



**DENIS VILLENEUVE: THE PATH TO DUNE**

# Prisoners

A critical and commercial success, *Prisoners* saw Denis Villeneuve bring his taut, powerful storytelling style to Hollywood. Detective Loki (Gyllenhaal), who prides himself on never leaving a case unsolved, strives to find two young girls who've been abducted, while the father of one of the girls (Jackman) takes the law into his own hands.

Complex, brooding and compelling, this psychological thriller boasts stand-out performances from an all-star cast, and Oscar®-nominated cinematography from Roger Deakins.

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'Be ready. All that stands between you and being dead is you.' This is the grim father-son warning that opens Canadian director Denis Villeneuve's first English-language movie, a powerful and deftly twisted child-abduction thriller. Fascinated by the growing tension between American individualism and institutions such as the police, it's a movie that puts its own dark spin on the stock cinema figures of obsessed cop and desperate vigilante parent. Where the *Taken* series or TV's *24* milked the predicament of the law-enforcement figure torn between parental and professional duty, here carpenter Keller Dover (Hugh Jackman) is a principled everyman. His belief in self-reliance combines with primal fear for his abducted daughter and drives him to kidnap and torture, while the film slowly but brazenly turns the screws on his desperation. 'She's wondering why I haven't found her every day. Not you. Me,' he spits at Detective Loki, his equally intransigent institutional shadow.

Yet this is a film where everything speaks louder than words. From its low-key Thanksgiving abduction opener, in which a parked RV in a Pennsylvania suburb seeps menace, through the tense, twisty frustrations of the investigation and the sleepwalking misery of two sets of parents, it's a film grimly eloquent in everything except its dialogue. Cinematographer Roger Deakins's pitilessly bleak November exteriors offer as little hope as his claustrophobic interiors, his camera peering through smeary windscreens and sneaking through corridors stalker-style. Still, in the excellent sequence where fellow parents Terrence Howard and steely Viola Davis are enlisted to help Dover torture the suspect he has kidnapped, Dover's repeated rationale is only a blunt stub: 'We hurt him till he talks. Or they die.'

Terse to the point of baldness, Villeneuve's thriller is nevertheless adult for a genre piece in its unsettling exposure of the moral dilemmas thrown up by Dover's actions. Unusually, it doesn't implicitly endorse his behaviour *Zero*

*Dark Thirty*-style, seemingly more interested in the effect on the torturer than in the question of whether torture can ever be justified. Since Paul Dano's opaque suspect Alex Jones offers up just one impenetrable remark after blood-soaked beatings and scalding showers, what Dover mostly reaps is moral anguish. Ambiguity permeates everything in the narrative, from screenwriter Aaron Guzikowski's bottomless supply of double-edged clues and narrative feints to Dover's own motivation.

Having lingered over their depiction at grim length, *Prisoners* declines to opine on whether Dover's actions transcend the rule of law. Instead it concentrates on contrasting loner and lawman; its other hero, Jake Gyllenhaal's dogged Loki, is similarly frustrated by his inability to break the case. In setting its leading characters up as parallel and rival 'protectors', the film is helped by a pair of eye-catching performances, particularly that of Gyllenhaal, playing utterly against type as a brooding, isolated, blue-collar workaholic. His stifled frustrations have the edge over Jackman's glowering, rage-filled Dover, a portrayal whose unremitting intensity recalls and redoubles his despairing Valjean in *Les Misérables*. Mostly the film pulls off with aplomb the tough act of giving the leading men narrative parity, conducting a tense game of story 'tag' between them. However, in the last act it plunges into a David Fincher-style welter of dark ritual-killing discoveries and red herrings, which feels like a deliberate distraction from Dover's transgressions. Responding to Dover's moral trespass with a suspenseful if over-symmetrical payback allows the film to offer a redemption that is showier than it is satisfying.

Guzikowski's well-honed thriller (it was much admired for its expert mechanics on the 2009 'Black List' of unproduced scripts) occasionally idles under Villeneuve's dark character studies, but the director's powerfully imposed mood of dread elevates what might otherwise have been just a superior police procedural. It puts it into the same bracket as *Mystic River* (2003) and *Gone Baby Gone* (2007), pieces unafraid to explore human wretchedness through their bleak mysteries, though it lacks the subtlety, and thus the surprise, of *In the Bedroom* (2001). Dread, heralded in the film by the thuddingly obvious 'menace' music of Jóhann Jóhannsson, is the film's main dish, not its seasoning. While not as extreme as *Incendies* (2010), Villeneuve's Oscar-nominated breakout film, which bludgeoned the viewer with tragic coincidences until its final oedipal whammy, the predilection here for piling on the misery to the point of melodrama makes *Prisoners* just a tad over-egged.

**Kate Stables, *Sight & Sound*, November 2013**

PRISONERS

Directed by: Denis Villeneuve  
©: LLC Alcon Entertainment  
Production Companies: 8:38 Productions, Madhouse Entertainment, Music & Digital Entertainment Office Georgia Film  
An Alcon Entertainment presentation  
Executive Producers: Edward L. McDonnell, John H. Starke, Robyn Meisinger, Mark Wahlberg, Stephen Levinson  
Produced by: Broderick Johnson, Kira Davis, Andrew A. Kosove, Adam Kolbrenner  
Co-producer: Steven P. Wegner  
Unit Production Managers: Gregor Wilson, John H. Starke  
Production Accountant: Anne Wilson  
Location Manager: Maida Morgan  
Post-production Supervisor: Brad Arensman  
1st Assistant Director: Donald L. Sparks  
Script Supervisor: Gail Hunter  
Casting by: Kerry Barden, Paul Schnee  
LA Casting Associate: Rich Delia  
NY Casting Associate: Allison Estrin  
Atlanta Casting by: Tracy Kilpatrick  
Written by: Aaron Guzikowski  
Director of Photography: Roger A. Deakins  
A Camera Operator: Roger A. Deakins  
Steadicam Operator: Bela Trutz  
Gaffer: Chris Napolitano  
Key Grip: Mitch Lillian  
Still Photographer: Wilson R. Webb  
Visual Effects Producer: Tony Meagher  
Visual Effects by: Pacific Title & Art Studio, Luma Pictures  
Special Effects Co-ordinator: David Fletcher  
Edited by: Joel Cox, Gary D. Roach  
Production Designer: Patrice Vermette  
Art Director: Paul Kelly  
Set Designers: Mayumi Konishi-Valentine, Aaron Linker  
Set Decorator: Frank Galline  
Property Master: Shawn M. Gray  
Construction Co-ordinator: Curtis Crowe  
Costume Designer: Renée April  
Assistant Costume Designer: Margaret Robbs  
Costume Supervisor: Joulles Wright  
Make-up Department Head: Donald Mowat  
Key Make-up Artist: Amber Crowe  
Hair Department Head: Peter Tothpal  
Key Hairstylists: Vincent Gideon, Taylor Knight, Elizabeth ‘Shawna’ Robinson

Main & End Titles by: Pacific Title & Art Studio  
Colour by: DeLuxe  
Prints by: DeLuxe  
Music by: Jóhann Jóhannsson  
Electronics/Percussion/Pipe Organ/Guitar: Jóhann Jóhannsson  
Score Conducted by: Ben Foster  
Music Supervisor: Deva Anderson  
Score Recorded at: AIR Studios (London)  
Score Mixed by: Daniel Kresco  
Sound Designer: Tom Ozanich  
Re-recording Mixers: John Reitz, Hugo Weng  
Sound Mixer: Mary H. Ellis  
Supervising Sound Editor: Alan Robert Murray  
Sound Effects Editors: Bub Asman, Jason King, Mark Larry  
Stunt Co-ordinator: Steven Ritz  
Detective/Police Consultant: Jaime Fitzsimons  
Dialect Coach: Jess Platt  
Armourer: Derrick Vener  
Animal Wrangler: Greg Tresan  
Unit Publicist: David Linck  
Digital Intermediate Provided by: EFilm

Cast

Hugh Jackman (Keller Dover)  
Jake Gyllenhaal (Detective Loki)  
Viola Davis (Nancy Birch)  
Maria Bello (Grace Dover)  
Terrence Howard (Franklin Birch)  
Melissa Leo (Holly Jones)  
Paul Dano (Alex Winterman Jones)  
Dylan Minnette (Ralph Dover)  
Zoë Soul (Eliza Birch)  
Erin Gerasimovich (Anna Dover)  
Kyla-Drew Simmons (Joy Birch)  
Wayne Duvall (Captain Richard O’Malley)  
Len Cariou (Father Patrick Dunn)  
David Dastmalchian (Bob Taylor)  
Brad James (Officer Carter)  
Anthony Reynolds (Officer Wedge)  
Robert Treveiler (forensics guy)  
Sandra Ellis Lafferty (Mrs Milland)  
Victoria Staley (check out girl)  
Todd Truley (Detective Chemelinski)

USA 2013  
153 mins

DENIS VILLENEUVE: THE PATH TO DUNE

Prisoners

Wed 1 Sep 20:00; Tue 14 Sep 14:15; Sat 25 Sep 17:00

August 32nd on Earth (Un 32 août sur terre)

Thu 2 Sep 20:50; Thu 16 Sep 18:20

Blade Runner 2049

Sat 4 Sep 20:00; Sat 18 Sep 17:15; Fri 24 Sep 14:15; Sun 3 Oct 17:30

Maelström

Mon 6 Sep 18:15; Fri 17 Sep 20:55

Polytechnique

Fri 10 Sep 21:20; Sun 19 Sep 12:15; Thu 30 Sep 20:50

Incendies

Sat 11 Sep 20:30; Fri 17 Sep 17:50; Sun 19 Sep 14:45

Sicario

Sun 12 Sep 18:10; Wed 22 Sep 20:40; Sat 25 Sep 20:40

Enemy

Sun 12 Sep 12:20; Tue 21 Sep 20:55

Arrival

Thu 16 Sep 20:45; Tue 28 Sep 14:15; Sat 2 Oct 17:30

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