

JOURNEY PLANET: THE FANZINE OF ODDLY WEIRD ESSAYS!

V FOR VENDETTA

JOURNEY PLANET
No:79
Free



EVEY



VALERIE



ROSEMARY





Journey Planet - V for Vendetta - March 2024

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Art Credits

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Front Cover

For this issue, with the kind support of Dez Skinn and David Lloyd, we recreated the classic look of *Warrior*, in which *V for Vendetta* was originally published.
Cover Illustration by David Lloyd
Cover Design by Simon Adams, after *Warrior* #11 (Quality Communications / Dez Skinn)

Back Cover

Evey by David Lloyd (new original art for *Journey Planet*)

Inside Back Cover

Steve Dillon's original drawing for the cover *Warrior* #4, graciously supplied by his family

Team Journey Planet Interviews David Lloyd Co-Creator of *V for Vendetta*



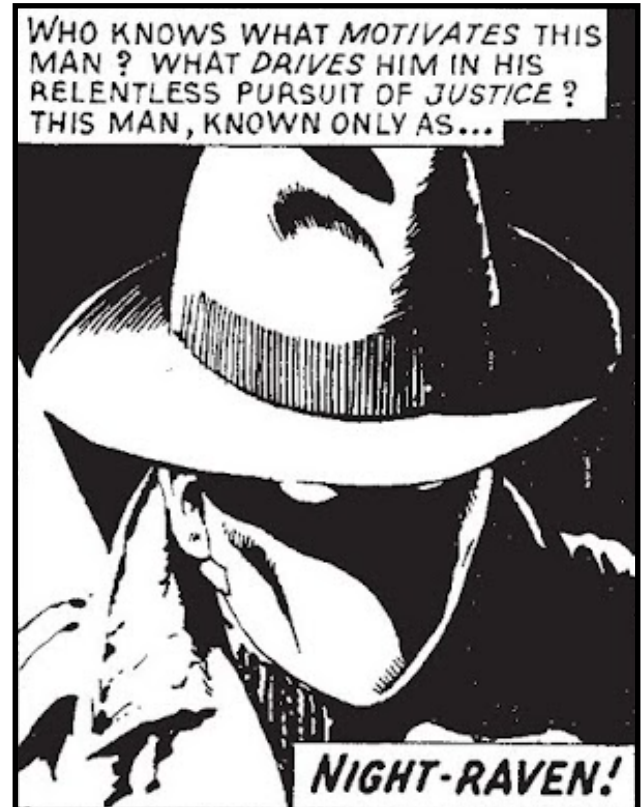
In November of 2023, co-editors James Bacon and Allison Hartman Adams had the opportunity to sit down with David Lloyd at Jack Horner's Pub in London to chat about the process of creating *V for Vendetta*, working with Alan Moore, comic-creation, art and art-making, and his expansive, inclusive vision for the future of comic books. This was a delightful afternoon. There was a lot of laughter and smiles we hope you can imagine as you read. We began our conversation over drinks discussing the upcoming issue of *Journey Planet* (*The American War in Vietnam*) and soon transitioned to the lasting impact of *V for Vendetta*.

JB: *V for Vendetta* is a serious comic isn't it?

DL: Oh, yes. Very serious. It was one of the very few at the time that was very serious, to be honest. If you mean being about serious matters.

JB: How did you become involved in it?

DL: The editor I used to work with at Marvel UK, Dez Skinn, launched a new independent magazine called *Warrior* after he'd left Marvel. At Marvel he'd asked me to help visualise a character for him for a new comic he was establishing called the *Hulk Comic*, which capitalised on the appearance of *The Incredible Hulk* TV show here. His idea was to make it like old traditional British comics, which were weekly newsprint anthologies of varying serials, unlike Marvel comics in America. One of the stories was for a 'masked vigilante character,' which I was asked to visualise. It was a crime fighter in prohibition America called Night-Raven, which was written by Steve Parkhouse. It became one of the most successful stories in *Hulk Comic* and struck a note with the readers, which gave me a following. Eventually, Dez left Marvel, then created *Warrior*, and then asked me to join the crew and create a 'masked vigilante character' similar to Raven, which I thought was a great opportunity. The original plan was that I write and draw the whole thing, but by that time I was working with this really great writer called Alan Moore, who was already on board *Warrior* with an update of an old British character called Marvelman. I asked Alan if he'd like to help with this new thing, and he agreed.



JB: That's a brilliant story, you know, and I'm never going to tire of hearing it, as a fan. Was it just that you'd worked in the same sphere as Alan?

DL: No, no, more than that. I drew Alan's first mainstream story, I think, in *Dr Who Weekly-Black Legacy*. That was the beginning of knowing how really good he was. We got on well, got together at various cons, and other places, and I liked working with him. He's a great brain, and really great writer, as everyone knows now...

AHA: You said you'd worked on the same fanzines before in the early years?

DL: Oh, yeah! Practically every one of my contemporaries did work in fanzines. When you're producing work that's not yet good enough to be published professionally, or you haven't yet got the breaks to do that, you take every opportunity to get published, and that was usually in fanzines. I'd done illustrations for a fanzine called *Shadow* and Alan was

writing articles for that exact same fanzine. The first time I spoke to him and discovered that was when we were working on the *Legacy* strip. I had a habit of calling writers of the strips I was asked to draw if I had any thoughts about them. We figured that out as being our first kind of previous 'meeting.'

All the *Who* strips I was doing before that were with Steve Moore—who was a great pal of Alan's and actually taught him how to write comics. Steve [Moore] was fantastic, a great writer.

JB: In the *Hulk*, I think he wrote the Nick Fury story that Steve Dillon drew. He was at the 2nd British Worldcon, too. And Steve Moore was important as a fanzine guy, he'd done KA-POW.

DL: Steve was a brilliant mind. He wrote a book on the I Ching. He was incredibly intelligent, and a great writer. I drew lots of stories with Steve for *Who* and elsewhere—he was prolific. The thing is, he never got that deserved break into the bigger US market that other writers did. I don't know why, maybe just luck.

JB: Certainly a fan favourite, when you look at what he's done.

AHA: I am curious. As an artist, what did you bring with you from *Night Raven* to *V*? I think about all the other masked vigilantes—Zorro and the Shadow, and so on. What was it that rose to the surface as being particularly important for a different type of story that had not been told before?

DL: I guess to answer that you have to remember that we began *V* as a basic adventure comic concept, albeit with a very clear motivation to attack a specific political tyranny. It got much more serious as time went by. When it started, it had the usual elements of pantomime that were designed to make it colourful and theatrical and attractive to the general comic reader, and what was taken from *Night Raven* and similar styles of things were like those you reference from Zorro, etc. The *V* sign, and *V* dressing up as Mr Punch, the horns, the sequence with the 'Sympathy of the Devil'—that all decreased later on when it became committed to a higher level of serious discourse.

But you have to understand that there was no grand plan at the beginning. Alan and I were working on a basic concept: we have a kind of Nazi Germany situation, dissidents are put into concentration camps, somebody escapes who's been tortured, experimented on, damaged, and the escapee vows vengeance. That was all before the Guy Fawkes elements. What made *V for Vendetta* important to us was that both Alan and myself really feared that the political structure here could change—that the political

power could drift towards a situation that we don't normally expect, especially in an English context. We wanted to write a warning in comics in exactly the same way as George Orwell did in prose. We made *V for Vendetta* about a possible future fascist Britain, instead of just a crime-fighting masked vigilante story that meant nothing.

AHA: Have we heeded that warning? Are we drifting?

DL: We're definitely drifting. In exactly the same way that no one heeded enough what Orwell said. The majority rarely do unless the message becomes so widely distributed it can't be ignored. The powerful and corrupt depend on it being ignored or sidelined. They're all about manipulating the masses. That's why they're burning books again in some parts of the US. Keep the people away from anything that might upset the status quo that keeps you in power. Once you find the most sophisticated tools to manipulate the masses, you can keep on using them, keep on fooling them.

AHA: *V* used mass media to manipulate the masses.

DL: *V* used that in order to try and swing the pendulum back. You have to fight fire with fire.

AHA: It was your idea to do away with the sound effects and the thought balloons. Did you feel that was a risk at the time?

DL: No, not a risk at all. I was never going to be challenged on it. I had the power. See, *Warrior* could not afford to pay us the going industry page rates at the time—he was an independent. The compensation for that shortfall was that we owned what we produced, so, firstly, Alan and myself owned the copyright to *V for Vendetta*. Also, we had complete control over it. That was why *V for Vendetta* ended up the way it was, talking about the things it did. Doing what it did to say them. If you were doing a regular comic, talking about the sort of things that we did, you would never get to the newsstands! But because we were in complete control of it, we did not care about that. We said exactly what we wanted to say that was relevant to the political stance we wanted to take.

AHA: So no one stood in your way when you made those decisions.

DL: No. The style of storytelling, no sound effects, no thought bubbles, no lines around the bubbles, all up to me with no editorial fences. My mission in this world in part—and it has been for a long time—is promoting

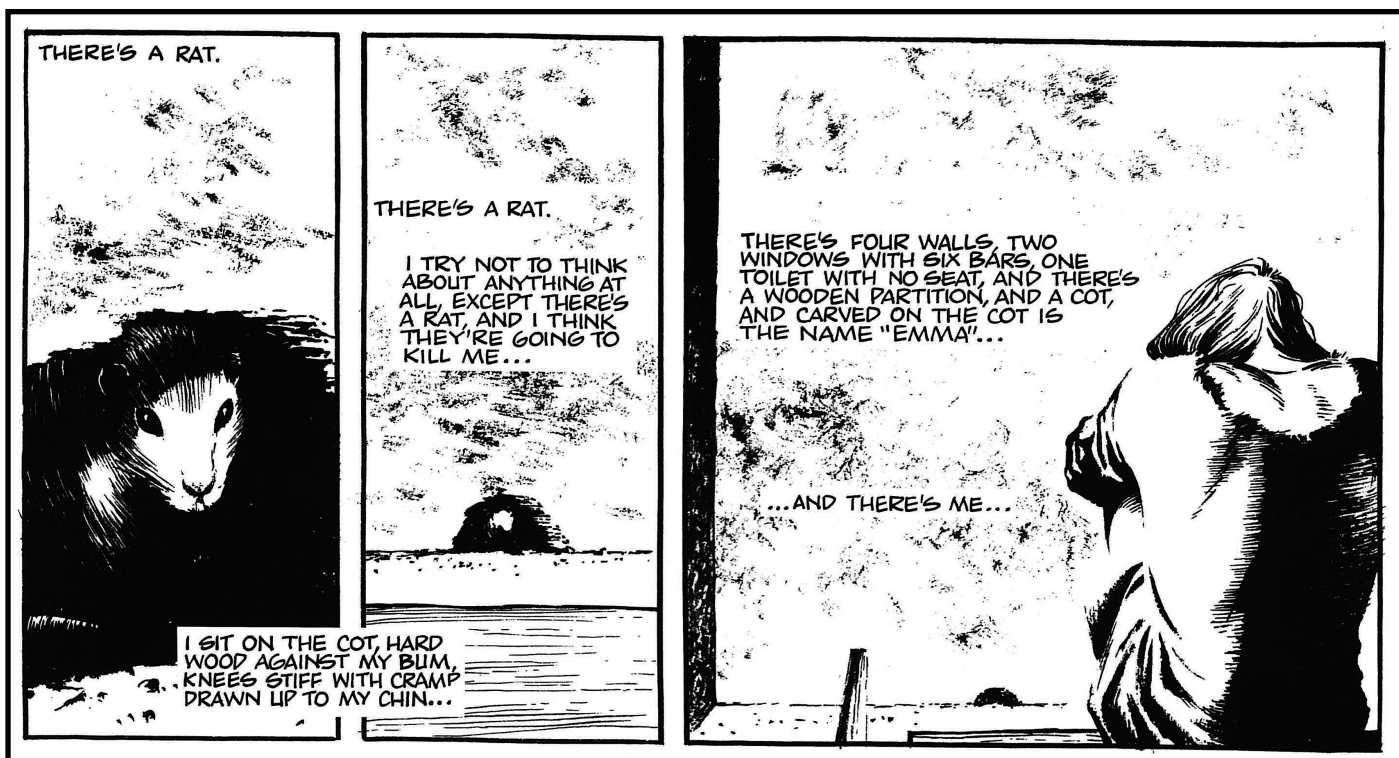
comics to the general public. The general public sees sound effects as stupid and for kids. We all know the sound a gun makes when it goes off; we don't need to be told that. And we're not told that in the newspaper strips, where an adult audience is the main one. Only in comics, where Joe Public still mostly views them as kids stuff. It's all BOOM, CRASH, BANG. We may love this as comic lovers who've grown up on it, or we can grow to love it as an aesthetic thing if it's well designed, but generally speaking, for the ordinary public with no special interest in comics, it's all part of the vulgar, child-like atmosphere of the medium. Once you get rid of sound effects, you're improving your chance of getting new readers outside of the general run. The other thing to notice in V: it's all simple panels. The reason for that is that splashy layouts put off unsympathetic readers. The ordinary Joe experiences visual narrative storytelling in two ways mostly: cinema and TV. What do cinema and TV have in common? They use rectangles as a way of [visually] telling the story. They have for years. One of the ways of getting non-readers of comics to approach them is to take away the splashy layout and give them a more direct narrative. Similarly, newspaper strips—they're panel, by panel, by panel. That's what most of the general public is familiar with who read them as a sideline in their newspaper entertainment sections. Comics readers are a completely different audience—they'll take anything: sound effects, crazy layouts, whatever, because we love comics!

At the time, [when Alan and I were working on V], it was also important for us to get the college crowd, the intelligent crowd that were not particularly interested in comics at the time. At that level, we were kind of doing what Stan Lee did in the Marvel days. He knew there was a crowd out there that was a different one to the usual, that he could write for. He and Kirby did that. This story might be apocryphal,

but when Stan Lee was about to be sacked at Marvel, his wife said to him, 'Look, Stan, if you're going to lose your job anyway, now do exactly what you've wanted to do with comics.' Apparently, he had these thoughts about making them more hip and communicative to a wider bunch, but he hadn't been able to because he was afraid of losing his job. So he does this, and energises Marvel into a completely different universe.

When I mentioned taking out thought bubbles and sound effects to Alan, he got on board with it, but what he did in response to that challenge was progressive. He turned thought balloons into captions—the thoughts of the characters into the streaming narrative. And we removed the lines around the captions and balloons, as I said. And the reason I did that is this: when you put lines around them, they're on a different level, a different plane is created above the object of the art and separate from it. If you take them away, they become integral to the art, to the whole experience of the reading. That's not some great idea of mine—I saw Alex Toth do it, who's one of the great creators. When he did that, the art and the script became integrated. There was no separation. They were not on separate planes. When you take away the separation, you have a completely integrated experience. I introduced that to the project because I wanted to expand the appeal of what we were doing. We were telling a story that wanted, needed, to appeal to more people. Not only on a sociological level, but because I care about making comics more accessible.

Unfortunately, nobody listened and followed me! Comics are still in love with the KABAM, KAPOW because most people who do the comics are as much in love with comics as the readers are. They don't really want to create a new bright world, or convert the sceptical. There's a section of the comics scene



and comics fans who want their little world, and they don't want anybody to make it more open to too many other people because it will actually mean that there will be people in their club that they don't really want to have there.

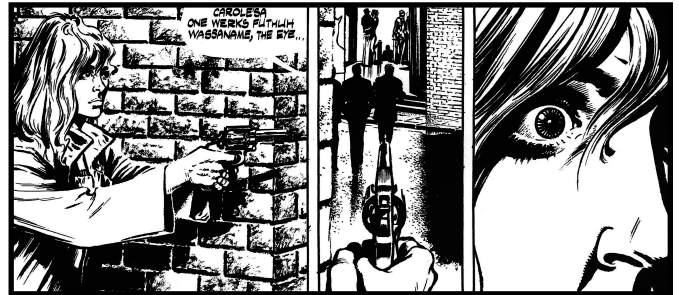
AHA: I feel like there's been a renaissance, though. Recently we've had so many diverse visions and new voices in comics and graphic novels. I know that in the past you've expressed antipathy towards the predominance of superhero comics. Do you feel like we're in a better place in terms of comics storytelling than we were maybe 40 years ago?

DL: In mainstream comics, no not at all. We're doing the same old stuff. There's nothing changing. There's great talent in mainstream comics, but they're still doing the same old thing.

JB: I felt about 10-15 years ago that the floodgate opened. SelfMadeHero, for instance, but comics are more ubiquitous now than ever, not just Marvel, while Marvel has helped. The maturity of *V for Vendetta*—its popularity, is so broad and it's brought that mature readership along with it. *V for Vendetta* is a comic for people who want to find an intelligent story and they want it on their shelves. I think it's the combination of art and words that make comics so special.

DL: Well, you can't have good art and a bad script. You can't have a good script and bad art. A movie is the same thing. With comics you can produce something similar to a movie on paper. Whatever you do with the layout on any particular page, the continuity of visual language has to work in the same way it does in cinema unless otherwise desired for the narrative. Now, lots of people are doing Kickstarters [to create comics], which is great. But the [product of those] Kickstarters themselves are sometimes fundamentally flawed because they are being produced by people who have not gone through a system of experienced critical judgement. They don't have anybody outside themselves saying to them 'Listen, this isn't working and it's not good.' The great thing about the industry, the structure of a cultural basis of comics storytelling, is that it's run, underpinned, by people who mostly know what they're doing—just like in film. Film schools are run by people who know film language. They teach people film language, how a story is told. If you go back to the older days of telling comics, the professionals knew how to tell a story. If anyone was working in the studio who didn't know how, they would actually be taught. Lots of independent projects and Kickstarters come from those who've had no training at all. If they have, they might have learned it from 'How to learn

comics in 10 days' internet programs. There isn't a global cultural underpinning of the teaching and learning of comics, like there is in film. That's why you have lots of great independent filmmakers coming out of film school. They've been taught a language that can be used globally. In comics, there's no such universality—it varies across the planet and is different according to geography.



JB: You are intrinsically a mentor and teacher, I think. Will Simpson tells a wonderful story where he was sending his drawings out to Marvel UK. There was something lacking and he was told 'We're going to sort this out and help you.' Will Simpson describes you ringing him and speaking to him at length. When he tells this story, it's clearly very important to him, you really made an impact. I just read Joe Kubert's biography in which he talks about being a teenager sitting at desks being paid to practice and be mentored. Do you think that you'd already gotten to a strong point when you began *V*?

DL: Oh, I'd practised a lot—pages and pages and pages of stuff before all the stuff I'd done as a professional. So, yes, I knew everything I needed by then, and—I have to say this unabashedly—I was a natural at comics storytelling. But that story about Will—you're right—I did help Will. I always knew how to tell a story in comics. It may be because I'm a TV kid and I watched lots of TV and movies. Maybe I ingested the way of telling a story. In drawing terms, though, I had to work really hard to become a good enough artist. Before I started doing comics professionally, my problem was that I wasn't as good an artist as I needed to be. I could tell a story, no problem, but in terms of my art, I knew I had to work hard on that. I started in an advertising studio, doing advertising art. When I left it on a promise of doing some newspaper strips, it all fell through. So for about four and a half years, I ended up doing part-time jobs, and during that time, working hard to improve my art—not my storytelling skills, but my drawing skills—so that I could eventually get published as a professional on a regular basis. That is *hard*.

When I see work from budding artists, I see many of the same problems come up. I used to teach in a school in the middle of London with Steve Marchant who's now with the Cartoon Museum. I saw either great artists who couldn't tell a story, or they could tell a story but were not good as artists. But they couldn't stop themselves from keeping on drawing comics, because they loved doing it so much. I'd have to say, 'Look, I know you want to tell a story, I know you want to create your own characters and have these worlds that you're creating, but that's no good right now. If you actually want to do this as a job, you have to improve your drawing skills fundamentally first. That's it. If you do that, then you're on the way there.' If someone was a really great artist, but their storytelling was no good, you'd have to say, 'Ok, this doesn't work, the continuity doesn't work...' I'd have to tell them to study cinema. That's always the toughest job, though. There are books on cinema technique, but it's something you also have to ingest. At the time I was starting to talk to students about this, some weren't watching enough TV and movies—they were playing computer games. When you're playing computer games, you've just got characters running and jumping around—well, that's what they were mostly doing then when I was teaching—and it had nothing to do with telling a story.

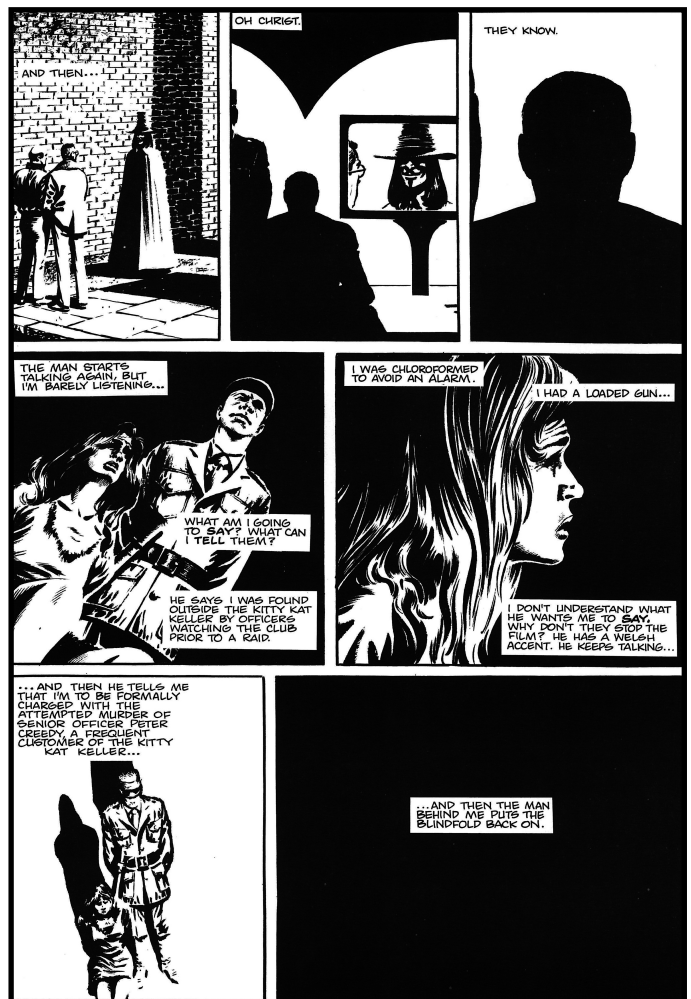
AHA: A lot of modern video games do have that storytelling element, where you feel like you're playing a character in a movie. But this is only in the last 20 or so years. I remember in an interview—maybe for the Cartoon Museum—you mentioned how writers write the script. But artists do the greater amount of work of doing the lighting, the costuming, the layout, the blocking. I had never thought of it that way. Is *that* the knowledge that people are missing? At what point did you realise that that's what needed to happen?

DL: I think that came to me the minute I began to understand what comics needed and were about.

AHA: So it's instinct for you.

DL: Well, it's innate in some sense. The very first serious comic strip I did as a teenager was an adaptation of an Arthur C. Clarke story and was inspired by the style of Steve Ditko, whose work I'd begun seeing in *Amazing Adult Fantasy*. Ditko produced a very atmospheric style of work. I could understand the cinema of it. I just knew how that worked. It's something that you either understand about cinema and lighting, or you don't. I've always said to people who want to do comics that it's basically cinema, and you have to understand what

cinema does in order to understand how to use that in comics. Whether you put things in a simple panel, like we did in *V*, or you've got it up in crazy layouts, you still have to recognize the power and effect of an image in storytelling—an upshot, a downshot, a bird's eye view.



I always suggest to people that they study cinema technique. You can't just study comics technique. It's not going to tell you the story. And there's a limit of study you can do in studying mainstream comics. You have to try and make your characters convincingly *real*. So much in comics is a bunch of characters who stand around like this [mimics superhero stance], in costumes. It has nothing to do with humanity. And they're supposed to tell stories that have some kind of humanity? The industry doesn't want humanity. It wants franchises. I found it funny that they made films about Wolverine/Logan that examined him as a serious character. I don't understand how anybody can believe any of that. That is not a criticism! That is a description of me being alienated from the concept that accepts that a character like that is a believably real character. If people believe in that, that's fine. It's all good entertainment that's fun, and that's fine. But if you aspire to a higher level of character creation, you must

make characters human in a real sense in everything they say and do and are.

AHA: I don't know if they *believe*, per se. It's escapism, and that is what people want. They don't want something as morally complex as V. They go to movies to escape.

DL: But that's a problem. People want to go to the movies to escape too much. It's great to have escape, but without the understanding of why you're escaping? I'd argue that V is just as much of an escapist entertainment as any other fantasy concept might be, but our aim is to tell you something about what you're escaping from.

JB: I remember reading V as a teenager and it just reinforced so much of my thinking. Possibly it's my Irish rebellious nature, but you can't be oppressed, freedom is important. There are a lot of things in V that didn't resonate with me as a teenager who hated school, yet I still recognized them as important, whether it be the rose, the importance of freedom, of music, of what V was saying. It showed me something that was *right*. Maybe not all of it was for me, but the bigger picture was. I think V helps people think. Is that not what every artist wants?

DL: Yes, exactly. That's the reason why V is anti-fascist and for freedom of thought and expression. It had that message from the very beginning, and it became a more serious one as time went on. But a lot of people don't know it was a progression that was urged by an accident. Valerie Page's appearance was an accident. After we revealed the existence of Surridge's diary, Alan needed to write a lot of exposition in Finch's meeting with the Leader, and he had no firm thoughts on what art might accompany some of that. So it was in my hands. I thought about it, and figured I'd set it in the Shadow Gallery, and figured it would be a great idea if there was a room in the Shadow Gallery where V might run old movies—or maybe home movies or slideshows of lost relatives, or something similar. One of the things I was concerned about at the time was that V was not seen as having any emotional depth at all. We'd seen him as a murderer with a philosophy, but we didn't know anything of a backstory. I wanted to show him looking at some images in this private spot that might suggest one. At the time, I knew an actress who'd sent me some stage shots. I asked her if she'd mind if I used them as that anonymous character from V's history, and she was fine with that. I wanted to show that there was someone who meant something to V. You don't know why, you don't know who it is on that screen. We just know he's watching pictures of a lost love or maybe a lost sister, or whatever. We don't

know. So, I did that. And Alan bounced off that accident amazingly and created Valerie Page which became a central part of the whole story. Now, that was an accident that ratcheted up the whole seriousness of the story's tone. You can put that down to the cultural and social circumstances of the time, too, of course. But that moment illustrates one of the great values of *V for Vendetta*: that it grew organically and could. Alan could bounce off accidents like that, and create this character from nothing, because when we were first creating the comic, we were doing it in 6- to 8-page episodes per month. Slowly, with time to think. There was no great story arc we had to follow. We weren't doing it like American comic books. That is the best of V—and we had complete control. And what Alan did with the completion of it all pulled it all together perfectly.

AHA: You talk about inserting Valerie Page, and how that's when V became 'more serious.' It occurs to me that it's also the insertion of the appreciation of art and beauty. I noticed that when I first read V. If not for V's music and his art and his movies and all that he collects, it seems to me that the character would be deeply unpleasant. It's the addition of his art and his collection that makes him a sympathetic character, among other things. I wanted to know: how much of it was your choice of what art, music, etc. to put in the Shadow Gallery? Or was it Alan and you agreeing on what to put in?

DL: It's interesting that you raise that, because sometimes when you read stuff about V, you see commentary saying that Alan 'chose' this or that. No, no. That was mainly just me grabbing stuff that was around.

AHA: That's what I wanted to know! That was all David!

DL: Well, a great deal of it was, which is only important to say because most of it wasn't chosen for the specific purpose of the narrative. I had *The Observer's Book of Painting and Graphic Art*, which had lots of the pictures I used for the Shadow Gallery. V had rescued great works of art in exactly the same way that a great philanthropist might rescue great works of art from the Nazis. The books you see on the shelves at the beginning are some of those it was felt he would grab as not only a culture vulture, but also as something that would interest him in terms of politics. He would grab Marx, he would grab *Dr. No*. He would grab all the intellectual stuff and also the pop stuff. The comic is a symbolic picture of what Nazi Germany had done. Would they have grabbed *Dr. No*? Probably not, but they would have grabbed

everything else to burn up that contested their image of correctness.



JB: I'm sure they would have seen *Dr. No* as degenerate. They saw so much as degenerate. Can you imagine: *What should be art?* That's appalling, isn't it?

DL: And the posters too. A lot of that is just fun stuff. V loved the Marx Brothers, so he'd grabbed a Marx Brothers poster. He loved James Cagney. It was just what I had at my disposal that he would have loved and wanted to curate. The key thing about Nazism and authoritarianism—the martial concepts—is that you're not allowed to be non-serious in your attitude to the authority. This is what brings it back to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. You're not allowed to be non-serious to the Party and you're not allowed to be frivolous. The whole point of authoritarianism is to keep you where you are without freedom to express yourself, without the freedom to laugh unless it's at permitted jokes.

JB: I would see that also in religion; objectively, it's indoctrination.

DL: All these authoritarians—religious or whatever—they always say 'No, you have to do *this*.' It's like Republicans in America. I find it amazing that Trump is still getting votes. Even though, on a state basis, many Republicans were being defeated left, right, and centre, who were lauding Trump's messages. But Trump will side-step that. Trump is a monster that somehow has seduced a whole mass of Republican voters. He has the party itself, and if he gets back in power...that's the scariest thing you could imagine.

When that election happens, all the thugs will be getting out on election day, and they will be outside the polling places with their shotguns, intimidating the voters, suppressing as hard as they can the Democratic vote. That's all going to happen. This year.

JB: Did you watch the march on the Capitol?

DL: Of course. It was an absolute disgrace! How can people—ordinary citizens—accept that? They accept it because they believe that the system of the US government is corrupt because Donald Trump told them it was. Fox News and Donald Trump have told them that the system is actually corrupted and flawed, so it's ok to go and attack the Capitol. It's amazing.

AHA: Did you know there were people there in Guy Fawkes masks?

DL: I did see one.

AHA: I saw that too, and wondered, have they read it?

DL: To be fair to them, that mask has been used since the beginning of its use as representing resistance to any tyranny. If protestors see there's tyranny in what others might see as the democratic process, they still have the freedom to express that opposite viewpoint with a mask that symbolises protest.

AHA: The language of the followers of the American Right is all about tyranny: 'We're being oppressed.' It's interesting to me that they *haven't* adopted that image of Guy Fawkes. I think perhaps because it has the reputation of being generally anti-fascist, left-leaning.

DL: I don't think they'd want to adopt it wholesale anyway because it represents Anonymity, too. It's a pro-government and anti-government tool at the same time. That mask has been used for very different purposes. But that's the value of it, too. I don't object to them using it because they see it as a symbol of resistance to their own view of tyranny. If they would stop to think about it, they'd know it's not the same thing. But we can't object to the mask being neutral as a symbol—it's a strength not a weakness ultimately.

AHA: So the Guy Fawkes mask was your idea, right?

DL: Here's the story. We began V with a basic structure: a dissident, captured, put into a concentration camp, tortured, damaged, escaped, and vowing vengeance on those who put him there.

But that's all we had. He could have been an ordinary guy. At the beginning, I thought that wasn't a bad idea for him to be an ordinary guy. But the big problem was an ordinary guy was not really enough for the fullness of what was wanted. He had to have some kind of deeper motivation—not just the vengeance, which is too simplistic. We had to add something. I presented some costume ideas, the possibility of one that was symbolic in some way, but none of it really hit the chord we wanted. There was an idea that maybe he was part of the police force, so he's working from within. But that didn't quite fit. We both were smart enough to know that for something to be a hit, it should hit with some kind of impact.

For some reason, and I have absolutely no idea why, [the Guy Fawkes image] came up in my head. It was the middle of summer, nowhere near November the 5th. It just came to me that it would be a great idea if our new revolutionary, our new fighter for justice, was a kind of resurrection of an old fighter for justice. When I thought about [Guy Fawkes' past], I thought, 'This is perfect!' Guy Fawkes failed as a revolutionary. He failed to blow up the Houses of Parliament. Wouldn't it be a great idea if we make him a *successful* revolutionary? And he actually *does* blow up the Houses of Parliament? In this story, it was a fascist Britain, where the Houses of Parliament did not represent democracy, but a representation of tyranny. But the important element that made this possible was that our character was *crazy*. If he had not been, it would have been just stupid. But being insane made him realistic. That's the difference between reality and fantasy. If you have a character you put in the real world, have him dress up to fight crime, that's not realistic. But if you have a character who dresses up to fight crime because they're crazy, *that's* realistic. That is the difference for me between the real superhero concept and the fake superhero concept. If V wasn't crazy, we could not have gotten away with him adopting the persona and mission of a dead revolutionary. Let's face it: he's a homicidal maniac right from the beginning. There's no question about that. The superhero concept—along with the pantomime stuff, the incarnation of Mr Punch, and so on—was ditched unconsciously later for the greater mission.

JB: You've said before—there was a potential intention not to give V a gender. Am I imagining that? Was V always going to be male?

DL: We had no deliberate intention to initiate a question about that at the beginning—we were just creating a male character. Later on, it became a subject of interest with readers, like other questions about his secret identity. And we deflated no speculation about it because it was all good attention

for the series.

JB: Because for me, there were a couple of points where I was wondering if V was female.

DL: Yes, but it didn't affect our thoughts. I think we just happily went along with the concept that V was getting attention from everybody who just loved V. I think we recognized that he exuded a non-specific sexual aspect.

JB: When he's revealed, he's described as 'beautiful.' Not a description you'd generally give a man.

DL: Well, that I don't know about, but there was a visual element to that gender identity question, too, I think, because of the hair. The fashion of the time in 1605 was long hair so that was part of V's appearance as a Guy Fawkes resurrection. But there were very few adventure heroes with such locks in the 80s. I don't know...Something else about the fashion at the time, while we're talking about it: Alan's initial thought re the Gordon character was to have a big hulking guy—somebody [Evey] could be protected by, and for her to take pity on, I imagined was part of the intention at the time. A guy like Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*, but smarter. But I saw that as a kind of Beauty and The Beast idea, which, in a sense, we had already in the V and Evey relationship. I thought him better to be a regular, ordinary guy, and I gave him a moustache for a specific reason—I wanted it to be in direct opposition to the fashion at the time that a moustache telegraphed your sexuality. The point was that I didn't want Gordon to be seen, at that particular moment in time, as this, that, or the other. He's ordinary and, importantly, too, I didn't want to give him the regular facial features that so many so-called ordinary characters in comics have, as if they were out of a cookie cutter.

So many comic characters have perfect features, because that's what comics want. The comics industry depends on trying to get every single person out there to identify with their characters through a common blandness of appearance, which is one step short of having their faces almost blank. But that's not reality. The way to make people really connect with a character is not to identify them through commonality but to use language that talks to them and convinces them of the character's humanity. The mainstream comics industry is what impacts most of society's attitude towards comics, and because it hasn't changed in the way it presents its characters, the general public attitude toward comics hasn't changed either.

AHA: Interestingly, Avengers is not generally taught

in classrooms, but *V for Vendetta* is. I think this speaks to what you're talking about: it's about more than perfectionism and escapism and going for the ideal and making it all very pretty and polished rather than being complex and difficult.

DL: Yeah, so long as it's not banned in Florida!

AHA: And Texas! A Texas state rep sent a list to the Texas schools of 850 books that he objected to—something about having children feel bad about who they are. Of 850, I highlighted the ones that are already in my classroom, and then I noticed that they're all LGBTQ+ and Black Lives Matter stories, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *V for Vendetta*. Of those 850, the ones that were actually banned, were 11, and *V* is on there.

DL: [Laughing] Oh, that's great!

AHA: You're in good company. There's Shirley Jackson, Laurie Halse Anderson, Brian K. Vaughan on this list. It's curious—850, and these are the ones they actually banned. I can see some of them, but *V*, really? What is it that it's making them feel that is so alarming?

DL: They don't want anything other than whitebread America. They don't want anything that'll make them feel different. You've got serious trouble over there. Every state is being affected by this stuff.

AHA: In education, it's especially troubling what Texas does. They write all the textbooks that the rest of the country buys. [They set the narrative because the school system is so vast that the textbook companies cater to them.] I live in Maine, where there's a tendency towards more common sense, and we're lucky that the school supports us diverging from what Texas puts in the textbooks. But people still buy the narrative. They hear what Fox News says and they just absorb it. It's incredibly troubling. Going back to *V*, on my most recent re-read of the comic, Valerie Page's perseverance—despite her circumstances—struck me. What do you make of how the film handles her character?

DL: After the Valerie Page sequence, you can see how the comic becomes centralised through her experience. She's representative of all dissidents, all non-conventional viewpoints that fight the government. She's still the core in the movie. The thing about the movie is that it has a very optimistic ending. We'd all love the fairytale ending, but we know it can't happen. A lot of people talk to me about the film's ending. [The film identified what we all want]. We all

want optimism in our lives. We all would like to think that the whole of society can come together for that one act of rejection of authoritarianism—like a Tiananmen Square that succeeds. But we know that's not real. That is what people want to believe is possible. But if you look at reality, nothing is going to save you. The large companies and nations have too much money they don't want to risk, they'll never invest in renewables and carbon capture fast enough to make a real difference to climate change. We're all done for. When somebody does act, it'll be too late. We know that. Vested interests will always be in control. There is nothing to make us feel good. So what the film [makers] did was give the audience a good-news ending.

AHA: Which is nice to see, because how the comic ends feels kind of obscure.

DL: It's depressing on the surface. The only optimism comes from the faith you feel people might have to be able to pick themselves up and do better. And maybe they will...

JB: Going back to Gordon's moustache—the freedom of sexuality is important to you. That comes across in the story. At the time, that was quite a strong and important message. Was that something you were seeing elsewhere?

DL: You could say that whole section of *V* was about Section 28¹. I'd guess that was informing what Alan was writing at the time. For me, I just didn't want society to retreat into its little boxes. You have to be part of the whole of society—don't retreat into your little boxes.

JB: A broader community?

DL: Yeah, that's what should happen. I think we live in a more liberal society now. There are very few places where you can't have a mix of sexual identity in England, which is great. I don't know what it's like in Northern Ireland.



JB: Northern Ireland didn't have any influence on *V*, did it?

DL: No. I think there's only one reference in *V* to what's happening beyond England—the Scottish National Terrorist.

AHA: Reading *V* through the LGBTQ+ lens brings us back to why it's so often challenged, and in some cases banned. I was rereading *V*, and Adam Susan says, there's no question that Fate—the computer—can't answer. Given this, I was wondering what your take on AI and ChatGPT is.

DL: Oh, god, that's tough...I don't know what to say about that. I think our vulnerability to computer access has been around for a long time. So what we have to suffer now is probably an enhanced version of that. What it means to us individually is that we can explore what AI offers us and use it—as long as we don't use it to infringe on anybody else's rights—and make the most of protecting what we create from it. Where it takes us is up to us to create. I regret that it's appeared to produce art from other people's art, which means that it's putting artists out of work. I don't know how you can put a copyright on something you've stolen from someone else. We have yet to determine what the rules and regulations are going to be, or how we're going to enforce those rules.

AHA: I ask because, while it can be a tool, I also see it as outsourcing creativity, which means you're also outsourcing empathy. I find that worrisome. Maybe because I see my students using it to get their school work done, so I worry about them more than I worry about us. I think you're right—we can't put barriers on it, because ultimately the cat's out of the bag. I don't know if we'll ever get answers.

DL: Well, I think the only way to guard against it is by people rejecting it because it's crap. I saw on BBC One Breakfast some elderly veteran from WWII, who'd been at GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters) in the middle of World War II, working to intercept and decrypt messages from Germans—Alan Turing was there as well. This woman had been presented with a poem about her work as a cryptologist that had been produced by ChatGPT.

This poem went something like, 'You were in this particular time, and you worked so well, and you calculated the things you needed...' At one point, the writing was so shit, that you knew that this woman, who was so accomplished, must have been thinking 'Well, that's a piece of shit!' But she was polite. What struck me about that whole thing was that it showed me how absolutely hopeless Chat GPT is. It couldn't

even produce a poem that scans. Of course, this veteran was too nice to say anything. As long as ChatGPT does crap like that, we'll know it's crap. But at a certain point, they [AI] will know it's crap too. From the very first time we ever used computers, we knew that when you ask them something for the first time, they don't do it exactly right. When you ask them to do it the second time, they do it a bit better. When you ask them to do it the third time, they do it perfectly. It's because they learn. And this is before AI.

JB: Was the use of the Beethoven music in *V* related to the World War II resistance movement?

DL: No I think that just came out of [Roman numeral] V. The thing is, once we had V as 5, we made every chapter begin with V in some way. I think [Beethoven] came about like that. V on the door was V / 5. I think the V stuff is Alan running off of that². As I said before, *V* grew organically, and bright ideas came up as it did. This was the value of doing things at a slow pace when you had time to think and experiment.

JB: You'll appreciate that fans like myself will hear or see something, and we'll *imagine* connections.

DL: I know! That can be a problem, people imagining connections. I'm happy for them to imagine connections but not actually say, 'Oh yes, here Alan has discovered this...or Alan must have chosen *The Three Graces*...'

AHA: That's why I ask. The fancy academic word for this is 'intertextuality.'

DL: But the academic world sometimes seems to have no understanding of a comic's collaborative work. They are thinking only of prose.

AHA: They're only thinking of the writer?

DL: They're only thinking of the writer.

JB: I don't disagree with you. I love how fans look for patterns and think 'This is *why*.' And you'll turn around and say that it's all accidental—I love that because that was your process. People want to have a simple flowchart of your process, but it's not that simple, is it?

AHA: People want to know everything about the thing they love. They can't just end at loving it—they want to pick apart all the pieces.

JB: I've always loved that statement, "Thought without

imagination is pointless.”

DL: Yeah, the problem with dissecting things is that it can lead to false conclusions. The story tells itself. If you dig into it and imagine something else, that’s not the story. The only thing you need to know is what the story tells you.

JB: V does that eloquently.

DL: That’s why I don’t want anyone to screw around with it by saying, ‘Oh yeah, this is what Alan meant here.’

AHA: The truth is that if you start a story with the mentality that this is going to *mean something*, you’re going to come up with a story that’s dreadful and forced. The accidental elements that you’ve talked about lends realism and believability to the story. Maybe they were rattling around in your brain when you and Alan were creating it, but I think it would be forced if you *tried* to do it.

DL: The important thing about any story is that, when it finishes, *it tells the full story*. It’s like the trouble with movie sequels—What can we find out more about blah blah blah? Why can’t we know more about the backstory? What happens to Winston Smith after the end of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*? Fucking nothing! He’s finished, effectively he’s killed, he’s dead! He’s dead along with the girl, they’re all dead...He’s not thinking, ‘Maybe I can get an army together.’ No, it’s finished! Fucking done. That’s the story. Forget it.

JB: Have people suggested to you that there should be a sequel to V?

DL: DC seemed to be exploring the possibility of it once.

AHA: I heard rumblings of a reboot of the movie.

DL: A writer friend of mine called me once—though I’ve no idea if it was a call directly endorsed by DC—and said, ‘How would you feel about the possibility of a sequel to V as a comic?’ I said that I wouldn’t want to be involved with it, was certain Alan wouldn’t want to be involved with it, but thanks for calling. DC has the right to do it, and the film company has a right to do one as well, but they would be very stupid to do so.

JB: They could just redo the movie. That’s not uncommon. We’ve seen *Dune* be redone. I should explain that I enjoyed V for *Vendetta* the film, as I

enjoyed V for *Vendetta* the comic. I can separate these things as entities. Because if I turn around as a comic book fan, I’d be like, ‘No, you’re doing this wrong.’ And I can’t approach it like that.

DL: I understand that and am on the same level. Whenever anyone talks to me about V the movie, I always describe it as ‘another version.’ But that’s only because I’m in the position of being able to say that. I do value that viewpoint. I read *Dune* years and years ago and found it quite amazing. I’ve read so many science fiction novels (Asimov’s *Foundation*) that I keep on a separate platform in my brain, so that when anyone makes something out of any, I think, ‘Well, whatever...’

JB: Well, ‘Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep’ is not *Blade Runner*. Both are very good—brilliant. *Blade Runner* is a great film.

DL: I think so, too.

JB: But the relation to the book is very thin. I think in appreciating art it’s good to separate. With comics especially, comic book fans want to impose the comic upon a film or TV series. What’s important is to say, ‘Let people enjoy this.’ I like how you say that V (the movie) is a ‘different version.’

AHA: If there were a new version of the V film, is there anything you’d like to see? Something that should be talked about today or something that was true of V that you’d like to see represented on the screen?

DL: I just don’t think there should be a new version. I don’t think there’s any value to it. But, if someone said to me ‘I’m going to make a new version of V and you can have complete control,’ I’d say yes.

But, I have to say that the Wachowskis were the best people at the time to do a version of V. They’d written the first good screenplay of V, and despite the success of *The Matrix*—which gave them carte blanche to do anything else, I’d guess—they still wanted to do it because they believed in it. It was something that was meaningful to them. Within the context of their Hollywood experience, and what they knew about the demographic of the wider audience of cinema-goers they had to satisfy, they did a fantastic job. It’s not the ideal job. It’s not what I would have done. But it was a great job. And that’s why I was happy to support it all along the line. Alan had a whole different view. But the point is this: I knew where they were coming from, I knew their sincerity, and I supported that.

JB: When I hear you describe this, let me see if I've got it right. A new movie would be literally scene for scene, word for word of the comic?

DL: We could do that. It's all told in cinema-style anyway. I could make that in a moment.

JB: I don't know if you've talked about it before, but was the change between *Warrior* and *DC* difficult? Did it hinder the work at all?

DL: No. Dick Giordano offered me to continue *V* in black and white. I said no. I knew that the popularity of black and white at the time in US comics was a flash in the pan. This is 1986, there were big black & white successes in the American industry, for example, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. I wanted *V* to be in colour because color reaches more people. This wasn't DC's decision. A lot of people think that it was. No. I decided it was going to be in colour. I decided I was going to control the colour, and that is why *V for Vendetta* is the global phenomenon it is now. Fans who are aware of its b/w incarnation often say how they loved the way *V* originally was. I completely understand that. But at the end of the day, it would not have reached the people it did in b/w.

AHA: You could make the argument that *V*'s popularity is partially responsible for legitimising the dark, gritty graphic novel revolution at the time.

DL: Don't know that's true. *V* had been around for a long time and got out to thousands of people ahead of that occurring. I'd credit Frank's *Batman* treatment more with that. The power of *V* was more fully released when the movie happened, people went to buy the book after seeing it. Like the movie of *Gone With the Wind*, the *V* movie stimulated great sales for the book. And that keeps happening with *V*.

JB: One of the things I appreciate is how you've always been fair and honest to the movie.

DL: Well, I sincerely think the movie is a great piece of work. I don't think it's crucial that the movie has everything the book has within it to be the effective promoter of its core message. As we said earlier, the movie is an *optimistic* version. Anybody who dons the mask or adopts the symbolism of it can defeat a system of oppression. That's the backbone to the book and the movie in different ways of depiction: you have to keep working, as you must in every revolution, to achieve the goal. You have to keep on working, keep on working, keep on working.

JB: Right now it does feel strange here in the UK. It's strange when you see a Home Secretary (Suella Braverman) saying the stuff that she is saying. Homelessness is a 'lifestyle.'

DL: Yes, a 'lifestyle.'

AHA: She said that?

DL: Yeah, buy a cheap tent, end up on a cold beach, and that's your 'lifestyle.' She's splitting people up in the worst possible way. Most everyone who's homeless wants companions, and are looking for people who can help them. Most want a community not an isolated lifestyle. In Brighton, where I live, every Saturday, a whole bunch of people who've ended up homeless wait at a charity that gives out food. Many know each other from similar experience, I imagine, and have that community of some kind. If you don't have a community of some kind when you're homeless, what security of any kind have you got?

AHA: I was wondering if you'd like to talk about your work on *Kickback*. I read someplace that one of the things you said about it was how it examines corruptibility in us all. I feel like that's also the case with *V*. Do you see any overlap with that and other things you've done?

DL: Yes corruption is the common theme between *V* and *Kickback*. In *V* it's about how ordinary people can become corrupted. You give them exactly enough of what they want to keep them exactly content enough and they won't rock the boat-until someone comes along to remind them of their complacency in thrall to tyranny. *Kickback* is about a corrupt policeman in a corrupt police force being paid to just toe the line under the tyranny of criminals who run the city. Complacent acceptance of being in a situation that you're sure is too powerful to change and will be dangerous to change if you try to.

In *Kickback*, this policeman does not want to live in that situation any more. He wants to try to change things. He tries; he acts. And whether he's successful or not, he will try his best. From a metaphorical point of view, it's all about whether we take a risk or whether we don't. To actually make an effort to change things, take a risk for a good purpose, face the ire of others in your peer group, maybe get arrested-or do we not? When I wrote *Kickback*, it was something I was concerned about. Am always concerned about in a general sense, of course.

AHA: Have you ever read 'Civil Disobedience' by Henry David Thoreau?

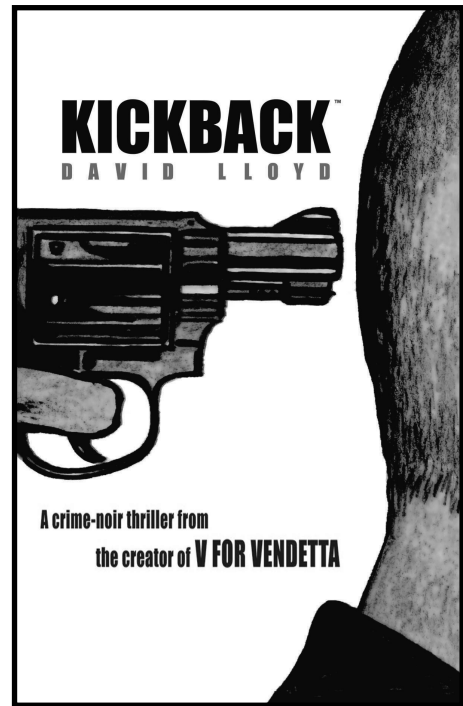
DL: No, I haven't.

AHA: He was a transcendentalist, a contemporary of Emerson, and he writes about the value of disobeying the government. Essentially, he argues that voting isn't enough because a citizen shouldn't outsource their moral choices to elected representatives. If all you do is vote, you're outsourcing your philosophy, your rebellion, and there's a temptation to say, 'Well, what are you going to do about injustice? I voted.' You have to actually do something about it. It was written in the 1840s, so America was relatively young. I don't agree with everything Thoreau is saying—it frightens me, some of it. I almost brought a copy for you, actually! A lot of what you talked about in your previous interviews lines up with Thoreau's philosophy.

DL: I think it's a very difficult situation for the individual to address. You have the ability to make a choice, to express yourself. But you have to express yourself within the arena [in which you find yourself], and that's very difficult to do. If you're referring to an individual person—someone like Donald Trump—you say, 'Well he's corrupt.' But his supporter will say 'Well, he was president of the United States. He did this, that, and the other. He saved us from Covid!' Well, you may think you're talking to someone who's part of some brainwashed cult, or the victim of disinformation, but he still represents an opposition that has to be confronted! How would you address that?

JB: We have no idea how to address that issue.

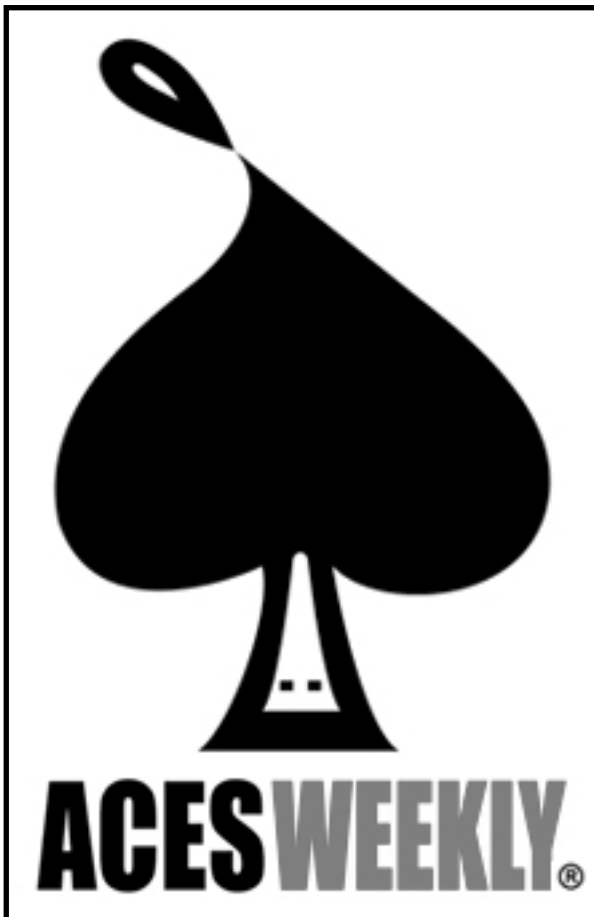
DL: We're lucky in Britain to have the BBC—a publicly-funded network—which most of us here rely on as a reliable source of unbiased information, whatever its detractors might have said about it in recent times. And we've had no special interest news channels until recently. Way back in the 60s we only had two channels of TV, which grew to three in the 80's and then expanded to a greater number as wider access was granted. We had ITV, the BBC, and Channel4 only for a long time, in the same way that the US had those 3 of CBS, ABC, and NBC. And then, in a different, future, world, Fox News appears and begins the solid support base of the Republican party—the party that represents the interests of Fox's magnate-owner, Rupert Murdoch—and, by default, and later, without any publicly-seen shame, begins supporting all the obvious crimes of the party's honorary god, Donald Trump. Fox has been spreading lies for Donald Trump for years. Here in England, we don't



yet have any of that, though we've come close to getting the same effect of a nationally-broadcast TV propaganda machine from a clutch of biased press outlets. We have three major political parties, but not one of them has ever managed to try to influence the public discourse in such a way as to be poisonous to the democratic system it's part of, which the Republicans seem to be doing. We have problems with a largely right-wing press—again mostly owned by Rupert Murdoch—and we are no way complacent about that, but it's much less of a problem to the people here than the grotesque disinformation machine that Fox news operates in the US, covering millions of voters across one of the most powerful nations on Earth. If we ever changed our rules of broadcast to allow anything resembling that in our national UK TV broadcasting system, we'd be finished as the tolerant nation of people we're often praised as being despite our varying imperfections. Poison is very easy to drip, drip, in the ear and can change the future of any nation's character and history.

JB: As an overall attempt to give decent news, the BBC works very hard. So much so that many in the conservative government hates them or wants to destroy them. It shows you how good a job they're doing.

DL: Yes, and they've learnt a lesson from those comments from vested interest criticism—they're parrying them with new formats that establish context and verification. Labelling and branding their responsibility to be fastidious and scrupulous. Will it stop those who seek to destroy the BBC's reputation and open it to commercialisation and ownership from



media tyrants? We hope and trust it will.

JB: Sometimes someone says something that is totally invented or inaccurate, and they (the BBC) turn around and say [that's not accurate].

AHA: They challenge the source.

JB: The underground element in *V for Vendetta*—did you come up with the tube train idea, or was it Alan?

DL: That was Alan—the train was just a way of getting a bomb underneath Downing Street. It happened to be a simple way of blowing it up.

AHA: Would you like to talk about Aces Weekly?

DL: Sure, though Aces Weekly is only relevant to *V* in one way—an important element of *freedom*. It's an exclusively online comics art magazine that makes the case for comics as a storytelling medium that does not depend on paper or print for its existence. From the beginning of the 21st century, we've been able to put great original comic art—the way it always was, developed to its full effectiveness as a craft over decades, with panels and balloons and everything else you could expect from a regular comic, but with no unnecessary bells or whistles like animation or

added sound—on a screen instead of a page. Simply that. We can do it cheaper as an online publishing option, we can do it easier, we can do it faster. And we don't depend on anybody other than ourselves to get it to readers. If everybody agrees that getting great comics at a cheaper price, looking better, being delivered faster, and without any distribution trouble or retail costs, seems like a good idea, then they should embrace what we're doing. You can reach Aces Weekly via www.acesweekly.co.uk, and if you don't believe that that's a good thing to access, you are a very stupid person [laughing] who does not believe in the future growth of comic art as a medium and does not believe in his financial welfare.

I'm very proud to have been presenting Aces Weekly as a publisher and editor for over 11 years. For some strange reason, many comics readers are obsessed with paper and print. They're addicted to it, like a heroin addict. Until they free themselves of that addiction, comics in the 21st century will continue to be seen as a very small area of interest amongst a very limited bunch of readers. It will never expand fully into the global public consciousness unless readers embrace an online platform for it and make the most of its value in that form. Aces Weekly has been trying to do that against all opposition. And we will continue to do that until we believe that the battle cannot be won.

JB: Do you mentor any of the writers and artists in any way?

DL: I'm the editor and publisher. I have a great tech editor who's essential in setting it up. And our co-founder, Bambo Georgiou, is the subscriptions manager. I do help any contributors who need it, but that mainly amounts to fixing tweaks in translated text, because we have lots of creators from overseas. You have to recognize that there's a massive number of creators outside the English language territory of comics who want to be part of the English language comics world—whether they're from Spain, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil. They want to be part of this great, global, position that comics holds for them in the western hemisphere. But comics in the western hemisphere is defined by print and paper. If you're not important enough, or not well-known enough to get into the print and paper world of this part of the globe, or if Marvel or DC don't want to use you, there are very limited options.

AHA: Have you seen other publishers following suit in the years since you've been publishing Aces Weekly? Have you seen more acceptance of the online version?

DL: Exact copies of us, no. But web comics are being

produced all the time, by all sorts of people, because they know it's an easy way of getting comics out there. But most are not making any money from them, or don't want to, because they just like the fun of being able to publish them easily, which is fine, but tends to devalue their talent if they ever feel they do want make some kind of income from it—if you're giving it away, why should anyone value it? And the masses of free online comics—backlogs of free manga, etc—dissuade them from putting a price on their online work because they don't think readers will pay for something they can get in such quantity elsewhere for nothing. It's a sad situation that makes the creators feel their work has no value unless they can get it put on paper somehow and justify its existence as something they can ask money for. But their great story can exist without any paper at all! Sadly, Marvel and DC have never taken the challenge to produce and promote an online-only product, which I think would change things. I don't know why they haven't. In a corporate world where such things can be produced so easily and effectively, and with the great power those companies have to promote them, why not do that and help expand comics and grow new readership from that massive pool of new potential readers that the web can give them? I can assume, I can speculate, but the days of Vertigo, where risk in looking for a wider readership was accepted as healthy and progressive for any big comics company, both artistically and financially, have gone. It seems to me that the franchise is now everything, and the source-form it all sprang from is not so important to encourage any more.

AHA: What I see my students reading is not print comics. It's online. The younger generation is sympathetic to the online format, in a way that we didn't grow up with. At this point, I mostly see them reading Asian comics.

DL: Well, I'm glad to hear that—and I wish they were as happily engaged in reading stuff closer to home. The input of the East and manga generally is a whole bigger subject. When Tokyopop hit America, it flooded the market with a massive backlog of Japanese Manga. It hit not only America, but also Europe. Manga became the most successful invasion of a comics form in comics history—bigger than all the superheroes of Marvel and DC that spread to everywhere on the planet. It went to America, Spain, England—everywhere. It had such an impact that after that initial push, every comic store in America was obliged to have a massive wall of manga. It changed everything in the whole business. Before manga, *V for Vendetta* grabbed a demographic of people who wanted more from comics than just superheroes. That kind of market had only been penetrated in a very

small way by the sophisticated treatment Frank Miller and others had given to the regular stuff of the mainstream.

But it's important to note something else about the changes the manga invasion made to the US comics industry. DC and Marvel had never produced comics for women in any meaningful way. As far as they were concerned, women were on the outside of the superhero-predominant readership they survived on and encouraged to buy from them. When manga came in, it came with masses of titles for women and girls, who bought them in their thousands. Girl fans filled the comic stores after Tokyopop hit and were buying comics that actually spoke to them. And then, Marvel and DC started thinking: 'I guess we should wake up. We'll have to have our own imprint for girls. We didn't know they (50% of the population) were out there and wanted comics. Now we're going to have to do something...' But it was too late. What was that imprint called? Minx?

JB: Yeah, that's come and gone.

DL: Well, it's too late. Manga—it grabbed them. Manga came in and it took over. It's really sad that the business was caught napping and it couldn't go back. Manga changed the artistic universe, too, which is good in one way, bad in another. The whole of American and western comics were asleep at the wheel, and when manga came in, it changed everything: the culture, popular viewpoints, everything you see around—and also in the way cartoons are represented—everything is influenced by manga-styles.

AHA: It's funny you mention that. My husband is an artist and teaches art, and I can't tell whether he's frustrated or happy that so many of his students will draw and draw and draw, all day long, and it's always manga.

DL: There's some fabulous work in manga, but it can understandably become hateful if one mourns the loss of the purity of some native-looking thing you'd prefer to have and want to see predominate in a nation's comics style. But then you'd have to ask yourself, 'What was that native comics appearance that was so essentially conservable?' Was it the McDonalds, whitebread, superhero stuff of many decades of mainstream tradition? Or was that lost already as a preference for thousands of comics readers because they were bored with it and didn't buy it anymore in the numbers you expected them to keep on buying it in, and only kept on buying it from habit? Your main industry was full of the regular-looking Superman-type stuff, and the rest was the ever-creative but much smaller indies. But readers of comics—and new readers

of comics—moved to manga because they found it exciting and different, and the game was over.

JB: There's always been subcultures, but nothing that's hit the mass markets.

DL: In the big two of the American comics market, there's never been anything of great influence outside of the generic, apart from manga. If you take a picture of those from the early 80s, before the British came, there was just your typical American mix. The only thing that was different in stylistic terms was the undergrounds. What else was really different and weird?

A discussion of fanzines occurs, which leads to JB mentioning Kevin O'Neill who had sadly just passed away.

DL: He was great (Kevin O'Neill). But British creators are generally not tributed with the kind of honour US creators receive. They don't seem to find their ways into the gallery of greats. Maybe it's because the British creators were eccentric and outside the inner circle of the usual comics creator fraternity in style and preoccupation. And nobody was like Kevin. Nobody ever drew like Kevin. And I don't think anyone will

ever encapsulate exactly what he did as an artist and memorialise it as well it deserves to be. He should be remembered long-term and find his way into the halls of the greats, and I hope he will. All of us British creators will be saying 'Oh, Kevin was great!' as he was. But will he be as lauded as many US creators are in the strong embrace of comics culture they have over there, in contrast to the pale shadow of one that we have here? Did enough remember and applaud Don Lawrence, here? Luckily for Don, he made most of his career in the Netherlands and was so well-regarded there that he was rewarded with one of the highest orders of merit the country—the country, I emphasise—could give him for his work! So he was memorialised in the Netherlands beyond anything that we here would have blessed his memory with if he'd have stayed here. Don Lawrence was a fucking amazing creator. But that wouldn't have helped him gain a fraction of the tribute he received from the Netherlands if he'd just worked here.

JB: We will remember him. His books are still available. His books are important. I think Kevin will be very important too because he's done a lot of good work.

DL: Do you think that Kevin will be remembered more



because of his work with Alan or because of his body of work?

JB: His body of work. I was going to say that *Marshal Law* for me was a phenomenal comic book story, and a very amazing superhero story.

DL: Yeah, but *Marshal Law* will never be recognized and applauded in a major way in America, because he's a weird, crazy, anti-Republican character. But it is a great work.

JB: At Lawless, a fan brought along a portfolio, and he opened it up and had a couple of pieces of *Marshal Law* art, which were huge. Within seconds there was a crowd to look at it. That for me, is recognition. I appreciate what you are saying, that bigger picture.

DL: The bigger picture is the thing. That's what makes culture—what makes cultural change. The closest we've ever come to a wide cultural acceptance of comics art is in the newspaper strips. Will Eisner and stuff like that. The progress of the century has not progressed that cultural acceptance. If you were around in the US in 50s, there were all the newspapers running *Flash Gordon* and such, all that incredible stuff, and everyone was reading the Sunday pages—it was all part of the mass culture. It's gone.

JB: I see what you're saying, but there are lots of new comics now that aren't for everybody, and that's really, really good. Comics about mental health, comics about hospitals, comics about different things. New people are reading them. Comics have gotten into more corners of the world than we ever imagined. [But ultimately], everyone knows V's mask. It's ubiquitous. It's huge.

DL: Thankfully!!

Food is eaten, drinks are drunk, and there is discussion about technical aspects, and David signs some comics. It was a wonderful afternoon. Throughout there was laughter, good humour, and a relaxed atmosphere, and after many hours, we all bid one another farewell.

1. Section 28: In effect from 1988 to 2000, Section 28 was a series of laws restricting the 'promotion of homosexuality' in Britain, enacted by the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher.

2. Interestingly, in Book I, Chapter 8, Eric Finch identifies Beethoven's Symphony Number 5 and comments, with an admiring smile on his face, that the famous opening notes ('Da Da Da DUM') are the letter 'V' in Morse code.



Call Me V: A Feminist Read of *V for Vendetta* by Allison Hartman Adams

I struggle with *V for Vendetta*.

A lot.

In fact, the number of times I've thrown this comic across the room in a rage should probably disqualify me from writing this article.

It's the same moment that gets me every time. After seemingly endless torture and humiliation, Evey leaves her manufactured prison cell and reenters the Shadow Gallery. She discovers V there, in all his pageantry, waiting for her. She confronts him. She forces him to see her pain and dismay.

She says, "Oh God, why?"

He says, "Because I love you."

And I say, "Fuck you, you demented sack of shit."

I challenge you to reread "Vermin," "Valerie," and "The Verdict," and as you do so, let yourself picture the person holding Evey by the neck, punching her, dragging her, "examining" her. To preserve the illusion, Lloyd's illustrations focus solely on Evey, so the other details are easy to miss, but those gloved hands are V's hands. These are expressions of V's love.

Survivors of abuse will have a hard time with the portrayal of women in this comic. We all should. But the trick here is perspective—reframing with consideration given to what we know about the creators. Moore and Lloyd's work requires thoughtful reflection. They don't let us get away with simplistic face-value reads, and they never have. Some critics have struggled with this, and Moore addresses the critiques leveled at him in an illuminating 2014 interview with Pádraig Ó Méalóid.¹ In a recent conversation, Pádraig told me that "there is no doubt in [his] mind that Alan Moore is a feminist writer."

So I guess this means that I'm not off the hook. I can't dismiss the comic as yet another tone-deaf "product of its times" that catastrophically misses the mark on women. The creators demand more of me. The portrayal of women appears, at first glance, to be wide brush-stroke characterizations that tip into misinterpretation. The women in Moore and Lloyd's *V for Vendetta* can be read as tropes, which are therefore easily disregarded by some critics as a symptom of lazy writing: the Vamp (Helen Heyer); the Shrinking Violet (Rosemary Almond); the Atoner (Delia Surridge); the Buried Gay (Valerie Page). But, if I accept that there's more here to see, as I scratch at the walls the patriarchy made for me—walls I helped

build myself—I now must work to see past what could be read as mere misogyny to discover the brilliant feminist clockwork of *V for Vendetta*.

Anarcha-Feminism

When engaged in the process of burning it all down, we must begin, of course, with anarchy. Nothing else will get this dirty job done, as V might remind us.

I've known for a while that Moore identifies as an anarchist, but I hadn't yet been able to bridge the gap between political philosophy espoused by an eccentric writer, and how that philosophy weaves feminist wisdom into one of my favorite comics. L. Susan Brown, however, gave me that link. In her 1993 book, *The Politics of Individualism: Liberalism, Liberal Feminism and Anarchism*, Brown argues that anarchism must by default be compatible with feminism, else it ceases to be. "Anarchism," she writes, "opposes all relationships of power," including patriarchal control. Therefore, anarchy must contain feminism within it because of anarchy's "opposition to the exercise of power." Brown writes that an "anarchist who supports male domination contradicts the implicit critique of power which is the fundamental principle upon which all of anarchism is built."

Jennifer Macfarlane deepens this connection in her piece "Anarcha-Feminism in Alan Moore and David Lloyd's *V for Vendetta*." She argues that "in order to convey a pro-feminist message, [V for Vendetta] presents patriarchy as an evil that goes hand in hand with authoritative power structures." Macfarlane suggests that women in the comic act the way they do as a response to a male-centered government.

This rings absolutely true to me, even though David Lloyd explicitly told me in November that many of the clever literary and political connections fans read in to *V for Vendetta* are based on nothing more than conjecture, imagination, and happy accidents (for more on that, read James Bacon's and my interview with David Lloyd on page 3.) But regardless if the intention was to extend V's anarchist commentary to include the feminist/patriarchal dichotomy, the connection is still there. (Sorry, David.)

The Vamp and the Violet

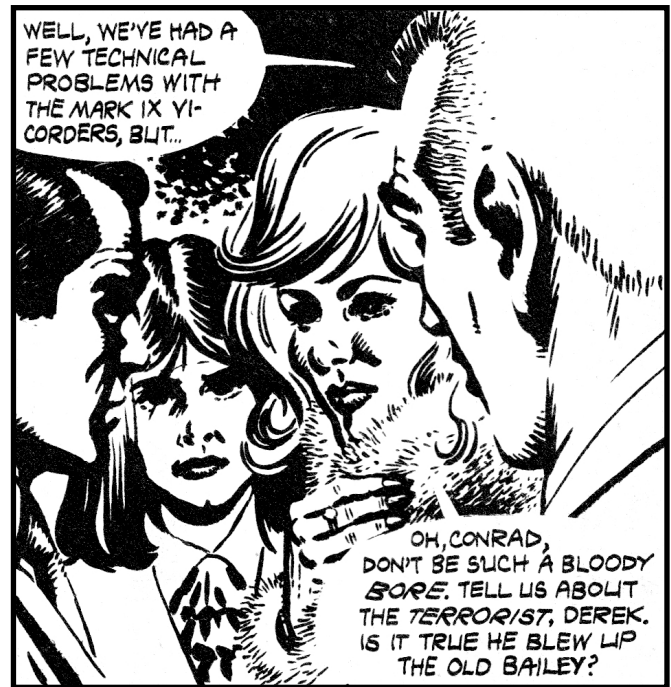
Ultimately, this comic is about the imbalance of power: the government, the people, censorship, free thought, imprisonment, liberty, and so on. However, in large part because of L. Susan Brown's anarchy-feminism connection, I believe that one of the most revolutionary lessons this comic has to offer is what it tells us about the imbalance of power *between the genders*.

Macfarlane argues that *V for Vendetta*'s portrayal of anarchy "allows for the imagination of a space where the feminine is free from the authority of the male hierarchy." Now, it's easy to engage in what-about-isms here, but I think Macfarlane is on to something. Each of the women were made by the system, in service of the system, and each is responding to this programming in whatever way is available to her.

Helen Heyer, that magnificent bitch, is easily dismissed by the reader. Macfarlane acknowledges that Helen "is a problematic character in that she conforms to conservative ideals, and uses her sexuality to manipulate and control men in order to achieve power." Helen engages in destabilizing—but not destroying—the male-centric status quo in order to leverage that same system to her advantage. She uses sex as a weapon, manipulates her weak-willed husband Conrad while trying to maneuver him into positions of power, wheels and deals with the gangster Alistair Harper for information in exchange for political and sexual favors, and is generally rather unpleasant.

Helen is also clever and tenacious. She possesses a savvy understanding of how to thrive within the patriarchal machine Norsefire created. A feminist icon she is not, but it's important to not reduce her to a vampy Machiavellian schemer who gets her comeuppance. That she is, but she also functions to show that gender inequality—in any direction—is dangerous. Despite her considerable skills, Helen never learns that life not a zero-sum game, so she ever won't be able to move outside this system, as Evey does. Ultimately, she survives, all the way to the (literal) final page of the comic. Her role as an example of the dangers of gender inequality, even that of women above men, survives too.

Rosemary Almond, on the other hand, operates as a sort of foil for Helen. They come from the same social stratum, but where Helen survives through sexual power, Rosemary survives through complete acquiescence to societal expectations. She is polite, quiet, and accommodating, all skills that Norsefire Britain values in women. In a brilliant move, however, Moore and Lloyd make Rosemary the tool of vengeance on Norsefire leader Adam Susan, not



because she is a stone-cold atrocity like Helen, but because Rosemary refuses to accept her fate.

In "The Veil," Rosemary, now widowed, reflects on her utter desolation. The authoritarian government has made her helpless by design. She has no skills (too busy being the perfect wife), no confidence (Derek beat that out of her long ago) no money (can't get a job), and the State won't support her (a comment on the absence of welfare programs?), and her only chance is to accept Roger Dascombe's sexual advances because her "purpose is to survive...whatever that takes." For a time, that works. But after Rosemary surrenders all that she is to the men around her, when she has nothing left to give, her transformation can finally begin. On stage at the Kitty-Kat Keller, offering her "hind-quarters in submission to the world," Rosemary realizes that she was programmed to have zero skills, no safety net, no self-possession. She was built by men, to be used by men. She asks, "Who has done this to me?" and the answer is immediately obvious. Rosemary cannot dismantle an entire political system, but she can kill a single man: Norsefire leader, Adam Susan. What follows are her final words, as she approaches Susan's motorcade, gun in hand:

Yes.

Yes, despite my fear, because it's insignificant. Like everything about me.

Yes, though they'll kill me because if I don't, life means nothing.

Yes, because our lives were wasted on your visions, and they were all we had.

Yes, because I can't bear what you've done to us.

Yes, because history's moving my legs and nothing, nothing can stop me.

Yes, because your kind led us to hell and now you say our only hope is sterner leaders.

Yes, because I'm nearly there and everyone's thinking "She must be important." And I'm not. But I will be.

Yes, because I had a life, a world, a marriage, and I valued them but you didn't.

Yes, because we've met a dozen times before and my Derek died for you and god, you don't even, don't even remember my face.

YES.

This primal scream contains no new sentiments.

Anyone who has even a passing understanding of history will know that women have been saying variations of Rosemary's monologue for generations.

But what is most telling here is that Rosemary is not simply lashing out in desperation. The assassination of Susan is a measured, considered act. Moore and Lloyd give Rosemary several multi-page monologues throughout the text, showing her journey from helplessness to empowerment. Even Rosemary's name changes; she sheds the virginal "Mary" and becomes "Rosey" or "Rose" by the end. And roses, V shows us, are a symbol of both hope and vengeance. Given the arc of her story, one wonders if Rosemary might have been V's chosen student if she had not already been chained by marriage to the system. In

fact, in another scene, V takes credit for Rosemary's evolution, saying to Evey that he has "cultivated a most special rose" for Adam Susan, but I call bullshit on this, as even V is not responsible for the way Norsefire crafted Rosemary's cage.

Moore and Lloyd's delivery of Rosemary's later moments are crucial, most importantly the one in which she murders Susan. In "Vindication," Lloyd has cross-cut the assassination scene with Finch and V's final showdown. This parallel editing carries a lot of narrative weight, but what stands out is that the panel showing Rosemary looming over Adam Susan, a gun leveled at his head, is immediately juxtaposed by a similarly-composed shot of V from below (presumably Finch's perspective).

The visual connection is clear: Rosemary is V, and it's the women, not the men, who bring down the mechanisms of oppression.



The Atoner

Interestingly, Delia Surridge is the only woman in these pages with a professional career that is built on skill and intelligence, rather than the male gaze (assuming one doesn't count Valerie, who lives only in memory). She's a scientist and a forensic pathologist who, presumably, has worked her ass off to get where she is. We are first introduced to Delia on the same night V comes to kill her, and we are meant to see her as an intelligent woman who experiences true remorse. She still deserves to die, and V must carry out his plans, but in Delia's case he does so mercifully. He kills her painlessly and even removes his mask at her request, the only occasion in the entire comic. And, even after years plagued by guilt, V is still "beautiful" to Delia Surridge.

Of course, this sympathetic introduction to Delia is intentional, as we only learn of her nefarious past after she is dead. Early in her Larkhill days, Delia is more Mengele than Nightingale, frustrated by the "weak and pathetic" inmates who are to be her test subjects. "They're hardly human," she says, as she systematically reduces them to a list of numbers, racial attributes, and experiment results.

But, even with this ugliness, Delia also serves to remind the reader of the deeper ugliness of the men running Larkhill. She finds Commander Prothero "rather vulgar and unpleasant" and describes him as a "fat toad." She despises the "creepy" Lilliman who "rubs his hands together and stares at [her] chest." Conversely, Delia clearly admires the Man in Room 5 for his intelligence and ingenuity. Over the course of her diary entries, the Man in Room 5's plans develop into something "intricate" and deeply fascinating to Delia. Prothero, on the other hand, Delia writes dryly, "picks his nose." Even as a servant of Norsefire, which implies a measure of power, Delia still has to contend with lasciviousness and incompetence from her male colleagues. Prothero failed upward, and Lilliman is already well down the road of sexual predation, yet both of them achieve more success in their careers after Larkhill than Delia Surridge (The Voice of Fate and Bishop of Westminster, respectively).

In her final moments, Delia repents. Her remorse and acceptance stands in stark contrast to the behavior of her former coworkers. When in V's clutches, Prothero reacts with defiance and rage. Lilliman blubbers and pleads during a cyanide-laced Eucharistic liturgy that might put the question of transubstantiation to rest for good. In this story, it is the woman who possesses some measure of morality and humility (albeit a bit late) whereas her male counterparts routinely fall back on arrogance and denial. The reader readily accepts this; studies have shown that moral identity is more important to women, which arguably is linked with the "male hubris / female humility" effect. Delia Surridge's humility—and therefore her suitability for forgiveness—are not only acceptable to the reader, but expected.

The Buried Gay²

Chris M. Arnone, writing for *Book Riot*, defines the "Bury Your Gays" trope as the "tragic death [of an LGBTQ+ character that] often occurs just after a first kiss or sexual experience...just before that magical moment in which a person fully embraces their queerness." J.E. Reich, writing for *Slate*, adds that the LGBTQ+ characters are often "sacrificial lambs to keep the plot rolling for their straight counterparts."

At first glance, it would seem that Moore and Lloyd lean hard on this trope, but I think it is inadvertent. *Pride Reads*, an LGBTQ+ sensitivity reader organization, outlines the following guidelines when identifying the trope: does the death of the LGBTQ+ character further the story of a cis het character? Is the LGBTQ+ character's happiness short-lived? Do they face regular homophobia? Are the LGBTQ+ characters the only ones to die?

Valerie Page does fall into some of these slots, but not to the detriment of the story. While her happiness is short-lived, Valerie's death is heroic and principled. She does not surrender. Moreover, the tragedy does not hinge on the fact that she is a lesbian, only that she is among the hundreds of political prisoners, ethnic and



religious minorities, and other "radicals" Norsefire jails. LGBTQ+ characters are not the only ones to die in this story.

It is worth noting that Valerie marks the point where *V for Vendetta* became a "serious" story for the creators. In our interview, David Lloyd points out that, "in the early days, [the comic] was very pantomimic. All those things like V dressing up as Mr Punch, the horns, the sequence with the 'Sympathy of the Devil'—that all vanished" after Valerie came into the story. The "comic becomes centralised through her experience," David told us. "She is representative of all dissidents, all nonconventional viewpoints that fight the government." Valerie is not a convenient plot device for the other characters' journeys. Valerie is their—and our—soul. The reader assumes that she dies in Larkhill, but her death is not the point (note all the "Valerie is V" theories out there). Indeed, it's the fact that Valerie lived and loved fully, without reservation, that makes her transcend the restrictive environment Norsefire created. Evey learns the truth from Valerie, and it is Valerie—not V— who is responsible for Evey's transformation. A woman, not a man.

What About V?

Before tackling the complicated relationship I have with Evey, I must address the masked man in the room.

The argument can be made that V, a man, orchestrated all the female characters' successes. He sets up all the (ahem) dominoes. He creates the chaos that Helen seeks to exploit, murders Derek Almond, causing Rosemary's dark journey of self-discovery and empowerment. V inspires guilt and remorse in Delia, showing the reader that even the most wicked of us are not beyond redemption. V preserves Valerie's memory, through which Evey is enlightened. And, of course, V is the puppetmaster behind all of Evey's psychological growth.

However, V continuously violates the rules of "maleness" in this society. When Evey asks why he hasn't demanded sex from her—or, in the absence of that, if he is perhaps her long-lost father—V turns her out on the street to fend for herself. Later, after her imprisonment, Evey kisses V, but it is an expression of gratitude, not sexual desire. When V tells Evey that her "heritage" includes romance, he does not mean romance between them. He speaks of capital-R Romance, that which makes humans love life. "Midst insurrection's clamour," V tells her, "we may easily forget just what it is for which we strive," and what V strives for is the "sweet music" and freedom to act and think and love as one wishes, which is only possible in an open and free society.

In this portrayal, Moore and Lloyd have removed the troublesome male/female sexual

dynamic. In fact, it might have never existed at all. Throughout the comic, V presents as androgynous and asexual, further undermining this society's laws of masculinity. Lloyd's costume design underscores this, as V's jacket and cloak are a far cry from the superhero standard of skin-tight spandex showing off every bulging muscle and throbbing vein. This androgyny extends to Evey as well, but only after her awakening. At the beginning of the comic, Lloyd illustrates her as typically female (long hair, makeup, etc.), which is contrasted with her appearance after she leaves her cell and reenters the Shadow Gallery. During this 12-page sequence, there is only a single panel that depicts her as having a woman's body. It is here that Evey and V become equals, and this androgyny is preserved, more or less, for the remainder of the comic. Indeed, a logical extension of the anarchy philosophy that underpins this comic is gender anarchy, the practice of challenging the heteronormative desire to categorize people into "male" and "female." If we abandon the desire to gender V, we allow ourselves to be open to a more unfettered wisdom of the text.

In the end, the fact that V is explicitly identified as a man multiple times in the text is rendered meaningless. Given the intentional way Moore wrote him and Lloyd illustrated him, V is barely "man" or "male."

V is simply V.

Evey Hammond

At this point, I've made myself dizzy with the mental gymnastics it's taken me to see *V for Vendetta* as a possibly, maybe, hopefully, could-it-be, sort of a feminist text. I've gotten there, for the most part, but Evey still stands in my way. I want to look away.

On the surface, Evey functions strictly as the vehicle for V's revolutionary plans. We learn the rules of Norsefire's society through the lens of Evey's suffering. V takes on the role of male protector, another move that undermines a feminist reading of this text, and, in truth, it gets worse from there. V manipulates, frightens, endangers, and uses Evey, page after page after page. One could even read Evey's torture sequence as the most violent expression of mansplanning. Here is V, all-knowing and all-powerful, teaching Evey the right way—his way—to see the world. And since it's hard to get girls to listen, *really listen*, V is going to have to shave her head, starve her, torture her, "examine" her, and threaten her with execution. As Isaac Butler comments in "V for Vile" on *The Hooded Utilitarian* blog, "if you [Evey, as a stand-in for the reader] won't see the light, we have the freedom...to rape you into enlightenment. Stockholm Syndrome is liberty."

Yikes.

So. There's no way to read V's treatment of Evey that isn't fundamentally uncomfortable and icky. Yes, there's the rationale that he has to completely break her in order to rebuild her, but that interpretation is hard to accept when these characters remember what life was like before Norsefire. This is not *Nineteen-Eighty Four* where the younger members of the Party literally have no concept of anything outside of Big Brother's all-encompassing gaze. Norsefire's indoctrination is neither as sophisticated as the Party's, nor does it go as deep. Evey remembers what life *should* be like, so why does V have to go to all that gruesome trouble to reprogram her?

In some ways, Evey's journey mirrors Rosemary's. They both begin the story attempting to survive by following the rules of the patriarchy.

Evey begins as a would-be prostitute, and it's by apparent chance that this path is diverted. Later in the story, after Evey leaves V to attempt something resembling a normal life with Gordon, she undergoes the same experience as Rosemary. In both cases, their men are murdered and the women plan to shoot the one responsible. In Evey's case, however, V intervenes yet again.

I realize now that what will unlock the puzzle of Evey for me is the same moment that makes her character so difficult: Evey's imprisonment. For years, V's "I hurt you because I love you" rationale made it impossible for me to be fully at peace with this story. I know that revolution demands trauma, and if she weren't completely broken, Evey would be tempted to go back to the familiar arms of a sexist society the rules of which she can understand.

But I finally noticed something: V is completely absent from Evey's thoughts during her time in the cell. He is mentioned by her interrogators, and she thinks at one moment, "Oh Christ. They know," but that's it.



Not another word. Evey does not wonder where V is or if he's going to rescue her. The narration is almost entirely Valerie's story, interspersed occasionally with Evey's own thoughts and her captors' questions. When she is asked to sign the document that admits V terrorized and brainwashed her into murder and mayhem, Evey refuses, but not to protect V. At the end, just before the guard comes to take her away, Evey is holding Valerie's letter. The person that exists in Evey's "last inch" is Valerie.

Evey then undergoes a total disintegration and rebirth. V calls her "woman" and tells her not to run from it, but Evey is more than just a woman now. Lloyd's illustrations reflect this. When V is holding Evey, her face is that of a screaming baby. She can't breathe. She is cold. And then V spirits her up to the rooftop to have the rain wash her body clean. Here Evey is on the brink of becoming

something new. She knows "everything's so different," and he tells her to "seize it," and to "become transfigured forever."

In this moment, V is not rescuer or father or lover. V is a midwife.

Evey becomes as androgynous as V himself, again violating the laws of a patriarchal society. She no longer looks to any man for protection. It is at this point, and not before, that V is able to transfer his power to Evey. He offers her Alistair Harper's life, as he murdered Gordon, but Evey no longer needs vengeance because she has transcended the society that would have her look for her identity in the arms of a man.

Moreover, it is not V who remakes Evey after her rebirth—it's Evey herself. In the subsequent chapters, we see Evey exercising, reading, learning. This is all self-motivated; V is not standing on the side like a wise old mentor as Evey sweats her way through kung fu routines. When Evey begins to demand answers from V, V stops playing games and shows her

all the tools by which she will dismantle Norsefire's world.

After V's death, Evey imagines taking off his mask. In a series of panels that alternate between Evey's imagination and reality, Lloyd shows the various people Evey thinks V could be. But, of course, he is none of them, and she comes to the only logical conclusion: "Whoever [V is] isn't as big as the idea," echoing V's earlier words spoken to Finch, "There's not flesh or blood within this cloak to kill. There's only an idea." In one of the more brilliant of Lloyd's illustrations, we see Evey smiling to herself in a mirror, a smile drawn exactly like the Guy Fawkes mask. Evey is now V because she has become the *idea*—not a woman or a child or a victim.

So. I pick up the comic from that untidy heap on my floor. And I think about the women within. I am not the only reader who makes the too-easy connection between Norsefire and our own society. Helen's scheming, Rosemary's acquiescence, Evey's fear—all of these are lessons of womanhood I learned at my mother's knee, and she from her mother. For a very long time, that is what women were meant to be: goddess or temptress, virgin or whore, muse or destroyer. I am grateful that I live in a time that questions binary definitions of gender, and I am even more grateful that my own children are not programmed as I was. They will read *V for Vendetta*

and readily accept that it can be seen as a feminist text. They will be comfortable with complexity and stories that remind us that revolution is not meant to be comfortable.

Still, I have questions...

David Lloyd counseled me not to theorize about What Comes Next. It's no use, as I'll never actually know...but I can't stop myself. At the end of the comic, Evey takes Dominic Stone under her wing. Implied within this new mentorship are the same troublesome gender and power dynamics that got in my way to begin with. Will Evey be as successful with Dominic as V was with Evey? Could a woman in this society exercise the same influence over a fully-grown man, and would choosing a female protégé have sent a different, more meaningful message?

Maybe.

Or maybe I'm just being sexist.

1: Pádraig's interview is worth a read. And then a second and third read, because damn, they cover a lot of ground. (<https://slovobooks.wordpress.com/2014/01/09/last-alan-moore-interview/>)

2: I wrote the following after doing what I hope is enough due diligence and research into the Bury Your Gays trope, but I acknowledge that I am not a member of the affected community and do not speak from a position of experience.



Visions and Versions

by John Vaughan



Award winning screenwriter and filmmaker John Vaughan gives us his personal views on V for Vendetta, the media and political landscape that he believes influenced it, the 2006 film version and why we are yet to see a truly great screen adaptation.

Prologue:

It is October 1982, and I am eight years old, sitting in the back of the family station wagon waiting for my parents to return from seeing their accountant in Cork City. Trips to Cork are rare when you are eight, and my mother promises that after they are finished, she will take me to the largest toy store in the city. After all, Christmas is coming and I am hoping for a second Action Man—one with eagle eyes and gripping hands to go with the Talking Commander I got last year. All I have to do is stay here and be good. To help me pass the time she allows me to buy a comic. Buying comics in Cork was always exciting simply because the city shops have more choice. I pick one up, and on the cover a superhero I have never seen before is leaping from the water. His name is Marvelman and the comic is called *Warrior*. My parents thinking it must be a war comic similar to *Battle* or *Warlord* leave me happily reading...but very soon I realise maybe I should have picked another comic. The artwork is wonderful but the stories...the stories are like nothing I have ever read, be it madmen from the 18th dimension or a priest called Shandor. Then I turn the page and I see a strange world of inky black and white, and a man who looks like Guy Fawkes—but not the Guy Fawkes whose mask you could cut out and wear from the back of comics like *Buster* or *The Whoopee* every November. This mask is angular, threatening. As I read, I suddenly begin to understand!

It is March 2006, and I leave a cinema with my wife after seeing the film adaptation of *V for Vendetta*. I am feeling a mixture of anger and disbelief at what we have just seen.

Somehow the filmmakers have removed all the subtlety and nuance from the story and tossed it away like a fistful of dead roses, turning V into nothing more than a quip-spouting action hero that we have seen a hundred times before. I am left thinking to myself, how is it that those who made this failed to understand what was obvious even to an eight year old in 1982?

“That's very important to you Isn't it? All the theatrical stuff?”

In a 1983 interview for *Warrior* magazine Alan Moore describes the influences and elements he and David Lloyd wanted to use in *V for Vendetta*, and among them he listed classic Vincent Price horror films, British films of the Second World War and the classic TV series *The Prisoner*. “But try as I might, I couldn't come up with a coherent whole from such disjointed parts.”

I think it's safe to say not only did Moore and David Lloyd succeed in making a coherent whole from such disjointed parts, but using those elements created perhaps one of the greatest comic book strips ever written, creating a blueprint for visual storytelling that any filmmaker worth their salt should have in their library. Unfortunately the filmmakers appeared to have ignored that blueprint.

Every frame of *V* drips with cinematic and media reference. From the very first page when we see V prepare in his Shadow Gallery adorned with classic film posters which, when looked at again, hint strongly at V's character, from *Son of Frankenstein* to *Murders at the Rue Morgue*. Dominating the frame however is the poster for *White Heat*, which starred James Cagney as Cody Jarrett, whose mental instability reflects V's own, and whose fiery end foreshadows what awaits V.

Moore and Lloyd took the rules of cinema and put them on the page. Read *V* again and you realise there are no thought bubbles; the comic book rule of showing what the character thinks is thrown out. As in the cinema, we see only what they want you to see. This is not only Moore's masterful storytelling, but also David Lloyd's astonishing artwork. Lloyd had only come into the comic book industry a few years before. Some of his early work was for *Hammer's House of Horror* magazine, adapting films to comic strip format and that experience shows. Like a great Director and Cinematographer, he lets the audience decide what the characters are thinking from their expressions, movements, lighting, and angles. A fear-filled glance from Almond as he realises he forgot to load his gun tells the reader more in three frames than a hundred words on the page could.



"You couldn't be expected to know...They have eradicated culture, tossed it away..."

Compare Moore and Lloyd's world to the comfortable catastrophe that is the movie. The desperation and fear has been removed. Just how did this fascist government come to power? People watch their televisions from the comfort of their living rooms, well-fed and well-clothed. The grey world of Lloyd's artwork has been removed, replaced instead with comfortable suburban rooms and hallways filled with sunlight. Evie's backstory is changed. She is no longer an orphan forced to work in a box factory. Now she's a P.A. in television with what looks like a really nice flat!?!?

The genius of Moore's script is in the day-to-day lives of his characters. He humanises his creations far more than we are used to from comics or television of the era: Eric Finch, the one good policeman who has lost everything except his job; Rosemary, Almond's wife, a beaten and abused woman forced to survive after her husband's death by whatever means necessary; the sexual frustrations of the cuckolded Conrad Hayer as his wife Helen plots to be the power behind the throne. Even the tragically short happiness that Evie experiences with Gordon feels more like a BBC *Play for Today* or an Alan Bleasdale drama than a "comic" strip. All the while in the background the banal evil of the regime plays out. Now looking back, V seems almost prescient of Thatcher's Britain and the decade to come and stands alongside such dramas as *Boys From The Black Stuff*, *G.B.H.*, and *Edge of Darkness*.

And that is the film version's greatest failing: all of this character development, this substance that is the heart of the story, is dumped by the screenwriters, the Wachowskis, and director James McTeigue, instead giving us something far more banal, flat, and utterly forgettable.

Perhaps the perfect example of the vast differences between the book and the adaptation is what happens to *The Voice of Fate*, Lewis Prothero.

In the film, Prothero is nothing more than an Alex Jones-styled hate monger, who V murders in the shower of his home as his own pre-recorded broadcasts plays on the television in the background. He is a character the audience barely knows with very little consequence to the story.

"You've got it wrong, miss. You'll do anything we want and then we'll kill you. That's our prerogative."

Outside the Shadow Gallery awaits a nightmare in chiaroscuro. V's London is a post-nuclear war world of deep shadows and darkness, where danger and violence lies in every alleyway, patrolled by the "Fingermen," the logical conclusion of the knock-the-door-down, shoot-first-ask-questions-later "coppers" of the harder-edged police dramas of the seventies on British television like *The Professionals* and *The Sweeney*.

One cannot help but imagine that Dennis Waterman or Lewis Collins would have been perfectly cast as the sheepskin jacket-wearing thugs who attempt to rape Evie. But the Fingermen are also a reflection of the views the public held of the police in the England of 1982—a police force whose actions led to the Brixton riots a year before and whose ineptitude and inherent misogyny inadvertently contributed to the killing spree of the Yorkshire Ripper. A far cry from the trusted *Dixon of Dock Green*, which National Television, the BBC of V's world, still plays among the saucy sitcoms and right wing pulp of Storm Saxon to give a sense of normality to the population.

This world is one of poverty and desperation, of fear and loathing, where every move is caught on screen, every word recorded, where the good news is that meat rationing may be lifted in early 1998 and the people huddle around their televisions and radios in the hope of reassurance. Where girls like Evie—and she is a girl, barely sixteen—are forced to sell themselves in awkward exchanges in the back alleys of London just to get enough money for food.

"Boarding moving trains is like something out of the pictures. Normal people can't do things like that."

Compare that to the symphony of film noir terror that Moore and Lloyd create. The first time we see Prothero is in extreme close up to a studio microphone. In a single frame Moore and Lloyd show the power Prothero yields simply through his voice. There is no need for a cliché-ridden ranting hate monger; this perfect frame shows the insidious way the Party keeps control. The next time we see Prothero is at the train station as his bodyguard threatens a passenger in an almost ersatz version of Lean's *Brief Encounter*. Once inside the cramped train carriage as Prothero boasts of past glories, the visual atmosphere changes with the use of lighting and close ups, becoming a mixture of Hitchcock's *Strangers On a Train* and the Amicus film *Dr Terror's House of Horrors*.



"All the world's a stage and everything else...is Vaudeville."

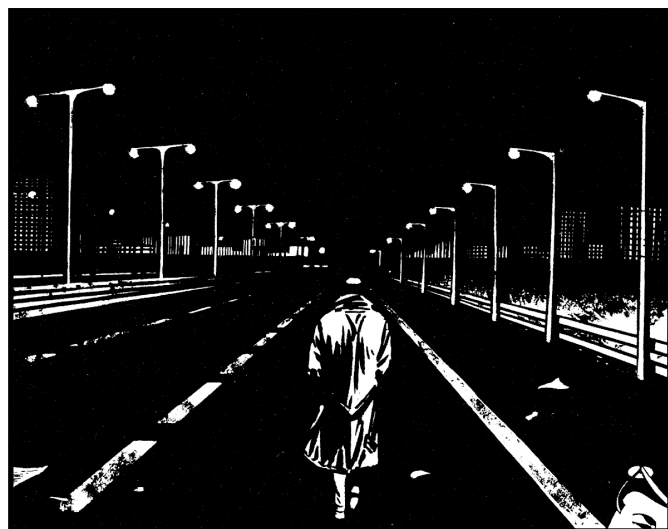
Then there is Prothero's comeuppance. There is no lazy kill and move onto the next scene as happens in the film. Instead we are shown the full terror of "the Camps." References to concentration camps in mainstream comics were and still to this day are rare with perhaps only *V For Vengeance*, which had first appeared in the middle of the Second World War, and even then only hint at the atrocities. So to have concentration camps in the heart of England would have been disconcerting to readers to say the least. What would have been even more disconcerting would have been V's form of punishment. He frames it as a holiday camp, a tradition in post-War Britain, which would have struck a particular chord with

readers in 1982, a dark reflection of the holiday camp "fun" of the then immensely popular BBC sitcom *Hi-de-Hi!*

Even Prothero's final fate smacks of cinema, in particular Sam Fuller's *Shock Corridor*. Driven insane by V's methods, he is left a shambolic sight unable to say anything except a single phrase, his mind and the Voice of Fate broken. Much more powerful than just a bloke dead in a shower as the film portrayed.

"It just won't be the same!"

So why does the film feel like a pale imitation at best, or to quote Jonathan Ross "a woeful, depressing failure," even giving us what appears to be a happy ending? The film defies the comic's uncertain ending where V, as they die states, "by turn of Century they'll know their fate, either a rose midst rubble bloom or else has bloomed too late." Perhaps only Finch gets what can be called a "Happy Ending" as he, realising the truth, abandons his post and decides to go his own path. Even then as he walks into an unknown future along a darkened motorway, Lloyd's artwork and the final frame of the final page cannot help but remind us of the ending of a dozen John Ford westerns as John Wayne rides off into the sunset.



It is quite obvious the filmmakers simply did not understand the material. In interviews before the film's release, producer Joel Silver called V a "superhero...a masked avenger who pretty much saves the world." This is something Moore railed against.

Perhaps Alan Moore himself says it best: "The movie has been turned into a Bush-era parable by people too timid to set a political satire in their own country...It's a thwarted and frustrated and largely impotent American liberal fantasy of someone with American liberal values standing up against a state run by neoconservatives—which is not what the comic

V for Vendetta was about. It was about fascism, it was about anarchy, it was about England!"

There have been more attempts to adapt the book. Channel 4 announced in 2017 they were going to adapt the book for a new series, but it has come to nothing. In a bizarre move, Pennyworth the TV series, which started out as a prequel to Gotham, suddenly shifted into a prequel to V for Vendetta. It didn't help the show, however, and it was cancelled.

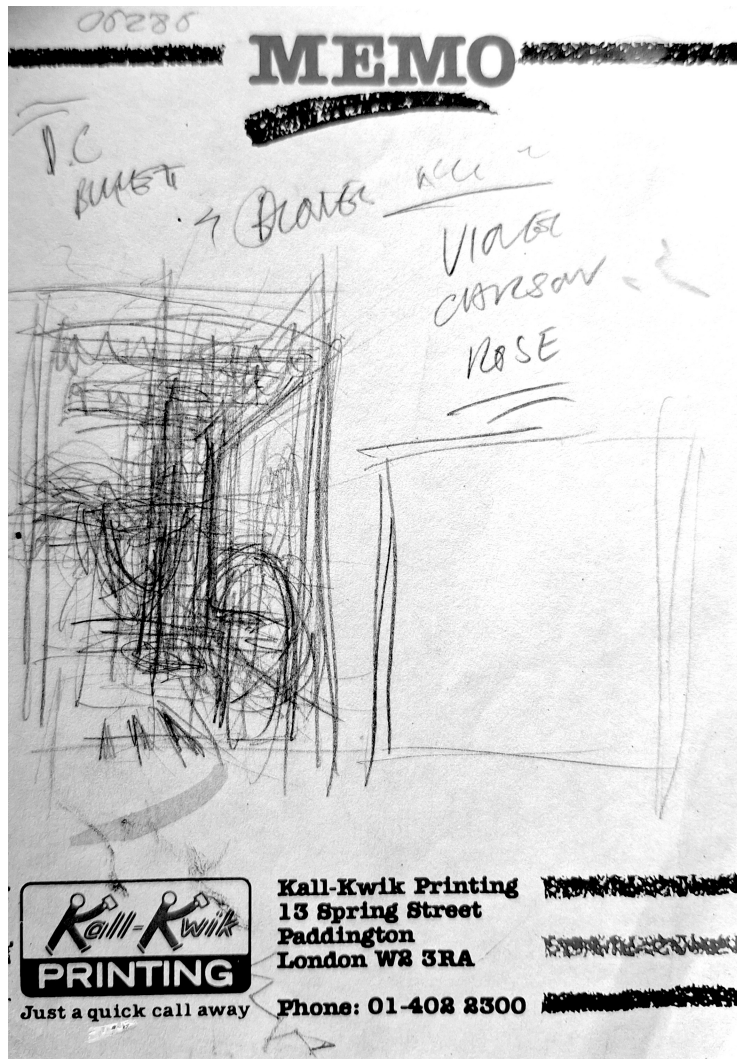
The truth is V For Vendetta is such a perfect work of visual storytelling that I don't believe it actually needs a film adaptation, not when you have the perfection of Alan Moore's words and David Lloyd's artwork, which 41 years later seems somehow more relevant than ever. However if you were to push me, was there a film released in 2006 that came close to capturing the atmosphere and look of the world of V for Vendetta? The fear of fascism, the camps, a grey world torn apart by war and disaster, yet tells a tale of possible hope however small rising from the ashes and the rubble?

Well there is. It's called Children Of Men.

Epilogue:

It is 2011 and the Occupy movement is in full swing across the globe. From Wall Street to Dublin, protestors don the Guy Fawkes mask of V as they take to the streets in protest. At RTE, Ireland's state broadcaster, I am pitching a new TV series to the heads of drama. At the time of writing this article, it is the only live action Science Fiction drama pilot RTE have commissioned in its sixty two year history (that I am aware of). My production partners and I are explaining the lore of the show I have created. One of the execs asks what are the inspirations for this story set in a world where Aliens have occupied half the planet. I mention the TV series V, the comic strip invasion from 2000 AD, and of course V for Vendetta. Someone chimes in: "Oh, like the movie!" My team look at me with eyes pleading "don't do it!" So I smile through gritted teeth and say "No, not the movie. The comic...never the movie!"

David Lloyd's preliminary sketch of the DC cover of Volume 1 of V for Vendetta



Finding Life and Ending in Death: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *V for Vendetta* by James Bacon



Dystopian prose fiction is defined by George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In comics, the seminal work is *V for Vendetta* by David Lloyd and Alan Moore. While we can try to draw comparisons, they are very different stories and really contrast strongly against one another.

The warning against totalitarianism and facism is a common theme to both works. While dystopian stories generally hinge on a form of oppression of regular people, which is often what makes them so thoughtful, the form of oppression can vary. For example, I was moved considerably by both Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and Paul Lynch's *Prophet Song* (2023), which each portray societies working against people in unique—but equally powerful—ways.

In *V for Vendetta* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the forms of rebellion are as vastly different as the forms the totalitarian governments take. But even with these differences, their inevitable similarities draw the reader to make reasonable connections: those in power have grabbed control in a moment of opportunity; these systems are undemocratic and rely on the silencing of the individual. But it is the contrasts—not the similarities—I find most fascinating, and probably why I consider both these stories to be favourites of mine, even though I rarely compare them. In fact, I place *V for Vendetta* just ahead of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in terms of favourite works.

The systems of power in each text have similar roots but go in notably different directions. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Ingsoc controls everything: media, fiction, music, information, the people. Similarly, in *V for Vendetta*, Norsefire also controls the media and individual freedoms. However, Norsefire more clearly demonstrates the corruptibility of those in power. Position, money, and control at all levels creates the environment in which the Fingermen can do anything they like. Those at the top possess all the property and wealth, and anyone with any amount of power can abuse those that fall below them on the hierarchy. Contrast this with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The Party certainly is susceptible to corruption, but, as O'Brien tells Winston, the Party seeks power for its own sake—not for wealth or status. The corruption of the government in *V for Vendetta* is much closer to our own and arguably more chilling because of this. Additionally, Moore and Lloyd's foresight in linking in religion creates a beautiful, if disturbing, element in

the character of Bishop Lilliman, a priestly man and child abuser. His crime, in our own world, has infected many churches widely, and organisations like Norsefire are practised at pumping out propaganda and failing to apologise or atone for their crimes.



While Ingsoc seems to have worked to rid cultural elements, and also impose a uniformity across all people within the Party, the destruction of culture is more obvious in *V for Vendetta*. We see Evey exploring so much of what *V* has to offer in the Shadow Gallery. She recalls it all—barely—but it is there in her memory. That exploration might be seen in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* briefly, but most of the characters have forgotten or never knew the culture that came before the Party. In *V*, who has been silenced, who has been discriminated against, and what has been lost is much clearer to the reader. We see, on the page, the victims of Norsefire's hatred through the scenes at Larkhill. This creates a stronger picture for the reader, and while imagining those who

were lost can be powerful, for me the direct portrayals and images of these people are stronger, and, sadly, still vividly resonate.

Additionally, Julia and Winston are not at all like Evey and V. The romance between Winston and Julia, despite a period of enlightenment for them both, does not compare to the platonic, brutal, yet caring relationship between V and Evey. Of course much of the text is about Evey herself. Her transformation is the focus of the story, and while Winston and Julia do transform, they revert to caged, shadow versions of themselves by the end of the novel. While we now have *Julia* by Sandra Newman, which explores the story from her perspective, there was disappointingly little about Julia in Orwell's original work.

Each text looks at fascism and totalitarianism differently as well. While there are similarities that one can stretch for, Moore and Lloyd came up with their own view and governmental structures. The Finger, Head, Nose, Ear, Voice, are all very clearly machines of government that keep the people down, but these are sufficiently different from the Ministries in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. They function differently, contrasting nicely. Familiar but not copies.

Both stories are, of course, set in London, England. In both stories there has been war, although the war in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* continues on endlessly. One might be able to grasp at some items mentioned in both works. Winston mentions how counting the bricks in his cell is reminiscent of the *Count of Monte Cristo*, which is V's favourite film, while there is also a Shakespearean reference from both characters. Although that could be stretching for commonalities.

There is a theory that *V for Vendetta* is a sequel to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. I do not at all buy into this idea. This doesn't work at all for me, and indeed, there is a more obvious sequel to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: *1985*. Anthony Burgess, of *A Clockwork Orange* fame, wrote *1985* in 1978. It is a fascinating piece of literature, where the first part consists of fictional interviews about Orwell and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, followed by a story projecting forward to 1985 based on social and political issues of 1978, which for me, misses much of the point of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The

enemy in the book is in many regards organised labour, Unions. It is a shame Burgess could not see the oncoming Tory disaster that actually occurred.

Here we see the genius of *V for Vendetta*. The warnings Moore and Lloyd wove into the text are not only clear, but accurate. So much of *V for Vendetta* telegraphs the risks the world faces from the political right, who work to create division, hatred, and sectarianism, who profit at the expense of regular people. The Miners Strike, the unpicking of public service, the unchecked greed and profiteering in London while regions are destroyed by the government—all created a horrendous time for regular people during the 1980s.

The brutality meted out to Winston is strongly portrayed, but ultimately it results in his disintegration as a person. The reader is not surprised by the violence Winston suffers at O'Brien's hands. However, in *V for Vendetta*, the unexpected happens: it is not only the State that is brutal, but V as well. V is horrendous to Evey as a means of helping her on her path of discovery and learning. Instead of disintegrating, like Winston, Evey evolves, grows, and becomes a new version of herself where she has the strength to take up the mantle and mask and become V in the end.

It is questionable whether V 'betrayed' Evey when he brutalised her and put her through the experience that he did. Ultimately, however, there was no betrayal between them in the end, and any hurt was resolved between them. Of course the romance V speaks of is that of freedom of the arts and of love and self-expression, not in a romantic fashion. With Julia and Winston, on the other hand, the betrayal

creates a void of feeling for one another. The ending of *V* is hopeful that change can be engineered and delivered upon. This is closer to my heart possibly, coming from a country that has seen a revolutionary period, and where fighting for freedom is much more visibly part of the cultural and historical landscape than perhaps it is for the English, where, generally speaking, silent unhappy stoical acceptance with some passive aggressiveness is more the norm.

Nineteen Eighty-Four and *V for Vendetta* both capture the concerns held by Orwell and Moore and



Lloyd. The war-weary Orwell had seen human behaviours during his time in Spain, fighting against fascism on both sides, and also was aware of the horrors of the Soviet system that was far from utopian. Lloyd and Moore were prophetic in their view of what might happen next. Adam Susan, for example, is a wonderful creation. His slavish, unhinged reliance upon computers is something that leaps beyond O'Brien and Big Brother in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a sadly depressing story, in some regards it is so unsatisfactory. At the close of the novel, Julia and Winston meet by accident for the first time since their imprisonment. They barely know how to talk to each other, and both confess that they betrayed the other in the end. Orwell portrays the sadness and oppression of the human spirit so successfully that we are left with a feeling of hollowness for them both. Contrast this with *V for Vendetta*, where V is killed as part of the finale, but is reborn in Evey in the moment she—dressed as V—looks on at the explosion under Downing Street. The human spirit is not broken in *V for Vendetta*, neither by Norsefire, with their experiments and treatment of V in Larkhill, nor by the ordeal V subjects Evey to. Evey resists and overcomes. She does not let pain and fear annihilate her true self—unlike Winston and Julia, who are both broken beyond belief and beyond love.

V for Vendetta champions human resilience. We see that a sacrifice can achieve much, that martyrdom for a good cause is to be appreciated and honoured, that fighting for what is right is worthy. Given this, it is fascinating to consider Orwell's writing in *Homage to Catalonia*, a real fight against facism, where he was fighting as part of the Republican Army, in the POUM militia (the Workers Party of Marxist Unification). He experienced the splintering and infighting on the Republican side, made of many factions, including anarchists, internationalists, Stalinists, workers associations. This was an amazing variety of people, who were all opposed to the Nationalists, but who often were bitter in their views of one another.

Yet in 'Why I Write,' Orwell said, 'Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it.' Democratic socialism, or democracy with social responsibility to all participants, was desirable for Orwell.

Orwell did what V did, and what Winston failed to do: he put a rifle to his shoulder, and fought. Although the front was not what Orwell expected, and he got involved in infighting between Republican factions behind the lines in Barcelona. He was shot in

the throat while on the front line, and subsequently had to escape Spain, as the POUM were made illegal by the Republican side. It was a chaotic time.

There is much about Orwell that is perhaps to be found in *V*, much easier than can be found in *Winston*. One might consider Orwell to have been a romantic, in a way the *V* was. Indeed Orwell's wife, Eileen O'Shaughnessy, travelled with him to Spain. After Eileen's death in 1945, he corresponded with many women to whom he was attracted, and eventually married Sonia Brownell in 1949, albeit when he was close to the end of his life. There is some speculation that Julia was based on Brownell.



While we can of course find some commonalities, I think the differences between the works are too many. Most importantly, however, are the differences in the societies in which they were written. One work is from 1948, the other from 1981. One is post-war, one is post-punk. Orwell's Britain was in the midst of an Attlee Labour government, which was hell-bent on extending massive social reform, creating the NHS, nationalising industries and utilities, and decolonisation of the British Empire. In the 1980s of Thatcherite Britain, on the other hand, the right wing was busy privatising and dismantling social services, enriching the rich, fighting against unions, and encouraging nationalism and jingoism. From these two differing times we get two very different stories.

V for Vendetta captures my heart in ways that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* doesn't, yet both are compelling and moving, hard to read at times, giving readers pause for thought.



V for Vendetta Instant Fanzine Interviews Part I by Michael Carroll

What is it that you love or enjoy about V for Vendetta and why?

V for Vendetta was a very "mature" comic for me, even though I was in my mid-teens when I first encountered it and was already reading *Epic Illustrated* and (on the very rare occasions I could get hold of a copy!) *Heavy Metal*. Because of David Lloyd's iconic art style I immediately thought "It's like *Night Raven!* Excellent!" but of course that's just the veneer. Underneath that, there are more layers than a plywood onion: V is *dark*, much more of a horror story than science fiction in my view, and setting aside the SF and fantasy elements it's all frighteningly close to possible. At the same time, though, V himself is *all* surface: all we really know of him is what he allows us to perceive, and that's part of the brilliance. He is very deliberately the author of his own mysteries. We never learn who he really was before Larkhill because that's not important. Not even remotely. What's relevant is who he chooses to become—a manifestation of his and others' fears and hopes, steeped in a special blend of nostalgia and violence—and what he chooses to do.

What are the political aspects of V that make you think?

I've always felt that V is fundamentally a study of order versus anarchy, or security versus freedom. Adam Susan's government wants everything nice and neat with the people sticking to the rules, and knowing their place. Obey at all times, because we want to keep you safe. We know what's good for you. Just in case there's any doubt, we'll bloody well *tell* you what's good for you. And for the sake of the greater good, if you step out of line, there will be consequences.

V represents freedom, expressed in this case as anarchy: let the people decide for themselves. Let them forge their own paths, make their own mistakes. Let them form—and *reform*—their own government. One of the movie version's taglines very nicely sums up V's approach: "People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid of their people."



What other works do you place next to V and why?

1984 is the first and most obvious comparison, story-wise. We have an oppressive government constantly lying to the population about the past and the present, and holding them back. But that's really the only strong point of comparison. Winston Smith in 1984 barely makes a dent in the enemy: they see him coming a mile away. And—arguably—they're quite charitable and generous in how at first they try to distract, divert and dissuade him before they resort to the more drastic methods.

I think that if we strip the humour and the larger absurdities from Terry Gilliam's 1985 movie *Brazil* we get a world that's a lot closer to V's, with Jonathan Pryce's Sam Lowry as a closer analogue for Evey: an "everyperson" who gets swept into the machinery of the "real world." Evey and Sam are both damned (or doomed, or destined) from the moment their eyes are opened to the real world. They try to go back, but they can't. They've seen too much...Some doors can never be closed again.

How do you compare the film and comic? Do you enjoy both, and why?

I do enjoy both, very much. The comic is better on just about every level, but not hugely so. I'd say the movie is the best and most successful of all the adaptations of Alan Moore's works.

Overall the movie stands on its own, and it updates the story very cleverly. Sure, they changed quite a lot but I don't think they really sacrificed too much of the core content, and certainly the story's message has remained intact and clear.

The movie is a tad over-the-top at times, and the climax featuring the crowds of V-garbed people swarming through the city doesn't really land as neatly as I expect they wanted (it doesn't even land in a proper heroic "Superhero Landing"). But then I've always felt that the ending is more metaphorical than actual—the presence of several deceased characters lends credence to this viewpoint, I think.

What do you think happens next to Evey?

You know, I've never given it much thought! I expect that Evey follows V's paradigm and teaches her new recruit about the real world, and about everything that has been lost by/taken from the people. And this recruit is likely the first of many. She will make plans to finish dismantling the government—but she's smart enough to know that it can't be done overnight, and certainly *shouldn't* be done without a new structure ready to take its place.

It'll be a long fight, and Evey knows that. A very long fight. She might not live to see her plans bear fruit, and she knows that too, but that's no reason to stop. Ultimately, she will succeed, and a new world, a better world, will emerge. And the inheritors of that new world will never know the names of their benefactors, and maybe that's as it should be...Who we are is not as important as what we do.



N For Night Raven: V's Strange Half-Brother

by Helena Nash

Night-time in the city...

A masked vigilante with a flair for the dramatic moves through a starkly monochrome city, meting out brutal justice to those that think themselves above the law. He may be a few old movie posters short of a vicious cabaret, but Marvel UK's Night Raven has more than a few things in common with *V for Vendetta*.

Night Raven debuted in *Hulk Comic* weekly #1 in 1979. Part of Marvel UK editor Dez Skinn's relaunch of the British titles, *Hulk Comic* was a cheaper, pulpier looking affair than the previous glossy reprints of the leading US superhero titles like Spider-Man, and instead favoured stories that veered as far away from spandex as it could get and still call itself Marvel. The weekly comic's short, home-grown stories gave us non-super heroic versions of the Hulk himself, the Black Knight, and Nick Fury Agent of SHIELD, where the plots and challenges seemed somewhat muted compared to their flashier, colourful American counterparts. I distinctly remember that the Hulk himself spent a lot of time fighting mundane bears and hunters in these issues; a far cry from the likes of the Abomination and Zzzax!

These lo-fi pulpy strips were brought to us by a slew of British talent, mainly named Steve with a few Daves, Davids, Pauls and Alans thrown in. And nestling toward the back of the comic, between Nick Fury and an old Ant-Man reprint, was Night Raven, written by Steve Parkhouse and drawn by none other than David Lloyd, two or three years before his stellar work on *V for Vendetta* in *Warrior*

Though Night Raven was set in Prohibition-era America while *V for Vendetta* was set in a dystopian future Britain, the visual similarities are clear, not

least being Lloyd's unmistakable facial work and mastery of strong black inks. It almost reads like a series of 3-panel daily newspaper strips glued together on one page, and that's no criticism. Appropriately Parkhouse's lean script jumps right into the action, compressing the set-up to a bare minimum of opening panels before launching into the surprise reveal of the masked vigilante Night Raven bursting in on a mob meeting. Lloyd matches the pace by giving us Dutch angles, overhead shots and silhouetted panel-busting action. Night Raven is simple, unpretentious and lots of fun.

Parkhouse continued Night Raven's punchy adventures for 20 issues of *Hulk Comic*, first with Lloyd and then artist John Bolton. They followed an episodic formula that frequently left the masked gangbuster in a perilous cliffhanger situation in the last panel of each issue, evoking old Republic movie serials and *Dick Barton, Special Agent* radio adventures. The titular hero is pretty much all business, using his wits, physical prowess and a bit of luck to keep him alive in

a one-man war against 1920s gangsters, mob bosses, assassins and murderers. We don't know his real name or see his face behind the eerie stylised bird mask; all we do know about him is that the criminals that he leaves in his wake – dead or alive – are found with an ominously poetic message pinned to them:

"When Brooding Darkness Spreads its Evil Wings, The Night Raven Stings!"

Never mind that ravens don't sting, it's a decent enough Poe-like tagline. And besides, "The Night Raven Pecks!" just doesn't have the same pizzazz.

Night Raven next pops up in Marvel UK's *Savage Action* monthly (1980-1981) as a series of illustrated text stories, not a million miles away from the



character's pulp magazine forefathers like the Shadow, the Spider, Doc Savage and others. Often the only original material in the magazine, the rest being reprints of the Punisher, Dominic Fortune and Moon Knight, there is little I can tell you about these text adventures on account of never having read them.

What I can tell you is that the writer was the pseudonymous 'Maxwell Stockbridge', in reality Marvel UK editor Alan McKenzie, the name being a knowing conflation of Maxwell Grant and Grant Stockbridge, themselves both pseudonyms for a number of writers of the Shadow and the Spider back in the golden age of the pulps. The artists providing illustrations for these stories are all stalwarts of the Marvel UK stable: David Lloyd (again), John Bolton (again), Alan Davis, Jerry Paris, Paul Neary, and others. It seems that anyone in Marvel UK's phone book who could hold a pencil got their chance to do a sketch or two of Night Raven back then.

We next pick up Night Raven in *Marvel Super-Heroes* monthly (1982-1983), another largely reprint black and white affair, but one that would soon see Dave Thorpe, Alan Davis, and Alan Moore's revolutionary reincarnation of Captain Britain. Night Raven is still a series of illustrated text stories, just two or three pages long, written by jack-of-all-trades Paul Neary, before Alan Moore finally gets his hands on the character, ably assisted by talented artists like Mick Austin, Steve Dillon and Paul Neary (once again).

And that's where things started to get a bit weird, in the best possible way. Of course they did, because Alan Moore was now writing the text stories, and I'm not ashamed to admit, seeing his name in the credits made me actually bother to read them for once, rather than skipping past them to see how the Avengers were doing against Modred the Mystic.

In the course of Moore's text stories, it's explained that Yi Yang, a somewhat stereotypical Dragon Lady-type crimelord from the original *Hulk* Comic strip, has returned from the dead and dosed Night Raven with an incurable poison that's deformed his body and left him in permanent agony, whilst stretching his mind beyond the point of madness. The stories go to some length to describe his now rasping, snakelike voice and his increasingly dishevelled appearance. No longer is this the sleek, lithe hero of the 1920s in a black sweater and twin holsters; this Night Raven is a tattered, itinerant maniac in a battered hat and flapping old coat. Something of a precursor to Moore and Dave Gibbons' Rorschach, Night Raven has metamorphosed from a masked but all-too human vigilante to something madder and more monstrously inhuman. Oh yes, and he's now immortal, obsessively chasing Yi Yang through the 20th Century in search of an elusive cure for his horrific mutation.



For me, Peak Night Raven comes a little later, in *The Daredevils* monthly (1983) with Moore now firing on all cylinders. We start with 'The Anaesthetic, Wearing Off...' in issue #6, illustrated by his *V for Vendetta* collaborator David Lloyd, which the two of them would have been already working on over in *Warrior*. This is followed by the masterful 4-parter 'The Snow Queen' (*The Daredevils* #7-10), a brutal, tragic, brilliant tale of doomed love, betrayal and merciless vengeance, memorably illustrated by Moore's Captain Britain partner Alan Davis. If you only ever read one Night Raven story, read 'The Snow Queen.'

After 'The Snow Queen,' Night Raven's continuing text story adventures would pass from Alan Moore to the perennial 'post-Moore follow-up writer Jamie Delano, just as he would on Captain Britain and John Constantine. Après Moore, le Delano.

Night-time in the city.



V for Vendetta Instant Fanzine Interviews Part 2 **by Errick Nunnally**

What is it that you love or enjoy about V for Vendetta and why?

The badassery was the first thing that caught my attention as a kid. I'd always enjoyed superhero mags, so V was just on the cusp of that scene. In later years, revisiting the material, I understood the more political and historical implications of the story. I also learned more about the years in the UK that inspired the comic which gave it, yet again, broader meaning. It's a very layered work.

What are the political aspects of V that make you think?

How much personal freedom should society allow amongst its citizenry? It's a constant tension in a democracy and something we should all be keenly aware of if we consider ourselves participants.

What other works do you place next to V and why?

The first thing that comes to my mind is *Give Me Liberty*, the Martha Washington series, by Frank Miller and Dave Gibbons. It broadly covers similar

themes as *V for Vendetta* about the gray areas between democracy and fascism, although in a more parodic way.

How do you compare the film and comic? Do you enjoy both, and why?

They're not very comparable, but I did enjoy both. However, I think the movie isn't able to cover the same themes due to time constraints. It wasn't possible for the movie to properly delve into people's lives or communicate their dystopian life. The comic characters did a far superior job in defining what life was like in V's world, what V was fighting against, and how this society has managed to alter itself.

What do you think happens next to Evey?

Evey will never be the same again, that's all I can imagine. What she does next could be dozens of things. I hope that she makes a difference in as impactful and intelligent a way as an individual can.



V for Variation

by Christopher J. Garcia



I love James McTeigue's film version of *V for Vendetta*. I also love the comic, which I remember first reading in the late 80s and have collected a couple of different versions of over the years. They're both exceptionally beautiful tellings of the exact same story (with minor variations, and each version is better at some things that the other doesn't quite nail) and they both speak to their time perfectly.

And that, perhaps, is something I need to explore.

There's no question *V for Vendetta* the comic was about Thatcher's England. It's clear in every dimension, calling out where that government would lead if left unchecked. It's so smart, and uniquely English.

The movie *V for Vendetta* is all about Bush the Lesser's America. Now, the overlap between the two is fairly incredible, but it's certainly evident that the notes that made Moore and Lloyd's work explicitly about fascism vs. anarchism are absent, replaced by a battle between anarchism and American State-ism (for lack of a more intelligent phrase) with characters more in line with American morality.

And that, to me, is why *V for Vendetta* as a whole, is brilliant. It's malleable to the point where the story can be used two ways and not only still make sense, but remain biting and impressive.

Let's take V. The character is presented as a psychopath with a goal to benefit the individual in society. That's a somewhat controversial reading of the character, admittedly, but on my recent re-readings, that idea struck me. There was literally no difference between V and Timothy McVeigh as far as I could see; they both used violence as a way to strike at a system they saw as inhumane and unjust. We've villainized McVeigh, rightfully, but we feel differently about V, no? That's one thing that I think Moore did incredibly well. He made a character we should truly find repulsive, with a near-complete disregard for human life, and made us root for him because the big bad he is up against is so big and so bad. I really believe that this story could only be told after the reality of waves of genocide, and specifically the Nazi atrocities, have been experienced and shown.

In the film, V has remorse. He's a remorseful killer, but resolute in the pursuit of his goal despite that. There's no better example of that than in the scene where he poisons Dr. Surridge. It's clear he wants her dead, but there's much more behind it. He expresses far more moments of humanity (I expect to get push-back on that; I feel like V in the comic is more a machine than a person) and seems to be a much

more realized character. His relationship with Evey in the movie is far more interesting to me, partly because there's a world of physicality that Hugo Weaving as V puts into his interactions with Natalie Portman. He's incredible in the role.

Moore points out that "[t]here wasn't a mention of anarchy as far as I could see. The fascism had been completely defanged. I mean, I think that any references to racial purity had been excised, whereas actually, fascists are quite big on racial purity."

This, I feel, misses the point, while also 100% solidifying the fact that Moore's vision was so thoroughly realized in the comic. It's clear that anarchy isn't a thing Americans really understand except in the absolute fringes. It is 100% something to be feared and fought against in every way. The fear is that America will fall into anarchy, not so much that America will fall into fascism. The latter, it seems, is much preferable to the former for a whole bunch of the county, and we're kinda living that at that moment. It's the bread-and-butter of the modern Republican party. I think the fascism as presented in the film is much more realistic, the comic goes a bit over-the-top, but of course, few of us read comics for realism.

Though, I can say the same about movies...

I think this is the big thing—the film had 20 years more data to draw on and that certainly informed the presentation of Adam Sutler's government. It's an impressive reading that takes elements of the original, but then burns them a lot brighter, allowing the entire concept of the fascism to feel more modern. There is a broadness to Moore's work, and certainly to Lloyd's visual presentation, that is both absorbed by and mutated by the aesthetic of McTeigue's work with Owen Paterson and Peret Walpole. They manage to create a realistic-looking iconography based off of Lloyd's work, but at the same time, diverging in a way that just feels updated and more realistic, while still maintaining a sense of distance.

And that is something that Moore and Lloyd specifically did not want to do.

One of the things the movie does is create a sense of "This is not here, this is not now," which the comic almost dares you to NOT see it as what's going on around you. That alone makes the comic feel heavier, establishing it as a fundamental piece of fiction. The film, though, presents you a dark fantasy that kinda looks like your world, and there are breadcrumbs that show this may be where we're

heading, but ultimately, it's not our reality. That's a huge difference, and I feel that both are valid.

Of course, I'm an American who lived through all of the US political stuff of the last 40 years. I get the film more than I get the comic, which isn't to say it's better (honestly, I put them both on the same footing within their respective fields, that is to say really freakin' high) but at the same time, there are elements of the in-your-faceness of the comic that I don't feel should be ignored.

When you look at how the real world has played out, yeah, the movie is pretty damn close to what the US has been goin' through. Less so the comic. As one of those Americans who is terrified by anarchism (I know I'd be dead-by-dawn if such a thing were to ever take hold around me) I am far more terrified of Moore and Lloyd's version which celebrates (to a degree) anarchism. Am I scared of the film's take? Well, yes, but at the same time, there's that distance that makes it, if not palatable, at least less immediate, which is strange as we've been REALLY close to it the last decade!

The way that Moore and Lloyd's material can be folded ever so slightly (and honestly, it's not much of a fold when you consider what filmmakers did to things like *The Road to Wellville* or *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*) shows me what I really believe about great stories: they can live in any time, any place, in any context. I often get annoyed when people, and especially authors, complain about the distortion of the original intent. Once a reader gets their brain on a work, where it goes is out of their control. That leads to things like a *V for Vendetta* that abandons the original vision, but at the same time, puts elements of the vision to work in a different, and far more present-day audience relatable, context. I think it was Sebilius who once said "it's not the notes that matter; it's what the audience takes away from listening to them."

These are two ballads based on the same melody.



Agents of Change

by Brenda Noiseux



More enduring for me than the “super rich becoming the governing” or “how we create our own monsters” is the element of awakening activism in *V for Vendetta*. V is a catalyst for change, shaking the masses out of complacency. Whether intentional or not, this aspect has always stuck with me whenever *V for Vendetta* enters the conversation.

Although V is on his own quest for vengeance, there is an underlying thread of inspiring/forcing Evey, and ordinary citizens, to realize their own power in effecting change. His initial address via television warns the characters, and by extension the reader, that “You have accepted without question their senseless orders.” Later, once the wheels are further in motion, V tells Evey, “Our masters have not heard the people’s voice for generations, Evey, and it is much, much louder than they care to remember.”

There’s a power in people coming together to fight back. With this perspective in mind, what else can we find in comics that inspires us to fight for change?

First, comics and graphic novels are no stranger to holding up a mirror to issues of injustice and corruption. We’ve seen the hardened journalist in well-known works such as *Transmetropolitan* by Warren Ellis, Darick Robertson, and Rodney Ramos and *DMZ* by Brian Wood and Riccardo Burchielli, both of which report on the ills of their time.

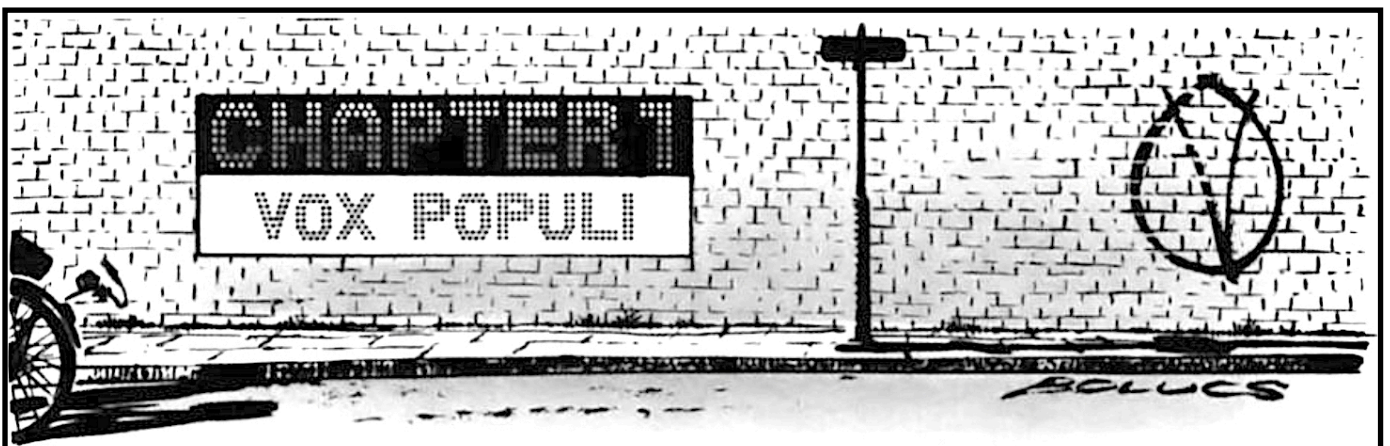
Perhaps lesser known, but more recent, are: *The Sheriff of Babylon* by Tom King and Mitch Gerads, which gives us a glimpse at the American involvement in the Middle East; *Barrier* by Brian K. Vaughan, Marcos Martin, and Muntsa Vicente, which tackles the hot button issues of illegal country border crossings between Mexico and the United States; and *Black*, in

which Kwanza Osajyefo and Tim Smith 3 reflect on a world where the reality of being Black in America is further complicated when only Black people get superpowers.

Similar to *V for Vendetta* in the realms of exploitation, violence, corruption, and vengeance is *Bitch Planet* by Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine De Landro, which is set in a world where non-compliant women are sent to prison at the whims of the patriarchy and forced to fight. Like *V for Vendetta*, these stories show us a glimpse of a near-future that feels more plausible than the reader might want to admit. The non-fiction essays and fake advertisements in the comics add to the urgency of the calls to action, reminding us that we are stronger together and that we can fight back.

In Alan Moore’s introduction to *V for Vendetta*, he noted that though he started work on the comic in 1981, by 1988 “Margaret Thatcher is entering her third term of office and talking confidently of an unbroken Conservative leadership well into the next century...the tabloid press are circulating the idea of concentration camps for persons with AIDS. The new riot police wear black visors, as do their horses, and their vans have rotating video cameras mounted on top. The government has expressed a desire to eradicate homosexuality, even as an abstract concept, and one can only speculate as to which minority will be the next legislated against.”

That comics like *V for Vendetta* continue to be relevant over the years and decades make them a powerful tool in rallying us to action. They are directly speaking to us about how we can change the world. The question is what are we going to do about it.





The Woman In Room Four

by David Ferguson

The best science fiction, in my opinion, is based around real human stories. *V for Vendetta* may be about the rise of a totalitarian regime and the main character V's attempts to bring it all crashing down, but it is full of human stories. And, to me, the story is driven by one person's story in particular. From the beginning of the story, we see the regime has always targeted minorities and we get hints of the bigoted nature of party members. When confronted by V, Lewis Prothero, the Voice of Fate and former commander of Larkhill Resettlement Camp, claims "we had to do what we did. All the Darkies, the Nancy Boys and the Beatniks... it was us or them."

However, the real story of their treatment of minorities comes into focus in the chapter called "Valerie." An imprisoned Evey reads a story that the author Valerie, a queer character, refers to as "the only autobiography I will ever write." She tells the story of a childhood crush, bringing a girlfriend home to meet her parents, which went poorly, and leaving home to go to London to go to drama college. Her mother told her she broke her heart. But Valerie said her integrity was important and that "it's all we have left in this place. It's the very last inch of us. But within that inch we are free." She also tells the story of finding true love. She begins a career in film, and that is where she found her girlfriend, Ruth. Ruth bought her roses on Valentine's Day and they lived in happiness for three years. This is a story the people, queer or straight, can empathise with.

After the war, there were no more roses. The party's rise to power saw them starting to round up gays, and Valerie's girlfriend was taken. They tortured her into implicating Valerie, signing a statement that Valerie "seduced" her. Ruth couldn't live with betraying Valerie and "with giving up that last inch" and killed herself. They came for Valerie next. They told her that her films would be burned, they shaved her head, tortured her and made jokes about lesbians. She had been taken to Larkhill and was then part of Dr. Delia Surridge's cruel medical experiments (like V). She talks of another lesbian, Rita, dying from them. The whole letter is beautifully written but my favourite piece is "...for three years I had roses and I apologised to nobody." The letter affects and inspires Evey to not give up her integrity. She'd rather be shot than give her "abductors" information. As her "abduction" is later revealed to be a fabrication of V's, she believes he wrote the letter. However, V

shows her proof of Valerie's existence and says of the letter "I delivered it to you as it was delivered to me." He also reveals that the words that inspired Evey "transformed" him five years earlier. Valerie was "the woman in room four." V shows Evey the roses he has grown in Valerie's memory. Valerie had stated in her letter that she hoped there would be roses again. These are the roses that V gives to his victims.



There are many human stories in *V for Vendetta*, but Valerie's story inspired V to destroy and flee Larkhill and seek revenge. It is a beautiful letter. To me, it is the heart of the story.

With an inspiring message:

"I hope that the world turns and that things get better, and that one day people have roses again."

Who Was That Masked Man?

by Pádraig Ó Méalóid



Put simply, *V for Vendetta* is one of the best films I've ever seen. Its impact on me when I first saw it was such that I found myself in tears almost continually from beginning to end. On the other hand, I can give you a very good argument as to why the film should never have been made in the first place. More on that later, after a quick synopsis of the film.

The setting for *V for Vendetta* is Britain in the near future, with a far-right, fascist regime in charge. After a brief piece about Guy Fawkes, presumably for the US audiences, who may not have heard of him, the film starts with Evey Hammond, a young PA for British Television Network, going out to keep an assignation with Gordon Dietrich, one of her superiors at work. Evey knows she will be out after the 11:00 pm curfew, but decides to take a chance anyway. She is soon in trouble with the Fingermen, this government's version of the secret police, and is about to be raped and probably killed, when a mysterious figure, wearing a cloak, hat, and Fawkesian mask, appears, kills her attackers in spectacular fashion, and introduces himself with a long monologue largely consisting of words beginning with the letter V. This is worth repeating here, not only because it more or less sets out his basic motivations, and because I'll want to refer to it later, but because it is also quite a decent piece of writing:

In view, a humble vaudevillian veteran, cast vicariously as both victim and villain by the vicissitudes of fate. This visage, no mere veneer of vanity, is a vestige of the vox populi, now vacant, vanished; a vital voice once venerated, now vilified. However, this valorous visitation of a bygone vexation now stands vivified, and has vowed to vanquish those venal and virulent vermin vanguarding vice and vouchsafing the violent, vicious, and voracious violation of volition. The only verdict is vengeance. A vendetta, held as votive, not in vain, for the value and veracity of such shall one day vindicate the vigilant and virtuous. Yet verily, this vichyssoise of verbiage veers most verbose, so let me simply add that it is

my very great honour to meet you, and you may call me V.

V then brings Evey up to the rooftops of London, just in time for him to conduct an imaginary orchestra in Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, which starts playing over the city's ever-present loudspeaker system, and which climaxes with the explosive destruction of the Old Bailey, complete with fireworks, just as Big Ben strikes midnight. The date is the fifth of November.

Within hours, the government's various agencies are trying to get to grips with the situation. The Finger, in charge of security services; The Eye, in charge of visual surveillance; and The Ear, in charge of audio surveillance, are all trying to find out what they can. Two further agencies, The Mouth and The Nose, in charge of propaganda and criminal detection respectively, attempt to deal with the situation in their own ways. The Mouth releases a statement about a scheduled nighttime demolition of what was a dangerous old building, with the fireworks put down to high spirits by one of the workers. In the meantime, Eric Finch, once a policeman but now reluctantly in charge of The Nose, is trying to find the culprit using good old-fashioned police work. From this point, the film goes into high gear, and simply never stops until the very last shot. To say more than that would simply be giving away too much. Along the way it has time to be a political thriller, a detective story, a conspiracy theory, and a love story, of sorts. It's possibly even a SF story, if the fact that it's set in the near future is enough to allow it to qualify. It seems to be influenced by all sorts of things: obviously the original graphic novel by Alan Moore and David Lloyd, but also by things like *1984*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and of course the story of Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot. It's also, of course, a product of the times in which it was made, in the same way the original story was a product of its own times. And it's really, truly, absolutely, one of the finest things I've ever seen on a cinema screen.

From this point on, I may be revealing more about the film than you wish to know, but I'll do my

best not to ruin any of the actual surprises. None the less, you have been warned!

V for Vendetta is the story of a year in the lives of three characters (V, Evey, and Finch) and the world in which they live. All three will be transformed by the end of it, and the world they live in will be transformed also. V starts by seeking only revenge for his hideous treatment twenty years before, and finds compassion through love. Evey wishes not to live in fear any more, and finds strength through revelation. Finch wants to find the truth, and is illuminated by the truth he finds. All three characters are well realized, and very well acted indeed. Natalie Portman, in spite of her slightly wobbly accent at times, is harrowingly good as Evey, and Stephen Rea gives a very solid performance as policeman Eric Finch. Hugo Weaving does astonishing things with his role as V, given that he spends the entire film wearing a mask and dressed in black. Subtle movements of the head and slight changes of body posture, along with clever lighting and direction, serve to give what is a fixed and seemingly immutable Guy Fawkes mask a whole range of emotions.

V is probably the most intriguing character to grace the big screen for many years. He's part action hero, part political activist. He's a dangerous anarchist and a champion of democracy. He is, undoubtedly, a demented lunatic, but also a dashing and mysterious romantic male lead. This last aspect (that of an attractive and romantic figure) is certainly one that I would never have imagined, but I have been assured by several ladies of my acquaintance that this is definitely the case. On top of this V's home, the Shadow Gallery, is simply magnificent. It is full to the brim with books and paintings and various cultural artifacts of all sorts, whether high art or popular culture. Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Marriage* shares wall space with a framed copy of *The Beezer*, and native carvings from all over the world are scattered on tables and desks. Evey's bedroom is simply stuffed with precariously stacked mountains of books. It's the kind of place any sane person would want to live, and makes a very attractive and intriguing backdrop for certain scenes in the film.

Lots of other actors give great performances. John Hurt as High Chancellor Adam Sutler is suitably angry throughout, only addressing his underlings through a huge television screen, much like Big Brother in 1984. It makes an interesting contrast to Hurt's own role in the film version of that book. He played Winston Smith, whose torture and transformation finds an echo in Evey's own

transformation. Tim Piggott-Smith is superbly menacing as Creedy, the head of The Finger and a thoroughly nasty piece of work. Stephen Fry, essentially playing himself, gives a very touching and very moving performance as Gordon Deitrich, a performance that would make the film worth seeing all on its own.

On the other hand...

Much has been made of the fact that Alan Moore is not a supporter of the movie of *V for Vendetta*. There are good and strong reasons for this, as I hope I can show. To do this, I'll have to delve a little into the history of Moore's work.

I read the first installment of *V for Vendetta* in the first issue of *Warrior* in 1982, where it shared space with another of Moore's finest works, *Marvelman*. I have a long interest in all the works of Alan Moore, more or less stemming from the time I read that first issue of *Warrior*. Moore is undoubtedly the finest and most important comics writer in the world now, and possibly ever. Despite this, he has suffered from very shabby treatment at the hands of most of the comics companies he worked for. The back-story of V, particularly, needs to be understood.

The UK comics magazine *Warrior*, in which V first appeared, lasted for twenty six issues, ending in 1984, by which point the story was a little over halfway through. At the time there was a lot of interest in comics in the media. The idea that comics were actually a legitimate form of literary expression, and that they could actually be read by adults, was starting to be felt. The way the comics companies were dealing with the creative people behind comics was also changing. That process would eventually lead to big companies (such as DC and Marvel) publishing comics that were still copyrighted to the original creators, rather than automatically becoming the property of the company as had always been the case in the past. Moore was at the very spearhead of this, along with Frank Miller and others. However, at the time that Moore went to negotiate a deal with DC, along with co-creator and V artist David Lloyd, and *Warrior* editor Dez Skinn, those kinds of contracts were still a while away.

The contract that Moore and co ended up with was this: DC would publish V as a ten-issue mini-series, beginning in 1988, and subsequently as a graphic novel, which appeared in 1990, and would own the right to the series, and the character, and in general could do as they wished with it, as long as they kept it in print. However, if the graphic novel went out of print, the rights would then revert to Moore and Lloyd. This all seemed fair enough, except that no-one could



have foreseen that the graphic novel would be continuously in print from then until now, therefore, by its very success, forever keeping his creation out of Moore's reach. When DC sold the movie rights for *V* to parent company Warner Bros, they didn't need Moore's permission to do so, and went ahead regardless of his opinions on the subject. Certainly movies had been made of DC properties before, but these were generally of characters that were part of the DC pantheon, and had been written by numerous people over many years, and could certainly not be seen as being the product of a single creative team.

Even at that point, Moore was prepared to allow things to simply proceed as they were. True, two previous movie versions of his works, *From Hell* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen (LoEG)*, were less than wonderful, but at least he more or less knew that was going to be the case and, having sold the rights, was content to leave the moviemakers to it, as long as they left him alone. Unfortunately, two things happened that finally finished Moore's desire to have any involvement with Hollywood, the second of which specifically caused him to take an adversarial position on the movie of *V*.

First of all he was drawn into a court case involving *LoEG*, claiming that that movie was substantially stolen from a screenplay called *A Cast of Characters*. There was, apparently, quite an amount of similarity between the two screenplays, but these similarities only came about in that version, and were entirely absent from Moore's original work. None the less, he found himself giving a ten-hour deposition for the case. It was at this point that he decided that he wanted his name taken off all movies based on his works, and that, if he owned the rights to something, he simply wouldn't sell those rights to Hollywood in the first place.

The final straw for Moore began in 2005 with a phone call from Lana Wachowski, *V*'s writer/producer. Moore politely told her that he didn't want anything to do with films and simply wished to get on with his writing. And that should have been that. But it wasn't. Moore was soon made aware of a press release about a press conference given by Joel Silver, the film's producer, and its cast. In this, Silver said that Moore was, "very excited about what Lana [Wachowski] had to say and Lana sent the script..." Moore felt, quite rightly, that his name was being used to endorse the film against his explicit instructions. Indeed, they'd managed to quote pretty much the exact opposite of his actual feelings about the project, and about the film industry in general. He requested,

through his Wildstorm editor, Scott Dunbier, that DC/Warner Brothers should issue a retraction of what he described as "blatant lies—that's the phrase I'm groping for." What he wanted, he said, was a retraction, a clarification, and a modest apology, released in a similar manner to the original press release. Silver's words were removed from the movie's website, but there was no retraction, although DC's president, Paul Levitz tried to get Silver to make one. When Moore's two-week deadline passed, and there was no apology forthcoming, Moore was true to his word. He finished his contracted work for ABC/Wildstorm/DC, which consists of finishing a hardback *LoEG* book, and a story for Tom Strong, and will now never work for DC again.

And that's why Alan Moore wants to have nothing to do with the movie version of *V for Vendetta*.

It is for that reason that I'm so personally torn about the fact that I like the film so much. I absolutely agree that Moore and David Lloyd deserve to have their intellectual property returned to them. On the same line of reasoning, I can see that Moore wouldn't have wanted the film made, and have no choice but to agree. However, the film did get made, and we can only judge it on what it is, and not what it might have been, or indeed might not have been.

One person who occasionally gets forgotten in all this is David Lloyd, who was the artist and co-creator on *V for Vendetta*. Unlike Alan Moore, Lloyd was fully in favor of the film, and the point could be argued that the film more closely resembles the story drawn by Lloyd than it does the story written by Moore. Lloyd's role in creating *V* was not just following art direction given by Moore either. The character of *V* was largely designed by him and the ways in which the story was told, like foregoing thought bubbles and sound effects, were at his suggestion. These ideas had far-reaching consequences as Moore and Lloyd were, unknown to themselves, rewriting the grammar of comics as they went along. I sometimes have difficulties with the story of *V*, which is not without flaws. Even Moore himself acknowledges this in the introduction he wrote for the series. But it is undeniably one of the milestones in the development of comics for a more mature audience, and one of the books on which the current popularity of graphic novels is based.

There are any number of differences between the film and the original graphic novel. If you are going to go see it hoping that it is a direct translation onto the screen of the original then you are bound to

be disappointed. The book was originally written in the Britain of the 1980s, and reflects its time. The film was made in the US in the early years of the twenty-first century, and obviously reflects its time, too. Characters are changed, and whole chunks of the book are missing, but none the less the filmmakers obviously had a lot of love for the original work, and manage to drop references to it throughout the film. V's soliloquy, which I quoted earlier, references many of the titles of the installments of V from the comics, all of which began with the letter V. There were titles like Vaudeville, Vox Populi, Verdict, and so on. Lewis Prothero, although he's not identified as a doll collector in the film, as he is in the book, still has a few shelves of dolls in his bathroom. The little girl who says "Bollocks" to the cameras still gets to say it, just in a different context. And much else.

On the other hand, the film is riddled with inaccuracies and plot holes. For instance the Jan Van Eyck painting in the Shadow Gallery, *The Arnolfini Marriage*, is much larger than it should be. We are told at one point that Bishop Lillian, in his earlier days, was paid some ridiculously large sum of money while working at Larkhill, without ever being told why this is the case. Considering that they're meant to be living in an oppressive fascist regime, the people we see in their homes seem to be in no way actually oppressed. Although a lot is made of the fact that Evey hasn't had butter in years, wide-screen TVs, tobacco, and beer seem to be in plentiful supply. Numerous other instances could be pointed out, and no doubt will be. However, as far as I'm concerned, they don't really matter. I loved the film the first time I saw it, and the second time, when I was considerably less emotionally affected and could simply enjoy it for what it was. It's a well-made film, and an important film, especially for the times we live in. It is even a reasonably good adaptation of the original work, at least in some respects. Certainly the film seems to gather oddness and controversy to itself as it goes along. One of the people working on the film during the destruction of Westminster, as part of a work placement scheme, was Ewan Blair, son of the British prime minister. I even managed to walk into my local comic shop just in time to hear a discussion on whether or not Lana Wachowski's alleged forthcoming gender realignment surgery would adversely affect the film.

There is one last aspect of the film that I found fascinating. There is a novelization of the movie, which has been written by Steve Moore. Steve Moore is a very old friend of Alan Moore, and is said to be the person who first taught Alan to write comics. He's also

Alan's magical partner, and in general the pair have worked together in various ways for quite a number of years. I got the opportunity to get a few words from Steve Moore about the writing of the novelization, which are fascinating in themselves:

Basically, I saw the job as a professional one, where my task was to adapt the screenplay I'd been given as well as I could under the circumstances; while at the same time doing the best that I could (given that I had to follow the screenplay) to make the novel worthy of the original graphic novel, which I obviously admire. That meant that I couldn't deviate from the screenplay, and felt obliged to use the dialogue it contained, although I was given freedom to provide additional material to flesh out the background. For this extra material I tried to draw as much as possible on the original graphic novel (though obviously I had to make sure there was no clash between the two).

"After discussions with my editor at DC, I did make some changes to the script: removing a historical prologue about the original Guy Fawkes; retaining the "Violet Carson" rose name, rather than the non-existent "Scarlet Carson" of the film; failing to mention any of the specific dates given in the screenplay so that the actual time-period of the story became more nebulous (and possibly closer to the present day). Obviously, there were a number of other areas in the screenplay where I had to smooth things over or make minor changes, just to make the story work as a novel rather than a film.

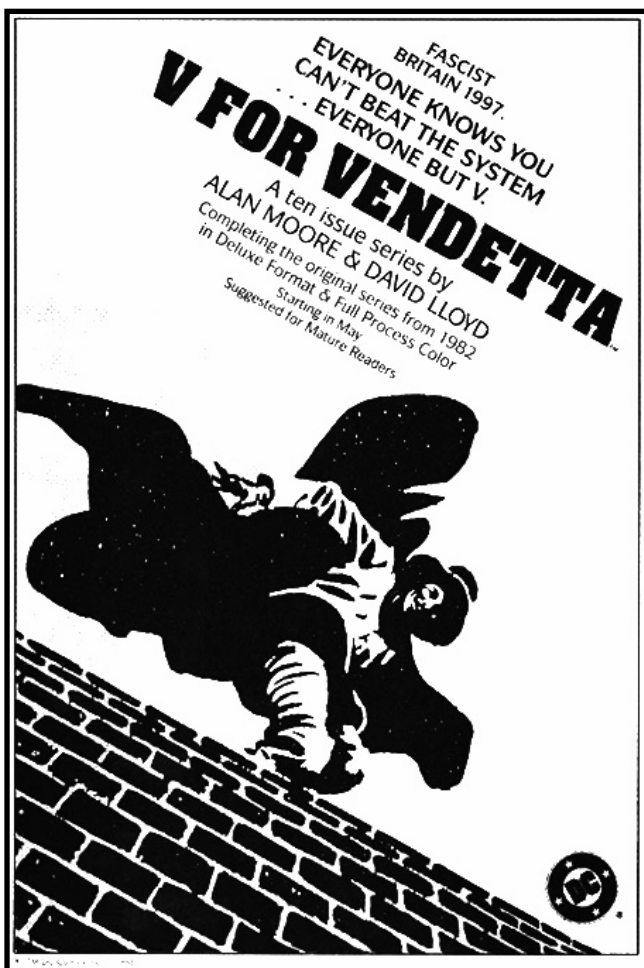
Certainly Steve Moore's novelization makes an intriguing third version of the story of V, and I urge you to read it, just as soon as you've been to the cinema to see the film a few times. It goes without saying that you should already own a copy of the graphic novel. I'll leave you with perhaps the most succinct comment I heard on the film, as a crowd of us gathered in the foyer of the cinema after the preview screening here in Dublin. A friend of mine came up to me with a shine in his eyes and said, 'Let's go blow shit up!'

First published in the April 2006 issue of Emerald City.



The F Word: V's unofficial DC crossover? by Helena Nash

Here's the 1988 house advert for DC's collected, coloured and continued V For Vendetta mini-series. Cool, isn't it?

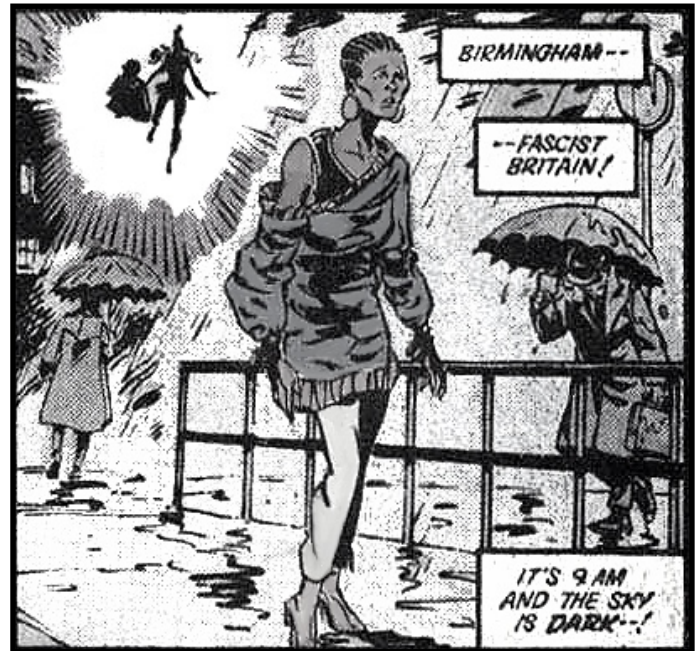


Now here's panel 6, page 15, issue #2 of DC's *Millennium* mini-series, also from 1988, illustrated by Joe Staton and the late great Ian Gibson.

Wait, what? Fascist Britain? Is this a *V For Vendetta* crossover? Are the Justice League about to go up against the Finger? Is Batman going to team up with some bloke in a Guy Fawkes costume?

The answer is No, that's not what's happening here. This appears to just be a throwaway 'Fascist Britain!' caption in an otherwise V-less comic, and it has always bugged me.

Millennium was DC's third big event crossover of the 80s, following the excellent *Crisis on Infinite*



Earths and the fairly good *Legends*. It was an 8-issue mini-series published weekly throughout January and February of 1988, and like its predecessors, was set in the mainstream DC timeline, the post-Crisis 'one and only Earth' if you will. It was the Earth of Metropolis and Gotham and Themyscira, of New York and Paris. And Birmingham, which was, according to writer Steve Englehart (or possibly editor Andrew Helfer), a city in 'Fascist Britain!'

A bit of context. In the second issue of *Millennium*, globe-trotting characters visit Australia, Japan, China, Russia, Iran, South Africa and Peru. None of those locations are accompanied by an authoritative narrative caption like, I don't know, 'Totalitarian China!' or 'Fundamentalist Iran!' or 'Apartheid South Africa!' Only Britain gets that treatment.

It's a weird anomaly, and there's no explanation in the comic why Britain gets the fascist treatment. It's just a casual descriptor on one panel, as if to say, 'Hey readers, you all know Britain's a fascist state, right?' Really?

It was months later, sometime around the middle of that year, when I saw a house ad for DC's repackaged and coloured *V For Vendetta* mini-series bearing the 'Fascist Britain' line again, and suddenly

things started to click into place, thinking back to *Millennium*.

Of course, it made complete sense in the context of *V For Vendetta* for the ad to use that line. It is a fascist Britain. A future, dystopian, 'it could happen here' Britain. Like Judge Dredd's Mega City One is a futuristic, dystopian America, or Star Trek's Earth is a futuristic, utopian vision. That's the setting for the story.

But *Millennium* wasn't about a dystopian future Britain; it was just the regular Britain of the DC universe, birthplace of Batman's Alfred, home to ridiculous 'prehensile hair power' superhero Godiva, and stomping ground of chain-smoking Liverpudlian Londoner John Constantine. So like I say, that throwaway caption bugged me. It felt out of place and clumsy.

I've always wondered what came first, the line in *Millennium* #2 (published January 1988), or the house ad for *V For Vendetta* (first seen August 1988). Did writer Steve Englehart or editor Andrew Helfer coin the phrase, and then someone in DC's marketing department think 'Hey, that's a cool line, we should totally use that for the *V For Vendetta* house ad'? That seems unlikely.

Far more likely would be that Englehart or Helfer were already familiar with the line from the *V* advert. Which means it must have been circulating around DC for a while, at least as early as late 1987, in time for it to be reused for *Millennium* #2. If that is the case, then it poses some questions about the veteran creators Englehart and Helfer's opinions of the UK in the late 80s.

On the other hand, maybe they were just gearing up for a *Brave and the Bold* Batman/*V* crossover. But the closest we would get to that ever happening was a year and a bit later in *Detective Comics* #608 (November 1989), with the introduction of Alan Grant and Norm Breyfogle's V-alike Anarky.





The Trains in *V for Vendetta* by James Bacon

David Lloyd is a brilliant artist and skilled writer, but as he noted, Alan Moore was the 'brain' when it came to *V for Vendetta*. Lloyd is one of those people who spots talent. During our interview (see page 3) there was plenty of lovely discussion about the comic itself, as well as much laughter around the fact that fans like to see things that might not actually be there; we like to focus in on details, and sometimes manufacture misplaced ideas.

I do love trains, and so I have had much fun documenting the appearances and occurrences of trains in *V for Vendetta*. Here are the details with some added commentary. It is about as obscure as you might expect.



Book I, Chapter 1 ('The Villain), page 7, November 5th, 1997

Intercity Train, a man looks up at the V-shaped fireworks in London's sky. The infrastructure remains. We see the *l*, *n* and partial *t* of *Intercity*, in the Railway Alphabet font, as used by British Railways. Although, in our 1997, the Thatcherite dream of privatising the railways, ensuring huge profits for banks and corporations, all at taxpayers' expense, had occurred, so the Rail Blue and Pearl Grey carriages with the British Rail 'double arrow' logo were no more.

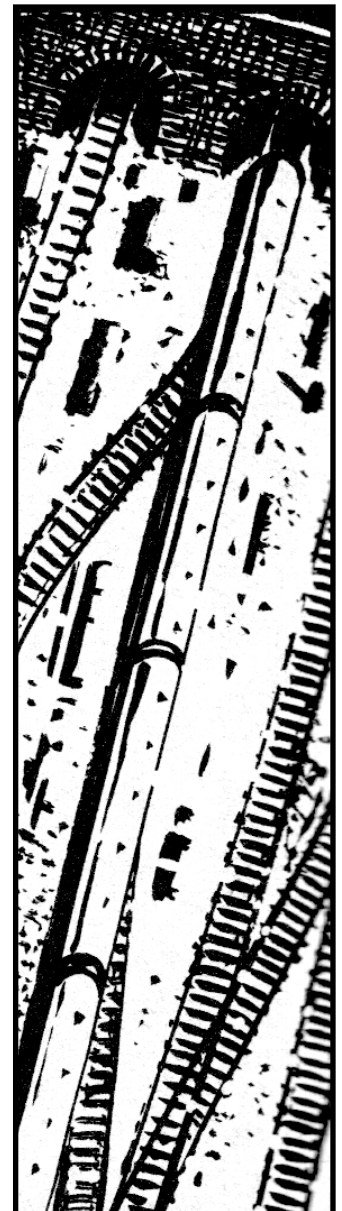
Book I, Chapter 2 ('The Voice), page 13, November 6th, 1997

Ted, one of Lewis Prothero's protection officers, stops someone boarding a train. It is a compartment train, so I assumed it is an Electrical Multiple Unit (EMU). We see the dispatcher and then a long shot of the train. This could actually be a locomotive-hauled train, as we see its distinctive three-window front at a station with many gantries, which could be Overhead Line Equipment (OHLE). We then have a view from above the train; there is no OHLE and of course, there cannot be, as V jumps onto the train later from the bridge. Is the locomotive an electric Class 86, or diesel 25 or 33, all of which have the three-window style?

David gratefully qualified the situation for me: 'The Prothero train begins from Liverpool St and is a train I used a lot up till 1979. The station has been redeveloped [since] then.'

This input was hugely helpful. I had looked at old photos of Liverpool St, but had not made this connection at all. Liverpool St station makes perfect sense now, as David noted, because the station was heavily remodelled in the late 80's and reopened in 1991.

The Great Eastern Railway (GER) operated out Liverpool St Station as its main London terminus, replacing Bishopsgate Station. The GER operated north-eastern commuter lines in and around London and main lines going east of London to Southend, north-east to Ipswich and



Norwich, and north to Cambridge, Peterborough, and King's Lynn. GER merged with London North Eastern Railway in 1923, then was nationalised as British Rail in 1948, and made part of the Eastern Region in 1979.

London Liverpool St had Over Head Line Equipment as the trains exited the station into an open area with a sequence of over-bridges. The sequence of bridges visible as the trains left the station are now very different with the remodel.

Slam Door Electrical Multiple Units, Class 302, 303, and 312 all ran out of London Liverpool St, as did Loco Hauled express trains, both electric and diesel locomotives, and diesel multiple units such as 101, 102, and class 104 units.

When one looks at 1980s photos, one can see the connection and influence more clearly.

On page 14, Ted catches a glimpse of V on a bridge above the train. This is one of so many iconic images in the comic. There is something superb about the angle and the distinctive flair to V's shadow before he leaps down onto the moving train, a stupendous feat.



We asked David Lloyd for more details on his use of London Liverpool St. As ever, he was very helpful and said:

It was probably the bridge/tunnel just out of Liverpool St that I mentioned in [reference] to the train...You should know that I was still using that station a lot...in the early 80s. But as it was all redeveloped a long time ago it may not be there now, though much of the

outside structure of the station remains. It may have featured in some polaroids I took for the train [reference] but not sure. Those pics are around here somewhere :)

Polaroids for train reference. This is just testament to the details and accuracy that David applies to his art. Hearing that is such a delight, and continues to make perfect sense, because so much is so right.

After jumping down onto the moving train, V moves forward to the engine cab, brings the train to a halt, and kills the lights. We next see V in the cab, with the number 0730 or O730 in the train display.

While the controls are generally on the left-hand side, the train is still amazing in its detail. The close-up makes it look like a Class 86, an electric locomotive that would have drawn carriages out of Liverpool St. The reporting number, or headcode (the number on the front of the cab), would have been done away with on trains by 1997. Headcodes became alphanumeric, and followed a number, letter, number, number sequence. These still exist, albeit they are now inputted into the Global System for Mobile Communications-Railway, known as GSM-R

So many fun details here, all of which David



nails beautifully.

On page 15, the comment 'Shouldn't worry about it lads, British Rail acting up' is of course very much a realistic approach to a train losing power. Of course, after this V enters, kills Ted and George, and then sits next to a terrified Prothero with a casual 'Hello.' Page 16 is a filler page with an excellent full-page shot of the outside of the carriage, leaving the reader to imagine what is happening within.

Book I, Chapter 3 ('Victims'), page 18, November 6th, 1997

The train is back at a station. After the attack, did it come back to the same station from which it departed? I would say so, and therefore it is back at London Liverpool St, which would make sense. Page 18 offers another view of the station with gantries, and page 19 shows another view of the carriage exteriors.



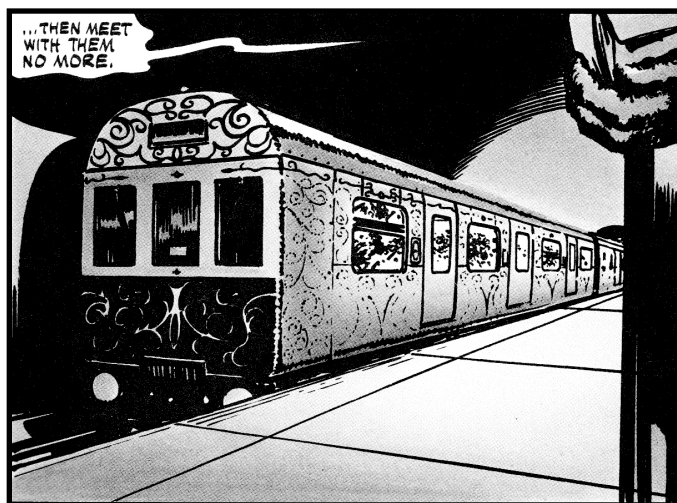
This is such a simple sequence, which is so brilliantly executed. As you can see, I enjoy considering the railway aspects quite a bit, and to see one of the finest looking cabs portrayed so accurately in a comic is a real joy.

Despite the role of trains in this story, a full year goes by before we see another. This is a difficult year, as we follow Evey as she experiences a horrendous time. This part of the book is always the hardest for me. I want V to look after Evey, and the first time I read it, I could neither comprehend nor understand why V did what he did to Evey. I was sad and upset as a teenager, and that feeling still rings when I read it now.

Book III, Chapter 5 ('The Valediction'), page 14, November 7th, 1998

In the Shadow Gallery, V shows Evey a district line Tube Train D Stock. This 1978 tube train differs from its similar but differently looking Metropolitan A Stock and Circle Line C Stock, and both the door and window layout are distinctly different. These details are well-captured here, neatly identifying the train. It's in its 1978 livery, partially—the front should be silver and red, but the sides are decorated. Evey describes it as 'lovely' as V places gelignite into it and continues to challenge Evey's patience. Page 17 shows the train sitting silently, waiting, amid panels of Adam Susan, Rosemary, and Finch. The visual implication here is that many paths are about to converge.

The idea of a Guy Fawkes character using a modern day train full of explosives is brilliant and touches upon the artfulness with which V utilises the modern-discarded-infrastructure in such genius ways.



Book III, Chapter 6 ('Vectors'), page 23, November 9th, 1998

Finch, just returned from his psychedelic experience at Larkhill, is walking along the street. He sees a V-shaped shadow on the ground and looks up to see the roundel of the London Underground, with the 'This station closed' sign hanging off to create the V symbol. 'Of course!' he says, and dives into the station to look for V. As he descends, he passes adverts, tiled walls, and then comes upon the flower-filled decorated tube train just at the start of Chapter 7, 'Vindication.' In this scene, Finch searches the tiled tube station hallways looking for V. Their showdown takes place in the shadowy London Underground, and, despite V's assertion that 'Ideas are bullet-proof,' Finch does succeed in mortally wounding V.

Book III, Chapter 9 ('The Vigil'), page 12, November 9th, 1998

The moments at the beginning of Chapter 9 are some of the saddest. V leaves us, and as he is dying, he tells Evey that she 'must discover whose face lies behind this mask,' but that she can 'never know [his] face.' He also explains that 'the Victoria line is blocked...twixt Whitehall and St. James,' and he asks for a 'Viking funeral.' After he dies, Evey descends into the tunnel, passes a tube map on the wall, mulling over V's instructions.



off on. As covers are often such an important part of the story, I remember being quite impressed, even though I was sad that the story was over.

In our interview, David informed me that the use of trains was more of a convenience—'just a way of getting a bomb underneath Downing Street,' he said. However, trains still play an important role in the way the plot is built. While the real lesson of this comic is about the dangers of fascism, one can also see the power in the everyday tools we might take for granted—tools that can function as the mechanisms of revolution.

For this piece though, I was able to combine my interests in railways and comics, and it was a pleasant way to write about a very poignant and important comic, while recognising the skill of David Lloyd and enjoying the challenge of figuring out some elements, which I should warn readers, like all research, may yet develop depending on the legendary railway 'polaroids.'

Book III, Chapter 11 ('Valhalla'), page 26-28, November 10th, 1998, 2:00AM

Evey, dressed as V now, loads V into the tube train. The train departs from Victoria, going east. In a panel that shows the tube map, Evey confirms that there is rubble between St. James and Whitehall.

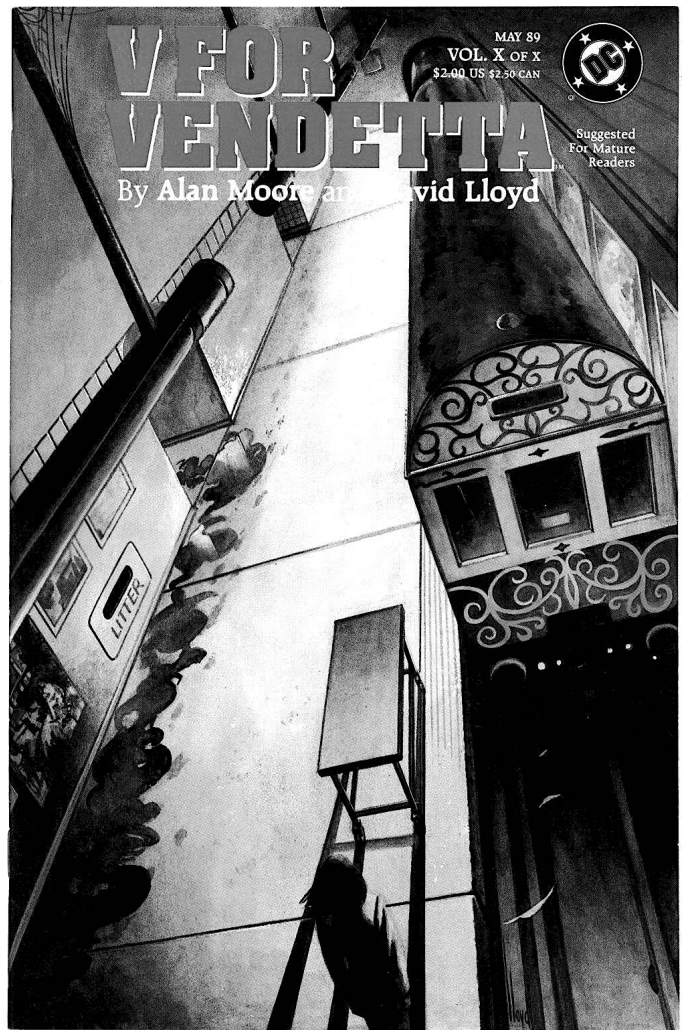
Book III, Volume X Cover

The cover of Volume X of the DC editions features V's tube train in a larger and more detailed view of the scene. Evey watches the train depart, at attention perhaps. V is dispatched on his final journey of rebellion and battle against Norsefire, having succeeded and with a succession plan in place. Evey now as V. The larger piece is beautifully painted, and captures the moment of both departure and journey strongly.

The beauty of the train, loaded with lilies and explosives, is notable here as it heads into the tunnel. The cleverness with which the cover subtly misdirects the reader and disguises what is to occur is brilliantly done. V is dead by the end, yet that revelation is not at all spoiled by the cover, where we see an empty gurney and V's blood on the platform. A scrap of paper lifts in the wake of the train; we see (Evey) V's hair lift, too, implying that the train is already on its way. There's no stopping it.

Evey is now on her own and on a new journey for herself. She goes up to the roof to watch the explosion. She checks her watch and then removes her mask, noting that the train will explode 'right under Downing Street.'

And soon the story is over. The cover had set some expectations for me and it is all very satisfying as an end. I read it quickly and then had to go back to consider the misdirection that the cover had set me





Une étude légère sur les échafaudages (A Light Study On Scaffolding) by Gary Lloyd

It could be an easy-ish research item, a discussion about the details of the music in *V for Vendetta*, in the comic-book, in the film adaptation, and David J's amazing almost-as-old-as-the-comic-book-itself album (featuring renditions of the V songs that could well be the most authentic versions we've heard). It could be a research item that would tell us all about the influence of Kurt Weill, Brechtian methodologies, lines, tricks and forms of lyric composition that owe a lot to English music hall tradition, analyses of 'This Vicious Cabaret' and all the other glorious examples of songwriting craft that make up the V songs (oh and let's not forget Kurt Vile too). However, maybe by considering *why* such elements work together we might illuminate something deeper about what Alan has been up to as an artist, and we may also be able to consider *how* many other artists are trying to navigate their work.



What isn't easy to understand or accept, perhaps, is the idea that *fine artists* are (generally, and no names mentioned!) less driven by targets, goals or results and far more by process, and the discovery of new techniques, which are drawn from the mud and mirk of process. Compared to this *commercial artists* operate almost in reverse, and reverse-engineer what they've achieved—measurable

public successes that have been their goal and are their proof - in order to then understand the processes better and replicate them forever and ever more. Fine artists (again, only generally) are also trying to figure out what people *need* rather than what they *want*, and figuring out what people really need is very difficult.

Van Gogh was probably hoping to sell some paintings some day but getting in the way of that were his fascinations in new ways of *seeing*, new ways of understanding the portrayal of that which makes us feel something in the real world, and how to put that feeling on canvas fully embodied and show people the result. He investigated new processes to build techniques and eventually an original and vibrant describable small family of styles which can be copied. Copying is of course missing the point of fine art...but you might find out something useful in doing so, and after all isn't process-based work about experiment and improvement anyway?

Could we say though that Van Gogh was really creating *études* rather than attempting to create sellable artworks? Maybe. It annoyed my own mother that some art critics of Van Gogh tried to provide reasons for his paintings, claiming the reasons for the choice of subject to be something circumstantial or emotional. My mother, as an artist herself, felt that Van Gogh just needed to paint something—anything to hand or something that just caught his eye—as he was simply hungry to explore his processes and techniques. Let's not forget though that Van Gogh was also trying hard to speak to people, engage their thoughts and emotions, and all of this with just some pretty basic technology. The other Impressionist artists were using similar sets of processes, dabs of different origin manifested as different techniques such as pointillism and impasto, though their common notion was 'painting with light' by whatever means necessary, which is why Impressionism is such a strong and recognisable style. It worked out for Van Gogh's work but not until after his death. It's sad to know what a hard time he had. He must have known he was really onto something very special that would mean so much to so many. Van Gogh's paintings just need a little light shined *upon* them, rather than light beamed *through* digitised versions of them, for us to understand his true genius in 'painting with light.' The emotion his work elicits is only fully completely evident

and truly fully felt by seeing his works in person for oneself.

Alan Moore was famously a member of the Northampton Arts Club, engaged in extensive experiments, bashing spoken word with music, songwriting, storytelling, fictions and ideas, visual arts, dance, performance and performing. Whilst there is something rather Wagnerian about all of this—the idea of the *gesamtkunstwerk*, the ‘complete work of art,’ no medium left untouched—it must have been a very broad and pretty fertile training ground, inadvertently super-rich, fitting different mediums together, borrowing and sharing methodologies to make these mediums marry seamlessly or juxtapose spikily. What then, for Alan as a nascent writer of comic books, could be the result of using the many lessons learned from smashing so many mediums together? What would still be felt in the restricted manifestation of work in just one medium, a singular complete whole, born of many parts but with the scaffolding removed from sight? Maybe it’s just instinct—but instinct has to come from somewhere, and be learned and earned, and that in the arts, as in the sciences or anywhere else, is to be found in work, work, work, work.

V for Vendetta is particularly distinguished for its inclusion and depiction of music. The desired effect is itself quite operatic, yet is still appropriate and believable. This work is perhaps where Alan truly blossomed, and in the many years that he was writing comics, he would rip up the rulebook every time, start from dot again, explore something different whilst no doubt gathering extraordinary knowledge with every new work. Alan wasn’t using a style he’d built, he wasn’t rattling it out again and again ad infinitum. He wasn’t restricting his exploration, never, not at all. Van Gogh wasn’t painting because he needed to explore his feelings about a difficult, glorious, or moving circumstance he happened to be in, or because he’d had a bad week and needed to relax or do something mindful. He was painting *despite* this. One might imagine the same for Alan. With every new comic that Alan created it seemed like he was devising whole new sets of processes and techniques and with a great many resulting original styles—which might just seem like a description of Alan’s works as *études*, but of course Alan also instinctively has an astonishing instinct for a ripping yarn, a black belt in suspending our disbeliefs, a gift for sending us somewhere we’ve never been, and is a highly nuanced communicator and projector of emotions.

Talking of projectors...People read comic books in all kinds of ways, from those that love to languish in the artwork, to those that love to *linguish* (a word overheard at a literary event) in the writing. At a guess, I would say a large proportion of comic-book readers consider the comic book artist in a similar way to a cinematic DOP (a director of

photography) in that they are rather taken for granted and seem to disappear behind their own brilliance, their brilliance at bringing something on screen believably to life—they do the real heavy lifting of film-making. In fact the director, who is usually considered as some kind of god, respects the DOP infinitely, and with good reason. Maybe the relationship between comic-book writers and comic-book artists is similar. Alan has often said things along the lines of how the artist makes the writer look even better, which seems true.

What was David Lloyd up to with *V for Vendetta*? He’s spoken of blending 60s gangsters and villains with folklore heroes like Robin Hood and Guy Fawkes to create *V* himself. Certainly there’s a nod to 60s adventure comics in the style of drawing, but looking at the comics today it’s also easy to imagine that the muted tones come from images featured on sheet music from the most popular period of the British music hall, the late 19th century. In searching for examples of this, funnily enough, the *Bumper Book of Music Hall Songs* appeared. Just a theory—or maybe it’s some influence of the kind we soak up all the time and maybe use without any awareness whatsoever. There’s also a hint of Victorian Burlesque about the look of many of the characters too, even in *V* himself. That sense of foreboding, creeping dread is hard to pin down visually: what the components are, how and why it is consistent, why it works, the horrors of the yarn itself, the physical and political that shudder your insides...but it just works.

David claims that *V for Vendetta* was where he really started to realise what was possible in telling stories using comic-books. It is this work that reveals the power of putting the words and images together, ‘the layering, the levels of meaning that you could attach to the story.’ The work was his first major breakthrough in terms of finding and founding his own personal style. He was also learning how to read, interpret, understand and judge comic scripts. It’s not a stretch to think of David Lloyd as one of the best DOPs in comic-book creation. His work is extraordinary and too easily taken for granted, far too easily in fact.

V for Vendetta is distinguished, maybe (after all this is just a bunch of opinion) as the place where process really started to sing and scaffolds began to fall away for both artist and writer. It’s where David began to forge his own personal visual styles, and it’s where Alan really started to show his mettle, skill, and industriousness. Maybe it’s the oldest unmistakably *Mooreish* comic book creation. Many more astonishments were to follow, all vastly different in almost all respects—apart from the fact that they are comic books. This singing and juggling and splicing and welding of processes has continued into Alan’s post comic-book writing life, in his novels and short

stories. Sometimes this can seem to be for the sake of it: the very scaffolding of document preparation and annotation is the foundation of 'American Light: An Appreciation' from Alan's short story collection *Illuminations* (2023). Quite the Matryoshka doll of imagination demonstrating Alan's love of the Beat Poets, it consists of a work by an imaginary Beat poet presented with annotations by an also imaginary critic who refers in his annotations to an unpublished Beat novel by another Beat writer (who is also imaginary). Yet form and function seem to match, to marry, and it's wholly believable. It belies the zeal with which Alan is still exploring artistic possibilities, gathering processes together, inventing new ones and always, consistently, it feels like he's just doing this to see what can happen. He pulls off another miracle, keeps us engaged, amused and touched, and long may this continue.

In this lovely tribute from *Journey Planet* to *V for Vendetta*, I wish A Very Happy 70th Birthday to Mr Alan Moore, and Very Best Wishes to Mr David Lloyd.



“Grow Roses—Beautiful Roses” by Allison Hartman Adams



If thou hast two loaves of bread, sell one and buy flowers, for bread is food for the body, but flowers are food for the mind.

—Galen of Pergamon (200 CE)

Roses are everywhere. Tattoos and sculptures and song, garlands and wallpaper and bed linens. Even Aphrodite, Our Lady of Guadalupe, England herself—among thousands of other cultural touchstones across the globe—are associated with roses. Political parties, from the White Roses, a non-violent WWII-era group that resisted the Third Reich, to the French Socialist Party to the American Bread and Roses Party, adopt the rose as their symbol. These flowers are tangled into our psyches to such an extent that we don't even see them anymore. Most every culture, ancient or modern, has ascribed some significance to the rose, and the sheer diversity therein makes the rose's significance hard to pin down.

Our curiosity around roses in *V for Vendetta* is therefore hardly a surprise. Roses are woven into the core of the text. V, when imprisoned in Larkhill, grew what Delia SurrIDGE calls “beautiful roses.” V condemns Norsefire for “eradicating culture...toss[ing] it away like a fistful of dead roses.” He gives roses to all his victims in his quest for revenge. Finch remarks to Delia that he thought the Violet Carson rose variety, V's chosen calling card, was extinct. V routinely uses gardening metaphors in his speech. He speaks of “plucking” Evey,” of “cultivating” Rosemary. When V shows Evey his tools of destruction and asks her to care for the garden of roses, he tells her, “Ideas can germinate within a bed of theory, form, and practice that assists their growth...But we, as gardeners, must beware. For some seeds are the seeds of ruin...and the most iridescent blooms are often the most dangerous.”

And, of course, we have Valerie, whose triumph and pain is framed by roses. Ruth brings her roses on St. Valentine's Day, and during this time, they lived together and enjoyed “roses and apologized to nobody.” After the war “there were no more roses. Not for anybody,” Valerie tells Evey through her letter, and at the end, closes with a wish that “one day people [may] have roses again.”

Commonly, roses in *V* are read simultaneously as symbols of love and destruction. Many online study guides offer up this interpretation in their recycled

literary analyses machined out over the generations. These might be helpful—if only to get a good mark on your term paper—but they feel too obvious. Boring, even.

I was reminded recently of Umberto Eco's *Postscript for The Name of the Rose*. In this “behind the scenes” reflection on his popular novel, Eco confesses the surprising logic behind his iconic title:



[T]he rose is a symbolic figure so rich in meanings that by now it hardly has any meaning left: Dante's mystic rose, and go lovely rose, the Wars of the Roses, rose thou art sick, too many rings around Rosie, a rose by any other name, a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose, the Rosicrucians. The title rightly disoriented the reader, who was unable to choose just one interpretation...A title must muddle the reader's ideas, not regiment them.

“A title must muddle the reader's ideas, not regiment them.” If there's any statement that recalls the sometimes infuriating spirit of *V for Vendetta*, it's that.

Maybe what follows is my desperate attempt to wrestle the comic back from the edges of easy Cliffs Notes banality. I might be trying too hard to find new

meaning, but here's the thing: the roses in this text confound the reader for good reason. I mean, this is V we're talking about here—clarity is not really his game.

So I'm going rogue here and not stepping one toe down the path of "What Alan Moore and David Lloyd Really Meant." They know what they meant—I don't need to tell them. Instead, I'm going to pull back and reflect on the power of roses as a revolutionary symbol, something that reminds us that there's more to life than mere survival.

I write this on St. Valentine's Day, a day that I expect no roses whatsoever. The roses that tumble from convenience store displays, pressing me to measure love in floral units, generally come from South American rose factories that strip all raw wildness from the blooms in favor of controlled predictability. Working conditions in these greenhouses are often poor, and labor representation is shaky at best—not to mention the environmental impact of shipping countless blooms in refrigerated containers all across the nation. These roses have no scent, no diversity, no undomesticated ferocity. They last unnaturally long, keeping their shape and color as if made from wax, trembling on the edge of wilting, in fear of the lover's judgment. These are incredibly well-behaved roses. Barely roses at all, in fact, and certainly not anything that V would use. But I can't help but wonder...Will I regret these arrogant days when I so callously dismissed my freedom to have roses—literal or metaphorical—whenever I want?

Rebecca Solnit, American writer and activist, whose 2014 essay "Men Explain Things To Me" inspired the term *mansplaining*, writes at some length about the role of the rose as a symbol—not of some easily-definable abstract idea, Cliffs Notes annotation, or intertextual connection, but of something more. Her book *Orwell's Roses* makes the argument that roses in particular are representative of an indefinable quality of humanity that demands more from existence than mere survival. "Even as ornament," she writes, "flowers represent life itself, as fertility, morality, transience, extravagance, and as such they enter our art, rites, and language."

Across her wild and rambling book, Solnit argues against the authoritarian tendency to believe "that human beings' needs can be reduced to quantifiable, tangible goods and conditions." We need more, she points out, and across history and cultures, this *something more* has been symbolized by the rose.

This is not a new concept. Helen M. Todd, labor rights leader and suffragist, is commonly credited with popularizing the American labor movement's slogan "Bread and Roses," inspired by James Oppenheim's 1911 poem by the same name. Rose Schneiderman, of the Women's Trade Union League of New York, echoed this in her 1912 speech

in Cleveland, saying, "What the woman who labors wants is the right to live, not simply exist—the right to life as the rich woman has the right to life, and the sun and music and art...The worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too."



During the 1912 "Bread and Roses" labor strike that took place in Lawrence Massachusetts, immigrant women under the leadership of the Industrial Workers of the World, carried signs with the slogan "We want bread, but we want roses, too!" and reporter Ray Stannard Baker wrote the following for *The American Magazine*:

[Lawrence] is the first strike I ever saw which sang. I shall not soon forget the curious lift, the strange sudden fire of the mingled nationalities at the strike meeting when they broke into the universal language of song. And not only at the meeting did they sing, but in the soup houses and the streets.

Singing. Marching. Roses.

What these women observed, and declared through song, is that roses—metaphorical or literal—aren't necessary for our existence, but they are necessary for what makes us human. They are art and music. They are freedom of expression and intellectual curiosity. They are everything in V's Shadow Gallery. Roses are everything.

There is a tendency for those in power to try to convince those they control that mere survival is all anyone deserves. Whether it be industry bosses to laborers or governments to their citizens—the message is the same: *You have bread, what else could you possibly want?* In some ways, this reminds me of the ongoing struggles in America around systemic racism and gender inequality. The law is equal, some argue. There it is, on the books, in black and white, the same

for each American. They ignore, of course, that the letter of the law neither is applied equally, nor does it encompass the whole of human experience, and that to thrive, one must have more than lip service. But still they say, *You have your bread. What else could you possibly want?*

What, indeed?

"Bread," Solnit writes, "can be managed by authoritarian regimes, but roses are something individuals must be free to find for themselves, discovered and cultivated rather than prescribed." This becomes particularly tricky when the same authoritarian regime has limited the public's ability to express itself through surveillance and information control. In his 1946 essay, "The Prevention of Literature," George Orwell reminds us that "We know only that the imagination, like certain wild animals, will not breed in captivity."

In the world of *V for Vendetta*, which has been limited by surveillance, as Orwell warned, the rose of imagination has also been removed, "tossed away" by Norsefire. They have "eradicated culture," *V* reminds us, making it impossible for any of the characters to imagine anything beyond their own survival. Indeed, Norsefire allows (the right) people to survive, but never thrive. Evey, even Delia Surridge and Finch—really any of the characters who still have a scrap of hope or morality left—all struggle within the system, hungry for something they can't quite name. Each of them is desperately sad, a sadness that is alleviated once they realize what Norsefire took from them.

Evey is lonely and scared, yes, but it isn't until she enters the Shadow Gallery, filled with art and literature and music, that she experiences a joy akin to that of her childhood, a joy born of imagination and intellectual freedom. Delia Surridge is worn down by her own sins, but also by the loss of some moral beauty she might have last seen in her youth before Norsefire. When *V* gives her that rose, he gives her the imaginative ability to recall a time when her moral compass might have pointed closer to true north. *V* does not judge her. Delia judges herself, and in that moment, frees herself of her own sins.

And Finch. Finch is critical of the Norsefire system, a stance that puts him at significant risk. It is perhaps because of this that Finch admires *V*—and subsequently we admire Finch because he has the imagination to see *V* as representative of something Finch has been missing all along. He pursues *V* with near-obsession because he knows *V* is right. And, because of *V*, Finch can see past the mental blocks Norsefire put in his way. Finch is saved because he has the intellectual freedom—even if hard-won—to be capable of criticizing Norsefire, and significantly, to be capable of remembering the Violet Carson rose—both a symbol and a literal flower.



And, of course, Valerie never forgot the rose. She refused to do so. She took those roses and "apologized to nobody." She demanded the same *something more* that Helen Todd and Rose Schneiderman and all those other women demanded in 1912, that Black Americans have been demanding since 1619, that we all yearn for, even if we don't have the words to name it.

And that's why Norsefire murdered her.

I think again of those women in 1912—of the sheer, vast, unignorable number of them—in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in Plymouth, Indiana, in Cleveland, Ohio. I think of how they refused to be silenced, refused to be told that mere survival was enough for them. They refused to be satisfied. I owe them so much. They gave me roses.

And I think of what *The Outlook* observed about these women marching in the streets.

There are almost as many nationalities here in Lawrence as there are in your Babel of New York. The workers are American, English, Scotch, Irish, German, French, Flemish, French-Canadian, Polish, Italian, Syrian, Russian, Armenian. I heard speeches in six languages. You might not suspect that a common sentiment could animate these diverse groups and weld them into a fighting unit. Nevertheless they have struck—struck as a single homogenous body.

This is a vision, as stunning and surprising as *V*'s rose garden. One that would make Norsefire—and many people in my own country—uncomfortable. To

these people, I am left asking *why*. What is it about imagination, about the desire for each human to want more than mere survival that worries you so? What is it about others having what they need that scares you into thinking that you will therefore have less? Happiness isn't pie. You don't get less because someone else gets more.

This protectiveness has its roots in fear. They are frightened, all the time, the same way that Susan, Prothero, and Lilliman are.¹ These people fear what V embodies, because V—once we look past the murder and mayhem that dismantling a system requires—ultimately embodies a way of seeing the world that requires vulnerability. It requires stretching of our hearts. It requires trust.

While I worked hard to not read too much into the symbolism of the rose in *V for Vendetta*, I must acknowledge a recent conversation with David Lloyd, in which he reminded me of the images on the back covers of the DC issues, which prominently feature roses. According to David, the rose theme had already been developed in the comic by the time DC republished the story. The opportunity for back-cover illustrations was David's idea after he and Alan Moore decided to avoid advertising in the comic altogether (which also accounts for David's illustrations on the bridging pages inside the comic itself). The focus of the back cover—a trash heap from which a rose grows—was David's suggestion, as the representation of "the tyranny that shrinks as the new begins to grow through it." Photographer Mitch Jenkins took the photo, and David "burnt out" copies of it, "gradually zooming in...and adding stacks of detritus [representative] of the authoritarian society."

The back-cover rose theme begins with Volume II, where we see a rubbish heap in the foreground and V's silhouette streaking across an apocalyptic sky above. Nothing can live here, it seems, but we spy familiar shapes amid the detritus—shapes we can't quite name. Volume III zooms in closer, but it isn't until Volume IV that we can make out a threadbare copy of *V.R.I. Her Life and Empire* by the Marquis of Lorne, the Duke of Argyll, a 1901 biography of Queen Victoria. This is partially overlaid by a scrap from the *Daily Mirror* noting the new presence of 24-hour security to its readers. Volumes IV and V both show something else: a slender young sprout, reaching past the Queen's portrait toward the sky. Volume VI adds a corner of the famous 1914 "Lord Kitchener Wants You" propaganda poster used to recruit British soldiers during World War I (which, incidentally, was the inspiration for the famous American Uncle Sam recruitment poster). The Queen alongside Kitchener, whose bold, mustachioed appearance was so famous at the time that the poster didn't even give his name, can be read here as the visual stand-in for British imperialism.

By Volume VII, it appears to have begun raining, and a printout from the Fate computer system can be seen in the corner. I might be imagining it, but Queen Victoria's face begins to look a bit more like V in profile (an illusion that is only intensified as the image evolves). It's not until Volume VIII, if you're not too distracted by what appears to be an image of vaudevillian actor Al Jolson in blackface, that we begin to see that the trembling sprout has a bloom on it. Then, in Volume IX, a massive, menacing sign covers over all of the discarded scraps that came before. It reads, "FOR YOUR PROTECTION." But it has not covered over the rose. The rose is still there; it has grown.

The final installment, Volume X, is of course the most meaningful and most hopeful. The single rose has become a fully-grown rose bush, abundant with heavy blossoms. Norsefire propaganda posters lie rotting beneath it, along with other memories of the corrupt world, such as a matchbook from the Kitty-Kat Keller and an NTV card. The visual message is clear: the rose has triumphed over the discarded relics of imperialism and totalitarianism.

So. Maybe I can read a bit more into the rose as a symbol than I originally thought. Roses in *V for Vendetta* are nothing and everything. They are hope and imagination. They are scrappy and resilient and a lot harder to eradicate than one might think—these are not the roses of St. Valentine's Day convenience store displays. These roses are triumphant roses. Unstoppable roses.

And one is as beautiful as a whole collection of them.

1. When I read a draft of this article to my brilliant son, he said, "Bread and roses? Of course, Mum. V gives both bread and roses to Bishop Lilliman when he gives him the poisoned Communion wafer and leaves the rose on his body. But Lilliman doesn't have the imagination to see what he did wrong. He can't be saved."

Rural Idylls and British Concentration Camps: Larkhill in *V for Vendetta* by Jim O'Brien



In *V for Vendetta*, Larkhill is the horrific 'resettlement' centre in which the governing Norsefire party's enemies are corralled and liquidated before being cremated in the camp's ovens, and in which V, along with other 'special prisoners,' is tortured and medically experimented on by the Mengele-like Dr Delia Surridge.

As Moore recounted in 'Behind the Painted Smile,' his essay on the origins of *V for Vendetta* published in *Warrior* issue 17 in March 1984, the writer chose the genuine Larkhill army base in rural Wiltshire as the inspiration for his and David Lloyd's fictional concentration camp, not only for its obvious links to the military and consequently to the apparatus of the British state, but because the author had endured a miserable hitch-hiking holiday near Larkhill some years earlier. Quite what occurred on this particular holiday from hell Moore declined to reveal in his essay, but it must have been fairly awful for the author to think specifically of Larkhill when creating a British version of Auschwitz for his dystopian comic strip.

Larkhill was first used as a military camp in the 1890s and the settlement—originally just a temporary, tented encampment—grew substantially in the twentieth century, operating variously as an early aerodrome, a firing range and an army training camp. Since 1919 the headquarters of the Royal School of Artillery, Larkhill is now a sizable community, complete with a primary school, an arcade of shops and a striking 1930s garrison church. Despite these more homely touches on its periphery, the camp itself, with its surveillance cameras and razor wire fencing, its closely guarded main entrances and serried ranks of windowless, off-limits blocks and hangars, nevertheless continues to possess a disquieting, slightly menacing air.

Portrayals like *V for Vendetta's* of life in Britain under a dictatorship stretch back at least to the Second World War, but the 1960s, 70s and 80s witnessed a marked resurgence of interest in the theme. Regardless of whether the dictatorship was right-wing (for example, Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo's 'what if the Nazi's had invaded?' film *It Happened Here* from 1964, or ITV television drama *The Guardians* from 1971) or left-wing in origin (as in Clive Egleton's novel *A Piece of Resistance* from 1971 and its two sequels, in which the Soviet Union invades and take over the country), the motif of the brutal

political prison or concentration camp used to silence opponents of the governing regime is a common one in many of these narratives.



Certainly, writers other than Moore had glimpsed military bases like that at Larkhill and apparently detected in them not the promise of protection and defence from foreign attack but the potential for coercion and the repression of civil liberties. Author Rex Warner's allegorical novel *The Aerodrome* (originally 1941, but consistently in print thereafter and with a new edition published in 1982, just as *V for Vendetta* first appeared in *Warrior*) uses the story's titular military base as a symbol for the insidious spread of fascist ideas in English life. Daphne Du Maurier's unsettling 1967 short story 'The Airfield' depicts its secretive air base as the site of weird scientific experiments carried out without due control or oversight. In author Robert Swindell's 1984 YA title *Brother in the Land* (a sort of *Threads* for teens), survivors in the North of England of a nuclear war that has decimated Britain, live in fear of the military camp (run, ironically, by a Mr Finch no less) into which survivors disappear, never to be seen again.

The sinister army bases and airfields in all these books are very precisely located in rural areas—a setting that functions as ironic contrast to the brutality and threat implicit in the bases themselves. So too it is with *V for Vendetta*, where Larkhill Camp is seen to be 'out in the country,' far away from London and the Leader's modernist office. There is a dark and gallows humour at play in the name Larkhill and the use to which it's put in *V for Vendetta*, with the placename more suggestive of natural harmony and rustic simplicity than the annihilation of the half-starved political prisoners overseen by Governor Prothero and his men.

It's the 'Lark' in Larkhill that is particularly potent in this regard. The composer Ralph Vaughan Williams' hugely popular musical work *The Lark Ascending* was first performed in 1920 and had swiftly become established as the very embodiment of traditional, wholesome Englishness. By the 1980s and the time of *V for Vendetta*'s first publication, records and tapes of Vaughan Williams' composition were almost universally packaged under reproductions of bucolic Victorian and Edwardian paintings that emphasised the music's call-back to an older, 'better' England of face-to-face relationships and natural harmony.

Likewise, author Flora Thompson's short, semi-autobiographical novels about her late 19th century country childhood on the Oxfordshire/Buckinghamshire border, first begun in the 1930s and after 1945 published under the collective title of *Lark Rise to Candleford*, were celebrated in subsequent decades for their vivid depictions of a rural world fast disappearing beneath the wheels of modernisation and the mechanisation of agriculture. The early 1980s—the time of *V for Vendetta*'s birth and first success in *Warrior*—witnessed a marked upsurge of interest in Thompson's writings, with a highly regarded stage play based on *Lark Rise* first being performed at the National Theatre in 1978/9 and a new, sumptuously designed *Illustrated Lark Rise to Candleford* being published by editor Julian Shuckbrugh in 1983.

However, Larkhill isn't just in any rural location: specifically, the camp lies less than two miles north of Stonehenge and its iconic landscape, and the ancient stone circle plays a pivotal role in *V for Vendetta*. When Moore's Mr Finch undergoes his acid trip at the now-abandoned Larkhill and comes to realise quite what kind of regime he has been loyally serving over the years, we see him being effectively 'reborn' amidst the sarsens of Stonehenge, as if the megaliths signified a different, better sort of Britain, free from authoritarian control and penal servitude.

Stonehenge has

been interpreted in wildly different ways over the centuries, but from the late 1960s onwards it was increasingly framed by elements of the counterculture as the ultimate symbol of a more ancient but far wilder and much freer Britain—as the physical embodiment of a way of life that was more spiritual and more libertarian than that obtained in the contemporary UK. To visit the stones, some argued, was to reconnect with values that stood opposed to the materialism and crass commercial interests of modern-day capitalism, was to be signposted down a road that led towards harmony and liberty.

The Stonehenge Free Festivals that ran for weeks at a time in the summer months from 1974 to 1984 were very much an expression of this sentiment. Although relations with the police and with other authorities were often cordial at the Free Festivals, tensions between the forces of 'law and order' and the caravan of hippies and (later) New Age travellers who converged on the stones to celebrate the summer solstice each year, grew increasingly fractious. In 1985 the notorious 'Battle of the Beanfield' occurred near to Stonehenge and to Larkhill, when police officers used extremely heavy-handed tactics to forcibly move on an encampment of travellers attempting to reach the stones. Much mythologised by both sides almost immediately, the Battle was presented by activists from each side of the cultural

barricade as a key indicator of where Britain was headed in the 1980s.

Alan Moore's own views on the Stonehenge festivals and on the Battle of the Beanfield may not be recorded but it is clear from *V for Vendetta* that, for the author, Larkhill and its landscape represented two possible futures for the country: one oppressive, militaristic and brutal, the other liberated and free. Just as Billy Bragg asked of another of the great battles of the 1980s, the Miners' Strike, Moore with Larkhill/Stonehenge seemed to be demanding: which side are you on?



V for Vendetta Instant Fanzine Interviews Part 3

by Gerard J. Carisio



What is it that appeals to you about V for Vendetta?

I remain intrigued by V's madness juxtaposed with the efficacy of his actions. His operations are ludicrously ambitious, as very few individuals audacious enough to attempt regime change while flying solo would also cultivate the discipline to succeed.

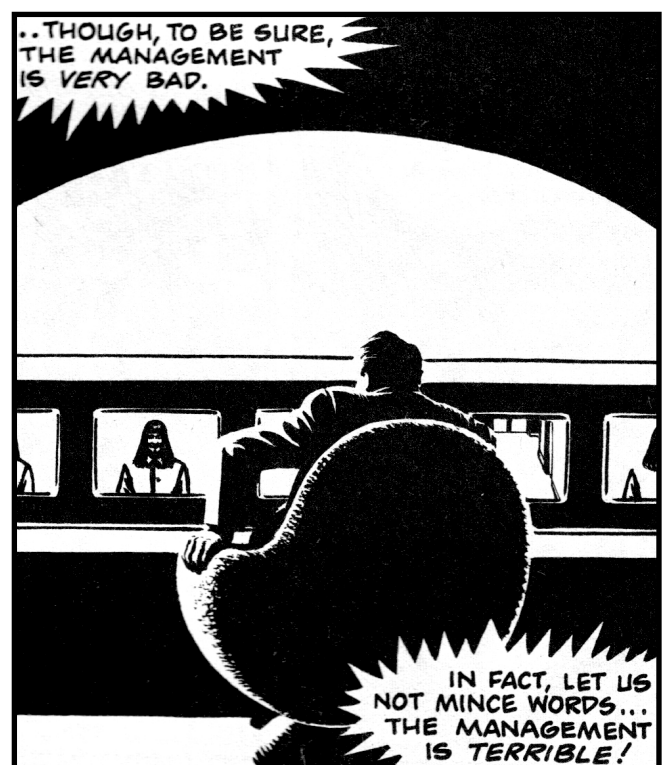
Alan Moore suspends V between the extremes of a nonsensical terrorist driven mad by oppression and experimentation, and a hyper-competent operative whose expertise with explosives, close-quarters battle, stealth, and psychological exploitation underpins a plot which dismantles a fascist government. Nudge the character just a hair in either direction and the reader no longer believes that V would confine and torture Evey or successfully rig an incendiary train car to halt directly below 10 Downing Street. The growing tension as Moore places each foot along this tightrope walk proves more suspenseful than the narrative itself and renders each return to this series a thrill.

Solid groundwork contextualizing V's unique perception appears early in the story. The kidnapping and torture of Lewis Prothero begins in Chapter 3, and V's vaudevillian stroll through the Shadow Gallery introduces the camp at Larkhill and the experimentation ward, wherein the reader discovers that Room V is the unhappy birthplace of the titular character. It takes very little narrative effort to suggest that the sole survivor of these experiments could be imbued with vast intelligence, unmatched physical prowess, and a highly altered personal reality. Thus, when V holds up both sides of the conversation with Lady Justice or addresses Evey with consistently heightened diction, it all seems earned via his survival of state-sponsored trauma. The reader has little reason to interrogate the authenticity of V's speeches, mannerisms, motives, and goals.

But what of his skills? David Lloyd does most of the heavy lifting to convince readers that V is a creature who moves without human limitations, leaping gracefully across rooftops and effortlessly manhandling agents of the Finger. But his preference for edged weapons, however anachronistic, serves as an easy shorthand for precision and competence. The mixture becomes two parts Count of Monte Cristo to one part Hulk. The study and practice required to

master such an unforgiving technique stands in for the research required to create gelignite, to set charges precisely enough to raze massive buildings. Most crucially, the reader believes that V possesses the self-control to build a patient timeline not only to exact his personal vengeance but to make war on Norsefire with anarchic designs.

Though V holds his war plans very close to the vest, he gradually allows Evey and even Finch a view into the uncompromising principles that govern his choices. This concept is familiar to western readers, as modern professional military services develop and disseminate their principles of warfare for wide consumption. Aspiring officer candidates in the US military memorize a list published in joint and service-specific doctrine documents, of which the core nine elements have remained unchanged for decades: mass, objective, security, surprise, maneuver, offensive, unity of command, simplicity, and economy of force (I memorized them for exams as an Air Force Academy cadet with the mnemonic MOSS MOUSE many moons ago). Unsurprisingly, these principles map imperfectly onto V's campaign, although Moore intuitively grasped and employed several of them. There is a particular category of operations, however, in which V specializes: information operations.



Although V's physical combat and program of assassinations is personal and intimate, his broader strokes of terrorism land hardest on the government's ability to control public access to information. The buildings he destroys are symbolic rather than practical, ensuring that the people of Britain still have access to power and water and transit while simultaneously losing confidence in Norsefire propaganda. The first abduction eliminates the comforting Voice of Fate, serving as an overture to V's center-stage broadcast and call to arms after infiltrating the Mouth. The abattoir of his horrifying creation thus serves as foundation for his obsessions, basis for his eccentricities, and master class in control of public perception. The reader believes he is skilled in informational warfare because he learned at the hands of the cruelest teachers.

Thankfully, while building the mystery around V, Moore avoids letting the air out of the balloon by showing his life before Larkhill, or worse yet, a cringey training montage. V emerges onto the page fully-formed and realized, a fixed point around which the other novel's characters must pivot or find themselves annihilated. Moore completes his narrative tightrope walk and dismounts proudly when V confidently hails Evey as the new hero. "Ave Atque Vale," he whispers, trusting that she will continue the essential mission of his struggle. "The age of killers is no more," she soon answers, already wielding information, speech, and symbolism just as sharply as V wields a blade.



A Short Note On Teaching *V for Vendetta* by Ann Gry



I lectured in Film of the British Isles for a few years, focusing on the cultural aspects for students of communication programme, non-native English speakers. For the films I wanted to give students options, so they would vote for a feature for the next class. *V for Vendetta* almost always topped the choice against my other favourites—Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil* and a strong drama, *This is England*. As you can see, I wanted to talk politics to bachelor students of age group 19-20. By the way, making them choose films got a much better response and engagement than when I assigned films myself without them voting.

So, Thatcher it was, and many other things were up for discussion, as you see in this zine and the multidimensional work itself. I asked students to watch the film and then read volume one of the comics. Surprisingly—or maybe not—few students read the comic for the assignment...

I also had a treasure to exhibit before the students as James Bacon presented me with a copy of the original run of *Warrior*. So this added another layer of discussion of subcultures, zines, adaptations and various media.

Another aspect was language, which was often mesmerising for language learners, cryptic with old slang and references. That was a nice part of the class as it fleshed out the craft of comics writing, the depth of *V*.

What surprised students was our discussion of the state in *V*, of its omnipresence in the comics and in our lives. The way it’s depicted as a human body was another mesmerising point; they enjoyed trying to figure out and remember which is which: the Eye, the Finger, the Head, the Ear, and the Nose—and why these associations. Surveillance in *V* is also prominent—all too relatable today, all too scary.

We spoke about characters too—which are your favourites, I asked them. And I heard such different answers: sympathies, adoration, hatred. We discussed *V* and spoke of the methods—are all of them valid if the end goal is honourable? We spoke of evil and of truth in a state that would make the final leap into darkness in just a few months’ time.

I hope that meant something for the students, as I prompted them to think of their life principles, choose a side, choose their acceptable means, and face their fears. *V* gave us a chance to create this temporary space of freedom, one of the last chances to breathe before drowning. For me - Alexey - he decided to come back and die for it. No flesh and

bone now, only the idea. And as we know, ideas are bulletproof.

For your entertainment or practical uses, here is a set of questions I gave students:

Please be prepared to talk about Margaret Thatcher’s political career, comment on the introduction to Vol.1 of the comic book by Alan Moore. (Here I also gave them a few articles on Thatcher to read).

Be prepared to talk about how the film and comic book continue to be relevant and topical today, think about the following issues:

- censorship
- quarantine zones
- restrictions of freedom of movement
- surveillance
- democracy crisis

I also asked them to write a brief comment (sort of like you’d do for a personal review on socials) to provoke them to think of Alan Moore’s shift of attitude towards comics in general:

Read this interview with Alan Moore and comment (500 characters min) on his relationship with film industry (pick any topic be it about the films based on his work or his view of superhero films or how he got involved in film himself, express your opinion on the matter):

<https://deadline.com/2020/10/alan-moore-rare-interview-watchmen-creator-the-show-superhero-movies-blighted-culture-1234594526/>



Steve Moore on Writing the *V for Vendetta* Movie Tie-In Novel

Statement by Steve Moore to Pádraig Ó Méalóid:

John Reppion passed on a message that you're intending to write a piece about the three versions of V for Vendetta, and inquired as to whether I might be willing to be interviewed about the novelisation I wrote. I'm afraid this puts me in a slightly awkward position, considering the ongoing dispute between Alan (my friend), DC Comics (my employer on the novel) and the film-makers (whose work I'm adapting). So I really don't feel that I want to do an interview or offer any opinions on the subject; on the other hand, I don't want to be unhelpful either, so I've drawn up a little 'statement' about how I wrote the book and what I had to do. If there's anything in the following section that looks useful to you, please feel free to use it, or to quote me if you wish.

* * *

I originally received the copy of the screenplay *V for Vendetta* around the beginning of April 2005, slightly later than I'd expected, which gave me pretty much a calendar-month to write a 90,000 to 100,000 word novel for a deadline of 6 May. This meant, having read the script (and having also recently reread the original graphic novel), that I had to set myself a target of writing 4,000 words a day, seven days a week, until I'd got through it. Normally, my schedule would be: up at 7.00; at work by 8.00; pass the 4,000 word mark about 4.00; a few hours off for relaxation and dinner; then at 8.00 in the evening, revising the day's work before collapsing into bed. I did this, adapting at what seemed a natural writing pace, until I'd reached the end of the script, and found myself with something like 75,000 words. Halfway through the month, my editor at DC managed to extract some colour production sketches from Warner Bros and send them to me, which is all the visual material I saw on the movie; similarly, I only learned anything of the actual cast list after I'd got through my 75,000 word version. The remaining days of the schedule were spent going through, revising, and expanding, which meant the work rate dropped to about 2,000 words a day because I was having to read through it all to know where to insert new material. But it got done, and I turned the job in on

the 5th, because I wanted to show the people at DC that I could...

Basically, I saw the job as a professional one, where my task was to adapt the screenplay I'd been given as well as I could under the circumstances; while at the same time doing the best that I could (given that I had to follow the screenplay) to make the novel worthy of the original graphic novel, which I obviously admire. That meant that I couldn't deviate from the screenplay, and felt obliged to use the dialogue it contained, although I was given freedom to provide additional material to flesh out the background. For this extra material I tried to draw as much as possible on the original graphic novel—though obviously I had to make sure there was no clash between the two. After discussions with my editor at DC, I did make some changes to the script: removing a historical prologue about the original Guy Fawkes, retaining the Violet Carson rose name, rather than the non-existent Scarlet Carson of the film, and failing to mention any of the specific dates given in the screenplay so that the actual time-period of the story became more nebulous (and possibly closer to the present day). Obviously, there were a number of other areas in the screenplay where I had to smooth things over or make minor changes, just to make the story work as a novel rather than a film.

As I said, I worked from the screenplay given to me at that time. Although I haven't seen the movie, I'm told there have been various changes since: for instance, the parcel delivery service is now called BFC (British Freight Carriers), where it was called FedCo in the screenplay I saw. There may be other things, but obviously I had to follow the material given to me.

Ironically, the book had been rushed through the copy-editing and proof-reading stages and actually gone to press by the time the London bombings of 7 July occurred; at which point, of course, Warner Brothers put back the release date from November 5 to March 17 this year...resulting in the novel going into storage for six months...

* * *

Note: *This piece originally came about because Pádraig Ó Méalóid was writing an article and wanted to interview Steve. Steve gave this statement. Interestingly, Pádraig went on to interview Steve extensively and published those interviews in *The Hermit of Shooters Hill* (2021). This statement was included in that book, which we at JP highly recommend.*

Alan Moore on *V for Vendetta* and Writing by James Bacon



I was at Boskone, a convention in Boston, and I was on a fabulous panel about holding Super Heroes accountable. On the panel was an ex-cop, a creative, academic, and genius. It was very good. One person made a joke about Alan Moore being grumpy and I said: "I have met him many times as a fan, and he is always delightful. I have never seen him grumpy." And this is true.

Over the years, I've been to so many events where Alan has spoken, signed, and engaged with fandom, and he is always very nice. Indeed, I have seen him go out of his way and be truly kind. One memorable moment was when a young lady was crying as she approached with her copy of *V for Vendetta*, and he signed it and was lovely to her.

Of course, humans fall out. We have things go wrong, work or business stuff can be both upsetting and stressful, but normally no one takes that much notice. Indeed, I fell out with a great pal of mine for a five-year period. In the scheme of thirty five years, it is now nothing more than unfortunate turbulence in the rear view mirror. I am cautious not to have issues with pals, especially over things that are not worth it, and I try to be open, but that is because I am nearly fifty, and it is easier on many levels.

When one is angry, upset or a deal, arrangement, situation has gone badly astray, let alone when one feels messed about, accused of lying, or done out of money, one naturally will express that, quite clearly, and fairly, maybe with friends. But Alan is such a public figure, the greatest comic writer of our age, that this gets the press and becomes a trope.

I have been privileged to have seen Alan Moore so many times, at so many talks and events. He is always so, so delightful. Just a nice person.

So, when I read Alan Moore on the page, I am mindful to see the sparkling-eyed genius, the person who has entertained me greatly, given me hours of comic book pleasure. I will remember how David spoke of Alan, with such high regard and respect, and I would encourage readers to do likewise. Sure, feel and acknowledge Alan's anger and frustration, but do not allow every word he says to be tainted with that. Read these pieces that span thirty years openly.

What follows is a small selection of interviews, writings, and so on to get a sense of what Alan thought at any given time. These are only excerpts, illustrative for this zine. The full interviews are much more extensive and highly recommended.

In an interview with Neil Gaiman:¹

"*V for Vendetta*—it's one of my favourites of things I've done. It's set in the near-future, in around 1997, when Britain is under a very right-wing government and everyone hates the police (I know, you'll find that very hard to believe!). And set against this bleak world we have a character who dresses up as Guy Fawkes."

"In the first issue he blew up the Houses of Parliament, and we've been working up to a climax since then. That's gone down quite well—there's obviously a place for a deranged, urban terrorist in the hearts of today's comics readers."

When asked by Kim Thompson in 1985 whether *V* and other stories are too British for people to understand:²

"It is possible. I think they may be too British for an incredibly wide audience. They are both (*Miracleman* and *V*) very British which was originally a reaction against the fact that America does have such a dominating influence upon comic book styles, just because it is the largest comic book producing nation. On the other hand there's a certain amount of common experience that would make those two strips pretty accessible to an American audience. The trappings will be different, like for example the references to Guy Fawkes, which would be a little bit obscure to people not familiar with British history. But on the other hand, when I was a child, I used to be able to read copies of *Superboy* and see references to Benedict Arnold and things like that, and I wouldn't have the slightest idea who he was. In context, though, I'd work it out. So I don't think there'll be a significant language barrier."

Was Alan worried that any of the material in *V* may be too strong for an American mainstream colour comic?

"I think it would probably have to be quite a special package. I can't anticipate it being a regular comic book from DC, in any event. But the saving grace of *V* is that David [Lloyd] and I set out to do something that's very understated, and consequently the strip has an atmosphere of extreme violence, but I can't think of

any pages where there's been any real violence shown. Everything has been off panel, or gives the effect of violence without actually showing any. I think the same thing applies to the sex in a lot of instances. It's an atmosphere—these things are sort of implicit in the atmosphere without being overt in the panel. I can't see any real problems on that score because it's very understated. It's not something that's done in a blatant or vulgar way.”

Kim compliments when Evey is taken by the police and notes that it's probably the most gruelling, terrifying comic story they have read in quite a while. This is a sentiment shared by many readers, I note, but Alan continues:

“Thank you. It gets worse from then on [laughs], if you haven't read the ones since then. But that was our attempt to—again, shaving a head, there's really nothing physically violent or horrible shown there. This is what I prefer to do. Seeing someone skinned or disfigured or tortured, that would be gross and horrifying, and you'd get the same degradation, but the simple fact of shaving someone's head, if it's done properly, can be every bit as disturbing and grim and frightening. This is the angle that I'd like to come at things from: To get more effect by doing slightly less, to understate the horror so that most of the horror happens in the reader's mind.”

“...Sometimes I will go for shock. I don't want to sound hypocritical about horror, or defensive about it, because there is a place for gross physical shock, and there are instances where I would use that. But it's something that if used incessantly defeats itself. I think that what you have to do is vary the mood of the horror, try for different effects. If you just keep hammering in the same spot of the reader's psyche, then it will eventually develop a thick layer of scar tissue and it won't feel anything. I think what you need is sort of a creative sadism: You have to keep finding new, untouched spots to jab a needle into. And don't return to them too often. [Laughs] That's what we're trying to do with it, anyway—using different approaches. Not just present a grim situation, but actually make the reader feel the full strength of it, achieve an emotional effect. If anything, that's the end I'm aiming for: make comics that actually grab the reader by the throat and squeeze him—if that is possible.”

Audience Member at SDCC 1985: Are you going to do any more V for Vendetta?³

“Yes. The contract should be waiting for me when I get home. I've already written the first couple of instalments of Book III, and there are only three books to *V for Vendetta*. That's it—it's a complete story. DC's going to be publishing it as a maxi-series in colour. I know it looks really pretty in black-and-white, and I was worried about the colour. But David Lloyd is colouring it, and it looks really good. He's left out all the warm colours, the reds, the oranges, and the yellows. It's all greens and blues and violets. It looks very cold, which fits the atmosphere of the story perfectly. I'm not sure when that's going to be coming out, but the contracts are being tied together, and it will be coming out as a maxi-series from DC sometime in the close future.”

Alan On Writing:⁴

“So, it's a difficult job. It's a dangerous job. You're probably not gonna make any money out of it. Most writers don't. You go down to W.H. Smiths or Waterstone's, most of those writers on the shelves, that is not their only job. Yeah alright, Steven King and Catherine Cookson, Jeffrey Archer, well other than convict and embezzler, most of them have got another source of income. It's difficult, it's dangerous, it's not necessarily good for your mind...I mean the rewards of it are fantastic, I wouldn't do anything else. To me it is the ultimate job and yes, it has made me more intelligent, because it's like George Orwell: if you want to make people less intelligent, limit their vocabulary, limit their language, give them a sort of 'Newspeak' like *The Sun*, this is a perfect Orwellian ways of limiting the vocabulary and thus limiting the consciousness. So the corollary of that holds true as well. If you want to expand people's consciousness, give them better language, wider language, new words. Learn to love words, learn to delight over a new word that you've found. Language itself is such a fantastic phenomenon with its own fantastic history, you can get involved in writing to whatever depth you want, but the thing is that really you have to kind of remember the best way to do it, with all this that I've said about the dangers of madness, treat writing the way that you would treat a god. If you believed in such things, if you were going to devote yourself to a particular god, then that's the best way to treat it. Treat it as if it's not just some abstract idea of a god, treat it as if it was a real god that will maybe, if you do right by the god, will maybe grant all your wishes, will maybe lavish nothing but success and wonder upon you and, if you don't do right by the god, will

begin to fuck with you in ways you cannot even begin to imagine. Treat it like that, and you won't go far wrong. In effect, that's what you're doing."

"Writing will consume your life, because so much of writing happens in your head—you don't need to be 'at work', you don't even need to be awake. You're not gonna get a respite from writing when your head hits the pillow, you're not gonna get a respite from writing when you go on a caravan holiday to Great Yarmouth, or anywhere the moon you can't get away from it, it's in your head. And if it's working properly, it's probably obsessive. If you've got a story on the boil, and if you're a writer you probably will have, you're probably thinking about problems with that story, good things about it that you wanna enhance and make even better, and you're probably thinking that all the time. You might be thinking that when you're having sex. You might be thinking that when you're eating dinner, you might be thinking that on public transport. This is something that will take over your life. Surrender. Surrender to it right from word one. Don't fight. It's bigger than you are, it's more important than you are, just do what it says. Even if that seems to be completely ruining your life, do what it says. Even if it tells you to do something stupid—if it tells you to jump off a cliff, do it. [laughter]"

"This is my experience. I mean, when I was 25, I'd got a baby on the way, or my wife had at least, we were living up Blackthorn, it was really shitty, but I had got a job. I was working down the gas board, and it was a regular job. It wasn't a great job, but with a baby on the way...at which point, writing told me to quit my job, with a baby on the way..."

"...I hadn't really got much of a choice by that point, because I was kind of aware what the alternative would be, and I couldn't stand that, that frightened me, that frightened me more than dooming my wife and baby, which frightened me considerably...it would have just doomed me to something different, if I'd stayed with that gas board job. So yeah, if it said jump off a cliff, do it. It knows what it's talking about, it's more intelligent than you are. It knows more about you than you do. Treat it like that, treat it like a god, and you probably won't go far wrong. And always try to do your best for the deity that you swore yourself to, and it might reward you. You shouldn't go into it expecting it to reward you, you just do this for the glory of writing itself. You want to do this for Thoth and for Hermes—you wanna write something that is just that good, just for the glory of writing. And like I say, that's a completely irrational attitude, but I think at the end of the day, that's the best one. That's got me through 25 years."

Alan Moore On Sex:⁵

Alan Moore, with Phyllis Moore and Debbie Delano, set up Mad Love Publishing, and published *AARGH: Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia* in 1988. In *Escape* magazine he wrote an essay, "No More Sex" on "showhorning Women back into the kitchen, Gays into the closet, and Sex into the marital bedroom."

"Besides, since when does humanity do things naturally? Camels don't wear polyester slacks. Amoebas know nothing of Shake'n'Vac. Every other human enterprise flaunts nature, so why is sex special?"

"Because it's powerful. Along with death, it's life's propelling force. Control sex and death, and controlling populations becomes simple. Death's easily subjugated: William Burroughs observed that anyone who can lift a frying pan owns death. Similarly, those owning the most pans, troops, tanks or warheads own the most death, and can regulate the supply accordingly. Death's a pushover, but how do you control desire?"

"Well, fear and guilt packaged as religion ought to be good for a few thousand years. When the ideology becomes threadbare, you simply employ more forceful salesmen: Jimmy Swaggart. Jerry Falwell. Sex is also restricted by self-policing family units: building blocks that, if arranged into neat pyramids, form stable societies providing the blocks are the same size and shape (and colour, preferably). Despite reducing relationships to Lego bricks, it's a serviceable theory. During agricultural times, extended families proved most efficient for running farms and paying tithes."

"Perceiving this shift towards multiple choice as chaos, many long for simpler bygone times. Their leaders, like all good whores, willingly accommodate these fantasies—Victorian nannies and grizzled cow-pokes a speciality. Canute-like, our leaders attempt to reverse society's tides; retreating from the future towards an imaginary past; shoehorning women back into the kitchen, gays into the closet, sex into the marital bedroom. But those things have grown too big. No amount of pushing will get those doors closed again. All we'll do is crush people."

"Sex exceeds politics, right or left (assuming you still differentiate). Mary Whitehouse or Andrea Dworkin may outlaw pornography, but can't stop people wanting it, regardless of legality. Similarly, Section 28 cannot remove the desire for homosexuality. Consenting sex cannot be prevented. There's regrettably little evidence that even un-consenting sex can be curtailed by legislation alone. Perhaps desire is better comprehended than contained? Perhaps sexual openness would mean less morbid longings, festering alone in darkness?"

"Despite a panic-stricken 'moral' backlash, we progress slowly towards tolerance, understanding. Our sexual turbulence and shattered preconceptions may resolve themselves into a new approach to sex, more various and humane, accepting different loves and lusts without reshaping them into Meccano for our social scaffolding. Sexual awareness rides an upward exponential curve, uncheckable by politicians, popes, police-chiefs..."

Ian Winterton asked why Alan left DC Comics:⁶

"Because they're a bunch of blood-sucking bastards, quite frankly. It was because of a growing deception in which writers and artists were being used as cattle by the companies. It was something that I'd been aware of theoretically but it takes a while to actually feel it, to actually get a sense of what it means for all of those artists, all of those writers, who've been bled dry by the companies they've worked for. It's after you've met Jerry Siegel, the creator of Superman. He sold Superman to DC for \$34. It's after you've met some of these people and realised just how tragically they've been screwed. It's after I met, say, Joe Colhoun, the artist on *Charlie's War* which was the only British war-strip, that I felt had any integrity. It was for a comic called *Battle* and was written by Pat Mills who is an excellent writer and it showed, for the first time in British comics, how the First World War really was. All the horror, the absurdity, the madness. It was not a heroic strip as such, but it was a very... poetic strip upon occasions. Anyway, Joe Colhoun, he was an old guy, he'd put everything he could into that strip, worked hard to get every detail right, the gas-masks, the horses, everything. And it came time for him to retire and he did. But then he found that, because he had never owned any of the copyright on any of his work, he hadn't got enough money to retire. So he went back to the drawing-board, and was dead within a couple of months. And younger people, too, you know, like Dan Day, frantically trying to get his work done for Marvel Comics on time because he'd been threatened by the editor in that way that editors do. Dan Day was actually sleeping at the Marvel offices, on the floor in the lobby. Staying up, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes—that was his diet—and working, you know, 20 hours a day. And, of course, his heart gave out and he died when he was 28. And these are not by any means unusual cases. There are an awful lot of casualties in the comics industry."

"With DC Comics I think there was just a day when me and Dave Gibbons...We'd been doing *Watchmen* and we started getting quite a lot of money for it; "Wow," we thought, "they're giving us a four-percent royalty." Then you suddenly think, "Hang on:

four percent each; that's eight percent and this leaves 92 percent that somebody else is getting. But we did all the work; we did all the adverts, etc. So why are these lists of credits in the back for people like the co-ordinator and controller? These people didn't do anything, so why are they getting all our money?" This was exacerbated by DC trying to swindle us out of royalties on merchandising we were putting out—the badges, the T-shirts and various other *Watchmen* paraphernalia. And we were saying, "No, come on now, you're taking the piss. You're already robbing us blind. Please don't try and grab this last couple of measly pennies from us, even if it is company policy to do that, please don't because we're gonna get really angry." And it went on. There were plenty of danger signs, if DC had been able to see them coming. The final straw came when DC actually brought in a ratings system on the front of their comics without consulting any of their creative personnel. They were bowing down to pressure from various fundamentalist Christian groups to put a ratings system on the front of their comics, similar to those used on films. Me, Frank Miller, Howard Chaykin and a couple of others, we just thought this was completely abhorrent, mainly because we thought that they shouldn't be caving in to fundamentalist Christian groups, of which there were a lot in America at that time. We also thought that it was abhorrent that they should do it without consulting us. You know, we made it clear to them that we did not want this system and that if they pressed ahead with it they would have to face the consequences. And, being DC, they pressed ahead with it, and I left. That wasn't the only reason, but it was the final straw. I had the growing feeling that cartoonists should take things into their own hands more. I mean, they're the ones who do all the work and so they should be the ones who're reaping the benefits from it, not a bunch of faceless middlemen in suits who do very little. That was why I left DC."

Author Alan Moore on the movie:⁷

"I've read the screenplay. It's rubbish. I don't want anything more to do with these works because they were stolen from me—knowingly stolen from me. It is important to me that I should be able to do whatever I want. I was kind of a selfish child, who always wanted things his way, and I've kind of taken that over into my relationship with the world. A strong believer in magic as a "science of consciousness...I am what Harry Potter grew up into, and it's not a pretty sight."

"I explained to [the Wachowskis] that I'd had some bad experiences in Hollywood. I didn't want any input in it, didn't want to see it and didn't want to meet [them] to have coffee and talk about ideas for the film."

Joel Silver was reported as saying Moore was "very excited about what Larry had to say and Larry sent the script, so we hope to see him sometime before we're in the UK." This, Moore said, "was a flat lie. Given that I'd already published statements saying I wasn't interested in the film, it actually made me look duplicitous."

Alan Moore wrote extensively for an article in *Warrior* #17 about writing *V* for *Vendetta* (also published as "Behind the Painted Smile"):⁸

"*V* for *Vendetta* started out partly in the *Marvel UK Hulk Weekly* and partly in an idea that I submitted to a D.C. Thomson's Scriptwriter Talent Competition when I was a tender twenty two years old. My idea concerned a freakish terrorist in white-face makeup who traded under the name of 'The Doll' and waged war upon a Totalitarian State sometime in the late 1980s. D.C. Thomson decided a transexual terrorist wasn't quite what they were looking for...Thus faced with rejection I did what any serious artist would do. I gave up."

"When David was given the mystery strip (for *Warrior*), he decided that while he had plenty of ideas on how it should be handled visually, the mechanics of plot and characterization were, for the moment, beyond him. Since the two of us had worked happily upon a couple of back-up strips in *Doctor Who Monthly*, he suggested me as writer. At this point the telephone conversations that were to financially cripple both of us began, along with the voluminous (and, where David was concerned, indecipherable) correspondence that we needed in order to trade ideas and knock this thing into shape. In other words, this is the point where it gets confusing."

"Given the original brief, my first ideas centred around a new way of approaching the '30s pulp adventure strip. I came up with a character called 'Vendetta', who would be set in a realistic thirties world that drew upon my own knowledge of the Gangster era, bolstered by lots of good, solid research. I sent the idea off to David. His response was that he was sick to the back teeth of doing good solid research and if he was called upon to draw one more '28 model Dusenberger he'd eat his arm. This presented a serious problem."

"It struck me that it might be possible to get the same effect by placing the story in the near future as opposed to the near past. If we handled it right, we could create the same sense of mingled exoticism and familiarity"

"Dave and I both wanted to do something that would be uniquely British rather than emulate the vast amount of American material on the market, the setting was obviously going to be England. Furthermore, since both Dave and myself share a similar brand of political pessimism, the future would be pretty grim, bleak and totalitarian, thus giving us a convenient antagonist to play our hero off against."

"It had the sort of grim, hi-tech world that you could seek in books like *Fahrenheit 451*, or, more recently, in films like *Blade Runner*. It had robots, uniformed riot police of the kneepads and helmets variety and all that other good stuff. Reading it, I think we both felt that we were onto something, but that sadly this wasn't it."

"At around about the same time, Never, Ltd. were preparing the first issue of their short-lived comic magazine *Pssst*. Dave had submitted a strip-sample that he'd come up with by himself entitled *Falconbridge* featuring a freedom fighter named Evelina Falconbridge and an art style that was a radical departure from the stuff he'd been doing on *Doctor Who* and *Hulk Weekly*. *Pssst* rejected it, certain that the future of comics lie in short experimental pieces rather than in continuing characters. For my part, when I looked at it I found it potentially exciting. Dave was obviously on the verge of something splendid here, and I very much wanted to be part of it."

"One night, in desperation, I made a long list of elements that I wanted to reflect in *V*, moving from one to another with a rapid of free-association that would make any good psychiatrist reach for the emergency cord. For those interested in the vast scope of my plagiarism, the list was something as follows: Orwell. Huxley. Thomas Disch. Judge Dredd. Harlan Ellison's 'Repent Harlequin Said The Tick-Tock Man.' 'Catman' and 'Prowler In The City At The Edge Of The World' by the same author. Vincent Price's *Dr. Phibes and Theatre of Blood*. David Bowie. *The Shadow*. *Night-Raven*. *Batman*. *Fahrenheit 451*. The writings of the New Worlds school of science fiction. Max Ernst's painting 'Europe After The Rains.' Thomas Pynchon. The atmosphere of British Second World War films. *The Prisoner*. *Robin Hood*. *Dick Turpin*..."

"Perhaps most important of all, we began to realise that the story we were telling was wandering further and further away from the straightforward 'One man against the World' story that we'd started out with. There were elements emerging from the combination of my words and David's pictures that neither of us could remember putting there individually. There were resonances being struck that seemed to point to larger issues than the ones which we'd both come to accept as par for the course where comics were concerned."

"Dave combines a remorseless professionalism with a deep emotional involvement in the strip equal to my own, and if ever he should decide to leave the strip there is not the remotest possibility of my working with anyone else upon it. V is something that happens at the point where my warped personality meets David's warped personality, and it is something that neither of us could do either by ourselves or working with another artist or writer. Despite the way that some of the series' admirers choose to view it, it isn't 'Alan Moore's V' or 'David Lloyd's V'. It's a joint effort in every sense of the word, because after trying the alternatives that is the only way that comics can ever work. There is absolutely no sense in a writer trying to bludgeon his artist to death with vast and over-written captions, any more than an artist should try to bury his writer within a huge and impressive gallery of pretty pictures. What's called for is teamwork, in the grand tradition of Hope and Crosby, Tate and Lyle, Pinky and Perky or The Two Ronnies. Hopefully, that's what we've got."

"So anyway, that's where we get our ideas from. I was going to go on from this point and tell you exactly who V really is, but I'm afraid that I've run out of room. The only real hint I can give is that V isn't

Evey's father, Whistler's mother or Charley's aunt. Beyond that, I'm afraid you're on your own. England Prevails."

1. *American Fantasy*, Winter 1987; Alan Moore interviewed by Neil Gaiman.
2. *Amazing Heroes* No.71, May 15th 1985; Alan interviewed by Kim Thompson
3. *Comics Journal* No. 106, March 1986; recording of Alan Moore made by Barry Burris and transcribed by Tom Jeintjes at San Diego Comic Con, 1985.
4. *Zarjaz* No. 3. May 2003; interview given to Daniel Whist-on, David Russell and Andy Fruish
5. *Escape* No. 15; "No More Sex," an amazing essay on sex, edited by Paul Gravett
6. *Interzone* No. 89, November 1994 ; interview with Ian Winterton, edited by David Pringle
7. *Comics International* No. 195, April 2006; editor Dez Skinn
8. *Warrior* No 17, 1984; article by Alan Moore on writing V for *Vendetta*

The AARGH! Signatories:

Kathy Acker, Steven Appleby, Dave Gibbons, Yellow, Savage Pencil, Harvey Points, Graham Baker, Gilbert Hernandez, Tony Reeves, Steve Bissette, Jaime Hernandez, Dominic Regan, Brian Bolland, Graham Higgins, Mark Buckingham, Floyd Hughes, Kate Charlesworth, Rian Hughes, Steve Craddock, Iskandar Islam, Who Admits, Robert Crumb, Howard Cruse, Roz Kaveney, David Leach, Jamie Delano, Gary Stupid, Gary Leach, Geoff Ryman, Alexei Sayle, Charles Shaar Murray, David Shenton, Posy Simmonds, Dave Sim, Bill Sienkiewicz, Art Spiegelman, Phil Elliott, David Lloyd, Bryan Talbot, Dave McKean, Dave Thorpe, Hunt Emerson, Frank Miller, Rick Veitch, Kirk Etienne, Alan Moore, Dick Foreman, Tom Frame, Shane Oakley, Joz Zabel, Oscar Zarate, Kevin O'Neil, Neil Gaiman

Other references:

Speakeasy No.90, September 1988; piece about V for *Vendetta*, David Lloyd interviewed
Warrior No. 0; Dez Skinn produced the Prototype in 2018 that was created Sept 1981
Back Issue No. 63, April 2013; Jim Kingman article on V in Roy Thomas' amazing zine
Comics Forum No. 20, Autumn 1999; Guy Lawley on Alan Moore
The End is Nigh No. 2, 2005; interview with Michael Molcher
Mud and Starlight - The Alan Moore Interviews, 2019, by Pádraig Ó Méalóid

Cruelty Is The Point

by Brenda Noiseux



I first read *V for Vendetta* closer to the 2005 movie adaptation than to the original comic release. Back in 2005, the idea of V torturing Evey to set her free was shocking, but somewhat understandable. Evey was full of fear prior to her captivity, so did the means, however complicated, justify the ends? For me, it reads as if it's meant to be complicated; the reader is not meant to feel that V was completely comfortable with what he has done to Evey and Evey's continued care, empathy, and consideration towards V further blurs those lines.

Back in 2005, I might also have discussed how it illustrates the cycle of violence. At the end of the book, Evey appears to have taken up V's mantle and has brought a young man into the Shadow Gallery, presumably to carry on V's work. Will that work include confinement and torture? The story ends, so we're left to consider this on our own.

Re-examining these scenes in 2024, after the social turmoil of the past 8 years, another perspective creeps into my mind. This aspect of V and Evey's relationships reminds me of the mentality of "I suffered in this specific way; so should you." This perspective continually pops up in discussions around reducing suffering caused by systemic injustice, such as student loan predation, trans rights and TERFs, or addressing the intersectionality of poverty and race. These attitudes cut off discussions of slavery, race, and poverty, which in turn limits our ability to analyze actual history and the experiences of those who lived it, isolating everyone. That isolation becomes detrimental to societal progress when the people with at least some privilege, use it to say "I suffered in this

specific way, so should you." They block the changes that would allow us to prevent further suffering.

As we explore V's backstory, we learn of his imprisonment and torture. He uniquely understands how far the people in power will go. It's something that no one should have to go through. It's a dark secret and this, too, is isolating. His story, and its place in history, is one that is not taught—clearly to the detriment of his society. With his use of imprisonment and torture of Evey, V is teaching that Evey that real history in a visceral way. Cruelty is at the forefront and cruelty is definitely the point. But, the more insidious cruelty is V's underlying selfishness of yearning to be understood.

But Evey is already suffering. Her past trauma is not the same as V's, but suffering is not a competition. Evey is living under a totalitarian regime. Her parents are missing or dead, she's experienced war as a child, she's seen neighbors disappeared, she's living hungry, cold, and extremely poor. There's no need to have her experience suffering in a specific way, just to make her see the world in a specific way, to understand it in a specific way, to continue the cycle in a specific way.

Maybe it's overly optimistic to think that V could teach Evey to enact change without that cruelty. And maybe it's overly optimistic to think that we as society could enact change for the better without it. I'd like to think that perhaps Evey, late at night in the Shadow Gallery, has moved past cruelty being the point and is about to show us a different way.





V For Vendetta - The Film by James Bacon

As with all movies based on comics, I suspended my belief system as I sat down to watch *V for Vendetta*; I was looking forward to the experience. Now as I sit and type, I cannot really offer the erudite critical analysis of the adaptation of a comic I know well as I had hoped, but rather my thoughts and reflections on the movie, which of course are much blunter than the cutting words of a scrutinizer of celluloid.

Unlike *Sin City*, which is literally taken shot for shot from the comics—angles, lighting, and all (a real translation thanks to the comics artist and writer being the director), I was prepared for something that would not meet the high expectations one should have when one's favourite comic is being adapted for the screen.

This is a pitfall that some fans immediately fall into; they have such high hopes, which obviously have no realistic basis, and this leads to considerable outrage and spleen ventage online as the movie *Constantine* has shown. I was ready, I knew to be grateful for whatever I got, it was only £6 in anyhow.

I think at this stage I must admit that I really enjoy alternative histories and dystopian futures. The vision of girls wearing red sashes from the anti-sex league is one that brings scorn and disgust to my mind. *Venom* I usually only save imaginatively for Jane Austen's Emma Woodhouse, anger springs into cerebral vision when I think about oppressive governments, religions, or systems manipulating people into a restrictive belief that interferes, binds, and oppresses, in my mind, how people should be allowed to live—freely.

Whether it be fictional such as Orwell's *1984* or documentary like Clarke's *England Under Hitler*, I am both grateful for the way the world has turned out and weary with a watchful eye on how the world is. We seem to fail in many regards to fight against facism. Now in 2024 we have Ukraine struggling against Russia, a Trumpian return on the horizon, and a Tory government who have ratcheted up the right and worn down the social responsibility and NHS as much as they can.

V for Vendetta immediately touched something for me as I read it. I was a teenager, and in fairness I came to it in its graphic novel form, handed over by pals recommending it to me. I have since gone on to collect the originating publication, *Warrior*, where it appeared with many other great stories, by the cream of Britain's comic creating genius of the

early 80's. It was an enlightening wonderful read, and one I have reread repeatedly.

At the time I watched this film, I had met the artist, David Lloyd as is possible when one has a hobby of going to and running conventions. The wish fulfilment at an early stage was to have him as a guest, and I have succeeded, such is my hobby. I have listened intently as he described the process of creating the comic with Alan Moore and how it truly was a collaboration, with Lloyd putting in quite a lot of the premise for the character and being responsible for Moore's involvement.

I hang the artwork on my wall, with pride, that Stef bought me, so I wear my loyalty for all to see.

So with a fresh and open mind, I went into the movie and sat down to enjoy the Hollywood version of something I have come to know intimately.

There were a number of differences, and this came to the fore quite quickly, as Evey played by Natalie Portman is a stronger, older, more middle class feeling character to begin with, than is portrayed in the comic, where she is rather younger, weaker and downtrodden, without much going for her. Portman is reported as saying that she wanted to make Evey a strong character. This is admirable but requires a balance: the story is not about the vain ego of the actor who portrays the character, but instead a vessel to portray the character's story in this journey from weakness to strength. Evey is strong, incredibly so, but not from word go.

I didn't mind so much, contradictingly. I enjoyed Portman's portrayal of Evey despite the lack of initial weakness, and the torture scenes were greatly portrayed. Her interaction with V was good, especially her upset at realising what had occurred, a moment where the comic was reflected well. I thought Hugo Weaving was excellent with his verbose rendition of the V monologue, the complexity of some of his phrases and the not giving too much away. I was pleased, but it was the scripting around him which was the let-down; his character was not allowed to fulfil its full potential. But all the same, it was V, and he pulled it off magnificently.

Another difference, which was unsettling, was that the wrong building got blown up. But that's typical Hollywood grandiosity, and although I wasn't bothered, some of the comic readers with me took this as a mortal crime.

I was pleased that the religious aspect was still there, as it would have been remiss to remove that, although simple things like Prothero's dolls only got a glimpse rather than the discourse they deserved.

The use of a TV screen for John Hurt somewhat removed him from the movie. In my mind, I would have much preferred to have him in person, as he is a great actor. The level of complexity and depth was swallowed out overall. Susan to Sutler was a strange change, I couldn't figure that one.

In the comic there is a whole subplot going on, involving a manipulative wife, which never even gets a hint in the movie, which is a shame, as it adds a level of depth to the story, and features more women, something that is notable about the comic.

Initially I assumed when I read the comic that V was a man, but as I was reading a female friend of mine at the time, called Anna, suggested that V could be a woman, and I realised that she could be right. Such a simple suggestion gets one thinking.

Throughout the comic, it is women who are key points: Valerie's story in prison, the act of Evey prostituting herself, only to be threatened with a brutal retribution planned by men of the government which heralds her encountering V, the torture, Dr Surrige, who knows part of V's tale, the wives who plot and are entangled into the story. Of course, it really is Evey's story, not V's, which has remained with me.

Stephen Rea as Finch was a great choice, although his character on screen lacked the confidence of experience, in my mind, compared to the comic book character. Tim Piggot-Smith as Creedy was an excellent choice, and the little reference to Ireland hit a chord with me that made me smile.

Stephen Fry's character of Gordon, was of course a total departure from the book, but pleasantly allowed the moviemakers to update the story and add some more current themes to the picture. Though the link between Gordon and Evey is much more complex in the comic, and therefore a more rewarding part of the overall journey she takes.

I loved the Tube scene. I understand that they used Aldwych, which used to be a branch off the Piccadilly line, and of course has been used for movies and TV since the sixties. There is even a working train stabled there, that occasionally runs up and down the line, to ensure it's in working order. I was disappointed though that the train itself was unpainted, as in the comics; that was something I was looking forward to seeing.

Obviously the biggest shift is what the movie's message is. In the comic, it's definitely fascism vs. anarchism, which will hopefully lead to something. In my mind that something would naturally be democracy. But the movie is less subtle, as it is about most things, and has democracy as its marked goal.

The scene at the end with people wearing V masks was a bit crap, I thought. I have seen enough footage of people rioting or rebelling, and to be honest, it is never so well organised. This was a disappointment. I think people rising up, out of alleys and side doors would have been excellent, but it would have been a rush not a walk, it would have been a fight, not a push over, it would have been violent—soldiers and police officers train to fight and kill mobs, not to watch and stare. Think Tiananmen Square, Prague 1968, the Detroit Riot 1967, Hungary 1956, Dublin 1916.

The Wackowski moments where V uses his knives were interesting and didn't spoil anything for me, but I thought they were a little superfluous, giving away a bit too much about what we know about V. I like my mind to connect the dots, not a pencil on screen.

The change from post-nuclear Britain to a planned outbreak of the St. Mary's Virus was a bit disappointing. I thought that, as a plot device, it lacked the depth to be effective, and was too simplistic for this story, something that allowed much to be skimmed over, too easy. The idea that Britain could yet have a war, is not that far-fetched, and indeed I note recently in 2024 that the Army are calling for some sort of reservist force, the drum beat of jingoism.

So overall, in 2005, I actually really enjoyed the movie, a lot more than I had expected. I was ready though; I wasn't expecting too much, and was reassured by David Lloyd's words at an exhibition of his artwork in the Newsroom Gallery in Farringdon where he said 'Go and see it, it's a good adaptation of the comic' which was reassuring.

As a fan of the comic I enjoyed the movie. Yes it's far from perfect, it's not the exact story, and there are many differences, but I enjoyed it and will continue to enjoy the comic, as soon as I read it again. The ongoing warning against Facism is still something we all need to be conscious of.

I did lament at the time and wonder still: if Moore approached the movie adapting business a bit more like Frank Miller, would he be more satisfied? Of course that's a fanciful alternative history that makes calling the Tube the U-bahn seem credible, and I think that David was right nearly twenty years ago. This film was the best one could hope for. So, suspend belief, place the comic to one side, and then enjoy a good film with decent performances.

(This review has been updated slightly from the one published in 2005, but without changing any sentiments)



Ideas are Bulletproof: The Power of Symbols in *V for Vendetta* by Josh Gauthier



"Good evening, London... this is the Voice of Fate."

So opens Alan Moore and David Lloyd's iconic graphic novel *V for Vendetta*. Much of the story's central imagery would likely be recognizable even to those not familiar with the book itself. Milton's verse echoes across history—"Remember, remember the fifth of November"—through the comic and into the film adaptation with such resonance that it has become more of a reference to Moore and Lloyd's work than a quoting of the original poem. The Guy Fawkes mask Lloyd designed specifically for this story has become the face of the hacktivist group Anonymous and a cultural symbol in its own right. Even *V*'s distinctive symbol adopts the anarchist emblem, a fitting image for the thematic crusade against the tyranny of government. One thing that *V for Vendetta* understands at its core is this: in both tyranny and resistance, symbols have power.

Early in the story, we are introduced to *V*'s Shadow Gallery. Hidden underground, this mysterious, faceless man has collected a wealth of artistic pieces to save them from the censors of the fascist state that rules above. Paintings and sculptures, a vast library and a jukebox full of music—*V*'s sanctum is a refuge for everything deemed unacceptable by those in power. "They eradicated some cultures more thoroughly than they did others," *V* tells Evey on their initial tour of his home. With cries of "England prevails" sounding through these pages, it's not hard to guess which cultures fared the worst.

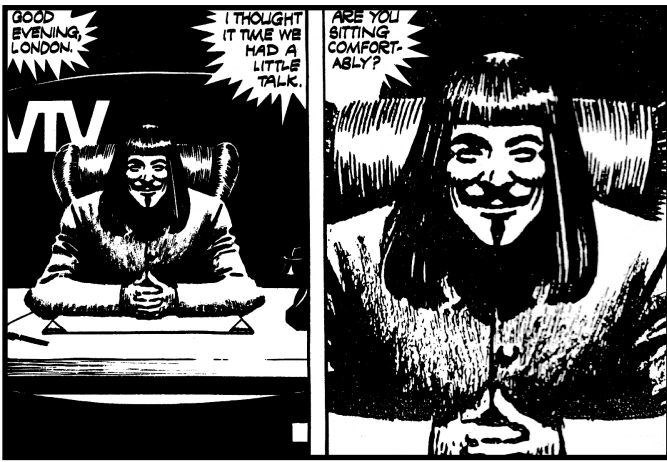
This censoring of the arts is nothing new. All the way back to Plato's argument that there is no place for poets in a just society, those who invent narratives and see the world through a different lens are considered threats to order. Every totalitarian government has followed that same path, right into the present moment. Refusing to conform is an act of resistance. Even if the creator of the art is not an activist themselves, their work may be enough to shake others into action. "A revolution without dancing," *V* states near the end of the film version, "is a revolution not worth having." This sits in stark contrast to the fascist streets of Moore and Lloyd's London, washed always in gray, strict with military protocol while the Voice of Fate broadcasts into every home. Before anything else, before beginning his revolution—*V*'s priority is to save the art. He grows flowers. With every line of Shakespeare spoken from

behind the mask, *V* ensures that beauty is not permitted to die.

But why? Why does art hold such power when it is not typically artists who pass legislation, organize wars, and shape social structure? It is because tyranny can only exist when society permits it. People can only be coerced into giving up freedom when there is no one to speak in opposition. Valerie, the young woman who sits at the hinge point of *V*'s entire life, writes about the country's descent into fascism in her letter which passes first to *V*'s hands and later into Evey's. "I remember how 'different' became dangerous," she says in the film, highlighting exactly the cultural shift that led to anyone deemed socially unacceptable being dragged away while the rest of the country looked on in silence. Marginalized communities, creative thinkers, activists like Evey's father—all vanished in the name of safety and order, their voices lost to society. In the silence they left behind, there was no one calling injustice what it was.

Instead, new voices rose to shape the path forward. In the graphic novel, it is the supercomputer Fate that allows this new government to function—with surveillance in every home and order on every street. Behind the Voice of Fate is the all-too-human and distinctly unpleasant governmental puppet Lewis Prothero. As long as there is no dissent, as long as Fate is able to define truth within England's borders, then people can be expected to stay in line. In a sense, Fate comes to represent the unquestionable need for this new government, the undeniable truth that there is no other option.

Which is why the Voice of Fate is one of the first symbols we watch *V* extinguish. Prothero is rendered silent, and The Voice that once dictated truth suddenly sounds different, sending some of the first fissures through this version of totalitarian Britain. If Fate's voice is not eternal, then, perhaps, neither is the government it speaks for. In Moore and Lloyd's world, the citizens are not so far removed from the way things were that they don't remember a time before government-sanctioned television, remember the activists and outsiders who believed in something different. They can recall the blacklists and violence that were required to shape the society in which they now live. Now, through the very apparatus once used to broadcast the Voice of Fate, *V* brings his new message to the world. "You could have stopped



them," he reminds the country in the graphic novel's second book. "You have accepted without question their senseless orders.... All you had to say was 'NO.'" All across the country, V recognizes a people who have chosen to forget their own ability to object.

This reminder is the beginning of awakening the populace again to what they are capable of. It's a shift that V takes even further when he later destroys the broadcast tower entirely and shuts down the surveillance network. "Her majesty's government is pleased to return the rights of secrecy and privacy to you, its loyal subjects," V broadcasts from the same speakers that once rang with Fate's voice. In surgically destroying key symbols of government and silencing the voice which was once nearly deified, V sets the stage for the whole carefully structured society to come crashing down. Symbolic buildings may loom large over a cowed population. But if those buildings are destroyed, what does that mean for the things they represent?

As we move from the general population to individual power players of Moore and Lloyd's narrative, it is these broader ideals that become important. What do the characters of this story believe in? What do they fight for? And how are those ideals embodied throughout the book?

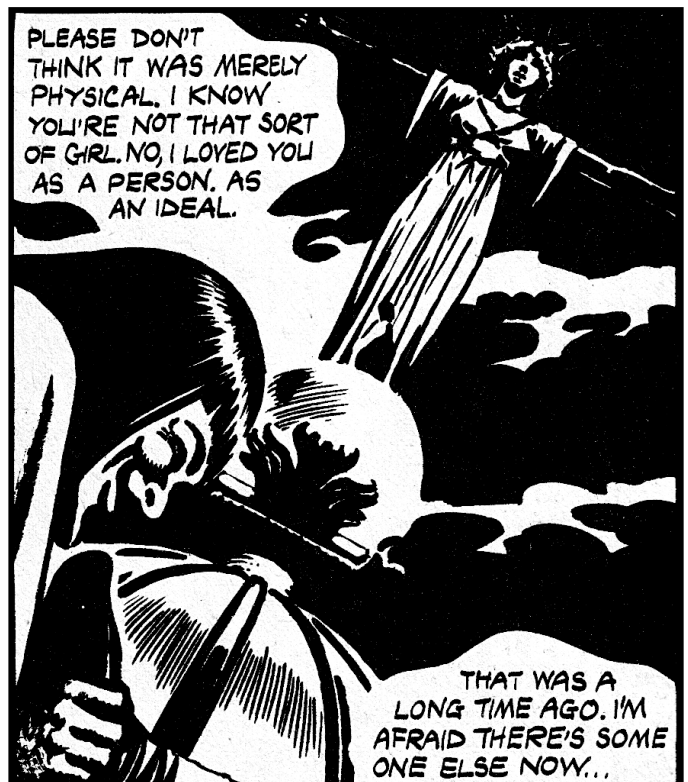
Chapter 5 of Book One offers an important contrast between V and Adam Susan, the leader of this fascist state. Two things happen in this chapter. One is that we watch V pay a visit to the statue of Madam Justice atop the Old Bailey. In a biting monologue, V describes how Justice has betrayed him and society at large and no longer deserves his respect or attention. In her stead, he has embraced anarchy. In a dramatic finale to this condemnation, V blows up the statue and leaves the Old Bailey in ruins. Another symbol destroyed before the eyes of all London. Another fissure in the façade of order.

The contrast to this comes from Susan who sits before the Fate computer, professing his love for the system and the order it represents. Indeed, Susan's love affair with the computer is quite literal, with his declarations of affection and personal obsession—

though covert—only becoming more ardent as the story progresses. Like Justice was for V, Fate represents all that Susan believes in, an orderly society entirely under his control, built atop the silent graves of those who stood in his way. Also like Madam Justice, this symbol is not to last. As Susan's carefully constructed order begins to collapse, V reveals to the Leader that Fate was his all along. In the silent image of Susan staring at his enemy's symbol shining out from Fate's screen, it's clear that this is a betrayal from which the leader of England will not recover.

With Justice and Fate both compromised, Susan clings to the pretense that all is not lost until the moment he stares his assassin in the face while the government collapses around him. In contrast, V and his newfound love of anarchy only gain momentum as the chaos spreads. He seeks to destroy so that, from the ashes, something new may be built. In direct opposition to the total control of a fascist state, V seeks freedom in the "Land of do-as-you-please." It is an ideal that drives him, and one that he seeks to instill in others.

Symbols—and the ideals underlying them—become equally important in Evey's journey. In the fake internment camp that V constructs within his Shadow Gallery, V puts Evey through the same crucible that formed him. While enduring the threat of torture and death, Evey discovers Valerie's letter, just as V did, and reads and rereads it, finding power in something greater than herself, even when she faces execution. "They offered you a choice between the death of your principles and the death of your body,"



V tells her in the aftermath of the experience, “You said you’d rather die.” Whatever else might be said about the trauma he inflicts on her, V achieves his goal, lighting the same spark in Evey that will burn the fascist state to the ground.

In any extended conflict, most people struggle to hold onto abstract concepts such as freedom or justice. Symbols and ideals must become much more personal if they are to retain any significance at all. Guy Fawkes became such an icon that, hundreds of years later, his failed attack on the seat of government is still remembered, immortalized in V’s chosen visage as he revives the conflict in his own way. Valerie, who died alone in a fascist prison, nevertheless became a symbol of hope and significance to V and then to Evey. The shrine V built to her turns Valerie into something greater than she was in life. In her memory, he continues to grow and preserve the Violet Carson roses she spoke of. With a rose left at the site of each murder V commits, he infuses myth and theatricality into his crusade. Even for those who never knew Valerie’s name, the roses she once loved become imbued with significance.

This brings us to the greatest symbol of all that the story contains—V himself.

V is more than a man, and it is vital to his success that each person in England sees himself in him. This shift takes place gradually, from the girl who paints V’s symbol on an empty wall, to each person who takes advantage of the crippled surveillance system to reclaim a bit of power for themselves. An individual alone would not achieve this effect. This is the realization Evey comes to after V is killed and she considers whether she wants to see V’s human face for herself. “If I take off that mask, something will go away forever, be diminished because whoever you are isn’t as big as the idea of you,” she says, before choosing instead to don the cloak and mask herself.

Indeed, it is Evey, not V, who finally ignites the revolution. V, the man, is dead. The remaining figures in government cling to the hope that his reported death will pave the way to restoring order. V had promised to appear to the people. If he fails to follow through, then perhaps what he stood for will fade. Only—V does appear. No one realizes that it is now Evey behind that grinning face, and it does not matter. V is something greater. Even as government agent Finch fires multiple bullets into V’s chest, this mysterious symbol of anarchy says, “Did you think to kill me? There’s no flesh or blood within this cloak to kill. There’s only an idea. Ideas are bulletproof.” As the story ends, V’s declaration proves true. The people remember what they are capable of. The last vestiges of order collapse as members of government turn on each other in the power vacuum. Evey embraces her new dedication to continuing V’s work.

And what they all decide to build in from the rubble—that remains to be seen.

It is fitting then, that the cover for the collected edition of Moore and Lloyd’s series is the iconic Guy Fawkes mask that conceals V’s human face throughout the comic. There is much that could be said about V morals and complicated nature, the creators’ political views, and the many themes inherent to this complex and layered story. But whatever else it may be, *V for Vendetta* is a story about symbols and the power that they hold. Forty years after this story was first told, it still rings with frightening relevance. Turn on any news channel and it’s clear that many still consider “different” to be “dangerous.” Fake news, echo chambers, and fascists—naked hostility against anyone who doesn’t fit comfortably into some idealized society defined by law and order. The comparisons we might draw to *V* are upsetting at times, which is why the comic endures.

The image of the Shadow Gallery near the book’s beginning is striking because it stands in such stark contrast to the rest of the book’s imagery—rich in art and color and beauty and chaotic with diverse voices and perspectives on the world. The Shadow Gallery might be the only real library left in Moore and Lloyd’s world, and stands as both inspiration and warning to the reader. Just last year, across the United States, we saw an alarming increase in book challenges and bans, driven by a handful of vocal individuals invoking falsehoods and fear. According to a report from PEN America, the equivalent of 100 titles were removed from schools every month in the first half of the 2022-23 school year¹.



From 2015 until 2023, I worked as a public librarian, watching as these bans and challenges swept the country. Locally and nationally, my coworkers and I watched people tear up books during school board meetings. We saw library funding threatened for not complying with conservative standards. We watched as books were pulled from shelves and hyper-conservative activist groups mobilized to prevent library patrons from having access to any material they deemed objectionable. In the era of internet and social media, these objections move quickly. We saw cases where parents or community members advocated for the banning of “indecent” books they had not even read. We saw literary professionals harassed, threatened, and driven from the profession for advocating for basic library standards of free access to information.

Understaffed, underfunded, and underappreciated, librarians and educators find themselves bracing for the inevitable book challenges that will come their way. Too often, they stand alone in this work. It is a time of fear, and it is far from over. In 2024, we see even dictionaries and encyclopedias pulled from school shelves for review under new laws². “It’s for the children,” cry the people who want to strip away any viewpoint they find distasteful. They claim that theirs is the moral stance, as those banning the arts will never present themselves as the villains. But history has never looked kindly on book-banners.

V for Vendetta is still relevant because of this simple fact: freedom is necessary. It is also difficult. In an era of misinformation—of book bans and censorship—we cannot wait for the uncomfortable conversations to pass us by. Those who seek to restrict access to arts and information aren’t waiting for the right moment—they are hard at work shaping the world into one that fits their ideal of conformity and order. Too often, those standing in their way are left to stand alone. What I’ve witnessed as a librarian—the vitriol, the abuse, the erosion of intellectual freedom—

serves to remind me that V’s world is thankfully not our own, but there is no denying that there are those who hope to make it so. Libraries and other centers of artistic expression, like the Shadow Gallery, serve both a practical and symbolic purpose. They fight every day to preserve the voices and perspectives that others would gladly silence. And symbolically, they remind us of the things we continue to fight for. V shows us that symbolism holds immense power, able to shift entire cultures toward complacency or freedom. Anything that challenges or upholds the prevailing worldview is inherently political, and recognizing that power is a necessary step in engaging with realities of the society around us.

V for Vendetta reminds us of a vital truth: whenever people seek to restrict freedom in the name of order or morality, they come first for the creators, the vulnerable, and the artists. They come for the symbols—the books, the music, the films—everything in V’s Shadow Gallery. They seek to restrict anything that does not fit into the confines of their gray and lifeless world.

So we protect the arts. We remember our power. And we build a world that always has room for dancing.

1. “Banned in the USA: State Laws Supercharge Book Suppression in Schools” <https://pen.org/report/banned-in-the-usa-state-laws-supercharge-book-suppression-in-schools/>
2. McDaniel, Justine and Natanson, Hannah. “Florida Law Led School District to Pull 1,600 Books - Including Dictionaries.” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2024/01/11/escambia-dictionaries-removed/>

Interludes

by Allison Hartman Adams



In music—and many other forms of art—interludes function in a variety of ways. They can signal a transition, a shift in tone or message, or even an opportunity for the artist to insert some new lens through which to experience the music. They suggest narrative continuity and support the mood of the piece. In some cases, they offer the artist the opportunity to experiment, test new ideas, or bring in new voices.

All of this is true for the “Interludes” of *V for Vendetta*. Alan Moore and David Lloyd created two over the course of the comic: “Vertigo” in *Warrior* #5 and “Vincent” in *Warrior* #20. These were republished by DC in Volume VII, and in trade editions ever since. It is interesting to see these Interludes in context. Each version tells a slightly different story and strikes a slightly different note.

“Vertigo” and “Vincent” in *Warrior*

The first Interlude in *V for Vendetta* is “Vertigo.” Here we witness the interrogation of Ryan, a clearly innocent man, who got nabbed by two Fingermen accusing him of having information about V. The Fingermen force Ryan out onto the window ledge, where he invariably slips and falls—only to be caught by V, who quips, “Nice night” just before Ryan faints from terror. V enters the room, picks off one Fingerman, and then forces the other out on the window ledge himself, where he falls to his death after stepping on a banana peel, presumably placed there by V.

The descriptions in this comic clearly still possess the tone of a story early in its progression. We do not yet know the characters or what they are capable of, and we are only passably familiar with the setting. The comic reminds us of all these things, operating almost like an advertisement for the larger story. There is plenty of dialogue and 3rd person narration, ripe with commentary on the events and characters, evoking the omniscient feel of earlier vigilante comics. “The men working for the Finger have a name for this man,” the narrator explains. “He strikes without warning. He kills without compassion. He is utterly deadly.” In this installment, V feels much more like an anti-hero masked avenger than the creature we know him to be. His dry sense of humor, and the macabre slapstick, banana-peel humor is in keeping with the early parts of *V for Vendetta*, before it became more “serious” with the introduction of Valerie.

This Interlude was originally published in *Warrior* #5 September 1982 (with V on the cover) and is in addition to the regularly-occurring V installment in the issue. At this point in the story, it’s been made clear that Adam Susan is, indeed, a fascist. “I will not hear talk of freedom. I will not hear talk of individual liberties,” he says as he walks past a row of soldiers, their hands raised in a distinctly Nazi-like salute. In this issue, V also has his famous conversation with Madame Justice, wherein he tells her he’s leaving her for his new mistress, Anarchy, just before he blows up the Old Bailey. At the end, Finch tries to get information out of the traumatized and insane Prothero.

The timing of “Vertigo” at this point in the comic makes a lot of sense. We’re still wrapping our heads around the extent of the fascism in Britain, so the Fingermen’s callous tormenting of an innocent man reinforces Adam Susan’s callous disregard for individual freedoms. Also, V’s dismissal of Justice as a guiding principle in favor of Anarchy—which might alienate some readers—is softened by his selfless rescue of a random everyman character. V, as we know, is not always governed by respect for human life, yet here we see him saving Ryan, someone who plays no part in V’s overall plan. V’s mercy for the everyman and poetic vengeance against the morally repugnant Fingermen recalls the revenge he takes on Prothero. In both cases, the punishment fits the crime. The reader is reminded here that V is just; he has a moral compass, which is an important reminder after we’ve seen the twisted ways he can exact his revenge.

“Vincent,” on the other hand, has no words or dialogue. This Interlude was published in *Warrior* #20 in July 1984, without any other V story included in the issue. David Lloyd produced layouts for the episode, but invited Tony Weare, best known for his Western newspaper strip, *Matt Marriott*, to draw it. Tony Weare had previously contributed to V by drawing the Valerie flashback sequence and sections showing Finch at the seashore, which Lloyd had asked him to do because he wanted a look to the scenes that contrasted with the rest of the work.

Similar to “Vertigo,” “Vincent” shows the important role of the everyman in the form of the titular character, a doorman at Northwest House Security and Surveillance Annex. The premise of this comic is simple: Vincent simply opens doors for people. What is brilliant about the story is *who* he opens these doors for, and what his choices imply. One by one, Norsefire agents arrive at the Annex.

Vincent salutes as each goes by (fingers to forehead, not the Nazi-style salute given to Adam Susan). We see several panels of Vincent standing, waiting... maybe even a little bored, and then from a window shot, we learn that V is inside, rifling through documents. A panel shows a photograph and dossier on Valerie Susan Page. When V is discovered by Norsefire security officers, he bursts down the hallway and stairs, knocking people over in his attempt to escape. Interestingly, he kills no one on his way. These panels are juxtaposed with images of Vincent, happily doing his job at the front door. The tension is immediate and palpable. On the final page of the comic, Vincent realizes that the man coming down the hallway is V the terrorist. Vincent reaches for his gun, pauses, and...opens the door for V. Vincent salutes, V glances over his shoulder (yes, he IS grinning under the mask!) and disappears into the night.

The last frame shows Vincent smiling—proudly, slyly—to himself.

I have to confess that this is one of my favorite slices of the V story because of the simplicity of the moment in which a regular man—a Norsefire employee, to boot—decides to do the right thing in an

utterly unshowy way. Who knows what, if any, repercussions Vincent faces. One can imagine quite a lot. But for a moment at the end, Vincent is happy with his small act of righteousness against a system he knows to be corrupt.

The placement of this storyline falls just after *Warrior* #19, wherein we see Evey and Gordon at the Kitty Kat Keller, and Evey realizing that “we shouldn't live this way” after she witnesses Gordon’s friend Robert beaten for speaking out about the state of their world. Just after “Vincent,” in *Warrior* #21, Gordon is murdered by Alistair Harper, and when Evey is about to take revenge, V snatches her out of a dark alley, yet again.

The “Vincent” Interlude does the same work as “Vertigo”—it softens our hearts towards V. By this point, V has abandoned Evey on a city street. In fact, we haven’t seen too much of him, as much of the story has focused on Evey. But by now, the reader is completely aware that V is demented, unpredictable, and dangerous, and the reminder that he is also just, honorable, and a massive badass is well-timed. The implication that there are others who are working with V both helps us be more sympathetic to him and



legitimizes his mission. In fact, the index copy of *Warrior* #20 even implies this: "World War three has happened. Britain lies under the jack-boot of fascist dictatorship. There is no colour. There is no hope. Everyone knows you can't beat the system...everyone except V. And perhaps one other. 'Vincent.'"

"Vertigo" and "Vincent" in the DC Issues and Trades:

Interestingly, when DC republished these Interludes, they moved both "Vertigo" and "Vincent" to a completely different part of the story—Volume VII. In this issue, Evey has survived, been transformed, and then recovered from the torture V inflicted on her. We see Fate (hacked by V) telling Adam Susan "I love you," and the issue ends with V telling Evey that the "Finale" is on the horizon. It is the calm before the storm, as we know something big is coming—we just don't know what.

Moving the Interludes to this moment—the held breath between the setup and the payoff—sets a different tone for both, one that I feel misses the mark. Do we need the omniscient narrator instructing us on this world's rules, character, and setting that is present in "Vertigo" at this point? Do we need to know that other London citizens might support V in his revolutionary schemes? I feel like we learned all this already. Also, why tell us where V gets Valerie Page's information *after* Valerie has already had her comic book Hollywood closeup? Positioned here, the Interludes feel disconnected from the story arc and the characters. They feel like leftovers.

This "leftover" effect is intensified in the DC Comics/Vertigo trade edition, in which the Interludes are removed entirely from flow of the story and placed after Moore's essay, "Behind the Painted Smile." In this case, they really are leftovers, and the introductory note tells the reader that these Interludes were "not considered by their creators as essential chapters" and are only included for completeness' sake.

For completeness' sake.

Well, yes, I guess so, but I'd argue that, while "Vertigo" might have taught the reader more about Norsefire's Britain at the beginning of the story (a necessary step if positioned as it was in the original *Warrior* sequence), "Vincent" does more of the heavy lifting. This is hardly a question of "completeness." Rather, "Vincent" does exactly what an Interlude is supposed to do: it gives the reader a chance to catch their breath and lends texture and nuance to the landscape.

More importantly, "Vincent" deepens the moral questions and complicates characters. Yes, the core comic does this too, but "Vincent" pulls it off in just four short pages with absolutely zero narration or dialogue. It is all angles, knowing looks, shadows, and movement, and it is expertly done.

"Vincent" shows us the true depths of the creators' talents and flexibility. Alan Moore, master of words, chose to use none. David Lloyd, master of cinematic comic book art, chose to cede his seat to another. Tony Weare, master of light, shadow, and the Western comic strip, chose to work in someone else's world, bringing his trademark visual energy to an already incandescent comic.

David Lloyd describes "Vincent" as "one of those unusual objects that [was] part of our experimentation [and] possibilities we could explore" with *V for Vendetta*. "Unusual objects" seems like an apt description—but "unusual" in the sense that it *shouldn't* be notable or extraordinary, but is nonetheless, like a glass paperweight with a fragment of coral inside, or a diary filled with rich creamy paper, the kind that demands to be written in with a real fountain pen.

Are either of these Interludes absolutely necessary to the story? No, probably not. But it is often that which is just slightly *more* than necessary that is the most striking of all.



Letters of Comment

We do like to hear from readers and welcome letters - journeyplanet@gmail.com

Joe Haldeman posted this to his Facebook and we are delighted to be able to share it here:

A fan in the U.K., James Bacon, sent us a remarkable fannish publication, "*Journey Planet 76: The American War in Vietnam*," with the title page in both English and Vietnamese—and a cover illustration in India ink by yours truly, which I had drawn in Cam Ranh Bay back in 1968! That was while I was in the Red Cross hospital there, recovering from combat wounds.

The fanzine also reproduces two long articles I sent to Ray and Joyce Fisher's fanzine *ODD*, which they published in St. Louis at the time. Ray and Joyce put me up in St. Louis twice while I was on weekend passes from Fort Leonard Wood, where I was in training before I was sent off to Vietnam. I wrote them a few times from there.

The article has a couple of line illustrations "rendered with a government-issue 19-cent ball-point pen (blue)", which reproduced pretty well on the Fishers' mid-twentieth electrostencil.

The long article is kind of fascinating to me. I was very much an amateur writer at the time (my first publication was in 1969), but I do show some promise. Someone retyped it with only occasional errors—like Viet Song for Viet Cong—and for me it's a huge time trip.

Thank you Joe.

I would like to mention, that Joe's book *War Stories* is available signed by Joe from <https://www.haldecraft.com/products/war-stories>

This collects together two novels, several short stories, and two long poems that deal explicitly with Haldeman's Vietnam and post-Vietnam experiences, which I picked up some time ago. It is well worth reading.

This includes *War Year* and *1968*, both of which are very poignant writings by Joe as well as the *Forever War* novella, "A Separate War," and new author introduction. My copy is peppered with post its; I found it an amazing compilation.

Justin Marriott published a fine review in *Battling Britons* #6

JOURNEY PLANET FANZINE: James Bacon, alongside Allison Hartman Adams and Chris Garcia, have delivered issue 76 of the award-winning *Journey Planet* fanzine with a special on the American War in Vietnam. It takes in all aspects of printed popular culture related to that war, including comics and paperbacks. Highlights are James' exhaustive lists of Marvel and DC comics set in that arena, Jim O'Brien on lesser known Vietnam set strips, and reprints of letters from Vietnam veteran Joe Haldeman to SF fanzines of the 60s and 70s, who went on to write the classic *The Forever War*. A staggering achievement. It is available for free as a pdf.

Battling Britons is a cracking zine, and not just because of this review! Available on Amazon.

From Will Morgan:

A quite fascinating read, tackling the topic from many angles. Greatly enjoyed.

From Dimitri Bogaert:

Thank you for the *Journey Planet 76* and *77*. That was already very kind with the sending of *The Drink Tank* (that is now in our collection).

Dimitri Bogaert

Bédéthèque - Stripotheek - Comic Strip Library

Musée de la BD - Stripmuseum - Comics Art Museum

From Rob Hansen:

Hi James,

This arrived in the mail today. Lots to read there. First I skimmed the zine, then I started in on it, but still have lots to read. A few opening thoughts:

Fascinating account by Joe Haldeman about his time in Vietnam. I assume he reworked some or most of this for his Vietnam-set first novel, *War Year*, much of which I assume is thinly disguised autobiography—I've never actually read it. In 1978, Haldeman and Spanish Civil War veteran and fan Clifton Amsbury were part of a fan/pro group that visited the Soviet Union and Amsbury wrote a piece contrasting him and Joe, which you can find in my book *Beyond Fandom: Fans, Culture & Politics in the 20th Century*. Also included is a profile of a fan who served in Vietnam in a civilian capacity flying missions for the CIA:

<https://taff.org.uk/ebooks.php?x=BeyondFan>

In September 1984, I visited the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington DC and found it quite moving. Here's what I wrote about it in my TAFF report:

"I hadn't known what to expect of the Vietnam Memorial and at first sight it wasn't very impressive, sunk as it is into a gash in Constitution Gardens, near the Lincoln Memorial. But as you slowly walk along its polished black granite walls, eyes taking in only some of the more than 58,000 names of fallen servicemen and women inscribed on them, it becomes powerfully

affecting by virtue of its stark simplicity. The Vietnam War was not my war, and in common with many of my generation I thought it was a stupid and unnecessary war, but those who gave their lives in its execution were not responsible for the actions of their government, and it's right that their sacrifice should be remembered. The judges of the competition were unanimous in choosing Maya Ying Lin's from the 1,421 designs for the memorial that were submitted. They chose well."

<https://fiawol.org.uk/FanStuff/TAFF1984/Taff12.htm>

Rob Hansen

Many thanks to Joe, Will, Dimitri, Justin, and Rob. We look forward to hearing from readers on this issue.

Editorial by James Bacon



Thanks to all our contributors: John Vaughan, Helena Nash, Errick Nunnally, Brenda Noiseux, Michael Carroll, David Ferguson, Pádraig Ó Méalóid, Gary Lloyd, Ann Gry, Jim O'Brien, Gerard J. Carisio, Josh Gauthier, and our correspondents, Rob Hansen, Joe Haldeman, Will Morgan, Dimitri Bogaert, and Justin Marriott for the review.

Our cover has art by David Lloyd, and Simon Adams brilliantly adapted the style of *Warrior* #11, with many thanks to Dez Skinn. Thanks to the artists whose works also appear here: Joe Staton, Ian Gibson, Roger Hutchinson, Norm Breyfogle, and Alan Davis. I am very grateful to Anna Dillon and to Steve Dillon's family, who keep his art alive with their amazing exhibitions of his work, and for allowing us to use Steve's original art from the cover of *Warrior* #4.

David Lloyd, though. Well without David, I do not think we would have gotten here, his contribution to this zine is enormous. He has been generous with his time, art, and patience with us. His level of engagement has been a huge pleasure and delight. We are so pleased with Evey on the back cover, a new original piece done exclusively for *Journey Planet*. Thank you David, both for a wonderful comic,

and for helping us celebrate it with this issue of *Journey Planet*.

Now, to future issues...

Paul Weimer is one of a number of people who were treated appallingly by the Chengdu Worldcon, whose valid nomination was arbitrarily made ineligible by Dave McCarty, under Ben Yalow, in the ongoing disastrous Chengdu Hugo Awards corruption of 2023. Paul joins us for a timely and crucial issue, in which we will look forward, look at solutions, look to rebuild trust, honesty, respectfulness, and democracy.

We will also have an issue on the Holocaust with Steven Silver, LGBTQ+ comics with David Ferguson, possibly an issue with Tim Powers (if we interview him—and we haven't asked him yet, so don't say anything to him, if ye don't mind), and will round out the year with *Dracula*.

2025 is ahead of us, and we already have plans for a 50th Anniversary issue on the UK comic, *Battle*.

My thanks, as always, to co-editors on this issue, Allison Hartman Adams and Christopher J. Garcia.



Ms. Texas Shadow Gallery: An Enditorial

by Allison Hartman Adams

A teacher in Texas has created a Shadow Gallery for her students.

In 2021, then-Texas State Representative Matt Krause sent a list of 850 books to school superintendents and the Texas Education Agency asking for their immediate removal from school bookshelves. These 850 books, he argued, “might make students feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress because of their race or sex.”

This Texas teacher (who remains anonymous), was so enraged by Krause’s small-minded idiocy, that she immediately enlisted her students to purchase any of these 850 books that they felt the classroom needed. She paid for every single book. This teacher could lose her job. She wouldn’t be the first (or the last) to be fired or pressured to resign because she gave her students access to literature that—heaven forbid—might make them feel *discomfort*.¹

V for Vendetta is on this list, alongside hundreds of other books that deal with LGBTQ+ issues, feminism, race, etc. Many of the books on this list are in my own classroom library right now.

My school district doesn’t have its head up its ass (that much, anyway), so I don’t fear losing my job. I wonder, though, if I would have the moral courage that this Texas teacher possesses. If it came to it, would I protect these books? Would I, like this teacher, like V, snatch books from the burn pile and quietly distribute them to those who need them most? Would I curate my very own Shadow Gallery, spines turned to the wall so that they’d be hidden from the casual glance? I like to think I would, but I admit that I’ve never been tested.

As I review the contents of this issue, I realize how many of our excellent contributors *must* have had someone in their lives like Ms. Texas Shadow Gallery.

I marvel at what we have assembled here, from discussions of cinematography to reflections on comics as protest, from connections to literature to lovingly-detailed examinations of trains. Within these pages we find conflicting opinions, stretched thinking, questions posed and not necessarily answered. Scan back through the Table of Contents and take stock—you’ll see that we cover a lot of ground! And not a single one of our contributors could have made these connections or built on ideas without someone, at some point, who pushed them to think, pushed them to question, pushed them into discomfort.

One of the great joys of crafting a *Journey Planet* on *V for Vendetta*—or any topic—is that everyone here can disagree on literally everything, but what keeps us coming back together is love of this comic. *V for Vendetta* is a *hard* read. It is complex and beautiful and sad. We come back to it over and over, and there is something new to discover within these panels every single time we crack it open. Every...single...time.

V for Vendetta makes us feel everything that Norsefire Texas warns against. It makes us feel anguish. It makes us feel guilt. It makes us feel discomfort.

It makes us *feel*.

I hope that this issue of *Journey Planet*, uncensored and freely available, makes you feel something as well.

1. David Lloyd, James Bacon, and I discuss this in our interview on page 3 of this issue. For more on Ms. Texas Shadow Gallery, read NPR’s writeup here: <https://www.npr.org/2024/01/29/1222539335/banned-books-high-school>

The Hugo Awards... Jaysus, lads. by James Bacon



*They have eradicated culture...tossed it away
like a fistful of dead roses.*

—V to Evey

*First they came for the socialists, and I did not
speak out—because I was not a socialist.*

*Then they came for the trade unionists, and I
did not speak out—because I was not a trade
unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not
speak out—because I was not a Jew.*

*Then they came for me—and there was no one
left to speak for me.*

—Martin Niemöller¹

I am a terrible fucking idiot.

I genuinely never expected that fans, writers, decent people, could somehow be in a position like Evey, Rose, and Valerie, stomped on by a faceless authority. That good people would be treated so badly by persons in charge of a Worldcon.

I never expected that professional writers and fellow fans, some of whom are connected closely to us here, would feel the rubber-soled pressure of the ironically named 'Liberation Shoe' pressing on their neck, bearing down.

I never expected that the foot in the shoe would be American.

It's Worldcon. It's the Hugos. I expected some level of integrity, especially with an American team so heavily involved. I expected these people to be the adults in the room, not the fucking enforcers, not the enthusiastic self-positioned tools of a silent fascist government.

The relevance of V for *Vendetta*, of V and Evey, has never been so strong as it is today. We need not look far to see the divisiveness and lack of empathy and understanding people have for fellow humans. Yet unbelievably, V's warning resonates in our own fandom sphere as well. Fans are encountering a real life dystopian experience, looking on as others have lived it cruelly. Worse, those in charge did it of their own volition. They keenly put on

the uniform of authority and acted out what they felt a fascist government would want—or what they felt the government's capitalist partner sponsors would not want. They used their initiative to crush a democratic process and shit on good people. Got a medal for it too.

Chinese fans—of which there are so many—have been properly fucked over.

It began with a slipshod approach to democracy, overseen by Americans. First was the delay in implementing a workable site selection process by the DC 2021 Worldcon under the failed chairs.² Then came the fact that the system that was eventually used did not ask for a physical postal address. Some fans used emails as their 'address.' Because not everyone has a credit card that works internationally, the fans grouped membership payments. Those who worked for the Canadian Bid for the 2023 Worldcon competing against Chengdu were not happy about this. There were grievous accusations. It got very ugly. It was hard; I felt so much empathy for the regular Chinese fans, mostly students, who had laboured so long for a solid Worldcon Chinese bid.

It soon got worse. The people who we had seen for years, the faces and voices on Zoom, mostly disappeared. In stepped Chengdu Commercial Daily. Who now?

Dave McCarty worked hard to have Ben Yalow made Co-Chair, and was then appointed himself as Administrator of the Hugo Awards. At the time it was reckoned that their presence would add integrity and stability to the process of working with these Chengdu Commercial Daily people. Over the years, McCarty has consistently acted appallingly to *Journey Planet*, but I thought he might do an OK job.

How wrong I was.

Chengdu Commercial Daily did a shit job, but it was shit on purpose. True, the Chengdu Science Museum, an impressive building and venue, was perfect for the Worldcon and great for Chengdu prestige. However, the convention was delayed from August to October in order to coincide with the opening of the museum.

'I felt a great disturbance in the Force, as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced,' said Obi-wan as he sat down, unsteady on his feet.

All those students who busted themselves in a marathon of effort to get votes in and bring Worldcon to China, who were all filled with genuine excitement, were fucked over. These student fans expected to enjoy Worldcon during the summer, but now it would occur mid-semester. Fucked over.

Chengdu Commercial Daily continued to do a shit job. People from Science Fiction World, which is well-connected, were drafted to run a 'Con within a Con,' as it became apparent that the Chengdu Commercial Daily people were failing horribly. Meanwhile Americans were being all positive. Canadians too! Yay.

The incompetence and corruption persisted. Chinese fans looking to exercise their democratic right to vote in the Hugos were badly advised by incompetent Americans. Make a list they were told. Then, caught in a cruel systematic bureaucratic trap, having done what one American on the Chengdu ticket suggested in regards to lists, these fans had their votes discarded, with nary an explanation or understanding, for being slates by another American also lauded.

Dystopian stuff for sure.

Even at the con, Americans, Canadians and westerners were stratified. Maybe 150 had translators, private buses from hotel to con, and top-class meals all the time. They were a higher class of fan and professional; a higher class of person. Egalitarianism? Not here.

Yalow and McCarty were praised and applauded. Hugo X received the imprimatur of many present, and a new award was proposed: The Tiananmen Square Award. Oh no. The Tianwen Project,³ with skills, duped dopes, and corrupters, happily smiled on. What's this now?

Finally, on the 20th of January, the Hugo Finalist Voting Statistics were released, and it became brutally apparent that the Hugos had been corrupted. Good people were made ineligible for no clear reason. As more information was released over the subsequent weeks, it was revealed that the American and Canadian-run Hugo team reviewed and flagged finalists' works for political purposes. Crikey.

A full accounting of what happened, with a clear and intentional apology, has yet to occur. While that is yet outstanding, shame and dishonour will sit with those who were involved. All of them. Shame remains with all those who were complicit. How many knew what was afoot, and supported silently what was happening? How many have been silent since, hoping no one notices?

Why did you not speak out? Fear or favour? Why are you silent still? Iniquities perpetrated through silence will not be washed away.

The corruption continues. More details about the insidious and rotten behaviours are yet to be known—but they will be known, inevitably. Lies are being spoken to hide how nasty matters have become. This is stretching out, further involving good people, powerfully enforcing both silence and acquiescence.

Ben Yalow and Dave McCarty both had the opportunity to do the right thing. They have failed. Failed badly. Continue to fail. Compound their failures and stay silent about the truth. Forcing silence.

Transparency is vital in democracy.

Corruption is vital to facism.

I was invited to China on five occasions—five. I must appear to have potential, as I know one Worldcon Chair who was not invited—at all. This person's progressiveness is clearly and rightly more obvious and well known. I dearly would have loved to hang out with fans in China, but no chance. No way would I be on their ticket.

The Chinese government is an authoritarian, nationalistic, capitalist dictatorship. Their anti-labour, anti-democratic, absolute control is frightening, and the fact that everyone still believes that it is a truly communist or socialist country only adds to how stupendously well China has evolved into a fascist state. Independent unions are illegal in China. Concentration camps exist.

I knew that the Chinese government is a brutal one-party state, horrendous to all who oppose it, but the level of facism here was unexpected. Of course, people can stumble—it can happen. But for Americans and Canadians to so willingly allow a fine democratic institution such as the Hugo Awards to be so badly abused, corrupted and tarnished is utterly unimaginable. I would never have believed that dumping Neil Gaiman, Rebecca F. Kuang, and Paul Weimer as valid finalists, corrupting and falsifying Hugo results, and destroying the integrity of one of the greatest fan run awards was possible.

We see now that fandom has our own Adam Susan figure, transfixed with the screen, so full of ego and lust for power and adulation, that the concept of corrupting democracy obviously never even bothered them. Their lack of remorse and unwillingness to seek forgiveness is indicative of their true character.

Being in a position of authority is a privilege. An honour. It naturally garners praise and attention, but this should be checked. Corruption, ego-fueled power trips, reprehensible behaviours will never be washed away by admiration. We are not entitled to crush democracy, to stomp on the voting rights of fans, or to ruin the reputation of an award that fans have worked tirelessly to celebrate. Our constituency is our community, and they will have their say.

Ben has failed himself and fandom. He has turned away from long friendships, and I have watched as he has discarded honest affection and respect. He has tarnished a lifetime dedicated to the community. Instead of explaining and accepting responsibility, he compounds his behaviour through continued silence and failure to accept that wrongs have occurred. Silence of lies, and lies of silence. It doesn't work.

How will the lies of silence be enforced? So far with the altering and redaction of the minutes of the Mark Protection Committee (MPC) and Worldcon Intellectual Property board.⁴ Keeping minutes is standard procedure with committees on the whole, but there are no minutes from over four hours of meetings. Rotten infection spreading, forcing silence, lies of silence added to convenient opacity and misdirection.

Ghodforsaken are those who are complicit in hiding the truth, and pitied will be those dragged into the mire. If you make a mistake, you apologise. So far, Diane Lacey is the only one on the Chengdu team who has had the courage to do so.

How many others have now been mired in complicity and continue to watch on silently? Is it misplaced loyalty or have they been silenced?

McCarty, the one charged with shepherding the cherished institution that is the Hugo Awards, was the guy who derived joy from the disrespect he caused our co-editors. He said so. He was happy that Chris was upset. Can you imagine that?

Journey Planet was asked to remove co-editors' names after being nominated for a Hugo in 2023. I thought we had resolved this already, when previous failed chairs demonstrated what is right and what is not in 2021. McCarty also forced this issue in 2018, which was upsetting.

Last year, McCarty never responded to any of our inquiries asking to explain the reasoning behind the limit to how many co-editors *Journey Planet* could list. Not once. We were stonewalled. When we queried Yalow directly, he said, 'This is a matter that falls within what has been delegated to the Hugo team, and Dave and Ann Marie have the full authority from the Chengdu committee to make any decisions concerning this.'

Ann Marie Rudolf responded at one stage saying, 'I don't make any decisions here, I am just the voice.'

Who would have guessed that *Journey Planet's* fight to have our co-editors recognised and ensure that Hugo finalists were not invisible so clearly resonates with V's words, 'They eradicated some cultures more thoroughly than they did others.'

Journey Planet's strength lies in our diversity of co-editors. This confounds the unimaginative because it upsets their view of order. The unimaginative have no idea how hard a zine is, nor

how much effort and love and passion our co-editors put into it, nor care that we draw on a variety of heritages and cultures. This experience, while very upsetting at the time, pales into insignificance compared to 2023 Hugo finalists being arbitrarily made ineligible and dumping out ballots, at the whim of these very same people.

It is notable that the February Lacey leak showed that in 2023 *Journey Planet* was flagged for political concerns. Incompetently so, of course.

The World Science Fiction Convention is an incredible thing. The fact that it travels from city to city is a gift. It is popular. Right now, despite everything, there are over 6,000 members of Glasgow, the next Worldcon, which is still five months away. I expect Glasgow to be a super event, and I look forward to more international conventions. This issue with American and Canadian fans and China will not stop me from voting for enthusiastic people from new and safe countries.

Journey Planet and - nearly all - members of our team will no doubt rally around motions to remove bad actors from positions they should not have, as well as motions that add transparency to ensure the respectful democratic process that the Hugos deserve. Some fans have misplaced loyalties to Yalow and McCarty, which shames them.

The Hugos have been, can be, and are amazing. *Journey Planet* won one; it is a powerful thing, and we will keep that lovely idea alive and well, rather than allow individuals to ruin them. Sure these bad actors have an impact, but I am not for burning it all down.

The Hugos belong to the Worldcon. Its democratic system allows a fan like myself to work to bring that con to my own country for the first time. That openness to diversity is to be cherished. The central event of Worldcon is the Hugo Awards, and witnessing that deeply moving moment in one's own country is amazing.

I understand why some people will not appreciate that.

I will ignore the jaded Americans, tired and unimaginative as they are, who suggest separating Worldcon and the Hugo Awards, as well as those droning voices who have never run a convention, and never will, these haters only too pleased to destroy something phenomenal, these types who want to carve out bureaucratic roles for themselves. Solutions are coming from people who have repeatedly demonstrated ignorance or incompetence, and indeed, there are some commentators who I ignore now. I have actual conventions to be part of.

Many so-called solutions ring hollow, and I will not support them. For sure, there needs to be checks and balances and maybe even independent oversight, but not extraordinary burdens for

international fans or future chairs who work to bring the con to their country. There are good solutions, but separating Worldcon from the Hugos is not one of them.

Worldcon has 800 volunteers and 6,000 members. The bad actors here number at only a dozen or so.

If these numbers tell us one thing, it is this: this catastrophe is not who we are. We are better. But right now we need to learn, we need to reflect, and we need to do better again. We—all of us—fallible fans.

I am so sorry for all the fans of all nations who have been so badly treated, for those finalists who were made ineligible, for those winners whose success is coloured by decisions and actions of so few, and for the insidious corruption that has come from it all. I am sorry.

I am also so very sorry for the regular Chinese fans, who watched as a commercial operation, assisted by American volunteers, oversaw what will now be known as one of the worst Worldcons ever.

In actual fact, their Worldcon was hijacked. Their Hugo Awards ruined.

Fandom will galvanise.

We need to work past this and ensure that all fans can feel part of a democratic process. Especially new fans.

The situation is far from over. But we will be there for our readers, contributors, and co-editors, working to do the best we can, supporting Glasgow 2024 and all who work hard to build trust and faith in the awards through transparency, honesty, respect, and decency.

'It... it's unbelievable! All of these paintings and books...' –Evey

1. Information on Martin Niemoeller and his words on the Holocaust Memorial.

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/martin-niemoeller-first-they-came-for-the-socialists>

2. Members of the current and previous year's Worldcon can nominate people and works for the Hugo Awards. Members of the current Worldcon can then vote for their favourites from a list of finalists. Thousands of fans participate, in what is a very democratic process. Site selection occurs two years ahead at that year's Worldcon, and members of that Worldcon vote for the future one. Again a democratic process. In 2023, Worldcon was held in Chengdu, China.

3. More information on the Tianwen Project here: <https://file770.com/decoding-the-tianwen-project/>

4. The World Science Fiction Society (www.wsfs.org, WSFS) is an unincorporated non-profit association whose activities include the annual awarding of the Hugo Awards via the selected World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) each year. WSFS, through its Mark Protection Committee (MPC), manages Worldcon Intellectual Property (WIP), a non-profit corporation that holds intellectual property on behalf of WSFS.



