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What to expect from the finale of the icy-hot romance series, 'Heated Rivalry'

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Scott Simon

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NPR's Scott Simon talks to Washington Post reporter Rachel Kurzius about "Heated Rivalry," the romance series about hockey players falling in love. The finale is streaming now.

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SCOTT SIMON, HOST:

Tonight, the Montreal Metros face off against the Boston Raiders in Game 6 of the - no, it's not time for sports. It is time for hockey romance. Back in July 2024, we spoke with Rachel Kurzius of The Washington Post about the icy-hot world of hockey romance novels. One of those novels, "Heated Rivalry," is now one of the most-watched TV series on HBO Max. Rachel Kurzius joins us now. Thanks so much for being back with us, Rachel.

RACHEL KURZIUS: It is a pleasure.

SIMON: How would you describe this phenomenon?

KURZIUS: It is, in a word, surprising. Even the creators of the show "Heated Rivalry" perhaps expected that this is a show that would slowly gain steam with international audiences. It was created and produced in Canada, and HBO Max said that they would also air it simultaneously. And since then, it has been an absolute juggernaut culturally. Its actors went from virtual unknowns to now very sought-after stars. And what I'm most delighted about is that people are talking

about these characters that I love - Shane and Ilya.

SIMON: Well, and - all right. Why do you love Shane and Ilya? Why do you love - let me use an NPR word here - the whole milieu?

KURZIUS: I think that the relationship between these characters, who are professional hockey players and rivals on the ice, is just really sticky. A lot of times in romance novels, what you read about is people who are basically kind of perfect already. And in this book, they are fascinating, flawed characters who somehow are able to, in one another, find this beautiful sanctuary of love, but it doesn't happen immediately. And in fact, the way that it happens is very different than what you might consider an archetypal romance where they meet, they chit-chat, the feelings build, and then maybe at the end, you see them kiss. This is kind of the opposite of that. They...

SIMON: Well, they - I mean, they're - the old liplock is pretty early on.

KURZIUS: That's right - the liplock and more.

(SOUNDBITE OF TV SHOW, "HEATED RIVALRY")

CONNOR STORRIE: (As Ilya) What is your room number?

HUDSON WILLIAMS: (As Shane) 1410.

STORRIE: (As Ilya) Well, if I come to 1410 tonight at 9 o'clock?

WILLIAMS: (As Shane) I might open.

STORRIE: (As Ilya) I might knock.

KURZIUS: Their entire relationship begins with physicality. And it is only through being intimate with one another that they actually reckon with the fact that they have caught feelings for one another.

SIMON: I spent a little time watching the show. At your encouragement, I've sketched out my impression. Ready? Skate around. Sex scene. Skate around. Sex scene. Argument. Makeup sex scene. What subtleties am I missing?

KURZIUS: Well, first of all, you sketched out the plot for me. But I want to hear

your feelings.

(LAUGHTER)

SIMON: I - but I was watching clinically.

KURZIUS: Here's what I think that you may be missing in your explanation of the plot, which is that, yes, there is absolutely a lot of sex. But the sex in the book and in the show - it is character development, and it is plot development. It cannot be skipped because the way that they are interacting with one another evolves over the course of the story, as the way that they feel about one another evolves.

(SOUNDBITE OF TV SHOW, "HEATED RIVALRY")

STORRIE: (As Ilya) Found you.

WILLIAMS: (As Shane) So you were looking for me.

STORRIE: (As Ilya) Of course not. Oh, I looked up that word - compatible.

WILLIAMS: (As Shane) What?

STORRIE: (As Ilya) Compatible. I thought I knew what it meant, but I wanted to be sure.

KURZIUS: I think that that's also true in life, is that the way that people interact with one another physically certainly affects their relationships. And I think as the show progresses, the sex scenes lessen because all of the other ways that they are interacting with one another deepen.

SIMON: The season finale aired.

KURZIUS: It did.

SIMON: No spoilers. Were you satisfied?

KURZIUS: I was deeply satisfied by the finale. I think after episode 5, which is kind of operatic in its scope, it's not going to surprise viewers to learn that episode 6 really zooms in on these two characters. They have never had an opportunity to linger with one another before. Everything has always been so