

At Venice Film Festival, Master Gardener Plants Tension Amidst a Colourfully Regal Setting

By: [Gautaman Bhaskaran](#)[News18.com](#)

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Venice



At the ongoing 79th edition of the Venice Film Festival, American director, screenwriter and movie critic Paul Schrader presented his new movie Master Gardener.

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Paul Schrader's Master Gardener is running for the Golden Lion, and may well have an edge at the Oscars 2023.

American director, screenwriter and movie critic Paul Schrader is best known for four of Martin Scorsese's works – Taxi Driver, Raging Bull, The Last Temptation of Christ and Bringing out the Dead – that he wrote or co-wrote. Recently, his Card Counter (2021) caught attention with its crime and criminality.

Now at the ongoing 79th edition of the Venice Film Festival, Schrader presented Master Gardener, a seemingly placid movie that gains thrill and suspense as it moves along the superbly manicured gardens of a rich woman, Norma Haverhill (Sigourney Weaver). Joel Edgerton headlines the film as Narvel Roth, an able horticulturist who doubles up as her estate gardener with a superbly competent team. The regal estate garden runs with clockwork precision, and nothing is out place or time, till Haverhill – whose relationship with her gardener (reminded me of Lady Chatterley's Lover!) goes beyond the boundaries of professionalism – asks him for a favour. Her grand-niece, Maya (Quintessa Swindell), has been orphaned, and Haverhill would like him to have her as his apprentice.

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Roth's life turns from strictly gardening (which, he writes in his dairies, is a bridge to the future and he found life in gardens), from his beloved plants and trees to the 20-something Maya, who arrives at Gracewood Mansion in a flaming red top and a ripped jeans complete with sunglasses. She seems more modern than either Haverhill, who appears to have been plucked out of the 1950s with glamorous dresses nipped at the waist and old world manners, or Roth, who could have emerged from the 1930s depression era with his stiff demeanour and drab work clothes.

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Soon, Master Gardener swings out of the placidity of the gardens and veers towards a crime noir. Roth has an unpleasant past, and Maya is caught between her drug handler and her own addiction, both of which are dangerously troublesome. But when the relationship between the gardener and Maya slips into an intimate mode, there is visible tension. Haverhill calls him impertinent and obscene. A strong trace of jealousy is apparent here.

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The performances add to the drama with Weaver still retaining her classic style bordering between a stern exterior and a vulnerable inside. The conflict is highly visible in some of her most devastating moments. Swindell brings in a layered touch to her performance, with the Australian actor, Edgerton, transforming from a boring, matter-of-fact man to a softer human being.

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About the Author

GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN Gautaman Bhaskaran is a movie critic, commentator and an author, who penned the first ever biography of Adoor Gopalakrishnan, and has been covering ma...[Read More](#)



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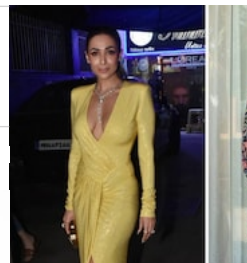
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