

## Brainbashing The Prisoner – The 2015 Convention Event: Scene and Heard – By David Barrie

*“In order, which three scenes from The Prisoner really resonate with you, and why?”*

As regular readers will know, a 'Brainbash' is an established part of our Convention, a time in which we can explore and discuss some of the elements that make The Prisoner such compulsive viewing. Over the years we've explored everything from 'The Games in Checkmate' to 'The Contribution of Alexis Kanner', from 'Why The Prisoner is a Work of Art?', to, 'The importance of each of The Prisoner episodes in the unfolding drama of the series', by way of, 'The essential seven episodes', referring to Patrick McGoohan stating there were seven episodes that were important and the rest could be discarded. In essence, the purpose of a 'Brainbash' is to stimulate our minds, to think about this enigmatic series, to ask questions about it, to hear others views of it, to perhaps gain a greater understanding, and thereby, enjoyment.

The 2014 'Brainbash' was held over so that we might allow Catherine McGoohan a longer time to discuss her Father's work. This then is the postponed offering. Back in 2013 we deliberated the three most important influences or contributions to the series, considering everything from writers to the surreal elements, the actors to Portmeirion itself. Back in 2012, we had considered the importance of each episode in No. 6's search for the truth and No. 1. So to 2015. For all of us, there are 'stand-out' moments in the Prisoner that send a powerful message to us. Each of us will have their personal favourites. Maybe it's the scene composition, or the acting, perhaps the dialogue, or the 'feel' of the scene.

This then is the question I put to the 2015 convention audience, *“When you make your scene selection, flesh out why you are making that particular choice. Discuss with your neighbours, they may trigger a memory or a factor that you hadn't considered, then we'll share our views, and I'm sure we'll all learn something to enhance our appreciation of this series. My original idea was to meet other individuals who were as enthusiastic as myself, and see what they thought and why! And here's my chance. So, in order, which three scenes from the series really resonate with you, and why?”*

To help stimulate the process, I played a few of my favourite scenes, around twenty in all. Examples were, from Arrival, the 'square peg in a round hole'. From A, B, and C, the 'dreamy party, mirror straightening, roulette, and key'. From Free for All, the 'Truth Test' dialogue. From Dance of the Dead, 'No. 6 stalking the corridors, secret rooms, and filing cabinets'. From A Change of Mind, 'No. 6, alone, on an outcrop, watching the flock of birds fly overhead', and from Fall Out, 'the Juke Box corridor', and 'The smart businessman doing a double-take in his car looking at the three escapees on the dual carriageway'.

Each individual, or group if they preferred, was given pen and paper, to complete their task. For around half an hour there was much buzzing of voices, earnest exchange of views, and thoughts committed to the form. Here, in no particular order, and in their own words, is what some of those present said. (I hope I've remembered everyone's name and comments correctly.)

Bill Nunn:

- 1) The gardener in Arrival, a small touch that helps set the scene, as he is the twin/clone of the repairman.
- 2) On the beach with Peter Pan, refer to great dialogue, also reference to Narnia?
- 3) The 'Kid' singing 'Dem Bones', just great.

Valarie Zeigler:

- 1) Dance of the Dead, the beach scene, the best of Portmeirion, No. 2, and No. 6.
- 2) Arrival, the first interview with No. 2, the control room, the props, and especially standing behind the penny-farthing, (it's aligned with No. 2's chair,) and the "I will not..."etc. speech. 3) Fall Out, at the Houses of Parliament, No. 2 leaves, No. 6 briefly walks, head in air, music soaring, triumphant, at least briefly, majestic.

Andrew White:

- 1) Arrival, the first encounter between No. 2 and No. 6.
- 2) Checkmate, the end scene, when No. 6 is caught on the boat, and sees his companions have turned against him. He realises he cannot trust anyone.
- 3) Dance of the Dead, the end scene when the telex starts printing with no electricity and No. 2 starts laughing. No. 6 realises that nothing is impossible and authority is ahead of him.

Janet Davis:

- 1) Free for All, the truth test. Brain-washing. Using techniques to force a human against his wishes. Echoes of 1984. The dinner suited man rather 'OTT'.
- 2) Dance of the Dead, the beach scene. Everyone's favourite but a deeper meaning in No. 2's coldness toward No. 6. She knows what is in store.
- 3) Chimes of Big Ben. Back in 'London' the cruel method. No. 6 thinks Nadia is his ally and all the time he is hoodwinked.

Byron Joyce:

- 1) Arrival. The shopkeeper is talking gibberish but as No. 6 enters flawlessly changes to English, "Please help yourself to pineapple madam". Is this an in-joke about North Wales and the Welsh language?
- 2) Living in Harmony. No. 6 waking up (and finding that he is not dead after his duel with the Kid) and finding he is surrounded by cardboard cut-outs of the Kid and the horse. This brings up the hairs on the back of my neck.
- 3) Fall Out. No. 6 (or should I call him John Drake?) back in London explaining (unheard by the TV audience) the demise of The Village to a London bobby! It is lovely visual comic acting.

Nigel Hazelhurst:

- 1) Mr. Tuxedo, the beach scene. The interplay of words. Atmospheric, underlying evil of the Village and how it will be directed at No. 6.
- 2) "I will not be pushed, filed, etc.", referring to people and politicians doing the right thing. It sums me up!
- 3) The butler and No. 6 run for the bus. The music is hope – escaped, but he hasn't.  
(DB adds: *Nige also suggests that my Dance of the Dead articles from years back should be re-published. Certainly, I was captivated by this episode, researched and wrote about it extensively. Perhaps as part of 'Desert Island Dave', I can re-visit this intriguing episode. I purposefully did not include the beach scene in my clips prologue because I was interested to see how many individuals would refer to it. As we see, it struck a chord with a number of them*)

Cerys, Jules and Simon:

- 1) Cerys chose the No. 58 slapping No. 6 sequence from Free for All.
- 2) Living in Harmony. Alexis is shot and falls off banister. (Even though we love Alexis).
- 3) Fall Out. Dem Bones, total anarchy, and when No. 6 returns home the door closes with the same noise automatically.

Paul Malamed:

- 1) Hammer into Anvil. "What's going through your mind, No. 6, Fear?" No. 6 responds, "Disgust". This sums up No. 6 as unbreakable.
- 2) Fall Out. All you need is love by the Beatles – the best band in the world meets best TV show in the world.
- 3) The opening credits, "You are No. 6". There we have the answer in opening credits.

Jana:

A very hard choice.

- 1) The truth test in Free for All. It's just the dialogue. It seems to be impossible to get to know what No. 6 is saying, I had to think hard to work it out. It had a big impact on my personal view of the series. It seems to get to the heart of The Prisoner, for me.
- 2) The sticks and the geese in A Change of Mind. No. 6 shows his warm side. I loved how it was done.

The stick that was removed from the bundle and broken and the geese flying away without him. Touching. For me this scene proves that McGoohan didn't just want to praise individualism, or was a loner.

3) Once Upon a Time. At the schoolmasters. The dialogue. Just outstanding. Again it underlines that No. 6 is alone, the wolf thing.

Jack Frydenlund: Jack says, "All written before Dave's lecture began".

1) Dance of the Dead. The French revolution dialogue. "They got rid of the dead wood didn't they?" No. 6's observer seems to forget that she was indeed his observer – emotional switch set to 'off', (like technology). Occurs after going through the various stages of history, religion, art. This is bigger than simply one spy trapped on an island.

2) Living in Harmony. No. 6 is shot at by the Kid and survives the ordeal – only after confronting death can he move forward with facing the prison he is in.

3) A Change of Mind. He figures out the rules and knows how to escape.

Isobel Smith:

1) The revealing of No. 1. Shows both good and bad within us all.

2) The very last scene in Fall Out which is a carbon copy of the opening shot in Arrival. Is the whole series going through the mind of a man who is thinking of resigning?

3) The 'psychological' game of war in Once Upon a Time.

Christopher Gale:

1) Arrival. "I will not be pushed...etc". This moment sets up the series.

2) Fall Out. "You have gloriously vindicated..." This scene really reveals the plans for a global village. They present it as a victory for No. 6, but in fact, he is simply the anvil upon which a new path for the Village has been forged.

3) All of Once Upon a Time. A distillation of the central themes and conflicts in one intense battle of wills.

Paula (from Virginia USA):

1) The scene where he escapes the Village on a raft – it represented hope to me.

Drenna from California (USA)

2) When the Kid wanted to show that he was more than he was – because PMG remained the mature man, unfazed by his bravura.

Paula again.

3) When the scientist escapes. No. 6 could have gone but stayed behind to allow this man to carry on.

Mike Hopper:

1) Rover retrieving someone (bursts from under water).

2) The opening sequence.

3) Gunfight in Harmony.

David Bendelow:

1) "I will not...etc." States future defiance of the system.

2) Schizoid man. The dialogue exchange when No. 6 and No. 12 first meet. Very clever for its time, and humorous.

3) Once Upon a Time. So powerful the head-to-head scenes are addictive.

Stella Tratt:

Having had no time to think about it, I thought of the most obvious. Given time, I might have a different list. My top two show No. 6 in direct conflict with No. 2's. Interestingly Darren thought the scenes should have only one No. 2 because the dramatic tension could be racked up. But these two episodes could reach a climax. Separate No. 2's give different challenges to No. 6. Love everything about Arrival. Dramatic, unnerving, beautiful. So:

1) Once Upon a Time. The Leo two-hander. The seven ages of man a great idea.

2) Hammer into Anvil. No. 2 resigns. Almost a two-hander. Both the above very tense.

3) Arrival. Everything. The whole concept. Portmeirion. When he opens the curtains.

David Rhodes:

- 1) The opening credits. Dramatic. Man with a purpose. The Lotus Seven sells the series. The music.
- 2) Fall Out. The climax. The escape. The chaos. No. 6 has won – or has he?
- 3) Many Happy Returns. Arriving back at his house, a man in a quandary – what do I do? He is home, but does he still belong there?

Terry Tratt:

- 1) Arrival. So many questions. You were hooked and needed to know what happened. His side or the other.
- 2) Leo McKern. Once Upon a Time. Their face to face was so realistic. Both of their acting was incredible.
- 3) Living in Harmony. So different but the same outcome. Alexis, no words, but so threatening.

Rachael McDougall: Bear in mind these are all the memories of a child.

- 1) Dem Bones scene. I remember feeling very perplexed by it as a child, as this series setting devolves into chaos and weirdness. I also remember Alexis's hair for some reason. The bright colour added to his lively character
- 2) I remember Leo giving No. 6 a very serious jowly look. I thought that his name was very apt because he had a gruff lion's stare, and the deep growling baritone of a lion.
- 3) I remember all of the bright colours of the twirling umbrellas, and rover, and the panel-coloured capes, because these were all very simple shapes with primary and secondary colours. They were a feeling of childhood, and the primitive, and the abstract and the archetypal.

Arno Baumgärtel:

- 1) Arrival. The exchange with the waitress in the cafe. No. 6 asking, she eschews, "Where is this?" This scene, especially because, for me as a German, the amount of surrealism is enhanced when in the German version the waitress replies as follows when asked, "What's the name of this place?", "Wie das hier heisst?" ("How do you say here?") That is, she responds back to him asking rhetorically not mentioning the word 'Village'.
  - 2) Free for All. The initial dialogue between No. 6 and No. 2, "Are you going to run?" "Like blazes..." etc.
  - 3) Schizoid Man. Again the dialogue, "The people's copying service..."
- (Arno lists a further four scenes he would like to choose, in order they are, 'London 27 miles, the beach scene from Dance of the Dead, the Arrival electrician/gardener clones, and the shop map scene in Arrival. He adds, "I was a bit misled into taking dialogue scenes only or the quality of them. Very difficult, depends on which aspect/perspective we're discussing it. Ranking could as well be shifted according to the emphasis/focus that is put on it. As a matter of fact I never seriously embarked on ranking episodes or scenes which is even more daring! Although, I admit, I once participated in a survey of favourite episodes, in an issue of 'Number Six' magazine many years ago.)

Steve Loofe:

- 1) The opening scene in Arrival, when PMG drives down into the car park entrance, walks down the corridor, and bangs on the table with his fist. This sets the scene for the whole series! As this scene (in a truncated form) is repeated at the beginning of most episodes it makes it clear to the viewer what the basic premise of the series is about. The powerful way that PMG bangs his fist on the desk of his boss shows his determination and strong feelings.
- 2) The General. When No. 6 is asked a question following the three minute 'Speed Learn' process and he knows the answer without realising that he had the information in his head. I think The General gives us a view of the Village that we have not seen before. It is what is going on behind the scenes showing that all is not what it seems. The Village has a darker side that shows the depth the hierarchy are prepared to take.
- 3) The penultimate episode, Once Upon a Time, when No. 6 and No. 2 are sword fighting. It shows the battle of their minds as well as the physical duel. Both these battles, physical and of the wills, are so powerful and it's very unpredictable and No. 6 is fighting for his life.

Finally, we turn to Michael Brüne, Michael gave a great deal of thought to this and emailed me his views after he had returned home to Germany. As you will read, Michael has chosen to present his reasoning and views with the advantage of the mature reflection that time allows, Michael has written in some depth and detail. So I relay his contribution in full thus -

### A. Sentences from episodes, that touched my life

The first German screening of 'Nummer 6' happened from August 16<sup>th</sup> 1969 to April 25<sup>th</sup> 1970. In that year I was 17 years old. In July I had finished school and in September I started a three year training course. So the Prisoner accompanied me in that important time of my life. Three sentences touched me in a special way.

#### 1) "I'm a cog in the machine." No. 12 in The General

It was my impression, that I was only a little cog in an unknown and inscrutable big machinery in which I was imprisoned. A feeling of helplessness and powerlessness overwhelmed me.

#### 2) "Who knows anyone here?" Watchmaker's daughter in It's Your Funeral

I met many people in my new professional Village world. Superiors and colleagues. But whom of them did I really know? Or to whom I could build a personal relationship in a world that is interested primarily in success and achievement?

#### 3) "I'm not a number, I'm a free man!" Opening dialogue

This significant slogan of No. 6 was a valuable companion in the then new world of profession. His permanent statement accompanied my first steps and helped me to find my own way personally of life as a true free man.

### B. Settings and characters that fascinated me

In addition to the simple sentences quoted above, there were three settings and characters, in the Prisoner series, that impressed and fascinated me. They have drawn me into their spell right up until today.

#### 1) Beautiful Village

The first impressive setting in the Prisoner is the beautiful village on the beach and its unique atmosphere. It seemed to me as a vacation paradise where I would have liked to spend my holiday. Unfortunately, it took 21 years until in 1990 for the first time I came into the real Village Portmeirion in North Wales.

#### 2) Modern technology

The second impression of the series is the modern technology, which is always and everywhere present in that place. It is a strong contrast to the dreamy, idyllic, small town. This technique reminded me of the company I worked in now. My daily work with industry technology has aroused in me the desire for the imaginative dreamland.

#### 3) Personality of Patrick McGoohan

The third impression is the charismatic appearance and powerful presence of the protagonist Patrick McGoohan. I knew and appreciated him from his previous agent series John Drake (Danger Man). From the first moment, he pulled me back into his spell. I identified with him in his struggle for freedom and personality in my new working world in which I felt myself imprisoned.

Thank you contributors for sharing your views. All the above demonstrates that a wide cross section appeal. We have both scenes that have been chosen just the once, yet other examples are referenced a number of times. To me, this translates the sheer high quality and production values that runs through the series.

On a wider front, many years ago, back in the 1990's, the then editor of our magazine, Howard Foy, had invited members to list their 'Top Ten' favourite scenes. He remarked that the appeal had elicited a big response, and after collating all the votes, he compiled a definitive list of member's favourites.

He added, "*The task of drawing up a table proved a massive headache, as no less than 158 different scenes received votes. However more than half of this total was made up of selections which received just ONE vote, and as your Top Ten poured in, it quickly emerged that the winner would come from one of the four in the list.*"

A number of member's choices do make for interesting reading. It was noted that the unmasking of No. 1 polled just a single vote. I find that quite astonishing. Another to receive this dubious accolade was the "I will not be pushed...etc." scene from Arrival. One member, Philip Barrett, contrived to choose nine scenes, which no one else mentioned. Of the 158 scenes which received votes, all seventeen episodes were represented. But only just. Do Not Forsake Me, managed to sneak in with Richard Beehler citing the scene where Nigel Stock walks down the corridor and bursts into the office in a virtual re-run of the opening resignation sequence.

Of course, we are talking a 'Top Ten' here, whereas I wanted the choice whittled down to just three. My rationale was that in the time allowed individuals would be forced to prune drastically.

Anyway, it's worth quoting what was the definitive list, the member's choices, in full, counting down from ten to one. I find it quite intriguing that what was selected then as everyone's favourite scene was not mentioned a single time by my audience. I wonder why?

So, here goes - Joint tenth place - Many Happy Returns – No. 6's ejection from the jet, and from Free for All, the reporter's, "No Comment" at the end of the interview with No. 6 in the Moke.

At nine. The Chimes of Big Ben. When No. 6 offers to make a handle for the door to No. 2's chamber.

At eight. It's Your Funeral. When the seal of office containing the bomb is handed to the new No. 2.

At seven. Arrival. No. 6 in the shop asking for a map.

At six. Arrival again, No. 6 smashing the radio.

Halfway through this list I would like to comment. This is a personal observation. I can understand why the above choices have been made, however whilst I agree that the reporters verbal exchange with No. 6 in the Moke is clever and witty, the exchange of the seal from It's Your Funeral lacks tension, despite the attempt by the sound editor to compensate by inserting suitably dramatic music. The ejection is sudden, unexpected, and signals to the viewer, no-one can be trusted, and there was a purpose to the previous scene with the milkman, watch carefully, you can't miss a beat. Again, the offer for a door handle always makes me smile, the dry delivery of the line and Leo's response, are a mini-acting class. I find several other humorous exchanges that I would rate higher. No. 6 asking for a map is both a pivotal scene, telling us quite a lot about the nature of the prison, and the smashing of the radio indicating the coming resistance of No. 6 are important plot devices, but they would never make my top ten. Would they make yours?

So to the final five.

At five. Fall Out, No. 6 and the butler running for the bus.

Yes, as has been mentioned above, this is a lovely scene, the sense of shackles broken, freedom, caution thrown to the wind, the bonds of friendship, loyalty, allegiance.

As mentioned the final four all jostled until one scene in particular came out the clear winner.

At four. Hammer into Anvil, No. 2's final breakdown. This tale is about justice, revenge, turning the tables, suspicion, out witting a flawed foe, once a weakness is identified. Of the two protagonists, McGoohan gets the easier role, goading and pressuring until the mental collapse of his opponent. Cargill portrays the growing paranoia magnificently. Remember, this was an actor noted for his ability to play comedy. As mentioned in a previous 'Desert Island Dave' Cargill said the last scene was filmed first. So top marks in that sense. But for me, it wouldn't make my top ten. Yours?

At three. A. B. and C. The unmasking of 'D'. Yes, very clever. First time round, I never saw that coming. Afterward you realise of course, it's brought us full circle. The scene, played out on the backlot, the street built and used for the film 'The Dirty Dozen', provides the ideal setting. The whole piece is deeply

atmospheric. From the entrance, right through to the throwing open of the doors as No. 6 exits, all inter cut with No. 6 being viewed on the back-projection screen by No. 14, (with her dry comment, "You'll have to call him 'D'") and a desperate, mentally ragged No. 2, about to get the surprise, and shock, of his life. Yes, it's good.

At two. Dance of the Dead. The Mr. Tuxedo scene on the beach with No. 2. Yes, this is magic. The location, the otherworldly dialogue provided by Anthony Skene, the two 'characters', and the evocative lighting, the sunset, the shadows. It's poetic. This was the scene that captivated film editor John S Smith and motivated him to restore this unfinished episode that had languished on the shelf. I suspect this was because the sheer mystery, atmosphere, and plotting was baffling to most. When filmed, this rough cut lacked an important element, something that the whole episode pivoted around, and made sense of all, and that was the voiceover provided by No. 6 for the written note he puts in the pocket of the corpse he gives to the tide as a distress signal. Without this, the episode would be baffling. When John asked Patrick to read the dialogue for insertion, only part was done, so doubt and ambiguity remain. To my mind, this actually translates into providing even more enjoyment as an air of mystery is heightened. A simply brilliant scene, which captures and epitomizes the essence, the spirit, of the series...

And now, the unveiling of the number one scene.

It was not mentioned by any of the attendees at the Brainbash. It comes from an episode that is frequently overlooked, is not considered integral, certainly not one of the 'magic' essential seven, a 'piece of fluff', escapist, a James Bond spoof. Maybe you have guessed, The Girl Who Was Death. The episode that both proved a sort of escape from the oppression and intensity of the Village and demonstrated that McGoohan was a versatile actor who could play light comedy. Considering this was near the end of the production, with all the pressures involved, to not show strain on screen, to perform as professionally as he did, this must have been quite a challenge, yet this is a comedic gem, and an episode I rather enjoy. It's also another example of how, when you sat down to watch this week's episode of The Prisoner; you had to expect the 'unexpected'! What is he up to this week? Two weeks ago he was a different actor, last week he's riding a horse in the wild west, what's it going to be this week? Scriptwriter Terrence Feely told me he was on holiday in the south of France when he got a call from Patrick. Did he have any ideas? He did. Patrick and David Tomblin flew down, and Terrence devised The Girl Who Was Death. It was originally envisaged as a two-parter, however Lew Grade balked at the costs, so it was condensed into the single standalone format. According to one source, the origin of the idea came from David Tomblin.

Watching The Girl Who Was Death comes as light relief after all the intensity that has gone before, and it is a hugely enjoyable romp. Particularly when, (and here we come to the number one most enjoyed scene as voted for some two decades ago) No. 6 drains his pint of ale and reads on the bottom of the glass, 'You have just been poisoned'! Yes, all the philosophy, the rights of individualism, the politics, the search for the inner self, the social comment, the creative experiment, the desire of Patrick McGoohan, the assembled creative talent, the fight against bureaucracy, and, it's the poisoned pint that wins the day. I have to smile.



Cheers. Bottoms up!

Thank you Dave for a very informative article. It would be interesting to hear our members top three and why. So please write into [www.sixofonemag@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:www.sixofonemag@yahoo.co.uk) and we will publish your responses next issue. (Ed).