



Who sucked out the feeling? Skarsgård looks tired at Fashion Week in NYC. Or shall we just call him "vampire weakened"?

From soldier to bloodsucker

HBO star Skarsgård isn't likely to be pigeon-holed in Hollywood

PROFILE. Brad Pitt, twice named sexiest man alive, can't make a Starbucks run without setting off a paparazzi frenzy. So what's a five-time winner to do? Get his own damn coffee and the chance to enjoy it, actually.

"The celebrity culture is very different in America," says actor Alexander Skarsgård, named the most superfine Swede in his homeland five times over.

"There are no paparazzi in Sweden, so I'm not harassed," he says. "It's a socialist country, so you shouldn't think you're special. It's not like L.A., where people drive around in their pimped-out Bentleys. In Sweden you're supposed to drive your Volvo and shop at Ikea."

Skarsgård may have mega-celebrity (or some approximation thereof) back home, but in the States he's becoming known for his serious acting skill. Critics hailed his quiet, intense portrayal of real-life U.S. Marine Sgt. Brad Colbert in HBO's honest and fascinating "Generation Kill." The must-see miniseries is based on the book by Evan Wright, a Rolling Stone correspondent embedded with an elite unit leading the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Skarsgård, who lives mostly in Los Angeles but keeps a place in Stockholm, admits he was "terrified" to step into the role. But it wasn't the controversial material that made the former Swedish Marine apprehensive.

"It's a big part with tons of dialogue," says the 32-year-old, who studied intently with a dialect coach to become "Americanized." "I've seen lots of European guys coming over here, and with accents, you tend to play the evil Nazi or the Russian bad guy making the bomb. That's fun for a while, but I wanted to be able to show I was able to play other parts."

Skarsgård's convincing embodiment of a red-blooded Yankee is unwaveringly stoic in "Generation Kill." So it's a bit surprising to watch the actor morph into the suave, 1,000-year-old Viking vampire Eric Northman in HBO's "True Blood," airing Sundays at 9 p.m. "It's not like he's been asleep for 1,000 years and just now woke up and he's still wearing his Viking helmet," Skarsgård says, laughing (He does throw a line of Swedish into the dialogue in homage to Eric's heritage, though). "True Blood" imagines vampires coexisting with humans since the invention of a synthetic blood substitute. Eric is owner of a vampire bar and sheriff of the Louisiana-area undead.

"I played with the idea of being around for a millennium," Skarsgård says. "Eric has a tremendous amount of confidence. He knows what he wants and he knows how to get it." Kind of like being able to score fame and your own Frappuccino.

'True Blood' airs Sundays at 9 p.m. on HBO

'Generation Kill' re-airs on HBO in November and hits DVD on Dec. 16

Amber Ray