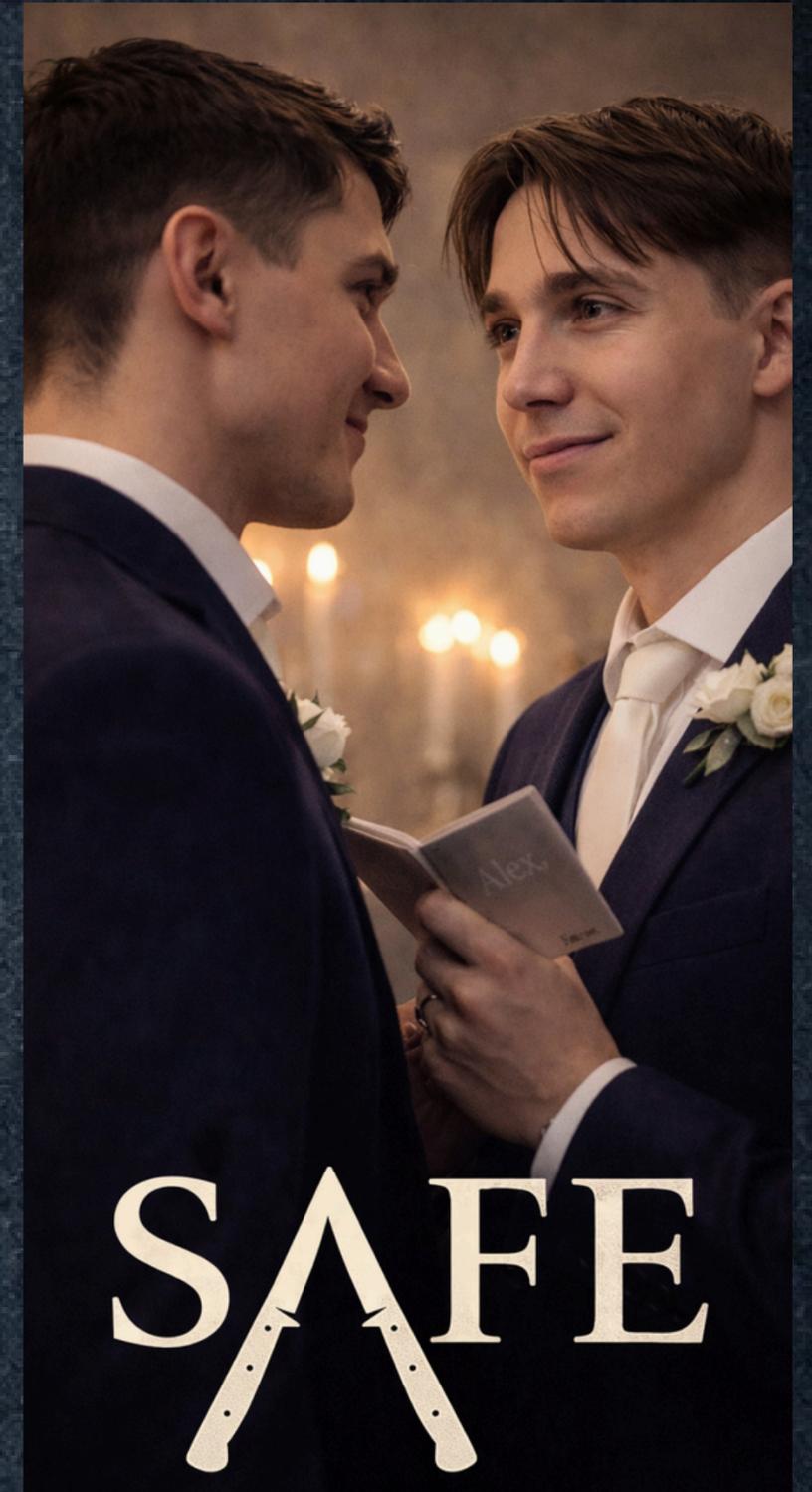
Why now

As conversations around mental health and accountability have become more visible, the psychological aftermath of guilt, denial, and self-preservation often remains private and unspoken.

SAFE focuses on that internal terrain, where survival depends not only on escaping danger, but on confronting what we may have buried.

By centring a same-sex relationship within a psychological horror framework, *SAFE* subverts genre traditions that have historically marginalised queer intimacy or reduced it to a token.

Here, queer characters are not symbolic victims, but morally complex protagonists.

Target audience & festivals

Primary Audience

- Fans of psychological thriller's and elevated horror, and audiences seeking LGBTQ+ stories beyond familiar narratives.

Secondary Audience

- Streamer short-form platforms.

Festival Pathway

- Sitges, Fantasia, FrightFest, BFI Flare, Frameline, Outfest.

Practical scope

- Primary location: one house.
- Cast: 3-4 principal roles.
- Contained timeline.

- Minimal VFX
- Low-to-mid budget, production-friendly.

SAFE

Status & next steps

SAFE is a completed screenplay currently seeking producing partners and development finance for production in 2026.

The project has been designed as a contained, production-ready short, with a scalable budget and strong crossover potential across horror and LGBTQ+ circuits.

With funding support, the next stage will include attaching a director and key creative team, followed by detailed budgeting and scheduling toward principal photography.

SAFE

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