



Vampira: Dark Goddess of Horror

W. Scott Poole

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The new book from award-winning historian W. Scott Poole is a whip-smart piece of pop culture detailing the story of cult horror figure Vampira that actually tells the much wider story of 1950s America and its treatment of women and sex, as well as capturing a fascinating swath of Los Angeles history.

In *Vampire*, Poole gives us the eclectic life of the dancer, stripper, actress, and artist Maila Nurmi, who would reinvent herself as Vampira during the backdrop of 1950s America, an era of both chilling conformity and the nascent rumblings of the countercultural response that led from the Beats and free jazz to the stirring of the LGBT movement and the hardcore punk scene in the bohemian enclave along Melrose Avenue. A veteran of the New York stage and late nights at Hollywood's hipster hangouts, Nurmi would eventually be linked to Elvis, Orson Welles, and James Dean, as well as stylist and photographer Rudi Gernreich, founder of the Mattachine Society and designer of the thong. Thanks to rumors of a romance between Vampira and James Dean, his tragic death inspired the circulation of stories that she had cursed him and, better yet, had access to his dead body for use in her dark arts.

In Poole's expert hands, *Vampira* is more than the story of a highly creative artist continually reinventing herself, but a parable of the runaway housewife bursting the bounds of our straight-laced conventions with an exuberant display of camp, sex, and creative individuality that owed something to the morbid *New Yorker* cartoons of Charles Addams, the evil queen from Disney's *Snow White*, and the popular, underground bondage magazine *Bizarre*, and forward to the staged excesses of Madonna and Lady Gaga. *Vampira* is a wildly compelling tour through a forgotten piece of pop cultural history, one with both cultish and literary merit, sure to capture the imagination of Vampira fans new and old.

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