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Movie News: V for Vendetta

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April 25, 2005

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Alan Moore's classic graphic novel (i.e. comic for grown-ups) "*V for Vendetta*" is being made into a movie as I write. Its opening date is planned to be this years Guy Fawkes night, befitting the fact that V, the hero of the book, dresses like him and succeeds in blowing up the Houses of Parliament.

Why should you be interested? Simply because, in Moore's graphic novel, V is an anarchist fighting a fascist state in a grim post-world war III future. It made compulsive reading when it came out in late 1988, inspired as it was by Moore's disgust of Thatcher's Britain. It also included some excellent anarchist propaganda (such as V's TV appeal to the people to take responsibility for their own lives and get rid of the criminals they allow to have power or his "discussion" with the statue of justice at the beginning of the book). While its glorification of "propaganda by the deed" is troublesome and no guide to action (and why should it, it is a comic book set in an imagi-

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nary fascist future after all!), V was no mindless terrorist. His targets were carefully selected and included sources of power (both real and symbolic) as well as state criminals. His actions, therefore, express the best aspect of “propaganda by the deed,” the holding to account of those in power for their oppression and repression.

As such, given its political nature and its grim account of both the rise of British fascism and live under such a regime, it is of interest to libertarians. Like *Watchmen* (also, incredibly, being made into a film), it is a modern classic. Making a movie of it was inevitable and we can only hope it will be good (the people who made the *Matrix* are involved so the special effects may be good). Unfortunately, Alan Moore’s comics have generally been butchered when made into films. This seems to be happening to “*V for Vendetta*” as well. The following is the movie’s plot synopsis:

“*V for Vendetta* takes place in an alternate future in which Germany wins WWII and Great Britain becomes a fascist state. A terrorist freedom fighter known only as ‘V’ begins a violent guerrilla campaign to destroy those who’ve succumbed to totalitarianism, and recruits a young woman he’s rescued from the secret police to join him.”

So does our anarchist hero become simply a “freedom fighter”? As for “Germany wins WWII” that utterly misses the point of the book, which is about home bred fascism. Moore obviously believed that Britain could become fascist — and with Thatcher in office who could blame him? In the book, we did it to ourselves and that puts V’s struggle in a slightly different light — if a fascist regime is created or supported by a majority, does that make struggle against it “terrorism”? Not from an anarchist perspective, of course, but under Thatcher

rebels were constantly subjected to the argument that direct action was “undemocratic” as the people had voted for her authoritarian agenda.

Perhaps “*V for Vendetta*” will fair better than those works by Moore which have already been turned into films. Let us hope so, although I’m not holding my breath. In today’s climate, an anarchist hero may be too much. V may be turned into a generic “freedom fighter” who liberates the masses who are too repressed, stupid or apathetic to do it themselves. The potential elitism of V’s tactics (imposed by the necessities of the superhero comic book genre and the nature of the regime V is fighting rather than expressing any core idea of anarchism) may be brought to the fore while his redeeming anarchism, his belief that people can govern themselves without bosses and politicians of any sort, consigned to memory hole. His anarchism may become transmuted into a general plea for “liberty” (even “democracy”!) and against the totalitarian form of government only. The real message may, therefore, be lost or, at best, mentioned in passing.

If so, it would be a great shame. But at least the film may get people reading the original graphic novel which is still a masterpiece by a master of his craft.