

# The Silence of the Lambs: Suspenseful, undeniably excellent movie-making

By Kathy Amen

*The Silence of the Lambs.* Directed by Jonathan Demme; written by Ted Tally; produced by Edward Saxon, Kenneth Utt and Ron Bozman. Starring Jodie Foster and Anthony Hopkins. Rated R. \*\*\* 1/2

This is a movie you hate to love. Its gross-out quotient is up in the stratosphere, but it's undeniably excellent movie-making. So if your stomach is up to the challenge, go for it!

FBI trainee Clarice (Foster) is close to graduation, and has developed the thick skin necessary to survive, and even excel, in the "man's" field she has chosen.

And she'll need every centimeter when her boss (coolly underplayed by Scott Glenn, with a resonance that really stays with you) asks her to help find a particularly grisly serial killer.

Only some of *Silence's* gross-outs can be credited to this killer, however, and that's one of the things that makes the movie so interesting.

Clarice is sent to interview another murderer, in an insane asylum, who may, mysteriously, be able to shed some light on the current

search. This guy, a calmly crazy psychiatrist named Hannibal (the Cannibal) Lector (Hopkins) is responsible for most of the movie's creepiness.

Hopkins' performance is truly amazing and gut-level scary. You'll remember his urbane yet menacing voice long after you've heard him speak the movie's macabrely humorous, and absolutely perfect, closing line. And he's often shot in such merciless close-ups that it will be hard to forget his insane but oh-so-intelligent face, either.

Playing a completely different sort of character, Foster is equally compelling. Clarice does still have her vulnerabilities, but she's strong in spite of them, and she makes a perfect heroine — honest, human and quietly capable.

The minor players are excellent as well. Ted Levine, as the seriously disturbed, yet oddly pitiable, killer makes a particularly strong impression with very little screen time.

On top of the remarkable acting, the style of the movie is flawlessly



Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) with Dr. Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins, in background) in *The Silence of the Lambs*. (Courtesy photo by Ken Regan)

creepy and suspenseful. The portion of the movie devoted to setting up and exploring the characters and their bizarre relationship is so adroitly handled that it doesn't seem as long as it is. Each of the Clarice/Lector conversations is as suspenseful as some entire movies.

The many twists and turns of the movie's thrilling climax may leave some viewers scrambling to catch up; and not all of these sequences are equally successful. But most of these shocking and exciting scenes work beautifully and will surely rank with the classics of their kind.