

A for Alan

The Beat

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Pt. 1: The Alan Moore interview

On November 1, 2005, I interviewed Alan Moore for GIANT Magazine. Although the finished piece was only 300 words long, I ended up talking to Moore for nearly an hour, and he went on at some length about his difficulties with DC Comics and the American Entertainment Industry, in general. A short version of the interview was published in Publisher Weekly Comics Week on November 8, 2005. I'd always meant to get the whole thing cleaned up and edited down, and with V FOR VENDETTA opening this weekend, it seemed like as good a time as any.

In talking to Moore – who is just as fascinating and voluble as you've heard – it becomes clear that the situation with his work at DC and in Hollywood causes him a lot of very real pain. As you can see from the transcript, you can disagree with some of his actions, but not with the real passion and love of comics that motivates them.

Since this interview was conducted, V FOR VENDETTA has indeed had Moore's name taken off the credits. The last I heard, his demand to have his name taken off the books he doesn't own still stood. Perhaps a follow up call is in order.

Despite Moore's unhappiness, he does manage to talk about V FOR VENDETTA, a work of which he is justly very proud. So with no further ado, ladies and gentlemen, Alan Moore.

The Beat: Can you in any way encapsulate the political climate that gave rise to *V for Vendetta*?

Alan Moore: At the time when I wrote it, it was of course for an English alternative comic magazine around about 1981. Margaret Thatcher had been in power for two or three years. She was facing the first crisis of her, by then, very unpopular government. There were riots all over Britain in places that hadn't seen riots for hundreds of years. There were fascist groups, the National Front, the British National party, who were flexing their muscles and sort of trying to make political capital out of what were fairly depressed and jobless times. It seemed to me that with the kind of Reagan/Thatcher axis that existed across the Atlantic, it looked like Western society was taking somewhat a turn for the worse. There were ugly fascist stains starting to reassert themselves that we might have thought had been eradicated back in the '30s. But they were re-asserting themselves with a different spin. They were talking less about annihilating whichever minority they happened to find disfavor with and talking more about free market forces and market choice and all of these other kind of glib terms, which tended to have the same results as an awful lot of the kind of Fascist causes back in the 1930s but with a bit more spin put upon them The friendly face of fascism.

So *V for Vendetta* originally came out of the fact I'd been asked to write a strip for David Lloyd to illustrate. We'd originally been talking about doing a 1930's noir strip and Dave had bolted that because I think he'd had enough of digging out '30's reference. We thought maybe we could get the same effect by rather than setting it in the near past, to set it in the near future. So it all evolved from several different sources, but it was playing into the fact that over here in England we've got quite a good tradition of villains and sociopaths as heroes. Like Robin Hood, Guy Fawkes and all the rest of them. And in our fiction, in British children's comics, there were as many sociopathic villains who'd got their own comic strips as there were heroes. Possibly more. The British have always had sympathy with a dashing villain.

So I decided to use this to political effect by coming up with a projected Fascist state in the near future and setting an anarchist against that. As far I'm concerned, the two poles of politics

were not Left Wing or Right Wing. In fact they're just two ways of ordering an industrial society and we're fast moving beyond the industrial societies of the 19th and 20th centuries. It seemed to me the two more absolute extremes were anarchy and fascism. This was one of the things I objected to in the recent film, where it seems to be, from the script that I read, sort of recasting it as current American neo-conservatism vs. current American liberalism. There 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.

The Beat: Yeah, it does seem to be a common element.

Moore: It does seem to rather be a badge they wear. Whereas, what I was trying to do was take these two extremes of the human political spectrum and set them against each other in a kind of little moral drama, just to see what works and what happened. I tried to be as fair about it as possible. I mean, yes, politically I'm an anarchist; at the same time I didn't want to stick to just moral blacks and whites. I wanted a number of the fascists I portrayed to be real rounded characters. They've got reasons for what they do. They're not necessarily cartoon Nazis. Some of them believe in what they do, some don't believe in it but are doing it any way for practical reasons. As for the central character of the anarchist, V himself, he is for the first two or three episodes cheerfully going around murdering people, and the audience is loving it. They are really keyed into this traditional drama of a romantic anarchist who is going around murdering all the Nazi bad guys.

At which point I decided that that wasn't what I wanted to say. I actually don't think it's right to kill people. So I made it very, very morally ambiguous. And the central question is, is this guy right? Or is he mad? What do you, the reader, think about this? Which struck me as a properly anarchist solution. I didn't want to tell people what to think, I just wanted to tell people **to** think, and consider some of these admittedly extreme little elements, which nevertheless do recur fairly regularly throughout human history. I was very pleased with how it came together. And it was a book that was very, very close to my heart.

The Beat: And you are still happy with it?

Moore: Well, this is a bit more complex, Heidi. A couple of weeks ago I did ask DC Comics to take my name off the book. This was after a long, long string of gradually worsening relationships which had been kind of obliviously ignored by DC comics. It's got to the point where I've become very, very distanced emotionally from a lot of the work which I don't own. It's a kind of feeling that sort of...if I don't actually have the moral right to declare myself the author of the work, does that not mean that I should have the moral right to declare myself not the author of the work?

V for Vendetta was about something that was very important to me. It was a book that I was very pleased that David Lloyd and I owned. And I never wanted to be in a position where I didn't own it. We were misled, I think is the probably the gentlest way of putting it, and ended up signing *V for Vendetta* away more or less in perpetuity.

The Beat: So near and yet so far...[laughs]

Moore: Yeah. At that point I kind of cut off contact with DC Comics and never wanted to work with them again.

The Beat: You're talking about back in the '80s?

Moore: Right. It was when I realized that in fact *Watchmen* and *V for Vendetta* had been taken from me. And I thought, all right, fair enough. I was fooled once, and I decided I didn't want to work for DC Comics again or indeed for any of the big American comic companies. And this

went fine for a number of years until DC evidently thought it would be a good idea to force me back into the fold, when they purchased *Wildstorm*. I had already signed contract and would go back upon my word with people I'd made promises to. So I stuck with it for six years. I was assured at the beginning that DC wouldn't be interfering. This turned out not to be the case, but I stuck with it for as long as I told my collaborators that I would be sticking with it. Which was longer than I'd wanted to, but it took longer than I'd expected.

But I stuck it out and I did the best work that I possibly could. In the midst of all this, this ridiculous thing with *V for Vendetta* film came up. All of this nonsense could have been stopped at any point if—when I had said, look I want my name taken off the films and all the money distributed to the artists—if they hadn't said, Okay, well, you'll just have to sign some things then to give your money to Dave Lloyd. When in fact what they should have said was “--and we're not going to bother doing anything to take your name off the film.”

The Beat: Your name is on [the] *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* [film], right?

Moore: *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* was the reason why I decided to take my name off all subsequent films.

The Beat: Well...[General laughter] I think anyone might have done that! But go on...

Moore: Yeah, a lot of things which had to do with *League* made me decide I really wanted nothing to do with the American film industry in any shape or form. Which is why I asked DC if I could possibly have my name taken off the films and the money redistributed. This went fine with the *Constantine* film. This was because my name was never going to go on the *Constantine* film in the first place. Because that had gone so well, I distributed the money amongst the other artists my name hadn't been on the film and I was completely happy. I assumed when DC then sent me paperwork so I could sign my money over to David Lloyd on the *V for Vendetta* film this was going to go fine.

It didn't. I had an American producer actually lying about my involvement in the film, which made me look like a liar. When I said I'm not taking any money from these films and I'm not interested in them, he makes a statement that's completely dishonest and was saying the complete opposite. So I felt I had to at that point exercise my right to completely sever myself from DC Comics if, assuming that they weren't able to just get a simple retraction, nothing humiliating, just a simple retraction apology and clarification that would have said we regret that due to a misunderstanding blah blah blah. That would have been all.

DC told me they were really trying hard to get that, I kind of got the idea that in fact probably they were just hoping if they stalled for long enough it would all blow over and there wouldn't be anything I was able to do about it. After a few weeks it turned out they hadn't been trying to get any apology or retraction or at least not very hard. They certainly weren't able to offer one that was anything like what I'd asked for. At this point, I said that's it I'm not working for DC again and also I still want my name off this film, if they don't take my name off this film, I will be taking my name off the books, because it means that much to me to sever my connection with this whole painful business.

The Beat: But, Alan, isn't that throwing out the baby with the bathwater?

Moore: Well, I don't own the baby anymore, Heidi! The baby is one I put a great deal of love into, a great deal of passion and then during a drunken night it turned out that I'd sold it to the gypsies and they had turned out my baby into a life of prostitution. Occasionally they would send me increasingly glossy and well-produced pictures of my child as she now was, and they would very, very kindly send me a cut of the earnings. This may sound melodramatic, but I've

been writing for 25 years and I think that the passion with which I write is probably evident—it's not faked. I really do feel intensely passionate about nearly everything I write. Obviously, it's going to vary, but I try to be passionate about everything I write. In some cases I succeed. *V for Vendetta* was one of those cases. It's that—I mean for 20 years since then, it's been a kind of a dull ache that the regular paychecks of our cut of the money don't really do an awful lot to assuage.

[Eventually] I said, look, if this would help, a simple solution would be, alright, if they are assuming my name's going on the film, then I don't want my name on the books, and I will sign off all the income from them. If they're thinking otherwise, if they'd just given me a small signed piece of paper assuring me my name's not going on this film. If they can get me that, before I see any books coming out with my name on them, that from my point of view DC are sort of producing dishonestly, then that would be all right.

Months passed. This piece of paper never arrived, but a big box of *V FOR VENDETTA* books did, that I specifically asked not to see, and which when I opened them had got on the front a big red sticker saying now a major motion picture. On the back it had kind of a half baked jingle from the film worked into the ad copy prominently, and it had also—

I have to say, the editorial standards in the comic industry these days are nothing that any proper editor would ever recognize as such. Most of these people—I mean, I wanted to be a writer or an artist ever since I was a child. I know most of the people in this industry, they wanted to be artists or writers since they were children. I don't know anybody who wanted to be an editor as a child. Or don't know anyone who honed their editorship skills and then got a job. All I mainly know is people who have got perhaps no marketable talent and who sort of drifted into the industry and found themselves in editor jobs. This is perhaps a bit of a slur on editors in general and there are some very good ones. But I hadn't even take the cling film of that *V for Vendetta* book and on the back cover in bold type, it's got the catchy phrase, "Have a pleasant..." [The copy has since been corrected to say "Have a pleasant evening."] I mean it's...it seems to me, I'm perhaps overstating, that nobody's even looked at this book at any stage during it's production.

The Beat: Hm, I just happened to get that book myself and took off the shrink-wrap, and now I'm looking at it. "Have a pleasant"...

Moore: Well, I think this is my basic message to the American industry at this moment. [general laughter] "Have a pleasant."

And so where I'm at, at the moment, it was heartbreak. When I got that package of books I took them straight out to the garage and threw them straight into a skid. I didn't even want to recycle them. That night at 4 in the morning I woke up and I had black thunder rolling in my heart. I could not sleep, I was just lying there thinking well, they're just going to ignore everything I say. It's not my book. It's their book, but the only reason they've my name on that book is it sells more copies, and it gives them a certain amount of integrity and credibility that I don't think they would otherwise have had.

I'm perhaps overstating my case here a bit, but I think I lent an awful lot of literary and intellectual credibility to the American comics business and to the comics business in general when I entered it. I don't feel the same way about comics any more, I really don't. I never loved the comic industry. I used to love the comics medium. I still do love the comics medium in its pure platonic, essential form, but the comics medium as it stands seems to me to have been allowed to become a cucumber patch for producing new movie franchise.

The Beat: I know what you're saying, but there is an awful lot of stuff coming out that's good.

Moore: There is some fantastic stuff but it is marginalized. The only things I ever get asked about are generally related to superhero films, and even some of the other stuff in the medium at the moment. I don't know, it's probably just my tastes. But one end of it seems adolescent in its brutality and in its inexperienced adolescent approach to violence and sex. And at the other end, at the more supposedly intellectual end I see an awful lot of angst, and adolescent breast-beating. This is not a complete blanket condemnation by any means, there's people like Joe Sacco, other people who do wonderful work that is not mainly concerned with them, and their fears of mortality or whatever it is. Or feelings of emptiness. This is not really what I wanted for the comics medium. That's fair enough. There's no reason why it should be the kind of medium that I wanted. But at the same time—I don't know. I think that my, kind of, contempt for the way that the major companies have handled things since their inception, they've only ever changed when there've been absolutely forced to at gunpoint. Otherwise the industry for all of the great claims it makes for itself these days—we're kind of post modern, we're hip, you know, we're sort of a major star accessory—the industry still seems to be based upon a gangster ethic that was around when it was founded. It's been modified slightly to sort of super times. But it's nothing I'm happy with.

The way that I've left it is, all right DC can take my name off *V for Vendetta* and stop paying me the money. And if that doesn't happen, take my name off all of the books and stop paying me the money. So no telling where this one could run to. I mean, believe me, I would be completely happy if my name came off everything I do not own.

The Beat: I know I'm not going to change your mind, but let me play devil's advocate. I certainly understand you reviling and castigating the sheer idiocy of things like the League film, but at the same time, the people who do understand what you're trying to get at are not going to be dissuaded just by the fact that Joel Silver has made *V* a liberal!

Moore: I know that. This started out with me being really upset with the way that the American film industry seemed to be treating me, not just on League but on *V*, but then it started to spread to the point where it's more the American Entertainment Industry that I've got a grudge against. When I originally allowed myself to work for DC again because I'd sign contracts with ABC, I said to Scott and Jim Lee, you know this is probably going to be very explosive, you might end up regretting this. I will do what I've said I'm going to do I'll work and produce these books to the best of my ability. And if DC leaves me alone we shouldn't have any problems, but be advised I am doing this against my will and I know that I am very volatile, especially with regard to this particular issue. But I was assured it was okay to go ahead. But I had warned everybody.

Now this stuff has brought up the whole original [reason why] I didn't want to work with DC in the first place. But it's brought it up more painfully and it's made it completely clear that actually I don't think DC Comics gives a shit about the comics industry or the comics medium except as an adjunct to Hollywood. I really don't.

The Beat: But do you honestly think Paul Levitz or Scott Dunbier or Jim Lee have any influence whatsoever on Joel Silver?

Moore: The thing is, Paul Levitz, Scott Dunbier and Jim Lee, I've got no axe to grind against them at all. Paul Levitz may not have any influence upon Joel Silver, but wouldn't it have been better for Paul Levitz to think about that before his company cheated me out of the ownership of my work and then peddled it to another part of their parent company? This wouldn't have arisen if they hadn't done this initial unfair act and despite the fact they've been given several

opportunities to put it straight and logical reasons to do so when in fact it would have made them more money. Can you imagine how nicely this could have gone? It could have gone swimmingly.

Pt. 2: the further adventures of Alan Moore

Continuing my conversation with Alan Moore from November 1, 2005. A few of the questions and answers reflect events that were current at this time – notably the Tokyopop matter, and should be read with that in mind. In part one of this interview, Moore talked about his unhappiness with the comics industry. In this part, he finishes up on that topic, and talks about his novel and answers the question: Is V a hero?

THE BEAT: You still have a good relationship with **Chris Staros** and **Top Shelf**, right?

MOORE: Absolutely, and various big works that are impending, *Lost Girls* and *The Black Dossier* [League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Volume 3 will be published through Top Shelf in 2007. **THE BLACK DOSSIER**, a LOEG book will be out from Wildstorm later this year], things I still own and am completely committed to.

THE BEAT: You own *Lost Girls* 100% and *From Hell* 100%, right?

MOORE: Absolutely, and *A Small Killing* and a painfully small number of other books. These are the books I'm completely happy about. These are the ones I can look at with pride and not with a pang of, yeah, but I don't own it. By asking DC to take my name off *V for Vendetta* and stop giving me the money for *V for Vendetta*, all I'm asking for is for them to treat me in the same way they've been completely happy to treat hundreds of much greater comics creators than I over the decades. I'm asking them to say to me the same thing they said to Gardner Fox and Jack Kirby and to all those other guys, just say to me you are not going to see a penny for any kind of future reproductions of your work and we're not going to put your name on them.

Why should I be singled out? They have extended this kind of freedom to all of their fellow countrymen who worked for them. Is it because I'm English? All I'm asking for is the same treatment they've given all these other fine, wonderful artists and writers. It's not the editors or publishers who have done anything to make the American comics medium what it is, other than in the sense it's a mess. You know as well as I do, these dear old men, dear dead men in a lot of cases, wonderful men—well, they probably had the same number of pricks as any other occupation has got.

THE BEAT: A Robert Kanigher here or there...

MOORE: Even he had interesting eyebrows. A lot of them that I met were sweet talented people who had got a genuine love for this medium and in nearly every case it seems that love was cynically exploited [by an industry] whose main concern at the end of the day was their corporate masters or the movies

THE BEAT: Let me take you back to when *V for Vendetta* began appearing at DC...85 or 86. At Warrior you did own *V for Vendetta* and when you went to DC what was going through your head?

MOORE: What happened, at DC, they'd been asking if we'd do the Charlton characters and then they said, we don't want you to use the Charlton characters, can you come up with your own. I said yeah we can and we were assured, if you come up with characters of your own, you'll be able to own them under this new different deal that forward progressive DC comics is doing now, and I believed this. I was completely convinced by this. They seemed to be nice people who

were treating me well and were offering what seemed to be a wonderful deal. So we signed the stuff on *Watchmen* and started work on it. At this point, they were asking, well what about *V for Vendetta*. I'd been shying away from anybody who wanted to own the work, but because I thought this was some new deal, that I'd been told about, I actually said to Dave Lloyd "I trust these people now, Dave." [laughs] I can hear myself saying it now. I trust these people, they won't take this away from us. As soon as they stop publishing it, it will be ours. And this was a time that no comic book had remained in print for more than 18 months,

THE BEAT: So you just didn't know at that point.

MOORE: Nobody knew. As Neil Gaiman pointed out to them later when he was saying, look it's a horrible situation you're in with Alan. You know as well as he did that back when he signed that contract, nobody could have predicted that these books would remain in print for that long.

THE BEAT: Right now there's this whole thing going on with Tokyopop publishing a lot of original manga by very young creators. Tokyopop is splitting the copyright with them and a lot of us old timers are saying well, that's not the best thing and the creators are saying, we know what we're doing, they will never betray us. It's obvious that some day, there could be heartache. Now, you were a little bit older, back then.

MOORE: I was in my late twenties. Not much older.

THE BEAT: You were a little bit beyond where they are, but still, did you have any idea then [where this could go from] talking to your peers?

MOORE: Well, I was a very aware young man at that point. I'd been reading the fanzines, I knew that Jack Kirby had been screwed. I knew that Marvel comics had screwed everybody and DC had screwed everybody since their inception. However, at the time when I was getting into the industry they were talking the language of progress, but sort of a mile a minute. There's new, dynamic currents running in DC, and you know, all right I was 28, I was an anarchist. I was very politically cynical, but I was also working in a medium I loved. Perhaps I was too ready to believe what I was told. That might be true. Perhaps if I'd really searched my stomach I would have thought these people are almost certainly lying. But that would have meant dismissing out of hand a lot of people who, up until that point, appeared to be my friends. And hadn't done anything.

THE BEAT: Probably most of them meant well. I'm sure Karen Berger meant well. And she did in fact did get creator copyrights soon after. You were almost there.

MOORE: Soon after I'd gone. This is what Neil was bringing up the point for, Is this really fair? Alan does all the spade work, and ends up in this invidious position, and doesn't benefit from any of it.

THE BEAT: You're still getting publishing money from *Watchmen*—

MOORE: For the moment.

THE BEAT: If you were to sit back and say, okay, whatever, go with god, you would still be making money off these books and *V for Vendetta*.

MOORE: Yeah, I would be and I would also still be subscribing to a "Culture." I'm very, very proud of the books I don't own. But I don't want to be associated with them any more because of the fact I don't own them any more, and I don't think it's fair I don't think it's any way to run a business. But I don't think that would be very honest. It wouldn't feel honest to me, and I'm basically at the end of the day, I'm the only person I'm concerned about. That is selfish I know, but at the end of the day, it's whether I'm waking up at four in the morning in a boiling rage or not, and there is practically no amount of money that can compensate for that. I want to have

the work I've done. [Such as the novel I'm writing.] This is a book about a subject that is, it's not next to my heart, it is my heart. It's right from the very core of me and what I'm all about. I'm loving it. It's the best thing I've ever written. I don't care whether it sells or not. At the end of it I will own this. Just like a proper grown up author working in a proper grownup industry,

THE BEAT: Do you know who's going to publish it?

MOORE: No, I haven't got a publisher yet. I'm not taking an advance for it. I'm waiting until I've got it finished because I don't actually want to send a synopsis and a chapter to an editor.

THE BEAT: Well, with your stature as a writer—

MOORE: I'm not going to have any problems.

THE BEAT: Yeah. You could probably, if you had an agent which I'm sure you—

MOORE: Haven't.

THE BEAT: Yeah, and probably don't much like the idea of. But I'm sure you could get New York publishing houses in a bidding war over it.

MOORE: Well, yeah, when I've got it finished and I know how good it is rather than merely suspect, I'll see what I want to do with it. At the moment I'm thinking quite seriously of not going to a big publisher but going to someone like Top Shelf that I absolutely trust. Which commercially might be a terrible idea, but morally might be a good one. The kind of idea I should have been going for 25 years ago.

THE BEAT: At some point, you know, there's got to be away – well, what am I saying. I wish there were a way to make the system work for you

MOORE: Yeah it would be nice, wouldn't it. Although having kind of dealt with the system for the past 25 years, even when I didn't want to, I have to say I can't see any point at which it will change. I'm not expecting DC Comics to be shamed by my asking to have my name taken off the work. I don't think anyone's going to be shamed.

THE BEAT: Let me ask you one more question on my original list about *V for Vendetta*. It's fascinating that people growing up under our generation grew up under the threat of nuclear winter, now people are growing up under the threat of Islamic Jihad.

MOORE: Well, they think they're growing up under the threat of Islamic Jihad. They're in fact growing up under the threat of nuclear winter. Just like we were.

THE BEAT: If you have a last laugh on Joel Silver it's that he's made this movie and depending on what the news is the day before it opens, he might or might not be able to open it.

MOORE: I've got to say to say we are having a lot of strangely costumed bombers blowing up landmarks in London at the moment and we're not that happy about it. I would have thought a film coming out of it, perhaps the timing could be better. But we shall see.

THE BEAT: Do you think you were being prescient?

MOORE: I wouldn't like to claim I was being prescient but that said, it is pretty clear that I have a direct line to God and I know every moment of the future before it happens. [laughter] I mean, as a case in point, I was saying back in 1981 or whenever it was, I was setting this in the absurdly far future period of 1997, where Britain would be run by a computer centralized right wing government. And to show what they were a really nasty right wing government, the easiest and quickest shorthand was to put monitor cameras on every street corner. In 1997, in England, I believe it first began in the town of King's Lynn, they had monitor camera saturation, where you could track somebody from one end of the town to the other without them ever going off camera. And when this was successful they shipped it into every town in the British Isles. So, yes, there are monitor cameras everywhere. I can only presume that someone like our former

home secretary David Blunkett [a blind British politician] must have somehow got hold of a Braille edition of *V for Vendetta* and thought oh, that's a good idea. But there again, these are not remarkably prescient ideas. It's fairly obvious. It's what I would do if I were going to start a fascist political state so I assume it's what anyone would do. It's like terrorism – you were talking about people being more frightened of dying in a jihad. No offense, but that is perhaps more of an American perception than a global one. You have to remember that over here, there were teenagers being taken out of cellar bars in separate carrier bags all through the '70s and '80s because of the war in Northern Ireland. Which in that case, the IRA were largely being supported by donations from America. That was why I was a bit worried when George Bush said he was going to attack people who supported terrorism, I thought oh my god, Chicago is going to be declared a rogue state and they're going to hunt down Teddy Kennedy and people like that.

THE BEAT: There were as many Al Qaeda ties in Brooklyn as there were in Baghdad,

MOORE: I should imagine there are probably a lot more Al Qaeda ties in Brooklyn than there were in Baghdad under Saddam Hussein because he was a secular leader who didn't have any connections with Islamic Fundamentalist. The thing is, another thing I understand about the spirit of this movie is that it's not really made clear that all the black and brown and gay and Jewish people have been put in concentration camps and vanished. I believe the only suggestion is that he could be Islamic. Which was of course nothing that I'd ever thought. And also, they're making way too much of this Guy Fawkes thing. Guy Fawkes was not a freedom fighter, he was a religious fanatic.

THE BEAT: He was more analogous to a suicide bomber?

MOORE: A bit of it. I was just saying to Melinda [Gebbie, Moore's fiancé and collaborator] today, the Gunpowder plot, thinking about it, was really stupid. They'd just gone practically 60, 50 years of the reign of Elizabeth I who was a staunchly anti-Catholic monarch. She'd been dead 2 years. James was on the throne and he was a Catholic nutcase. This was the point at which Guy Fawkes and his plucky band decided on their perhaps ill-judged scheme. They were shot through with agent provocateurs. The guy who informed on them was actually one of my townsmen. The Gunpowder plot was actually plotted in Northampton. We're good at that sort of thing.

THE BEAT: There's a long heritage of anarchy there?

MOORE: Oh absolutely. The reason why Northampton is the biggest town in Europe and the reason no one has ever heard of it, is we really royally pissed off the monarchy back in the 1200s, and the British monarchy have got quite a long memory. You'd be surprised. The thing is that to me I was just using Guy Fawkes as a symbol, without really any references to the historical Guy Fawkes. It was the bonfire night Guy Fawkes I was referencing, with the at the time easily available Guy Fawkes masks. Although, weirdly, say we started doing *V for Vendetta* in 1980, something like that. Up until that point every November you'd be able to buy fireworks and you'd be able to buy Guy Fawkes masks in the shops. When we decided to use Guy Fawkes as the model for *V for Vendetta*, Dave Lloyd said, great I'll just go out around the shops and buy a Guy Fawkes masks to base it on. He came back and said to his astonishment, there weren't any Guy Fawkes masks to be had. And there have been none since.

THE BEAT: Really?

MOORE: You tend to get left over Frankenstein masks from Halloween. Nothing that refers to Guy Fawkes. It's also no longer referred to as Guy Fawkes Night. It's like there's been a cultural shift and any references to somebody who wanted to blow up the houses of Parliament have been carefully clipped out. So let's hope we at least reawaken some traditions.

THE BEAT: Do you think V is a hero?

MOORE: No, we called the first chapter “The Villain” where we introduce him. I don’t want to say he’s the hero any more than I really want to say he’s the villain. He’s a force. It’s funny with fascism or anarchy, yes, they are the two poles of politics but neither of them are actually, strictly speaking, a political system. Fascism is a kind of weird mystical system and anarchy is an attempt to move beyond the need to be politic, the need to manipulate large masses of people. So I tend to think V is pretty much an allegorical force, an idea given human form. And, obviously I have a lot of sympathy with some of his basic ideas. But I think that killing people is wrong.

THE BEAT: Some of the things he does to Evey are dubious.

MOORE: Well...that was the bit where, I could get behind what he does to Evey – this is probably telling far too much about me – I could get behind that far more than I could get behind killing people. Because it seemed to me that even though, yes, he was actually torturing Evey, this was in his own mad way, an attempt to heal her. An attempt to push her to a point where she has to wake up to herself as an individual with its own will and own wants and destiny that is not just part of the carpeting of the world, but is a person, is a fully human being. And yes, he does use rather extreme methods. I suppose what I was doing was if I were to actually go-around and imprison all the people that I wanted to mentally and spiritually set free, and subject them to torture for a couple of months, I’d probably get locked up, wouldn’t I? Nobody would understand that one. Whereas, if I put it in a comic then I can to some degree take the reader vicariously through the same experiences and give them the same revelations without risking a jail sentence which is one of the delights of fiction.

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