

## Desert Island Dave

### The 2017 Brain Bash: Is there a Favourite Episode Order?

By David Barrie

To mark the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Prisoner, for this year's theme for the regular Brain Bash, I decided to take a closer look at the three McGoohan scripted episodes, **Free for All**, **Once Upon a Time**, and **Fall Out**. Three very intense episodes, but for entirely different reasons. First a colourful, fast-moving, political satire, featuring dialogue that crackles with terrific throw-away lines, then a claustrophobic duel to the death with acting of the highest calibre, from two power-house actors, and finally, a thrilling ride through one mans imagination. Enigmatic, surreal, kaleidoscopic, bold, a simply stunning finale to a series that gripped millions of viewers and continues to enthral a devoted following down though the decades.

To do justice by putting these three episodes under the spotlight, I needed to research; and where else to look, but the thoughts and views of members. So began a trawl through the various Six-of-One magazines. I went back to the beginning. As I researched, I found that, at various times, there had been polls to choose members favourite episodes. Three of the surveys rated all episodes from 1 to 17, whilst a fourth asked for members 'top ten' and three least favoured. Mind, I could have saved a great deal of time and gone straight to the Summer 1997 issue of 'In The Village', because David Healey, the then editor, had taken the same route I had replicated, checking when polls had been conducted.

So below you will see the various poll results conducted through the years. Two things struck me; first, how an episode could cease to be popular and descend markedly, and also vice versa. For example, how could **Dance of the Dead** rise from 13<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>? Or **The General**, fluctuating wildly, respectively polling 15<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and back to 15<sup>th</sup> again?

So, my Brain Bash fell into two parts. Firstly, to conduct a fresh poll. As a survey had not been conducted for 20 years, again this emphasised it was high time we did another.

This then naturally led on to ranking McGoohan's three scripts. **Free for All** went from 9<sup>th</sup>, then to 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and finally to 7<sup>th</sup>. An obviously popular episode. **Once Upon a Time** was pretty consistent. 11<sup>th</sup>, outside the top ten in Autumn 1986, then 11<sup>th</sup> once more, and finally 10<sup>th</sup>. **Fall Out** started well, a favourite episode of many, holding the top spot in Spring 1978, slipping to 4<sup>th</sup>, then down to 9<sup>th</sup>, and reviving to 3<sup>rd</sup> last time.

Part two of the Bash was discussing the content of these three episodes, exchanging thoughts and ideas, and putting these views onto a questionnaire. The examination of these episodes and what attendees thought about them will be put to one side for the moment and presented in another article. For our purpose, let's focus on the polls which you will see below, along with the one I conducted.

To arrive at a result, I asked everyone to score the episode from 17 points for their favourite, down to 1 for least favoured. I then totted up the points and came up with a new survey. For fairness I had to discard a number of questionnaires where perhaps not all 17 episodes had been rated. That left me a dozen members views to work on.

Below you will see the results of all five polls. I do realise that mine reached only a fraction of the membership,

So, along with the previous surveys, here are the results from my Brain Bash.

Now to the actual scores from my mini-survey. You will notice **Arrival** is the runaway winner. It stands well above three clear groupings. What surprised me was that **The Girl Who was Death** came last, when the poisoned drink scene had topped the poll of member's favourite scenes, when a survey was conducted back in the 1990's. My article looking at favourite scenes appeared in Six4Two magazine, issue 7 where I mentioned this. Maybe tastes change, or perhaps the small number who completed my questionnaire are not representative of the membership as a whole.

Points	Position	Episode
176	1	Arrival
154	2	<b>Free for All</b>
148	3	Checkmate
142	4	Schizoid Man
137	5	A B & C
135	6	Dance of the Dead
131	7	Chimes of Big Ben
109	8	Many Happy Returns
104	9	<b>Once Upon a Time</b>
99	10	<b>Fall Out</b>
94	11	Hammer into Anvil
90	12	The General
66	13	A Change of Mind
64	14	Do Not Forsake Me
62	15	It's Your Funeral
57	16	Living in Harmony
51	17	The Girl Who was Death

Compared with previous surveys:

Spring 1978	Autumn 1986	Winter 1992	Summer 1997
1 <b>Fall Out</b>	1 Checkmate	1 Arrival	1 = Arrival
2 Checkmate	2 <b>Free for All</b>	2 Checkmate	1 = Hammer into Anvil
3 Many Happy Returns	3 Schizoid Man	3 Hammer into Anvil	3 <b>Fall Out</b>
4 Schizoid man	4 <b>Fall Out</b>	4 A, B, & C	4 Dance of the Dead
5 Arrival	5 The General	5 <b>Free for All</b>	5 = Checkmate
6 Hammer into Anvil	6 A, B, & C	6 The Schizoid Man	5 = Many Happy Returns
7 A, B, & C	7 Arrival	7 Many Happy Returns	7 <b>Free for All</b>
8 Chimes of Big Ben	8 Hammer into Anvil	8 Chimes of Big Ben	8 The Schizoid Man
9 <b>Free for All</b>	10 Girl who was Death (Only Top 10 asked for)	9 <b>Fall Out</b>	9 Girl who was Death
10 Girl who was Death		10 Dance of the Dead	10 = Chimes of Big Ben
11 <b>Once Upon a Time</b>		11 <b>Once Upon a Time</b>	10 = <b>Once Upon a Time</b>
12 A Change of Mind	(Least favourite	12 Girl who was Death	12 A, B, & C
13 Dance of the Dead	17 Do Not Forsake	13 The General	13 Living in Harmony
14 Living in Harmony	16 Living in Harmony	14 It's Your Funeral	14 Change of Mind
15 The General	15 Change of Mind)	15 A Change of Mind	15 The General
16 It's Your Funeral		16 Living in Harmony	16 = Do Not Forsake
17 Do Not Forsake		17 Do Not Forsake	16 = It's Your Funeral

## Summary Positions

**Free for All** – 9, 2, 5, 7, 2

**Once Upon a Time** – 11, -, 11, 10, 9

**Fall Out** – 1, 4, 9, 3, 10

**Free for All** – Always in Top 10 – Was it the plot, the Village colour, why rise from 9 to 2?

**Once Upon a Time** – Consistently placed. Why? Did it lack Village colour, was it too minimalistic?

**Fall Out** – Some fluctuation. Was it 1<sup>st</sup> in '78 as audience sought answers? Did it slump to 9<sup>th</sup> because without a conventional plot it lost power. Then shot up to 3<sup>rd</sup>, finally plummeting to 10<sup>th</sup>.

How could Dance of the Dead rise from 13 to 4? How could The General fluctuate from 15 to 5?

You might like to get your brain into gear as you mull over the pros and cons of each episode?