

BY DUNCAN H. BROWN

MOVIE REVIEW

V for Vendetta

 starring Hugo Weaving and Natalie Portman

V for *Vendetta* is a dark, violent comic book/movie. It offers a depressing vision of a future Britain, resembling one conquered by Hitler. Onto this dark canvas comes a hero/anti-hero, wearing a colorful mask of British anarchist Guy Fawkes, donning a black cape, and wielding swords and knives. It's *Phantom of the Opera*/*The Three Musketeers* meets the Third Reich.

V comes from the Wachowski brothers (who brought us *The Matrix* and its sequels), and is based on the highly-praised comic book series by Alan Brooks. Like many movies spawned from comics (*Spiderman*, *Superman*, *X-Men*, et al), it follows specific rules: suspension of the laws of physics, elevation of sensation over thinking or plot logic, and demonizing of bad guy(s) so the victorious good guys are more heroic.

A serious subtext in this movie speaks to how totalitarianism grows, and what it becomes once it is victorious. It shows how suppression of freedom and free speech can start with the best of intentions and end up with terror and violence.

Hugo Weaving is great as the mask-wearing tortured soul "V" whose sworn mission is to destroy the evil dictatorship through violence and spectacular explosions. We never see his face, but he manages to communicate a full range of emotions behind his exaggerated mask.

Natalie Portman is fabulous as the scarred girl/woman who comes to understand who (and what) V is. This is a far cry from the minimal acting that George Lucas asked of her in the first three of the *Star Wars* films, playing Queen Amidala.

The arc of the story of *V* takes us to dark and violent places; this is not a movie for those who find on-screen violence offensive. Knives and swords may symbolically be instruments for peace and good in this movie, but they also wreak bloody havoc amongst the bad guys. Fortunately, the violence has a comic-book quality: while many people get killed and maimed, only a few get hurt, and those are generally the baddies who really deserve it.

I enjoyed this movie. It's dark, but filled with

thought-provoking ideas. Those who enjoy drawing analogies will notice that the evil dictatorship of the movie grabbed power by lying, playing to people's fears, and offering to solve all their problems—abolishing people's need to think for themselves.

If you find it difficult to watch the graphic depiction of killing, torture, and the violent suppression of free thought and free speech, you should avoid this movie. It's not a pretty picture, and offers disturbing echoes of the conflicts and choices we find ourselves facing in the current day.

New and Notable on DVD

A History of Violence garnered very solid reviews, and tells a compelling story about a man (Viggo Mortensen; Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings*) who has a hidden past that refuses to stay hidden.

Dreamer: Inspired by a True Story A girl, a horse, a father, a race. It's simple, it's direct, it's beautiful—a great movie.

Capote Philip Seymour Hoffman won an Oscar playing this fascinating and memorable character. It depicts Capote researching his most famous work, *IN COLD BLOOD*, a true-crime book about a terrible murder and its aftermath.

The Straight Story is a gem of a movie from director David Lynch. Lynch proves that he can make a sweet, beautiful family film about a simple and memorable Iowa man (Alvin Straight, played by Richard Farnsworth) who sets out on a riding mower to visit his ailing brother in Wisconsin. (Though not new to DVD, this movie is a must-see.)