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'Heated Rivalry' Boss on That Emotional Finale and Whether He'll Write and Direct All of Season 2

Jacob Tierney breaks down Shane and Ilya's visit to the cottage, why the season had to end there and if he's planning to write and direct all of season two alone.

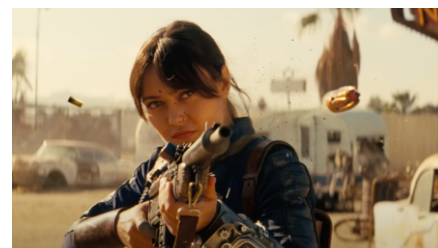
BY NICOLE FELL  DECEMBER 25, 2025 10:00PM



Connor Storrie (left) as Ilya Rozanov and Hudson Williams (right) as Shane Hollander in the season one finale of 'Heated Rivalry.' SABRINA LANTOS/HBO MAX

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[This story contains major spoilers from episode six, "The Cottage," of *Heated Rivalry*.]

Pack your bags, it's time to head to the cottage.

Heated Rivalry wrapped its first season with the show's highly anticipated sixth episode, "The Cottage."

Professional hockey rivals turned secret situationship turned maybe more [Shane Hollander \(Hudson Williams\)](#) and [Ilya Rozanov \(Connor Storrie\)](#) finally get a moment

away from the chaos of their world to spend two weeks together, *all alone*, at Shane's secluded cottage.

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For fans of *Heated Rivalry*, who have been rooting for Shane and Ilya to get it together since episode one, it's a 50-minute emotional rollercoaster. For the first time in the season, these two characters give into the romantic and domestic vibes that have been building throughout the six episodes. It's still plenty sexy, but it's mostly emotional and real.

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After a mutual love confession, a decision to have Ilya move to a Canadian team closer to Shane and a plan to start a charity together as a way to soft launch they don't actually hate each other, Shane's father catches the pair together at the cottage. This leads the couple to Shane's parents' house, where Shane finally comes out as gay to his parents and admits he and Ilya are "lovers," as the Russian player puts it. The episode ends with the pair literally driving off into the sunset, (some) of the weight lifted off their shoulders as they head into the unknown — a.k.a. the **recently announced season two**.

"They get to be in love," writer and director **Jacob Tierney** tells *The Hollywood Reporter* about Shane and Ilya's season one ending. "That's all that I wanted was the simplicity of that, of just letting them have a [moment]."

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Season one followed the source material, Rachel Reid's novel of the same name, quite religiously, oftentimes using direct dialogue from the book. Season two will,



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presumably, follow Reid's sequel *The Long Game*, but Tierney can't get into too many details on that yet as he hasn't started writing.

He'll definitely direct all episodes of season two, but he might get some help in writing the scripts, he says. That would be a change from season one, as Tierney wrote and directed all six episodes solo.

"It's possible that other writers will come in to help me out. I'm not sure yet. We'll see what the additional demands are that I have to deal with, the logistics," Tierney says, adding that *Heated Rivalry* will "continue to be as intimate and handmade" as it was in season one regardless of what's decided because it's the only way he knows how to make a show.

Below, the showrunner discusses his decision to end the finale where he did, why that scene with Shane and his mom needed to happen and what he can share about season two.

In Rachel Reid's book, it jumps ahead to Shane and Ilya announcing their charity. Why did you feel that ending it where you did, at the cottage, was the right move?

It's a couple of reasons. One's just a TV reason, which is I don't want to end with exposition. I was ending with a news conference. I did write that at one point, and as usual, I talk about it all the time, but Rachel Goldstein, my creative executive at Crave, she called me and she was like, "Are you setting up season two? Don't do that." I was like, "Alright, alright, I hear your tone of voice. I get it."

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I love this book so much, and so much of what I wanted to bring to it were the things that I remembered, the things that imprinted on me. What I remember so clearly was just this feeling of oh, they get to be in love. That's all that I

wanted, was the simplicity of that, of just letting them have a [moment]. They say it at the beginning, [but] they never get a moment. Just letting them drive together with [Ilya's] hand on [Shane's] neck and just being sweet. That's enough for me.

There was a scene you added in with Yuna, Shane's mom, that really added to the story. I think it showed us a bit more about Shane, who's so internal as a character, and where he's at. Why did you feel that needed to be there?

He is a tricky character in that way. He's so internal, and his struggles are so internal. I think Yuna is too. They are actually quite similar. I really felt like those two needed a moment together. Not just because of where we've come from, but also because of where we're going, and how involved Yuna is in the rest of their story. How crucial a role she plays. I think that my little gay heart just needed a moment with Shane and his mom. They needed to talk and that was it.

What is it about the parental relationship that's important to show?

Part of Shane's journey that I relate to really strongly — I was a child actor, he was a child athlete — you make so many decisions with your parents that are because of something you want and you love. Whether it's hockey or acting or whatever it is, and you do it before you know yourself. These parameters are put up around you and a world kind of builds itself around you as you're figuring out who you are. I think there's a lot of really easy ways for well-intentioned people to do things that aren't great for their kids, their parents, back and forth. The communication can be difficult. I think that it's really easy to be ungenerous with a character like Yuna, and I don't think that's fair to her. I wanted to show her heart a bit more clearly than I felt was on the page in the book, and also to show, again, her similarities to Shane.

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The other thing that I love about her is her [saying] “Enough, what are we going to do?” That wonderful part of her as well because it was not to change her character, but just to ground her and ground that relationship. Parents were something that I thought about a lot when I was writing this because we didn’t have a ton of money, and I had to fight pretty hard to keep Kip’s dad in the show, which was a huge thing for me. I needed and wanted him there. Scott’s an orphan. Ilya has the relationship he does with his parents and Shane’s [parental relationship] is complicated. I want there to be a spectrum of parents here dealing with these kids. I think that it lays the groundwork for what the readers of the book know is coming, but when Ilya’s talking about his dad in episode five and he says, “I wish he could have known me.” I think he’s acutely aware that, for Shane, you need to do this. You need to talk to them because you’re going to regret it. Even my monster father, I wish I’d told because you want them to know you.

Heated Rivalry has become appointment TV. What does it feel like for you as the creator to see that? We’re in an age where it doesn’t happen much.

It’s deeply surreal, if I’m being honest with you. *Letterkenny*, which had many, many seasons and stuff, it dropped six or seven in a row. I would definitely have moments where I wondered if anyone noticed the episode I liked in the middle. I know people would consume it in one sitting, which is also amazing. That’s fun too, but I didn’t really register. I knew when HBO bought us that it meant we were going to be [week-to-week], but Crave was going to do that anyway. I guess I just forgot what that was like.

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Honestly, it feels so cool to be a part of a tradition of TV that I grew up with, of waiting for *The X-Files* to come on,

of waiting for your shows. God, I remember waiting with such anticipation for *Mad Men* to come on or *Veep* or *The Wire*. These shows that you'd be on the edge of your seat waiting [for], remembering what happened last week and wondering what was going to go down. It feels very cool to be a part of that tradition. I realize I'm literally just naming HBO shows. Oh no, AMC, I guess I did mention *Mad Men*.

I feel like we're in the cultural conversation because of that. I think it's much harder to be when you just drop [all at once], and everybody reacts on their own time. Especially in a time of so much fucking TV to cut through. To be a show that people are talking about during the week, it's crazy. I'm also kind of looking forward to it being done for the moment too because it's very overwhelming.

I can only imagine.

I don't think anyone can anticipate this, but boy, we didn't. It's so good, but it's not like we were like season three of *Game of Thrones* or whatever.

In the first conversation we had, you stressed that you wanted this story to be about queer joy and queer characters just getting to love and have sex and be who they are. We both know that (the sequel book) *The Long Game* deals with heavier topics. How do you think you'll balance that?

I don't know yet. I haven't started writing yet, but I do in my head call it *Sex Scenes From A Marriage*, so it's definitely heavier. I don't know if I'm going to go quite into Bergman route there, but I think another thing that I told you is that I promised Rachel Reid [I'd] take this seriously.

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Yes, you did.

She takes them seriously in the second book. She's like, "This is a real relationship and real relationships come with struggle." It's so compelling. I'm just excited to keep going on this journey with these characters, honestly. I think part of that is there's definitely an element of sadness to what's coming, of loneliness and of isolation. Of Ilya learning a lot about himself, and Shane learning a lot about himself too. I'm excited, and I still think at its heart, these books and this show, they want to entertain.

I want this. We want this. This is supposed to be fantasy romance, and I still want to keep it there. But I think part of the reason that it does work as entertainment is that we are taking this seriously, and that you're on a journey with two people that you feel have earned these moments. I don't think episode five would've had the impact it had if you hadn't watched the four that came before it, you need to go through the real-time struggle of this with them so that you can feel that exhale when they say something true or sweet or kind.

There's been quite a lot of conversation, deservedly, about how this show has completely changed the careers of Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie, which is so exciting to see. But how are things looking for you right now? Are you getting any old calls? New calls?

Oh, the old calls are interesting. There's a lot of nice stuff being pushed my way. We'll see what comes of it. The nicest gift that I've gotten is that I get to continue to live in this world for a little while, and I'm very, very, very pleased about that. But yes, certainly [HBO chairman and CEO] Casey [Bloys] emails me, so that's nice.

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First name basis too.

Oh, my friend Casey? Who did you think I meant?
(Laughs).

Of course. Of course.

It's been very nice, and that's the beauty of being an actor is you get that stuff face on and they (Connor and Hudson) should. They deserve it. I think there's some nice things coming my way too, which is great.

Is there anything from the show that fans noticed that you had hoped they would?

The sunshine line. (Tierney is referring to a line of dialogue from show's third episode where a character tells Scott Hunter, the first player to come out, that he and his secret boyfriend both deserve sunshine). [It] really made me really happy that people got that. I don't even think I told (producing partner) Brendan [Brady]. I just did it. I [thought] maybe somebody would notice [it was] the echoing that song (Wolf Parade's "I'll Believe in Anything," which boasts the lyrics, "Give me your eyes / I need sunshine").

I've never felt more observed in my fucking life. I want to crawl into a hole, but those moments are really nice. Those little things when [someone sees that]. That's great. I'm not Taylor Swift. I do not have the attention span for that level of easter egg, but a little thing like that, that meant a lot to me because also that song means a lot to me. I love that song so much and to get to use it that way and to get it and then to see it, it was so nice. I got the sweetest note from the Wolf Parade guys about how happy they are.

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I spoke with Spotify about some of the songs, and you guys have really made quite an impact with those streaming numbers.

It's crazy. It makes me so happy that I picked all these songs I love. I'm so happy to do this for Wolf Parade and Feist and Wet Leg. Peter Peter, our composer, who's fucking

amazing, and all these awesome French songs that are doing so well for themselves. Amen, [it's] great. I'm so thrilled.

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