

Screen

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

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SATURN

Mike Goodridge IN LOS ANGELES

Dir: Robert Schmidt L US. 1999. 95 mins.

Prod co: Sibling Productions. Int'l sales: Sloss Law Office, tel: (1) 212 627 9890. Prod: Palmer West. Exec prods: Eric Watson, Jonah Smith. Scr: Robert Schmidt. DoP: Matthew Libatique. Prod des: James Chinlund. Ed: Gabriel Rye, Michael Ross. Main cast: Scott Caan, Len Burmester, Mia Kirshner.

Robert Schmidt makes an audacious film-making debut with

this painful drama, a talking point of this year's Los Angeles Independent Film Festival. So dark that it's unlikely to stir up much buyer interest — either international or domestic — *Saturn* nevertheless announces a major new directing talent. Schmidt has already landed his next gig, *Crime And Punishment In High School*, for uber-indie producer Christine Vachon, MGM and G2 Films. It's easy to see why he's so much in demand.

Caan is the film's key actor — he rarely leaves the screen — playing a gifted student engineer and carer for his bedridden father, who is crippled with Alzheimer's disease. He gets high to escape his turgid existence, but when he starts an affair with Sarah (Kirshner), a drug addict, he descends into selfishness, despair and crime.

This is a deeply depressing movie. Schmidt never flinches from depicting the miseries and realities of Caan's life. But there's an exhilaration to be had from his exciting direction: the scenes of sexual attraction and drug-fuelled escape are so imaginatively staged and shot (by *Pi* DoP Matthew Libatique) that you can understand why, in among so much unavoidable self sacrifice, life seems worth living.