Some people are comparing PRISONERS, the new dramatic thriller starring Hugh Jackman and Jake Gyllenhaal, to SILENCE OF THE LAMBS. I don’t really see that, not only because the two movies are quite different, but because PRISONERS is a much better film than the generally overrated SILENCE OF THE LAMBS.

PRISONERS is the story of a man obsessed with finding his missing daughter. Apparently kidnapped along with another young girl on a rainy Thanksgiving Day (and isn’t Thanksgiving the most depressing of all holidays anyway?), little Ana seems to be gone without a trace. The only clue to her whereabouts is the description of a strange RV the girls were playing on shortly before their absence. But when the owner of the RV is found, there is no trace of the girls, no sign they were even in his vehicle. The police, represented by Detective Loki (Gyllenhaal), can’t find any justification to charge the man, so they let him go. But Ana’s distraught father, Keller (Jackman) knows better. And if the police won’t do what’s necessary to find his daughter, then Keller is more than willing to take matters into his own hands.

PRISONERS is an absolutely stunning film. Visually, everything is starkly understated and dreary, much like the plot. The drama is heavy and morose, which is only appropriate given the subject matter. The script delves deep into the minds of people who have lost their children and are struggling with the unbearable burden of that loss, but it also shows us what the police who are charged with solving the most heinous of all crimes have to go through. Keller is the heart and soul of the film, and we feel his pain, rage, and frustration simmering throughout the whole movie. Keller is painstakingly detailed as a good man, a fine husband and father and devout Christian, and so the questionable moral choices he makes later take on the added weight of believable pathos. Detective Loki is likewise presented as a determined, essentially noble and sympathetic cop who is nearly as obsessed with finding Ana as her father is, though unlike Keller he understands procedure and desperately wants Keller to leave things alone so the police can do their job. Without question, each role shows Jackman and Gyllenhaal at their best, and both actors certainly deliver the finest performances of their excellent careers.

PRISONERS is full of twists and turns and unexpected plot revolutions that at times threaten to devour one another in their labyrinthine dungeons, and so it is almost amazing that in the end everything comes together so logically and satisfactorily. Though a great thriller, PRISONERS is even more than that. It’s a movie about the moral choices we make and the line between right and wrong, and where those choices may lead us. In short, PRISONERS is a new classic of suspense.