Filipino director Yam Laranas’ THE ROAD (opening May 11 in U.S. theaters from Freestyle Releasing) is broken into three distinct parts and, in reverse, tells a story that encompasses both supernatural phenomena and very human evil.

Part one, which takes place in 2008, begins in a way stereotypical enough to make most horror fans gag. Three teenagers go for a drive, they begin to get frightened and horrifying things start to happen around them as they are unable to get off the road. However, the queasy sense of familiarity quickly fades as the teens pull over, and begin to investigate vehicle wreckage in nearby foliage (a plot point brought back up in part two). Hazy figures begin to attack the teens, and while such a scenario seems played-out, there is such striking beauty in the onscreen imagery, it’s hard not to respond to the freshness of the visuals. One very brief moment deserves particular mention: As two of the teens run in fear, a hazy figure can be seen hovering in the far distance. Words can’t describe the impact of that single shot, which alone makes the film worth watching. (This section, interestingly, resembles a number of modern French horror films, including INSIDE, ILS/THEM and HIGH TENSION.)

After a harsh cut, a group of police officers are apparently looking for the three teens we saw in the previous section—which leads us into part two, set in 1998. Two sisters are driving down that same road when their car breaks down, and an awkward young man just happens to be

walking by at that moment. They head back to the boy’s house, where he clubs them over the head and locks them inside—yes, here we go again, as THE ROAD falls back into that dreary land of tired storylines and tormented victims.

And yet, although the parallels between parts one and two are almost too clear, the equivalence gives the audience an understanding of events that are unclear at best as part one comes to a close. The primary function of the midsection is to offer an explanation for the supernatural occurrences during the opening act—and to serve as a gateway into part three, which more broadly defines the reasons behind everything we’ve seen up to this point. Fascinatingly, as each part of the film unfolds, previously unexplained imagery and story points are explained in complete detail, creating a depth within THE ROAD that often goes missing in modern horror.

In the third and final section, which plays out in 1988, the story of that murderous young man’s childhood is explored. Confined to his house, with a brutally cracked mother and God-fearing, incapable father, he starts down the path to homicidal tendencies. As opposed to part one’s visual reminder of French horror cinema, this segment offers a distinct parallel to A TALE OF TWO SISTERS—not only in tone, but in specific content.

The disjunction of the editing, which creates a disconnection in the flow of the story, is not enough to detract from all the positives that THE ROAD offers. Another problem is the score, which too often directly hits on the action and interferes with the psychological subtext that the visuals elicit. The film might have been better off with more minimalistic music, or none at all. But these issues do not weigh heavily enough to detract from the many qualities of THE ROAD, whose overall effect stays with the viewer for days—which is what truly makes it worth seeing. The intricacy of the multifaceted plot is difficult to sum up in just a few paragraphs, but one thing is certain: THE ROAD is a gift to horror fans, and shouldn’t be missed.