



# When Their Alter Egos Come Out to Play

By day, Jennifer Donovan works as an astronomer, listening for the faintest whispers from atoms in deep outer space, the tracings of movement in galaxies millions of light-years from Earth.

But it is nighttime.

And in an abandoned cigar factory on a deserted street in Astoria, Queens, Jennifer Donovan, the astronomer, has become Luna Impact, roller derby chick.

She hurtles down the floor, a blur of pursuit behind Hyper Lynx, a skater who has twice blocked her so hard that she flew out of bounds.

Now, Luna Impact — 125 muscular pounds packed into the lithe frame of Ms. Donovan — has a ferocious derby face on. As she passes Hyper, she drops into a crouch and shifts lanes directly in front of her. Then she abruptly uncoils, standing up and bashing into Hyper's helmet.

The referee whistles a foul. Luna Impact goes to the sideline for the penalty. Between gasps, she spits out an explanation, after first spitting out her mouthpiece.

"I tried to do a move called the can opener, but I hit Hyper Lynx in the front of the helmet, instead of the chest," she said. "The chest would have been legal."

Skating rinks have shut all over the



JOYCE DOPKEEN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Jennifer Donovan, an astronomy student at Columbia University, will adopt another identity tonight at the Gotham Girls Roller Derby championships.

city. But this evening in the Holman gymnasium at City College, Luna Impact will be one of 30 women on two teams competing for the championship of the Gotham Girls Roller Derby ([www.GothamGirlsRollerDerby.com](http://www.GothamGirlsRollerDerby.com)).

Roller derby, which seemed to have a short final flare of life on cable televi-

sion back in the 1970s, has been reborn atop the skates of amateur women across the country. They have formed leagues, broken bones, drunk beer and won tens of thousands of raucous, loyal fans. The New York teams, which started in 2003 with a handful of women skat-

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# For Roller Derby, Their Alter Egos Come Out to Play

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ing under the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, include teachers, stage managers, accountants, a lion keeper, corporate lawyers and an antiques dealer, as well as the one known astronomer. Their ages range from 23 to 42.

Each skater registers her nom du derby on a national list. The New Yorkers have become Lil' Miss Stuffit, Surly Temple, Beatrix Slaughter, Lemony Kickit and Brigitte Barhot. They pooled funds and bought a 7,500-square-foot portable floor to use as a flat-track rink, and spend three hours packing and hauling it to the matches. The league is entirely owned and operated by the 60 skaters.

"It's the anti-sport sport, because even though it's very athletic, it has none of that big sports culture," said Aja Gair, a paralegal who skates under a name so sprawling that it is just about one

verb short of an op-ed essay: Barbara Ambush Mother of All Your Problems.

In a black dress and pumps, Danielle Noonan arrived for practice at the old cigar factory earlier this week direct from her office in the law firm of Kaye Scholer, where she practices patent law. She had never played a team sport, and had been trudging miserably on health club treadmills to keep fit. Then she heard about the derby, and fell for its generous camaraderie and silliness. For today's match, Ms. Noonan, 28, will change into a short skirt with bloomers underneath, emerging as She Raw.

"People from the office come to watch — mostly men, waiting for me to fall and hoot when my skirt flies up," she said. "They're asking me to join the firm's football team, but between derby and billable hours, there's no time left."

Everyone wears pads on the elbows, knees and wrists, hel-

## ONLINE: VIDEO

Skating along with the Gotham Girls Roller Derby:

[nytimes.com/nyregion](http://nytimes.com/nyregion)

metals on the head and mouth guards between the teeth. The aggression runs high on the rink floor, but rarely gets nasty. "We really don't fight because we have to run the business together," said Ginger Snap, alias Nately Blair, 30, who wears a necklace that includes a pin once used to hold her fractured wrist in place. "You leave it on the track and buy her a beer afterwards. Something about putting on the skates takes away the vulnerability."

Luna Impact — Ms. Donovan, a graduate assistant in astronomy at Columbia University — had figure skated most of her life but gave it up after a coach moved to Florida. "I'd heard about derby through friends of Flying Squirrel, a geneticist,"

she said. "I went to a championship. In 20 years of national figure skating, I never saw a crowd like that."

Two weeks before the opening bout, she took an accidental shot in practice that broke the joint of her jaw. "Auntie Christ meant to hit my shoulder," she said. "You know those boxing movies where they show the boxer's jaw getting hit in slow motion and how it gets deformed? I know how that feels."

One woman, a lawyer for the city, noted that while she did not go in for the tattoos or piercings that accessorized many of the skaters, and while she weighed about 100 pounds more than most, she still felt very much at home.

Because of her job, she said, she could give only her skating name. "It's Beyonsláy, accent over the A," she said. "It's really great to have an alter ego. I highly recommend it."