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V FOR VENDETTA

A day after seeing it, I'm still a bit shaken by John McTeague's graphic-novel adaptation *V for Vendetta*

. Action blockbusters – not to mention action blockbusters based on *comic books*

– have been so dour and pedestrian of late that I don't know if I've fully grasped the extent of *Vendetta*

's greatness yet; it's the kind of explosive, overwhelming work that gets better and better the more you think of it. The film is a little

1984

, a little

Phantom of the Opera

, and, with its screenplay by the Wachowski brothers, more than a little

Matrix

-y, but it casts an extraordinary, devastating spell. It may be the most fully realized film of a graphic novel the genre has yet seen, a movie you want to talk (and argue) about long after the closing credits.

As its surprises are key to the movie's magnificence, I'll give nothing away of the film's labyrinthine – yet astonishingly lucid – storyline, except to say that it involves V (Hugo Weaving), a heroic, British terrorist in a chilling Guy Fawkes mask who wages war against the totalitarian regime that has effectively silenced its populace; any similarities between current and *futuristic* governmental policies are absolutely intentional. Yet *V for Vendetta* isn't a tract.

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It's a staggeringly effective, exciting, and, in a wondrous shock,
moving

entertainment, funny when it needs to be, appalling when it has to be, and so well-staged – the fight scenes, featuring V's dexterous proclivity with knives, are deliriously enjoyable – and well-acted by Weaving and Natalie Portman, playing V's accidental protégé, Evey, that it leaves you breathless. (Weaving is so vocally and physically expressive behind that immobile Fawkes mask that his unchanging expression actually

seems

to change through the course of the film; a friend commented that the Fawkes visage "does what you

want

it to," and he's right.)

V for Vendetta

– a big, meaty adventure pulled off with superlative skill – deserves far more space for discussion than I have here. But this deceptive "popcorn entertainment" is so good that I'm not sure what amount of space would be

enough

. It needs to be seen. And – for the sheer pleasure of it – seen again.



SHE'S THE MAN

Like all erudite terrorists, V often quotes Shakespeare in *V for Vendetta*, and develops a particular fondness for

welfth Night

; as a child, Evey wanted to play Viola. Meanwhile, on a neighboring cineplex screen, Amanda Bynes actually

is

playing Viola – or at least, her movie seems to

think

so.

She's the Man

, which has Bynes' Viola infiltrating a boys' high-school soccer team in the guise of her twin brother, Sebastian, is purportedly based on the Bard's romantic, gender-switching comedy, and

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in addition to Viola and Sebastian, the film finds room for characters named Duke Orsino and Olivia, and the action takes place at Illyria Prep. (I couldn't fathom how a Malvolio was going to fit into the mix, but the filmmakers were a step ahead of me – it's the name of a character's pet tarantula.)

Yet *She's the Man* bears about as much resemblance to *Twelfth Night* as Rob Schneider's *The Hot Chick*

does, and it might be an even stupider piece of work. Of course, we're not meant to take Andy Fickman's girl-power extravaganza

seriously

, but come on – I'm okay with characters buying into Bynes' completely unconvincing drag act, but when the real Sebastian shows up at the end, and characters fail to recognize that this

isn't

the same Sebastian they've been talking to throughout the movie, don't they at least notice that this new Sebastian is six inches

taller

than "he" was five minutes before? Add to the movie's migraine-inducing ridiculousness a torturous screwball plotline and a rare unappealing performance from David Cross, and

She's the Man

stands as almost hatefully bad.

Or at least it *would*, but damn it all if Amanda Bynes doesn't give a completely inventive, even invigorating performance. From minute one of *She's the Man*, this girl is *on* –

Bynes catches you off-guard with her lightning-quick double-takes and comes up with a hysterical "boy" voice that is part hayseed, part gangsta, and so out-of-left-field

wrong

that your giggling at Bynes quickly morphs into giggling

with

her. (She sounds like a pre-pubescent Harry Connick Jr. after a fifth of vodka.) No one with an IQ in triple digits should bother with

She's the Man

, but until Viola turns into a predictably love-struck sap in the final reel, Bynes makes mindlessness feel like a pretty delightful state.

E for Extraordinary: "V for Vendetta," "She's the Man," "The Shaggy Dog," "The Human Body," and "Bugs"

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