

# my megan

**WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY**

Sheffield Leithart

**PRODUCED BY**

Origin Productions

**LOGLINE**

When a journalist obsessed with serial killers thinks his pregnant wife is one, he resolves to stop at nothing to keep his family together.

# Synopsis



**M**eeet Sean Stephens, writer and journalist. When Sean was young, his best friend was randomly killed by a serial killer. Ever since, Sean has been obsessed with bringing those killers to justice.

A new serial killer is on the loose. The more Sean learns about them, the more he thinks it's his wife, Megan. Pregnant women are being murdered everywhere Megan travels on business. Sean is ready to turn her in to the police, when she tells him she's pregnant. He decides that he must keep his family together at all cost.

Hot on the trail of the serial killer is Alan Winter, an FBI agent with a sterling reputation. He always solves the case. Alan and Sean are connected by a mutual friend in the hope that Sean will, with his unique knowledge, help bring the killer to justice. Unknown to Alan, Sean only joins in a desperate attempt to cover up his wife's tracks.

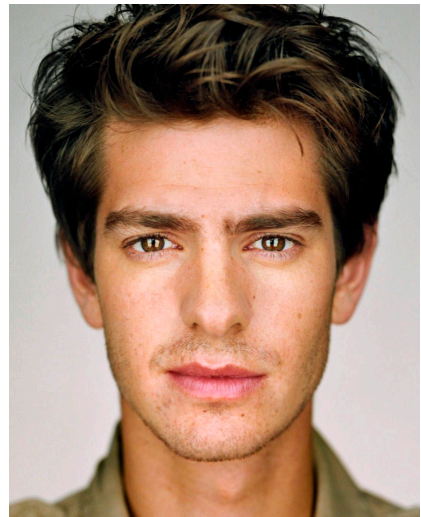
Sean befriends Alan and leads him on a wild goose chase, giving just enough information to string him along, but withholding just enough to keep him from tracking down Megan. Everything seems to be going well, until he learns that Megan has killed again—this time, in the alley behind her hotel. Alan latches onto this new information, and it looks like he's going to figure out Sean's plan. Sean decides his only option is to kill Alan.

Just before he follows through, Alan calls to tell him he's figured it out: the serial killer is a woman named Michal, Megan's assistant. Sean races home to find Michal in a deadly battle with his pregnant wife. Sean intervenes, and he and Megan overpower Michal just as Alan arrives. Sean is wounded in the fight, Megan is saved, and Alan cleans up the mess, arresting both Sean and Michal. The film ends with Sean sentenced to ten years for aiding and abetting a serial killer, with Megan on the outside, raising their son alone.

# Characters

## SEAN STEPHENS

**W**hen you first meet Sean, you might find him off-putting. He is a whip-thin, smart, crackling with energy. He fixates on specific ideas and phrases, obsessing over them, worrying away at them until he figures them out. When he gets stressed, he rearranges his surroundings in an orderly way. He might straighten the silverware on the table or center the salt and pepper shakers without realizing it. He comes across as a friendly man because he will focus on you while you're speaking, but once he fixes on something else, something more pressing, you are all but forgotten. Sean is a freelance research journalist, and he is excellent at it. He is a meticulous fact-checker. He files every story on time. He keeps all of his writing in giant filing cabinets in his office. As in every area of his life, he has a particular focus: serial killers. When Sean was in high school, his best friend was randomly killed by a serial killer, and ever since, Sean has been obsessed with bringing those killers to justice. He is dedicated to the idea of a better, safer future. He works tirelessly to bring it about.

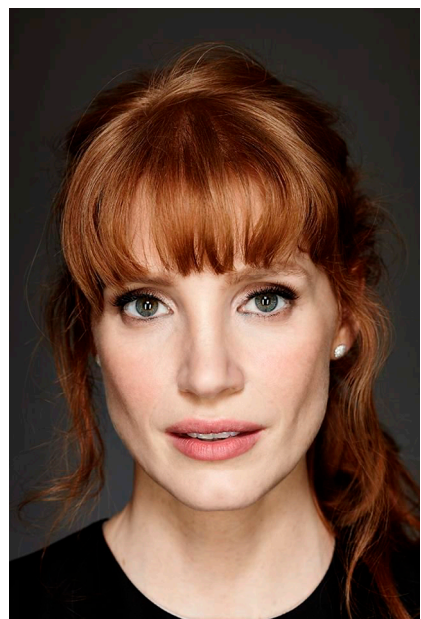


### Actor comparison

Jake Gyllenhaal, David Oyelowo, Andrew Garfield, John Krasinski

## MEGAN STEPHENS

**M**egan is married to Sean. She is the love of his life. They are both organized, but where Sean tends to get frantic, Megan remains cool. She is rarely flustered, even when Sean's adoration annoys her. Megan works as a PR representative for a clean energy company and she knows the value of appearances. She is meticulous about her own, and it shows: people turn their heads when she walks by. She has not had to pay for a drink in years. Masked by all of the above is Megan's deep insecurity. She grew up in a broken home, fought over by parents who hated each other and used her to hurt one another. Captivated by Sean's optimism about the future, she desperately wants to have a baby and give it all the peace and love she never knew.



### Actress comparison

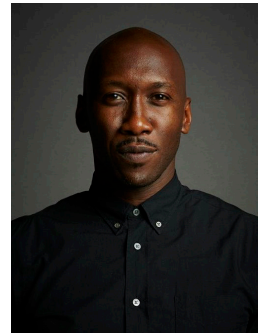
Margot Robbie, Eva Green, Jessica Chastain

## **ALAN WINTER**

Alan is a career FBI man, a model agent, with perfect scores and an immaculate record. His personal life is a cliched wreck: no friends, two divorces, one child who moved far, far away. He's old, tired, and only cares about his job. When he's not working, which is rare, he drinks alone in his apartment in front of the TV.

### **Actor comparison**

Viggo Mortensen, Mahershala Ali, Mark Strong, Gary Oldman

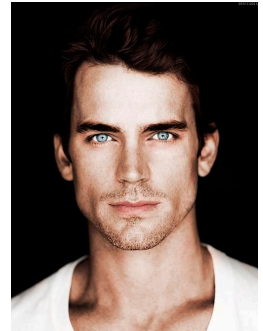


## **FRED PUGH**

A gregarious FBI analyst whom Sean has befriended. Fred wants to be good at his job, but he often feels over his head. Sean is the organized fact-hound Fred wants to be, so Fred tends to ask for Sean's help a lot more than he should, legally speaking. Fred is Sean's "inside man" when it comes to his journalism work.

### **Actor comparison**

Jonathan Groff, Armie Hammer, Matt Bomer

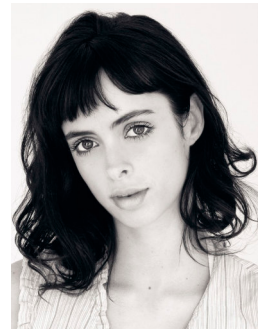


## **MICHAL MARTINEZ**

Megan's assistant. Travels with her. Wants to be just like her when she grows up.

### **Actress comparison**

Felicity Jones, Kristen Ritter





# Themes

## COGNITIVE BIAS

“A compelling narrative fosters an illusion of inevitability.”

— *Daniel Kahneman, Thinking, Fast and Slow*

**M**y Megan is a cautionary tale of cognitive bias. Sean is so entrenched in his belief that Megan is a serial killer that he never pauses to consider any other possibility, or that all the evidence against her is purely circumstantial. It takes another man—one with his own set of biases—to point Sean in the right direction.

In a world full of biases, and full of encouragement to entrench oneself in those biases, it seems impossible to open one's mind to new possibilities. My Megan reveals the pitfalls of cognitive bias by putting a recognizable character, Sean, in an extreme situation in which his cognitive bias leads to horrifying results. In allowing the audience to live vicariously through Sean's experiences, the audience will learn the same lessons without the attendant negative consequences.

## PREGNANCY

“For those who deeply want children and are denied them, those missing babies hover like silent ephemeral shadows over their lives. Who can describe the feel of a tiny hand that is never held?”

— *Laura Bush, Spoken from the Heart*

**I**n modern cinema, countless stories explore the pain of the loss of a child, but far fewer explore the emptiness of never having had the opportunity to be a mother, a father. How might people cope with the tragedy of barrenness? What might this hope deferred do to an individual's psyche? And when a child does miraculously come, after that hope has been crushed time and time again, to what lengths would a parent go to defend that life? My Megan explores these questions by presenting two different characters, Megan and Michal, who deal with the same struggle in different ways.

# Director

## SHEFFIELD LEITHART

Sheffield Leithart is an accomplished director with over ten years experience in the industry as a director, cinematographer, editor, and producer. He started as a director in 2009, capturing live performance music videos for acts such as Rocky Votolato, Joe Pug, and Horse Feathers. In 2011, he became the cinematographer and photographer for Zac Brown Band, capturing live performance and documentary style shorts. He was a producer on Mercy Rule in 2014.



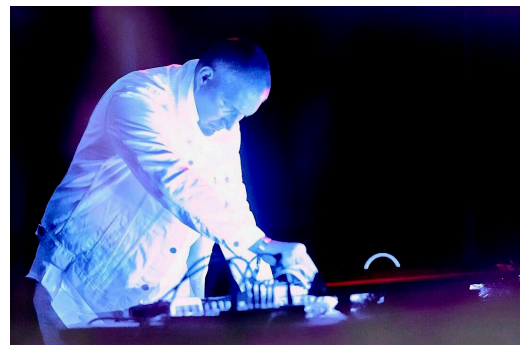
2015 marked his debut as a director of narrative films. That year, he directed *This Is Me*, a short film which premiered as an official selection at the Colchester Film Festival in the UK. In 2017, he directed *Dark House*, a feature-length psychological horror film distributed worldwide by Cardinal XD. In 2019, he directed the short film *My Megan*.

Sheffield is a director well-versed in each aspect of storytelling through film; he is that rare director who understands and operates in both the technical and artistic side of the filmmaking process. He intimately understands the language of the camera and is able to effectively communicate his vision to the crew. He is also an actors' director, allowing performers room to discover and pushing them to find the most effective performance for a story.

# Composer

## JAMES WATSON // EIGHTCH

James Watson is the vocalist, guitarist, synthesist, sound designer and songwriter for the experimental drone and noise project Eightch. Best known for his live performances, he uses synths and effects to create imaginatively dramatic soundscapes. Each composition is designed to transport listeners into a meditative/trance like state. Employing techniques like micro-listening as a way to gain sonic entrainment, ambient works serve as a

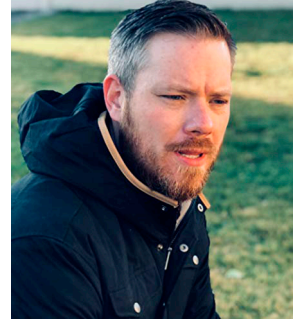


a counterpoint to heavy and aggressive modulation and phasing often played at high volume. Eightch has toured extensively in the US and throughout Europe, and has performed at both Knobcon in Chicago and Superbooth in Berlin. He is currently in the studio working on a full-length album for release later this year.

# Executive Producer

## CALEB APPLGATE

**C**aleb Applegate has been involved in numerous development projects, film, and commercial productions in a producer capacity. His first feature, *Dear Eleanor*, was acquired and distributed by Sony Pictures and directed by Kevin Connolly (HBO's *Entourage*) and starred Jessica Alba, Luke Wilson, Josh Lucas, Liana Liberato, Isabelle Fuhrman, Joel Courtney, and Patrick Schwarzenegger. It was released theatrically in 2016. Previously, Applegate obtained the film rights to C.S. Lewis's *Great Divorce* and also worked with Hisau Kurosawa (son of famed Director, Akira Kurosawa) on a groundbreaking experimental short film based on poet Francis Thompson's acclaimed work, *The Hound of Heaven*.



Applegate is a successful entrepreneur and an established business leader working in gaming, digital, and social technology spaces. His gaming company, Mineplex, is one of the world's largest Minecraft gaming servers and is partnered with Microsoft and Minecraft Studios.

# Mood Board





# Treatment

**M**eeet Sean Stephens, writer and journalist. A thin, intense man. When Sean was young, his best friend was randomly killed by a serial killer. Even since, Sean has been obsessed with bringing those killers to justice. Even as he grew up, went to school, fell in love, and got married, the thought has never been far from his mind: no child should grow up in a world where killers are on the loose.

Sean is madly in love with his wife, Megan, partly because in her he sees hope for the future. She is beautiful, smart, organized, competent. She works as a PR representative for a clean energy company. He roots for her, singing her praises every chance he gets.

The only trouble is, Megan can't have kids. She and Sean have tried everything. Their marriage is under strain. Sean begins to fear the worst: they have no future. Megan leaves on a long business trip while Sean loses himself in research for his latest story. A new killer is on the loose, active in multiple states and targeting women. For Sean, it feels personal. If he can crack this case and bring this person to justice, the world will be a better place.

Sean works and works, putting the pieces together. He has a contact at the FBI who feeds him clues. The killer has killed again, in yet another state. Sean notices a pattern, so awful he doesn't want to admit it to himself. But the facts are there: every murder has happened in a place his wife has traveled to for work. Sean can't believe it. His lovely wife. A serial killer?

But then he starts to think. Megan is often cold and distant. She had a troubled childhood. She doesn't have many friends. She is obsessively clean. Sean faces the inevitable. He has to turn her in.

Megan comes home. Sean doesn't get a chance to confront her. The minute she comes in the door, she throws herself in his arms. She's pregnant. Pregnant! A baby on the way. Sean couldn't be happier.



Later, in his office, going over his research, Sean tries to bend the data, to make it say anything else.

It refuses to change. He makes a decision, for the sake of his child, for the sake of the future. He will cover up his wife's crimes until their baby is safely born.

**A**lan Winter is the lead FBI agent in the hunt for the new serial killer. He is a model agent, with immaculate scores on every exam. His track record is perfect. He's going to bring this bad guy down because justice must be served.

Alan is hampered by his team, a bunch of lazy dopes who have seen too many movies. They seem more interested in who will play them in the TV show about the case than in actually catching the killer. Alan needs someone as serious as he is, and he needs to find that person quickly—before the killer kills again.

Fred, one of the hapless underlings, mentions his friend Sean, a journalist who has written extensively about serial killers. Alan gives Sean a call and ropes him into the investigation. Sean is happy to help, maybe a little too happy. Alan chalks it up to civilian enthusiasm.

Alan and Sean pool their resources and glean what information they can. All of the victims were young women—nothing new there. The victims were various ethnicities—that's odd, given that most killers stay within their own ethnic group. The victims were killed in major cities, but spread out between states. Sean keeps mum, but Alan finds this intriguing. He deduces the killer must travel by air and begins to stake out airports.

Megan is off on another business trip with her coworker, Michal. Everywhere she goes, she glows with happiness, so much so that Michal comments on it. Megan shrugs it off. She's just jazzed about work. Sean texts her constantly, trying to keep tabs, hoping she doesn't go off the deep end. At home, he tries to foil Alan in whatever ways he can: offering incorrect facts, suggesting alternative explanations, slowing down the investigation. Megan returns, casually mentions that she was searched at the airport.

Sean is frantic. Megan suggests they have Alan over for dinner. Sean tries to change her mind, but she is insistent. Alan is stiff and awkward in their home. Sean laughs loudly at his own jokes. Megan is the perfect hostess, polite, charming, warm, friendly. Honestly, Sean can barely recognize her. Alan picks up on Sean's discomfort and confusion and leaves thoughtful. The next day, he asks Fred to look into Sean's background.



Megan's ultrasound. Sean is transported with joy. A new human. A new start for all of them. The doctor is slightly worried that the baby isn't developing normally. Asks them to schedule another visit, very soon. They leave with a mixture of joy and fear. What if something's happened to the baby?

Megan has yet another business trip. Sean asks her to stay home this time, but she is determined to go. She has to stay busy. Keep her mind off things. Sean is just beginning to calm down when she texts him: Bleeding. Oh, no, she's miscarried. He calls her, calls her again, but she doesn't pick up. No, no, no. Sean wonders if he should tell Alan, confess the whole thing and try to stop Megan. He stays up all night, wondering, deciding.

Next morning, Alan calls him. There's been another murder, they just found the body. Yes, the same killer. Yes, in the same city Megan was staying in. And there's more: the body was found in the alley behind her hotel.

Now it's all over for Sean. There's nothing left for it now. He has to turn her in. He's at home, psyching himself up, and Megan shows up. Out of the blue. Not due home for two days. She left the conference early. She had to see him. Had to tell him. She saw a doctor. The baby's fine. Developing normally. Nothing to worry about. Sean destroys any evidence he has about the latest murder. He won't turn Megan in, not till the baby is born. He parries Alan at every turn, bringing up every shred of evidence he can think of that will lead him off the right track.

Alan, meanwhile, is putting the pieces of the puzzle together. The killer is a woman. A woman who travels a lot. A woman who was probably staying in the hotel and left the next day. He considers sharing his thoughts with Sean, but something stops him. They meet again, and Alan is cagey. Sean suspects that something is up. He starts to wonder if he needs to take this into his own hands. He knows where Alan lives. He knows Alan's schedule. He could make Alan disappear.

**A**t home, Megan has Michal over to tell her the good news. "I'm pregnant!" Michal is suitably excited. The two chat and gossip about Megan being a mom. What about work? Megan will probably quit, but it's worth it, right? Raising a child, bringing new life into the world. The two stay up late, talking and sharing.

Alan and Sean are at the FBI office, working late, digging into the files. Alan decides to knock off, get some sleep. Sean pretends to drive home, then turns around and follows Alan back to his apartment. Alan goes inside. Sean sits in his car, waiting, trying to get ready for what he has decided must be done. For the sake of his wife. For the sake of their child. He is about to get out of the car when his phone rings. Alan. Sean picks up, trying to sound sleepy. Alan says he's figured it out. The killer is a woman. She works for a clean energy company. She was in town for a conference. She kills women out of envy. She always kills on the last day she's in a city, then leaves. The latest victim was killed on the last day of a clean energy conference. Hold on, says Sean. That can't be. My wife was home that day. She left the conference early... Your wife? Megan's not the killer, Alan says. The prime suspect is a woman named Michal...



Sean speeds home as fast as he can, dialing Megan. Michal has gone into the kitchen for a glass of wine. Megan's phone is on the counter. Michal tosses it in the garbage, casually selects a chef's knife from the block on the counter. Megan is in the bathroom. Michal stands in the living room, waiting, knife in her hand. Megan steps into the room. Her eyes go wide as Michal rushes towards her. Sean bursts into the room and takes her down. She slashes him. Megan picks up a chair and knocks her senseless. Alan pulls into the driveway and rushes into the house, gun drawn. He finds Sean covered with blood, embracing his wife. Sean Stephens, you are under arrest.

Sean moves numbly through his trial, not trying to argue his innocence. He didn't know Michal was the killer, but he aided and abetted her all the same. Megan is cold, sitting silently in the courtroom. Sean gets ten years. He and Megan sit on opposite sides of glass in the visiting room. Megan presses a picture of their son onto the glass.

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