Romance and Representation: An Evening with Heated Rivalry Author Rachel Reid

Published on October 22, 2026 Time to read: 5 minutes

English General

On-the-scene reporting from Carleton students Kayla Lessels and Hajer Zorgani from the sold-out event at the 2026 Ottawa Writers Festival

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Now, the hit Canadian television show holds a score of 97% on Rotten Tomatoes, with season two set to hit Crave in the next year.

On Oct. 7, the *Heated Rivalry* author took to the **Carleton Dominion Chalmers Centre** in a sold-out conversation with Ottawa-based author Ruby Barrett, hosted by the **Ottawa Writers Festival**. With an audience of 900 eager fans in attendance,

the two writers discussed Reid's approach to storytelling and the romance genre at large, while also fielding audience questions from aspiring writers and fans.



Heated Rivalry author Rachel Reid receives a standing ovation from audience members at the Carleton Dominion-Chalmers Centre. Photo by Kayla Lessels.

What is described by Barrett as "one of the best examples of a high-heat, slow-burn story" originated from a love for the sport of hockey and the romance genre in general.

Despite what its public reputation may suggest, romance as a literary genre holds a very deep history, with Reid drawing inspiration from books published through the 1980s and 1990s.

Historically, both authors agreed on the confusing notions held by society on what it meant to read romance, and how readers seemed puzzled by its bold storytelling.

Over the years, the genre has gained more attention as it evolved, leading to a shift in how intimacy and romance are discussed by the public.

Along with this evolution, Reid revealed how her hockey romance book series underwent a metamorphosis of its own, as *Heated Rivalry* television series showrunner Jacob Tierney took the story to places Reid explained she never explored originally.

Reid acknowledged that there was a different atmosphere within the publishing sphere when the first book in her *Game Changer* series was published in 2018. She felt that the TV adaption, which was released on Crave in 2025, took more creative freedom to showcase the changing landscape of the romance genre and where sexual intimacy fit within it.



Rachel Reid is the bestselling Canadian author of the Game Changers series, which has been adapted into the smash hit television series, Heated Rivalry.

Although she was closely familiar with romance and hockey, writing the *Game Changers* series required Reid to learn about the everyday realities surrounding the sport.

Games and rivalries were one thing. The superstitious routines that made up a player's life were another.

While writing the series, Reid would watch locker-room tour videos from professional teams, paying close attention to the unspoken rituals that a casual viewer might not notice. Such attention to detail helped keep readers immersed in the atmosphere.

During the event, Reid answered some burning questions from members of the audience. One aspiring writer asked how far the author allowed her characters to wander from their pre-intended storyline.
Reid's answer was simple: "I don't ever have a preconceived arc — it's all just them wandering."

> "I let [the characters] tell me the story."

Unfortunately for all the eager fans awaiting updates on the highly anticipated second season of the TV show, Reid had very little to share during the event. She had been sworn to secrecy, although small hints were dropped as Barrett pressured her for some easter eggs. Season 2 will follow *Heated Rivalry*'s sequel novel, *The Long Game*, where Ilya is playing in Ottawa, and Shane in Montreal.

When asked about the decision to root the story in Ottawa, she described Shane Hollander's hometown as a "nice city to have a dog": suitable walking trails, plenty of farm country outside of the main streets, and a struggling hockey team.

Ilya Rozanov, one of the main leads of *The Long Game*, plays for the Ottawa Centaurs, notoriously known within the story as one of the worst teams in the league. Reid explained that the decision was made after she was struck by a question she couldn't answer: "Why would Ilya go to this team?".

Reid briefly mentioned how the NHL remains a hostile place for minorities and, as such, wanted to shape the Centaurs as a haven for both Shane and Ilya after the events of The Long Game (no spoilers!).



As the show bloomed in success, she observed the "real conversations happening [within the NHL] that they didn't think they'd ever hear" regarding the mistreatment of minority communities within the sport.

However, some of the show's producers believe there is still work to be done. In a recent interview where Tierney sat with host Andy Cohen, the host remarked that the NHL seemed to have "met the moment" regarding the success of the show. Tierney, who **disagreed with the statement**, questioned if the NHL had ever really embraced "the moment".

Filming for season two of *Heated Rivalry* officially began in August 2026 and is expected to premiere in April 2027. While Reid was unable to disclose many details, promises were made that future information would be shared with the fans.

> **Kayla Lessels** is an undergraduate student at Carleton University in Ottawa, working towards her Bachelor of Combined Honours in Journalism and English. Born with a love and passion for writing, she has written some articles for *Collingwood Today*, and is constantly working to expand her journalistic abilities.

> **Hajer Zorgani** is a full-time student at Carleton University, studying English and Journalism. She loves to write, and has gotten to publish her name in a few articles with the *Ottawa Citizen*, as well as writing and directing theatre productions. She hopes to continue her journalistic career through her studies, and further her love for writing.

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