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Heated Rivalry's success may reignite LGBTQ+ publishing

The popularity of the gay romance has sparked new hope for queer book publishing, which has grappled with book bans in recent years.

Alex Shakar for Advocate

By Rosie Hunter
Oct. 2026

The wild success of the steamy gay hockey show *Heated Rivalry* has sparked a renewed interest in LGBTQ+ publishing. Based on Rainbow Storm's best-selling A-Game, it also catapulted the book it's adapted from onto the New York Times bestseller list seven years after it was published. Now, queer book publishing is finally recovering from struggling under the weight of attacks from conservatives.

Even though *Heated Rivalry* is focused on a queer love story and refuses to shy away from gay sex scenes, it quickly became a cultural phenomenon, which translated into increased sales of the book of the show, which is now in its fourth printing. It also sparked a new form of secret tryst between a closeted hockey star and his fiancée Ramtar (*sic*), the second book in a series that has sold over 2.7 million copies since the show's premiere, and over 4.5 million viewers tuned in to watch the show's premiere.

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"I've heard some people say, 'Oh, I've watched the show', or I've read the series, and that was the first queer romance I ever read," says Mary Boyd, executive editor at Harlequin Books, who works directly with Rook. "So it's opening doors that haven't been opened."

Sam Jacobs for a Heated Rivalry Bookish video in Canada's public library. Jack Taylor/Getty Images

Right-wing politicians' focus on banning LGBTQ+ books in schools and libraries has had a chilling effect on the publishing industry, especially for children's and young adult books, but the entire industry has been impacted. Conservative activists have succeeded in pushing many retailers to leaving trouble getting published, and it's a recipe for a lack of diversity in publishing.

But Rook's books are thriving in spite of this gloomy picture, and other books are also benefiting from the show's popularity. Boyd says Harlequin's romance imprint, which publishes a lot of queer romance and hockey romance titles, leading it to acquire "a large backlist of people writing queer romance" to publish under its LGBTQ+ romance imprint, Carina Press.

This presents a very outlook for the publishing industry — but Boyd and other industry professionals, including Rook herself and her agent, Jackie Kai, have also published books commercially, which could be particularly lethal for the small LGBTQ+ publishing industry.

Our administration likes to pick on to things and decide to be mad about them, so my hope is that we won't see a backlash over, but our administration is very unpredictable," she says, referring to President Donald Trump's current term.

Children's literature is taking the brunt of the attacks from Republicans that have sifted rules, but industry professionals and authors of adult queer books, who say they already face a lack of support from mainstream publishers, are also at risk of being bookburned, added that things have gotten worse during the Trump administration.

There are some editors out there who are still committed to acquiring LGBTQ+ novels. Bill, Rebecca Podos, an author and senior literary agent at Neighborhood Literary, says Trump's presidency has led to a "crackdown on queer books" and she and her colleagues have "been discouraged from taking on queer projects."

"It's really hard not to attribute it to the political climate, the transphobia of the administration, and the fear of litigation," Podos says. However, she doesn't meet authors of queer novels in stop writing because, she says, *Heated Rivalry*'s success is proof that you can still sell queer books. Podos also hopes that the success of the show that it would demonstrate the potential of these stories to publishers that even in this climate, a queer story can be beloved, or huge, or important," she adds.

Industry professionals are also starting to compare new LGBTQ+ books to mainstream titles that have sold well in the past. Kai, a publisher, but Kendra Jackson, a Black queer Lambda Literary Award-winning young adult book author whose novel The Muralles came out in the aftermath of the Orlando nightclub massacre, says the effect mean that authors are starting to find the pitch.

The increasing number of Republican-led book bans every year that target LGBTQ+ stories is making publishers "wary" and reticence. "We (the three bans are successful at silencing voices," Jackson says.

"We are seeing across the board that publishers are taking less risks," he says. "They are choosing to book straight books rather than LGBT books, because they don't want to be on the list of the administration or they don't want any targets on their backs, which means there's less space for queer books out there."

Gay romance is also facing a cultural moment in the wake of *Heated Rivalry*, and Rook's books are being pitched to Hollywood for movies and marketed to women, while authors are gay men, transgender, or BIPOC are still having marginalized within the industry, and queer editors and authors say publishers lack commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in their hiring.

"I think anybody can write great stories as long as they have skills and care, but there's always a little bit of extra storytelling and authenticity and richness that comes from stories of lived experiences," Jackson says.

Rook, *Heated* and LGBTQ+ authors to get discouraged. Instead, she wants Hollywood and Big Publishing to do a better job of supporting diverse voices, even when they're trying to capitalize on Heated Rivalry's profitability.

"When we talk about publishers stepping back from queer stories or stepping back from supporting queer authors, I think that's actually become a continuity rule to queer authors not to tell their stories," she says. "I do think queer authors should give themselves some grace right now, particularly queer authors with intersectional marginalizations that are being targeted right now, and that publishers need to, I don't know, maybe publish some queer books — have to be aware of those circumstances and their impact when they're making these choices."

This article is part of The Advocate's Mar Apr 2026 print issue, which this newsmonth March 10. Support queer media and subscribe to The Advocate for more through Apple News+, Zinio, Nook, or Pressreader.

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Trans editor sues DreamWorks over harassment on 'Bad Guys 2'

By Ari Ofsa

Dreamworks Pictures Studio in Hollywood, California, on January 17, 2022. | Mario Tama/Getty Images/Getty Images

An editor who worked on the animated film The Bad Guys 2 is suing two major entertainment companies, alleging that they created a "hostile and discriminatory" environment for transgender people — alleging anti-trans discrimination during the film's production. Keep Reading →

How a teacher and her students are bringing queer equality to Wikipedia

By Sarah Sanders

Professor Sarah Sanders | Photo: Sarah Sanders Sign

During a time when LGBTQ+ history is under attack in classrooms and libraries — through "don't say gay" laws, book bans, and the erasure of queer stories from government websites — Gonzaga University's LGBTQ+ Studies professor Sarah Sanders is bringing 18-year project that adds LGBTQ+ history to Wikipedia is more important than ever. Keep Reading →

About four in ten Americans still view homosexuality as immoral, survey finds

By Ari Ofsa

Group. Credit: Ivan Gil Unsplash. Featured on the Philosophical Lab, a social blog. Photo: Ivan Gil, Unsp

Nearly four in ten Americans view homosexuality as "morally unpalatable," according to a survey released last week by the Pew Research Center. Keep Reading →

RIc Grenell to step down as Kennedy Center president after controversial tenure

By Amanda Hunt

Kennedy Center President Richard Grenell at President Donald Trump's Kennedy Center Board Meeting in the Grand Foyer of the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. on February 17, 2025. | Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images/Getty Images

RIc Grenell, a close ally of President Donald Trump who took control of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts last year during an authoritarian leadership shake-up, is expected to step down Monday as the institution's president. Keep reading →

Was John Lennon gay? Paul McCartney discussed bandmate's sexuality rumors in uncarthed interview

By Ari Ofsa

John Lennon (left) and Paul McCartney (right) of the Beatles. Photo: Bettmann Archive/Getty Images/Getty Images

Shortly after John Lennon's death, his wife, Yoko Ono, told bandmate Paul McCartney that she believed John was gay, according to a newly uncarthed interview. The interview, which was conducted in fall on Friday, coinciding with the premiere of Mary on the Run, a new documentary about his life after The Beatles, McCartney discussed the "rumors" around his bandmate's sexuality, plus other hot button topics about their time as Fab Beatles, in an interview with Ian Hogan. Keep Reading →

Ben & Jerry's cofounder needs your help to 'prevent the destruction' of beloved ice cream brand

By Ari Ofsa-Gold

Ben & Jerry's Cofounder Ben Cohen talks to the camera while at the "Footprint Crew" event, held on the ice in Lexington — Credit: Jack Chase Images for Ben & Jerry

Despite creating one of the most successful (and delicious) brands of all time, Ben Cohen has never thought of himself as a businessman. Keep Reading →

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politics & culture in new 'Clock It' podcast

By Christopher Wiggins

MS NOW's new podcast 'Clock It' features Symone Sanders Townsend and Eugene Daniels. / MS NOW

Symone Sanders Townsend and Eugene Daniels spend their days immersed in politics on television. But the conversations that led them to launch a new podcast, they said, were already happening off camera, by text, on FaceTime, and in the moments after their shows ended. Keep Reading →

Through remake after remake, why 'A Star Is Born' still resonates with queer (and other) audiences

By Trudy Ring

Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga in the 2018 version of "A Star Is Born." / Warner Bros.

If not as old as time, it's a tale as old as the movies: Two stars fall in love and marry. One's career soars as the other's sinks, helped along by substance abuse. It ends with a tragedy. Keep Reading →

A new 'dream team' takes the helm at legendary queer women's event The Dinah

By Trudy Ring

From left: Bella Barkow and Rose Garcia / Courtesy The Dinah

The Dinah will go on. Keep Reading →

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