In its cryptic opening scene, Park Chan-wook sets the tone of STOKER, his English-language debut, with a monologue and the sound of the world in which the film takes place. STOKER prides itself on not being a conventional genre picture by any means, but the hypnotic rhythm in which the film unfolds will undoubtedly keep any audience transfixed.

STOKER (premiering at the current Sundance Film Festival, and hitting theaters March 1 from Fox Searchlight) ties itself to no time period, and to no specific location, often feeling like a folk tale lost in time, warning of the dangers that one's own flesh and blood could embody. It plays more as an intriguing, old-fashioned thriller than an out-and-out horror film, akin to an Alfred Hitchcock film as captured through the lens of Terrence Malick. The gorgeous landscapes insinuate a larger story at hand, often allowing the audience to forget that the film is contained largely to the eponymous family's estate. The use of color in the film, especially when opposed to darkness, implies a fantastical element, often alongside the fear of a hidden, sinister element. But perhaps most significant is the pacing of the dialogue, suggesting epic prose rather than realistic back-and-forth. In that sense, the characters' words may sound unusual to those unfamiliar with international cinema, but there is no line that feels wasted or unnecessary.

Park pulls no punches, allowing the story to venture into dark places while always maintaining a level of class that elevates even the most shocking of scenes. STOKER never feels exploitative or even overtly horrific, but the atmosphere that Park and his cinematographer,

Chung Chung-hoon, build through their awe-inspiring visuals inspires terror of the soul rather than of the senses. The visuals are complemented by a classically inspired score by Clint Mansell, another impressive work in the composer's career. And the fact that a story so simple and enigmatic can remain so daring and unpredictable is a testament to the writing talents of Wentworth Miller and his Black List script.

Another impressive aspect of STOKER is the talent in front of the camera, as Park employs a phenomenal cast to bring his Gothic thriller to life. Mia Wasikowska shines as young India Stoker, sinking into the withdrawn yet fearless nature of her role and reveling in the dark places the story takes her. India often serves as the film's anchor as the audience absorbs the story alongside her, and in turn sheds her own apathetic shell. Nicole Kidman also gives a riveting performance as India's mother, Evie, exuding desperation and resentment in a way that would be poetic, were it not so intensely threatening. Jacki Weaver and Dermot Mulroney also shine in smaller albeit significant roles, but the film truly belongs to Matthew Goode.

As Uncle Charlie, who arrives on the scene following the death of the Stoker patriarch, Goode alternates between childlike playfulness and seductive menace, which makes his darker impulses all the more terrifying. Goode can't help but steal scenes from his heavy-hitting co-stars, and the relationship between Charlie and India plays as an endlessly fascinating game of cat and mouse. His actions are almost animalistic, with his impulsive actions hinting at a grander plan. His performance is emotional, shocking and all too unnerving, and should be Goode's calling card for bigger roles to come.

And just because the film finds weight within its dramatic elements doesn't mean horror fans will feel neglected. STOKER has several disturbing scenes, one in particular featuring explicit violence that leads to one of the film's most jaw-dropping revelations. There is a fair amount of bloodshed here, although not nearly as much as in some of Park's previous work, and the strongest representation of horror is found within the perverse predatory aspects of Uncle Charlie, who elicits psychological dread via his almost omnipotent presence.

STOKER manages to be simultaneously beautiful, thrilling and frightening, and is different from most anything we've seen in recent time. By presenting moral questions in the midst of the suspense, Park challenges the audience intellectually and spiritually, and does so with impressive finesse. Beyond showcasing the formidable talents of his biggest-name cast yet and a potential breakout turn from Goode, STOKER proves that the director's unique brand of thrills and chills works in any language. For horror fans seeking something fresh and unique, look no further.