



January 2024

Little Death

Christopher R. Deacy
University of Kent at Canterbury - U.K., c.deacy@kent.ac.uk

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf>



Part of the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

Please take our feedback survey at: https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE

Recommended Citation

Deacy, Christopher R. (2024) "Little Death," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 28: Iss. 1, Article 10.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.jrf.28.01.10>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol28/iss1/10>

This Sundance Film Festival Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Religion & Film by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.

Little Death

Abstract

This is a film review of *Little Death* (2024), directed by Jack Begert.

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

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>



Little Death (2024), dir. Jack Begert

Little Death is a curious and disjointed effort in which two totally disparate stories are brought together with no effort to attempt to make them dovetail, and it is a disappointingly threadbare work which is unlikely to find a ready-made audience. The first part has moments of sardonic wit accompanied by virtuoso animated flourishes, in which a television screenwriter (David Schwimmer) undergoes a midlife crisis, and is all set to have the break of a lifetime and make a film that has been his real passion—only to be told that the ‘minor detail’ that is stopping it from getting the green light treatment is that the protagonist, clearly modelled on his own life experience, needs to be rewritten as a female on the grounds that audiences have had enough of white men in crisis.

This part of the film seemed to resonate with the packed audience I saw it with at Sundance who found the angst-ridden middle-aged man whose greatest burden seems to be that his successful TV sitcom is actually quite rubbish, to be superficially self-absorbed, neurotic and

lacking in empathy. So far, so Woody Allen. Gaby Hoffman, who made one of her first films at the age of 14 in Woody Allen's musical comedy *Everyone Says I Love You*, appears here as the female version of Schwimmer's male-in-crisis, and for much of the first part of the film she appears interchangeably with Schwimmer—even in scenes of domestic discord with his partner, played by Jena Malone—as well as with various Hollywood executives. But when Schwimmer experiences a break-in at his home, he is killed in a freak accident involving bowling balls which crush his skull and his character ends at this point.

Hitchcock went for a similar conceit in *Psycho* by having the lead character die in the first half of the film—but that classic film offers a stylistic and narrative continuity with what came before. *Little Death*, however, proceeds to give us a heist-gone-wrong story involving three young characters with addiction problems, and this second half is fundamentally discontinuous from the first. It reminded me in places of Doug Liman's indie hit from 1999, *Go*, in its tale of a drug deal gone awry, but without the wit or level of structural convergence. Indeed, *Little Death* has no character arc in its second half, whereas at least the first part had something ironic to offer about the absurdities of Hollywood screenwriting. It offered at least a critique of commercial mores and attitudes, whereas the second story is linear and seems tailored to an opposing demographic.

These are two worlds in free fall, and the audience I saw this with didn't even wait for the credits before they dispersed from the packed auditorium. There is a potentially rewarding intellectual exercise in giving us two different films aimed at different audiences appearing in the same film, but it doesn't work as it feels here like we are being cheated and/or that two undeveloped screenplays by different writers were combined, as if a Charlie Kaufman character deconstruction was combined with a linear, unironic, unremarkable crime story. *Little Death* is ultimately going to be remembered as a failed attempt at breaking the mold rather than for anything

that happens onscreen, and it is sad that a film that seems so adept in the first part at understanding and dissecting Hollywood should then turn into a film that so fundamentally misunderstands how Hollywood works.