

## **Renee St. Louis: Veteran Victor: *Dollhouse* and the Depiction of Real-World War Survivors**

As conflicts continue and escalate around the world, and societies struggle to accommodate and understand refugees from conflict zones, veterans returning to civilian life, and our own relationships to these conflicts, fictional texts potentially provide a space in which to engage in meaningful discussion about what it means to survive a war zone and the difficulties of finding peace in its aftermath. The work of Joss Whedon is filled with depictions of war, but these wars are typically both fictional for the audience and never-ending for the character/participants. An interesting exception to this tendency appears in *Dollhouse*. Read as an extended discussion of trauma, memory and identity, the show offers a rare opportunity to examine the depiction of ongoing geopolitical conflict in a genre-fiction format.

One central character, Victor, represents an amalgam of struggles, conflicts and post-war consequences borne by soldiers returning from the ongoing (U.S.-led) coalition wars in the Middle East and Central Asia. Examining this character's depiction--as well as some of the narratives constructed around his service, survivor guilt, ironic and confusing nostalgia for the ideological clarity of war, failed effort at civilian reintegration, and manipulation at the hands of powerful defense contractors--affords an opportunity to consider how veterans and other survivors of real-world conflicts are (and, often, are not) depicted on screen, and the consequences of these choices.