

Heated Rivalry author: 'The sex isn't titillating, it tells the story'

NEW

Rachel Reid's romance novels from the hypermasculine world of ice hockey have been turned into the hottest drama on TV. She says she's still in shock



Connor Storrie and Hudson Williams in Heated Rivalry, which comes to the UK this weekend

SABRINA LANTO/CRAVE

[Phoebe Luchhurst](#) Saturday January 10 2026, 12.50pm GMT, The Sunday Times

Rachel Reid's 15-year old son has not yet watched *Heated Rivalry*, the television show about a rivalry turned forbidden romance that has become a word-of-mouth global sensation. "He's very aware of how popular it is," she says, "but I think he wants to watch it without me there, which makes sense."

Few teenagers want to watch sex scenes with their parents, particularly if their mother wrote them. Reid, 45, is the Canadian author of the 2018 book on which *Heated Rivalry* is based. The book charts the romance between the Canadian ice hockey wunderkind Shane Hollander and his brooding Russian rival Ilya Rozanov, though some characters are drawn from other books in the series. In 2023, she was approached about a TV adaptation; in November the six-episode series landed on the Canadian streaming platform Crave and promptly became a phenomenon.

It has become Crave's most-watched original series of all time, was bought by HBO and became a hit in the US as well. TikTok videos pore over clips; column inches have been devoted to its storylines and its young stars — the Canadian actor Hudson Williams, 24, who plays Shane, and American actor Connor Storrie, 25, who plays Ilya — are everywhere. The show has already been renewed for a second season, and series 1 arrives in the UK this weekend.

All six episodes will be available on the streaming service Now from Saturday and the first two episodes will be shown as a double bill on Sky Atlantic on Saturday at 9pm, then weekly. But such has been the demand here that lots of British viewers have found ways to watch it on illegal streaming sites. "I think I'm still in shock," Reid says, "and I think I probably will be for a while."



Rachel Reid
CALEB LATREILLE

The show tracks the evolution of Shane and Ilya's secret relationship, from teen stars to champions. Critics have praised the tender depiction of their romance, and for addressing the persistence of homophobia in male sports. Online fans are bewitched by the leads' chemistry and ludicrous good looks — not to mention all the sex in locker rooms. Reid and the series showrunner, Jacob Tierney, discussed how “the sex is not just there to be titillating. It's there to tell the story.”

In the UK, where ice hockey is a curiosity, it may be hard to understand the cultural impact the series is having. Ice hockey is aggressive, bloody, hyper-masculine. “Here in Canada, it's very much the blueprint for masculinity,” says Reid. “Even if you don't play hockey, it's still the standard for [how] men are supposed to behave. It's very conservative and promotes conformity. You're supposed to be a certain way, like certain things. You're certainly supposed to be heterosexual.” As a lifelong fan of the sport, Reid saw the creative potential of this. “I felt like it was a good place to explore toxic masculinity, among other things.”

The show may yet trigger a reckoning. Canadian fans are wearing *Heated Rivalry* shirts to [National Hockey League](#) (NHL) games and players in the league are banned from wearing Pride jerseys. Last month, an NHL representative said the show was “the most unique driver for creating new fans”. A shift in its culture could open up the sport in the same way Netflix's *Formula 1: Drive to Survive* did for a sport formerly associated with oil, pit girls and machismo. “I think this show is making some people very uncomfortable,” says Reid, “but it's also opening up a lot of interesting conversations here.”

Official Trailer | Heated Rivalry (Crave Original)

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Williams has received messages from LGBTQ players across many sports who have felt unable to come out. "I've been receiving emails like that for years," Reid says, "but since the show came out, way, way more of them. From all over the world, all different sports, all sorts of different people." This includes in Russia, where LGBTQ communities are persecuted — and where the show has a rating of 8.6 on Kinopiosk, a Russian version of the film review site Rotten Tomatoes. "I've got a lot of emails from fans in Russia," Reid says. "I've heard some really bleak stories from those same fans, but also how much they enjoy the books. Especially the character of Ilya. It means a lot to them and that means a lot to me."

Rachelle Goguen — Rachel Reid is a pen name — was born and raised in Nova Scotia, on Canada's frozen eastern seaboard, where she lives with her husband Matt and two children. She runs a company that makes promotional products, and started writing fiction "for fun" when her children, now 15 and 12, were small. ("I desperately needed a creative outlet.") Her first book, *Game Changer*, was the first in what became a six-part romance series about hockey. *Heated Rivalry* is the second, published in 2019. "I'm glad I took that chance because it was definitely scary to let other people read what I've written. Especially when you're writing sexy stuff, it's very vulnerable."

She is conscious of being a woman writing sex scenes between two men. "I'm writing these stories because they're very important to me personally. I do put a lot of thought into them. I try to write them very sensitively." The show and the books — *Heated Rivalry* is now a New York Times bestseller — have a lot of female fans. "Romance has always had a mostly female audience. I can't speak for everyone, there's probably a pretty wide array of reasons — complicated ones and simple ones. But I think there's something appealing about emotionally vulnerable men, men that aren't in any way scary to a female reader."



Hudson Williams, left, has fielded messages from sportspeople who are worried about coming out

SABRINA LANTOS/CRAVE

Reid has another book on the way and will announce details of it this week, although writing is becoming increasingly tough. In 2023 she was diagnosed with early onset Parkinson's disease, the neurological condition which usually affects older people. "It's getting very difficult to write and use a computer," she says. "In the last few months it's started to deteriorate more." She is seeing a new specialist in a couple of weeks; one reached out via Tierney, the showrunner, after he mentioned her condition in a television interview. "I'm optimistic because it is generally a slow-progressing disease when you have it this young," she says. "I like to think that the treatments and maybe even the cure will outpace my progression."

Season 2 of *Heated Rivalry* is planned for 2027. Would she ever consider writing something about another sport? "I think it's an interesting place to set a romance, so maybe." Sport is theatre, after all. "Yeah, high emotions, high stakes," she says. "And great bodies. There's also that."

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