



Cheer Up: Love and Pom Poms

Crystal Frasier

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Oni Press (Aug 10, 2021)

Softcover \$14.99 (128pp)

978-1-62010-955-7

In *Cheer Up*, two friends on different tracks reconnect and explore their romantic feelings.

Annie is smart but antisocial. To present colleges with a more balanced high school transcript, her mother suggests that she give cheerleading a try. Beatrice is a transgender member of the cheerleading squad who feels pressure to succeed and an unwanted amount of attention. Annie's history of confrontation precedes her, but Beatrice stands up for her at tryouts.

Beatrice helps Annie with cheerleading and makeup, while Annie helps Beatrice advocate for herself and study history. As each becomes more confident and well rounded, a budding mutual attraction leads them to attend the homecoming dance as each other's dates.

The book is appealing in its complexity, showing a variety of relationships with nuance. The squad defends Beatrice, but sometimes treats her like a publicity tool; Beatrice's parents are still adapting to her gender identity. The artwork captures myriad emotions through the teenagers' facial expressions, while its convincing settings and details enhance the storytelling, too. These include the digital marquee in front of the high school that sets the time of year for the story with its display of "Welcome back, students!" Elsewhere, a newspaper clipping about the state's "1st Transgender Cheerleader" is mounted on Beatrice's wall; its placement in her room, and the roughness of the article's torn edges contrasted with the otherwise careful presentation, reveals much about the delicate combination of pride and uncertainty that she inhabits.

Showing that everyone has more to learn, and that embracing others is often the best way to do it, *Cheer Up* is a wonderful graphic novel.

PETER DABBENE (July / August 2021)

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