



**NIGHTMARES & DAYDREAMS – A CENTENARY  
CELEBRATION OF SCREENWRITER NIGEL KNEALE**

# Quatermass and the Pit

The third series – and perhaps the best – featuring Nigel Kneale’s hugely successful creation, the steadfast scientific genius Professor Bernard Quatermass, *Quatermass and the Pit* (BBC) was also the last, until the character was resurrected for one final appearance in *Quatermass* (ITV, 1979). Running over six Monday evenings between December 1958 and January 1959, the series, like its predecessors, was compulsory viewing.

The professor was played this time by André Morell, the third actor to take the role. Morell, who had previously appeared as O’Brien in Kneale’s adaptation of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (BBC, tx. 12.12.1954), typically played clipped-voiced officer types – as he did in David Lean’s *The Bridge Over the River Kwai* (1957) –, and he brought a natural authority to the part.

As in the previous stories, Quatermass was pitted against an extra-terrestrial threat – in this case an ancient and hostile intelligence from Mars – in an exciting and intelligent story which mined mythology and folklore and carried serious political and philosophical ideas. The story begins with the discovery by workmen of a curious skull. Further digging uncovers what appears to be an unexploded bomb – not an uncommon find more than a decade after the war. The professor gets involved when it becomes clear that the skull represents a previously unknown human relative, and that the ‘bomb’ is in fact an alien vessel.

Although the special effects may appear crude now, the series remains powerful today thanks to an exciting climax and some genuinely thought-provoking ideas. Like many of Kneale’s later works, notably *The Stone Tape* (BBC, tx. 25.12.1972), *Quatermass and the Pit* puts a scientific spin on the supernatural tale, in this case suggesting that mankind was visited in its distant past by an evil alien force, which left its mark in our own vicious nature and inspired our ancestors’ depictions of demons and devils.

Another interesting feature of the series is the way in which Kneale uses his creation to attack the military and government’s subordination of science to their own ends. The story begins with the professor furious after his rocket project is placed under military control, while one of the more satisfying moments comes when Colonel Breen (Anthony Bushell), Quatermass’s arrogant and narrow-minded rival, meets an untimely end.

**Mark Duguid, BFI Screenonline, [screenonline.org.uk](http://screenonline.org.uk)**

## **‘Quatermass and the Pit’ reviewed**

*Quatermass and the Pit* was the third of Hammer’s trilogy of adaptations of Kneale’s hit TV series chronicling the exploits of the ill-fated Professor Bernard Quatermass. It may lack the dark, visionary qualities of *Quatermass II* (1958), but it’s streets ahead of its contemporaries, thanks in no small part to its audacious and complex plot.

Brilliantly scripted by Kneale with a storyline of breathtaking scope and imagination, *Quatermass and the Pit* takes in alien invasion, demonic possession and the birth of many basic Christian precepts. The Martians' infrequent psychic manifestations whenever their subterranean lair has been disturbed (during the sinking of a well, for instance, and the construction of the original Hobbes Lane tube station) result in sightings of demons, the grasshopper creatures resembling traditional Christian images of the Devil. Kneale's hypothesis is that the Martians not only jumpstarted the human race by artificially speeding up evolution, but indirectly created witchcraft, demonology, Satanism and a good percentage of Christian demon mythology. The implications are startling, that the Martians have been – either consciously or otherwise – moulding human culture and belief since we first fell out of the trees and stood upright, implanting race memories that have haunted us ever since.

Kneale's concise and witty screenplay is as peppered with subtleties and nuances as one might expect. Kneale is never content with merely telling a story, involving himself instead on creating a fully self-consistent scenario brimming with in-references and asides. The alien spacecraft, for instance, is at first misidentified as a 'Satan', a form of German secret weapon supposedly dropped on London during the war. Later, the inhabitants of the spaceship are found to be three-legged, a conscious reference to Wells's Martian invaders, perhaps. Kneale's cleverly demythologises the Christian legend of the Devil and offers a witty pseudo-scientific explanation for the occult. Like Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) made the following year, it suggests that Mankind's destiny is not in its own hands and that it never has been – that basically, we're little more than cattle in the eyes of a higher, inscrutable intelligence. And like Kubrick's film, Kneale's aliens truly are alien, enigmatic beings with a society and culture quite unlike our own.

*Quatermass and the Pit* is a staggering achievement, well directed by Hammer new-boy Baker, a veteran of TV's *The Avengers*. His handling of Kneale's remarkable ideas is spot on, particularly in the apocalyptic finale, a sequence that seems to have inspired much of Tobe Hooper's *Lifeforce* (1985). It's a film of great depth and intelligence, one that rewards repeated viewings. It combines Kneale characteristic attacks on authority and pomposity with his humanitarian attitudes and wide-ranging speculations on the nature of Man, evolution, the development of culture and the growth of religion.

**Kevin Lyons, [eofftv.com](http://eofftv.com)**

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## QUATERMASS AND THE PIT

*Directed by:* Roy Ward Baker  
*©:* Hammer Film Productions  
*a Hammer Film production*  
*Presented by:* Associated British Pathé  
*Executive Producer:* Anthony Hinds \*  
*Produced by:* Anthony Nelson Keys  
*Production Manager:* Ian Lewis  
*Assistant Director:* Bert Batt  
*Continuity:* Doreen Dearnaley  
*Casting:* Irene Lamb  
*Original Story and Screenplay by:* Nigel Kneale  
*Director of Photography:* Arthur Grant  
*Camera Operator:* Moray Grant  
*Special Effects:* Bowie Films  
*Special Effects:* Les Bowie \*  
*Supervising Editor:* James Needs  
*Editor:* Spencer Reeve  
*Supervising Art Director:* Bernard Robinson  
*Art Director:* Ken Ryan  
*Wardrobe Mistress:* Rosemary Burrows  
*Make-up:* Michael Morris  
*Hair Stylist:* Pearl Tipaldi  
*Music Composed by:* Tristram Cary  
*Musical Supervisor:* Philip Martell  
*Sound Recordist:* Sash Fisher  
*Sound Editor:* Roy Hyde  
*Produced at:* MGM British Studios

## Cast

James Donald (*Dr Matthew Roney*)  
Andrew Keir (*Professor Bernard Quatermass*)  
Barbara Shelley (*Barbara Judd*)  
Julian Glover (*Colonel Breen*)  
Duncan Lamont (*Sladden*)  
Bryan Marshall (*Captain Potter*)  
Peter Copley (*Howell*)  
Edwin Richfield (*Minister of Defence*)  
Maurice Good (*Sergeant Cleghorn*)  
Grant Taylor (*Police Sergeant Ellis*)  
Robert Morris (*Jerry Watson*)  
Sheila Steafel (*journalist*)  
Hugh Fatcher (*Sapper West*)  
Hugh Morton (*elderly journalist*)  
Thomas Heathcote (*vicar*)  
Noel Howlett (*abbey librarian*)  
Hugh Manning (*pub customer*)  
June Ellis (*blonde*)  
Keith Marsh (*Johnson*)  
James Culliford (*Corporal Gibson*)  
Bee Duffell (*Miss Dobson*)  
Roger Avon (*electrician*)  
Brian Peck (*technical officer*)  
John Graham (*inspector*)  
Charles Lamb (*newsvendor*)  
Gareth Thomas (*workman who finds skeleton*)\*  
Anthony Rayner \*

UK/USA 1967©

97 mins

\* Uncredited

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### A CENTENARY CELEBRATION OF SCREENWRITER NIGEL KNEALE

#### The Abominable Snowman

Mon 28 Mar 20:50; Sat 23 Apr 14:50

#### Wuthering Heights

Sat 2 Apr 15:10

#### Missing Believed Wiped: Out of the Unknown: The Chopper

Sun 3 Apr 18:00

#### Nineteen Eighty-Four + Panel Discussion: Nineteen Eighty-Four and the legacy of Nigel Kneale

Mon 4 Apr 18:30

#### Seniors Free Matinee: Quatermass and the Pit + discussion

Mon 11 Apr 14:00

#### The Year of the Sex Olympics

Tue 12 Apr 18:10

#### First Men in the Moon

Fri 15 Apr 14:30; Wed 27 Apr 20:50

#### The Woman in Black

Sun 24 Apr 14:40

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