

= Sardines ( Inside No. 9 ) =

" Sardines " is the first episode of British dark comedy anthology series Inside No. 9 . Written by Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith , it premiered on BBC Two and BBC Two HD on 5 February 2014 . The episode features a stand @-@ alone plot revolving around a group of adults , who are non @-@ recurring characters , playing sardines at an engagement party . Rebecca , the bride @-@ to @-@ be , finds a boring man named Ian in a wardrobe ; he introduces himself as a colleague of Jeremy , Rebecca 's fiancé . The pair are subsequently joined by family , friends and colleagues of Rebecca and Jeremy . As more people enter the room and step into the wardrobe , secrets shared by some of the characters are revealed , with various allusions to incestuous relationships , child sexual abuse and adultery . The humour is both dark and British , with references to past unhappiness and polite but awkward interactions .

The story takes place entirely in the bedroom of a country house , with much of the filming taking place inside the wardrobe . Pemberton and Shearsmith wrote the episode with the intention of evoking a feeling of claustrophobia in viewers . In addition to the writers , the episode starred Katherine Parkinson , Tim Key , Luke Pasqualino , Ophelia Lovibond , Anne Reid , Julian Rhind @-@ Tutt , Anna Chancellor , Marc Wootton , Ben Willbond and Timothy West . The cast and writing were praised by television critics , and the episode was chosen as pick of the day in a number of publications . On its first showing , " Sardines " was watched by 1 @. @ 1 million viewers , which was 5 @. @ 6 % of the audience .

= = Development and 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 , which was in turn inspired by Alfred Hitchcock 's Rope . " David and Maureen " took place entirely in a single room , and it was filmed in only two shots . The writers were keen to explore other stories in this bottle episode or TV play format , and Inside No. 9 allowed them to do this . 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 . "

The format of the series also pays homage to Tales of the Unexpected , The Twilight Zone and Alfred Hitchcock Presents . Pemberton and Shearsmith returned to writing more macabre stories , according to the latter , as they " always feel slightly unfulfilled if [ they ] write something that 's purely comedic , it just feels too frivolous and light " . During the filming of " Sardines " , Shearsmith professed excitement to be working on Inside No. 9 , saying that " being in the middle of filming a third series of Psychoville would be utterly depressing " . Pemberton and Shearsmith aimed for a simpler experience than Psychoville , describing " Sardines " by saying the episode is " just about some good actors in a wardrobe with a good story " . As each episode of Inside No. 9 features new characters , the writers were able to attract actors who might have been unwilling to commit to an entire series . In addition to Pemberton and Shearsmith , " Sardines " starred Katherine Parkinson , Tim Key , Luke Pasqualino , Ophelia Lovibond , Anne Reid , Julian Rhind @-@ Tutt , Anna Chancellor , Marc Wootton , Ben Willbond and Timothy West . West had previously starred in Tales of the Unexpected , and Shearsmith said that , due to this prior appearance , " it was a great nod " to have West in the episode . " Sardines " has more characters than any other episode of the first series , and these characters were written before casting took place . Pemberton recalls the fun he had in selecting a cast for the episode , aiming to bring together a very varied group of actors who would work well as a group .

Pemberton described the concept of " Sardines " as " a simple idea " , and he was happy that the pair did not " have to worry about the consequences of it " , due to the format of the series . The writers were inspired by a large wardrobe in their workspace . They had already written several

other episodes for the series , and confinement was a recurring theme ; the possibility of putting characters into a wardrobe gave them the opportunity to develop the theme to a more extreme level . The story was not initially about the game of sardines . Pemberton said that the writers " talked about various ideas of why [ the characters ] were in a wardrobe " , but that the pair " were certainly not working out [ their ] Freudian psychobabble " . A list of characters was written before the script , and the script included the introduction of a new character every three pages .

" Sardines " was written so that a feeling of claustrophobia would develop as the story progressed ; Pemberton said that " our first consideration was , ' Can we get 12 people in a wardrobe ? ' So when we did the script read @-@ through , the designer bought a wardrobe off eBay and we checked whether we could all get in it and shut the door " . Writers for Broadcast described seeing the assortment of actors " crammed inside an imposing wardrobe " during filming as " an arresting spectacle " . The story is filmed from within a single bedroom , with much of it taking place inside the wardrobe . Filming presented a particular challenge , as the aim was to give the impression that the viewer was in the wardrobe with the characters , and not to " cheat " by giving the impression that the viewer was outside the wardrobe looking in . The episode was filmed with two wardrobes ; one complete one , and one " faked " one . The complete prop was used to film the characters entering the wardrobe , while the other was in a different room for close @-@ up shots from " within " the wardrobe . For director David Kerr , the difficulty was sustaining the illusion that everything was happening in a single place , ideally without viewers even realising that there was a technical challenge involved . The episode was filmed mostly in sequence , meaning more actors arrived as the filming continued , reflecting the fact that more characters arrive as the episode progresses . Kerr aimed for a particularly " immersive " filming style on the episode , with extensive use of wide angle shots . He aimed to avoid " leading " the audience with regards to the more important characters , by , for instance , " not giving [ them ] coverage " earlier in the episode .

= = Plot = =

Rebecca and Jeremy host their engagement party at Rebecca 's family 's stately home . The guests play the parlour game sardines , a variation of hide @-@ and @-@ seek in which one person hides and the other players have to join them in their hiding place once they are found . Rebecca finds Ian ( who works with Jeremy ) in a bedroom wardrobe . As they wait for more people to arrive , Ian mistakenly calls her " Rachel " . A young man , Lee , enters the room but does not find the pair , though they are later found and joined by Rebecca 's prudish brother Carl , and then Carl 's flamboyant partner Stuart . Jeremy 's ex @-@ girlfriend Rachel finds the group and joins them . Ian mentions that Jeremy frequently talks about " you " , but it is unclear whether he is talking to Rebecca or Rachel . To Rebecca 's annoyance , Stuart , Rachel and Ian briefly leave the wardrobe for a break . Stuart enters the en suite where Geraldine is sat on the toilet . In the wardrobe , Carl and Rebecca talk ; the former is uncomfortable , and , when Rebecca asks why , he tells her to " look where we are " .

Ian , Rachel and Geraldine join Rebecca and Carl . Geraldine says that the room is normally locked , but Rebecca rebukes her . Stuart rejoins the group after using the toilet . As the group talk , Mark and his wife , Liz , enter the bedroom , unaware of the people hiding in the wardrobe . The pair talk candidly before beginning foreplay and lying down on the bed . Geraldine shouts to alert them , and those in the wardrobe pretend they did not hear Mark and Liz 's conversation . Mark and Liz reluctantly enter the wardrobe . As the doors close , Rachel 's boyfriend Lee enters the room , but as the wardrobe has become more cramped , Stuart and Lee hide under the bed and Ian moves to the en suite bathroom . Stuart and Carl argue , and it is revealed that Carl has a fear of intimacy . When " Stinky " John enters the room , both those in the wardrobe and under the bed claim there is no room , so he hides behind a curtain . Jeremy enters the room and tells Rebecca he is going to pick up another guest from the train station , but as he turns to leave he mistakenly calls her " Rachel " . Andrew , Rebecca 's father , enters and becomes annoyed when he sees people hiding in different places . He forces Jeremy , Stuart , Lee and Stinky John into the wardrobe with everyone else and follows them in .

The people in the wardrobe are uncomfortable , not least because of John 's odour . Geraldine passes around mints as Andrew tells Mark that he no longer has contact with Dicky Lawrence , a potential business contact of Mark 's . Andrew sings the " sardine song " , but Carl angrily stops him . Andrew and Geraldine reminisce about a scout jamboree held in the house many years ago , but Geraldine remembers that a boy named Phillip Harrison , nicknamed " Little Pip " , said Andrew did " terrible things " , and that the police were involved . Carl says how Andrew paid Pip 's family to move away , and Andrew counters by claiming he did nothing to Pip and was only teaching him how to wash himself . Carl implies that he and John were not as lucky as Pip , and John says he can smell carbolic soap . There is silence , and Stuart points out no one else is looking for them , but they realise Ian has not yet returned from the bathroom . Jeremy says Ian is the person he was going to pick up from the station , but when Mark claims Ian is already at the party , Jeremy reveals the person Mark is referring to is not Ian . Outside , " Ian " locks the wardrobe and sprays it with lighter fluid while singing the sardine song . Carl realises Ian is actually Phillip , and the episode ends with Phillip leaning against the wardrobe , a lighter in his hand .

= = Cast = =

= = Analysis = =

The episode is , in effect , a one @-@ scene , one @-@ act , play . Writing in The Times , Andrew Billen observed that Aristotle " ruled that plays should take place over a single day in a single place " , while " Sardines " takes place " over half an hour in a single wardrobe " . The use of the wardrobe is reminiscent of Beckettian absurd theatre , and presented particular cinematographic challenges . For Ryan Lambie , writing for entertainment website Den of Geek , the single @-@ camera setup and Kerr 's direction gave the episode " the tense look of an early Hitchcock film , all low angles and illuminating shafts of light " .

The characters bring their respective agendas , relationships and backstories into the wardrobe . The various interconnected plotlines are seeded towards the start of the episode , and more is gradually revealed before they are resolved . " Sardines " starts as comedic , before becoming darker ; as more characters arrive , their relatively cordial interactions become more unpleasant . The increasingly claustrophobic environment serves to heighten the tension .

The comedy is black , with the most overt humour coming from Stuart , a flamboyant character played by Shearsmith . The humour is also extremely British . Tropes of Britishness identified by PopMatters critic David Upton include the dated clothing , and interaction between Katherine and Tim at the start of the episode . Despite not knowing each other , they converse courteously , which " smacks of more refined days " ; the conversation is a " portrayal of social awkwardness " . With the introduction of the noticeably younger Lee , there is a clash of customs , illustrating the differing norms of the respective generations . This " 1940s aesthetic " and the fact the story took place in a single location tied the episode to " a golden age of plays on British television " . Broadcaster and writer Mark Radcliffe felt that the script " could be a really arresting stage play " .

As is typical of Shearsmith and Pemberton 's work , " Sardines " addresses dark topics . Writing in The Daily Telegraph , Paul Kendall identified some of Shearsmith and Pemberton 's " regular tropes " utilised in the episode ; namely " a bunch of misfits , uncomfortable silences and allusions to dark crimes in the distant past " . Billen felt that the treatment of dark issues was reminiscent of the work of Alan Ayckbourn . Particular themes addressed in the episode include murder , incestuous relationships , child sexual abuse , vengeance and adultery . As the episode progresses , secrets related to these themes are revealed to be the explanation for apparently innocuous tendencies , such as Carl 's dislike for the sardine song and John 's aversion to soap .

= = Reception = =

" Sardines " was well received by television critics . Kendall , Billen , Keith Watson and Dan Owen ,

writing for The Daily Telegraph , the Metro , MSN and The Times , respectively , all gave the episode four out of five stars , while , writing for The Arts Desk , Veronica Lee gave it five out of five . The episode was labelled " pick of the day " in The Times , The Sunday Times , The Observer and the Daily Record .

Reviewers responded positively to the cast . Kendall described the acting as " top notch " and Owen said that all cast members " played their roles to perfection " , while Jane Simon , writing for The Daily Mirror , said that " every twinge of awkwardness and discomfort is played to perfection as the mood turns darker " . Harry Venning , writing for The Stage , described the cast as " impressively stellar " , and also commended the writers ' performances . Comedy critic Bruce Dessau said that the " cast alone is almost recommendation enough " , while another reviewer said that if " a bomb dropped on the cupboard where they were hiding , a good portion of the acting talent in this country would be wiped out . " Key 's portrayal of Ian and Parkinson 's portrayal of Rebecca were particularly praised .

Journalists also lauded the script , with Kendall labelling the dialogue " perfectly pitched " , Dessau calling it " tightly written " and without wastage , and Owen praising the way each character was " delivered into the story at the exact right moment " . Brad Newsome , writing for The Sydney Morning Herald ( the episode having been shown in Australia on BBC First in 2015 ) , said that the episode was " deftly written " , and Venning said the " lean , mean narrative didn 't just twist and turn , it folded back upon itself to provide a totally unexpected , profoundly disturbing and deeply satisfying denouement " . On The Arts Desk , Lee praised the direction of Kerr , saying that he delivered " a pitch perfect piece with no character overwritten or line overplayed " .

Dean , writing for The Independent , commended the writers ' " weaving together of the morbid with the laugh out loud " , and Mike Bradley , writing in The Observer , called the episode " wickedly funny " ; similarly , Newsome said the episode displayed " a wicked sense of humour " . Dessau concurred on the darkness and quality of humour . Watson was more ambivalent , saying the episode offered " more of a knowing chuckle than an outright belly laugh " .

Watson wrote that " the chief joy [ of the episode ] was the stealthy way the atmospheric story was built up layer by layer " . In The Times , Billen described " Sardines " as " a disciplined comedy , but a little bit of discipline , as one of the League 's perverts might say , never did anyone any harm " . With the exception of the ending , Billen " loved it " . A separate review in The Times , however , praised the twist ending ; " this isn 't just an inspired set up performed by a stellar cast ? it builds to a macabre and horribly imagined climax . " Owen was ambivalent about the ending of " Sardines " , saying that it " worked very well in terms of narrative , but perhaps it landed with too much softness " . Mark Jones , writing in The Guardian , gave a more mixed review overall , describing " Sardines " as a " slow burner , but a decent introduction to a series " . Newsome called the episode a " gem of an opener " .

= = = Viewing figures = = =

On its first showing , " Sardines " was seen by 1 .1 million viewers , which was 5 .6 % of the British audience . This was lower than the premiere of Psychoville , but higher than the audience towards the end of the second series . " Sardines " immediately followed the first episode of the two part Royal Cousins at War , a BBC documentary . This had stronger viewing figures , with 2 million viewers ( 8 .6 % of the audience ) . Nonetheless , " Sardines " was more highly viewed than is typical for the slot . Despite this strong start for the series , the viewing figures for Inside No. 9 later dipped ; the average viewing for the series was 904 ,000 people , or 4 .9 % of the audience , lower than the slot average of 970 ,000 ( 5 .1 % of the audience ) .