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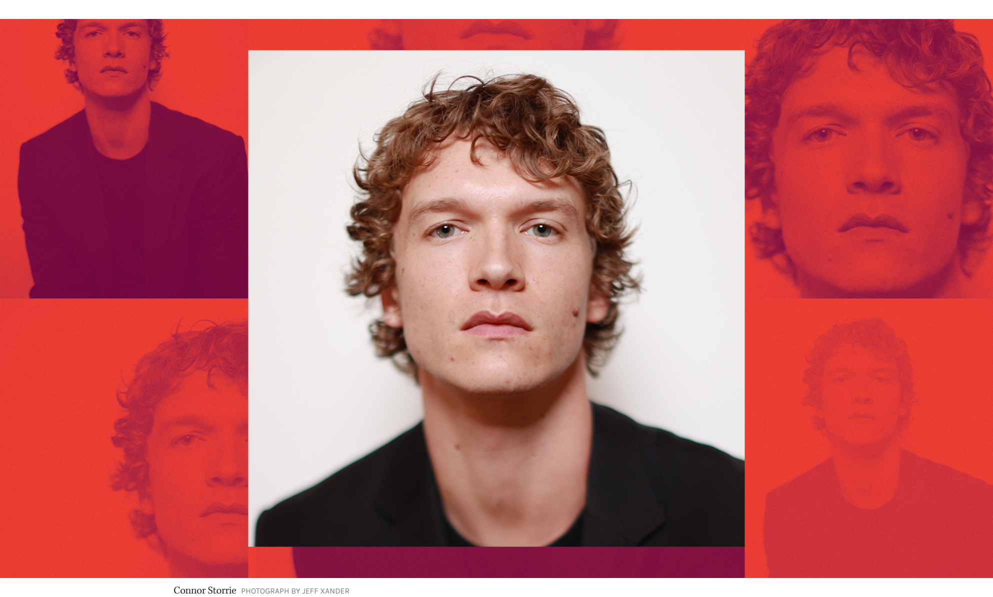
Connor Storrie PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF XANDER

Connor Storrie Was Convinced He Wasn't Going to Book 'Heated Rivalry'

The 25-year-old actor has found himself in the spotlight after his breakout role in the HBO Max-Crave series has caught fire: "As an actor, you just always hope that things pop off."

BY NICOLE FELL DECEMBER 11, 2025

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"My head hasn't exploded yet, so we're doing good," Connor Storrie jokes.

No one could blame the 25-year-old if that were the case. His buzzy series *Heated Rivalry* went from the special project he made in the bubble of a tight-knit Canadian set to the show of the moment, becoming the internet's favorite before it even found a U.S. home or was released.

In *Heated Rivalry*, Storrie plays Ilya Rozanov, a Russian-born hockey player who meets his professional rival, Shane Hollander, portrayed by Hudson Williams, at the age of 17. By the age of 18, the pair, now professional hockey players, begin sleeping together on and off for years throughout their career, growing from teens to men. The show is hot and exciting, while still being vulnerable and smart.

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The actor, perfectly cast even though he himself didn't see it at first, not only had to learn hockey but an entirely new language, as his character spends a considerable amount of time each episode speaking Russian. Hearing Storrie, a West Texas native, speak in his normal accent is jarring, in a genuinely impressive way. "I've always loved languages. I've always loved accents," the actor tells *The Hollywood Reporter*. "I used to write monologues, and I would just put it into Google Translate and memorize it in different languages."

Below, Storrie chats all about his breakout role in *Heated Rivalry*, how he learned Russian so quickly, the pressures of adapting a beloved character and what's next.

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How are you doing with this instant love from the internet?

I feel really honored and blessed. We all know the internet can be really ruthless, especially Twitter. For every negative comment, I feel like there's a billion good ones, so I feel like the pros far outweigh the cons. Also, I think being from this day and age, I'm very aware of the presence of social media. I'm aware of how connected you are to the people who are watching it, so that's prepared me to really engage with people. I feel good. My head hasn't exploded yet, so we're doing good.

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In the past, people didn't have that instant access to every creative person to share such quick feedback. Are you thinking about that in a way that's stressful, or something that just is?

No, I think if you think on it too much, it can stress you out a little bit. We're in a really cool circumstance where the people who are interacting with this are just so enthusiastic and positive. I think that's because Jacob [Tierney, show creator] created something really cool and because Rachel Reid [author, *Heated Rivalry*] spoke to a community and a group that really loves her work. It's both of those things. Before the show even came to be, the fandom was already so positive and warm and enthusiastic. If you're doing anything great or anything that's bold, you have to have the idea that some people aren't going to like it, and that's OK, and that's good. Some of the best movies in the world have haters on them. There's some movies and stuff that I don't like that are world-renowned, and it doesn't mean that it's not awesome. It just means it doesn't speak to every single person, every single thing, given this speaks to a lot of people.

Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov in *Heated Rivalry.* COURTESY OF BELL MEDIA

In taking on this project, how much did you know about it? What were you thinking when it came your way?

When I got the breakdown, it was like 6'3, native Russian speaker, hockey player. Usually [the requirements are] a little less specific than that. With that being so specific, I didn't think this was going to be me. The breakdown also said that it was a book. I remember looking up the book, looking up the fan art and reading about it online. All of the fan art was this ginormous guy with brown eyes and scruff. As an actor, especially at the phase I was at before *Heated Rivalry*, you audition for things all the time that are such a shot in the dark and are such a long shot, but you want to act and work, so you give it a shot. I thought this was special and cool from the jump, but definitely did not think it was going to be me. Personally, the thing that excited me most about it too, off the jump, was the Russian element of it.

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Why was that exciting?

I've always loved languages, I've always loved accents. When I was little, I used to — this is probably back in 2007, I think when Google Translate came out, 2008, so it was not correct at all. I used to write monologues, and I would put it into Google Translate and memorize it in different languages.

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Wow.

Looking back on it, the pronunciation was horrible. The grammar was so wrong. I probably half memorized it. I would do it in French, I would do it in Chinese. The culture shifting, the language and the accent, that was really, really, really cool to me.

Everything makes a lot more sense. How long did you have to prepare that?

The timeline's kind of spotty because I'm pretty sure I didn't get the actual call that it was 100 percent a go until, I want to say, a week before we left, which isn't super-duper abnormal. But it's kind of crazy to have to learn how to skate, play hockey, speak Russian and do the accent and you don't even know until a week before. Once I got the yes, I started almost instantly. They hooked me up with my awesome dialect coach, Kate Yablunovski, who was based in Montreal. We started doing three, four-hour Zoom sessions every single day. A week before I left, I started learning Russian, and then I was with her for the first month and a half of the shoot, [and] I had Russian sprinkled throughout. Again, every single day — five, six, seven days a week, we would talk on the phone and go over the Russian.

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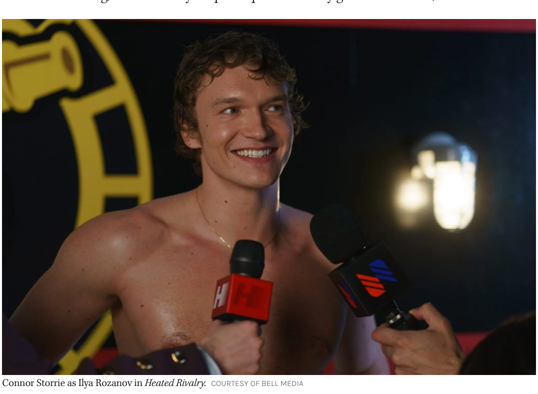
Then the hockey of it all, that's another element. How into sports were you before this?

Growing up, I was a tumbler. I'm from West Texas, so the tumbling, gymnastics [and] competitive cheerleading thing is pretty big out there. I did that growing up, so I was always into individual sports. I'm not the best team player. If I'm going to fail, I want to fail because of me.

Yeah, not because of someone else.

Totally. I skated a little bit growing up. I remember recreationally skating with my cousins and stuff. One time, there was this Russian lady who actually came up to me. Again, this is in West Texas, middle of nowhere [in the] desert. This Russian lady came up to my mom and was like, "You have to let me train him." I remember the next day I came back and there was no one in the skating rink, and she skated backwards and made me do these little — they call them C-cuts in hockey. Yeah, never saw her again, but my mom said she really wanted to make me her little prodigy. I'm good at anything that has to do with control. With hockey, I can do the skating, but once they drop that puck and they give me the stick, I'm out.


Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov in *Heated Rivalry.* COURTESY OF BELL MEDIA

It seems like you were able to film most of this show in a bubble, which I assume was nice. There were built-in fans, but I imagine this rollout has been more than anyone imagined. What did you think going in versus what it ended up being?

There's two parts of that for me. On one hand, when I signed up for this, it was a Canadian television show that was getting put up on Crave, which is a strictly Canadian streamer. I was still super excited about that because to me, that meant we were going to do a limited series in a more independent way. Sometimes, that's where a lot of magic can happen. Maybe it'll have some sort of international distribution at some point, but at the end of the day, I was excited to work. I was excited to work on something that was so specific and cool. I'm not a hockey player. I got to get out of my country for a few months. I got to speak a different language. I was in it. If it never got seen, and if it never got finished, I would still have been ecstatic just to have that experience.

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Then the international distribution came along?

Getting that next level of distribution, it's the dream. Everyone that I've talked to in the industry and on the distribution or the sales side [has said] this doesn't happen. As an actor, you just always hope that things pop off. We do this, we make stuff so that it can be seen, it can be shared and so that it can affect people and it can become part of the cultural ethos. It looks like it's doing that, so it's so cool. I'm also kind of nihilistic in the way where I just — I don't think it's a bad thing, I actually think it's a good thing — always expect the worst. I hope for the best. Shoot for the stars and expect the worst.

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In the span of a week, essentially, you go from just doing your job as an actor to having a lot of people on the internet talking about or weighing in on you. How are you dealing with it?

I don't know how to say this without sounding like an asshole, but I think as an actor, I've always wanted to work at a really high scale. I think every actor does. If you want to be an actor, on some level, I think there's something about wanting what you do to be seen and be exposed and reach people. I've wanted to be an actor since… My mom always says that since I could speak, I've always been like, "That's me on the TV." I don't know, I've always seen that for myself. For it to finally manifest, and to be reaching people in that way… This is what I wanted, so can't really be too shocked when it happens.

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As for people addressing me specifically online, rather than just the work that I do, I just see it as part of the territory. Once again, luckily people are really, really nice to me and say a lot of really nice things. I think it comes with the territory of wanting to work on the level that I'm really excited to work on, and I hope that continues to grow, and I get to do more stuff and work with other cool people that inspire me. It's part of the job, baby.

In bringing Ilya to life, I'm wondering how you saw him when reading the script or the book for the first time. There's been a lot of conversation online about who the character is. How did you see him? How did you track that emotionally?

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I saw a lot of love for Ilya online before I dove into the book. Once I booked a part, I instantly read the book. I didn't read the second one just because I didn't want to play [him] with the end in mind. But it's funny, I think that at first I remember thinking that people loved him because of the bad boy sort of archetype. Me as a person, I don't always find that charming, endearing, funny, because I see it as a shell. I was like, oh, here we go. [I'm] going to play the bad boy. Everyone loves this bad boy because he's cheeky and he's cocky and people like that. Then I realized really quickly that everyone likes him for the same reason that I'm learning to like him, which is that it's a front, that it's a shell. There's more underneath it. He's playing at being a grouch sometimes. He's playing at being a flirt sometimes, but underneath it, without revealing anything for the plot for the people who haven't read the books, he goes through a lot. He goes through some shit, and that's why people like him. We feel for people that go through stuff. I mean, it's so easy to engage with someone who tries to wink his way through all of that. That's so charming and so likable.

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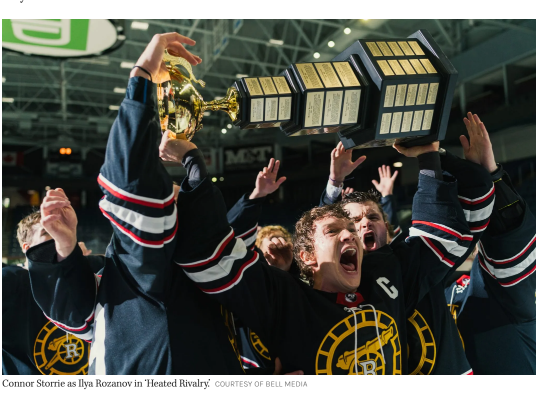
It is.

It just means that he feels everything since you don't see it. He feels it a hundred times bigger than most. That's why people love it. That's why people love him. That's why I love him, and why he's so cool.


Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov in 'Heated Rivalry.' COURTESY OF BELL MEDIA

Jacob has spoken about the fact that he wanted to take this material seriously. In general, romance is typically adapted in a bit more frivolous way. I appreciate that the show takes the material seriously and treats it in a real way. Did you feel more pressure in that sense?

Pressure is an interesting thing in that — to be completely honest — I don't really feel a lot of pressure as an actor, and it doesn't mean that I'm always confident. I doubt certain choices or putting on an accent as hyperbolic as Ilya's is not always a comfortable, easy decision.

I can imagine.

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But I'm very much of the mindset that with art — and today's world pushes this all the time — you do something, you give it 100 percent, and eventually it'll move on, and we'll watch it, appreciate it and then we'll move on to the next thing, which I don't think is a bad thing at all. For me, I'm always just like, just give it 150 percent, and if people don't like it, accept it and move on. I just felt like I was in really good hands. Because you're right, a story like this, I think a lot of other directors and writers would've tried to adapt something like this and could've fallen into a few pitfalls, kind of what you said, tried to feed into a really watered-down idea of the female gaze, and Jacob didn't do that. It's interesting. It's fast, it's witty, it's sexy, it's stylized, it's awkward at the right moments. Reading that, instantly a lot of my fears went away because I think the only time that you can really hesitate is if the foundation isn't strong.

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What do you, as an actor, hope comes next after this experience? You're still very much in the middle of it, but looking ahead, what are you thinking about?

I'm still very much in the beginning stages of my career. I think it's cool to be transparent about that because when you talk to actors a lot, or when you read or watch interviews, it feels so distant from you. To be completely honest — and I think this is cool to talk about because I never hear a lot of actors talking about this — but when I auditioned for *Heated Rivalry*, I was working at a restaurant. I was working at a restaurant 40 hours a week, getting off at 1 a.m. I did that on and off ever since I was in high school.

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I just feel really lucky and so blessed right now to be doing the thing that I've always wanted to do. Really, honest to God, all I want going forward is to keep having opportunities to work and be on set and enjoy the people and the experiences along the way. It sounds so cheesy, and I was not of that mindset up until eight months ago, but it really is just about being inspired and being with cool people. I just feel so blessed to be doing the thing that I've always wanted to do with my life. How long that lasts, what that looks like, who I get to work with, the ups and the downs, I don't know, but all I can do is be thankful for right now and hope that those fruits continue to grow.

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