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## "Brutal Beauty" and "Zenith": New and not-to-miss on video

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As a film journalist in the Twin Cities, I try to catch almost everything that gets released in town. In other cases, I get intrigued about films that don't open in the Twin Cities and I have to get them through Netflix or Red Box—which has its benefits, of course, but it's not the same as seeing a film on the big screen. Two films released on DVD yesterday—the sci-fi noir *Zenith* and the sports documentary *Brutal Beauty: Tales of the Rose City Rollers*—didn't open in the Twin Cities, and both are certainly worth a look, even if it's on your home television or computer and not at your local theater.

*Zenith* comes with the tag line, "The Film They Don't Want You to See," and it's directed by "Anonymous," which would seem to be two strikes against it normally, but *Zenith* is a nifty futuristic *noir* that will improve in repeat viewings. The less you know about the film the better, but with that said, this low-budget feature works wonders with an original story, complicated editing schemes and lighting throughout the film, turning areas of Brooklyn and Queens into convincing wastelands to convey the story's year: 2044. There are two storylines, which unfold concurrently; Ed, an ex-priest, gave up the church in search of the elusive "Zenith" conspirators, who are drugging all humans into a nirvana-like state without feeling any pain. During Ed's investigation, he has been making videotapes of each episode and labeling the VHS tapes for documentation. Jump to 2044, where Ed's son, Jack, a former doctor turned drug dealer selling expired pharmaceutical drugs, to give humans pain again, is given the first tape in his father's search to uncover the conspiracy behind "Zenith." Director "Anonymous," a.k.a. Vlado Nikolic, has plenty of fun evoking old sci-fi tricks (authors Richard Matheson and Philip K. Dick come to mind), but half the fun of *Zenith* is riding an inventive Mobius-strip narrative without getting tangled and letting the pieces fit into place. Nikolic, responsible for the screenplay too, lets the future play out with limitless possibilities.

After my disdain for Drew Barrymore's flimsy roller derby film *Whip It*, I can forget those awful memories and cherish new ones of roller derbies in the new documentary *Brutal Beauty*, about Portland, Oregon's Rose City Rollers. With names such as "Madam Bumpsalot," "Scratcher In the Eye," and "Blood Clottia," they participate in the violent—and, from the looks of it, exhausting sport, getting more than bruises for their efforts. Using a fly-on-the-wall approach, director Chip Mabry interviews many of the women/players and gets personal stories about their past and how they got involved in the sport. One of the better ones told comes from Marollin' Monroe, who wanted to be on a team; when a friend from high school asked her to come to the tryouts, she goes and stayed with the sport, while her friend quit two weeks later.

The highlight of the doc might have nothing to do with actual derby play but with the explanation of the rules. Working at Voodoo Doughnuts in Portland, the coach of the Rose City Rollers, grabs donuts off his tray and smothers chocolate on certain old-fashioned ones, moving plain donuts around each other; earning huge laughs, he explains the rules better than anyone in the movie. Showing two different sides to the sport, one within Portland and the other on the national circuit, Mabry's doc brings an energetic spark in capturing these women not only as tough players but as women with surprising big hearts. The release of *Brutal Beauty* makes me think about our own [Minnesota Roller Girls](#) and North Star Roller Girls; I, for one, will be dragging friends