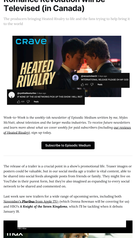
Wylen McNutt
Episodic Medium

MAR 14 2022

Week-to-Week: The MM Hockey Romance Revolution will be Televised (in Canada)

The pandemic-defying Hallmark Hockey Movies are back. Now trying to help bring it to the world.



Stick-to-Stick is the weekly roll-out newsletter of Episodic Medium written by me, Wylen McNutt, about television and the larger media industries. To receive future newsletters and learn more about what we cover monthly (or just subscribe-curious) bookmark our roster of Episodic Reports! sign up today.

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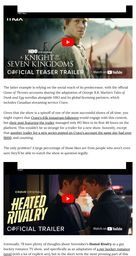
The release of a trailer is a crucial point in a show's promotional life. Teaser images or posters could be valuable, but in our social media age a trailer is vital content, able to be shared onto social feeds alongside posts from friends or family. They might live on your phone, tablet, or TV for days, weeks, and even months as engaging to every social network it is shared and commented on.

Last week saw two trailers for a wide range of upcoming series, including Netflix's Stranger Things Season Four (Vol. 1) (which premiers on Netflix on May 27th) and HBO's **A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms**, which I'll be tackling when it debuts January 30.



The latter example is vibing on the social reach of its predecessor, with the official trailer for Game of Thrones's prequel series having over 15 million views. Both Game of Thrones and Stranger Things are the highest viewed series on Netflix and HBO, respectively.

Given our country's feelings about hockey, this urges for the extension to lovers story of Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov shouldn't be surprising, but it has proven rising for the fans of Rachel Reid's novel outside of the country who are being treated with a trailer for Heated Rivalry, Crave's adaptation of Reid's novel, premiering on Bluesky on an ARCOM — a conference dedicated to the sale of digital TV content — working to change that, pitching their (almost) finished series to platforms beyond the Great White North.

This situation has created what strikes me as unprecedented discourse among fans of Reid's book. Conversations of the strength of a group where Canadian or otherwise (which has lived in this liminal space of proximity and distance to a Indian Reber, Canadian-born author of the book, Reid herself, and Canada's Crave) are not in one country or region. While fans have long lobbied streaming services to see a canceled show using Netflix and other services' "request" features, I can't recall a case where international fans have lobbied for a show to be produced and aired in a country the fact it is English, read while it's possible I'm unusual other examples of have phenomena before, I am confident that no fan group has ever actively discussed their actions in relation to ARCOM, positioning their advocacy as a boon for meetings the show's viewers will take this week.

It's both just and amazing to see a group of people who are, in a sense, fighting for the rights of their favorite fictional characters. Fans have long been a powerful force in the entertainment industry, particularly in the case of romance readers who have fought for representation in broader discourse. Combined with the cross-section of little-plate-reader romance and hockey romance, and the periodic accessibility of Reid's books on the Kindle Unlimited platform, in many ways Heated Rivalry exists for the same (if related) reasons as Netflix's Bridgerton, Hulu's Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin, and the series director Rachel Tunnage and producer Jacqueline Poole were involved together on Letterkenny and Shoresy from Accent Alpha Entertainment, they acknowledge they need to Crave on those home fans.

Every seminar I talk to my American students about Canadian content evaporates, and I always start by asking them how many people they think live in Canada. It's an exercise in understanding how the country's population is small, but it's also a way to talk about why it is so important that this work matters. I would be very surprised if American TV shows are a threat to Canadian stereotypes because they have the budgets afforded a show with a built-in audience of 340 million people, which are just naturally going to have a competitive advantage over shows being built for an audience of 40 million.

For this reason, Canadian shows have historically tried to expand their potential audiences by leaning into universality, or, in the case of Schitt's Creek, leaning into the development of a show in order to gain access to additional funding. The idea is that while a Canadian show relying solely on Canadian funding might struggle to make a profit, a show that relies on a mix of Canadian and international funding markets helps create a product where it has wiggle room. For example, the CMF shows that Heated Rivalry will appear alongside in Crave's lineup. This is the system that gave us some of the Canadian shows Americans are most likely to have seen, like Orphan Black (although that one was cross-conditioned and Schitt's Creek. It's not the only system that produces Canadian TV, but it's the model that offers the most resources for Canadian producers to work with.

Heated Rivalry's trailer is the most recent example of this system, a show that pitches itself as a romantic comedy-drama, with a focus on the relationship between two men, and a lot of hockey. It's a story that, on the surface, could be anywhere, but it's also a story that's specifically Canadian, with the hockey and the Canadian Olympic team in the background, and the lead characters being a Canadian and a Russian who are forced to hide their relationship because of the pressure of the prospects in this realm. They're including at least some of the first-look Crave Changes within this season.

- Speaking of sport drama, I caught some of Netflix's Swin in the midst of grabbing and I thought it was, fine. It's interesting to see them repositioning a moment to the Olympics, and I appreciated the focus on the athletes' lives, but it felt like it "left" and to non-Olympically setting up a complete season two following these characters.
- Apple TV+ was kind enough to host a TCA press conference for The Last Frontier, which means that I had to sit in the background over the course of the past few weeks and watch the show, which I'm not a fan of, but I'm glad it's there. It's a Netflix-esque crash-landing in Alaska plus another conspiracy? survivalist hunger together fully, but it's just some prescribed elements to make Jean Smart episodes more interesting, and I'm not sure it's working well enough. I'm hoping it's working with a lot more of a serialized drama to it. (Also, the roster of "Classical Jazz" lists using for the theme song gives hunter than it needs to).
- As far as HBO comedies that weren't scheduled where I set the fall lineup for Episodic Medium, I consider it more likely that Search Party's Season 5 will air before Curb Your Enthusiasm's Season 12 (which I'm sure Larry David's Production Company can't come into its own, I'm admittedly not a connoisseur of The Robinson's scenes, but I sampled the one last night, and it was definitely funny, but it felt like it could have been a bit shorter, and I'm not willing to the point that critics who could hope probably have a better group on my sheet to time than someone sampling one episode.
- As a reminder, if you want to discuss shows we aren't covering, the best place is our Episodic Medium Discord exclusively for our Loyal Viewers! Yes, I'm sure that out more on our Discord page.

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