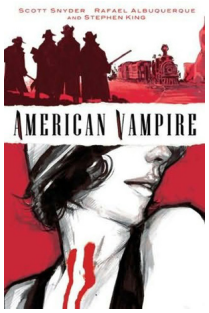
AMERICAN VAMPIRE: Volume 1 collects the first five Vertigo Comics issues chronicling the revenge-themed journey of Skinner Sweet, a new, vicious breed of vampire. Legendary master of horror Stephen King joins creator Scott Snyder and artist Rafael Albuquerque to trace the first American vampire’s bloodline through various decades of U.S. history.

In Snyder’s story, set in 1920s Los Angeles, Pearl Jones is a struggling actress hoping to make it big in Hollywood. At a film set, the naive young woman is invited to an afterparty where a famous producer will be in attendance. Pearl unfortunately discovers she has been set up as the main course for a vampire party, and Skinner Sweet appears at her deathbed, offering the dying Pearl a chance to take revenge against those who violated her. As if she has just made a deal with the devil, Pearl becomes a hideous creature, roaming the streets during both daylight and nighttime.



In the second half of the narrative, King details Skinner’s murderous origins. In the Wild West of the 1880s, the entire town of Sidewinder has been completely flooded. The buildings and cemetery have been submerged, and deep in the murky water, Skinner lurks inside his coffin, patiently waiting for the opportunity to break out. In a fresh and original take, Skinner represents an unusual jump in vampire evolution: a bloodsucker who can survive in the sunlight. As America becomes stronger, advancing in technology, so does his thirst for blood and vengeance. His hatred never grows old, while his aging enemies live their normal lives, almost forgetting about him.

Artist Albuquerque brilliantly captures two distinct time periods. In the first half, he drenches his panels in the glitz and glam of Hollywood. Then, in the following section, his depiction of the Western frontier is reminiscent of classic John Ford movies. Distinguished in her vampiric

features, Pearl has beady yellow eyes, an elongated face with sharp fangs and long, clawlike fingers. Albuquerque also contributes eye-catching angles on the vampire-vs.-vampire battles.

To Pearl, the mysterious Skinner is an antihero, a charismatic and mystifying persona. Though he helps her on her quest for payback, he is also doing it for his own devious purposes. But to Abilena, another of the key characters, he’s the cold-hearted murderer who killed her father. The well-developed setup leaves much anticipation for what will happen next to Skinner and his victims in future story arcs.

AMERICAN VAMPIRE: Volume 1 delivers a genuinely entertaining package of story and art. This hardcover volume, which contains an introduction by King and early sketch art, hits stores this week; the sixth comic issue, set in 1930s Las Vegas, is out in stores now.

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