



PREVIEW

Hoard

Hoard

Directed by: Luna Carmoon

©: Hoard Film Ltd, The British Film Institute,
British Broadcasting Corporation

An Anti-Worlds, Delaval Film, Erebus Pictures
production

Presented by: BFI, BBC Film

Executive Producers: Eva Yates, Kristin Irving,
Mia Bays, Stephanie Aspin

Produced by: Loran Dunn, Helen Simmons,
Andy Starke

Line Producer: Tiernan Hanby

Locations Manager: Chloe Mission

1st Assistant Director: Ina Luders

Script Supervisor: Nua Watford

Casting Director: Heather Basten

Written by: Luna Carmoon

Director of Photography: Nanu Segal

Editor: Rachel Durance

Production Designer: Bobbie Cousins

Art Director: Sofia Sacomani

Costume Designer: Nat Turner

Hair & Make-up Designer: Billie McKenzie

Original Music by: Jim Williams

Production Sound Recordist: Tom Osborn

Re-recording Mixer: Steve Single

Supervising Sound Editor & Dialogue Editor:

Steve Single

Cast:

Saura Lightfoot Leon (*Maria*)

Hayley Squires (*Cynthia*)

Joseph Quinn (*Michael*)

Lily-Beau Leach (*young Maria*)

Deba Hekmat (*Laraib*)

Samantha Spiro (*Michelle*)

Nabil Elouahabi (*Ali*)

Pena Ilyambo (*Ellie*)

Honey Makwana (*Holly*)

Cathy Tyson (*Sam*)

Albert Rickenburg, Freddie Howe, Jake Smith

(*boys lighting fireworks*)

Albina K (*music teacher*)

Alexis Tuttle (*Mrs Norwood*)

Amelia Barber (*young Maria double*)

James Cooper (*Jeremy*)

Amir Hamza, Saulius Cijauskas (*paramedics*)

Mark Philpot, Jaqueline Philpot, Danielle Philpot,

Charlotte McGrath, Kelly Dean (*neighbours*)

Christian Jenner (*policeman 1*)

John Jesper (*policeman 2*)

Sarah Rose Denton (*social worker*)

Erin Jemmotte (*young Laraib*)

Sandra Hale (*Janice*)

Tim Bowie (*Pete*)

Ciara McGoldrick, Tara McGoldrick,

Edita Cereskiene (*pub bar staff*)

Simon Collins, Kevin Vose, Leah Ceara Coveney

(*pub punters*)

Petra Markham (*Mrs Brewer*)

Jenny Bolt (*gold coin lady*)

Sam Retford (*Sean*)

Phoebe Naughton (*lady at bus stop*)

Mark Humphries (*delivery guy*)

Paul Bassett (*drunk man*)

Frankie Wilson (*Anthony*)

Janie Booth (*old lady with sheet*)

Sam John (*yuppie boy's mate*)

UK 2023©

126 mins

Digital

Courtesy of Vertigo

+ Q&A with director Luna Carmoon and actors Joseph Quinn and Hayley Squires

A visceral, pungent and playfully macabre coming-of-age story, *Hoard* plays nimbly with both meanings implied by its title – hoarding as madness, a hoard as treasure. When eight-year-old outsider Maria (Lily-Beau Leach) and her loving, obsessional mother Cyn (Hayley Squires) go out on their nightly dumpster dives, they are heaping up emotional treasure for one another, filling their house with a vast and stinking ‘catalogue of love’. First-time feature director Luna Carmoon even gives their suppurating 1980s nest a sprinkling of enchantment by wreathing the detritus in fairy lights, and their sticky mother-daughter symbiosis in rhyming rituals and giggling private games.

Along with Charlotte Wells (*Aftersun*, 2022) and Charlotte Regan (*Scrapper*, 2023), she’s one of several British female directors whose dramas focus on young daughters wrestling with unreliable parents. What marks out Carmoon here is a sure hand in blending social realism and surrealism with the kind of note-perfect rendition of south London girlhood that distinguished her dark, noughties-set short *Shagbands* (2020). She’s hinted that the story includes some personal elements (there’s a telling sliver of home video in the closing credits), but it’s one rich with vivid imagery, and won’t be contained by a misery memoir or social realist template.

The film embeds itself in little Maria’s conflicted point of view. On those trash quests, she believes they are happy Kings of the Castle, but outside influences encourage Maria’s suspicion that they are the Dirty Rascals. Smelly and sleepy at school, her shame causes her to clash with the adoring Cyn. Carmoon shuts them in an increasingly confining world through eloquent camerawork, cinematographer Nanu Segal’s close-ups creating their *folie à deux* in the red and peach womb-light of curtained rooms, in shared baths or whirling shopping trolleys. There’s both beauty and unease in a bird’s-eye reveal of Maria and Cyn nestled on a sofa like a tiny barque in the lounge’s surging sea of rubbish bags.

Jim Williams’s 1970s-style electric piano score, with its ethereal choruses, sews a seam of quiet dread into their clinging on. The film smartly swerves the ‘mad mummy’ trope to emphasise Cyn’s gift for making the mundane magical: lunchbox foil is neurotically saved for a silver-swathed Christmas tree, street-scavenged chalk becomes tender face paint. There’s a hint of the good-bad mum of *The Florida Project* (2017) in Hayley Squires’ charismatic Cyn, who can be fierce (brutally crushing a callous teacher) as well as fiercely loving. But their idyll inevitably ends, with a horrific accident involving her teetering temple of trash. The traumatised Maria is dropped into foster-care with Samantha Spiro’s bustling Michelle.

This is where the film slides deftly from poor-child poignancy into a bold, body-horror-laced psychodrama. After an unseen decade with Michelle (now her ‘Mum’), 18-year-old Maria (a coltish Saura Lightfoot Leon) is sideswiped by the sudden arrival of Cyn’s ashes, and of refuse collector Michael (Joseph Quinn of *Stranger Things*, 2022), a cocky ex-foster-child now on the cusp of 30, crashing with Michelle while waiting for housing with a pregnant girlfriend.

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From Fri 3 May

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From Fri 10 May

Hoard

From Fri 10 May

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The narrative is fascinatingly acute and watchful about how grief drags Maria down like an undertow, and how it's deepened by the absence of her only friend Laraib, who has been banished by her strict father. It all propels her into a furtive, feral affair with Michael, once they've sniffed one another out as chaos-born children (and Maria has caught his pervasive binman odour, her personal Proustian rush). Quinn and Lightfoot Leon create an animalistic bond on screen that feels spontaneous and transgressive, as the couple luxuriate in bad behaviour (a pretend bullfight, gross food-fighting, dry humping). Wielding disgust like a weapon to fascinate and upset the viewer, the film develops an intrepid mix of mucky moods and tones, sprinkled through its disturbing encounters. Rather than the contrived sensationalism of *Saltburn* (2023), *Hoard* is a film you can virtually smell.

It is a periodically queasy sensory experience – we're met with the jolting sight of a rotting, knotted 'Rat King' slick with mucus, the sound of prolific open-door peeing and the implied stench of the rubbish that Maria seeks out to recreate her childhood nest. The film should come with a John Waters Polyester-style Odorama scratch-and-sniff card for iron-burned skin, rat droppings, bin-juice and Impulse body spray. One taboo-busting sequence combines enough yuck-inducing crunchy abject elements to keep the philosopher of disgust Julia Kristeva busy for days. But despite the tough subject matter, Carmoon's direction keeps the film full of playful ironies and handles its notes of dread lightly. Clues are strewn like crumbs from the start, in a breathy elliptical voiceover about the fatal consequences of the 'catalogue of love'. And Michael's readiness to push their transgressions hints at jeopardy. However, Carmoon twists the initial predatory characterisation of Michael in unexpected directions, showing his bond with Maria as less *amour fou* than pseudo-incest. Quinn gives him a damaged intensity, moving Michael's behaviour towards Maria seamlessly from jokey menace through besotted bemusement and into a dangerous tenderness.

Hoard is a pleasingly original movie, but one resonant with the passions of a self-taught filmmaker and cinephile. Even when spinning its wheels, this audacious, unsettling film is powerfully driven by Lightfoot Leon's mesmerising turn. She uses a dancer's looseness to convey Maria's shrieking, teasing joy in teen friendship or the reckless physicality of the affair with Michael. Far from a shrill or brittle portrayal of hysteria, she makes Maria's dreamy, obsessive psychosis fiercely believable in its compulsions. She can make the sustained stroking of a letter box, or the careful tucking of detritus into sofa cushions, into deliciously odd and beautiful moments. Her performance is the key that unlocks Carmoon's film – one whose world feels unboundaried, slippery and unsafe, but also filthily captivating.

Kate Stables, *Sight and Sound*, May 2024