

= The Quatermass Experiment =

The Quatermass Experiment is a British science @-@ fiction serial broadcast by BBC Television during the summer of 1953 and re @-@ staged by BBC Four in 2005 . Set in the near future against the background of a British space programme , it tells the story of the first manned flight into space , supervised by Professor Bernard Quatermass of the British Experimental Rocket Group . When the spaceship that carried the first successful crew returns to Earth , two of the three astronauts are missing , and the third is behaving strangely . It becomes apparent that an alien presence entered the ship during its flight , and Quatermass and his associates must prevent the alien from destroying the world .

Originally comprising six half @-@ hour episodes , it was the first science @-@ fiction production to be written especially for an adult television audience in Britain . Previous written @-@ for @-@ television efforts such as Stranger from Space (1951 ? 52) were aimed at children , whereas adult entries into the genre were adapted from literary sources , such as R.U.R. (1938 and again in 1948) and The Time Machine (1949) . The serial was the first of four Quatermass productions to be screened on British television between 1953 and 1979 , and was transmitted live from the BBC 's original television studios at Alexandra Palace in London , one of the final productions before BBC television drama moved to west London .

As well as spawning various remakes and sequels , The Quatermass Experiment inspired much of the television science fiction that succeeded it , particularly in the United Kingdom , where it influenced successful series such as Doctor Who and Sapphire and Steel . It also influenced successful Hollywood films such as 2001 : A Space Odyssey and Alien .

= = Production = =

The serial was written by BBC television drama writer Nigel Kneale , who had been an actor and an award @-@ winning fiction writer before joining the BBC . The BBC 's Head of Television Drama , Michael Barry , had committed most of his original script budget for the year to employing Kneale . An interest in science , particularly the idea of ' science going bad ' , led Kneale to write The Quatermass Experiment . The project originated when a gap formed in the BBC 's schedules for a six @-@ week serial to run on Saturday nights during the summer of 1953 , and Kneale 's idea was to fill it with " a mystifying , rather than horrific " storyline .

Rudolph Cartier , one of the BBC 's best @-@ regarded directors , directed the serial . He and Kneale had collaborated on the play Arrow to the Heart , and worked closely on the initial storyline to make it suit the television production methods of the time . Kneale claimed to have picked his leading character 's unusual last name at random from a London telephone directory . He chose the character 's first name , Bernard , in honour of astronomer Bernard Lovell . The working titles for the production were The Unbegotten and Bring Something Back ... ! , the latter a line of dialogue in the second episode . Kneale had not finished scripting the final two episodes of the serial before the first episode was transmitted . The production had an overall budget of just under £ 4000 . The theme music used was " Mars , Bringer of War " from Gustav Holst 's The Planets .

Each episode was rehearsed from Monday to Friday at the Student Movement House on Gower Street in London , with camera rehearsals taking place all day on Saturday before transmission . The episodes were then transmitted live ? with a few pre @-@ filmed 35mm film inserts shot before and during the rehearsal period ? from Studio A of the BBC 's original television studios at Alexandra Palace in London . It was one of the last major dramas to be broadcast from the Palace , as the majority of television production was soon to transfer to Lime Grove Studios , and it was made using the BBC 's oldest television cameras , the Emitrons , installed with the opening of the Alexandra Palace studios in 1936 . These cameras gave a (by modern standards) poor @-@ quality picture , with areas of black and white shading across portions of the image .

The Quatermass Experiment was transmitted weekly on Saturday night from 18 July to 22 August 1953 . Episode one (" Contact Has Been Established ") was scheduled from 8 @.@ 15 to 8 @.@ 45 p.m. ; episode two (" Persons Reported Missing ") , 8 @.@ 25 ? 8 @.@ 55 p.m. ; episodes

three and four (" Very Special Knowledge " and " Believed to be Suffering ") , 8 @.@ 45 ? 9 @.@ 15 p.m. ; and the final two episodes (" An Unidentified Species " and " State of Emergency ") from 9 @.@ 00 to 9 @.@ 30 p.m. Due to the live performances , each episode overran its slot slightly , from two minutes (episode four) to six (episode six) . The long overrun of the final episode was caused by a temporary break in transmission to replace a failing microphone . Kneale later claimed that the BBC 's transmission controllers had threatened to take them off the air during one significant overrun , to which Cartier replied , " Just let them try ! " Some BBC documentation suggests that at least one transmitter region did cut short the broadcast of the final episode .

The BBC intended that each episode be telerecorded onto 35mm film , a relatively new process that allowed for the preservation of live television broadcasts . Sale of the serial had been provisionally agreed with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation , and Cartier wanted the material available to use for trailers and recaps . Only poor @.@ quality copies of the first two episodes were recorded before the idea was abandoned , although the first of these was later shown in Canada . During the telerecording of the second episode , an insect landed on the screen being filmed , and can be seen on the image for several minutes . It is very unlikely that material from the third to sixth episodes of the serial will ever be recovered to the BBC 's archives . The two existing episodes are the oldest surviving examples of a multi @.@ episodic British drama production , and some of the earliest existing examples of British television drama at all , with only a few earlier one @.@ off plays surviving .

In November 1953 , it was suggested that the existing two episodes could be combined and followed with a condensed live production of the latter part of the story for a special Christmas omnibus repeat of the serial . This idea was abandoned . Although Cartier and star Reginald Tate were keen to make an all @.@ film omnibus version for television , this also did not come to fruition . In 1963 , one of the existing episodes was selected as a representative of early British programming for the Festival of World Television at the National Film Theatre in London .

= = Plot = =

Along with his laboratory assistants , Professor Bernard Quatermass anxiously awaits the return to Earth of his new rocket ship and its crew , who have become the first humans to travel into space . The rocket is at first thought to be lost , having dramatically overshot its planned orbit , but eventually it is detected by radar and returns to Earth , crash @.@ landing in Wimbledon , London .

When Quatermass and his team reach the crash area and succeed in opening the rocket , they discover that only one of the three crewmen , Victor Carroon , remains inside . Quatermass and his chief assistant Paterson (Hugh Kelly) investigate the interior of the rocket , and are baffled by what they find : the space suits of the others are present , and the instruments on board indicate that the door was never opened in flight , but there is no sign of the other two crewmen .

Carroon , gravely ill , is cared for by the Rocket Group 's doctor , Briscoe (John Glen) , who has been having a secret affair with Carroon 's wife , Judith (Isabel Dean) . It is not just Quatermass who is interested in what happened to Carroon and his crewmates ; journalists such as James Fullalove (Paul Whitsun @.@ Jones) and Scotland Yard 's Inspector Lomax (Ian Colin) are also keen to hear his story . Carroon is abducted by a group of foreign agents whose government wants the information they believe he has obtained about travelling in space . It is clear that there is something critically wrong : he appears to have absorbed the consciousness of the other two crew members , and is slowly mutating into a plant @.@ like alien organism .

As the police chase the rapidly transforming Carroon across London , Quatermass analyses samples of the mutated creature in a laboratory , and realises that it has the ability to end all life on Earth if it spores . A television crew working on an architectural programme locates the monster in Westminster Abbey , and Quatermass and troops of the British Army rush in to destroy it in the hour before it brings about doomsday . Quatermass convinces the consciousness of the three crewmen buried deep inside the creature to turn against it and destroy it ; this appeal to the last remains of their humanity succeeds in defeating the organism .

= = Cast and crew = =

Following the success of *The Quatermass Experiment*, Nigel Kneale became one of the best regarded screenwriters in the history of British television. In addition to the various *Quatermass* spin offs and sequels, he wrote acclaimed productions such as *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1954) and *The Stone Tape* (1972). A tribute article by writer and admirer Mark Gatiss, published on the BBC News Online website shortly after Kneale's death in 2006, praised his contribution to British television history. " He is amongst the greats ? he is absolutely as important as Dennis Potter, as David Mercer, as Alan Bleasdale, as Alan Bennett. "

Kneale's actions were represented on screen in the final episode of *The Quatermass Experiment*. He manipulated the monster seen in Westminster Abbey at the climax, with his hands stuck through a photographic blow up of the interior of the Abbey. The monster actually consisted of gloves covered in various plant and other materials, prepared by Kneale and his girlfriend (and future wife) Judith Kerr. The couple kept the gloves as a memento, and still owned them fifty years later, when Kneale wore them again in a television documentary about his career.

Rudolph Cartier had emigrated from Germany in the 1930s to escape its Nazi regime, and joined the staff of the BBC the year before *The Quatermass Experiment* was made. He collaborated with Kneale on several further productions, and became a major figure in the British television industry. He directed important productions such as Kneale's *Nineteen Eighty Four* adaptation, the two further BBC *Quatermass* serials, and one off plays such as *Cross of Iron* (1961) and *Lee Oswald : Assassin* (1966). His 1994 obituary in *The Times* praised his contribution to 1950s television drama : " At a time when studio productions were usually as static as the conventional theatre, he was widely respected for a creative contribution to British television drama which gave it a new dimension. " The same piece also named *The Quatermass Experiment* as a high point in his career, calling the serial " a landmark in British television drama as much for its visual imagination as for its ability to shock and disturb. "

Quatermass was played by the experienced Reginald Tate, who had appeared in various films, including *The Way Ahead* (1944). He died two years later, while preparing to take the role of the Professor again in *Quatermass II*. Tate was the second choice for the part ; Cartier had previously offered it to André Morell, who declined the role. (Morell did later play *Quatermass* in the third instalment of the series, *Quatermass and the Pit*.) Victor Carroon was played by Scottish actor Duncan Lamont, who later appeared in the film *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962), and as a different character in the film adaptation of *Quatermass and the Pit* (1967). He enjoyed working on *The Quatermass Experiment* so much that, although he was not required for the final episode, he went to Alexandra Palace to lend moral support. While there, he helped Kneale and Kerr to prepare their ' monster ' prop.

Appearing in a small role as a drunk was Wilfrid Brambell, who later appeared as a tramp in *Quatermass II*. Brambell, who also appeared in Cartier and Kneale's production of *Nineteen Eighty Four*, later became widely known for his roles in the sitcom *Steptoe and Son* (1962 ? 74) and the film *A Hard Day's Night* (1964). The 74 year old actress Katie Johnson played a supporting part ; she later became well known and won a British Film Award for her role as the landlady Mrs. Louisa Wilberforce in the film *The Ladykillers* (1955).

= = Reception and influence = =

The Quatermass Experiment achieved favourable viewing figures in 1953, opening with an estimated audience of 3 @. @ 4 million for the first episode, increasing to 5 million for the sixth and final episode, and averaging 3 @. @ 9 million for the entire serial. *The Times* estimated that one year before *The Quatermass Experiment* was broadcast, in August 1952, the total television audience consisted of about 4 million people. In March of that year, the BBC estimated that an average of 2 @. @ 25 million people watched BBC programmes each evening.

In 1954 Cecil McGivern, the Controller of Programmes at BBC Television, referred to the success of the serial in a memo discussing the impending launch of a new commercial television channel,

ending the BBC 's monopoly . " Had competitive television been in existence then , we would have killed it every Saturday night while The Quatermass Experiment lasted . We are going to need many more ' Quatermass Experiment ' programmes . " Following Kneale 's death in 2006 , film historian Robert Simpson said that the serial had been " event television , emptying the streets and pubs for the six weeks of its duration . " When the digital television channel BBC Four remade the serial in 2005 , the channel 's controller , Janice Hadlow , described the original as " one the first ' must @-@ watch ' TV experiences that inspired the water cooler chat of its day " .

Viewers ' responses were generally positive . Letters praising the production were sent to the BBC 's listings magazine , the Radio Times , while the writer and producer were also applauded by readers of TV News magazine , which nominated them for one of the publication 's " TV Bouquet " awards . Looking back at The Quatermass Experiment in a 1981 article for The Times , journalist Geoffrey Wansell highlighted the finale :

" Westminster Abbey undoubtedly dominated television during the summer of 1953 but it was not just the Coronation of the Queen that sticks in my mind now . It is also the memory of Professor Bernard Quatermass grappling with the pulsating giant plant that threatened to destroy the world from its rooting place in the Abbey 's nave ? The Quatermass Experiment frightened the life out of a vast new generation of television viewers whose sets had been acquired in order to watch the Coronation ? Quatermass was one of the first series on British television to make life seem potentially terrifying . "

Subsequent audience research showed that technical problems interrupting the final episode 's broadcast had a negative impact on audiences ' views of the serial ; the audience felt that the climax had been spoiled .

Despite such problems ? and the existence of only the first two episodes in the archives ? The Quatermass Experiment continued to earn critical praise in the decades following its transmission . The British Film Institute 's " Screenonline " website describes the serial as " one of the most influential series of the 1950s " , adding that " with its originality , mass appeal and dynamism , The Quatermass Experiment became a landmark of science fiction and the cornerstone of the genre on British television . " The website of the Museum of Broadcast Communications praises the serial 's underlying themes as its most effective feature . " The Quatermass Experiment 's depiction of an Englishman 's transformation into an alienated monster dramatized a new range of gendered fears about Britain 's postwar and post @-@ colonial security . As a result , or perhaps simply because of Kneale and Cartier 's effective combination of science fiction and poignant melodrama , audiences were captivated . " The website also points to the programme 's influence on the British science @-@ fiction television productions that followed , claiming that " with [The Quatermass Experiment] began a British tradition of science fiction television which runs in various forms from Quatermass to A for Andromeda to Blake 's 7 , and from Doctor Who to Red Dwarf . "

Kneale disliked Doctor Who ? the most successful of the British science @-@ fiction programmes ? saying that it had stolen his ideas . An article for The Daily Telegraph in 2005 described Doctor Who as the " spiritual successor " to the Quatermass serials , and Mark Gatiss , a scriptwriter for Doctor Who , wrote of his admiration of Kneale in an article for The Guardian in 2006 . " Kneale wrote that [1953] was ' an over @-@ confident year ' and he piloted his hugely influential tale like a rocket into the drab schedules of Austerity Britain ? What sci @-@ fi piece of the past 50 years doesn 't owe Kneale a huge debt ? "

In 2007 , Gatiss appeared as the character Professor Lazarus in the Doctor Who episode " The Lazarus Experiment " . The Radio Times noted in its preview of the episode that " Tonight 's story is an enjoyable synthesis of She , The Fly and The Quatermass Experiment ? even down to the final battle in a London cathedral . "

= = Other media = =

The popularity of The Quatermass Experiment gained the attention of the film industry , and Hammer Film Productions quickly purchased the rights to make an adaptation . It was released in 1955 , and starred the American actor Brian Donlevy , supported by the English actor Jack Warner ,

with Val Guest directing and co @-@ writing the screenplay . Nigel Kneale was unhappy with the result , and was especially displeased with the casting of Donlevy as Quatermass . He stated in an interview , " [Donlevy] was then really on the skids and didn 't care what he was doing . He took very little interest in the making of the films or in playing the part . It was a case of take the money and run . Or in the case of Mr Donlevy , waddle . " The film was titled The Quatermass Xperiment to emphasise its X @-@ certificate status . In America the film was renamed The Creeping Unknown after the title Shock ! was considered for that territory , and an alternative opening title sequence with that name was prepared .

The BBC were also pleased with the success of The Quatermass Experiment and in 1955 a sequel , Quatermass II , was broadcast , with John Robinson in the title role following Tate 's death . This was followed in 1958 by Quatermass and the Pit , and both serials also had feature film versions made by Hammer . The character returned to television in a 1979 serial , simply titled Quatermass , for Thames Television .

A script book of The Quatermass Experiment , containing several production stills from the missing episodes , was published by Penguin Books in 1959 . To coincide with the broadcast of the Thames serial , it was republished in 1979 with a new introduction by Kneale .

In April 2005 , BBC Worldwide released a boxed set of all their Quatermass material on DVD , containing digitally restored versions of the two existing episodes of The Quatermass Experiment , the two subsequent BBC serials , and various extra material , including PDF files of photocopies of the original scripts for episodes three to six . However , the quality of these photocopies is in some cases quite poor .

On 2 April 2005 , the digital television channel BBC Four broadcast a live remake of the serial , abridged to a single special , also entitled The Quatermass Experiment .