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The seduction of Hudson Williams

On set in Victoria for the new witchy Canadian series, Yaga, the Heated Rivalry star is steaming up the screen again, this time with a veteran cast

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The stars of YAGA, left to right: Noah Reid, Clark Backo, Hudson Williams and Carrie-Anne Moss.
CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE/CRAVE/SUPPLIED

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The quietly sizzling scene was being shot on a rainy March morning in a grand old house in Victoria, the stately home separated from the street by an expansive lawn. A main-floor living room had been transformed into a set: a dark, old-school university professor's office. And a seduction was under way.

"I would like to talk to you today about bones," the character played by Hudson Williams, suddenly one of the hottest stars on the planet, said to the character played by Carrie-Anne Moss.

In the scene, Moss's Katherine, a professor with deep expertise in bones, is being interviewed for a podcast by Williams's Henry Park, heir to a fishery fortune in a small coastal town.

"Are you comfortable or would you rather do it on the desk," Henry asks.

"I think you mean *at* the desk," Katherine responds.

It might be raining outside but it is steamy on set. "Prioritize the hot, people," showrunner Kat Sandler instructs.



Carrie-Anne Moss, left, stars next to Hudson Williams in a seduction scene from Yaga.

CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE/CRAVE/SUPPLIED

The scene appears in episode five of the upcoming series *Yaga* – a supernatural psychological thriller based on Sandler's play, *Yaga*, marking her first move into television.

She has adapted the witchy award-winning play, inspired by the Slavic legend of Baba Yaga, for the screen, expanding it from a two-act play to an eight-part

series with more characters (and thus more suspects).

In the first episode, which premieres on Crave on Oct. 23, a private investigator named Rapp (Noah Reid) arrives, hired by the wealthy Park family to investigate Henry's potential disappearance. Rapp is paired with a local police detective, played by Clark Backo. It's not long before Rapp, an old friend of Henry's, becomes intoxicated by the local women, including Moss's Katherine.

"It is interesting to play someone that is my age that is supposed to be invoking attraction from younger men. That's a trip," said Moss, who is now 59.

Hudson Williams and YAGA premiere leave TIFF crowd buzzing

Growing up in Vancouver, Moss spent parts of her childhood summers in Victoria with an aunt and uncle who lived here. Being here now to shoot the series, she said, evokes a childhood nostalgia. "Just the smell, the weather, the feeling of the place, even though it's changed so much," she said. "I think subconsciously, where you come from is in your bones."

Moss became a breakout star herself as a younger woman, cast as Trinity in *The Matrix* opposite another Canadian, Keanu Reeves. Given that, I asked if she had any wisdom to offer 25-year-old Williams, who is also from B.C., about rocketing to stardom.

"I don't think he needs it, you know? I think he's very grounded," she answered. "I don't know if it's the Canadian thing."

We were speaking in between takes of her exchange with Williams, a scene Sandler describes as "really sexy." So hot, I was told, that even during an online read-through of the scene, Williams appeared to be blushing over Zoom.



Williams: 'There is nothing that really prepares you for the weird intricacies of celebrity.'

CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE/CRAVE/SUPPLIED

Not that Williams is any stranger to shooting racy TV scenes, as anyone who has not been in a pop-culture cave since *Heated Rivalry* took over the discourse is aware. The heat and chemistry between Williams's Shane Hollander and co-star Connor Storrie's Ilya Rozanov shot the two young men into the stratosphere since its late 2025 release.

It was in the midst of this phenomenon that Williams joined the cast of *Yaga*, giving this new Canadian production a boost beyond its creator's wildest dreams.

"I was, of course, over the moon," Sandler, who lives in Toronto, told me. "I couldn't believe it."

Production was under way at the peak of the *Heated Rivalry* frenzy, which at that point was still new and strange for Williams. It was early March and over the past three months, he had gone from relative unknown to one of the two most visible stars in the world, along with Storrie, who four days earlier had guest-hosted *Saturday Night Live*, complete with a Williams cameo.

Life had changed dramatically. A year earlier, Williams was working on some short films, juggling acting classes and his server job at a suburban Old Spaghetti Factory, trying to save up some money for a vacation, he told me.

And now? He's one of the most recognizable stars in the world.

"I'm doing relatively good. I'm learning all throughout this," Williams said during an interview that day on set. We were sitting in an improvised green room on the mansion's top floor, Williams dressed in his character's crisp white shirt.

"In the beginning, it was really hard during the blow-up. The good moments are absolute highs, but the lows are weird lows that I hadn't experienced before because it's foreign territory. The lows don't feel like regular emotions. The whole Earth feels different."

"There is nothing that really prepares you for the weird intricacies of celebrity," he continued. "It feels completely foreign."

He talked about meeting thousands of people, shaking endless hands, fans throwing themselves at him. "It's sweet, but it changes how you just walk down the street." The other day, he told me, he went out for what should have been a five-minute walk and was stopped about twelve times. So many new people but so few chances for true, organic connection.

"But now I feel like I know the muscle that can engage with all these different things is growing and getting better," he said.

The hype he has brought to *Yaga* has been palpable. After Williams was announced as a cast member, orders came in from around the world for copies of *Yaga*, the play. This season in Toronto, the Tarragon Theatre will revive *Yaga* for its 50th-anniversary season.

“It’s really cool that theatre begets television, that begets more theatre,” said Sandler, who from the beginning has approached her stage productions with a television model. “Let’s make theatre for people who don’t like theatre, who really love HBO.”

Sandler’s enthusiasm is infectious. On set, in a ball cap that says “Bad” and later during an interview in a “Diet Coke” ball cap, she exudes excitement about her play moving to TV, her first foray as showrunner and her top-flight cast.

“I lost my mind when Carrie-Anne said yes. You don’t get people like this to do first-time shows,” said Sandler, rhyming off the show’s “Avengers-level” team of Canadian talent, also including Reid, Backo, Sheila McCarthy and Megan Follows.

And while much of the early buzz about the series focused on its male breakout star, this is very much a female-centric story and a show powered by women: Sandler as showrunner, her friend and creative partner Mackenzie Donaldson as producer, and Moss as star and an executive producer. Half of the episodes, including episode five, are directed by Rachel Talalay.



Director Rachel Talalay, Hudson Williams and showrunner Kat Sandler watch a playback of Yaga while Marsha Lederman, back right, looks on.

CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE/CRAVE/SUPPLIED

The story is based on a folkloric witch figure, Baba Yaga, whom Sandler calls “the original bad girl of Eastern-European folklore.” If TV audiences could accept Dexter, Walter White and Tony Soprano, why couldn’t they also fall for a complicated female anti-hero?

“It’s rage and it’s sexy and it’s witchy and it’s mysterious, but it’s fun,” Sandler said of the show, which imagines Baba Yaga as a woman living in contemporary times.

Reid, who, like Williams, became famous playing a gay Canadian – Patrick on *Schitt's Creek* – said during an interview on set that day that the show has contemporary relevance. "This kind of repurposing of the myth of Baba Yaga and how she might be useful in today's society and the sneaky ways that men try to get away with things."

It had been just over a month since the shocking death of his *Schitt's Creek* co-star Catherine O'Hara, and I asked him what he learned working from her that he was able to bring to his other projects, including this one.

"I think about her process all the time," he told me, after shooting a driving scene with Backo. "I don't think it's something that you could replicate, because she was such a pure source of creative energy."

Reid and the others I spoke to about Williams were excited about the buzz he was bringing to the show, but quick to point out how deserving he is; that he's a great actor – and a great guy.

"He is just a really lovely human," said Sandler. "There's the Hudson thing, but then there's a really smart actor who just wants to really work."



Williams and Moss shared high-fives on set after seduction-scene takes.

CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE/CRAVE/SUPPLIED

Williams, who plays two characters in the series, more than holds his own up against the veteran Moss (and her desk). At the same time, co-starring with her is a personal thrill, he said during the interview. His parents introduced him to *The Matrix* when he was very young, and he has often been told that Keanu Reeves is his celebrity look-alike.

"She's just the best person to work with. No B.S., no sort of prima donna nature whatsoever. Just wants to get in there and do the work."

And no, he was not intimidated by the onscreen intimacy. “Even *Heated Rivalry* didn’t scare me.”

On set that day, there was much discussion about their scene: the choreography leading up to the kiss, the way certain words should be said, the desire for maximum steam. Williams and Moss pulled apart and high-fived after takes.

At one point, Williams drifted over to the spot known as video village, where the monitors were set up, and talked to creatives and other crew about horror movies and psychological thrillers. He is a huge film buff, “a film and TV nerd” with “a gajillion references” who has seen everything and can impersonate anyone, as Backo describes him.

Heated Rivalry adds Canadian actors Emily Hampshire, Priyanka to Season 2 cast

Now, the encyclopedic cinephile has suddenly found himself part of the world he has studied so ardently as a fan. Given *Yaga*’s subject matter, the video village discussion that morning included *Black Swan*, *Halloween*, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *The Ring*. Someone mentioned also *Scream* and Drew Barrymore.

“I just met her,” Williams said – not a boast; more of a ‘can you believe it?’ He was just one of the gang, even if the odd joke was made about his fandom, which someone jokingly called the Hudson Brigade.

Given his sudden superstar status, Williams could have chosen anything for his next project. He said yes to *Yaga*, to Sandler, to Canada.

“Well, the patriotic person in me kind of said … I’m not going to run to the States. I want to double down and go Canada, back to back, and show that we are making great content,” he said, adding that it was also nice to be shooting a half-hour helicopter ride from Vancouver, where he lives.

“To see that Canada is really taking big swings, I wanted to sort of honour that.”

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