



Top Stories 'The Pitt' season 3 first look 'Big Brother' star addresses anti-drag comme

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A guide to the *Heated Rivalry* TV universe: Meet the characters and the books they come from

Here’s a quick rundown of the various characters and books the show pulls from.

By [Nick Romano](#) | August 21, 2026 12:15 p.m. ET

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Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov and Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander on 'Heated Rivalry'.

Credit: Sabrina Lantos/HBO Max

KEY POINTS

Here's your guide to the *Heated Rivalry* TV universe.

Learn about the characters and which books they come from.

Showrunner Jacob Tierney teased how the team will adapt various storylines and characters.

[*Heated Rivalry*](#) is turning into a who's who of the *Game Changers* universe, the wildly popular romance book series from author Rachel Reid.

While season 1 largely adapted the main events of the 2019 work of the same name, it also gave some episodic real estate to Reid's *Game Changer*, the book that started it all. With season 2 now in production ahead of a spring 2027 premiere on HBO Max (in the U.S. and various other international territories) and Crave (in Canada), it's clear other romance saga will play a part.

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Game Changer

 Illustrated book cover for *Game Changer* by Rachel Reid featuring a man in a hockey team attire holding a drink with another man behind a counter

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Game Changer' book cover.
Marina Press LTD.

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Scott, captain of the New York Admirals hockey team, is in a professional slump when he meets Kip, a handsome barista at a smoothie shop. Their morning encounters become part of Scott's new pregame ritual, which he credits to his team's newfound winning streak.

The pair fall deeply in love with each other, but the closeted nature of their relationship puts stress on their dynamic – until the Admirals win the Stanley Cup weeks later and Scott celebrates by kissing Kip on the ice, coming out publicly.

How *Heated Rivalry* adapts *Game Changer*

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François Arnaud and Robbie G.K. as Scott Hunter and Kip Grady on 'Heated Rivalry' season 1.

Credit: Sabrina Lantos

Season 1 of *Heated Rivalry* introduced [actors François Arnaud and Robbie G.K. as Scott and Kip](#), hitting the big beats of their story from *Game Changer* over the course of one-and-a-half episodes.

Episode 3 (“Hunter”) focused entirely on the couple, while the ending of episode 5, “I’ll Believe in Anything,” adapted the ice-rink kiss and the start of episode 6, “The Cottage,” gave us Scott’s acceptance speech for his MVP award.

Arnaud teased during an interview with [WWD](#) that “there’s definitely more of Scott and Kip” in season 2.

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Nadine Bhabha as Elena Rygg on 'Heated Rivalry' season 1.

Credit: HBO Max

Other figures that we've already met on season 1 from the *Game Changer* sector of the universe include members of the Admirals hockey team, such as Carter Vaughn (Kolton Stewart), Scott's close friend.

From Kip's world, there's George Grady (Matt Gordon), his supportive father; Elena Rygg (Nadine Bhabha), his bestie; Maria Villanueva (Bianca Nugara), his coworker at the smoothie shop; Shawn (Brandon Ash-Mohammed), his friend from college and a regular at the group's preferred bar, the Kingfisher; and Kyle Swift (Matthew Finlan), a bartender at the Kingfisher.

But more on Kyle later...

Heated Rivalry

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'Heated Rivalry' book cover.
Credit: Carina Press LTD.

Reid's 2019 entry begins the story of Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov, told across a span of years.

In the timeline of the books, these two wunderkind hockey stars meet as junior players at the end of 2008 and become caught in a very public

SKIP TO CONTENT ivalry on the ice, fueled by their attachment to rival teams.

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 something meaningful across the years.

Within the events of this book are the events of *Game Changer*. The Hollywood-style kiss between Scott and Kip at the Stanley Cup win becomes a pivotal moment of visibility for Shane and Ilya as they navigate their relationship.

The main storyline caps in 2017, though an epilogue takes us to 2018 when the young men announce the Irina Foundation, a charity organization named after Ilya's late mother that serves as one way for them to remain close to each other in the public eye.

How *Heated Rivalry* adapts...well, *Heated Rivalry*



Two individuals standing close to each other appearing engaged in a tense moment

Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov, Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander on 'Heated Rivalry' season 1.
 Credit: Sabrina Lantos/HBO

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So far from the ice hockey.

That includes Shane's parents, Yuna (Christina Chang) and David (Dylan Walsh); Rose Landry (Sophie Nélisse), Shane's celebrity beard-turned-bestie; Ilya's now-late father (Yaroslav Poverlo) and coke-fiend brother (Slavic Rogozine); and Svetlana (Ksenia Daniela Kharlamova), Ilya's friend with benefits prior to Shane.

And, yes, more hockey players. On the show, the names of Shane and Ilya's teams are slightly different. Instead of the Montreal Voyageurs, it's the Montreal Metros. Instead of the Boston Bears, it's the Boston Raiders.

Hayden Pike (Callan Potter) is on Team Metros as Shane's closest friend on the squad. There's also defenseman Jean-Jacques "J. J." Dagenais (Benjamin Roy). Cliff Marleau (Franco Lo Presti), meanwhile, reps the Raiders as a lineman alongside Ilya.

Tough Guy

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'Tough Guy' book cover.
Credit: Carina Press LTD.

Tough Guy, published in 2020, follows a different couple in the *Game Changers* universe. This one is primarily set between 2019 and 2020, around the courtship of Ryan Price and Fabian Salah.

Ryan, with a reputation as an all-star enforcer, is traded to the Toronto
im. Moving to the city, he reunites with Fabian, a former

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How *Heated Rivalry* pulls from *Tough Guy*

 Priyanka and Emily Hampshire

Priyanka and Emily Hampshire join 'Heated Rivalry' season 2.

Credit: Harry Elletson; Dennys Ilic

Given how Ryan and Fabian recur in the *Game Changers* books, they are expected to show up in live-action form on *Heated Rivalry* season 2 in some capacity. However, their casting has not been announced at this time, while other characters from their orbit have.

Emily Hampshire of *Schitt's Creek* and Marvel's upcoming *VisionQuest* joins season 2 as Vanessa, who was introduced among the pages of *Tough Guy*. She's a proud feminist lesbian who works at a Toronto sex shop and runs a sex toy review blog on the side. She's a close friend of both Ryan and Fabian.

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Vanessa and another character named Marcus.

In an Instagram post celebrating the casting, Priyanka [promised](#) to bring
“all kinds of drama, gaggy, [and] bafoonery to the new season.”

Common Goal

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'Common Goal' book cover.
Credit: Carina Press

Released in 2020 but starting its story in 2019, Reid turned her attention to a peripheral character, Kyle Swift, the bartender at the Kingfisher in New York City, a prominent hotspot for many of these characters.

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Kyle, however, gets his own love story with *Common Goal*. He meets and becomes enamored with Eric Bennett, a much older veteran goaltender on Scott's team, the New York Admirals. The two become friends-with-benefits after Eric's recent divorce from a woman, but they don't stay friends for very long.

How *Heated Rivalry* pulls from *Common Goal*



Matthew Finlan in Heated Rivalry

Matthew Finlan as Kyle Swift on 'Heated Rivalry' season 1.

Credit: HBO Max

So far, *Heated Rivalry* doesn't take as much inspiration from *Common Goal* as some of the other books in Reid's repertoire, but Kyle remains a presence. And in the timeline of the story that season 2 now adapts, he and Eric are characters that appear in some capacity, crossing paths

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‘Hey, Kip!’” he told EW. “Jacob [Tierney, showrunner] was like, ‘Great, great, great, great, great. Awesome. So, yeah, just to let you know, there’s a whole fourth book where your character has a relentless love, will-they-won’t-they with Kip, but he’s heartbroken, forlorn, and it never really comes to fruition. So if you can put all of that into two syllables, that would be awesome.’”

The Long Game

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'The Long Game' book cover.

Credit: Carina Press LTD.

The Long Game (2022) was published after a different book in the *Game Changers* universe, *Role Model* (2021), but the events of the story begin prior to that entry. The story picks back up with Shane and Ilya at Hollander's cottage in the summer of 2020. (The COVID-19 pandemic doesn't exist in this world.)

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 voyageur, though Ilya has since left his high-profile position with the
 Boston Bears to play for the Ottawa Centaurs, a much smaller and less
 lauded team, in order to be closer to his boyfriend.

Behind the scenes, the two are still very much in love, though Shane worries about what would happen if the public were to find out about their relationship. Ilya also struggles privately with depression, especially as he adjusts to his new reality on a less-celebrated hockey team.

How *Heated Rivalry* adapts *The Long Game*



Robert Naylor and Edvin Ryding

Robert Naylor and Edvin Ryding will play Wyatt Hayes and Luca Haas on 'Heated Rivalry' season 2.
 Credit: Annie Diotte; Martin Kiessling

The Long Game will feature as one of the two primary books adapted
 with *Heated Rivalry* season 2.

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Digging a bit deeper, Tierney posed the question, “What do you do after the rush of danger is gone and yet now you have to live in a relationship where you still aren’t communicating properly, much as you would like to? You can say you love each other, but as adults know, there’s so much more than that to make a relationship successful. And that is what they’re learning.”

With *The Long Game* material also comes the arrival of certain characters. That includes Troy Barrett and Harris Drover, the hot new bombshells in the villa played by Charlie Gillespie and [Justice Smith](#). Like Ilya, Troy is a new trade to the Centaurs, while Harris is the team’s lovable social media manager. (More information on them below.)

There’s also Wyatt Hayes and Luca Haas, two supporting figures in *The Long Game* who are prominent members of the Centaurs team. Robert Naylor (*Mile End Kicks*) plays Wyatt, a proficient goaltender described in the book as a fan of comics and an ally to queer people. He and Troy have history, as they both played for the Guardians in Toronto.

Edvin Ryding (*The Young Royals*) plays Luca, a rising rookie player from Sweden. He’s now the youngest player on the Centaurs and has a man-crush on their new captain, Ilya.

Sabrina Jalees (*I Used to Be Funny*) will also play Farah Jalali, another character introduced in *The Long Game*. She’s Shane and Ilya’s agent and helps them navigate the professional sports scene when certain things...go down.

Role Model

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'Role Model' book cover.
Credit: Carina Press

Now let's talk a bit more about Troy and Harris. Within the timeline of *The Long Game* are the events of *Role Model*, a separate book which chronicles a romance between these two characters.

Troy is a troubled athlete who once played for the Toronto Guardians, now-former stomping grounds. For years, he was buddies

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While the entire world seemed to rally around the star athlete, a video recording of Troy confronting Dallas as a rapist made the rounds. The blowout coincided with Troy's recent breakup with Adrian Dela Cruz, a handsome actor he'd been dating in secret. By the time he's traded to the Centaurs, Troy's floundering under the weight of his personal baggage, which also includes a toxic father who seems more interested in Dallas than his own son.

However, the move puts him in the path of Ilya and, more importantly, Harris, the team's social media manager.

Harris is the light to Troy's brooding darkness. He's out, proud, and joyous. Everyone on the team gravitates towards Harris, who grew up on an apple orchard in Ottawa. *Role Model* follows the big beats of this couple's courtship, though it continues in later portions of *The Long Game*.

How *Heated Rivalry* adapts *Role Model*

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TV

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Romance Shows

Charlie Gillespie and Justice Smith will play Troy and Harris on 'Heated Rivalry' season 2.

Credit: Ben Hider/Tubi via Getty; Mat Hayward/Getty

Role Model is the other book that will take a front seat in the series adaptation. While Tierney confirmed *Heated Rivalry* will continue to focus on Williams and Storrie, Gillespie and Smith were cast in lead roles, which suggests the Troy and Harris relationship will play a more prominent part of the season than previously expected.

“There is an easy, facile way of looking at *Role Model*,” Tierney said. “It’s very ‘grumpy sunshine.’ It’s very ‘apple orchard.’ It can drift into things that you want, but Troy is a *really* damaged guy. And Troy is quite damaged on the show. I would say we’re digging into that even harder.”

Smith’s casting, in particular, drew a lot of feelings from the fan base when it came to light. Many supported the actor’s inclusion, while others pointed out how Harris is described as more curvy than Smith’s slender figure in life, a factor that contributes to the character’s feeling of physical inadequacy when around Troy.

In a statement shared in a now-expired Instagram Story, Smith wrote, “I

SKIP TO CONTENT m moved by the support and love I’m getting from fans in

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the the chance. I am beyond excited for this experience.

Unrivaled

Unrivaled by Rachel Reid.

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the description contains spoilers for anyone just following the TV series. It's another continuation of Shane and Ilya's relationship, which potentially gives the show more to adapt.

According to an official plot description:

For the first time in their professional hockey careers, Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander have nothing to hide. After more than a decade of keeping their love secret, they're out, married, and even playing on the same team. The support has been incredible. Most of the time. While fans celebrate them, others in the hockey world are still reeling from the reveal. A growing backlash—led by the popular hockey podcast Top Shelf and the #TakeBackHockey movement—is making its presence felt. Standing together in the light was everything Shane and Ilya ever wanted. Now, they may be facing their biggest challenge yet.

This past August, Reid [shared a photo](#) of a draft to *Unrivaled*, teasing what will be potentially her longest book to date.

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At this stage, it's unclear if the show will get to this portion of the story. But given the runaway success of *Heated Rivalry* thus far, it feels like a safe gamble to suggest it will. Reid continues to converse with Tierney regularly to provide insights into the characters and narrative.

From an official standpoint, the show has only been greenlit through **SKIP TO CONTENT** ugh there's a chance season 3 is already in the works and

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episodes will be used for season 2 and the others will be used for season
3. HBO had no comment.

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sitting at a bar
each holding a
beverage facing

***Heated Rivalry* season 2 casts 5 more players, including book characters Wyatt Hayes and Luca Haas**

By Nick Romano



Justice Smith
smiling with
another individual
beside him

ROMANCE SHOWS

***Heated Rivalry* season 2 reveals hotly anticipated Troy and Harris casting: Meet the new hockey lovers**

By Nick Romano



Connor Storrie
as Ilya Rozanov and
Hudson Williams
as Shane

ROMANCE SHOWS

***Heated Rivalry* team asks fans to 'give our cast and crew the space they need' ahead of season 2 filming**

By Nick Romano



Jake Lively and
Nico Tortorella

ROMANCE SHOWS

***Younger* star Nico Tortorella breaks into microdramas with spicy, queer *Lyonesse Trilogy* adaptations (exclusive)**

By Nick Romano



Connor Storrie
as Ilya Rozanov and
Hudson Williams
as Shane

DRAMA SHOWS

***Heated Rivalry* season 2: Who's returning, who's joining, and what's next**

By Randall Colburn and Britt Hayes



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'Heartstopper

By Nick Romano



 A person wearing a cowboy hat and vest outdoors facing

ROMANCE SHOWS

Ashby Gentry thinks fans will hate Alex even more after *My Life With the Walter Boys* season 3 – and he gets it

By Kat Pettibone



 Emma D'Arcy 'House of the Dragon'

SCI-FI & FANTASY SHOWS

How *House of the Dragon* season 3 ending 'condemns Rhaenyra to the path she's chosen'

By Nick Romano



 Shay Rudolph attends the "She Keeps Me Young" Premiere during

TEEN DRAMAS

***Off Campus* season 2 adds Shay Rudolph as Summer Di Laurentis**

By Samantha Highfill



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'Heated Rivalry'

By Joyce Eng



 Malin Akerman as Margo, Brittany Snow as Sophie in episode 202 of

DRAMA SHOWS

***The Hunting Wives* are back: Season 2 first look reveals John Stamos and more saucy cowgirls**

By Nick Romano



 Paul Bettany as Vision with a glowing forehead emblem in a

SUPERHERO TV SHOWS

***VisionQuest* trailer: Vision and Ultron reunite in first look at *WandaVision* trilogy capper**

By Nick Romano



 Kit Connor and Joe Locke in 'Heartstopper Forever'

ROMANCE SHOWS

Kit Connor and Joe Locke on saying goodbye to *Heartstopper* and returning to the site of their first kiss

By Nick Romano



 Jake Weary attends the "Westhampton" premiere during

ROMANCE SHOWS

Meet your newest cowboy obsession as author Elsie Silver's *Rose Hill* series announces cast

By Shelby Stivale



 Michael Evans Behling as Jordan Baker in *All*

DRAMA SHOWS

***All American* brings the drama – and a few familiar faces – in explosive midseason 8 trailer (exclusive)**

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Animated

characters from
Golden Axe a
group of warriors

**Matthew Rhys, Liam McIntyre charge into
Golden Axe animated series in exclusive first
look at SEGA adaptation**

By Nick Romano



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