



GravesVille: Home of the Undead

A. C. Hernandez

A. Jane Rodriguez, Illustrator

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Insecurity and humor in the young narrator's voice bring a sense of authenticity to this supernatural adventure.

The town of GravesVille is under attack, and a group of young monsters must unite in time to save their loved ones. Book one of a proposed series, *GravesVille: Home of the Undead*, by A. C. Hernandez, will delight middle-grade readers with a wickedly quirky cast of characters and a fun, if predictable, story line.

Thirteen-year-old Ryan Ghouls and his best friend, Kyle Wolfermen, are alarmed when the pompous vampires, led by Mayor Matthew Bloodthirst, begin forcing all the nonvampires to drink Brainbasher soda. Not long after, the zombies aren't the only ones walking around in a trance. With the help of Mariska von Abomination and the swamp-loving Gillman twins, the teens vow to take back GravesVille Junior High and the town, as long as they don't miss their history quiz.

Boys in particular will relate to best friends Ryan and Kyle: "He howled as I gave him a high-five, or four, on my part: I have no pinky finger." Apart from the supernatural, the two exhibit many qualities found in preteen boys, including awkward social skills, crushes, the desire to look cool, and a propensity to laugh out loud at a "swamp that smelled like farts." A few grammatical lapses occur, most notably with tenses and plurals. However, given Ryan's age, these seem more a part of his voice than actual errors.

Hernandez keeps the naming simple and obvious: Ryan Ghouls is a ghoul, and Kyle Wolfermen is a werewolf. The simple and obvious is carried into the plot when the Brainbasher soda ends up brainwashing the town. It takes the boys a surprisingly long time to make this discovery, and though there are some attempted twists and turns, nothing truly shocking happens here. Ryan's point of view is charmingly insecure, and young readers will enjoy following him around GravesVille.

Interspersed throughout the book are nine black-and-white, manga-like sketches drawn by A. Jane Rodriguez. The drawings enhance the story, introducing characters and juxtaposing the supernatural with the mundane. Placing a sketch at the beginning or end of each chapter would have been a more even and seamless option than the current sporadic placement. Regardless, the illustrations are an unexpected bonus, and the addition of more would be appropriate, especially given the widely spaced lines of text, which also indicate catering to a younger crowd of paranormal fans.

GravesVille: Home of the Undead, with its uncomplicated plot and overt themes, will ultimately appeal to an audience of elementary and middle school readers. A bonus chapter at the end introduces the mysterious Malcolm, a talked-about friend who never actually appears in the story. The obvious assumption is that Malcolm will narrate volume 2. Hopefully, Ryan and Kyle will make appearances as well.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (July 28, 2014)

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