

The low-budget but endlessly inventive *Doctor Who* owes its existence to an even more pioneering television creation, *Quatermass*. With both series poised to return, Sinclair McKay traces the history of this homegrown sci-fi, while Matthew Sweet provides the definitive *Doctor Who* A-Z

A tale of British boffins

British manned space flights; an insidious threat from outer space; a man mutating into an evil alien, his human consciousness being eaten away; and a scientist – utterly anti-Establishment, courageous and cerebral – the only man who can fight it. No, not *Doctor Who*, but his highly distinguished predecessor, Prof Bernard Quatermass, who, by pleasing coincidence, is also about to return to the BBC after a very long time.

To those of a certain (very certain) age, the name Quatermass alone evokes an enjoyable nostalgic shudder. Through the 1950s, Nigel Kneale's creation, the head of the British Rocket Group, featured in three six-part serials that were so fantastically popular that they emptied the streets.

After *The Quatermass Experiment* in 1953, the professor faced, in *Quatermass 2*, mind-controlling, oil-refinery-based gas creatures that were insinuating their way into Whitehall (sounds all too familiar). Then, in 1958, came the best-remembered and, to many, scariest story of them all, *Quatermass and the Pit*. In this, an archaeological dig in London uncovers an age-old spaceship containing petrified locust-like Martians, but also an explanation for ghosts, poltergeist activity and, indeed, our belief in the Devil. Kneale summed up the three serials succinctly: they're out there, they're already here, they've been here millions of years. But the book also resonated heavily, and played on Cold War fears.

In terms of television technique, the professor also proved to be something of a pioneer. This, of course, was the very dawn of TV and despite the complex, clever nature of Kneale's scripts and the special effects, the first shows in 1953 were performed and broadcast live from Alexandra Palace.

Early next month, there will be a full-scale recreation of these skilled techniques when *The Quatermass Experiment* is adapted and remade for BBC4, again performed and broadcast live. The cast includes Jason Flemyng as Quatermass himself, together with Mark Gatiss and Isla Blair. It is part of BBC4's forthcoming week-long TV on Trial season when viewers will get the chance to vote on what they consider to be the finest era of television. For aficionados of British sci-fi, there could only be one choice. Kneale's creation paved the way not only for *Doctor Who*, but also *Blake's Seven* and the cryptic spookiness of ITV's *Sapphire and Steel*.

"The original *Quatermass*, broadcast live, was truly iconic," says *Experiment* producer Richard Fell. "We're doing this over two hours. It's an adaptation of Kneale's original six-episode serial. Plot and character remain intact but we have brought the science up to



date. Kneale has been a consultant on this show; I think he's really pleased."

One break with tradition is the casting of Flemyng in the lead. Quatermass, whether played by Reginald Tate or Andre Morell, had the authority of age. Not to mention an RP accent so absurdly sharp you could slice a lemon with it. "We have to bring a different stamp to it," says Fell. "Quatermass is an adventurer, he has charisma and brain power. In fact, you can see a line running through him and many other British heroes. He shares elements with both Sherlock Holmes and Ellen MacArthur."

That charisma and anti-Establishment mind-set were transferred in 1963 to *Doctor Who*, his spiritual successor. Though pitched at children, this series bore many of the same characteristics, infusing sci-fi with a gothic aspect. Both these shows were often less Isaac Asimov and more Mary Shelley. In *Quatermass*, the fate of Victor Caroon – Quatermass's astronaut, brought back to Earth with an alien infection, who soon becomes a haunted wasteland-dwelling fugitive – has very strong echoes of *Frankenstein*. At the climax of *Quatermass and the Pit*, a vast flickering image of a horned demon hovers in the night sky over London. In the second serial of *Doctor Who*, the doctor's companion, Barbara, is pursued through a weird, deserted alien citadel by something unseen by us but clearly so appalling that her scream echoes over the closing music. It is, of course, a Dalek.

The notion that sci-fi could be low-key and unsettling ensured the doctor's longevity. But the rebellious

spirit of Quatermass reached out further. In 1978, the crew of *Blake's Seven* took off into space, taking a stand against proto-fascist aliens across the galaxy, in what sounded like a spaceship with wooden floors. This was the golden age of the quarry location, when actors in spangled costumes ran around pretending to fire space weapons at each other just outside of Reigate. But the anti-Establishment theme prevailed. In those days, when you could get a convincing laser beam for neither love nor money, the only alternative was robust and gaudy scripting.

Kneale remains the spiritual godfather of this kind of fantasy TV, where the humans are more important than the hardware. He demonstrated that simply by concentrating on strong characterisation and tight structure, you could conjure horrors rather more potent than any big-budget technicolour effort could do. In doing so, he ushered in a highly distinctive age of British sci-fi.

Not that the original *Experiment* did not have its unintended *Acorn Antiques* moments. With hindsight, the idea of having the mutated astronaut monster take over Westminster Abbey was a touch ambitious for 1953. "Nigel showed me how they did that," says Fell. "They had a large photo of Poets' Corner with a hole cut into it. Through this hole they stuck a hand – Nigel's – enveloped in a glove with greenery and twigs and things stuck to it. And all Nigel had to do was twitch this hand. We'll have a monster in our production, but it will be rather more sophisticated than that."

The Quatermass Experiment will be broadcast April 2 at 8.20pm BBC4

Iconic: The Quatermass Experiment, 1953, starring, from left, Reginald Tate as Prof Quatermass, Duncan Lamont as Victor Caroon (under helmet), Isabel Dean as Judith Caroon, Moray Watson as Peter Marsh and Thorp Devereux as Blaker



With hindsight, the idea of having the mutated astronaut monster take over Westminster Abbey was a touch ambitious

THE A-Z OF DOCTOR WHO

A Autons
Switch on the first episode of the new *Doctor Who* and you'll see the return of one of the old series' most unusual monsters: a race of aliens formed from sentient plastic. Jon Pertwee encountered the Autons as inflatable plastic armchairs, killer gonks, lethal artificial daffodils and murderous window dummies in kipper ties and Stayprist slacks. The new Doctor, Christopher Eccleston, will do battle with psychotic Auton wheeble bins.

B Baker, Tom
Recently voted the greatest Doctor of them all. In his heyday, a goggle-eyed bohemian with a thing for jelly babies. Now a white-haired gentleman who loves to boast of his power to make elderly bosoms tingle with the memory of the children who used them as a place to hide from the Cybermen. Also known for saying very rude things on the soundtrack of Little Britain.

C Cardiff
The Doctor's new production base. Doubles very nicely for contemporary London and any number of creature-filled alien planets. Welsh persons of restricted growth who don't mind being encased in rubber are said to be cooling it.

D Davies, Russell T
The executive producer and chief writer of the new shiny, breathlessly fast Doctor Who. His appointment was no surprise to anyone who saw his series *Queer as Folk* – the only TV drama in which the romantic climax is a love-test involving naming all the Doctors. In order, William Hartnell, Patrick Troughton, Jon Pertwee, Tom Baker, Peter Davison, Colin Baker and Sylvester McCoy, should you ever find yourself in this position.)

Also, of course, **Daleks**
Not robots, but gruesome little mutants who gad about in metal travel machines. Being hideously ugly, it's very important for them to dress well: the Daleks in the new series sport a chunky gold look. Much more bling than their old gun-metal grey livery.

E Eccleston, Christopher
The latest Doctor – leather trenchcoat, black t-shirt, sticky-out ears, toothy grin, Salford accent, doesn't stay still for a second.

F Fanboys
Men who understand the following words and phrases: Cartmel Masterplan, Divergent Universe, Sinister Silthers of Strikk. Approach with caution.

G Grade, Michael
The Doctor's arch-enemy, who signed the show's death warrant in 1986 by halving the number of episodes in a season. Now he's back at the BBC, and the return of *Doctor Who* is the media event of the year. Cigars all round.



ALL PICTURES © BBC
 Timetravellers: (clockwise from top left) the alien Mox of Balhoon; the Doctor (Christopher Eccleston) and Rose (Billie Piper); an original Dalek; Tom Baker; the gratted Doctor of them all; and the space-time vortex

H Home Counties

The magnet for alien invasions, Daleks favour Bedfordshire, Axons are keener on Kent. This series, the action is moving to Dyfed and Anglesey.

I Internet

This is where closely guarded details about the new series of *Doctor Who* (and one entire episode) have mysteriously appeared before the show's transmission on BBC One. Time travel is clearly possible.

J Jacobi, Sir Derek

He is among the actors to have played the Doctor in audio dramas, webcasts and TV comedy sketches since the BBC sent the Tardis into oblivion. David Warner, Richard E Grant, Hugh Grant, Joanna Lumley, Arabella Weir, Rowan Atkinson and Jim Broadbent have also had a bash at being Gallifreyan.

K Kam, Sisterhood of

A club for gay *Doctor Who* fans, named after some mystic ladies in floppy frocks from *The Brain of Morbius* (1976). The *Doctor Who* universe has always been a little pink: the 1973 story "Carnival of Monsters" reveals that on the planet of the Lurmans, the population speaks 1950s gay Polari like Julian and Sandy on *Round the Horne*. Fantabuloso!

L Lambert, Verity

The first producer of *Doctor Who*, who was told by her superior, Sydney Newman, "no bug-eyed monsters".

M McGann, Paul

Star of the 1996 attempt to relaunch the series as an American co-production. His prediction that he would become "the George Lazenby of *Doctor Who*" would seem to have come true.

N "No, not the Mind Probe!"

Exclaimed by a character in "The Five Doctors" (1983), and thought to be the most melodramatic line in the history of *Doctor Who*. So celebrated that a fanzine used it as a title.

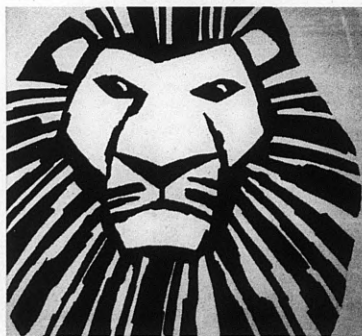
O Outing

Now *Doctor Who* seems to be – gulp – cool, fashionable fans are leaping from the closet: Liz Hurley, Rob Lowe, Stephen Poliakoff, Slipknot and, er, Tim Collins, Torry transport spokesman.

P Piper, Billie

Chris Evans's former consort is the Doctor's new companion, Rose – and unlike in the old days, the show is focused as much on her character as the Time Lord's. The tabloids have applauded this recognition that things have moved on since 1963, which is why they've printed so many photographs of her in her knickers.

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'It's properly scary and funny'

Mark Gatiss, the gothic family butcher in *The League of Gentlemen*, is a *Doctor Who* fan turned scriptwriter. He talks to David Derbyshire

As one quarter of *The League of Gentlemen*, the creator of the most famous twitch in television in *Nighty Night*, and former script editor of *Little Britain*, Mark Gatiss has made a career out of blending the grotesque with the surreally comic. His characters – the family butcher who offers customers nosebleed-inducing “special stuff” or the James Herriot-style vet who unwittingly brings death with every housecall – are rooted in the darkest recesses of British gothic horror.

So it should come as no surprise to discover that Gatiss's contribution to the new *Doctor*

Who is on the dark side. His story is a Victorian gothic horror set in an undertakers, featuring Simon Callow as Charles Dickens.

“They are having problems with the cadavers, which won't stay dead,” says Gatiss, 38, a lifelong *Doctor Who* fan. “It is quite unusual for a Saturday evening family show to feature Victorian zombies. It's very blackly comic, which is my favourite form. But at the same time I had to be true to what I think *Doctor Who* is, in that it's properly scary and properly funny.”

Along with Russell T Davies, the writer of *Queer as Folk*, *The Second Coming* and the current

BBC3 drama *Casanova*, Gatiss was one of a clutch of writers who kept *Doctor Who* alive during the “wilderness years” of the 1990s by writing audio dramas, videos and books. When Davies was given the go-ahead to bring back the series after 16 years (not counting a critically derided 1996 television movie), he asked Gatiss to write episode three.

“I've always wanted to do it,” says Gatiss. “I've written four *Doctor Who* books, but writing for the series itself is an itch I've never scratched. I was also aware of a sense of responsibility to fans of the series, as well as the joy that comes from being in at the new beginning.”

Along with most fans, Gatiss believes the golden era of *Doctor Who* was in the mid-1970s, when Tom Baker's goggle-eyed character was married with chilling, gothic stories. The producer at the time, Philip Hinchcliffe, and script editor Robert Holmes plundered Universal, Hammer horror and 1950s B-movies. Plots of *Frankenstein*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *The Beast With Five Fingers*, *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Forbidden Planet* were raided, while murderous ventriloquist dummies and giant rats kept Mary Whitehouse busy filing letters to the BBC.

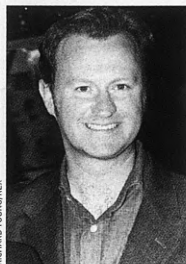
Gatiss believes that the gothic tradition which surfaces in *Doctor Who*, *Hammer*, *Quatermass* and *The League of Gentlemen* runs deep through British horror and science fiction. Part of that tradition is to place the exotic in the familiar world. Brian Stoker's *Dracula* may be chilling in Transylvania, but he is terrifying in Yorkshire.

The new series is almost entirely set on Earth. The first episode recreates one of the most famous *Doctor Who* scenes, from the 1970 Jon Pertwee debut in which shop dummies turn into moving killing machines.

“Someone recently said to me that *Doctor Who*'s skill is a kind of gothic surrealism,” says Gatiss. “It's more frightening to see shop dummies come to life. Your familiar, ordered life is suddenly thrown into this grotesquery.”

The revamped *Doctor Who* has kept the balance of humour and horror from the original (another writer is Steven Moffat, creator of the BBC2 sitcom *Coupling*). In the opening episode, Christopher Eccleston's Doctor flicks through *Heat* magazine and mutters: “It'll never work. He's gay. She's an alien.” And the most memorable scene sees the boyfriend of his assistant, Rose, devoured by a deadly belching wheeie bin.

Gatiss was under no instructions to tone down the humour in the episode he wrote, but stresses that the show is not a comedy. Future stories, featuring hospital wards of sinister patients in gas masks,



Blackly comic: Mark Gatiss

“If you are at the right age and you see someone being devoured by a wheeie bin, you'll be terrified of wheeie bins for years”

are expected to push the boundaries of family viewing to their limits.

While there are no plans for *The League of Gentlemen* to return to television, a *League* feature film (described by Gatiss as “*Blood on Satan's Claw* meets *Bambi*”) opens in June. Next month Gatiss stars in the live recreation of the original *Quatermass* serial. Because only two episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment* were recorded, it will be the first time the Nigel Kneale's drama has been seen since 1953 (see feature on previous page).

“He is an extraordinarily prescient writer. In *The Year of the Sex Olympics*, which he wrote in 1968, he imagined a world of *Big Brother* reality TV, and everything he thought about is now our staple TV diet.

Quatermass has been justly recognised as the founding father of TV science fiction. “There is also talk of another series of *Doctor Who*,” says Gatiss, “although the BBC have yet to commission it. The format is so terrific. People have asked whether it's still relevant, but of course it is. If you are living in an estate in Swindon and you watch a programme in which a wheeie bin eats someone, if you are the right age you will be frightened of your wheeie bin the way that I was frightened of tailors' dummies for years. Suddenly you find a little door has opened into an imaginative world. That's the joy of this programme.”

The new series of *Doctor Who* starts next Saturday at 7pm on BBC1.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Quillam

Character from the Colin Baker story “Vengeance on Varos” (1985), awarded Doctor Who's campiest line – “I want to hear you scream until I'm deaf with pleasure!” Hurray!

Radiophonic Workshop

Responsible for the timeless collage of noise that is the *Doctor Who* theme. Imagine listening to it for the first time. Would you be able to tell whether it was composed 40 years ago or yesterday? Delia Derbyshire is the woman responsible: a pioneering genius who left the BBC and ended up working for the gas board.

Sofa, behind the

Best place for viewing *Doctor Who*, if an old lady's bosoms are unavailable.

Tardis-like

Term used by estate agents to describe any flat that appears to be bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. Can only be used accurately about properties boasting a swimming pool, cloister, library, boot cupboard and food machine dispensing Mars bars that taste of bacon and eggs.



Unfolding Text, The

1980s academic textbook containing musings on the “semiotic thickness” of *Doctor Who* – so funny that it was quoted in the Sylvester McCoy story “*Dragonfire*” (1987).

Vortex, space-time

That swirling tunnel you can still see in the *Doctor Who* title sequence.

WOTAN

Evil supercomputer in the Post Office tower which (in “The War Machines”, 1966) had a cunning plan to link itself up to every other computer in the world, forming a vast telecommunications web with which it hoped to control the world. Wonder what happened to that idea?

Xerophytes

Race of villainous cacti from the planet Zolfa Thura, seen in the story “Meglos” (1980), and a stark warning for any actor taking on the part of *Doctor Who*: you may be required to be covered in green paint and have your face and hands painted with cactus spines.

Yeti

Jon Pertwee said that finding one sitting on a loo in Tooting Bec was the most terrifying image he could imagine. In the *Doctor Who* universe, these creatures were not shy Himalayan beasts but the hairy root pawns of the Great Intelligence – and therefore clearly not good company in the gents.

REUTERS



Z Zaroff, Professor

Mad scientist with a plan to blow up the planet by draining the Atlantic into the Earth's core. Catchphrase: “Nuzznik in de vurd can stop me now!” Unlikely to be making a return in the new series.

Matthew Sweet

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