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BOOKS

Rachel Reid has had a wild year. As 'Heated Rivalry' heats up again, its author reflects on all that's changed

A new deluxe edition of the Canadian writer's bestselling book is dominating the charts again.

Oct. 24, 2026 4 min read



Author Rachel Reid in Toronto, October 2026.

Nick Kozak for the Toronto Star



By Sarah Laing Special to the Star

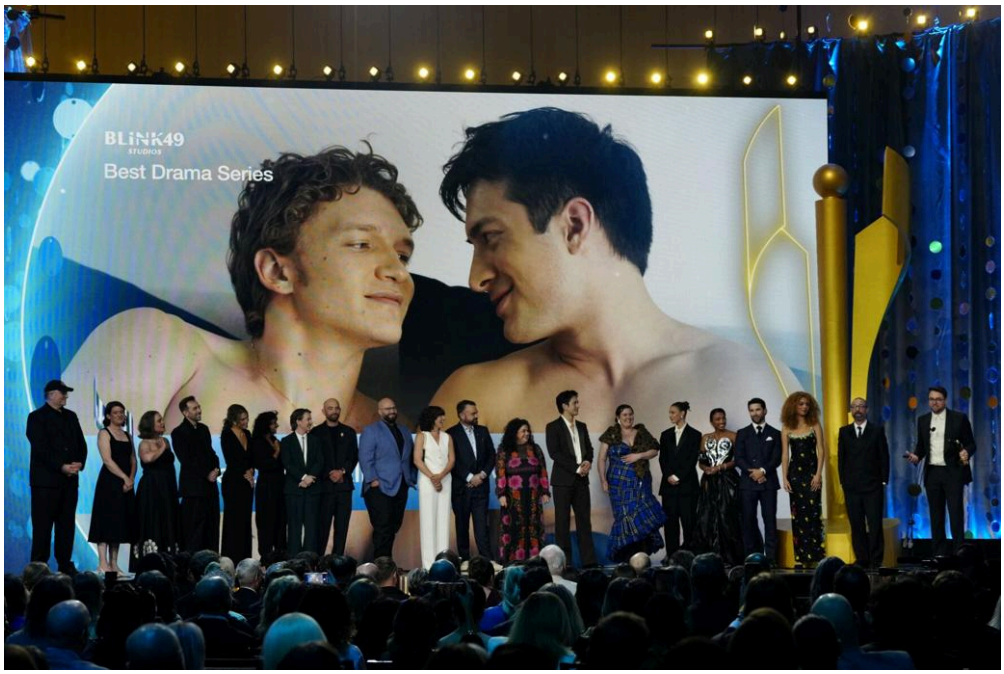
When Rachel Reid published "Heated Rivalry" in 2019, it sold about five thousand copies in its first year. That's perfectly respectable, especially for your second book. It just pales in comparison to the numbers she's racked up since.

Bestsellers in over 40 countries, her Game Changers series has now sold over 5.2 million copies, with 260,000 physical books sold in Canada alone. A new deluxe edition of "Heated Rivalry," resplendent with gold-sprayed edges and new endpapers illustrating a loved-up Shane and Ilya, is dominating the bestseller charts again. There's already talk of midnight release parties at bookstores when her seventh novel, "Unrivalled," is released on June 1 next year.

In case you missed it, Reid is the reigning queen of queer sports romance. What began as midnight scribbles on her iPad while her children slept became, via a brief foray into self-publishing, a successful series of novels about male hockey players finding love. Then it exploded.

The 'Heated Rivalry' effect

While the Nova Scotian author's series has always had a strong following, late last year she experienced a game-changer of her own when "Heated Rivalry" was adapted for television by showrunner Jacob Tierney. The Canadian-made Crave Original series surprised everyone by becoming a global hit, including its stars, Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie, who were suddenly Hollywood's hottest property. Season two is on the way.



Rachel Reid with the cast and crew of "Heated Rivalry" accepting the award for Best Series, Drama, at the Canadian Screen Awards in Toronto, May 31, 2026.

Frank Gunn The Canadian Press

"I kind of was alone. What was happening to me was very separate from what was happening to everyone else in the show," Reid told the Star at the Toronto offices of her publisher, HarperCollins. "I didn't make the show, so I didn't have the same connection that everybody else had."

Reid quickly built a team around her: A publicist, a stylist, lawyers. "It's not a one-person job being me anymore," she said, laughing wryly. "That happened so fast."

It also changed how she interacts with her readers. She took her email address off her website, since there was just no way she could cope with the volume of fan mail, and stopped doing in-person events that involve interaction, like signings, something she could do even earlier this year.

"There's an intensity to the fandom that's new," she said. "People did always have some strong feelings about these characters, and I always was blown away by it, but it's maybe too much for me to handle one-on-one these days. I do appreciate it, it's just I need to feel safe."

Some aspects of the series have been debated and critiqued, and the television show has amplified those conversations exponentially. There have been questions around Shane's speculated neurodivergence — which Reid has publicly addressed, explaining she initially wrote the character without a full understanding of autism — and the books' limited diversity and representation, which she hasn't.

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Examining masculinity

Throughout the books, each of which follows a different couple's journey, Reid touches on complex themes such as homophobia, mental health and familial pressure. A key theme is "the way that men are miserable by their own design," as she explains it.

"There's no reason why any of my characters should feel uncomfortable being who they are, loving who they want to love, or even things like panic attacks being something that they have to keep a secret," she said. "I really like to explore how much better off everyone would be if they just allowed themselves to be happy."

Of course, there are reasons why they can't. Through the rose-coloured lens of the romance genre, where happily-ever-afters are guaranteed, Reid wanted to show what it could look like if men were free of the shackles imposed on them by the patriarchy. "We all have to live in a world where men are at the top, and I think this is a great way to explore some feelings about that," she said. "I've always had a real fascination with masculinity, and what we expect of men and the roles they need to conform to. That's a big part of why I like writing this."

The series is about gay men navigating relationships, but most of Reid's readers are heterosexual women, defying long-held ideas that people only want to read about characters like themselves. "I have a lot of lesbian readers as well, and I

know a lot of lesbian writers of male-male romance too, which a lot of people would be surprised by," Reid added.

The sex factor

The books, like the show, are famously steamy. "For a lot of women, I think it's nice to read sex scenes that you don't have to insert yourself into, or feel connected to," Reid said. "For some women, it enhances the fantasy, makes it easier to just enjoy something without it maybe triggering your own memories or experiences."

She said female readers often tell her that this has helped them, particularly in the context of a story that features "emotionally vulnerable men being really sweet and tender with each other."



Rachel Reid, writer of the books that spawned the TV show "Heated Rivalry," in Toronto, Oct. 9, 2026.

Nick Kozak for the Toronto Star

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Reid has also heard from plenty of professional athletes. "Some of them have told me they're excited about the conversations the popularity of the show has opened up," she said. "People you didn't expect would like a show like this do, and it makes you feel safer being yourself around them."

She counts a number of female hockey players in the PWHL as fans, and while there are still no active NHL players who are out, Reid has heard from "a few former athletes who were closeted at the time, but have had their happily ever after now."

Like many authors, Reid likens her characters to children that she wants the world to love and understand. In the past year, she feels like they're all grown up. "I do feel that they've flown the nest. They belong to the world



Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie in a scene from "Heated Rivalry" season one.

Crave

now," she said. "But they're so loved, and that's all you can hope for as somebody who created them."

What's next for "Game Changers"

The flipside of fan devotion is pressure. Reid lives with early-onset Parkinson's disease, and has spoken about how her worsening physical symptoms have slowed her writing speed. Her next book, a continuation of the Heated Rivalry story, feels especially fraught.



Rachel Reid, writer of the books that spawned the TV show "Heated Rivalry," in Toronto, Oct. 9, 2026.

Nick Kozak

"It feels like an enormous responsibility to be the person who tells the next part of their story, who gets to decide that," she said. It doesn't help that there's already fan fiction out there from readers who are writing their own sequels. "I haven't read them, but I know it's out there. It's a huge honour, but I hope that my own version holds up next to it."

Next up, Reid is interested in experimenting with other genres or trying screenwriting. But she'd be very happy to always be known as a hockey romance writer.

"It's not bad to be pigeonholed if you're considered good at something and people like it and they get excited about your next release," she said. "That's a blessing. If that's all I end up doing, I shouldn't feel bad about that. I'd be very lucky to have that career."

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