

“Watchmen”

I need to get this out of the way: Do not go see this movie if you are upset by graphic violence or sexuality, including male frontal nudity.

“Watchmen,” based on a best-selling graphic novel, tells a story that is based in an alternate history, but with overtones in current events. It begins with the murder of Edward Blake (Jeffrey Dean Morgan). He is retired, but what he retired from is what makes the murder so unique. Edward Blake was the Comedian, a superhero used by the government to spy and do covert operations.

His death is treated by the police as a burglary gone badly. They do not know Blake to be a superhero. But to the masked man called Rorschach (Jackie Earle Haley), his death opens the door to a wider conspiracy. Rorschach is a renegade “mask,” a person operating outside the law.

The world of “Watchmen” is one where it is 1985 and the Cold War is getting hotter. Richard Nixon is still president. A walking nuclear fusion reactor called Dr. Manhattan (Billy Crudup) backs his power. Dr. Manhattan was once part of the superhero team called the Watchmen. Made up of six heroes, including Rorschach and the Comedian, the group worked for the government to do such things as win the Vietnam War.

This world is one where bad things happen, and they are done by those who are considered to be good people. The heroes here are heroes only in the sense that there is no other word to describe them. They walk a line of contradiction and ambiguity that is razor thin and cuts easily.

Ozymandias (Matthew Goode) was one of the Watchmen. He is called the world’s smartest man. When the tide turns against “masks,” he wisely outs himself and reveals he is Adrian Veidt. Veidt uses his time as a hero to market himself and

create the world's largest private fortune. He lives beyond the masses in a skyscraper penthouse and works with Dr. Manhattan on a system of energy that would be given to the world freely and end the energy dependence on oil and coal. The corporate world sees this and calls him a "socialist."

All the while the world moves closer to Armageddon. The doomsday clock is moving closer to midnight. This is the world of the Watchmen.

What lies at the heart of this work is a longing for a return to the past. People are nostalgic for a simpler time. Modernity did not deliver on its promise. Why can't things be like they once were? To quote Merle Haggard, people wonder if "the good times are really over for good."

But when we attempt to discover why things are the way they are, we tend to bring God into the picture. The degree of "badness" we experience tends to color our understanding of God. In this story, the characters have come to the conclusion that God is an absentee landlord. The world is a mess and God does not intervene in it, but lets the people who live in it do as they wish. What they get is determined by their actions. This mindset overshadows all that takes place in the story.

With this at its core, the world of the Watchmen is such that evil and good really are not relevant. Good is subverted into evil, while evil acts give way to good. These "heroes" step away from the idea of divinity and righteousness because for them to do good, there needs to be a wrong done. That gives us a story that is hard to watch, but fascinating to see.

"Watchmen" is based on a comic book series done by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. It has sold thousands of copies as a bound graphic novel. Time magazine named it one of the most important novels of the 20th century. Director Zack Snyder did what many thought impossible: He created a movie from what many said was an unfilmable story.

I liked the movie, not because of its content, but because of the grandeur of the

story. One of the metaphors in the movie is watch-making: taking so many small pieces and combining them to get a working whole. That's what this story is. It is a marvel of narrative, where all manner of pieces of information are combined, and you see it and marvel at the whole.

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MPAA Rating: R for strong graphic violence, sexuality, nudity and language.
Reviewer's note: This movie is not for children of any age.

Director: Zack Snyder

Writers: David Hayter and Alex Tse (based on the graphic novel by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons)

Cast: Dr. Manhattan/Jon Osterman: Billy Crudup; Rorschach/Walter Kovacs: Jackie Earle Haley; The Comedian/Edward Blake: Jeffrey Dean Morgan; Nite Owl/Dan Dreiberg: Patrick Wilson; Silk Spectre/Sally Jupiter: Carla Gugino; Ozymandias/Adrian Veidt: Matthew Goode.