

# FINAL CUT

When cult TV comedy *The League Of Gentlemen* devoted an episode to bizarre SM games in a provincial B&B, it looked like someone on the team must have remarkable inside knowledge. So we sent Liz Tray to find out just where writer Mark Gatiss got his ideas for *The Medusa Touch*



Deep breaths: Daddy (Steve Pemberton) ready to embark on a little light asphyxiation with his Medusa-suited neophytes

First televised in 1999, *The League Of Gentlemen* has become a British TV comedic institution and a cult hit worldwide. So we clearly couldn't ignore the League's recent sortie into the world of extreme SM breath control games – in an episode called *The Medusa Touch*.

Especially as the story parodies certain people and practices so convincingly as to raise suspicions of insider knowledge!

Aired by the BBC in October, this magnificent slab of the bizarre focuses on a gathering of 'sexplorers' at the B&B (or rather BB&B) run by Alvin (Mark Gatiss) and Sunny (Reece Shearsmith). The group has gathered to experience the erotic pleasures offered by the sinister Daddy (Steve Pemberton) and his Medusa breath-control machine – an octopus-like contraption with half a dozen inflatable suits attached by tubes to a central tank.

Meeting up with the episode's writer, Mark Gatiss, shortly before he went on stage in London's West End (where the League have been appearing in the hit play *Art*), I asked what informed his foray into the world of erotic asphyxiation.

"I've encountered people very much into that, and I can't stand that lazy shorthand of 'Miss Whiplash'," he says.

"Recently I met a bloke who I was interested in, and he wanted me to hold

his head underwater. So I drowned him, fucked him and went home. No, I'm just kidding! We needed a way that all the characters would die."

Inspiration for the inflatable suits came, unsurprisingly, from late night TV.

"Channel 5 had a show about rubber fetishists. Mr and Mrs Blow-Up were on and their heads looked like beach balls. When they came downstairs it was like the end of episode one of *Doctor Who*! It was both hysterical and tragically unsexy, as, once they were in their full gear, all they wanted was to sit and watch TV."

So how come the Medusa's inflatable suits were not rubber, but plastic fabric? "BBC Visual Effects designed them. We made a fantastic glossy rubber prototype. One of the crew put it on and it reflected light badly, so they had to use plastic."

Daddy, the Medusa's slightly speech-impaired inventor, seemed to us too much like a certain older type of master on the London scene to be pure

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invention. It turns out that Mark based his character on a chance meeting at a wedding. "He was a photographer and would say things like [in sleazy voice] 'I'd like to photograph you, you're very beautiful – let me tell you about the rectum, a beautiful organ'. He actually said 'rectum' with a 'd'!"

So none of this remarkable tale was based on actual personal experience of the perv scene? Apparently not.

"But," Mark recalls, "I did cover a *Dungeon In The Sky* event for *Boyz* magazine about six years ago. I was not trying to be cynical but it was so funny. I went to a spanking workshop and it was gloriously unerotic. The demonstration was on a pillow instead of a bottom and it was covered with white chalk marks showing you how to improve your aim. It was like a WI jam-making workshop."



In *League*: Alvin (Mark Gatiss) and Sunny (Reece Shearsmith) prepare to host a weekend of bed, breakfast and breath control