

‘Jennifer’s Body’ a Bloody, Out-of-Body Dud For Oscar-Winning ‘Juno’ Scribe Diablo Cody

Submitted by [HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com) [1] on September 18, 2009 - 1:01am

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Rating: **1.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – For Oscar-winning “Juno” writer Diablo Cody, writing “Jennifer’s Body” with “Transformers” star Megan Fox and “Mamma Mia!” star Amanda Seyfried as the two lead women was as much of an out-of-body experience as Charlize Theron’s against-type role in 2003’s “Monster”.

The difference? Theron nailed it; Cody bloodied this bold opportunity.



The insatiable appetite of Jennifer (Megan Fox) takes her on the prowl for a meaty snack in “Jennifer’s Body”.

Photo credit: Doane Gregory, 20th Century Fox

Since our [Nov. 2007 interview with Cody](#) [20] for the Oscar-winning “Juno,” we know she’s as quick with her wit in person as she is with her pen for the screen.

While an [early reading](#) [21] of the “Jennifer’s Body” script showed promise, once it hit the screen Cody’s razor-sharp wit was blunted against the mismatched backdrop of two female leads who couldn’t sell the script and the overarching horror tone that the talented Cody hasn’t yet mastered.

Like “Juno,” you still *hear* Cody’s obscure and uniquely twisted pop-culture references. Like “Juno,” you once again travel with Cody as she deftly maneuvers the cliché without being so. Like “Juno,” Cody has found another way to inject the importance of relationships into strong female roles.



Needy (Amanda Seyfried) emerges after encountering her best friend, Jennifer (Megan Fox), who has become a demon in Diablo Cody’s “Jennifer’s Body”.

Photo credit: Doane Gregory, 20th Century Fox

But “Jennifer’s Body” more than disappoints – and, in fact, offends considering the prodigy who wrote it – on three primal levels.

First, the “horror” in this horror film merely used visual gore and loud, jarring noises as the mechanism by which you were supposed to be scared. Only doing so and doing so in predictable manners allowed you to successfully anticipate a “scary moment”. You’re therefore underwhelmed because you see it coming a mile away.

Second, I somewhat understand why Megan Fox was selected for this lead role, but she’s unquestionably all wrong for it like oil is for water. Sure, this script necessitated a sexually ravenous and stunning siren for its demonic, flesh-eating lead. Yeah, Fox fits that bill like she always does.



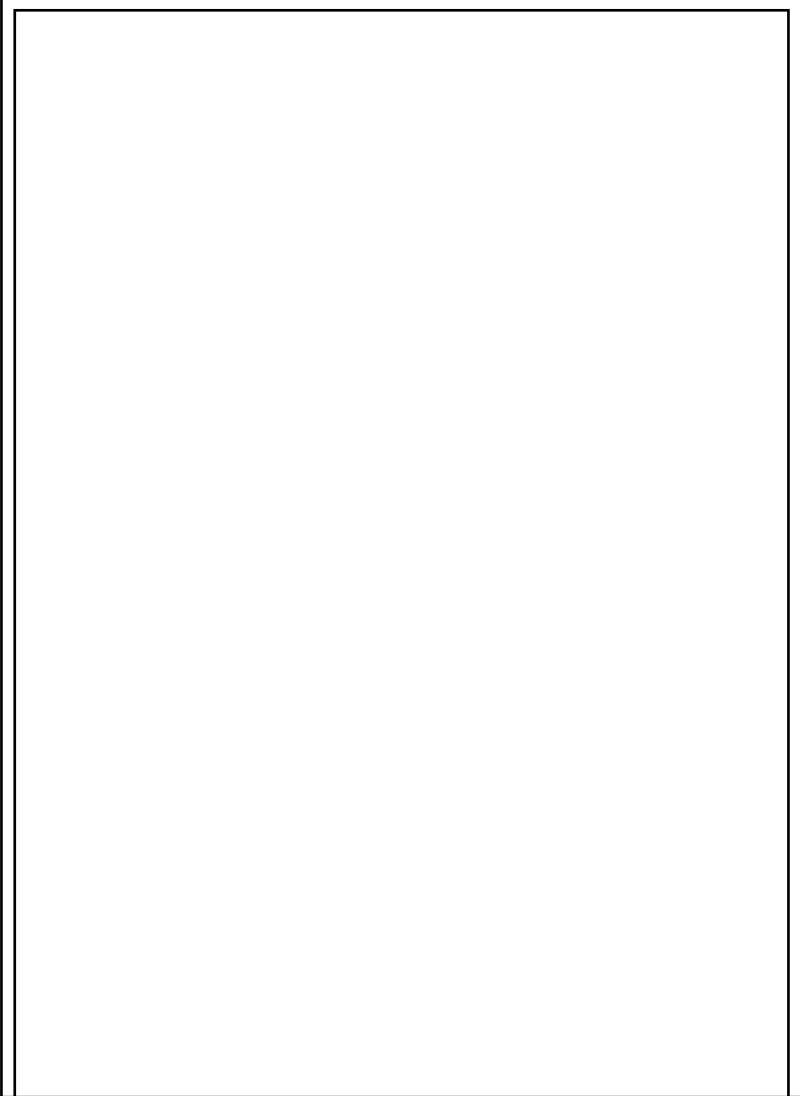
Jennifer (Megan Fox) prepares to feast on her best friend’s boyfriend, Chip (Johnny Simmons), in “Jennifer’s Body”.
Photo credit: Doane Gregory, 20th Century Fox

But either Fox needs to learn to be cast for a role when it’s more than just about physical beauty, or better yet, this film needed a sexpot who could successfully pull off the temptress act *and* act well, too. The latter? That’s not Fox’s forte.

Third, Amanda Seyfried’s performance is even more surprising and perplexing than Fox’s predictably underwhelming go at Cody’s first attempt at a horror film. That girl can act *and* sing. She demonstrated both playing opposite the legendary Meryl Streep in 2008’s “Mamma Mia!”.

While Seyfried even pulls off immersing herself into a world of Mormons in HBO’s “[Big Love](#) [22],” here she plays the less-attractive and weaker friend of the duo in a manner that’s well below her capabilities. It feels contrived for her to even be in this supernatural universe that Cody has strangely created.

Though the script is sprinkled with some well-inked Cody lines (almost entirely from Seyfried’s mouth, which is in stark comparison to the dirty garbage from Fox’s), this dotting will even cause diehard Cody fans to second guess what they may have thought was her impeccable pen.





After being possessed by a hungry demon, Jennifer (Megan Fox) transitions from being high school evil to the real deal in “Jennifer’s Body”.

Photo credit: James Dittiger, 20th Century Fox

It may take you a moment, by the way, to recognize Adam Brody in the film’s hunky indie-rock, lead-signing band role. Following [my interview with Brody](#) [23] for “In the Land of Women,” I didn’t even make the connection for 60 minutes in. But Brody is the least of this film’s worries.

As well, a cameo role as Seyfried’s mom by the refreshingly talented Amy Sedaris pays off, but is still underutilized.

Even the relatively unknown Johnny Simmons dishes up a surprisingly genuine performance as Seyfried’s boyfriend. Still, when the three best-performed roles in the film come from various supporting actors who can’t carry the distaste away from the two lead roles, even the formulaic Hollywood ending can’t set the balance of this pendulum straight.

Since the 31-year-old, Chicago-born Diablo Cody is still new as a paid Hollywood scribe (she also expertly writes Showtime’s “United States of Tara” starring the flawlessly cast Toni Collette), I won’t dock her points for once again using much of her *safe* talent in “Jennifer’s Body” as she did in “Juno”.

As Cody’s still at that phase where she needs to prove herself until she can officially break out as a go-to writer who won’t do you wrong, using the riotous and fast-talking J.K. Simmons of “Juno” fame in a slow-talking “Jennifer’s Body” role is forgivable and does serve up some momentary refreshment.

With Cody also on as the film’s executive producer, seeing the names Jason Reitman and Mason Novick credited as producers is another safe selection. Reitman directed Cody’s “Juno” (as well as “Thank You for Smoking”) while Chicago-native producer Mason Novick is credited as first discovering Cody through her long-running blog, which was called “The Pussy Ranch”.

But while Karyn Kusama directing “Jennifer’s Body” makes some sense based on her directorial filmography of female-centric films to complement Cody’s tendency to write for strong female leads, having only directed one episode of TV’s “The L Word,” “Æon Flux” and “Girlfight” still reveals her as a relative newcomer and a risky selection to helm the film. The risk doesn’t pay off.

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Nary a “horror” theme will you find in Kusama’s repertoire and it shines through like a discombobulated thumb in her latest work. As for Cody, she’s at her best when she’s writing comedy and, most important, awkward but true-to-life experiences of the artistic and eccentric kind.

But if there's lauding to be awarded to Cody this time around, it's only for the honesty of the extremes in a best friendship between two high school girls who are confusingly learning life, boys, sex and fitting in. Beyond that singularly redeeming theme, this film is a tragic desecration of mammoth talent that'll serve as an arresting step back in Cody's buoyant career.

“Jennifer’s Body” from Oscar-winning “Juno” writer Diablo Cody and director Karyn Kusama stars Megan Fox, Amanda Seyfried, Johnny Simmons, Adam Brody, J.K. Simmons, Amy Sedaris, Ryan Levine, Juan Riedinger, Colin Askey, Chris Pratt, Juno Ruddell, Kyle Gallner and Josh Emerson. The film, which was released nationwide on Sept. 18, 2009, is rated “R” for sexuality, bloody violence, language and brief drug use with a 102-minute running time.



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