

V. P. ANDERSON
TATIANA HILL

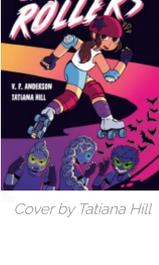
Reviews

“Blood City Rollers”

By [Ryan Fitzmartin](#) | May 20th, 2024

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Do you like your sports with a side of the spooks? Do you think that competitions of strength and skill could be improved with a splash of the supernatural? Well if the idea of Vampires and Witches playing Roller Derby sounds enticing, then “Blood City Rollers” could be for you! This inventive teen-targeted graphic novel takes a typical underdog sports story, and adds in a healthy dose of the undead. The result is more comedy than horror, and things never get too gruesome.



Cover by Tatiana Hill

Written by V.P. Anderson
Illustrated, Colored and Lettered by Tatiana Hill

Skates on. Fangs out. Let's roll. This perfectly paranormal graphic novel about a 13-year-old ice skater who embraces the dark side and finds her light when she joins a vampire roller derby team is to die for.

Ice-skater Mina is on a one-track path to Olympic gold and glory—that is, until she totally wipes out at her biggest competition, and is kinda-sorta-kidnapped by undead kids on roller skates. Sucked into the high stakes world of Paranormal Roller Derby, she finds herself “recruited” by a squad of vampires who need a human player to complete their team—just in time to save the league from losing it all.

Between learning to play derby well enough to kick butt on the track, crushing hard on the dreamy team captain, and navigating the spooky rules of the supernatural, how can Mina go from striving to be a ten alone, to becoming one of nine chaotic bodies forming a perfectly-imperfect team? Forget being the best. Will she be enough to help her new friends survive the season?

The genre being worked in here is somewhere between *Paranorman*, and *Gravity Falls*, but bringing a more female-centric narrative akin to *Jennifer's Body*. The novel is squarely aimed at teens (the protagonist is thirteen), and there's not a drop of blood in sight. All vampiric biting or sucking happens off the page, and the worst injury is a bloodless decapitation that's played for laughs. This might be a story about some spooky characters, but it's more sweet than scary. For kids dipping their toes into horror, the mere presence of fangs may provide enough frights.

The focus here is not on the ghouls, but rather on a girl finding her place in her community. Mina, the lead character, has failed out of figure skating, but she finds herself an unwilling participant in paranormal roller-derby, known as PRD. PRD teams are made up mostly of ghoulies, but require one full-human player on each team, known as a “jammer”. Mina is recruited by the vampire team to be their jammer. Bumped out on her figure skating career and avoiding her parents, Mina gives PRD a shot.

What follows is a charming and entertaining tale, as Mina slowly finds a home with her vampire teammates that she lacked at home. It's clear that writer V.P. Anderson and artist Tatiana Hill are genuine roller derby devotees, as they dedicate a ton of time to the playing of the game. *[Editor's Note: Which you can read about in our interview with the team!]* Paranormal Roller Derby is explained and depicted in detail, and it's not merely a device for character advancement. The game feels real and exciting, and is drawn with weight and power. The comic is not violent, but the hits and falls feel like they have more than enough impact.

Mina is a likeable character, I was rooting for her and her new vampire family the whole way through. Some might find her detachment from her birth family a little harsh, but it's made quite clear that her parents don't care about her as a person. She's happier with her family, and that's fine. I admit I was cautious about how the central love story would play out. Mina develops a pretty hard crush on another vampire, who's at least three hundred years older than her. There's nothing wrong with this of course, and I think vampire romance can be fun, but it gets a little tricky when dealing with a kid. Nothing untoward happens, and the issue is ultimately left unresolved at the end. I do hope it's handled with care when the story is continued in another volume.

Continued below

Despite some flaws, I found that I was engaged by the writing. The dialogue isn't too bogged down in exposition, even as there's a lot of rules and plot developments to explain. The characters develop their emotions naturally, and only one time does it feel forced by genre conventions. Mina's emotional journey is believable, and I enjoyed following her on it. The world that Anderson has created is unique and cute, and despite a few holes, I wanted more out of it.

The art is suitably charming, and effectively sets the cut-but mildly creepy tone of the whole piece. It's got a slightly cartoonish feel in a good way, with big eyes, elaborate hair, and strong use of color to convey emotions. The artist's biography describes Hill as having a background in animation and a love for anime, and that really shines through. There are big facial expressions, and the outsize eyes are used for maximum effect. The result is a strong emotional comic, conveying a lot of character feeling through the art.

Hill's use of color is also very emotional, and she relies heavily on dark purples, greens, and magentas. The result is a very moody comic, not quite dark but definitely a little creepier around the edges. We feel like we're in a secret underworld society, removed from the brightly lit outside world. It's stylish and feels influenced by kid horror greats like *Scooby-Doo: Mystery Incorporated* and *Coraline*. It's an inviting visual style, and it really suits the script and characters.

Overall, I'd definitely recommend “Blood City Rollers” for teens and younger readers. I think the novel has the right level of spookiness for that age group, as well as telling a relatable and inspiring story about a found family. It's also unabashedly queer and feminist, and deserves plaudits for that. As a unique hybrid between sports story, teen romance, and supernatural saga, “Blood City Rollers” definitely breaks new ground, and is worth checking out.

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“Lunar New Year Love Story”

By [Paul Lai](#) | May 7, 2024 | [Reviews](#)

At one point, I was just so grateful for Asian-American representation that almost any story would do. Thankfully, these days, with creators and media that are “East Asian things everywhere all at once,” we can dispense with the tired tropes that obscured the targeted and vitality within our communities. Does the romantic notion of “following LJ

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