Review: Marilyn Monroe biopic 'Blonde' is hugely exploitative

- **'Blonde' will hit Netflix in the Middle East on Sept. 28**

VENICE: It is not easy to pull off a biopic on someone as iconic as Marilyn Monroe and writer-director Andrew Dominik's attempt "Blonde," which was unveiled at the recent Venice International Film Festival, was moving in parts, but ultimately extremely lopsided. The director used James Carol Oates' bulky 738-page book of the same name as source material, while Cuban Spanish actress Ana de Armas does a stellar job at portraying Monroe.

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The men in her life, including President John F. Kennedy, are painted as monstrous, while she is depicted as a poor lost soul throughout.

Despite the star's difficult life — she did indeed have a troubled childhood and was exploited by powerful men throughout her career — the film's nearly-three-hour overemphasis on the negativity Monroe endured is difficult to sit through. It is also voyeuristic and exploitative, leaving her in a state of unnecessary undress for much of the runtime.

What is even more worrying is that the story is full of historical distortions, based often on rumors, that serve to add layer upon layer of sordid details to the already misery-laden film.

The one hugely redeeming factor is de Armas. She is intensely fascinating and fits the picture of the seductively sweet Hollywood icon. The actress was certainly a legend and de Armas tries — and succeeds — in getting that right, aided by superb camerawork by Chayse Irvin who captures 1950s Hollywood with its popping flashbulbs and desirous fans to great effect. Monroe's scenes with Arthur Miller, to whom she was married when she overdosed on sleeping pills in 1962, are touching and Adrian Broody plays the role with his usual natural ease.

But these qualities are not quite enough to salvage this production, which will begin streaming on Netflix at the end of September.