

Lessons to learn on Chicago's 'L' trains

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The elevated train system (the "L") in Chicago is like the beating heart of the city, with its veins stretching out to the furthest suburbs. Without it, Chicago would crumble to its knees, leaving empty tracks where blood used to flow, and a sluggish bus system holding together whatever is left. This system has become one of the best parts of my IIT experience.

Even as a freshman, I have rode these trains to nearly every stop. I've traveled as far south as 95th and taken the long trip up to Evanston, plus everywhere else in between. It gives me a time to relax, finish some work, and even write a few articles for the newspaper. It has been my companion as I travel all over the Chicagoland area in search of items people are giving away for free on craigslist, from TVs to an old oversized leather briefcase. Along with all that, it is how all of my adventures in Chicago begin: "one day I hopped onto the 'L.'"

Some of the best things on the "L" are the people. If one pays attention, they will see, hear, and smell people from all different backgrounds and from very different walks of life. The experiences of the train are there, waiting to be soaked up like a dehydrated person soaks up water after surviving in the desert for a week. These are the stories of a few memorable train rides.

While sitting on the "L" coming back from some late night expedition, a man slipped out to the gap between cars while the train was running through the loop. A roll of toilet paper was in his hands, and between mumbles of the word "shit", I assumed that he had just done his business on the moving train. His

bright yellow flat-brimmed hat and baggy pants gave off an aura of up to no good. Yet, he clearly had enough money to spend on simple luxuries like the newest iPhone and not one, but two pairs of Ray Bans sitting on his hat. His gallery of tattoos told a story of recently lost relatives and "Mi Vida Loca," probably compounded difficulties in his life. But is anyone's life really hard enough to do a number two between the cars of a moving train? Maybe not.

Another favorite is the story of the wise old man. My friend and I and about six random others were sitting on the train when this elderly gentleman across from us suddenly gets up and announces he's sat in the wrong seat. Not knowing what to make of this, we all just stared at him silently. He explains while moving to the other part of the car that sometimes when you get to be his age you forget things and sit in the wrong seat. He keeps talking to us as if we were imploring him to tell us more, which we might have if he ever took a break to breathe. He went on about his life and being a pastor. He said once there was a young man who came to him distressed.

The man said, "Pastor, I am sad. I have been thinking about the future and don't know what I'll do when I'm fifty." The old man says simply "Son, if god blesses you so that you live to be fifty, he will have also granted you the wisdom to know what to do." He eventually got



Image courtesy of stevencanplan.com

off in the middle of one of his anecdotes but it made the hour and a half long trip to Evanston feel much shorter.

Between the motivational pastor and odd young fellow, there are always some weird snippets of conversation that can be heard. One couple just kept babbling on about convincing one of their friends to smoke with them and get high off Nyquil, not the best of ideas. Some people run into long lost friends, and their lives could not be more different.

Even a lawyer and man living out of his mother's basement can have meaningful conversations. Sometimes people are nice, helping you transport heavy objects off the train. Sometimes they are not as courteous, like a woman who held up the train by blocking the door and yelling to people standing on the platform. No matter what, riding the train is always an adventure.

Movie Review: 'Prisoners' engrossing, thrilling mystery

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From its opening sequence, director Denis Villeneuve's and writer Aaron Guzikowski's "Prisoners" captures you in its thrilling suspense and fascinating mystery. With its foreboding atmosphere, "Prisoners" draws you in, ever deeper into its labyrinth of human cruelty and moral ambiguity, and never for a moment does it relent in its pace, up to its final revelation that leaves you breathless and pining for more.

Few films have managed to raise significant moral questions while at the same time maintaining the tension of suspense—and yet "Prisoners" does just that, and does it exceptionally well. Faced with the kidnapping of their daughters, the Dovers (Hugh Jackman and Maria Bello) and the Birchs (Terrence Howard and Viola Davis) have their faith in God tested to the extreme when they are confronted with the release of their daughters' suspected kidnapper (Paul Dano) just three days after his supposed crime. Detective Loki (Jake Gyllenhaal) is the quasi-eccentric detective assigned to the case, and he must attempt to unravel the imponderable mystery of the girls' disappearance before it's too late.

At face value, the synopsis might seem like a predictable Hollywood cutout. But, I assure you, it is not.

For starters, two hours of watching Gyllenhaal's character alone is worth the price of admission. Gyllenhaal skillfully crafts an incredibly unique detective character, who with his unspoken backstory and intriguing air of dangerous mystery, ought to have a film just to himself.

In no way, however, does Gyllenhaal carry this film alone. Although the entire ensemble works well, two others stand out: Hugh Jackman's extremes of feverish intensity and broken vulnerability come through beautifully in his role as a father left helpless to protect his family; and Melissa Leo's role



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as a hewed-out old hag is unsettling in its reality. One must also give credit to Paul Dano, whose adeptness in his role as a demented child is outmatched only by his spectacular performance in "There Will Be Blood."

The suspense of "Prisoners" lies in the looming threat that at any moment these parents' girls may turn up dead. The moral overtones of the film, however, are even more

compelling and worthy of comment. How does a Christian (or any person believing in forgiveness as a principle tenant) confront evil and injustice when it boldly parades violence through one's life? In "Prisoners" we are shown nearly the full-spectrum of responses; and while most are not loving, the given circumstances challenge one's prejudices and lead one to ponder the gap between one's

noble and one's basest self.

"Prisoners" is captivating entertainment; but for those who seek it, it is also a profound reflection on the fragility of our human condition. For, on any given day, we all are peace-loving people confronted, not always with the banality, but with the absurdity of evil.