

Questions are a burden to others

4: Living In Harmony

Looking for Harmony? Go West, young man!

The allegory within an allegory, a dream within the dream?

by Dave Barrie



Illustration: Coby Fied 5

"I wanted to do a western. I'd never done one. And they'd never made a western in England, and we were short of a story." Patrick McGoochan.¹

During the autumn and winter of 1967/8, *The Prisoner* hooked millions of us and we'd tune in each week, wondering what new mind-bending tricks Number Six – and we viewers – would be faced with. The episode transmitted in the London area, where I resided, on the evening of Sunday January 14th, really wrong-footed we viewers. With no warning, suddenly we were in the middle of a western. It wasn't until

the familiar Albertus typeface spelt out *Living in Harmony*, (ironically over a graphic fist-fight,) that I began to comprehend in some way this may be something to do with *The Prisoner*. With the bare minimum of familiar names in the credits, then confirmed by the early plot development, I realised we were on familiar ground as the resignation sequence played out.

What a total viewing audience of some 9.3 million for that episode saw was a good, solid, well written and produced story, in a genre that had enjoyed a high profile since the birth of film², and was currently enjoying a resurgence, even as the craze for spies was taking centre stage, after which, with *Star Wars*, sci-fi pointed the way to the future.

Living in Harmony was up there with some of the best. Apart from cracking pared-to-the-bone dialogue, accomplished acting from McGoochan, and a hypnotically intense performance from Alexis Kanner, the Sergio Leone influenced atmospheric direction, authentic clothing and props, were gripping. The real challenge, getting us back into 'The Village', was handled cleverly, in a twist that genuinely surprised and worked. The wonder was that its feature film quality, which usually would take months of production time, belied the swift TV schedule of mere weeks.

This episode marks a real turning point in the evolution of the series. Until now, the boundaries have been flexible, but clear. The format has been observed. Here we actively defy the established framework, becoming both experimental and controversial, and challenging the viewer. The genie was truly out of the bottle.

So, how had we got a western, in what was still loosely a rather 'off beat spy action' series that was part futuristic, part action-adventure, a mix of mind-bending and social comment, yet decidedly original? If we overlook both *The Sheriff of Fractured Jaw*, (shot in Spain 1959.) and *Carry on Cowboy*

(1965), *Living in Harmony* can claim to truly be the first British western.

There were a number of factors. Firstly, *The Prisoner* project was encountering real problems. A combination of rapidly approaching screening dates, a shortage of funding, and a dearth of ideas for scripts, the turmoil was making life stressful for those involved. Desperate for ideas, McGoochan and Tomblin turned to the production crew. Although a number of scripts were submitted, only that by assistant editor Ian Rakoff found favour. Secondly, in the 1950s there was an avalanche of TV western series, an evenings viewing was not complete without at least one offering.³ Cinematically this theme continued right through the 1960s, and the arrival of the Sergio Leone 'Dollar trilogy,' starring Clint Eastwood, the first of these appearing in 1964, sparking a 'spaghetti western' craze. They helped breath new life into this genre as it explored perhaps more mature themes than the genre staple of 'Cowboys vs Indians'. Thirdly, reputedly, McGoochan had always wanted to 'do' a western. Fourthly, the western genre, traditionally a blank canvas where morality tales could be played out, lent itself to accommodating a wide range of storylines, and scenarios. Even Shakespeare, *Yellow Sky* 1943, (*The Tempest*) and *Broken Lance* 1954 (*King Lear*), for example.

"I never escaped the shadow of The Prisoner" - Ian Rakoff

In the pub one night, Frank Mayersaid to Pat "Why don't we go somewhere different. It's all in the mind anyway." Pat replied, "As long as you handle it all." David Tomblin and I worked hand in hand on that one together. I did the wardrobe, the posters in the saloon, props, horses and everything. Westerns were my thing.... The idea for a western came from me"⁴

But you need a script.



"Want to write a western with me?" McGoochan to Ian Rakoff, Writer of *Living in Harmony*.⁵

Right from the beginning of my interest in *The Prisoner* it was the scripts, the ideas that fascinated me, the actors were secondary, even though I was fortunate enough to meet, interview, and correspond with a number of them. When I contacted Ian Rakoff, I hit gold.

When I first met Ian he was about to embark on his book, *Inside The Prisoner*, and because he warmed to me, he asked if I would care to give him some assistance. I was regularly in London on business then, so at the end of a day, I'd ascend the several flights of stairs to Ian's eyrie, and over a meal, and some wine, we'd discuss his progress. At one point, Ian was writing, I was reading, and Steve, the editor, was checking. It was a magic time. Until the series music editor Eric Mival produced his autobiography, Ian was the only person who had worked on *The Prisoner* to describe the experience. Fortunately his book can still be sourced via the net. He writes of his involvement working on radical films in that intoxicating decade in an engaging and involving manner.

Ian is... an individual. Employed as an assistant editor on the series, little wonder he took to McGoochan, a man of substance and values, and also no wonder vice versa. For many of the actors and technicians, working on *The Prisoner* was just another job, but for a precious few, it was something special, a work of significance. Ian was one of that number. I noticed that when the *Society* magazine arrived, he devoured it, underlining in red ink passages he felt needed time to study. He cared.

How Ian came to write this episode makes quite a tale. To fully appreciate the genesis, one must understand that Ian grew up in apartheid South Africa, which he perceived as abhorrent. He became an activist, and acting on a tip-off, left before he was apprehended. Coming to the UK he was able to access the film industry, and a chance meeting with editor John S Smith found him assisting on a number of *The Prisoner* episodes.

So when the appeal for ideas was mooted, it was Ian, with his love of the western, who came up with the story and script. Amongst the sources for Ian's inspiration was the classic *High Noon* (1952). Ian writes, "This was the epic western in which one man is pitted against a whole town." This classic was widely seen as an allegory of Senator Joseph McCarthy's high profile anti-communist witch-hunt that ruined so many Hollywood careers. Ian adds, "When most were running scared of McCarthy, Zinneman⁶ stood his ground. He moved to London before McCarthy succeeded in getting him. There were aspects of *High Noon* which I had born in mind when writing the script." The fact is, the western, as sci-fi, can be very accommodating. As Ian points out, "Almost any conflict could easily be incorporated into the format of the western which is so all embracing." The stars aligned, and we got *Living in Harmony*.

Ian's second source was his beloved comics. One being a Gene Autry example from the early 1950s that provided the idea of a "horseless drifter, walking with his saddle across his shoulder. He is captured on the outskirts of a western town which exists on no map." *Harmony*, the name of the unfriendly town came from either *Two Gun Kid*, or *Kid Colt Outlaw*, comics circa 1963.

John questioned how Ian would get a western into the Village. Ian replied, "I'd just jump in. The tricky bit will be getting out of the West and back into the Village. But with the right drugs and medication, one can be manoeuvred into believing anything." To Ian, all could be solved. "I'm assembling the main characters as western archetypes." McGoochan would be the drifter captured on the outskirts of a western town. Number Two would be a corrupt judge who runs the town. There would be the 'tart with a heart', and a psychotic gunslinger. The villagers become townspeople who are afraid of the judge and his gunmen. "Gun law prevails. It's an open town." Ian added, "In my story, the locals resent the intruder...they don't like someone who is different... especially as he doesn't carry a gun."

When McGoochan read the draft script, he was enthusiastic. Particularly the opening, "Get your audience having to think right from the beginning", he told Ian, "You've already got most of it down there. It's a proper western. It's different but it fits into the Village effectively." Together they worked on the script.

Ian again: "The probability was that Pat had already thought of tackling a western, nothing quite as bleak, dark, and foreboding as I had written. It seemed to have just happened that I was on the right wavelength and had come along with an idea which had already been bandied about." This demonstrates that Ian has never claimed to think of the idea first, the general view being that Ian and Frank thought up the idea independently.



"He'll tear up the scenery."

- Casting director Rose Tobias Shaw talking about Alexis Kanner.

This episode was well cast. If McGoohan underplayed; sparse dialogue, all in the eyes, the expression, the way he moved, it was Kanner whose intensity was a force of nature. Both McGoohan, and Tomblin, (who had already worked with Kanner⁷) very much admired his work.⁸ As Kanner said, "Dave Tomblin phoned me up and said "Wanna do a western?" He had been First Assistant Director on one of the first pictures I had done. At the time, McGoohan was in Hollywood filming *Ice Station Zebra* and of course was ready to do the *Harmony* episode upon his return.⁹

What made for compelling viewing was the 'Kid' was mute. Alexis told me in 2003, "Eventually we cut the few lines I had because they were so rotten and it was much more interesting if I didn't talk." (this was rare as actors usually want more), so gives a riveting and compelling performance as the infantile, disturbed, psychotic gunslinger. Total intensity and a magnetic presence. I told Alexis this, and he was genuinely affected. I then realised that he was actually quite shy and maybe underrated his talent. A nice man. The bit of 'business' he does with the hat, he is conveying a symbol of his self-worth and respect. Clever. The 'heroine' was played by accomplished actress Valerie French, meeting the same fate as she was destined to in the Glenn Ford western *Jubal*. The heavies also acted and looked the part, notably McGoohan's stunt double, Frank Maher. Finally David Bauer, who played it very smooth and confident. Harking back to McCarthyism, it was this intolerance that drove David to immigrate to the UK. Many other actors, writers, and directors also brought their talents to Europe. Amongst them were Charlie Chaplin, Orson Welles, directors Cy Endfield, Jo Losey, and Sam Wanamaker, and many writers, including Dalton Trumbo. The madness finally ended when Kirk Douglas bravely insisted that Trumbo get a full credit for his work on *Spartacus*. Incidentally, for those old enough to remember the well-written ITC adventure series from the 1950s and early 1960s, we have McCarthy to thank for the many quality screenwriters who washed up on these shores.

Just as the protagonists are archetypes, so too are the familiar western scenes, the bar room brawl, the town with no way out, cowed citizens, the hero finally strapping on guns. The plot plays out as each character makes their moves, chess like, toward the inevitable showdown. The effective final duel, with Kanner replacing his gun in its holster after being shot, just as Burt Lancaster did in *Vera Cruz* (1954)¹⁰

Although *Harmony's* origins had been influenced by the American western, the Tomblin production was very clearly influenced by the Sergio Leone 'spaghetti' westerns. Leone employed minimal dialogue, instead choosing facial close ups to convey thoughts, feelings, and reactions. What dialogue there is, is often blackly humorous - typical of Leone's work. Just as he used periods of silence punctuated by bursts of violence to build tension, *Harmony* portrayed not only violence but also sadism. The trail weary dustiness of the *Dollars* films is evident throughout this episode. It is a British Spaghetti Western.

All seemed set, then a bombshell. McGoohan was off to Hollywood to be in John Sturges production of *Ice Station Zebra*. It may seem unthinkable, in the middle of any series, for the star to disappear. The reason becomes apparent. Money was tight. Very tight. Three sources Ian reveals told him that Pat was doing this to save the project financially. David Tomblin, Pat himself, who told Ian, "I've accepted a part in a Hollywood film... It'll mean we can do another four episodes. It's a matter of financing (them) to get them made the way I want them to be. Otherwise, I could have it taken out of my hands." And it was the film librarian, Tony Sloman, who shared with Ian that McGoohan's fee was three quarters of a million pounds...

With the script largely completed, Ian understandably felt both worried and apprehensive. Generally with the script development Ian had found Pat to be both receptive and responsive. McGoohan offered, "There's not a lot to do on the script. I'm leaving you in good hands." This was to be David Tomblin and the relationship quickly soured. It was Tomblin who asked Ian to think of a different title other than *Do Not Forsake Me O My Darling*, the theme song from *High Noon*. Before long, Ian found himself sidelined, and was effectively pushed out, as, with McGoohan still in the USA, Tomblin helmed the production, eventually taking credit for writer, producer, and director.

Ian was merely given a part story credit. Tomblin took script. I have had sight of the original first draft and Ian deserves much more, far more, than that.

THE ALLEGORY WITHIN THE ALLEGORY

For transmission, a number of cuts to the more extreme moments were made, whereas in the USA it was not screened at all. It was thought this was because of the role of hallucinogenic drugs in the plot, and initially this was CBS's stance, but it does not stand up as mind-altering drugs frequent several other episodes. The truth emerged when CBS admitted the issue was of the pacifistic tendencies of Number Six, refusing to strap on a gun. This episode is not about escape, it is about rejecting violence. It raised a moral question. Should an individual go against their own beliefs in order to defend their Country? At the time the Vietnam War was very controversial and youth was rebelling so the parallels were obvious. It would be one thing to have this plot set in Portmeirion, but to set it in the mythical west, where traditionally good always triumphs over evil, was far too close to home, and ensures that (at least for CBS), this is the most subversive of all episodes.

Ian Rakoff agreed Tomblin's direction was good, nowhere better than the climax. The final shoot-out is well staged, the three heavies intelligently occupying different locations rather than an easily targeted group. The hand-held camera work used throughout is particularly effective, echoing the camera unchained technique used by the early German expressionist cinema in the days of silent film. The clever idea of surreal cardboard cut-outs was Tomblin's idea. The transfer back into The Village handled well.

This mould-breaking episode launches us into the unknown. It

explores the nature of reality, it toys with the viewer, it asks serious political questions, and it holds a mirror to the American legend and the American dream.

Now we, along with Number Six, become aware that all we have been seeing is but an illusion, as we have shared Number Six's hallucinations. The other protagonists also appear to have become so immersed they can no longer separate the illusion from reality. To participate perhaps they too were fed the same drug? The story could have ended here, which would replicate the conclusion in *Chimes of Big Ben*. But to then tag on an extra scene alters everything, including scope for further audience interpretation, as all are drawn back to Harmony. For it is The Village that is the nightmare. All have been deeply affected emotionally by the experience. Fact and fiction blur. This results in the very theatrical deaths of both Numbers 22 and 8 and can cause the viewer to question what they have seen. However as this episode can be interpreted as allegorical, or a dream within a dream, which makes sense - in fact, perfect sense if the episodes represent the thoughts of *The Prisoner* as he speeds down the runway, intent on resignation. **DB**

¹ The 1977 Ontario University Warner Troyer interview.

² At twelve minutes long, *The Great Train Robbery* film is considered a milestone in filmmaking. Film historians now largely consider this film to be the first American action film and the first Western film with a "recognizable form".

³ As the western grew up, becoming more complex, there was one TV series that went too far. *'Outlaws'* (1960) starring Barton McClane and Don Collier, turned the format upside down, each week showing how a man became an outlaw, showing his reasons and portraying him in a sympathetic light. This role was usually played by the guest artist. There was uproar in the press. Clearly this could not be allowed. It was pulled, with the second series back to the accepted juvenile format.

⁴ Roger Langley, *Patrick McGoohan: Danger Man or Prisoner?* (2017) - updated and revised, with contributions by Catherine McGoohan (originally published by Tomahawk Press in 2007)

⁵ *Inside The Prisoner*. Ian Rakoff. Radical television and film in the 1960's. Batsford books. All Ian's quotes are sourced from this book.

⁶ The director.

⁷ *'We Joined the Navy'*, (1962).

⁸ Kanner remained for the series, and McGoohan and he developed a close friendship, akin to a surrogate son/father relationship, leading to McGoohan agreeing to star in Kanner's film, *'Kings and Desperate Men'* (1981)

⁹ As 4 above

¹⁰ Leone went one better with his masterpiece, *'Once Upon a Time in the West'* (1967) which featured variations on a number of the most famous western scenes, commencing with an adaptation of the wait for the train in *'High Noon'*.

Next issue - **Face Unknown**

