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V FOR VENDETTA _____ 9/10

Inspirational classic (to be) on social justice

Screenplay by Andy Wachowski, Larry Wachowski

Directed by James McTeigue

Natalie Portman ...	Evey
Hugo Weaving ...	V
Stephen Rea ...	Finch
Stephen Fry ...	Deitrich
John Hurt ...	Adam Sutler

In the early days of Free State existence we were all excited by the Wachowski brothers (The Matrix) next cinematic innovation. What better to follow a work of sci-fi Kung Foo mysticism than a work of sci-fi swashbuckling libertarian justice. (I include a passage on our night to out to see V in Merrimack, in my book.)

It initially seems to be a period piece with the protagonist wearing a cape and suit from the (very) early Enlightenment period in England and a static mask that represents Guy Fawkes. But shortly after V (Hugo Weaving) saves a young TV clerk Evey (Natalie Portman) from being violated by rogue street cops, one realizes this is a theocratic-totalitarian England in the not-too-distant future.

In fact, it's clear the Wachowskis, who adapted David Lloyd's graphic novel of the same name, are giving us a projection of what they feel the current American federal executive branch would be green with envy about. They even have a sadistic, mean-mouthed little dictator (John Hurt) playing the extrapolated George Bush.

He and his Stalinesque lieutenants have the country wrapped up in pious platitudes and police-state tactics, also spoonfeeding the broadcast entertainment and news to the masses. (Even though the masses show increasing signs of no longer buying the baloney stuff.)

V is on a mission, a mission of retribution for a specific series of State crimes that have left him disfigured and several of his friends killed for really no reason whatsoever. The State has covered up a massacre it committed a few years ago, and V knows all about it... in fact his injuries are incidental to that mass murder.

After saving Evey from the street crime, V insists she move in with him for her own protection; the police have her picture and would certainly haul her away to a prison camp. While staying in V's posh underground fortress, she learns quite clearly what his mission is all about—he doesn't try to hide it, as he appropriately redresses the evils committed by agents of Church and State.

I can't help it, I do love it so... as V slices and dices, or poisons, the bad guys. They deserve even more brutal ends, but the heroic, impartial implacability of this avenging angel is reminiscent of the Count of Monte Cristo. They're not getting away, and he's much more a master of the martial arts than they are.

I realize violence isn't the answer and that the best chance for ending tyranny may be Ghandian resistance. But there's a part of me that simply wants to see justice, if not an eye for an eye, at least a bonecrushing for a bonecrushing. And V delivers... elegantly. In fact it goes too well; Evey figures out what V is up to and leaves his quarters, complicating his ultimate business.

The *coup de grace* is of course promises to be the act that Guy Fawkes attempted back in 1605, demolishing selected Parliament buildings. This time, the objective of such destruction is to be symbolic of ending the general tyranny and restoring democracy. Will it happen or will it not? What's it like? Hey, this is a Wachowski film.

Won't spoil the ending, but in between the relationship between V and Evey becomes more complicated and, for Evey, edifying of her character.

The movie is truly an interesting effort, quite special, well done, invigorating to advocates of freedom. Some caveats have been offered by libertarian critics, essentially that the flick is ideologically lightweight. Well, it's

an action movie after all. At one point, V does deliver a line to the effect "ideas are bulletproof." I feel we get enough good lines to tie in the obvious pro-liberty sentiments of the Wachowskis.

Production values and effects are first class, not as leading edge as The Matrix, but fully satisfying. It's an exciting, fast-paced movie from start to finish. There are some extremely tender touches, some beautiful photographic interludes against which the drab reality contrasts starkly.

Also, I almost forgot, there's a whodunit involved in the plot as a police inspector Mr. Finch (Stephen Rea) tries to piece together whether the government actually committed the massacre it blamed on terrorists. Shades of 911. Will this seemingly good cop do the right thing?

I'm not enough of a critic to find much fault. I can watch it repeatedly... plus, I've always had a soft spot for Natalie Portman. She and Hugo Weaving make a good duo, splendid acting. Quite a tonic for the liberty smart set.