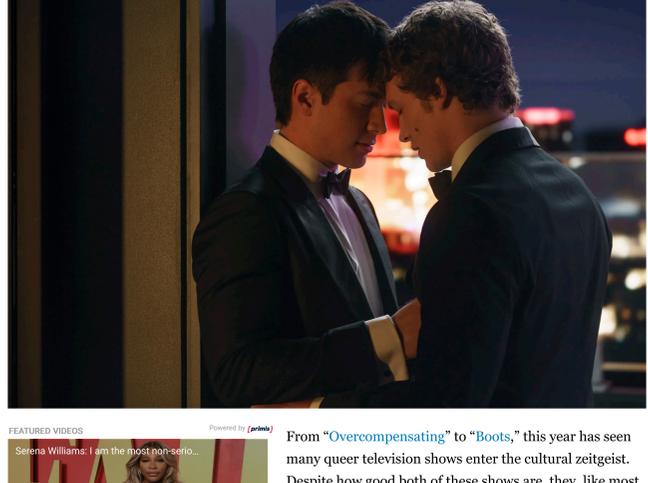


23 Must-Have Gadget Gifts
23 Insanely Cool Gadgets You Didn't Know You Needed (Until You Saw This List)
Smart Trending Gifts Open

TV/Streaming

HBO's "Heated Rivalry" is the Sexiest and Most Significant Queer Show of the Year

Kaiya Shunyata 1 day ago 5 min read



From "Overcompensating" to "Boots," this year has seen many queer television shows enter the cultural zeitgeist. Despite how good both of these shows are, they, like most queer shows of this decade, are unfortunately lacking the audaciousness found in the age of new queer cinema, packaged into perfectly quaint and safe representations of queer sexuality.

Thankfully, Canadian production company Crave has swooped in to rectify this problem, shattering expectations and proving that queer television can indeed take risks if the creators and actors behind these shows are up to the task.

Based on Rachel Reid's best-selling romance novel of the same name, "Heated Rivalry" focuses on Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams), a young Canadian hockey player whose rivalry on the ice with Russian player Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie) dominates both of their careers. In addition to being two of the most successful athletes in their field, the rivalry quickly gives way to a frenetic friends-with-benefits situation, where gazes linger, and desires threaten to shake the foundations of their careers.

Save up to 30% Hertz
Jingle all the way with our newest fleet yet. Pay now & save.

What the first few episodes of the series lack in dynamic storytelling, the show makes up for with the scenes shared between the two leads. Their dynamic is compelling, largely because of the instant spark between Williams and Storrie, and also because creator and director Jacob Tierney are determined to dive straight into the budding romance. While a story like this is usually spaced out in a way that forces viewers to salivate through a will-they-or-won't-they situation, in the first half-hour of the show's first episode, it's clear that by the episode's end, Shane and Ilya won't be able to keep their hands off of each other.



It's a bold choice from Tierney, who abandons typical romance tropes and forces these characters headlong into the kind of hazy romance queer viewers have been begging for. Each time the characters reunite, after fade-to-blacks showcase the passing of weeks and sometimes months, it's as if a spark has been ignited deep within each of their chests. Both Williams and Storrie showcase this with gasping breaths and gazes that pierce through the screen. Although the pacing can be jarring at first, the feverish time jumps help us understand the fast-paced nature of the lives these men are forced to live. Paired with the secrecy that looms above their heads each time they meet, the speed in which the show unravels slowly becomes one of its most fascinating adaptational choices.

What sets "Heated Rivalry" apart from its peers is its focus on its characters' sexual chemistry. While heterosexual sex on screen is disappearing, gay sex on screen doesn't have the same kind of traceability in cinema or television to measure. When Ilya and Shane finally start hooking up, we see it from multiple angles and dual perspectives, shot in a way that feels more intimate than anything else released this year. What makes the show truly soar is not just how steamy these scenes are, but how Tierney engages with the mechanics of gay sex and the sexual dynamics between these characters. An inherent power dynamic marks the relationship that unfolds, and both the show's creator and its actors bask in this push-and-pull rather than shying away from it.

The weight of their careers and the livelihoods of their families lies heavily on both Shane and Ilya's shoulders, and both Williams and Storrie showcase this deftly in the show's quieter moments. As Ilya, Storrie commands the screen with a swagger remnant of a classical Hollywood star, but it's Williams—a relative newcomer—whose presence shakes the foundation of the series. An internal character, Shane isn't someone who speaks his mind, yet what he's feeling is always apparent because of the microexpressions that grace Williams' face. With a slight quirk of his lip or a gaze that passes through his lover, Shane quickly becomes a fascinating character to watch unspool before our eyes.



While the series may be dismissed as nothing more than a sex-fueled adaptation of an already smutty romance novel, the dedication of its actors allows it to triumph over its source material. Yes, the sex scenes are bold and tantalizing. Still, the show also goes to great lengths to explore how the homophobia and racism that plague professional sports forces our protagonists to abandon their true desires, instead only allowing themselves to bask in each other's company under the cover of darkness. Each time the two meet up, there's an invisible shadow that looms in the corner of the hotel rooms they hide in, a presence that shapes not only how they engage with each other on the rink, but outside of it.

"Heated Rivalry" stands out in a wasteland of recent queer television that plays it too safe. By simply existing, the series has already become revolutionary, as one of the few pieces of media willing to showcase queer sex. But, beyond its importance and its inevitable legacy, the show is also one of this year's most enjoyable. Its sexiest scenes are backed by what could be called a rip-off of Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross' "Challengers" score, synths pulsating through the background as our protagonists meet each other's gazes across gyms, hotel rooms, and, of course, ice rinks. Paired with this, Williams and Storrie share a chemistry so intense it rivals Bogart & Bacall, shaping this series into not only one of the most entertaining shows of the year, but also one of its most significant.

"Heated Rivalry" is now streaming on HBO Max.

Social media icons (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram) and author bio for Kaiya Shunyata.

Leave a comment

Related articles

- Netflix's "The Abandons" Leaves Its Capable Stars Behind in a Weak, Weary Western
Starz Returns to Form With Brutal and Brilliant Spin-Off "Spartacus: House of Ashur"
"Stranger Things" Sets Up Its Endgame with Quartet of New Episodes
Wong Kar-wai's Gorgeous, Captivating "Blossoms Shanghai" Arrives on the Bitterness Channel

Popular reviews

Movie review cards for 'The Chronology of Water', 'Arco', 'Night Always Comes', and 'Happyend' with star ratings.

The Best movie reviews, in your inbox

Enter your email SUBSCRIBE

- Movie Reviews: Roger's Greatest Movies, All Reviews, Cast and Crew, Ebert Prime, Sign Up
Movie Genres: Action, Amazon Prime, Comedy, Documentary, Drama, Horror, Hulu, Mystery, Netflix, Romance, Science Fiction, Suspense, Thriller
Blogs: Reviews, Chaz's Journal, Great Movies, MZS, Far Flungers, Interviews, Tributes
Ebert Co.: About the site, Contact us, Advertise with us, Contributors

"Roger Ebert Loved Movies" In Memoriam 1942-2013