



Muse of Fire: Richard Burton

## Villain

### Villain

*Directed by:* Michael Tuchner  
©: Anglo-EMI Film Distributors Ltd.  
*an Anglo-EMI film*  
*a Kastner/Ladd/Kanter picture*  
*Production Company:* Winkast Film Productions \*  
*Presented by:* Nat Cohen  
*Executive Producer:* Elliott Kastner  
*Produced by:* Alan Ladd Jr, Jay Kanter  
*Production Associate for EMI:* Richard Du Vivier \*  
*Production Supervisor:* Gavrik Losey  
*Production Manager:* James M. Crawford  
*Production Assistant:* Joyce Herlihy  
*Producer's Assistant:* George Pappas  
*Assistant Director:* Kip Gowans  
*2nd Assistant Directors:* David Wimbury, Nicholas Hippisley Coxé \*  
*Continuity:* Ene Watts  
*Casting:* Rose Tobias Shaw \*  
*Screenplay:* Dick Clement, Ian La Frenais  
*From the novel 'The Burden of Proof' by:* James Barlow  
*Adapted by:* Al Lettieri  
*Director of Photography:* Christopher Challis  
*Camera Operator:* John Harris  
*Editor:* Ralph Sheldon  
*Art Director:* Maurice Carter  
*Set Decorator:* Andrew Campbell  
*Wardrobe Supervisor:* Jimmy Smith \*  
*Make Up:* Alec Garfath  
*2nd Make-up:* Ron Berkeley \*  
*Hairdresser:* Allan McKeown  
*Titles by:* National Screen Service Ltd.  
*Filmed in:* Panavision  
*Colour by:* Technicolor  
*Music Composed by:* Jonathan Hodge  
*Arrangements by:* Steve Gray  
*Sound Recordist:* John Bramall  
*Dubbing Mixer:* Len Abbott  
*Recorded at:* EMI-MGM Elstree Studios  
*Dubbing Editor:* Don Sharpe  
*Studio:* Goldhawk Studios \*  
*Cast:*  
Richard Burton (*Vic Dakin*)  
Ian McShane (*Wolfe Lissner*)  
Nigel Davenport (*Bob Matthews*)  
Donald Sinden (*Gerald Draycott*)  
T.P. McKenna (*Frank Fletcher*)  
Joss Ackland (*Edgar Lowis*)  
Fiona Lewis (*Venetia*)  
Cathleen Nesbitt (*Mrs Dakin*)  
Elizabeth Knight (*Patti*)  
Colin Welland (*Tom Binney*)  
John Hallam (*Terry*)  
Tony Selby (*Duncan*)  
Del Henney (*Webb*)  
James Cossins (*Brown*)  
Ben Howard (*Henry*)  
Anthony Sagar (*Danny*)  
Clive Francis (*Vivian*)  
Stephen Sheppard (*Benny Thompson*)  
Brook Williams (*Kenneth*)  
Wendy Hutchinson (*Mrs Lowis*)  
Michael Robbins (*Barzun*)  
Sheila White (*Veronica*)  
Cheryl Hall (*Judy*)  
Shirley Cain (*Mrs Matthews*)  
Lindy Miller (*Gilly*)  
Godfrey James (*car lot manager*)  
Bonita Thomas (*strip dancer*)  
Leslie Schofield (*detective-constable*)  
Paul Hardwick, Michael Munn \*  
UK 1971© 98 mins 35mm \* Uncredited

Meet Vic Dakin, your everyday London businessman and murderous, sadistic gang leader: the sort of diamond geezer who would shake your hand prior to nailing your head to a passing milk float. Vic loves his dear old mum and would only ever harm other criminals/anyone who crossed him/random passers-by. His more innocent hobbies include complaining about the decline in British morality – ‘We should never have abolished the National Service’ – and a part-time sado-masochistic gay relationship. Any resemblance between Vic Dakin and Ronnie Kray was quite deliberate.

1971's *Get Carter*, directed by Mike Hodges, enjoys a cult afterlife and is now regarded as one of the defining crime dramas of its era. The same year's *Villain*, however, quickly vanished into a shadowy existence of late-night television airings. Based on James Barlow's excellent 1968 crime novel *Burden of Proof* and adapted for the big screen by Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais – then famed for BBC's *The Likely Lads* (1965-66) – *Villain* boasts more than its fair share of quotable dialogue: ‘Stupid punters. Telly all the week, screw the wife Saturday’.

The film's casting coup was Richard Burton as Vic. When *Villain* entered production in 1970, Burton's star was on the wane, but the part allows him to experiment with a Cockney accent that varies between early Sid James and vintage Dick Van Dyke, and to eat the scenery at every conceivable opportunity, albeit not without a sense of humour. Burton portrays Dakin as a very house-proud gangster, who favours an eminently respectable Rover P5B Coupe as everyday transport.

As with *Get Carter*, the prevailing mood is one of bleak depression, and Michael Tucher's direction captures a realm of cheap and seedy violence. The film takes every opportunity to display Vic's sheer brutality, not least when he beats up James Cossins' bitter office manager, who acts as his inside man in the wages snatch. *Villain* underwhelmed at the box office, partly because of its utterly unglamorous approach to on-screen violence but also because of Burton's central role; UK memories of the recently incarcerated Krays may have been fresh, but they were less known elsewhere. But it remains a film that is in dire need of reappraisal. Had Dakin survived to the present day, he would probably have published several volumes of self-justifying memoirs glorifying violence and thuggery. And, perhaps, made the odd ironic cameo in a ‘Brit-Gangster’ flick of the 1990s.

Andrew Roberts, BFI Screenonline

In September 1970 Burton and Taylor were in London for him to make a British gangster film, *Villain*, for Anglo-EMI. He played a thug with homosexual tendencies, receiving no fee in advance but only a percentage of profits. ‘He did it for his cab fare,’ says a producer. In fact he did it for expenses in cash and kind worth around \$80,000. *Villain* was good in places in a modest, B-picture manner, but Burton added nothing to it except his name in first place, the same size as the title. It might have been any competent actor with raddled features who could snarl in guttural Cockney. The *New York Times* kept watch on him while filming. He was in a hotel thirty miles out of London, suffering from a cold. He had woken at two in the morning, he said, and heard voices saying ‘Richard, Richard’. The writer, Bernard Weinraub, noted ‘an unmistakable aura

## Muse of Fire: Richard Burton

### Look Back at Richard Burton

Tue 2 Dec 18:15

### The Last Days of Dolwyn

Tue 2 Dec 20:30 (+ intro by actor Kate Burton, Richard Burton's daughter); Sun 14 Dec 12:00

### The Night of the Iguana

Fri 5 Dec 18:10; Mon 22 Dec 20:25

### My Cousin Rachel

Fri 5 Dec 20:50; Sat 6 Dec 14:00

### Now Barabbas Was a Robber...

Sat 6 Dec 11:50; Fri 12 Dec 20:50

### Look Back in Anger

Sat 6 Dec 16:10; Mon 15 Dec 20:50

### A Subject of Scandal and Concern + extended

intro by John Wyver, writer and television producer

Sun 7 Dec 12:45

### The Comedians

Sun 7 Dec 15:00 (+ intro by season co-curator

James Bell); Sun 21 Dec 14:30

### Boom!

Mon 8 Dec 18:10 (+ intro by Charlotte Frances

Burton, Richard Burton's granddaughter);

Sat 27 Dec 14:15

### The Spy Who Came in From the Cold

Mon 8 Dec 20:30 (+ intro by Charlotte Frances

Burton, Richard Burton's granddaughter);

Wed 17 Dec 18:10

### Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Sat 13 Dec 17:50; Mon 29 Dec 20:30

### 1984

Mon 15 Dec 18:20 (+ intro by Lucy Bolton, Queen

Mary University of London); Sat 27 Dec 20:45

### Philosophical Screens: 1984

Mon 15 Dec 20:30 Blue Room

### Exorcist II: The Heretic

Fri 19 Dec 20:45; Sun 28 Dec 18:30

### Equus

Sat 20 Dec 12:00; Tue 30 Dec 17:45

### Where Eagles Dare

Sat 20 Dec 17:20; Sun 28 Dec 14:45

### Villain

Tue 23 Dec 18:10; Sun 28 Dec 12:00

of stardom', but Burton sounded tired. 'It seems fairly ridiculous', he said, 'for someone of 45 or 50 to be learning words written by other people, most of which are bad, to make a few dollars.' There were still challenges. His ego, he said, would force him to play Lear and Macbeth. Nobody asked when. 'Fame is pernicious,' said Burton. 'So is money.' The reporter saw his hand shake when he lit a cigarette, and wrote, 'Despite the bravura voice and style, he appears, at this point, oddly vulnerable, even frail. Somehow, the shadows of the past have deepened. The drinker, the lover, the celebrity, have flickered into a surprisingly weary figure.'

Paul Ferris, *Richard Burton* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981)

## A contemporary review

After *Performance* and *Get Carter*, there appear to be few atrocities left unexplored in the British underworld. But where the latter's determinedly 'unsentimental' approach resulted in an automaton hero and a story-line loose enough to accommodate a maximum number of picturesque deaths in striking locations, *Villain's* superficial nastiness (largely a matter of louder and better synchronised punches) conceals a relatively old-fashioned approach to the genre. The story (from James Barlow's novel *Burden of Proof*) is tidily plotted; the locations are functional; the bad characters are human enough to elicit sympathy at their downfall; and the film whirrs smoothly into top gear for its last-ditch climax, complete with curtain line. ('Who are you looking at?' yells Burton to the audience as he is led away handcuffed.)

Though violence and homosexuality put a Seventies gloss on what is essentially a Fifties-style 'well-made film' (of the school of Dearden and Guillermin), the impression is still cosily humanist: Dakin is a vicious thug but loves his mother; Lowis is a coward but suffers from ulcers. It all makes an unnerving contrast to *Get Carter's* mechanised and unsuffering hero, and the sentimentality tends to undermine a film that is otherwise 'well-made' in the best sense. The performances are uniformly good; the screenplay, by Ian La Frenais and Dick Clement, is witty and laconic; and Michael Tuchner's direction is thoroughly efficient, with the robbery itself and the bungled getaway brilliantly staged. Perhaps the next British gangster film will locate its hoodlums credibly somewhere between automatism and homeliness.

Nigel Andrews, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, July 1971

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