**The queen of tarts**

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Nigella. Nigella, Nigella, Nigella. It sounds like a playground nickname for an effeminate boy. They might as well have called her "Malcolmina". Or "Keithette".

Nigella. Nigella. Nigella. Nigella.

Tell you what else it sounds like: a brand of antiseptic cream. Or an island off the Italian coastline. Or an incredibly pretentious kind of tiny ethnic hat. Or a cheap and horrible car ("Police are on the lookout for a light blue Fiat Nigella").

Here's what it doesn't sound like: an ITV daytime show. But that's precisely what **Nigella** (Mon-Fri, 1.30pm, ITV1) has become. She's become a celebrity chat show, and a cookery show, and a human interest debate show - all at once.

Confused? Try watching it. It opens with a kitsch credit sequence in which Nigella flutters her eyelashes and smiles a lot. Then she appears in person, looking far more ill-at-ease - like a minor royal who's somehow been coerced into presenting a Christmas edition of Blue Peter. A minor royal who started regretting it the moment the lights went up.

After a spirited, doomed attempt to read naturally from the autocue, Princess Nigella meets her celebrity guest-of-the-day, then cooks a meal for them while simultaneously conducting an interview. Naturally, since she has to concentrate on making sure she doesn't overcook the salmon or inadvertently hack her thumb off, she can't absorb anything they're saying, and the conversation flows like granite. It's hardly fair: even a veteran presenter would struggle. Nigella's clearly inexperienced, yet she's literally expected to spin plates. What next? Make her do it on stilts?

It's bewildering just watching it. In fact, it makes your brain hurt. Are you supposed to follow the recipe, or the discussion? Or both? Is it some kind of test? If so, perhaps next week they'd like to superimpose an animated pie chart over the screen at the same time.

Anyway, once the baffling cookery-interview is out of the way, it's time for a REALLY horrible bit in which a dowdy, downtrodden member of the public is wheeled on to discuss a personal problem while HRH Ovenglove does her best to sympathise and give counsel, like Princess Diana getting dewy-eyed at a peasant's hospital bedside. It's toe-curlingly awkward, but at least Nigella's not being asked to toss pancakes at the same time. Yet.

Just as you've got to grips with that, there's another awkward gear-shift and the show suddenly turns into Loose Women, as Her Sacred Cookliness and a couple of guests loll around and discuss an "issue", apparently just for the hell of it. On Tuesday's edition, the "issue" was "old folks' homes" - not because they're in the news, but because Nigella had just read a book about one. Come week three she'll be reading the nutritional information panel off the side of a soup carton and asking her guests to guess the carbohydrate content. While deboning a herring. On stilts.

Then there's an unbelievably condescending phone-in section (members of the public whine about their problems: Nigella and co offer sympathetic platitudes), a competition, and another bloody recipe. Then it's all over and you're out the other end, with an icky taste in your mouth. Never a good sign for a cookery show.

Before I vamoose, here's a deadly serious order. You absolutely must watch **Deadwood** (Sun, 10pm, Sky One). Better yet, nip down the shops now, rent or buy the series one DVD box set, and watch that first.

I failed to catch it when it was shown last year - a shameful dereliction of duty on my part, as I could've recommended it to you sooner. It starts slowly, but by about episode three you'll be so pathetically hooked you'll be an embarrassment. The first series is 12 hours in total, so assuming you've got no social life, you should be done in time for the start of series two. Look, I know I sound like an advert, but just trust me, OK? Still here? Shops are that-a-way, and time's short, so get moving. G'wan, git! Git, git! GIT!