

# THE "HEATED RIVALRY" MANIA

By Hannah Jocelyn January 16, 2026



Illustration by Ohni Lisle

"Heated Rivalry" has captured hearts—and Instagram feeds—everywhere. The six-episode series on HBO Max mainly follows two hot, hot hockey stars, Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander, as they fight with each other on the ice and have sex with each other everywhere else. It's great—and Naomi Fry agrees. "Part of the pleasure for viewers," as Fry writes in her column, "is the show's plainspoken articulation of desire, when the love that dare not speak its name finally does." We chatted recently about this and other reasons the show is so special.

*Our conversation has been edited and condensed.*

### What is it about "Heated Rivalry" that has everyone so heated?

First, it's a perfect encapsulation of a story of two people who are attracted to each other trying to resist being attracted to each other—in this case, because of the obstacle of their closetedness—who then persevere and have sex anyway. And that rhythm of will they or won't they is repeated every episode—getting together, can't be together, getting together, can't be together. And, the whole time, the larger question is looming over them of whether it could be love.

Part of the charm of the show is that it's pretty simple and elegant. Every episode has conflict and resolution, and there's something incredibly satisfying about that.

### I can think of a few satisfying things about the show.

Right—the second thing that makes "Heated Rivalry" so successful is the extreme freshness and handsomeness of the two leads, Connor Storrie and Hudson Williams, who play Ilya and Shane. Much has been made of how hot they are, what gods. But they are also near-total unknowns.

They seem to have sprung fully formed from anonymity, and there's a sense of having discovered them. It's very rare to see that these days, and there's an excitement to it that lends itself to this sudden fan frenzy. Really, there's something a bit old-fashioned about this overnight-success story. It reminds me of starlets being discovered in the fifties.

### They're just a couple of starlets.

They are. And we've all been looking for something to all care deeply about together, and there's a pleasurable shock to discovering these boys—who have no baggage or back stories, really, as far as we know—together.

### And speaking of pleasurable shocks . . .

That's the third thing: the explicit sexiness of it, the idealized gay sex. You see butts, you see acts happening, implied penetration and oral sex, all that, with no cut to crashing waves. It's exciting, and I've spoken with gay people who appreciate the representation. Especially now, with the country the way it is—not its most liberal moment.

### That's part of the reason the show felt very Canadian to me.

It's funny you say that. I grew up watching "Degassi" and I was actually reminded a little bit of it when watching "Heated Rivalry," in that it kind of teaches you a lesson—not in a didactic way, but the clear motivations of the characters sometimes felt like a Canadian teen show to me. In a good way! The way it's charming and low-key and uncynical. There's something wholesome about the kind of pure optimism of this love-conquers-all story.

### Do you think that's also why straight women seem to love the show?

There's been a lot of discussion about the dire straits of masculinity right now, and how women feel about men's emotional availability, their ability to be vulnerable without being complete wussies. And I think there is that fantasy element to this show: these guys are the strong, silent types, but beneath that hard veneer there is a molten lava of pure passion and love.

### And we just want to get burned.

Exactly.

### What do you make of the social-media storm around the show?

Connor and Hudson are so talented. And for them it's really gone from zero to a hundred real quick, as another famous Canadian has said. It must be very overwhelming for them, because they're doing it all—every appearance possible.

I was actually at the premiere for the new season of "Industry," the other night, and Hudson was there. I didn't interact with him at all, but a couple of things struck me. First, everybody was abuzz about him, whispering to each other "Did you see him?" and trying to take a picture with him. There were other celebrities there, and usually people try to be cool at these events, but everybody was excited about his presence in a way I hadn't seen before.

And, then, when he passed by me, I noticed that he had a cigarette over his ear! And even though I obviously know that an actor is different from his character, that Hudson isn't *really* a gay hockey player, I still did a double take. His persona had superseded reality for me. Like, on the show he's so straitlaced and health-conscious; it's Ilya who smokes and is the bad boy. It was just funny that, without realizing it, I was so affected by the character.

### Shane would never.

No, our Shane would never.

[Read Naomi's review »](#)

## Editor's Pick

Photograph by Stephen Maturin / Getty

## The Minnesota War Zone Is Trump's Most Trumpian Accomplishment

"The violent confrontation that Trump craves most," Susan B. Glasser writes, "is the war at home, against the enemy within." Despite having, in the last week alone, threatened war with the ayatollahs in Iran and with Denmark, the President seems most serious about his actions against protesters in his own country. He may have started out by trash-talking America, but one year into his second term he is simply trashing it, Glasser argues. [Read the story »](#)

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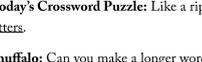
### Our Culture Picks

- **Read:** "Homeschooled," by Stefan Merrill Block, is a precisely rendered memoir of a novelist's highly [unorthodox homeschooling experience](#).
- **Watch:** In the wry film "A Private Life," Jodie Foster acts mostly in French. [See what else our critics recommend this week](#).
- **Listen:** A\$AP Rocky, whose new album drops today, is "most appealing in the purple fog," [Sasha Frere-Jones has written](#), "remembering his roots and then partying hard enough to forget them."

### Daily Cartoon

"It's this trend where you post a photo of yourself from thirty-eight seconds ago."

Cartoon by Jason Adam Katzenstein



### Puzzles & Games

- **Today's Crossword Puzzle:** Like a ripe plum or a scandalous piece of gossip—[five letters](#).
- **Shuffalo:** Can you make a longer word with [each new letter](#)?
- **Laugh Lines:** Test your knowledge of classic [New Yorker cartoons](#).

P.S. It's freezing in New York again, making us wish we were that man who spent forty-two years at the [Beverly Hills Hotel pool](#). ❄️

*Hannah Jocelyn is a newsletter editor at The New Yorker.*

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