Me and Alan Moore

And that’s a lot of the problem for me.
Sure, the artistic line up is very good, yes part of me wants to see a prequel to Watchmen, don’t I have the Role Playing game, that Moore himself contributed to and I would love to know the goings on of the Minutemen in the Second World War, but you know what, not without Moore.
Alan Moore created a great stand alone series, and it should be left alone, if that’s what he wants.
He is a lovely caring man. He is always smiling or listening, or talking with that slow Northampton accent whenever I see him at events, friendly, happy to sign any comic without any issue, happy to chat to fans, happy to take a fanzine, and he laughs, and is really quite a funny guy, and his eyes are bright and shiny, so behind the massive beard and hair, there is not some terrible monster, but a great man, who entertains and excites me with his clever and intelligent writing.
I respect him.
Thus I am so conflicted and even annoyed about the announcement that we will have 34 comic books, that will be prequels to Watchmen. Conflicted, yes, I am honest, it is not as if I am not a huge fan of some of these creators involved, its not like, I wouldn’t be first in line if he was at Gosh or Orbital or wherever, if MOORE had written, or contributed, or even approved of a comic that was drawn by Darwyn Cooke or the Kuberts, or Amanda Conner. Gosh I adore her work.
But he isn’t. He is reported in the New York Times as saying its; ‘completely shameless.’
That’s strong stuff.
And you know, it’s at odds with what I know of some of the creators, lets look at what Darwyn Cooke said about working on the comic version of Parker; “Donald Westlake has been very involved in the development process and we’ve had a very productive back and forth through the email. With a character as low key and internal as Parker, Donald’s explanation or understanding of his motivation was revelatory.”
Doesn’t that sound respectful, like I love Parker, and was really impressed with how it was impressed upon the reader that there was respect and collaboration with the originator of the story, but obviously, this does not apply for Alan Moore. And that saddens me.
The line up of creators, could have done so much, so much more, with the 100th anniversary of the first world war coming upon us, couldn’t they have done 34 comics about characters perhaps fighting in an alternate version of that historic event. Or could the creators not have gone through the massive DC back catalogue of characters and created a whole new prequel to something yet to come.
Do they lack the imagination and ability not to do a comic to the standard of Watchmen. There is so much skill and creativity here. Yet DC admit in one moment that there isn’t. They can’t be trusted to make a success out of their own creations or ideas.
And lets not get it wrong, these are not creators on the breadline, none of these creators ‘need’ to do this work, lest they cannot pay the rent, and in fairness, I would never deny a person a wage, but in this case, with these creators, its about choice. They have chosen.
Grant Morrison, for instance. He was diffident in his defence of Alan Moore, when I saw him speak at Foyles last summer. He sees the realism of superheroes in the 80’s as a dead end - but when asked if therefore watchmen was poisonous - he was no – ‘it’s beautiful’.
On The Mindless Ones Blog, he was asked by Bobsy if he was going to write a Watchmen sequel;
‘No, they asked me to do that, and I said, “Why would you want a sequel to Watchmen?” [Laughs] No, I mean, c’mon. Watchmen is actually perfect in its construction. I mean, not necessarily in other areas, obviously, but as a story it’s complete, it’s utterly circular, and there’s absolutely no need for anything else in it.’
Kevin Smith was also asked about turning the project down, over at Bleeding Cool and his response;
"Talked to Jim [Lee] and Dan [DiDio] about it two years ago. Only passed because I'm not Alan Moore, sadly. If I was Alan Moore, I'd be all over it. As Kevin Smith, I'd likely just make Bubastis ‘big pussy’ jokes and have Rorschach wet himself. Hurm."

It’s a humorous response, but its also very respectful. And I like him all the more for it, and his run on Daredevil was pretty good.

Some creators obviously have integrity, and well some are blinded by the opportunity to work on something that, could be awesome, but also hated by so many.

Two million copies of the graphic novel of Watchmen have sold, and it was in the top ten selling graphic novels in 2011, like is that what DC are after, to make more cash somehow. Lets be honest, all 34 comics, if they are the best sellers each month, could sell around 100,000. I don’t really see it to be honest, and expect that it might average out at about 50k, or maybe it will get close enough to 2 million comic book sales, and then there is the graphic novels, no doubt DC will continue their atrocious approach to omnibus editions, and maybe release seven graphic novels, more sales. So it has potential to make money. Then what. A sequel? A continuous series? What drivel next?

Apparently we can’t argue about who owns Watchmen, as we know DC do. Yet I haven’t seen the contract, and wonder what was agreed in there about prequels and sequels. I note in the New York Times that Moore says; “I tend to take this latest development as a kind of eager confirmation that they are still apparently dependent on ideas that I had 25 years ago.”

and the Times also says; Mr. Moore said he has over the years resisted overtures from the publisher to approve sequel or prequel projects. Still, Mr. Moore said he was unlikely to stand in the way of Before Watchmen or to fight the project in court, where he said DC Comics would meet him with an “infinite battery of lawyers.”

Well, how can Moore stand in the way, unless he is entitled to?

And that places the question as to whether DC actually have the rights to do this or not. How could Moore go to court, regardless, unless he had a case. Does he have a case, is it not only disrespect, but breach of contract, and DC stand in defiance behind lawyers.

ARE DC BREACHING A CONTRACT?

Because it starts to stench even more. You would wonder if the creators involved have looked or seen the original contract, or even asked if DC are applying it correctly.

It’s hard to know what way things will end up, while I was in Chicago, I spoke with Dal from Challenger Comics who was equally very conflicted. The Alan Moore is not actually a bad guy, so he is being screwed over...

angle; was his attitude. Its a lovely big shop, with couches and a gallery and lots of interesting comics.

Then in down-town Chicago, at Graham Crackers comics, another really awesome comic shop, I Ended up chatting with Matt in the shop, who expressed the sentiment, PRIVATELY that I am expecting from many comic shop owners and workers. He was excited, and thought its a great idea, sorry DC and Moore cannot get along, comics do get written by others. Interestingly Matt also seemed to look at the wider industry, contemplating how DC have left marvel standing, first with their New 52 and now with this, which made their X-men versus Avengers looks staid and boring in comparison. Matt seemed really impressed that DC have done this, it’s a boost to their New 52, and said who wouldn’t want Darwyn Cooke to do the Minutemen, and wondered if Moore really liked comics, then how he might NOT want Cooke to do it, just to see what he does.
This guy was quiet, refined, pleasant and knew his comics. I listened and knew what he meant, sure of course I want Darwyn to work on something like the Minutemen, but only after a proper sit down conversation and agreement with Moore.

Like, how can Chris Staros of Top shelf comics manage to publish and work with Alan Moore, for nearly thirteen years now, having published ‘From Hell’ and currently publishing ‘League of Extraordinary gentlemen; Century’. What does Staros posses that those at DC totally lack.

Integrity, an ability to discuss and converse perhaps.
And its not like Jim Lee doesn’t know how to work with Moore, all he wants is respect and why do people like Joel Silver have to lie, and refuse to apologise for it.

It’s simply shitty.

DC are the ones who have committed a wrong here. They have opened a horrible Pandora’s box. Who hasn’t recommended Watchmen, I have recommended it, I have multiple copies, some thumb worn, and the original comics, I have a sketch of The Comedian on my wall, I have the games, the badges, that DC refused to pay loyalties for, because they were ‘marketing’ not merchandise, and even the little metal figurines.

It’s going to be impossible to diminish the original work, and of course comic books are an amazing form of literature, where many creators work on it, no issue here, but this is a stand alone series, and the man has said I don’t want to be taken anywhere else.

The Minutemen by Darwyn Cooke is an amazing idea, if it was done with Alan Moore.

Moore had mentioned at the time (1986), that once the characters had reverted back to himself and Dave Gibbons, after being out of print for a year, that he might do something with them. There was also talk of various prequels,

I have the Mayfair Games DC Heroes role-playing game. The Dan Greenberg ‘Who Watches The Watchmen?’ and ‘Taking Out The Trash’ by Ray Winninger, who also wrote the the 128 page source book, with the contributions and assistance of Alan Moore, himself. I know Moore helped and had ideas, and I know Moore had an idea about a Minutemen prequel, I read how he was offered projects, along the lines of ‘Rorschach’s Journal’ or The Comedian in ‘Nam., and although he helped with the games, he turned down offers of prequels.
That’s his right.

And although there is a lot of business at play here, it doesn’t change that it will be people who but or don’t buy these comics. It could be the worst car crash that DC have ever driven, these creators might be good, but you know, everyone once and aq while even the best can foul up, can fluster or fail, and here, as one friend said, its going to be the most analysed piece of fan fiction ever written.

I also wonder, if this will be the most pirated comic ever. I wonder will middle class middle of the road, comic buying men and women, who are not that au fair with their computer, will suddenly seek out ways and means to down load and get their hands on this comic, as they too are conflicted.

I think that John Higgins, has a get out of jail card on this one, he was involved in the original, and he is not actually doing a Watchmen prequel, or sequel, so it’s so far removed, in a way, that he dodges a bullet on this.

I just don’t know why DC did it. A display of creative bankruptcy to make money.

How many comics will be better than these prequels, so many to read anyhow.
The big man from Northampton said no.

James

Readers, we welcome comments or reaction, or your thoughts on any issues in this fanzine, just send them to journeyplanet at gmail.com or garcia@computerhistory.org. We hope to come back to this series, once it starts, depending on whether we have come to blows or not. So do get in touch.
Let’s talk about Fan Fiction. I love it. I know, I know, you have mixed feelings. Why should anyone get to play in someone else’s sandbox? The fact is so many authors want to be in control of their own IP, something I neither understand nor appreciate, but I really think it’s a better world where people can create whatever they want and not have to worry about being sued. Yes, this is a naïve interpretation, but it’s true. There are some stories that can only be told off the charts, in the backwaters of the world of those that truly love the material. There is power there. If you’re doing it for the love, I can not fault you at all for doing it, and I hope you’ll get it out there where other folks who have the same appreciation might get a gander.

Now, what about when a big company, let’s say a division of one of the largest media conglomerates in the world, takes a property they apparently have rights to and turn loose some of their excellent writers on it? What if there was a deal saying that once the work went out of print they’d return the rights to the creators, only to have them keep it in print for more than twenty years? That’s gotta be wrong, right?

To me, no. It’s telling a story that people want.

Even if you hadn’t known that this was an issue about Before Watchmen, that last part would have told you everything you’d need to know. The deal that Alan Moore and co. signed said that Watchmen would return to Moore and Gibbons one year after they were done with the characters. That was 20 something years ago. Moore has always claimed that he had no idea that they would ever keep his work in print so long, which makes sense. He signed the deal, which means he has to deal with the consequences, but he has every right to be pissed off about it, to envenomate the entire process if he wishes. He also has the right to expect serious residuals from Before Watchmen’cause these suckers is gonna sell.

Because people want to read them. They gotta know.

Now, I totally get why Moore, and a whole lot of other folks, are pissed off. If the question is “is it right that DC is doing Before Watchmen?” I think my answer to that is a semi-reserved ‘no’. DO they have the right? Apparently they do. There’s a contract that spells out the dos-and-don’ts and, apparently, it’s been lived up to by the letter. The Spirit, not really, but the letter. There is question, as the Contract is not in the public eye though has been talked about by so many folks who have seen it that folks seem to believe they know what is in it. The widely-held belief is that the Watchmen characters and storyline rights are held by DC until the work has been out-of-print for one year. This gives DC the right to create ancillary works, most likely. If this is not the case, and DC has certainly been acting as if it is the case, then Moore should get his lawyers on it because this would solve one of the greatest cases of creator defrauding that has ever taken place, and would make claims by so many others who have been ripped off so much stronger.

But he hasn’t.

These things are difficult, and I understand the entire Creator’s Rights thing, but I also know that a signed contract, even one that seems signed in semi-bad faith, still binds. It is the inherent problem with professionalism: you can not expect anything to happen that isn’t explicitly spelled out. Why will I never do anything professional in nature? Well, because I’ve got no talent, but even if I did, I wouldn’t because I can not out-think a corporation. The contract means more than any desire on the part of anyone but The Money.

But that’s neither here nor there in this case. The question is SHOULD DC do Before Watchmen. To me, the answer to this is an absolute yes.

You see, Alan Moore created something amazing, something that has captured the world’s attention, and especially those of us in our 30s and 40s who were kids when Watchmen came out. For so many of us, this was our introduction to ‘grown-up comics. Not mine, but many folks of my age who constantly threw it at me saying it was the best thing ever. When I finally read it, I saw what they meant, got it fully. Now, we want to know more, we want to get back into that world. This is no different than those older folks that wanted to return to those worlds like Oz, the world of Holmes, Dune, etc. There is a desire to return and one of those worlds that we want to see before us one more time is that of the Watchmen.

There are a great many times that these sorts of things have been done. Philip Jose Farmer took
Kilgore Trout and released a book ‘written’ by him called Venus on the Half-Shell. Tarzan, Bond, Holmes have all had novels and stories written in their universes without participation of their creators. Moore has often used other people’s characters, and while that should have no bearing here, it’s a part of the same idea: if you can use a character, you can use it to tell a story that people will want to read. And it looks like DC can use The Watchmen.

Is it fair that it’s not Alan Moore getting to take us back to the world he created? Nope, it should be Alan. Maybe he would, maybe he wouldn’t, but that would do nothing to bring those of us who want to see what else there is of that world. DC has ruined their relationship with Alan Moore forever, which is a shame as I’d love nothing more than to see him take on a character like Firestorm (a ridiculous character, but what he could do with him!) or The Doom Patrol. Should they have given him back the rights ten years ago? Yes. No question, but they didn’t and they had a contract saying that they didn’t have to. That’s the real problem. You give up so much to reach an audience. Alan Moore is, without question, the greatest writer of comics who has ever lived. Along with Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, he’s one of the greatest creators in the history of comics. The troubles with DC have lessened the amount of work we see from him, which sucks. I’ll never get Alan Moore’s Firestorm, which also sucks, and the trouble with V for Vendetta and Watchmen is what’s led to that.

I’ve never met Alan, wish I could, but the way he’s marketed, at least in the US, is as a Mad Rasputin-type character, which I’ve heard many folks dispute. They think it sells comics to have the creator being a Mystic Knight of some-sort who creates with a power From Beyond. It’s a weird concept, and he’s really the only comics creator I can think of who gets that treatment. And maybe part of the reason that he’s been given that tag is that it makes it harder to feel sorry for him. He’s been cheated out of his creations here, and that is a shame, but that doesn’t mean that in the pursuit of cash there isn’t the right outcome: more Watchmen. Maybe it’s just that I have no feeling of The Sacred towards anything. Watchmen is one of the greatest comics ever written, but that doesn’t mean that only Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons get to use the characters because no one else is worthy of entering the Temple. It’s no more sacred than Firestorm, than Spiderman, than Elongated Man, than Bat-Mite. There is nothing magical about Watchmen but the experience of the reader when they encounter it.

That is the magic.

And who is to say that these folks who are creating the new books won’t be able to tap us into that feeling again?

The desires of the creators are tantamount, folks say. I’m not sure that’s true. I really believe that the audience has a role to play and that by ignoring their desires, you’re weakening the industry. Let’s not forget that comics is an industry, a business. Should it be? I wish that it weren’t, that anyone could make a comic, get it out there and have it sell without huge multi-nationals stripping rights, precentages and the like, but it doesn’t work like that. It’s a business that is based around selling comics, selling visions. No, it shouldn’t be a one-way street, and I really don’t think it is as much anymore. Part of that is that folks fought hard for creator’s rights, especially folks like Alan Moore, but at the same time, they did business, they gave the audience what it wanted. Maybe not everything it wanted, maybe not the way they wanted, and maybe not at the quality they wanted, but they gave the audience what it wanted and that’s the only reason there’s an industry today: they have something to sell that people want to buy.

Recently, the years have not been entirely kind to comics. It wasn’t too long ago when every week at least one comic shop was boarding up its doors. As far as units sold goes, the peak seems to be 1997 (more than a hundred million copies of the Top 300 titles sold) and that number has not been approached since. True, the amount of money made from comics sales has increased, but largely this is due to the increase in sales of graphic novels and higher prices across the board. The recent DC re-boot has helped, 2011 saw a roughly 4.5% increase in units sold, with about a 1.3% increase in the total dollars of sales, which is down almost 10 percent from the peak in 2007. Comics have done OK, but rarely have they approached the levels of the 1997 peaks.

This is an endless argument, of course. There is no way you will ever convince someone who truly believes that the creators should own what they create that Before Watchmen is anything other than a cynical cash-grab. There’s the other side that believes that once something is out there, it belongs to the world. I fall closer to that side. Yes, this may sound like a “Me Wanty!” argument, and yeah, boiled down to syrup, it is. It’s also more than that. It’s an argument for the continuation of the world. If DC gave Moore and Gibbons back the rights to the
Watchmen characters, would there be any more? Who knows? Does this make it right that DC has held on to the rights? No. It seems as if they’ve lived by the letter of the law here, for better or (more likely) for worse, and by doing so have established that they own the rights (for the time being) and can create ancillary products.

And let’s not kid ourselves, these are products that we’re talking about. They can do it, and I really think they should. No, I KNOW they should. This is something that people have wanted for a long time, and now it’s something they’re going to get. The comic shop owners I’ve seen around here mostly seemed happy that they’re going to get a chance to sell more books. Can you blame them for wanting that?

And in my eyes the best part is that DC didn’t just throw some hacks at it (except for Straczynski, but what are you gonna do?). Brian Azzurello, who is currently doing the awesome Spaceman, and Darwyn Cooke and a couple of Kuberts. Len Wein, who edited the first Watchmen, is back! Amanda Conner, AMANDA CONNER!, will be on Silk Spectre! This is not a ‘throw it up and the Watchmen name will carry it’ operation. This is a serious attempt at doing a high-class series of prequels. Lesser names, and even I may have turned on it, but I don’t think you can say that these are scrubs. These are some of the top folks, and they’re getting to play in that sandbox.

Of course, there are those who think that we don’t need to go back, that Moore and Gibbons created a work that says everything that needed to be said. Personally, I don’t think so. Why do companies constantly recreate, re-use, sequel and prequelize when there are so many folks coming up with so many new character and stories? Because the audience wants to see the stories they know continue to live. A perfectly awesome film like The Thing from Another World was good, telling of its time, well-made and crisply written. Then John Carpenter got a hold of the concept, changed it, made it feel new, fresh. Then it was remade in 2011 and guess what? That one was better than either of the earlier attempts.

The argument that these writers and artists, or even others we’ve never heard of, could have been put on other, original projects is a good point, but look at it as a business, and why take a chance on an unproven property? Now, look at it through a Creative lens. What could be better than some of the best writers of today taking a swing at one of the greatest properties of yesterday. To me, it is a amazing thing and I can not wait to read it, especially Minutemen.

It’s not that there are no new ideas, but it’s part of the audience’s mind that they want to see stories they know retold, taken and played with through the lens of the current day. They want to see what came after, what came before. Before Watchmen is designed to satisfy those needs, and how it will be interesting to see if they succeed. Will it be better than the original? I can’t see how it could be, but will it be worth reading? I’m betting so.

Ultimately, the audience is the one that will determine if this is the right project, if there was more life in the Watchmen concept, if further projects should have been done. They will vote, loudly, at every comic shop they walk into, at the voting booth that is the longbox with their weekly pulls, the New This Week shelves.

They will stand and vote on whether this was a good idea with cash and credit cards. They will look at the offerings of new Watchmen, they will make their payments, and that will be them saying ‘Yes.’
**Pádraig Ó Méaloid Talks Watchmen and Before Watchmen**

James spoke with Pádraig Ó Méalóid for Comic Buzz, a fledgling Irish Comic Blog with over 2,500 articles and reviews and a massively growing audience.

Pádraig, who is known to some of you, is a Dubliner who is considered one of the pre-eminent scholars on the works of Alan Moore, has not been shy about his opinions. He has been working on a book about Marvelman, has a live journal called GLYCON, where he published, with Alan Moore’s permission, many items that have not been seen since their original publication, or in the case of Big Numbers issue 3, ever before. He brought insight to this interview, thanks to sources close to Alan Moore, on the subject of Before Watchmen.

**Comic Buzz:** Pádraig, you are something of a historian when it comes to the work of Moore, can you explain what you think is wrong with Watchmen?

**Pádraig Ó Méalóid:** I should point out, first of all, that this is what’s known in legal circles as ‘leading the witness’! However, on the understanding that what you really wanted to ask me was, ‘What is your opinion of Before Watchmen?’, I shall proceed...

There are a number of problems I have with it. The primary one is the fact that Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons don’t own the rights to their own work. The original Watchmen series was published ‘way back in 1986/87, which was before the World Wide Web, before DVDs, before iPods, and, most importantly, before the huge popularity of graphic novels. When Moore and Gibbons brought the idea for Watchmen to DC, they didn’t want to do it under the work-made-for-hire contracts that were prevalent in the comic industry at the time. So, DC offered them a new kind of contract, which would mean that DC would own it, but that a year after the property went out of print, the rights would revert to the creators. It seemed to herald a new, better, and *fairer* relationship between the creators and their publishers. This was, as I said, before there were shelves full of graphic novels on both comic shops and most bookshops. Even the term graphic novel, which has actually been around for quite some time beforehand, wasn’t in common usage. So, there was no expectation that the twelve issues of Watchmen would be collected into a single volume, and it certainly would have been the opinion of everyone involved, even the people at DC, that the rights would revert to Moore and Gibbons in fairly short order.

But of course, this never happened. DC *did* collect it into a single volume, called it a graphic novel, and have kept it in print ever since. I can remember when the only graphic novels on the shelves were Watchmen, V for Vendetta, and Dark Knight Returns. The very fact that Watchmen is so good, and so hugely popular, has meant that the collected edition has been continually in print ever since, and therefore the rights have not reverted to Moore and Gibbons. So, while DC had promised them that they’d get their creation back once DC was finished with it, they decided instead to keep it in print, and forever keep it from them. This may have been the word of the contract, but it was never the spirit of it. And I know that there are lots of people who are saying that they should have read their contract more carefully, but this is, to be plain about it, a bullshit argument – the graphic novel format didn’t exist as we know it, and nobody foresaw it, so how could there have been a clause in the contract about it. So, I feel that Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons have had their great work, which most people who have an opinion on these things regard as the greatest achievement in comics, kept away from them by the greed of a huge American corporation. It’s as apt an analogy for what’s wrong with the world as you could possibly wish for.

**Comic Buzz:** How do you feel about the Before Watchmen series?

**PÓM:** About the series themselves, you mean? To be honest, I haven’t even properly looked at the individual series details, nor do I really intend to. Besides my impassioned plea above, my other
main objection to these is that there's no need for them. One of the unique things about Watchmen, up 'til now, was that it is a single creation. There's no need to read sixty or seventy years of back-continuity, or to try to figure out which of the many re-launches of the characters you're reading: everything you need to know is between the covers of the collected Watchmen. If Alan Moore had felt you needed to know more, he would have put it in there.

And I think all the writers and artists on these new stories – and particularly the writers, for some reason – should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves. Alan Moore is regularly cited as the best comics writer of our time, and possibly ever, and certainly those writers and artists – in this instance I find it hard to refer to them as 'creators' – all get a much better deal because of how hard he fought for creator's rights, and probably all call him an inspiration, but they know he's against this, and they still go ahead anyway. In other words, they're quite happy to piss all over him and his principles for money. Will I mention again how this is an excellent analogy for what's wrong with the world?

Actually, it's entirely possible I'm more angry about this than Alan himself is. A friend, who is close to Alan Moore, but wishes to remain unidentified, told me,

"Alan isn't upset about this, he's not crying into his pillow. He's disgusted by the shameless and desperate exploitation of any 'available' creative content DC can raid, in what is blatantly a wholly cash-driven enterprise.

The cartoon-baddy fat-cat antics they are pulling in order to bring out the Prequels are pissing him off because they centre around the draconian and genuinely unbelievable sub-clauses contained in the contracts around which this whole mess revolves; contracts which would be unthinkable in a modern creative marketplace and which I hear have been described as 'the most ferociously anti-creator contracts ever seen' by some people in the contract business.

Alan appears to have decided not to do the Hollywood thing of sending a barrage of legal letters and court documents at this, which would just allow DC to attempt to gag and bankrupt him in never-ending court proceedings; instead he is just making clear via the NYT how pathetic the whole affair is, and then stepping back and allowing the new content to be judged on its merit."
**Comic Buzz:** Is a cynical move to make more money from Watchmen, or a way to make more movies?

**PÓM:** You say that as if they were two separate things! Yes, it's obviously a cynical move to make more money from Watchmen, and will quite possibly lead to more movies. Next question!

**Comic Buzz:** How will you feel, if for the 34 weeks these comics are on sale, they sell massively?

**PÓM:** I will, to be completely honest with you, not give an absolute f**k. These undoubtedly will sell well, as this is exactly what they've been designed to do. It won't change my opinion that this should never have happened, or that there's no need for more Watchmen material, or that a great man is being treated abominably. It might, however, make me speculate on why these supposed top-notch comics 'creators' couldn't have actually created something of their own, rather than having to rely on another man's work for their ideas.

**Comic Buzz:** What about the redirection that the original work will receive?

**PÓM:** Are you suggesting that sales of Watchmen are flagging so badly that they need these new properties to bring it new attention? Because I really don't think that is the case. These titles will be relying on the original work to provide them with any relevance, not the other way around.

**Comic Buzz:** Do you think if sales are good we will see more Watchmen comics in the future?

**PÓM:** Good or not, we'll obviously see more Watchmen properties. After all, after Before Watchmen, you've obviously got to have After Watchmen, don't you? There is so much detail, so much richness, in that original work – and I mean original in every sense of the word – that they could plunder it forever. And they will. Once the box has been opened, it won't ever be shut again.

**Comic Buzz:** Do you think this could this be an extension to the reboot of DC last year and DC are looking to Watchmen to increase sales in the fight with Marvel – and why have DC run out of ideas?

**PÓM:** You have to understand, I have no possible interest in any of the things this question is about. Are DC looking to plunder one of the truly original pieces of art in the field as part of a corporate battle for supremacy against their rivals? Yes, of course they are – have I already mentioned how I think this is an excellent analogy for what's wrong with the world? And as to why they've run out of ideas: could it be that they don't really want new ideas? That they want to rehash the same corporate properties over and over, and are finding that there is a finite amount of times this can be done, whilst maintaining any sort of pretence at artistic integrity?

**Comic Buzz:** Anything else?

**PÓM:** Only to say that I won't be buying these, and I won't be reading them, ever, and that I urge you all to do the same. I hate the idea of them, and I think the people involved with them should all be ashamed of themselves. It is possible that I may have already mentioned that I think that this is an excellent analogy for what's wrong with the world. It's certainly a perfect example of what's wrong with the corporate comics industry.
Of all of Alan Moore’s work, “Watchmen” is my favourite (Wait, maybe Top 10 is. No, “Watchmen”... no, “Top 10”... no, “Watchmen”... I may be at this for a while, amuse yourselves for a moment... okay, I’m back. It’s been over an hour and I can’t pick. I’m going to go with “Watchmen” is one of my favourite comics of all time and get back to the article). I’ve been obsessed with it since I was a teenager. I’d been drawn into the alien world of the comic book shop through my fascination with the 1995 X-Men cartoon. After denuding the back-issue boxes of everything mutant-related over the course of a few months, the owner of my local comic book shop waved me in the direction of the Neil Gaiman and Alan Moore graphic novels and said “Girls seem to like those.”

Well, this girl certainly did. There were, like, plots in those comics. And themes. And subtext. I started loaning my copy of the graphic novel to anyone I could bully into giving comics a try. But I missed reading it while it was away, so I bought a second copy and loaned that out instead. Given my affection for the series, when “Before Watchmen” was announced you’d think I’d either have excitedly signed control of my bank account over to my LCS or alternatively have chained myself to the railings outside in protest. You’d think I’d feel something. But I don’t.

Between them, Marvel and DC have emptied me of the intense emotions I used to feel at their announcements. I have lived through too many “Everything Will Change”, “Bringing It Back To Its Roots” cycles. I’ve seen too many rewinds and reboots and reimagining. Of course Watchmen spin-offs were going to happen. No doubt some of them will be brilliant and some of them will be awful, and that will probably have nothing to do with which ones get cancelled. Given the claims John Rozum has made about editorial interference on DC’s New 52 “Static Shock”, the quality of each “Before Watchmen” series may even have nothing to do with the assigned creative team.

So no, I won’t be buying the “Before Watchmen” comics. I won’t be boycotting them either. I’m just going to stay here in the indie aisle, panning for gold.
I'm going to play Devil's Acrobat (or whatever the term is) here... I'm a huge *Watchmen* fan, and the thought of someone other than Alan Moore writing new *Watchmen* material is a little unsettling. But I have to remind myself that this isn't the first time it's happened. Back in 1987 or thereabouts DC released three *Watchmen* role-playing games, and most of the material within was not written by Mr. Moore. As far as I recall (and if I'm wrong, please correct me), Alan willingly contributed to the projects - as did Dave Gibbons, supplying artwork.

So *Before Watchmen* isn't unprecedented.

The idea that only Alan should get to play with the toys he created is a troubling one for me: after all, Alan’s most major works (*Swamp Thing*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Marvelman*, *From Hell*, *Lost Girls*, *The Killing Joke*, etc.) all feature characters and situations created by others (and so, from some aspects, does *Watchmen*). Should the “No one but the creator” rule apply one way but not the other?

As a writer and creator of my own universe of superheroic characters, I can certainly understand Alan not wanting others to tinker with what he’s done. I’d be pretty annoyed if I somehow lost creative control of the *Quantum Prophecy* series and other writers were brought in to add their own ingredients and mess up the recipe. But then again, I also write *Judge Dredd*: I’m having fun in the universe created by John Wagner and his successors....
The story that appears in *Watchmen* is whole, and finished. Yes, there are unanswered questions, but are they questions that need to be answered? Isn’t it more fun to speculate on those unanswered questions than to have a series of official prequels that define those answers once and for all? Or is it a fascinating experiment to return to that closed universe after a quarter of a century and have it explored by very talented people on whom the original was a major influence?

In 1987 the two biggest graphic novels were *Watchmen* and Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. The latter was also whole, and finished. It didn’t need a prequel, sequel or any other form of supplementary material. But we got it anyway: *The Dark Knight Strikes Again*, published in 2001. It differs from *Before Watchmen* in one important way: the same creative team (Well, apart from Klaus Janson). Is *The Dark Knight Returns* any less of a classic because there was a sequel? Will *Before Watchmen* be so bad that its stink is strong enough to go back in time and taint the original? I really doubt it - this isn’t *Highlander II* we’re talking about (I hope).

Arthur Conan Doyle’s original *Sherlock Holmes* stories haven’t been diluted by the countless sequels, prequels and adaptations. The original *Dracula* is still a masterpiece. Fans aren’t obliged to read the pretenders: they can simply ignore them, right? But... This is where the danger lies: Ask any kid today about Dracula, and he or she will know that Dracula is a vampire who comes from Transylvania. But they won’t have read the book. Actually, I suspect that one would be hard-pressed today to find an adult who’s read the book. Do we want *Watchmen* to fall down that route, to become - going back to comics - the Batman of future generations, where they will be aware of the characters and familiar with the then-current stories, but have never experienced the original? (Hands up all the Batman fans who have actually read Bob Kane’s original stories... Not so many, I suspect.)

*Before Watchmen* is not being patched together lightly or cheaply by a bunch of amateurs desperate for money. The writers and artists involved are among the very best in the business. I mean, they’ve even got John Higgins on board, award-winning colourist of the original *Watchmen* (and, I feel it’s only fair to add, a close personal friend). I know that John will do nothing but his absolute best on the *Crimson Corsair* strip, and that alone is more than enough reason for me to buy it.

I believe that the new teams are going to provide the *Watchmen* universe with some incredible stuff. They’re going expand its horizons and shine a light into the darker corners. We will see old events and characters in new way, and some of those ways are undoubtedly going to make us go “Oooh! Cool!”

All that said, does *Before Watchmen* need to exist? No, no more than *The Dark Knight Strikes Again* needed to exist. No more than *The Killing Joke* needed to exist. I totally understand and sympathise with the fans who feel that *Watchmen* is untouchable, but I can’t agree. If *BW* is bad, it’ll be forgotten in a few years and the original will still stand as proud as ever. If *BW* is good, but not great, it will give us *Watchmen* fans plenty to argue about in the coming years. And if it’s superb, well, the chief reason for that will be because the creators are standing on the shoulders of a literary giant.

In summary, *Before Watchmen* has raised a number of conflicting emotions and ideas in my little brain. Part of me doesn’t want it to happen, but another part is very intrigued to see how it’s going to turn out. I do trust the people involved to not pee all over what has gone before, but I’m still a little worried they might bring too much to *Watchmen* and dilute or obfuscate the themes and points of the original.

It seems to me that some fans are letting their trepidations grow into full-blown panic. “Worry not!” I say. Read *Before Watchmen* before you judge it. I’m sure that back in 1984 there were *Swamp Thing* fans panicking because their beloved character was about to be tinkered with by some unknown writer called Alan Moore, and before them, there’s bound to have been a good number of people with fond memories of *Marvelman* worried about the new incarnation that was appearing in *Warrior*.

Great stories change the world, they give birth to new ways of thinking, and they inspire other creators. Who can blame the inspired for wanting to pay homage to their inspiration? *Watchmen* has been so successful and so important that prequels and sequels were always an inevitability. They were never NOT going to happen. Nothing ends. Nothing ever ends.
BEFORE WATCHMEN
Martyn Pedler, comic book columnist for Bookslut.

Over the years, Watchmen has become something I admire more than love. When I first read it, however, it amazed me. I can still remember the sick, breathless sensation of its grim climax. Watchmen survived Snyder’s film and it’ll survive these Before Watchmen prequels, too. It is a little sad that someone will have to wade through all the prequels on the shelf to purchase the original. If DC was serious about this, they’d do a single 12-issue story – something to sit proudly next to the Moore and Gibbon’s collected Watchmen – instead of these scattershot miniseries.

Corporate comics will always focus on characters rather than stories because it lets them produce more material and make more money. (The idea that Rorschach has been sitting, unused, for decades must’ve been making DC executives wake up in cold sweats.) As Josh Flanagan wrote for iFanboy, DC have the legal right to make more Watchmen against the wishes of Alan Moore, and “morality and what’s right doesn’t come into it.” But why shouldn’t morality come into it? Isn’t the whole point of morals that they come into everything?

The most depressing thing about Before Watchmen for me isn’t the cult of nostalgia or corporate greed or wondering why Darwyn Cooke said yes. It’s seeing how – yet again – so many comic book fans automatically take the side of the company over the creator. Do they think Marvel and DC are the ones protecting these characters? And unhappy creators could cost them the new stories they desperately want? I don’t know – but if superheroes teach us anything, I’m pretty sure it’s not “morality doesn’t come into it”.

MARTYN PEDLER
DC announces Before Watchmen: a reaction

So, DC has done it at last. They have announced Before Watchmen, a new series of comics using the characters created by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons in 1986. Well, as a summer event, it beats yet another universe-spanning reboot, I suppose. I don’t suppose I shall buy them myself, but then I’m generally disenchanted with superhero comics these days, and to be honest I thought the original not without serious flaws.

DC have wheeled out Dave Gibbons to give the most non-committal and unenthusiastic endorsement it’s possible to imagine, and employed John Higgins, who coloured the original series, to do the art on Crimson Corsair, written by original series editor Len Wein, who is also writing Ozymandias. And there’s a pretty impressive line-up of other creators involved (Darwyn Cooke, Andy and Joe Kubert, etc.). But the question remains, should DC be doing this?

Alan Moore, as reported in The New York Times is, unsurprisingly, unimpressed. And I’ve seen online fan reaction that takes the attitude that these characters should be left alone, because their story has been told.

On one level, this last objection is a bit silly. Before Watchmen is just DC doing what they’ve always done, and exploiting properties they own through new stories. DC is not dependent, as Moore has suggested, on characters and ideas he created twenty-five years ago, but on characters created by Jerry Siegel, Joe Schuster, Bob Kane, Bill Finger, Jerry Robinson, Jack Kirby, etc., seventy to seventy-five years ago (just as Marvel are dependent upon characters created in the 1960s by Jack Kirby, Stan Lee and Steve Ditko), and they continue to exploit them. If you’re going to object to Before Watchmen on the basis that DC are not using new ideas and characters, then you pretty much have to object to almost everything DC publish (and almost everything Marvel publish, and new Judge Dredd material, and Doctor Who, and Sherlock ...). From the corporate perspective DC are taking here, Before Watchmen can be seen as no different from Paul Cornell writing Stormwatch, or indeed Moore himself writing Swamp Thing or Superman. It’s clear from their press release that Dan DiDio and Jim Lee view the Watchmen characters in the same way as they view Superman, Batman, Captain Marvel, the Blue Beetle, and everyone else the company has acquired over the years.

I can appreciate why to some it does seem particularly rich for Alan Moore to make some of the comments he has, implying that Watchmen should be left alone on principle. Moore substantially made his name playing in other people’s sandpits (Marvelman, Captain Britain, Swamp Thing). Watchmen itself began as a treatment of the Charlton characters. And Moore is still going back to other people’s characters, in League of Extraordianry Gentlemen. A number of people have picked up on this, including J. Michael Straczynski (who is writing Dr Manhattan and Nite-Owl).

Moore, in some of his comments, is implying that simply because the story of these characters has been told, no new stories about those characters can ever be originated, as if that should be a general rule for all literature. Leaving aside the fact that I think such an attitude denies a basic feature of storytelling that’s been there ever since writing was invented, I would concede that it’s fine for Moore to say that characters should be left alone on principle; but he can’t then go and write (and if we agree with him, we can’t then go as readers and enjoy) League of Extraordinary Gentlemen. When Moore says, “As far as I know, there weren’t that many prequels or sequels to Moby-Dick,” I think, “Hang on, who is it in the crew of the Nautilus?”

Moore uses Ishmael, the narrator from Moby-Dick, as first mate of the Nautilus in the first two volumes of LOEG. In any case, he’s clearly using Moby-Dick as an example to stand in for all classic literature – yet he is busy writing what is in effect a sequel to Dracula, King Solomon’s Mines, The Invisible Man, etc. When Padraig O’Mealoid says that the Watchmen characters were created for a particular story and not intended for further use, it’s not a sustainable argument, since the same could easily be said of Henry Jekyll, Mina Harker, Hawley Griffin, etc.

People have tried to argue to me that LOEG is different, and isn’t really a ‘sequel’ to anything,
Despite using lots of characters from other works. Of course, it does so in a transformative manner – but that raises the question, how do we know that Watchmen prequels won’t be transformative? I admit it’s unlikely, but it’s not impossible. My point, anyway, is that you can’t make a statement that on principle prequels and sequels are wrong, and the reuse of characters not intended to be reused is wrong, and then hedge it around with special pleading along the lines of ‘unless they’re transformative’ or ‘unless they’re good’.

Now don’t get me wrong. Bottom line, I too think that the idea of Before Watchmen stinks. I just think that some of the reasons that have been advanced for why it stinks are silly, and unhelpful. By making statements suggesting that sequels and the reuse of characters in general (as opposed to the reuse of these characters) are wrong in principle, Moore and his allies muddy the waters and expose themselves to charges of hypocrisy and double standards. This distracts attention away from his actual legitimate grievance (a grievance that Straczynski and others rather overlook).

Because, in the end, Moore is right to get upset, not simply because other people are now doing to his characters what he has done to other people’s, but because it would appear that he was told that this wouldn’t happen; indeed, his story is he was told that the characters would revert to him and Gibbons should the comic ever go out of print (which, of course, it never has). DC had in any case always given the impression that, though happy to exploit the existing comic as best they could, they would never allow anyone else to create Watchmen material, at least not without Moore’s and Gibbons’ approval. They’ve gone back on this (as corporations always do). One wonders how long similar promises to Neil Gaiman with regard to the Sandman will hold true.

So, though I don’t accept that Watchmen should be left alone simply because they are sacrosanct characters whose story has been told, I would agree that they should be left alone because DC always promised Alan Moore that they would be. The key point of objection to Before Watchmen is the ownership issue.

And there are other Watchmen-specific considerations. There is a certain sense that prequels and further adventures are missing the point of the original comic. Watchmen is a story about the passing of a world. Any new stories with the characters can only feed into that story, and are unnecessary to it. And as Damien Walter says in a comment on The Guardian’s website (and hardly any of the comic’s imitators have recognised), Watchmen was a commentary on the superhero comic, rather than, as most people have taken it, an expression of its possibilities, and to turn it into another superhero franchise is to misunderstand it thoroughly. In a decade, expect to see the Watchmen fully integrated into the DC Universe, Nite Owl in the Justice League of America and Dr Manhattan facing off against Sinestro or Darkseid. And then, of course, the original point of the characters will be well and truly missed, but there you go ...

In the end, BeforeWatchmen isn’t really a sign that DC are heading in the right direction. I don’t read modern superhero comics as a rule, so I haven’t seen any of The New 52 (though fellow reviewers on FA Online have not generally been kind, with a couple of exceptions for specific titles), but from what I hear, too much of it is aimed at fourteen-year-old boys who can’t get girlfriends, and adults who’ve never grown beyond that mentality. Beyond Watchmen just reinforces the idea of a corporation that doesn’t really know its customers as well as it thinks it does.

This is a modified version of a post that first appeared on FA Online (http://comiczine-fa.com).
Before Watchmen, After Moore – Laura Sneddon

The “Watchmen moment”, as my lecturer in Comic Studies describes it, is when we read a comic so great and revolutionary that we have to rush out and tell everyone we know to read it and share in the experience. In comics history, these moments are few and far between. What is perhaps more common is the “Before Watchmen moment”, when we discover that our beloved medium has been pressed once more into chasing profitability through the ashes of past glory and ethical wrongs.

It’s been on the cards for a while, but finally DC have stepped up with what was previously nicknamed “Watchmen 2”. The publisher has been smarter than that though, announcing Before Watchmen, seven prequels that focus on the main characters from the original. Launching seven books instead of one both maximises profits, and seriously dilutes any potential backlash to the titles themselves. Backlash is, of course, inevitable. The legal fallout between Alan Moore and DC is both emotional and protracted.

The original 12 issue series from writer Alan Moore and artist Dave Gibbons was first collected in trade format in 1987, just a year after the first issue had hit the shelves. Along with Frank Miller’s Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, Watchmen was marketed as a “graphic novel”, a term that elevated the books from being mere comics and associated them more strongly with novels and literature. Watchmen has been an annual bestseller ever since, and subsequently has remained in print.

The success was unprecedented at the time, which goes a long way to explain the contract that the creators held with DC. Moore and Gibbons were not duped at the time of the contract, and agreed willingly to the terms that avoided the usual work-for-hire restrictions. A reversion clause stated that when the book went out of print – as was the usual case for comics at the time – then the rights would revert to the creators. By continually keeping the book in print, DC did not break the letter of the contract but it was certainly an unprecedented move.

Moore was further angered by Watchmen merchandising (a watch in fact) that initially didn’t deliver any licensing money to the creators, and he split from DC. Move forward a few years and Moore begins writing for Jim Lee’s publisher, WildStorm, on The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen. WildStorm was bought over by DC before Moore began, but the writer wished to honour his contracts with Lee. Soon he was running up against issues of censorship (an entire print run was destroyed and reprinted) and Moore left the publisher once more. Owning The League with co-creator Kevin O’Neill, later volumes were published by Top Shelf Productions (US) and Knockabout Comics (UK). The first two volumes of The League, along with The Black Dossier, are owned by DC and resulted, along with Watchmen and V for Vendetta, in films that the original creator did not wish to be made.

The fallout between DC and Moore is legendary, and reminiscent of the many creators over the decades who have been exploited by the comics industry. Whether or not you prioritise legal or ethical right, the simple truth is this – the result was less mainstream comic work from Alan Moore, surely an unforgivable offence for DC to commit.

What is most surprising about these prequels isn’t their announcement, but that it has taken DC so long to exploit the Watchmen name. For a long time they held off, out of respect for Moore even when still pushing him so far out of reach, but now with the success of the New 52 relaunch last year, and a shiny new DC logo makeover, it’s clear that the publisher’s line is currently to recycle and renew anything that will bring in more dollars.

This is understandable; the mainstream comics industry is in a prolonged death grip. Historically a boom and bust industry, there is no denying that the numbers have been dropping significantly for over a decade now. New and exciting series like Transmetropolitan or The Invisibles seem like a very long time ago, while newer imprint series like The Unwritten or Sweet Tooth are hardly pushed at all in comparison with the constant repackaging of past glories. Yet the success of
Robert Kirkman’s The Walking Dead – even before the television adaptation – shows that original creations are still craved by the readers. Another break out hit in the making is John Layman and Rob Guillory’s Chew. Both these latter titles are from Image, a publisher that is hot on the larger companies heels.

One of the best selling graphic novels in the UK in 2011 was, of course, Moore and O’Neill’s latest League of Extraordinary Gentlemen instalment, Century 1969. Those who defend DC’s decision to release prequels to Watchmen point to the League books as evidence of Moore’s hypocrisy. These books after all reuse and reinvent characters from the vast history of literature, from Captain Nemo to Orlando. Some also point to the origins of Watchmen itself, built upon older comic characters from Charlton Comics that DC had recently acquired.

These arguments somewhat miss the point. Re-imagining characters in itself is not a bad thing; there is a long-standing tradition of doing just that within literature particularly with public domain characters such as Dracula, Robin Hood, Sherlock Holmes, Captain Nemo and Orlando. Many authors, like HP Lovecraft, even encouraged such reuse within their own lifetimes, to further the lifespan of their own creations. Reinventing a character is very different from recycling, and is markedly different from producing a straightforward sequel – or prequel.

The Charlton characters played into Moore’s initial idea of revamping older comic characters, just as he had done previously in his Marvelman/Miracleman series. Moore crafted a murder mystery story and looked for some generic heroes that he could use. The Charlton characters, recently purchased by DC, fitted this description perfectly, but DC did not wish to see any of the characters die due to plans to use them across other titles: Blue Beetle and Captain Atom still have titles today in the New 52, and The Question appeared in titles prior to this latest relaunch. The story that evolved into Watchmen was not based on these characters, but on equally generic original characters. Resemblances to the Charlton characters reflect the stereotypical nature of comic book superheroes, part of the commentary intrinsic to Watchmen.

But here’s the thing. Even if Moore is being hypocritical, or those reasons just don’t stack up – are the Watchmen prequels a good idea in their own right? The world of Watchmen is an intriguing place, but Watchmen itself was a very complete story. The triumph of Watchmen was not in the creation of the characters but in the overall technical work that Moore and Gibbons collaborated on. A prequel can only ever lead to that final destination, and with Watchmen containing so much of its own history in the book itself, it’s difficult to see where a genuine re-imagining can come from. Moore and Gibbons originally had their own plans for filling in some of the history gaps, but we can only speculate on whether that would have come to pass.

My main concern is that in overestimating the value of the characters themselves, the prequels may make some major missteps. Few would argue against Moore being a master storyteller, yet even he had problems ensuring that the readership did not sympathise with Rorsach, a moralistic right-wing and psychotic vigilante. There are also some very sensitive rape issues in the original book, that are kept understated but with far reaching effects. Complexities that are easy to miss when focusing on how great the characters are, when a lot of them are far from being heroes.

Unlike the majority of mainstream superhero stories, the characters were not the focus of Watchmen. It’s perhaps telling that DC is releasing seven books rather than one larger story, disguising the lightness of character strength and pulling in more money over what is likely to be a far shorter shelf life than the original has enjoyed. Make no mistake, these comics will sell regardless of how many Moore fans plan to boycott the titles – the talent that DC has employed will ensure that. And these prequels will also sell well as collected editions in book shops, as readers will see the Watchmen title without being aware of the differences in creators and intent. But like all comics, those sales will only be maintained if the work is up to scratch; if the prequels are equal to the original.

There are those who were sure they would be boycotting any further exploitation of Watchmen who have been swayed by the excellent writers and artists announced on the project. Creators like Darwyn Cooke, Adam Hughes, and Amanda Conner are big names that are well respected both within the industry and by fans. I feel it would be wrong to blame the writers and artists on these titles as Moore’s issue is with DC the publisher, not those it employs. It can be argued that many other creators turned this job down, but at the end of the day very few people within comics at the creative level make a lot of money, and fewer still can be held responsible for wanting to do the best they can on a book that the corporation is determined to publish.

Grant Morrison is one of the writers who turned down the idea of working on a Watchmen project two
years ago. Despite his often hyped enmity with Moore, Morrison made it clear in Supergods, his book on the history of the superhero, that he admires the “technical excellence” of the comic. Morrison is currently working on Multiversity, a series that spans many worlds including the world that the Chartlon Comics characters reside on. Pax Americana, the book that focuses on that world is drawn by Frank Quitely, and I’ve seen some of the pencilled pages – beautiful work as always from the Scottish duo. Morrison then is putting his own spin on these characters and their world, coming at it from a different angle than anyone else. He’ll crack a few jokes about how it’s “Watchmen done right”, and the headlines will go mad and miss the cheeky grin and roll of the eyes. But Morrison, like a handful of other writers, has the ability to always create something innovative and new, even from something old: the antithesis to the recycling trend.

I can understand Moore’s upset. Interviewing him a few months ago for the Independent on Sunday, I realised that the writer genuinely feels bereft about those years when things fell apart with DC. The work he produced then, even the great V for Vendetta, has been stained with a “trail of tears”. This is no off the cuff melodrama, but the real pain of a writer turned against his own creations.

In an industry that saw the creators of Superman reduced to living in poverty while the publishers raked in the cash, and the co-creators of Spider-Man and just about every other Marvel hero having to fight for their credit, it seems that mainstream comics have not learned their lesson. Thanks to independent publishers, and an increasing interest from book publishers, Graphic Novels are one of the only genres in traditional publishing that is expanding year on year in a declining market. By focusing on talent and originality, comics in this form have a secure future.

But the publishers behind superhero comics continue to prioritise money over creativity, recycling and repackaging the same stories on an ever shortening loop, while sales continue to slump. We don’t need more stories spun out of past glories; we need new stories, new characters, and new creativity given the chance to flourish and grow.

These “Before Watchmen” moments are killing comics, and it would have been all too easy for DC to have made amends with Moore and have real original and creative works pouring out their doors, from Moore and others secure in the knowledge that talent comes before profit and not the other way round.

No matter how hard DC now shout to be saved, Moore will always look down and whisper... No.

http://fonografiks.deviantart.com/
James Bacon caught up with Robert Curley, of Sub City comics, to find out what the retailers perspective of Before Watchmen was like.

First and foremost - you are a retailer but you are also a reader and publisher, so I expect you have some interesting thoughts.

As a fan, for me Watchmen is one of dozens of good graphic novels but to suggest it's the best one ever written is purely a matter of taste. Personally I would place a lot of other books ahead of it including Alan Moore's own V For Vendetta. My own personal favourite is Mark Waid's Kingdom Come but again that's just my own taste. From the publisher perspective I can understand why DC are bringing out new books using these characters. You have to remember that it was the Watchmen movie that put it on the New York times best seller list and made it relevant for a new generation. I think the prequels will do the same thing. As far as I understand it DC own the rights to those characters so it's up to them to decide how to pursue their future. I don't know the exact details of the contract Alan signed with DC but I can only presume that it was done in good faith and with a sound mind.

What do you think of the news about the Watchmen prequels?

I'm looking forward to them. I think that the nature of superheroes (and that's what Watchmen are at the end of the day) is to evolve, as long as the stories are well executed. Oddly enough it's projects like this and the movie that bring the book to a wider audience. I've asked a lot of customers their opinion on it and most are looking forward to it, some are not happy about it and others have no feelings on it because it doesn't interest them.

Personally, I enjoyed the original book and from a fan point of view, I'm happy to see the universe expanded upon. I know there are some people who are outraged at the thought of Before Watchmen and that's their right but for me, I don't feel that close to the work to be so emotionally attached to it and remember I'm talking about the artistic side here not the legal. As far as the legal side stands I wasn’t in the room when the contracts were signed so I’m not in a position to comment on them. Remember also two of the people involved in the original book are working on the prequels and Watchmen co-creator Dave Gibbons has given his blessing on the project saying ...

“I appreciate DC’s reasons for this initiative and the wish of the artists and writers involved to pay tribute to our work. May these new additions have the success they desire.”

I would imagine that outside of Alan Moore himself Dave Gibbons’ opinion on the matter is also to be respected.

How do you think your customers will react?

As I mentioned I have been asking people their opinion on this and 9 out of 10 people are excited about it. You also have to remember that a lot of people reading comics today weren’t around 30 odd years ago so they didn’t experience the initial impact of Watchmen. The world of comics has moved on since then and there have been plenty of great books from numerous writers and artists so the competition Watchmen faces today is a lot steeper than when it was first published. Again I think to suggest that nothing comes near it in terms of quality is wrong.

What do you think of the line up?

Overall I’m happy with the line up. Darwyn Cooke, J.G. Jones, Joe and Andy Kubert, Brian Azzarello, Lee Bermejo and J Michael Straczynsky have all more than earned their stripes in this industry.

As a creator of comics - what qualms do you have over the Ownership or ethics of the comics release?

I self publish under Atomic Diner so I have creative control. That gives me a lot of freedom but it also means that I’m limited in what I can do to reach people and three decades ago people like Alan were even more limited so they relied on companies like DC to get their work out there and to do that I guess they had to
swallow a bitter pill. If DC or any other major company were to approach me with an offer for my characters I would have to think long and hard on whatever offer was on the table but I would only sign on the dotted line if I was happy with the end result.

Alan Moore owns Watchmen in the sense that he created them and DC can never take that away from him and in fairness I don’t think they want to take it away. The book clearly acknowledges him as their creator. Unfortunately he did sign them over to DC and that has had its backlash but who knows, if he had decided against it would we even be aware of the book or would it just exist as a five hundred limited print run in a few people’s collections?

It has been pointed out that Alan has used other people’s characters for his own stories, mainly with League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen and Lost Girls, and that there is no real difference in other creators reinterpreting his own work. I would tend to agree with this myself. I imagine that there are lot of people who hold the characters in Lost Girls very close to their hearts and were very unhappy with how Alan reinterpreted them.

**How do you think this will effect the view people have of the original?**

I don’t think it will affect it unless you want it to and that’s the great thing about fiction, it’s not real so you don’t have to consume it all. The original stands on its own as a piece of art and I don’t think that will change.

**How do you think it will affect sales?**

I think Before Watchmen will be the biggest selling series of 2012. Maybe of the last decade and if I’m right that will tell you where people stand on the issues involved. If any individual feels in their heart that this is wrong, the best protest they can make is not to buy the books. There is no better way to say no. I also think it might bring the more traditional comic readers around to buying the original.

**Any other thoughts?**

On a similar point I, like many people, found Frank Miller’s Holy Terror to be offensive and insightful to hatred so I declined to order any of those books.

I know Alan Moore has his opinions on Miller’s work also, and they are quite similar to mine and any interview I have read with him he comes across as a well presented and thoughtful person and I have every respect for him and his work but that does not mean I’m not entitled to my own opinion on the subject.

I am grateful to Rob for this insight, his Atomic Diner Press, [http://www.atomicdiner.com/](http://www.atomicdiner.com/) has been receiving a lot of positive reviews of late, and I think I would encourage readers to check out three titles in particular, Rosin Dubh, League of Volunteers and Jennifer Wilde.
There's an old *Simpsons* Tree House of Horror episode [3F04, if you must know and I best you do] that features a sequence called “Attack of the 50-Foot Eyesores”—a loving homage to the B-picture classic *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*. In it giant advertising figures like the donut-toting Lard Lad come to life and wreak havoc on the town of Springfield. The ever-resourceful Lisa heads to an advertising agency to find out more about these cartoonish characters and an ad exec suggests the best thing to do is ignore them.

Lisa manages to scare up Paul Anka, perpetrator of the world's worst pop song, to get him to compose a jingle with the theme, “Just Don't Look.” When the song catches on, people comply and the corporate behemoths topple. Day saved, Springfield recovers.

This is my advice to all the fanboys about the *Before Watchman* series: Just don’t look. If it tanks, DC will give up on looting the bones of that corpse. Problem solved.

But I know you will look. And whinge and complain and buy those books just so you can gloat on email and message boards that they’re either just as bad as you knew they’d be or not as bad as everyone said they’d be. It doesn’t really matter once you’ve fed the corporate coffers. Your job is done. And as long as you keep doing it, DC will keep exploiting the property they own until every bit of blood has been shaken from the desiccated corpse.

I’m not precious about sacred texts: I don’t think *Watchman* constitutes a holy book that must not be sullied. The other day on Facebook I shared Jim Jarmusch’s quote about how artists should “steal from everywhere.” I always say that becoming a medievalist saved me from the terror of “originality” -- because there’s nothing like studying a thousand years of literature to show you without a doubt that every story has been told before. To my creative writing students who find this revelation deflating I also offer the reassurance, “But no one has told your version.” If I’d been paying more attention, I would have learned the lesson from Shakespeare. The bard’s stories are not “original” -- looted from various sources from Ovid to histories to contemporary events. Yet no one told the tales as he did; that’s why we still read him with such pleasure.

The “stealing” Jarmusch refers to here is not a mindless copying of another’s work but an appropriation of elements that resonate through your soul. Because once you’ve placed your stolen object in a new location, it transforms. But the key thing here is the inspiration that you steal.

A lot of fan boys use Moore’s *League of Extraordinary Gentleman* as proof that something like *Before Watchman* has legitimacy. After all, Moore loots widely from the worlds of film, comics and literature to write his mash-up tales of improbably happenings. As with *Lost Girls*, I’m not sure the creators would enjoy the liberties he has taken with their spawn. But here we speak of creators who have for the most part died long before. They are not affected by the liberties taken (I assume: if there is a heaven after all, they are doubtless infused with infinite forgiveness—and if there is a hell, I’m sure they’re far too busy to worry about comics with a relatively small circulation.)

The key difference remains that Moore steals characters who have animated his imagination, that resonate deeply within him, and he takes them and makes them his own and flies high with them. There is no greater success than having your works live on past your own time. *Before Watchmen* did not spring from the burning desires of creativity: it’s work-for-hire: not an artistic need, but a corporate one. We have a product, DC muses, that has not been completely exploited. Anytime we mention it, the fan boys explode like so many Geiger counters. There’s money to be made!

I don’t blame the creators who signed on. It’s hard work making a living as a writer or artist. Would I agree to ghost a Justin Bieber tome about the essential role kittens played in his rise to stardom? You bet your boots I would if it paid handsomely. Would I try to fit in sniggering jokes like those prisoners in Vermont who snuck a pig into the police car decals? You betcha. Because like most people I want to have my cake and eat it too and my royalties at present don’t provide for near enough cake.
So my advice is just don’t look: and for Fenby’s sake, don’t talk about it on Facebook and Twitter and all those message boards. The creators have been paid, so the poor sales won’t affect them. If you really wanted to take the high road though, you’d go out and find new, exciting creators to support with your cash. As long as you continue to support corporate grave robbing you can expect it to continue.

We can respect the dead by keeping their memories alive; we can respect the living by giving them a decent living.

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“Grant Gould, GrantGould.com”
First, from an artistic standpoint, the *Watchmen* prequels don’t interest me. I think the story is complete as it’s told, and the power of *Watchmen* is in the ideas and the writing—not the characters. We learn all we need to know about their history in the excerpts from Hollis Mason’s *Under the Hood*.

But more importantly, I think it’s part of a much larger breach of ethics.

I find much of the defense of the prequels disingenuous at best, particularly the attempt to draw a parallel with Moore’s use of public domain characters reinvented for fresh projects, as though there is no difference between using public domain creations of dead writers in an entirely new way and appropriating the characters and world of a living writer who has said in no uncertain terms that what he wants is not money, but “for this not to happen.”

DC’s overtures toward Alan Moore in the past decade appear not to have been in the best of faith—come back and work for us and we'll give you the rights we promised you originally but never actually granted. Yes, Alan Moore signed a bad contract. Yes, DC is well within their legal rights. These facts are regurgitated as though they are statements of natural law, and as though being well within one’s legal rights is exactly the same as doing the right thing.

A legal right, or the (often parallel) assertion that corporations have the right to make money and that’s all they’re doing—again, said in a way that suggests this is a fact as inviolable as the rotation of the Earth—doesn’t really address the issue at all. This excuse is presented as though any reasonable person ought to be able to see that “it’s legal” or “it makes money” trumps every other human consideration—as though laws and businesses and institutions aren’t made by humans. And yet they are; and while yes, I’m sure it sounds hopelessly naïve, I actually do think it isn’t right that we live in a world where a company’s bottom line is accepted as an excuse for just about any sort of behavior (much of which would be illegal if practiced by an individual). And we make the world a little more right by deciding not to hide behind excuses like that, and by doing the right thing regardless.

Decisions like not playing around in the universe of a respected and beloved creator who wishes you wouldn’t, one whose contributions not only changed the medium as we know it and did perhaps the best work the field has ever seen, but whose efforts changed and bettered things for so many artists and writers who came after him.
James Bacon - Editor (Page 1 - 3)
Hugo-winnign co-editor of The Drink Tank and Journey Planet, James Bacon is a comics fan, a con-runner, a reader and all-around good guy!

Christopher J Garcia - Editor (Page 4-6)
Chris does what he can...

Maurine Mo Starkey - Cover Artist
Mo has provided nearly 50 covers to various Bacon-Garciazines. She's based in Santa Clara, CA and is just awesome. She was nominated for Best Fan Artist Hugo last year.

Carol Connelly
Carol was born and raised in Dublin, Ireland. She spends most of her time trying to prevent her pets from eating her garden, each other, and sometimes herself.

Michael Carroll (Page 11 - 12)
Michael writes full-time, having published a number of science fiction, fantasy and romance novels in Ireland, the UK and the US. I also love his website http://michaelowencarroll.com

Robert Curley (Page 19-20)
Rob Curley is a Dublin-based comics writer, publisher and retailer. He opened the Sub City comic shop in Dublin with his brother Brian in 1994, and a second branch in Galway in 1997. He launched the publishing company Atomic Diner in 2003.

Steven - Fonografiks.com (Page 18)
You can find more at http://fonografiks.deviantart.com/

Grant Gould (Page 22)
Grant is an amazing artist who has drawn cards in various universes including Star Wars, for groups like Topps, ECW Press, and PW Torch! You can find out more and see a lot of his great work at GrantGould.com.

Brian Hess (Page 20)
Brian is a fantastic artist and cartoonist from San Francisco! You can see more of his work at http://bosstones22.deviantart.com/

Thais Yuki Jussim (Page 13)
Cosplayer and costuming enthusiast, her image as Silk Spectre was shot by Marcelo TaKeo (marceloTK.deviantart.com) and Riyagi (ricardoiagi.deviantart.com). You can find more photos at http://yukilefay.deviantart.com/

K. A. Laity (Page 21 - 22)
K. A. Laity is the award-winning author of Pelzmantel and Other Medieval Tales of Magic and the forthcoming Owl Stretching, as well as Unikirja, a collection of short stories and a play based on the Kalevala, Kanteletar, and other Finnish myths and legend, for which she won the 2005 Eureka Short Story Fellowship as well as a 2006 Finlandia Foundation grant. With cartoonist Elena Steier she created the occult detective comic Jane Quiet. Her bibliography is chock full of short stories, humor pieces, plays and essays, both scholarly and popular. She currently resides in Galway, Ireland where she's a Fulbright Fellow in digital humanities at NUIG. http://katelaity.wordpress.com/bib/
Kev Levell (Page 15)
Cam, East Angular, United Kingdom. After a twelve stretch in a promotions agency. I’m a reformed creator and I fight artistic crimes as a freelance illustrator, comic artist and designer.

Mark Lewis (Page 22)
Mark has made a living in animation since 1993, and has also managed along the way to do the occasional comic book project or other art job on the side. You can find out more at http://marklewisdraws.com

Pádraig Ó Meálaíid (Page 7 - 9)
THE man when it comes to Alan Moore scholarship, you should check out GLYCON on LiveJournal for more of his fantastic work in the world of Moorephenalia

Martyn Pedler (Page 13)
Graphic Novel and Comics reviewer for Bookslut, Martyn’s also an excellent website at http://www.martynpedler.com/

Lynda Rucker (Page 23)
From Athens, GA, a wonderful writer of horror, a traveler, a great person to sit and chat with. She’s had stuff in The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror, The Year’s Best Dark Fantasy and Horror, Black Static, and Supernatural Tales

Laura Sneddon (Page 16 - 18)

Comments? Complaints?
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