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'Heated Rivalry' Author Rachel Reid Has Advice For Studios Circling Romance Adaptations, Teases 'Unrivaled' & Celebrates Harlequin Takeover At Fenway Park



By [Destiny Jackson](#)

September 3, 2026 3:00pm



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Rachel Reid attends the premiere of 'Heated Rivalry' at TIFF Lightbox on Nov. 24, 2025 in Toronto, Ontario.

Harold Feng/Getty Images



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There was something wonderfully surreal about walking through Fenway Park on August 31 and finding it overtaken by the world of Heated Rivalry.

The home of the Boston Red Sox was transformed into a fan-centric celebration of Rachel Reid's bestselling queer hockey romance series, with 12,000 fans attending through special-event and VIP ticket sales. The books already had built a devoted following, but *Heated Rivalry* reached an entirely different level after being adapted into the feverishly popular television series for Canada's Crave and HBO in the U.S., turning the romance of Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) and Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie) into a global phenomenon.

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On this night, baseball became the backdrop to their rivalry.

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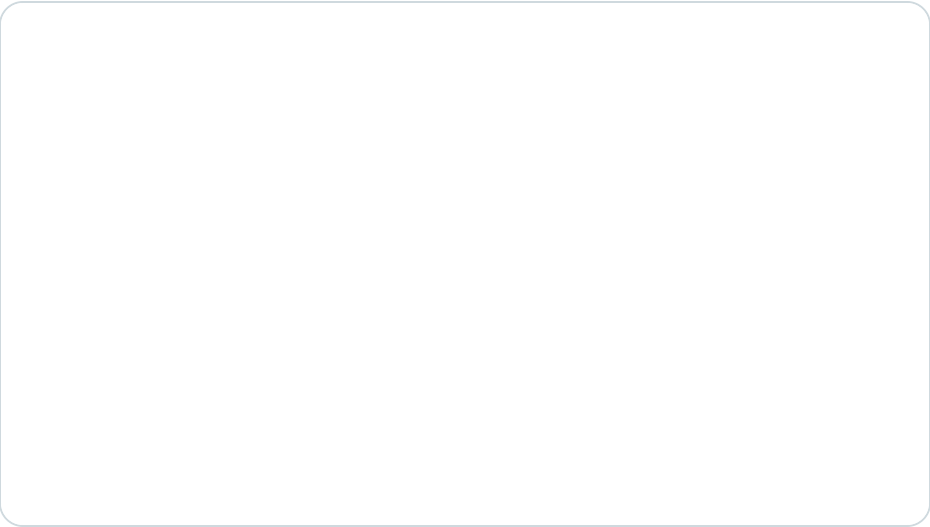
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We are currently at "The Cottage" for [@fenwaypark](#)'s Heated Rivalry night.



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Hollander and Rozanov jerseys filled the ballpark, with fans passionately discussing the love between the two hockey stars. VIP ticket holders received an exclusive *Heated Rivalry* hat riffing on the series'

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Cottage” offered photo opportunities. At the same time, themed food and drinks and a pregame DJ set from UK artist-producer Harrison brought elements of the TV show into the ballpark.

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Fenway Park partnered with Harlequin and HarperCollins Canada for the event during the Red Sox's game against the Seattle Mariners. Fans began lining up hours before the gates opened, eager to take part in what became the team's biggest theme-night promotion to date.

Craig Swinwood, CEO of HarperCollins Canada and Harlequin, said the event sold 12,000 tickets in just a few days, including 2,500 VIP passes that disappeared within minutes.

“We've not seen this kind of fandom for romance books at this scale before,” Swinwood told Deadline during the event.

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Harlequin CEO Craig Swinwood on the Boston Red Sox [#HeatedRivalry](#) theme night at Fenway Park tonight and how romance books have surged in popularity as more inclusive, diverse stories are being told

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For Swinwood, the response at Fenway also was a reflection of a broader shift in romance publishing. The genre has expanded in the kinds of stories it embraces and in the audiences who see themselves represented in those stories.

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“Romance is a big tent,” he said. “People are starting to realize it’s become much more open, romance as a genre. It’s much more inclusive than it used to be.”

That evolution isn’t necessarily due to romance readers themselves suddenly becoming more diverse. According to Swinwood, they always were.

“Readers have always been the heart of the romance industry, and they are diverse. They always have been,” he said. “But I’m not sure publishers always publish to that diversity to the extent that they are today.”

Harlequin has published LGBTQ+ romances, including stories set in the sports world, for years. But *Heated Rivalry* has demonstrated the size of the audience waiting for those stories when they are given a chance to reach a broader readership. Swinwood also sees Reid’s success as a way to create opportunities for other romance writers.

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“I think Rachel has really created a path for a lot of authors who are writing terrific romances today,” he added.

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Harlequin CEO Craig Swinwood reflects on the global success of Rachel Reid’s ‘Game Changers’ series with [#HeatedRivalry](#) and the excitement for her next book in the series, ‘Unrivaled,’ which will release June 1st, 2027

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She later brought her own children there when they were young, while her father remained a devoted fan of the team.

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So when the Red Sox reached out about a *Heated Rivalry* theme night, the choice of venue carried a significance that went well beyond the franchise's growing popularity. Reid returned to Fenway with her father and family, where later that night Reid and her father ultimately would throw out the ceremonial first pitch.

"I was really, really thrilled when they reached out because I am a Red Sox fan," Reid told Deadline. "I love this ballpark."

For Reid, the transformation of her public life has been almost as surprising as the transformation of her books. Authors can become successful without becoming recognizable to strangers, but *Heated Rivalry* has put Reid in a very different position.

"My life's changed quite a bit this year," she said. "It's not usual at all for an author to be recognizable, really, even very big authors."

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She said being stopped by fans has taken some getting used to, but she added: "It's lovely. It's nice."

That connection between the author, the characters and the readers is something Reid believes the television adaptation understood particularly well. The books already had developed a passionate audience before the series arrived. Still, the show brought Shane and Ilya's relationship to an even wider audience without losing sight of the people who had been with them from the beginning.

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“I think the takeaway from the success of *Heated Rivalry* is respecting the source material, the IP and the author and the fans and the fans of the books,” Reid said.

She also hopes the series changes how studios and streamers approach romance, particularly when it comes to adult stories.

“They weren’t scared of making it for grownups and treating it with that kind of respect,” she added. “I hope that this show will change how romance gets filmed a little bit.”

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The story of Shane and Ilya is continuing on the page, too. *Unrivaled*, the next installment in Reid’s *Game Changers* series, is coming June 1, picking up after the couple’s wedding and placing them in an entirely new stage of their relationship. After years of hiding their romance, they are now married, living together, traveling together and playing on the same hockey team, with their relationship finally public.

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[#HeatedRivalry](#) author Rachel Reid teases what's in store for 'Unrivaled,' her upcoming book in the 'Game Changers' series which continues the story of Ilya and Shane's relationship and serves as a sequel to 'The Long Game'

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“It’s huge to go from hiding and just grabbing time whenever you can to being full-on married and living together and on the same team,” Reid teased. “This [dynamic] is a massive change for them, and it changes their relationship a lot. And that’s been really fun to write and explore.”

In regards to how *Unrivaled* potentially could be perceived for Shane considering that its predecessor *The Long Game* had an Ilya focus, Reid explained: “ For Shane specifically, I do see him as the one who has the hero’s arc — if we’re going to call this a trilogy. He’s the one with that arc. I feel like even

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two books, you'll like this one. It's got a lot of the same elements that I think people like."

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For Swinwood, the anticipation around *Unrivaled* is another indication of just how deeply the audience has connected with the characters Reid created. And at Fenway, that connection was impossible to miss.

Fans had come fully dressed and decked out in their homemade, crafted merch; greeted one another with inside jokes; posed for photos inside the fictional world; collected limited-edition merchandise; and spent hours waiting to enter a ballpark that, for one night, belonged as much to Shane and Ilya as it did the Red Sox.

As for Reid, if she could have added one more *Heated Rivalry* element to Fenway, even as a mascot, she knew exactly what she wanted: a "really busted-looking loon" with glowing red eyes, wearing a baseball jersey.

Nothing against Wally, the Red Sox's beloved monster mascot. But on this particular night, Fenway already had found some new stars.

To find out more about that potential Luca Haas book update, watch the video below.

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Author Rachel Reid shares an update on the Luca Haas book at the #HeatedRivalry theme night at Fenway Park tonight

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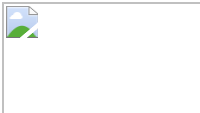
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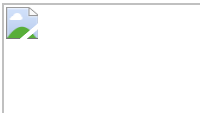
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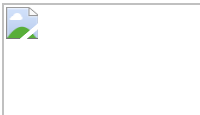
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