

SERIES BUSINESS

Inside Hollywood's Book Wars: How a Top Universal Exec Decides What to Buy

IP guru Jordan Moblo on the 'Heated Rivalry' moment shaking up studios



LESLEY GOLDBERG
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CLOSE READ "We're always on the hunt for romance. In the TV space, it's more difficult to adapt romance because romance books have a happily ever after, and it's a closed ending," says Universal's Jordan Moblo. (The Ankler illustration; Maarten de Boer/Universal Studio Group, Peacock)

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I wrote about the [resurgence of traditional pilots](#), spoke to [Versant execs Mark Lazarus and Val Boreland](#) about the NBCU spinoff's strategy, and interviewed [the Bell Media execs](#) who bet on breakout hit *Heated Rivalry*. I'm lesley.goldberg@theankler.com

Yeah, I know Hollywood has never stopped loving books. But it has rarely needed them this much.

In an era of tighter budgets, fewer bets and growing pressure to deliver shows that arrive with audiences already attached, studios are once again scouring the publishing world for stories that feel both *safe* and *surprising*.

Enter *Heated Rivalry*. The breakout romance series from showrunner **Jacob Tierney** — produced by Bell Media for Canada's Crave and streaming in the U.S. on HBO Max — didn't just become a pop-culture phenomenon. It delivered something Hollywood is desperate for right now: proof that a relatively low-budget adaptation, rooted in a passionate readership devoted to **Rachel Reid's** *Game Changers* series, can break through in a crowded market without a nine-figure price tag.

That success has landed like a flare over the book business.

To understand the *Heated Rivalry* effect — and what kinds of titles are now moving fastest through development pipelines — I spoke with **Jordan Moblo**, executive vp of creative acquisitions and IP management at Universal Studio Group. Moblo oversees book and IP strategy across Universal Television, UCP, Universal International Studios and Universal Television Alternative Studio, and was one of the earliest in-house executives hired specifically to hunt for adaptation-worthy material.

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Since building IP departments at Disney and Netflix before landing at Universal in 2022, Moblo, 41, has optioned or helped shepherd hundreds of properties — from breakout hits like *Will Trent* to buzzy titles like *Dungeon Crawler Carl*. He also runs the popular [Jordy's Book Club](#) on Instagram, giving him a rare dual vantage point: studio gatekeeper and real-time reader barometer.

I asked Moblo — whose husband, **Jordan Cerf**, is in the business as a manager/producer and head of literary at Linden Entertainment — what *Heated Rivalry's* success actually means inside studio walls right now, but also for some boots-on-the-ground intel on what is moving right now in the books-to-screen market and why.

Today, edited and condensed for clarity, you'll hear about:

- Why romance is a challenging genre for TV, and how *Heated Rivalry* threaded the needle
- How studio book buyers spot demand months before a title hits shelves
- The rich opportunity in pandemic-era auction darlings quietly back on the market
- Why books still outperform podcasts and articles as Hollywood IP
- Four studios, including an indie darling and a behemoth, that Moblo sees as his toughest competitors for top books and authors
- The genres Moblo is "always looking for"
- Emerging formats with lots of buzz, and the era most ripe for nostalgia now
- How Jordy's Book Club gives Moblo an edge even when he loses a bidding war

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