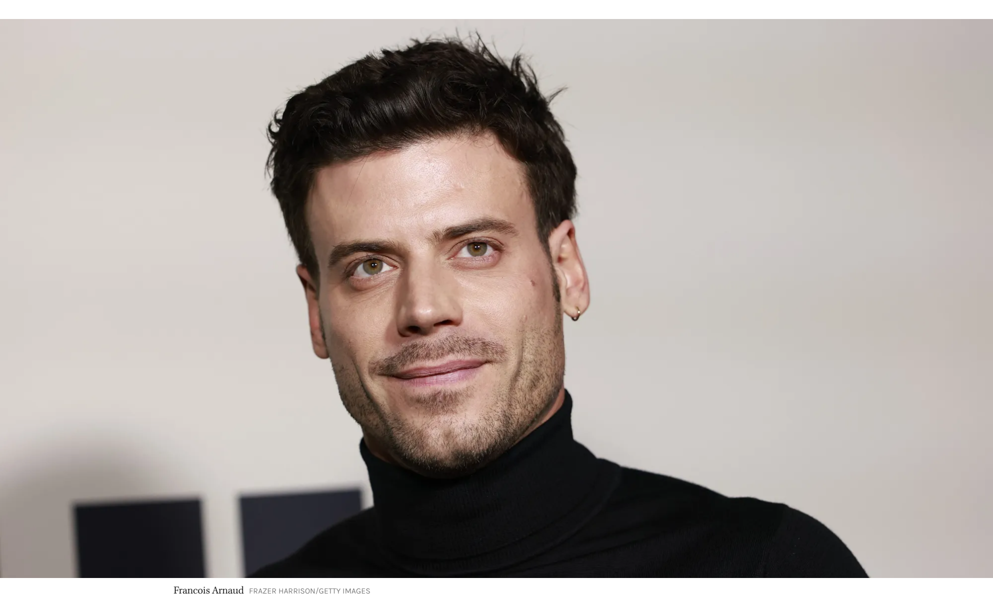


Francois Arnaud FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES

François Arnaud Was Ready to Be the "Game Changer" of the 'Heated Rivalry' Universe

The actor digs into the show's success, why he's so vocal about intrusions into actors' lives and what the show's about at its core: "More than about gayness, actually, it's about masculinity and the currency that it is."

BY NICOLE FELL DECEMBER 26, 2025

Listen to this article now 16 min listen Powered by Trinity Audio 00:00 15:45 1.0x

[This story contains spoilers from the first season of HBO Max's *Heated Rivalry*.]

"It made me feel like I'm fucking ancient," François Arnaud jokes.

The 40-year-old *Heated Rivalry* star is far from ancient, but he certainly *is* the elder figure on the Jacob Tierney-helmed HBO Max-Crave hockey romance series. Arnaud plays Scott Hunter, a veteran professional player, who much like the fresh faced rookies, Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) and Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie) at the center of the show, bears the weight of being a closeted professional hockey player.

ADVERTISEMENT
DUCT & ATTIC RENOVATION
Solving comfort, energy, and air quality problems.
CONTACT US
KNIGHTS OF THE ATTIC DUCT & ATTIC RENOVATION

Related Stories

TV
Critic's Notebook: In Praise of 'Heated Rivalry' and Gay Happy Endings

TV
'Heated Rivalry' Boss on That Emotional Finale and Whether He'll Write and Direct All of Season 2

Scott's story, *Game Changer*, is the first book in *Heated Rivalry*'s source material, a string of novels by author Rachel Reid set in the same universe. In the penultimate episode of season one, released Dec. 19, Scott literally changes the game of hockey — pun intended — by publicly coming out after winning the championship, kissing his love interest Kip Grady on the ice. It gives the younger players the push they need to get together for real — thank you, Scott — and it offers another queer experience different than that of the main plot.

To quote several fans online, Arnaud's character Scott is essentially the universe's gay hockey godfather. "It provides perspective on what it means to stay, to keep that a secret for longer and the weight, the toll that it takes and the emotional availability of being older in that space," Arnaud explains.

It's just days before Christmas, and the actor sits casually in a conference room at *The Hollywood Reporter*'s L.A. office. He's calm and charming, sharing his upcoming holiday plans. Taking some time to finally log off the internet seems to be a priority.

ADVERTISEMENT
DUCT & ATTIC RENOVATION
Solving comfort, energy, and air quality problems.
CONTACT US
KNIGHTS OF THE ATTIC DUCT & ATTIC RENOVATION

"It's weird. I feel like I've been an up-and-coming actor my whole life and I just turned into a veteran in three weeks," he says. "I'm like, oh, God, I feel like Ian McKellen."

Below, the actor shares his thoughts on Scott's future, why he speaks his mind about the intrusion in actors' private lives and adjusting to this new level of stardom.

Everyone is probably so tired of hearing me say they need to watch the show.

It's crazy. I think people are surprised. It's crazy how much press the show got surrounding the sexiness and the smuttiness of it, where I feel like that's really not why people are watching now.

It's a small part at this point.

To be fair, it's kind of how they hook you in the first two [episodes], but it is so much more than that, I think.

That's what [showrunner] Jacob Tierney told me in the beginning, that you were going to get us with the sex, but then the heart is going to sneak in. I feel like that's what your character really does.

Certainly he's the first one to do it. I think it gives permission to the other guys to go there as well.

Francois Arnaud as Scott Hunter in episode 101 of Heated Rivalry. SABRINA LANTOS/HBO

What were your thoughts going into the third episode after you saw the reaction to episodes one and two? People were getting so invested in the Ilya-Shane story. Were you nervous?

A little bit.

Were you anxious about how they were going to react?

I think I have talked about that a bit, and I didn't want to preempt that fear or that reaction too much. I think I appreciated the fact — as an audience member and an artist and actor or whatever, someone who likes movies and TV — I love that Jacob allows himself to do that. To sort of throw us a complete curveball. I never thought about that when I read it. If anything, I thought that it was kind of a breath of fresh air after the sexual tension of the first [episodes]. Then when I saw the online response to the first two, I was like, "Oh, fuck. Oh, fuck, yeah, people are going to want more of these two and then just be reticent or reluctant to take us in." I'm sure there were [some] people who did feel that way, but I think for the [most] part I've received tons of incredibly warm responses. I certainly miss [Shane and Ilya] too whenever we're on screen, but I think to provide a window into another sort of experience took a lot of people by surprise. I think the people who were in for it were rewarded.

ADVERTISEMENT

Scott's story in particular, to go off what you're saying, almost feels like it's for a different section of the audience in a way. Myself, as a queer person, I had a lot of feelings on the storyline that I felt I resonated with. I imagine you, as an openly queer person yourself, it might carry a different weight.

Can you tell me what kind of difference it carried for you?

I think I related to it more. Especially as someone who came out later than most of my friends and clued in on myself later than most of my friends.

Yeah, I've received a lot of those comments certainly.

I felt that in that way, it resonated differently with me. But I'm wondering how it resonated for you.

ADVERTISEMENT
DUCT & ATTIC RENOVATION
Solving comfort, energy, and air quality problems.
BOOK NOW
KNIGHTS OF THE ATTIC DUCT & ATTIC RENOVATION

I think those two things are complementary. I'll answer your question in a second. I think certainly some people relate more to the Shane and Ilya couple and others to Scott and Kip. But really what I think the brilliance of Jacob's screenwriting is that no matter where you stand on that spectrum, it all comes together to make a more complete experience as a viewer

I relate to it in a way that … Listen, I think I've given a lot to have this career and to live this passion of mine that has been at the forefront of every single one of my thoughts since I was a teenager. Everyone's experience is different. It felt like in my life, there was certainly a time where it was easier to just kind of not … Well, to pass, I guess. To use a dated term, maybe.

I understand.

I didn't really feel the need to confront those things for a while. Then for a variety of reasons that belongs to both career and personal life, there was a moment where I just felt like it wasn't worth the effort or the mental toll that it was taking on me. I thought it would make me a more honest performer if I was able to just let that go.

ADVERTISEMENT

That was my greatest fear, and that's why I'm sort of so reluctant to talk about these things is because I don't want it to mean that it's an open door to talk about my private life, because I do believe in the value of privacy, and I don't believe that people are entitled to know anything about an actor's private life. For me, it required a bit of juggling, and I'm someone who likes and who can't help but voice my opinions on a lot of things. (*Laughs.*)

I appreciate it, actually. I don't think you need to talk about your private life; I'm of that same belief.

So I want to be able to do that, as well as lend my authenticity to roles that I take on, all kinds of roles that I want to take on. I don't want to be limited by anything.

ADVERTISEMENT
DUCT & ATTIC RENOVATION
Solving comfort, energy, and air quality problems.
CONTACT US
KNIGHTS OF THE ATTIC DUCT & ATTIC RENOVATION

There's something about the moment that Scott finds himself in his life in that third episode that really deeply moved me and I connected with on an immediate level. I felt like there is nothing to prepare for this apart from learning to tie my skates properly and look a little less stupid doing it. But other than that, I was just like, "Oh God, I'm ready to say these words. Maybe it's too intense," like [Scott's] whole spiel to Kip at the kitchen counter. I believe in showing up in that way, and I want to do that in my own life. This is the kind of relationship and connection that I'm interested in.

I think it's a welcome addition to the canon of queer experiences that are seen on television. The whole show is about that. More than about gayness, actually, it's about masculinity and the currency that it is. How we are taught as men to limit the vulnerability that we're showing other people. I think that the whole show is cracking that cookie, dismantling that and providing different windows onto that.

ADVERTISEMENT

Francois Arnaud as Scott Hunter and Robbie G.K. as Kip Grady in Episode 105 of Heated Rivalry. SABRINA LANTOS/HBO

You hit on something I want to talk about, which is that you like to speak your mind and want to talk about things.

For now. I might be going back into my shell in about a day.

There is this idea that as a consumer of media, you're somehow entitled to know details about a person's private life. You commenting back to DeuxMoi ("If you're going to be posting unauthorized recordings of people's private lives, maybe at least get the title of the movie right?") was an example of pushing back on that. Why is it so important for you to do that?

It's kind of two birds, one stone actually, because that movie that I was promoting that day (*FuckToys*) is something that I really believe in. For them to get the title wrong, I was like, "Well, can you get us distribution then? Can you help us? Can you make it useful to us if you're going to …" I don't know. I mean, it's just mind-boggling to me that this kind of intrusion into personal life is still accepted in 2025 after people like Kit Connor was bullied out of the closet in a way that he wasn't ready for. Is that the representation that we want? I don't think so. I was wondering which comment you were going to bring up.

Well, I mean, your comment, "Should the sex that closeted hockey players have look like the sex that sceney L.A. gay guys have?" was also pretty good.

Again, that was not a diss to any particular branch of the community.

ADVERTISEMENT

I don't think it came off as that.

Not only should we be allowed to show a variety of experiences, we should crave that and want that. It should all be celebrated and not just — the show is about closeted hockey players, it's a hypermasculine world. That's the point. If you don't want to see that, then to each his own, right?

I spoke with Chala Hunter, your intimacy coordinator, who pointed out that there is no universal experience. This is one sliver of the queer experience.

That's also what being an actor is. Being specific, taking on a person's reality that could have nothing to do with your own and trying to make it personal and inject a lot of things. That's why the question of representation for me is a difficult one because there's … I think our responsibility is to the characters and the story and to bring truth to that. And, of course, enrich it with everything that you can bring from your own lived experience, but it's within the realm of the genre, which is not a documentary. It's fantasy, and we're fine with that. We always knew [that]. I love how Jacob has spoken about that.

Me too. I really appreciate that the show takes it seriously.

Yes, totally. [Jacob] takes on the source material and honors it and honors people's love for it. I think on television, and also in their own lives, people are longing for masculine figures of vulnerability and people who are willing to go there. Certainly, that's what I'm looking for with my family members, with my friends. We've all been raised to shut down. I think it needs a lot of work to constantly chip at those walls, and I think the show does that brilliantly.

ADVERTISEMENT

You've defended your coworkers, Hudson and Connor, by saying they've been famous for a short while and to give them a break. Do you find yourself jumping into that because you are the veteran of the cast?

No, it just happens to be Hudson and Connor in this position now, but it's not actually about them. What I'm saying is it's about all of us. It's about what our responsibility is as actors, as people who take on these stories and who give so much to that for months on end. It's a much more general thought about the value of our contribution, the responsibility that it entails. I guess when I say they've been famous for nine days, and just can you give them a break, that sounds pretty specifically about them, but it's really fed by my general thoughts on the matter and not really about them.

You've been famous for a bit more than nine days.

I'm not famous ever. I've been a working actor who has been lucky enough to have many opportunities to work on inspiring pieces of work. I had little periods of scrutiny into my private life, but never on the level that they are getting now, or that I'm getting now.

(L to R) Francois Arnaud as Scott Hunter and Robbie G.K. as Kip Grady in Episode 103 of Heated Rivalry. SABRINA LANTOS/HBO

What are you feeling now? This part of things is still a very new experience for you.

There's a bit of a whiplash. After having been in and given so much to projects that maybe we thought or were way more poised to be huge than this was, being a smaller Canadian show, that's taught me so much actually because I don't really think of the result anymore. It's taught me to appreciate every day on set, the camaraderie, the group work, the introspective work too, of being an actor and preparing and all that. I rarely think about the result anymore.

ADVERTISEMENT

For this surprise to come and for doing something that happens to resonate culturally and be part of the zeitgeist, it's kind of amazing. It's like, great, that's what you do it for. You do it to reach people, and this is reaching people on a massive level, so I'm not going to complain. It's a fun moment. I can't wait to log off the internet for two weeks tomorrow.

How online are you?

Well, I'm going to delete Instagram today or tomorrow. Maybe download it again for episode six and then delete it again until the New Year, for sure, or when I come back [to L.A.]. I think that despite [Connor and Hudson's] inexperience with that and their youth and everybody's kind of new experience with that level of success, I think that we're all, first and foremost committed to our craft and anxious to go back in and reconnect with why we want to do this. This is a strange part of the job that we're grateful for and excited by, and it's fun.

Scott and Kip certainly have parts in other books, including *The Long Game*. How do you want his story to continue?

Listen, I have no idea, and I think no one does. I don't think even Jacob does, to be honest. I think he's a bit shell-shocked by the whole thing.

I can imagine.

He's planning to take time off the holidays and then go back and start writing in January. So far, the first season has been a faithful adaptation of the books. Now, whether that changes for the future, who's to say. The conversations I had with him were prior to all this, six weeks ago or two months ago. I don't know whether we get our own little thing.

ADVERTISEMENT

Would you want to?

Maybe a TV movie, or something shorter. I don't know. Our story is more of a classic rom-com arc. It always reminded me of *Notting Hill* for the way it deals with fame and all that. We got that big moment. Do we want a soapy version of them fighting over Kip not cleaning the smoothie blender? Maybe. I don't know. I think it would be interesting to turn that on its head and make it hyperreal, as opposed to aspirational like it's been. I'd be curious to see that. I'm operating as a free agent. We'll see what happens, and we'll see if we're all on the same page.

What do you want people to take away from this show?

ADVERTISEMENT
Details

I've received messages from people who told me that their son came out to them because of our episode, and that it kind of changed their reaction to it too. Am I ever hoping that fiction work has that kind of real life effect? I feel like it'd be arrogant to say that. I just hope in everything else that I partake in, it's like an empathy creating machine and that it makes people softer, more forgiving, tender and more empathetic to whatever other people have going on.

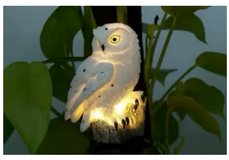
You May Like

Inside The Reiner Home Before The Tragedy: What A Close Friend Witnessed
TipHero

Brad Pitt moves Angelina Jolie to tears in emotional revelation
The Celeb Post

Cardiologist: Strong Legs After 60 Comes Down To This
Ultra Health Findings | Sponsored

Jeff Bezos Swears by the 5 AM Rule. I Gave It A Go.
Blinkist: 40 million users. 4.7 star rating in the App Store | Spons...



American In Chandler Love This $45 Owl Solar Garden Lamp
1115629041 | Sponsored

Updated-Diane Keaton's Cause of Death
TipHero

Cause Of Death Revealed For Newlywed Couple Found Dead In Car
TipHero

Cardiologist: Strong Arms After 60 Comes Down To This
Ultra Health Findings | Sponsored

Spine Specialist Says: Do This For 15min To Relieve Sciatica
SmoothSpine | Sponsored

Servers Reveal The Truth About Stars
Whisper Journal | Sponsored

READ MORE ABOUT:
FRANCOIS ARNAUD / HBO MAX / HEATED RIVALRY

PRESENTED BY AVATAR: FIRE AND ASH

THR Launches Exclusive Avatar: Fire and Ash Edition of...

The five-part audio and video series premieres on December 10 with episodes focusing on Score, Production Design, VFX,...

THR NEWSLETTERS

Sign up for THR news straight to your inbox every day

SUBSCRIBE

MORE FROM THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

LIVE FEED
Chase Stokes and 'Outer Banks' Cast Feel "Ready" to Say Goodbye: "We Want the Story to End on the Right Note"

LIVE FEED
'Pluribus' Star Karolina Wydra Explains Her Optimistic Take on Season One's Ominous Ending

SOPHIE NELISSE
Critic's Notebook: In Praise of 'Heated Rivalry' and Gay Happy Endings

POLITICS
Trump's Christmas of Chaos: Hosting a Rebranded Kennedy Center Honors, Over 100 Angry Truth Social Posts

OBITUARIES
'Big Brother' Alum Mickey Lee Dies at 35

THE FIEN PRINT
'The Copenhagen Test' Review: Simu Liu and Melissa Barrera's Peacock Espionage Drama Takes Too Long to Uncover the Fun Stuff

ADVERTISEMENT

PMC

MOST POPULAR

1. shekNOWS — Keith Urban Is Reportedly Questioning Whether Divorce From Nicole Kidman Was a 'Huge Mistake'
2. Sportico — Chiefs Land Record $1.8B in Public Money to Cross Kansas State Line
3. ARTnews — Arnulf Rainer, Austrian Artist Known for His 'Overpaintings,' Dies at 96
4. VIBE — From Buffalo To Paris, Conway The Machine Remains Bulletproof

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE

Sportico
Heisman Runner-Up Pavia Seeks Court Order to Keep Playing
58 MINUTES AGO

Robb Report
One of America's Best Craft Distilleries Just Dropped an Excellent New Cigar Blend Bourbon
44 MINUTES AGO

VIBE
From Buffalo To Paris, Conway The Machine Remains Bulletproof
4 DAYS AGO

billboard
Harry Styles Quie Releases Surpris 'Forever, Forever' Music Video
2 HOURS AGO

Your Privacy Rights
PMC, its service providers, and third-party partners collect information about you and how you use our services (including clicks and screen recordings) using first and third-party cookies, pixels, and similar technologies. Learn about our data practices and your choices in our Privacy Policy. By continuing to use our services, you agree to our Terms of Use (including to waiver and arbitration).