

# Book of the Week

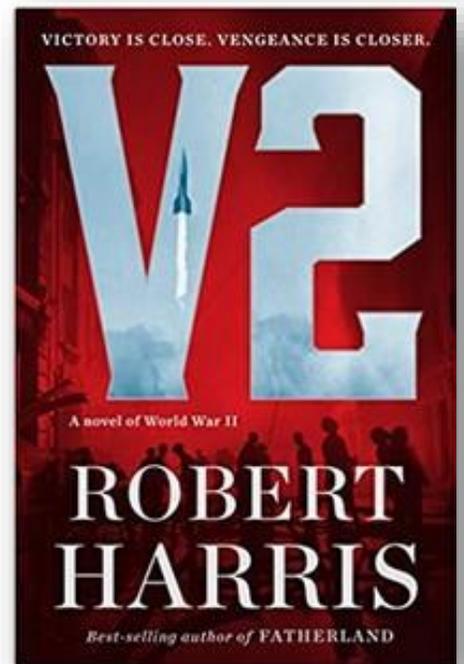
**V2: A Novel of WWII by Robert Harris**

**Book Review by Eddie Keith**

V2 is a 2020 novel by British author Robert Harris, one of the leading historical novelists of our time. He is a prolific author who has written novels from those set in ancient times, such as *Pompeii* and the *Cicero* trilogy, to those set in WWII and after. Several of his books have been made into movies, including *Fatherland* (my personal favorite of his books) and *Enigma*, both set in WWII. Although the novels by Harris, who began his career as a BBC journalist, are fiction, each is well-researched and has a sound historical basis.

Though set in WWII, a momentous and difficult time for England, the book is relevant today for a couple of themes. First, it demonstrates the contributions made by women during WWII, particularly those in England. (His previous book *Enigma*, about the cracking of the German code by British intelligence, featured a similar theme.) Given the recent focus on the contributions of women and minority groups to significant historical events, though fiction, the novel highlights a critical role women played in the Allies' victory in Europe. Secondly, V2 is about the beginning of the Space Age with the first use of ballistic rockets. Since we are in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary period of the Apollo program and landings on the moon, as well as the recent development of new rockets and a focus by the US and other nations on returning to the moon, it's timely. The book features as a main character Wernher Von Braun, who became the father of the US space program. Parenthetically, the role of former German scientists in the American space program and the ethics of hiring and embracing former Nazis have come under more recent scrutiny and criticism, including the recent Amazon Prime series *Hunters*. As Faulkner wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

The story illustrates the terror England faced during the latter days of the war when the Germans began launching V-2 rockets, which were mobile and able to be moved about to various launch sites in captured countries near England. For months the weather and night firings prevented Allies from



locating the launch sites. Although the war was lost, Hitler employed the V-2 as a weapon of terror and revenge for the Allied bombings of German cities (the V was for the German word for *vengeance*). About 3,000 of the V-2's were built, and about 1,500 hit England from late 1944 until March 1945 (about six weeks before Germany's surrender), killing about 9,000 civilians and military personnel.

Harris's novel *V2* is the parallel story of two main characters, Kay Caton-Walsh, a young British intelligence officer, and Rudi Graf, a German physicist. Graf was a German scientist interested in rocketry and space exploration compelled to help the V2 program, though not a Nazi or proponent of the use of the rockets for military use. His counterpart in the story, Caton-Walsh, a well-educated officer, has a close personal encounter with a V2. She joins a group of female mathematicians who use pencils, paper, slide rules, and nimble minds to find the parabolic curve of the flight path of the V2's to track them back to their launch site, to enable the RAF to at last find, attack, and hopefully destroy the launchers and rockets.

As with all of Harris's books, *V2* offers the reader a combination of historical knowledge relevant to our world today and a dramatic novel. The history is illuminating, and the story includes dashes of soap opera romance, classic SS bad guys, mysterious characters, crises of conscience, and drama. It's not Harris's best, in my opinion, but it's an enlightening and entertaining read.

For more information about supporting the Friends of the Starkville Library, click [here](#).