

= The Harrowing (Inside No. 9) =

" The Harrowing " is the sixth and final episode of the first series of British dark comedy anthology series Inside No. 9 . It aired on 12 March 2014 on BBC Two . The episode was written by Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith , and stars Shearsmith , Aimee Ffion Edwards , Helen McCrory , Poppy Rush and Sean Buckley . While comedic in places , " The Harrowing " makes extensive use of gothic horror elements transmuted into a modern context . The plot follows Katy (Edwards) , who has been hired to house sit for eccentric siblings Hector (Shearsmith) and Tabitha (McCrory) . They rarely leave the house , but have an event to attend . They tell Katy about their bedridden , disabled brother Andras (Buckley) , who cannot speak but will ring a bell if he needs assistance . Katy is joined by her friend Shell (Rush) once Hector and Tabitha leave , and , upon hearing Andras 's bell , the pair reluctantly head upstairs . The episode takes place in Hector and Tabitha 's mansion , which is kept deliberately cold and filled with paintings depicting Hell . The writers experimented with a variety of possible endings , hoping to make the episode 's close both interesting and scary .

Critics agreed that the episode was the most gothic and scary of the series , with journalists writing for The Sunday Times saying that " The Harrowing " would be best avoided by those of a nervous disposition . Critics writing in the Metro felt that the episode was a poor finale for the series , and that the episode 's ending was unsatisfying . By contrast , Alex Hoskins , writing for the Cheddar Valley Gazette , felt the episode 's ending was very strong , and Bruce Dessau described " The Harrowing " as an excellent end to the series . On an Empire Online list , " The Harrowing " , particularly its final scene , was selected as the 17th best TV moment of the year . The episode was watched by 833 @, @ 000 people on its first showing , which was 4 @. @ 7 % of the audience . Due in part to her appearance , Edwards was nominated for a " Daffta " award .

= = Production = =

Writers Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith , who had previously worked together on The League of Gentlemen and Psychoville , took inspiration for Inside No. 9 from " David and Maureen " , episode 4 of the first series of Psychoville . This episode , in turn , was inspired by Alfred Hitchcock 's Rope . " David and Maureen " took place entirely in a single room , and was filmed in only two shots . At the same time , the concept of Inside No. 9 was a " reaction " to Psychoville , with Shearsmith saying that " We 'd been so involved with labyrinthine over @-@ arcing , we thought it would be nice to do six different stories with a complete new house of people each week . That 's appealing , because as a viewer you might not like this story , but you 've got a different one next week . " As an anthology series with horror themes , Inside No. 9 also pays homage to Tales of the Unexpected , The Twilight Zone and Alfred Hitchcock Presents .

As the format of Inside No. 9 requires new characters each week , the writers were able to attract actors who may have been unwilling to commit to an entire series . " The Harrowing " starred Aimee Ffion Edwards as Katy , Helen McCrory as Tabitha , Shearsmith as Hector , Poppy Rush as Shell and Sean Buckley as Andras . " The Harrowing " was the only episode in the series in which Pemberton did not star ; Shearsmith played a character in all but " Last Gasp " . Comedy critic Bruce Dessau noted that Shearsmith 's role was actually relatively minor , saying that the house was the real star .

Pemberton and Shearsmith are fans of classic horror films , and the episode displays inspiration from the likes of Alfred Hitchcock 's filmography and the Hammer Horror films . Pemberton called the episode the " most genre " of the series , while Shearsmith described it as their attempt to produce a " full on ... gothic horror @-@ esque " episode . The writers utilised the horror norm of a gothic mansion rather than bringing horror into a normal home . This route , Shearsmith suggested , has now become atypical . The setting allowed the writers to mix modern elements with traditional gothic horror , sometimes for comedic effect (a reference to " something called broadband ") , and sometimes to add to the horror (mobile phones cannot be used , as the characters are in a " dead zone ") . While the writers did want the episode grounded in reality , they also wanted to make more

use of gothic horror tropes than they had in other episodes of Inside No. 9 . " The Harrowing " was advertised with a poster homage to classic horror films . The poster was designed by Graham Humphreys , a graphic designer known for his work on horror film posters . The episode 's name was taken from the Harrowing of Hell , the story of Jesus Christ 's descent to Hell in Christian theology .

The character Katy is initially hired to babysit , though it turns out that there is no baby . Previous horror films , including *When a Stranger Calls* , have made use of a babysitter as a plot device , and an urban legend involves a babysitter downstairs with a threat upstairs . Both the viewer and the babysitter learn about the environment together , with both beginning in a position of ignorance . For Pemberton , the device works because the character has been moved from a safe environment into the unknown . In " The Harrowing " , he suggests , it is obvious that there is something in the bedroom . The writers experimented with different endings , in an attempt to make the bedroom 's contents interesting and genuinely scary .

= = Plot = =

Katy has been hired to take care of Hector and Tabitha 's mansion while the two go out for the evening . They usually never leave the house , but have a rare event to attend . Tabitha greets Katy at the door and explains that the house is always kept at 3 ° C as Hector and Tabitha 's disabled brother , Andras , needs the air to be at this temperature . The paintings on the house 's walls depict the Harrowing of Hell . After meeting Hector , Katy is disturbed by Tabitha 's descriptions of Andras , who , it is claimed , does not have a mouth . He instead keeps a bell , which he never uses , beside his bed . Katy is told not to go upstairs .

Hector and Tabitha leave . Katy is spooked by the house , especially when she finds a stuffed cat on the sofa . She sees an old photograph of Hector , Tabitha and Andras as children , but Andras does not look disabled . Katy 's friend Shell arrives and plays with Hector 's stairlift , sending it upstairs . Katy warns Shell not to break anything , and is startled to see the now @-@ live cat . Katy tries to call her father so she can leave , but the house has no mobile phone signal and the house phone 's party line is tied up . As she prepares to leave , the stairlift returns downstairs and Andras 's bell rings . Katy is scared of going upstairs , but , at Shell 's insistence , the two go to check on him .

Katy and Shell explore and enter Hector 's bedroom , where they find a circle of salt around the bed . They hear the bell again and trace the sound to Andras 's room . When Katy opens the bed 's curtains , Andras 's deformed body is revealed ; he is tied to the bed and gagged . Katy goes to untie him , believing that Hector and Tabitha have kept him prisoner . Shell asks how Andras could have rung the bell if his hands were tied . Hector and Tabitha appear and show that it is they who rang the bell . They quote Dante 's *Inferno* and explain that Hell is cold , as the text says , so the house must be kept refrigerated for Andras . They say he was possessed at age ten by Castiel , demon of mischief , but Castiel needs a new human host every fifty years , and Andras is now dying . Katy was chosen as the next host after a mutual friend at Tabitha and Hector 's church recommended her to them . It is revealed that Shell also attends the church , and she helped them to lure Katy . Shell implies that the church 's members protect the earth from being overrun by demons .

Tabitha and Hector prepare to inject Katy with a sedative , but she fights back . She runs downstairs only to find that the door is locked . Shell arrives and says that Katy cannot escape . Shell says she wanted to be Castiel 's new human host , but she is too weak , whereas Katy has the strength of character needed to keep the demon contained . Shell injects Katy , who collapses . Upstairs , Hector strips Katy and ties her to a chair , while Tabitha feeds Andras his " last supper " : rusks and baby milk , the only food he can manage . Hector , Tabitha and Shell leave Katy to become acquainted with Castiel , who , they say , will possess her as Andras dies . Andras advances on Katy as she screams .

= = Reception = =

Critics variously called " The Harrowing " the " nastiest " , " most Gothic " and most horrific episode of Inside No. 9 . It was described as " unashamedly macabre " by Metro journalists , " genuinely frightening " by David Upton of PopMatters , and " a genuine fright fest " by Dessau . Despite both reviews characterising " The Harrowing " as one of the weaker episodes of the series , it was called " very creepy " in the Liverpool Echo , and the closing scene was described as extremely scary in the Metro . Critics writing for The Sunday Times said that the episode " really is best avoided by those of a nervous disposition " , and the sentiment was echoed in the Cheddar Valley Gazette , where it was suggested that the character of Andras " certainly warranted the warning of disturbing scenes " given before the episode .

Concerning the comedic elements of " The Harrowing " , Sunday Times critics said that " comedy doesn 't come blacker than this " . Jack Seale , of the Radio Times , said that viewers would " marvel at how [the writers could] pepper the elegant script with gags without breaking the spell " . Dessau also felt that the script was " great " , and commented on a " particularly pithy " joke , " just when you least expect it " . Nick Rutherford and Keith Watson , writing for the Metro , downplayed the comedy of the episode , saying that " the odd defiantly bad joke ... pierced the darkness " . They felt that " The Harrowing " was a weak instalment of Inside No. 9 , giving it three out of five stars . The ending , these critics suggested , was " a bit of a cop out " rather than " daring " . For them , unlike in other Inside No. 9 scripts , there was no twist . Alex Hoskins , writing for the Cheddar Valley Gazette , acknowledged that the " ending will most likely have sparked an online outcry " , but felt that " it was fantastic , fearless and a perfect end to [the] series " . Dessau shared a positive view , saying that the series ended " on an absolute high " , with one of his favourite episodes .

= = = Viewership and recognition = = =

" The Harrowing " was watched by 833 @, @ 000 people , which was 4 @. @ 7 % of the audience . This was a recovery from the series low of the previous week 's " The Understudy " , but was fewer viewers than any of the first four episodes . The average viewing figures for the series were 904 @, @ 000 people , or 4 @. @ 9 % of the audience , lower than the slot average of 970 @, @ 000 (5 @. @ 1 % of the audience) .

Due in part to her appearance in the episode , Edwards was shortlisted for WalesOnline 's " Daffta " award for best actress , but lost in the public vote to Eve Myles . For Hallowe 'en 2014 , ezine Den of Geek listed " 31 scary TV episodes that truly terrified us " . Phoebe @- @ Jane Boyd selected " The Harrowing " , commenting on its divergence from previous episodes of Inside No. 9 and the clash of humour and horror tropes . Describing the character of Andras , she explained that " Seeing him jerkily moving towards [Katy] with glee , hissing ' mischief ' ... ' straight into camera , is shocking , unexpected , and above all , just horrible . " " The Harrowing " , particularly its final scene , was selected as Empire Online 's 17th greatest television moment of 2014 . " Though there are dark laughs in the episode " , it was claimed on the website , " the ending is pure nightmare fodder , the babysitter helpless as a Castiel @- @ possessed man advances , hissing , ' Mischief ! ' Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith , we both salute you and request you contribute to our therapy bills " .