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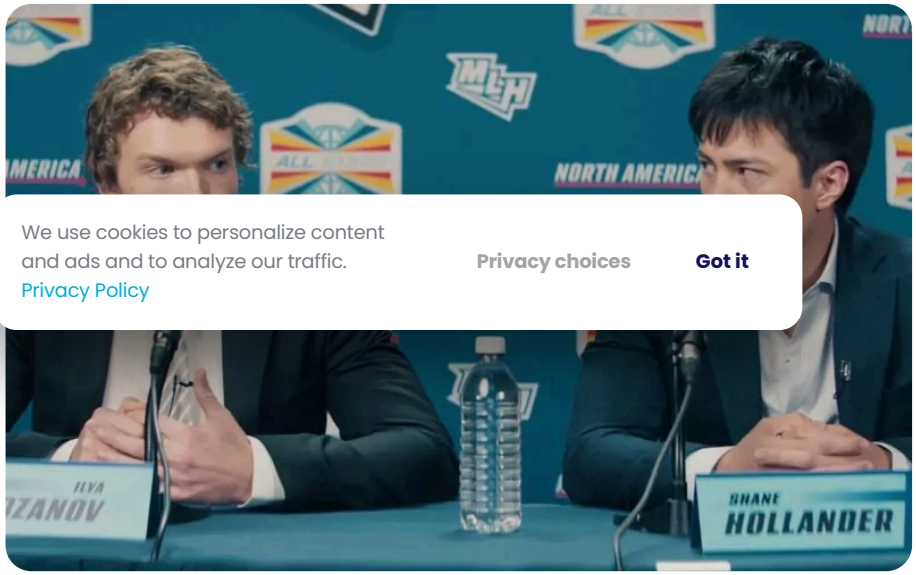
FEATURED

# ‘Heated Rivalry’ Fanfic Just Broke an AO3 Record, and It Shows Where Fandom Really Lives in 2026



Emma Loggins
Founder & Editor-in-Chief · October 28, 2026 · 5 min read

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Thirty-nine thousand and twenty-two. That is how many new *Heated Rivalry* fanfic works tagged Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov landed on Archive of Our Own in a single year, and no pairing in the archive’s history has come close.

The count comes from the 2026 edition of AO3 Ship Stats, the long-running project from fan statistician centreoftheselights that ranks the fastest-growing relationship tags on the site. This year’s window ran from July 29, 2025, to July 26, 2026. The old single-year record was 20,298 works, set by

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Aziraphale and Crowley from *Good Omens* in the 2020 list. Shane and Ilya nearly doubled it, and their friendship tag charted separately at No. 14.




Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander and Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov in 'Heated Rivalry.' (Photo: Crave/HBO Max)

## A Better Hype Map

Streaming charts tell you what people pressed play on. AO3 tells you what they could not stop thinking about once the credits rolled, and writing a story costs hours that a stream or a like never does.

Read the 2026 top 25 that way and the year's real obsessions jump out. Will Byers and Mike Wheeler from *Stranger Things* came in second with 25,492 new works as the series wrapped up. *The Pitt* put five different pairings in the top 100, led by Robby and Whitaker at No. 20. *KPop Demon Hunters* landed a polyamorous Mira/Rumi/Zoey tag at No. 17, and *Project Hail Mary* sent Ryland Grace and Rocky to No. 21 with 4,766 works for a movie that only opened in March. Formula 1 real-person fic had three pairings in the top 32.

None of those fandoms need a big Discord server or a viral TikTok to prove they exist. The work count is the proof, and it is a stubborn number to fake, which is more than you can say for most engagement metrics in 2026.



Mira, Rumi and Zoey in 'KPop Demon Hunters.' (Photo: Netflix)

## *How a Six-Episode Show Took Over*

Six weeks before *Heated Rivalry* premiered, AO3 held a few hundred stories set in its world. By early October that figure had passed 51,000, according to Bustle. Prime Video's *Off Campus*, another hockey romance adaptation, sat at 912 works in the same report, despite pulling the kind of audience we tracked when it drew 36 million viewers in 12 days. Big viewership and big fan fiction output turned out to be two very different things.

The origin story makes the gap funnier. Author Rachel Reid first posted an early version of *Game Changer* to AO3 in 2016 with Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes standing in for her original characters, because she assumed the site only took fanfic. "I desperately wish I'd never posted that fan fiction," she told Salon, as Elite Daily reported. A decade later, Steve and Bucky sit at No. 84 on the same list her characters top.

My read on why it caught fire is structural. Jacob Tierney's show plays like the fic its fans write, with a slow burn across years, a relationship carried by text messages and a lot of space between scenes for readers to fill. Six episodes left plenty of gaps, and fandom has always rushed to fill a gap.



Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander and Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov in 'Heated Rivalry.' (Photo: Crave/HBO Max)

## The AI Fight Inside the Fandom

Growth that fast brought a fight with it. On June 29, an anonymous 25-page document circulated on X explaining how to spot fics pasted straight out of an AI chatbot by searching for leftover formatting code, Fansplaining reported. It named 38 works across several fandoms, two of them from this fandom, and the accusations that followed pushed several writers to pause or pull their work after harassment.

AO3 is not going to settle it. The Organization for Transformative Works has said a ban on AI-generated works "is not enforceable," and the site's "Created Using Generative AI" tag holds more than 10,000 works out of more than 17 million. Fans will keep arguing about whether AI belongs in fanfic at all. The practical problem is narrower, since a formatting trace is a clue rather than a verdict, and in a fandom this big a wrong accusation spreads as fast as a right one.

## Discord Adds Age Checks

AO3 is where the stories live. The conversation around them happens on Discord, which says it has more than 200 million monthly users, and on Sept. 23 the platform began sorting every account as adult, teen or unconfirmed using signals like account age and activity, TechCrunch reported. Teen accounts are now blocked from age-restricted servers and channels. Discord says more than 90% of users will never be asked to verify, and those who are can use a credit card or app store age data instead of an ID scan. The rollout was delayed in February after a privacy backlash, and a third-party vendor breach in 2025 had potentially exposed ID photos from about 70,000 users.

For readers of *Heated Rivalry* fic, that change has real effects. A fandom built around an explicit show runs a lot of age-restricted channels, and those channels just got a door that checks. Discord also filed confidentially for an

IPO in January, Bloomberg reported, and a company headed toward public markets has every reason to tidy up the rooms it hosts.

The 2027 Ship Stats count is already running. Heated Rivalry Season 2 is expected in the spring, squarely inside the window, so the record Shane and Ilya just set may only last one year, and the most likely ship to break it is theirs.

### Where Heated Rivalry Was Filmed

Filming Map ›



McMaster University Olympic Stadium Lake Muskoka Windsor Station

Bell Centre Dundurn Castle

**See all 18 Filming Locations**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Emma Loggins

Founder & Editor-in-Chief

Emma Loggins Sprinkle is the Founder and Editor in Chief of FanBolt. Frequently referred to as the "Geek Girl," Emma has been writing about the entertainment industry, geek culture, and pop culture for more than 20 years, with her work appearing on FanBolt, CNN, Autotrader, and a number of other publications. She's also done on-camera host and media personality work for numerous fan and comic conventions. Additionally, she can be seen in the documentary *Rise of the Superheroes*, where she was featured as an expert on the evolution of comic book and geek culture.

Based in Atlanta, Georgia, Emma covers the latest entertainment news, her opinions on current happenings in the media, movie reviews, screening/filming opportunities, inside scoops, and more on FanBolt.

As a big film nerd, Emma is also an active member of multiple film critics associations, including the Critics Choice Association, Southeastern Film Critics Association, Atlanta Film Critics Circle, and Georgia Film Critics Association.

In addition to her love of writing and the entertainment industry, Emma also loves to travel, having spent considerable time in the UK,