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Scrapper

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Scrapper

Abstract

This is a film review of *Scrapper* (2023), directed by Charlotte Regan.

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Author Notes

Chris Deacy is Reader in Theology and Religious Studies and former Head of Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kent in Canterbury, UK. His PhD (University of Wales, 1999) was in the area of redemption and film, and Chris has published monographs which include *Christmas as Religion: Rethinking Santa, the Secular, and the Sacred* (Oxford University Press, 2016); *Screening the Afterlife: Theology, Eschatology and Film* (Routledge, 2012); and *Screen Christologies: Redemption and the Medium of Film* (University of Wales Press, 2001). Chris also writes regular film reviews, is writing a book about nostalgia and religion and has been hosting a podcast since 2018 called *Nostalgia Interviews with Chris Deacy* - <https://audioboom.com/channels/4956567>



Scrapper (2023), dir. Charlotte Regan

Growing up can of course be a tumultuous experience in many ways, but being a twelve-year-old girl whose father left before she was born and a mother who has just passed away, with no family members to look after her, is going to be especially challenging. This London-set drama is not the most polished of films shown here at Sundance, but it has a rawness and rough-and-readiness which befits a story told from the point of view of Georgie (Lola Campbell) who resourcefully gets a local shopworker to record phrases which she can use on her phone to keep social services at bay while Georgie steals bikes and uses the money she makes selling them to pay the rent.

Georgie's father makes a surprise visit when he jumps over the fence and moves in, but she is understandably wary of the father she never knew only now deciding to make a reappearance with the concomitant heartbreak when he will most likely disappear again. He's not much more than a child himself, and left when his girlfriend at the time got pregnant because he wasn't mature enough to take care of a family.

Scrapper is replete with documentary talking head elements, as when characters pass judgment like a Greek chorus on Georgie's circumstances, from the boys and girls at her school to her teachers and the woman who runs the local bike shop. They all have their views and judgments on what is happening, but we sense that no one really knows Georgie's life circumstances better than Georgie herself. There is an obvious parallel with British indie hit (and Oscar nominee) *Aftersun*, which also deals with a young dad and his precocious daughter trying to get to know each other better, but they are quite different pictures as *Aftersun* is told in retrospect from the point of view of a girl now in her 30s as she reflects on an overseas holiday when, we get the sense, she saw her father for the last time. In *Scrapper*, the father makes a reappearance but we don't know if he is capable of hanging around for good, although the film does end on a moderately upbeat note. Yet *Aftersun* is richly textured, intelligent and poignant, whereas *Scrapper* at times feels like an episode of the 1980s British TV children's series *Grange Hill*.

After a while, there is only so much one can do with scenes of a young girl stealing bikes from her council estate and being chased by the cops, and this is a really quite patchy drama which goes for light, comedic flourishes but is ultimately rather threadbare and wears out its 84-minute running time before too long. There could have been more of an effort to tell us about young Georgie's relationship with her mother, and maybe some backstory involving her errant dad, but this is not 'that' kind of movie, going for an in-the-moment, spunky, colorful feel that is at odds with the drab surroundings and which would have been very different had this, for example, been a Ken Loach or a Lynne Ramsay social commentary. Scenes involving close ups of talking spiders have an offbeat feel, but *Scrapper* feels too much like a short that has been made into a full feature but has too few new ideas to undergird it. Ultimately, we see a girl who is perhaps doing things that are ahead of her time, while her father is just a grown-up kid with peroxide hair.