



Vampira: Dark Goddess of Horror

By 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 *Vampira*, 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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Editorial Review

Review

"Finally, Poole lovingly gives *Vampira* her due."—*Booklist*, Starred Review

"Pop culture critic Poole (history, Coll. of Charleston; *Monsters in America*) sure knows a monster when he sees one. He continues his macrocultural exegesis in this microquasiobiography and cultural (especially the 1950s) explication of TV's first and most revelatory horror host...This stone-cold winner belongs in every American studies collection." —*Library Review*, Starred Review

"W. Scott Poole has written a fascinating and illuminating socio-sexual history of the last half decade of American Pop Culture...W. Scott Poole explores deftly and accurately the history and the politics of both feminism and "the outsider," the parts of America pushed to the curb but yearning for acceptance, love, and financial success, the "new and shiny" promise of the (supposed) post war era. Poole has done a great job in bringing such a variety of disparate pieces into a singular whole, and this book should be bought and read by anyone interested in the unspoken history of Hollywood, and the darker story of our culture." —*The Examiner*

"Poole is as concerned with the larger social changes afoot in mid-century America and uses the *Vampira* narrative to approach the second half of the 20th century from a fresh, and new thought-provoking perspective...[*Vampira*] provides an interesting and singular window into a time in the nation's past that can hardly be over-examined, especially as so many of the battles described are still being fought and it can often seem as if some of the hard-won gains of the era are slowly being given up." —*Charleston City Paper*

"Scott Poole has the chops, the Hollywood savvy, and the horror genre's insider smarts to write a killer book on *Vampira*. I'll be first in line to grab a copy." — Jonathan Maberry, multiple Bram Stoker Award winner and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Assassin's Code* and *Dust & Decay*.

"...this pioneering book is a tribute to the change that *Vampira* incited and the awakening that so many unknowingly received from her presence." —*Santa Fe New Mexican, Pasatiempo*

"Poole goes to great, and effective, lengths to identify the attempts at social engineering that fostered specious notions of maleness and femaleness in the name of governmental control and selling the American dream. But the most impressive thing (besides his impeccably researched historical insight) is his understanding of Nurmi and her character in that context." —*Delirium Magazine*

"Horror hostess, bondage goddess, Charles Addams cartoon comes to life, *Vampire* was every first-generation fanboy's wet dream. Scott Poole takes us on an unforgettable ride through the overlapping underworlds of B&D magazines, Hollywood noir, and early political liberation movements that inspired actress Maila Nurmi to challenge a postwar culture bent on stifling women's choices, bodies, and desires. This book is a subversive masterpiece." -- Sheri Holman, author of *Witches on the Road Tonight* and *The Dress Lodger*.

"W. Scott Poole's last book, *Monsters in America*, was a dazzling work of cultural history: smart, funny, subversive and wildly entertaining. He showed a special gift for playfully saying serious things. His new book is even more wonderful. The life of Maila Nurmi, better known as the late-night TV hostess *Vampira*,

is a great, strange story in itself, but also allows Poole to explore our attitudes about sex, death, fear, and difference. 'The Lady of Horror' was famous in the 1950s, but she is a remarkable symbol who connects backward to Poe and forward to Goth. She is as American as the Statue of Liberty." —Christopher Bram, author of *Gods and Monsters* and *Eminent Outlaws: The Gay Writers Who Changed America*

"Vampira is up there with Vincent Price for lovers of the macabre, an icon whose shadow and influence lingers long after death. She's not only important to modern children of the night for being the first TV horror host, but as the original 'Glamour Ghoul,' whose style has inspired generations of Goth Girls to adopt the sexy undead look as their own. But there is more to her story than her ability to look good screaming, and Scott Poole, whose writing on the dark side of popular culture has proven to be some of the smartest, sassiest commentary on American society around, is the man to tell it." —Liisa Ladouceur, author of *Encyclopedia Gothica*

"An expert critic of pop culture, W. Scott Poole is one of the finest historians of all that is wicked, salacious, and sexy in America. Poole's previous award-winning books on monsters and the devil in movies, comic books, and television have revolutionized how we think about evil and culture. Now with Vampira, he plans to wow us again. By looking into the life and times of Maila Nurmi, the former stripper turned television's dark goddess of sex and death, Poole unveils a new side of midcentury America, the 'American century' in which we too often forget the steamy, scary, and sensational." —Edward J. Blum author of *Reforging the White Republic* and *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America*

"Scott Poole is, in my view, the finest (certainly the wittiest and most crafty) scholar working in this area and by far the most persuasive. Vampira represents a way to talk about fifties culture, especially about the political and moral pressures exerted then and what costs ensued. Scott Poole has shown how brilliantly he can unearth cultural fears and desires, both dangerous and heartbreaking, by analyzing what passed itself off as entertainment." —James R. Kincaid, Aerol Arnold Professor of English at USC and author of *Erotic Innocence* and *Annoying the Victorians*
[Praise for *Monsters in America*]

"Poole brings to life American horror stories by framing them within folk belief, religion, and popular culture, broadly unraveling the idea of the monster. Thanks to Poole's insights we see the ubiquity of the monster lurking in and around us." —John David Smith, Charles H. Stone Distinguished Professor of American History, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

"Poole's connection of the monster to American history is a kind of Creature Features meets American cultural history. Here we not only meet such monsters but also discover America's cultural monstrosity." —John W. Morehead, editor, TheoFantastique.com

"A well informed, thoughtful, and indeed frightening angle of vision to a persistent and compelling American desire to be entertained by the grotesque and the horrific." —Gary Laderman, Professor of American Religious History and Cultures, Emory University

"With *Monsters in America*, W. Scott Poole has given us a guidebook for a journey into nightmare territory. Insightful and brilliant!" —Jonathan Maberry, New York Times bestselling author of *Patient Zero* and *Dead of Night*

"An unexpected guilty pleasure! Poole invites us into an important and enlightening, if disturbing, conversation about the very real monsters that inhabit the dark spaces of America's past." —J. Gordon Melton, Director, Institute for the Study of American Religion

"From 19th century sea serpents to our current obsession with vampires and zombies...Poole plots America's past through its fears in this intriguing ...sociocultural history." —Publishers Weekly

"Poole ... has set the bar ridiculously high for any future research exploring the locus of historical and cultural studies, particularly as it pertains to the horrific. ... *Monsters In America* challenges, enlightens, and, quite honestly, frightens in its prescient view of American history, as well as the seeming ubiquity of the monsters of our past and probable future." —The Crawlspace

"After reading *Monsters in America*, a reader will view monsters in a completely different light. No longer just something that goes bump in the night, Mr. Poole showcases that monsters have more meaning and shed more insight into society than one might have previously suspected. Well-written and engaging, *Monsters in America* is a must-read for anyone fascinated by history or monsters or both." —That's What She Read

"While we can never isolate all the elements contributing to our horror stories, Poole looks at the distinct soil that produced *Monsters in America*. He lurks in the forests and depths that gave rise to *Moby Dick*, the Headless Horseman and even Bigfoot. Writing from his faculty position at the College of Charleston, Poole locates many of our manias in racial fears and tensions." —Purple State of Mind

"The story of monsters, Poole rightly observes, is actually the "underground history of the United States.... American monsters are born out of American history." *Monsters* reveal what simultaneously enthralls and repels us, whether it's leviathanesque sea monsters off the shores of 17th-century New England or Stephenie Meyer's puritanical, defanged Edward Cullen addressing contemporary America's split-personality longing for a supersexy Ozzie-and-Harriet family." —Jana Riess, *Beliefnet*

"Poole is as concerned with the larger social changes afoot in mid-century America and uses the *Vampira* narrative to approach the second half of the 20th century from a fresh, and new thought-provoking perspective...it provides an interesting and singular window into a time in the nation's past that can hardly be over-examined, especially as so many of the battles described are still being fought and it can often seem as if some of the hard-won gains of the era are slowly being given up." —*Charleston City Paper*

About the Author

W. Scott Poole, who teaches at the College of Charleston, has written widely about American history, horror, and pop culture, including most recently in his award-winning history, *Monsters in America*, which received the John G. Cawelti prize from the Popular Culture Association and was named among the "Best of the Best" by the AAUP for 2011. *Monsters* received nominations for the Bram Stoker and the fan-sourced Rondo Hatton Classic Horror Awards. Poole is a regular contributor to *Popmatters* and his work has appeared in the *Huffington Post*, *Religions Dispatches* and *Killing the Buddha*. He has been a guest speaker at Authors@Google and has collaborated on films for the History Channel, PBS, and, most recently, the Banger Films project, *Satan: The Movie*. He blogs at his website, monstersinamerica.com.

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She emerged out of the white smoke, exuding an aggressive sexuality and a hint of danger. Her eyes suggested playfulness, her nails phallic daggers of implied threat. Waist shrunken to a ghastly circumference by a cinch belt favored in the world of S&M enthusiasts, her eyebrows archly painted, her long black hair swirling behind and around her, she shocked, titillated, angered, and seduced.

A black-clad goddess of sex and death, she called herself *Vampira*, and in 1954 she burst into suburban living rooms across the nation.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carson McDonald:

The ability that you get from Vampira: Dark Goddess of Horror could be the more deep you digging the information that hide into the words the more you get thinking about reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to know but Vampira: Dark Goddess of Horror giving you thrill feeling of reading. The author conveys their point in certain way that can be understood through anyone who read that because the author of this e-book is well-known enough. This book also makes your own vocabulary increase well. It is therefore easy to understand then can go to you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We advise you for having this kind of Vampira: Dark Goddess of Horror instantly.

Iona Calhoun:

Beside this specific Vampira: Dark Goddess of Horror in your phone, it could give you a way to get nearer to the new knowledge or data. The information and the knowledge you will got here is fresh from oven so don't always be worry if you feel like an older people live in narrow village. It is good thing to have Vampira: Dark Goddess of Horror because this book offers for your requirements readable information. Do you at times have book but you do not get what it's facts concerning. Oh come on, that wil happen if you have this within your hand. The Enjoyable set up here cannot be questionable, including treasuring beautiful island. Techniques you still want to miss this? Find this book in addition to read it from at this point!

Trisha McClain:

Is it you who having spare time and then spend it whole day through watching television programs or just lying on the bed? Do you need something totally new? This Vampira: Dark Goddess of Horror can be the solution, oh how comes? It's a book you know. You are so out of date, spending your spare time by reading in this brand new era is common not a nerd activity. So what these guides have than the others?

Margaret Pace:

As a college student exactly feel bored to help reading. If their teacher requested them to go to the library in order to make summary for some book, they are complained. Just minor students that has reading's heart and soul or real their leisure activity. They just do what the teacher want, like asked to the library. They go to at this time there but nothing reading significantly. Any students feel that looking at is not important, boring in addition to can't see colorful images on there. Yeah, it is for being complicated. Book is very important for you personally. As we know that on this era, many ways to get whatever we really wish for. Likewise word says, many ways to reach Chinese's country. Therefore , this Vampira: Dark Goddess of Horror can make you experience more interested to read.

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