



The thing with anything claiming to be a vampire action series these days is that there's already a series in that category that sets a very high standard for anyone else to follow: *Hellsing Ultimate* . *Blac*

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is keen to give it a try, so let's see how it shapes up...

10 years ago, Hong Kong fell victim to a horde of vampires, the Kowloon Children, with the city left a ruined wasteland after the attempts by the remaining humans & less bloodthirsty vampires to force them out. One of the fighters on that day was Jiro, a vampire whose life was turned upside down when his love was killed by the Kowloon Children and who thought of nothing but revenge, with the female vampire responsible being the main target of his anger. But the past is the past - now, a cargo ship heading for Yokohama is carrying a cargo that soon attracts the attention of the group in control of the Special Zone, an area set aside for vampires and humans to live with each other in peace. Jiro and his brother Kotaro are part of that cargo – but so are some surviving Kowloon Children. Is the Special Zone about to fall in the same way that Hong Kong did?

Jiro may carry a longsword and have a fearsome reputation – no-one earns the tag "kin-killer" without good reason, after all – but he's no Alucard, and *Black Blood Brothers* is no *Hellsing*. Whereas the latter goes for blood, gore and shock value, often at the expense of story, this series takes the opposite approach – it's trying to tell a story, with occasional violence included simply as a tool to do that. The problem is, the storytelling's not exactly great.

The first thing I thought after watching the opening episode was "whuh!?" - I simply had no idea what was going on. Sure, the episode was full of eyecandy and action, it was great fun to watch, but in story terms it was a mess - and that can't be a good thing, right? Then I started thinking about it, and piecing things together, and slowly everything began to fall into place. Now, the fact that I even thought about it should be a hint - you don't normally waste time thinking about terrible shows, other than thinking "why did I waste my time". The show had just completed a neat little trick: planting the seeds of a few ideas in my head, then sitting back and waiting for them to take root. In the hour or two after watching the episode, I went from "whuh!?" to "aah!" - almost - as a little light went on somewhere and things started making sense.

The series does some rather confusing hopping through time – the opening scenes of each episode (or opening half, in the case of episode one) all take place in the past, and set aside from the main story and considered on their own tell a tale in their own right. It's a tale that explains Jiro's origins and why he came to be the vampire he is today. Set alongside that, the main story deal with events in his past catching up with him again, as the battles of Hong Kong look set to happen again as the Kowloon Children infiltrate the Special Zone.

The Order Coffin Company control the special zone, and initially there's a little bit of confusion over what their role is, precisely. Provide a useful coffin ordering service? No. Impose their own form of order on those who may spend their days asleep in a coffin? More likely. If that's the case, though, they seem to have something of an identity crisis: why would the company that uses the Suppression Squad to keep vampires in check also need Compromisers like Mimiko to provide negotiation services, when their negotiations are more normally conducted at gunpoint? It just doesn't make sense, especially when you end up with a situation where employees of the same company are trying to both protect and kill Jiro and Kotaro, depending on their roles. The situation is clarified a little as the series goes on, but it highlights the show's biggest problem: it's never entirely clear what's going on or what the characters' motivations are, and that leaves the experience of watching it a little bit lacking.


The leads are watchable enough, at least. Jiro *looks* the part of a vampire, with his heavy coat, sunlight protection and elite fighting skills, while his unhappy past gives him a certain moodiness that fits him well. Kotaro is almost the complete opposite – funloving and carefree, he's very much *not* what you expect of a vampire, and he's great fun to watch. Completing the lead trio is Mimiko, a Compromiser (negotiator, more accurately) for the Company who takes Jiro and Kotaro under her wing. She's another character who's fun to watch, but it's never really clear *why* she takes to the brothers as well as she does – she certainly goes to lengths for them that don't match what they've done for her.

On the dark side, the main person of interest is Cassa, who has had plenty of contact with Jiro in the past – both good and bad – and who really does fill the villain role well. She doesn't have much in the way of motivation to be the way she is – like the rest of the Kowloon Children, she's evil because that's her nature, nothing more – but sometimes the best villains are those who do evil just because they can, and Cassa certainly falls into that category.

There are other characters on both sides who make regular appearances – and a few shades of grey in between – but they don't play so much of a role. When the series does action, it's actually quite good. It doesn't have the visual flair or visceral nature of some other vampire shows, but it's perfectly competent as far as it goes and does entertain. The problem is with the way the plot is handled, which at times just leaves you confused, and at other times unfolds a little too slowly. It's also left with the hooks clearly in place for a second season that has yet to happen, so don't expect all your questions to be answered.

What it comes down to, then, is whether the characters can balance out the show's failings in the plot department. The answer: almost, but not quite. *Black Blood Brothers* does have its good points and there's plenty of it that's enjoyable enough to sit through, but there's also enough about it that's not quite right that you're left feeling a little underwhelmed at the end of it. When the DVD release came out in the UK, I rated this as one to try before you buy - now, with FUNimation giving us a free stream of the series, you've got the ideal chance to do that.

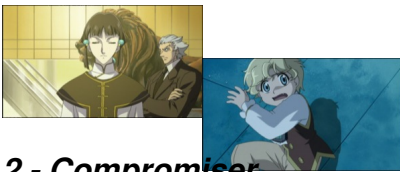
For full episode summaries and screenshots, check pages 2-4 of this review.

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| Title Black Blood Brothers | Studio  |
| Release Information Free streaming via youtube.com | Our Rating ★★★★☆ |

Disc One: Bad Tidings

1 - *Black Blood Brothers*

10 years ago, Hong Kong fell victim to a horde of vampires, the Kowloon Children, with the city left a ruined wasteland after the attempts by the remaining humans & less bloodthirsty vampires to force them out. One of the fighters on that day was Jiro, a vampire whose life was turned upside down when his love was killed by the Kowloon Children and who thought of nothing but revenge, with the female vampire responsible being the main target of his anger. But the past is the past - now, a cargo ship heading for Yokohama is carrying a cargo that soon attracts the attention of the group in control of the Special Zone, an area set aside for vampires and humans to live with each other in peace. Jiro and his brother Kotaro are part of that cargo – but so are some surviving Kowloon Children...



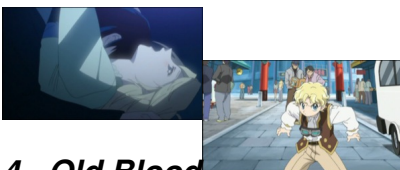
2 - *Compromiser*

Making their way to shore at long last, Jiro and Kotaro are unexpectedly rescued by Mimiko, a Compromiser. She's another member of the Order Coffin Company, but unlike some of her comrades she's more interested in promoting peaceful co-existence rather than simply eliminating vampires. Offering to act as their guide, the threesome head towards the Special Zone, but they're not long on their way when Kelly Wong, leader of the vampiric refugees, approaches, hoping to recruit Jiro to their cause. She's not the only one on their tail, either, as the Company's Suppression Team soon makes another appearance...



3 - *The Kowloon Bloodline*

Having split up from his brother, Kotaro's taken in by the refugee group, with Mimiko also tagging along. As for what's happened to Jiro.. he's ended up in the tender care of the Order Coffin Company's rather less-than-tolerant Suppression Team, who have him confined and under interrogation. Not that he's being all that co-operative. When he learns that OCC believes that a Kowloon Child - the most violent and infective vampire sect - is hiding amongst the refugees, though, Jiro decides that maybe it's time he played a part in the hunt...



4 - *Old Blood*

Jiro's determined to go after Kotaro and the Children, but Mimiko realises than in the condition he's in, he's not going to win any battles - and so she offers him some of her blood, in an effort

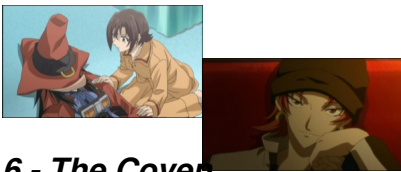
to help him heal. Then, charged up and ready to go, Jiro heads out in pursuit of the others. Following behind, Mimiko can see Jiro dealing with the Children left behind to delay him, and is amazed at his ability, but when he finally catches up with Tsang that his determination will really be tested...



Disc Two: Emergence

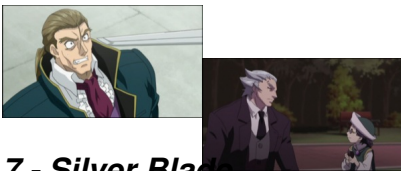
5 - The Special Economic Zone

Mimiko's resonance with Jiro should be over by now - it's only meant to be a temporary effect - but she's still catching flashes of his dreams and memories, even though she doesn't quite realise what they are yet. She just realises that they're making her late for work, and takes appropriate payback on Jiro. While they may have made it safely inside the Special Zone, though, there are those within the Order Coffin Company who, being aware of Jiro's true nature, aren't happy at his presence and are already planning how to make best use of the situation...



6 - The Cover

Jiro's 'welcome committee' from the Coven are soon taught a lesson in how not to deal with Jiro, who seems to have... issues to resolve with the Coven's leader, Zelman. Just as well that Zelman would like to meet him, then - and the meeting turns out to be somewhat different from what Jiro was expecting it to be. But while Zelman's striking a conciliatory note, at least for now, there are some in his organisation who aren't so keen to let Jiro go unhindered. Even some of Jiro's old comrades, trusted allies of the past, are refusing to accept his presence in the Special Zone. It seems there are things going on amongst the Clans in the Zone, and everyone seems to want to keep Jiro far away from them...



7 - Silver Blade

The plan for Jiro and Kotaro to stay with Mimiko for a while goes up in smoke, literally, when they arrive there to find that her apartment has been bombed - it's becoming clearer almost by the moment that someone *really* doesn't want Jiro staying in the Special Zone. Reporting back to the Company, Mimiko finds that both the Company and the Cans are afraid of the chaos that Jiro tends to bring with him - and as if to prove the point, while she's in her meeting, Jiro heads out on his own to mount "a little assault", a move that leads to the Company's Suppression Team being mobilised against him. Just what is Jiro trying to achieve..?

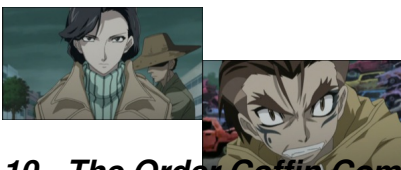
**8 - Protector**

Yafuri is a Kowloon Child, and a special one at that - little brother to Cassa, someone who Jiro is *very* familiar with. It's been ten years since they last met, during the battle against the Kowloon Children in Hong Kong, and learning that she's nearby drives Jiro into a rage. The arrival of the Suppression Team prevents Jiro and Yafuri from fighting further, but Jiro's even more convinced than he was before that the Special Zone can no longer be a refuge for him and Kotaro. The Company, meanwhile, has learnt of Cassa's presence as well - their hope is that Sei, the Lord Dragon, will be able to deal with her, but despite assuring the Company that he can, Sei seems less than certain. Kotaro, meanwhile, sneaks away from Jiro to say a proper goodbye to Mimiko - but when Jiro finds himself unable to sense Kotaro's aura, he realises that something is horribly wrong...



Disc Three: Resurrection**9 - The Eleventh Yard**

Kotaro had intended just to pay Mimiko a quick visit, to say a proper goodbye, but he's managed to get himself lost in the backstreets of the Special Zone. It's a place that inhabited by the seedier side of life, and Kotaro's cocky 'warrior of justice' talk soon lands him in trouble, until Zelman turns up to save his skin. Jiro, meanwhile, is still trying to track his brother down, before any harm comes to him, while Cain attempts to deal with Cassa and Yafuri directly - but soon learns that underestimating them is a mistake that could well turn out to be fatal...

**10 - The Order Coffin Company**

Mimiko learns that the person she's thought was Kelly Wong is really Cassa - and in doing so, learns that she's in real trouble. Cassa is looking for a way to get under Jiro's skin, and is hoping that keeping hold of Mimiko for a while will help her do just that. Knowing the level of trust that Mimiko has for Jiro, she also has a few secrets from Jiro's past to share in the hope of breaking that trust. Help comes in an unusual form, though, when Kotaro arrives on the scene. As for Jiro, he's still trying to find a way to deal with the Kowloon Children without causing too much mayhem - but it seems that Zelman has already decided that a more direct approach to dealing with Cassa is required. Problem is, both of them appear to have made their moves far too late...

Black Blood Brothers

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