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Reviews may contain information that could be considered 'spoilers'. Readers should proceed at their own risk.

Publisher**DrMaster Publications, Inc.**<http://www.DrMasterbooks.com>**Credits**

Writer: Jozev

Other Creators: Jerry Cho

Grade: 6***Journal of the Vampire Hunter [1]: Claws of Darkness***

is a vampire horror comic series from Hong Kong that comes with a parental advisory and is rated for ages 18-plus. If you're the type of person

who can't look at true crime pictures without having nightmares afterward, then this comic is not for you. If your mom is the type of person who angrily asks store clerks, "Does this book have devil worship in it?" then ditto.

This relaxed-pace comic is dark, violent, and humorless, but the color art's great. Many panels are wordless, except for sound effects, letting the visuals breathe to tell the story. Buy volume 1 at least for the dramatic cover art with fully armed vampire hunter Nicholas Bane (that's some "fishing



hook" he's carrying in his left hand), even if you don't think you can stomach the contents of ***Claws of Darkness***.

Nicholas Bane finds himself drawn to Santa Anna, Mexico, because of the strong stench of evil there. It's difficult to say whether the presence of vampires is the worst thing that has ever happened to this town. He stops at the Azul Bar managed by the young and beautiful Anna, who surely will need his protection later. On Nick's shoulder is often perched his wide-eyed, troublemaking black cat Bobo.

See page 23 for the extreme close-up on drug lord Gino Carlos's red snakeskin boot, a scary-looking snakehead with forked tongue crowns the footwear design. My favorite panel is the full-page close shot of the handsome Nicholas Bane in profile (page 39). Another unforgettable panel is the chapter 2 lead page splash (page 45) where a full shot of a victorious Gino Carlos can be seen in reverse, reflected in a pool of fresh blood beneath his boots.

There is an awkward cut from Nick's return to the bar to Gino's villa where a satanic ritual is taking place. But what's even more puzzling is why Gino's lover Simone isn't naked for the ceremony. She has on a black bikini that's out of place for the occasion. I wondered if it was in the original novel by Jozev, or perhaps it was Jerry Cho's artistic choice, or censorship to comply with Hong Kong comic industry standards.

Written: February 25, 2006

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