

**Liam Bradley reviews homelessness film
“The Insatiable Moon”**

On 18th October, in an event sponsored by the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust, a preview screening of ‘The Insatiable Moon’ was held at Cineworld in Birmingham. The film, set in New Zealand, centres on the story of a Maori man named Arthur, a former psychiatric patient who is resident in a community care hostel. Arthur proclaims himself to be the Second Son of God who is destined to father a child with the ‘Queen of Heaven’; this thought-provoking depiction of mental health holds nothing back in its honesty and, perhaps, its controversy. Without giving too much away, ‘The Insatiable Moon’ documents the developing relationship between Arthur and a social worker called Margaret, whom he believes is his ‘Queen’. This complex scenario is played out against the backdrop of Arthur’s hostel being threatened with closure due to the pressure of a somewhat vicious media frenzy. Rather than emphasise Arthur’s mental health issues, however, this crisis effectively draws out his essentially human compassion, highlighted through his efforts to defend the hostel and his fellow residents and his unquestioning forgiveness of the hostel’s opponents.

The religious themes of the film may not suit everyone’s taste, yet certain scenes are equally as likely to offend the pious, particularly an adulterous liaison between Arthur and his ‘Queen’, tastefully shot though it may be. Ultimately, though, such issues should not have an impact on the overriding theme, as Arthur’s story serves as a powerful reminder that it is often more rewarding to celebrate difference than to accentuate it. The film’s

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portrayal of Arthur and his fellow residents, and its treatment of the delicate issue of mental health, is refreshingly honest. Arthur's apparent holiness is approached with a deliberate ambiguity, which challenges the viewer to question their own perceptions of mental health and homelessness. As screenwriter Mike Riddell has said, 'everyone is a little bit mad and a little bit sane'.

After enduring over ten years of funding problems and filming issues, (James Nesbitt and Timothy Spall were originally lined up as the film's big names) 'The Insatiable Moon' has emerged as a wonderfully engrossing piece of cinema. It lacks the glitz and the star attraction of Hollywood, and was shot in five weeks on a relatively low budget of just under half a million dollars, with a cast and crew wholly native to New Zealand. Far from being shortcomings, however, these details reinforce the sometimes gritty but often upliftingly honest account of what it means to be marginalised in a modern society, lending the film an aura of authenticity rarely found in high-budget, sentimental Hollywood productions. 'The Insatiable Moon' will make you think, make you talk, make you laugh and – yes – may even make you cry, but most importantly it will make you seriously consider the issues of mental health and homelessness, challenging your own perceptions as well as those of society. William West, a service user who attended the preview screening in Birmingham with SIFA Fireside's Carole Fox, 'would recommend that anyone who has ever worked with or been affected by mental health or homelessness, and the vast majority of the general public, should see this film; it will take you on an emotional journey through the twists and turns of an unseen world'.