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## Sometimes I Think About Dying

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## Sometimes I Think About Dying

### Abstract

This is a film review of *Sometimes I Think About Dying* (2023), directed by Rachel Lambert.

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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>



**Sometimes I Think About Dying (2023), dir. Rachel Lambert**

*Sometimes I Think About Dying* is a film heartbreaking in its delineation of a hard working but socially awkward and quiet woman working in an office near the coast in Oregon where she is constantly surrounded at work by the hustle of colleagues all eager to please and to learn from and about one another. But this comes at a price as Fran (Daisy Ridley) finds it hard, though not impossible, to join in. The repetition of the nature of her life, most of it spent by herself, is presented in painstaking detail, and Fran has many waking daydreams in which she imagines herself dead. In one especially haunting scene, she is driving in her car when the music playing goes silent and we hear a loud thump and then the sight of glass smashing and Fran's comatose body lying on the ground outside. But this is one of many "alternative reality" scenes in which Fran's lack of self-esteem and the pressure of her life make the prospect and visceral experience of her death strangely comforting and normal for her.

Nonetheless, Fran isn't incapable of social interaction, and when she unexpectedly gets invited to a dinner party where the characters play a Murder game, Fran not only plays along but comes up with the best and most imaginative "cause of death" narrative, which we know derives from her having contemplated every conceivable way to end her life. She divulges this information to one of her colleagues with whom she embarks on a furtive relationship, who has a secret of his own: he has never had a job before, which she suggests he might want to keep quiet about. The two of them have the capacity to complement one another, but Fran is way too much of an enigma for everyone, who nevertheless treat her with dignity and respect and don't cast judgement on her for grabbing a slice of cake and leaving the room when a colleague celebrates her retirement. If this was a different type of movie, Fran would gradually come out of her shell and turn into a fully-fledged extrovert, but here she tends to revert to herself following occasional dates, and there is no sense that she is going to become a different person having met a potential love interest. Indeed, the opposite is the case, though Fran does have the wherewithal to account for herself on one especially heartrending occasion when she speaks out of turn and says something hurtful to her co-worker who is keen to know a little about her past.

There is no sense in which Fran is either suicidal or depressed (though a scene when she seems to spend a whole day lying on her living room floor might suggest otherwise). Rather, the contemplation of her death is Fran's way of seeking some peace in her life after occasions spent around others, and death is here a leveler which paradoxically grounds her and allows her to recalibrate into her natural hibernation mode. Much is made of the location, with the coastal town in the Pacific Northwest as much a character as Fran or her colleagues, and the focus on mundane objects in the home rather than going for the thrill of the car chase makes this a very different film from what this would have been had it been made in Hollywood. Fran is given room to breathe,

undoubtedly acknowledged by her colleagues as someone rather introverted but actually a decent colleague who does something of great kindness when she brings a box of doughnuts to the office one day for everyone to share. This is Fran's way of showing that even if she doesn't join in with them she respects their company, and her difference from them is more a matter of degree than kind and she needs to belong as much as they do.

*Sometimes I Think About Dying* is also a companion piece to Bill Nighy's Oscar nominated performance in *Living* in which the head of a municipal department in 1950s London only gradually comes out of his shell when the prospect of death—there, diagnosed, as opposed to imagined as in the case of Fran—causes him to appreciate life and live more meaningfully and authentically for the first time. Fran may only take small, incremental steps here, but this is in keeping with her character arc and the film's apotheosis—two fractured characters giving each other a hug—which was heartbreaking to behold.