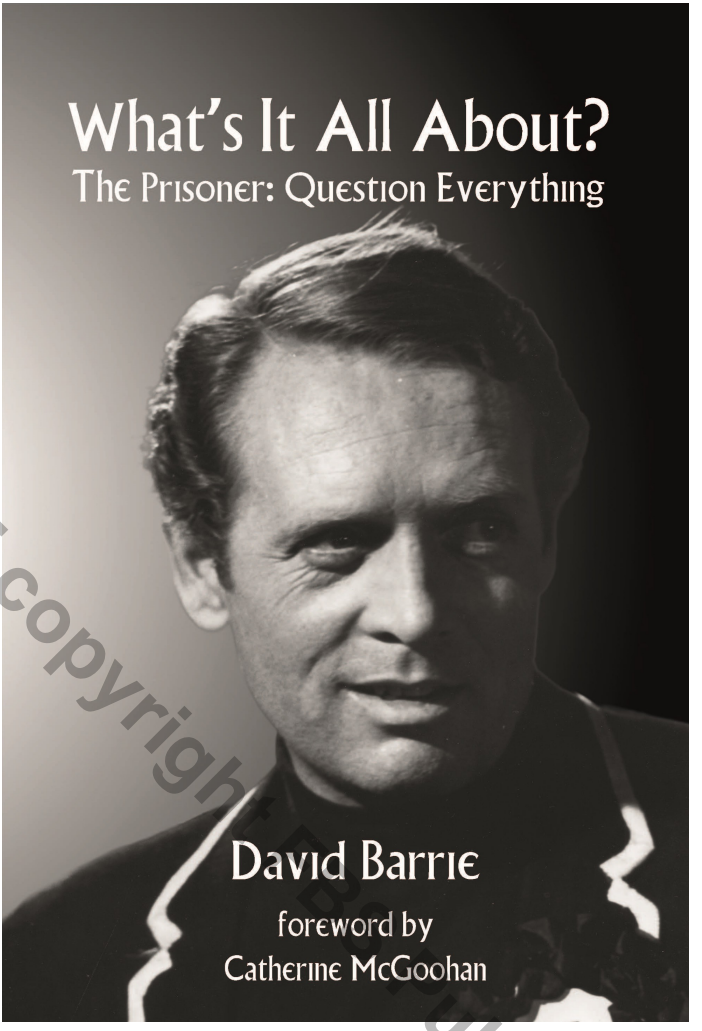

Excerpt from 'What's It All ABout? The Prisoner: Question Everything by David Barrie.

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What's It All About?

The Prisoner: Question Everything

David Barrie

FabulousBookS

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This book employs the house style employed in all literature produced by Six of One: The Prisoner Appreciation Society.

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Preface

'What's it All About?'

"The series was posing the question, has one the right to tell a man what to think, how to behave … Has one the right to be an individual? I wanted the audience to ask questions, argue, and think."
Patrick McGoohan

'The Prisoner' was a compelling, controversial, 1967 television series that was the vision of its star, the charismatic Patrick McGoohan. At the time he was the highest paid TV actor in Britain and was granted total artistic freedom. In addition to starring in his production, he wrote and directed a number of episodes, and as executive producer was responsible for the devising of this widely acclaimed and ground-breaking landmark television classic. McGoohan's creation continues to defy categorisation, yet still manages to exert a profound impact and influence, individually, socially, and culturally. The most significant and important factors arising from The Prisoner are its ingenuity, its ambiguous and allegorical nature, and its double edge. This 'Secret Agent in a Kafkaesque Wonderland', was underwritten with apparent philosophical, social, political, and cultural comment, which was, and still is, its greatest achievement and attraction.

Each of the seventeen episodes took a potent theme and expertly buried it just beneath a surface of entertainment. It is the dissection and discussion of philosophical commentary, political manipulation, psychological drama, social criticism, symbolism, fantasy and myth, along with the enduring quest for one's inner self, which provides the strength of the series. Since it was first screened The Prisoner has become part of the fabric of life, refusing to concede, cower, or conform. It captured the zeitgeist of the 'Swinging' yet paranoid '60s. At its very heart is a powerful message, a timeless truth: has one the right to be an individual? If you wish for more than a brief flirtation with this challenging television classic that demands exploration, that poses and seeks to answer some of the more enduring and significant questions in life, then this book may be for you.

The author saw part of the location filming at Portmeirion, in North Wales, in 1966 and was totally enthralled when it was broadcast a year later. It seared a way into his consciousness, and never let go. Subsequently it was re-screened in the Autumn of 1976 and it was his details being broadcast after the transmission of the final episode, 'Fall Out' on December 12th that led to the formation of Six of One, The Prisoner Appreciation Society, which acted as the embryonic focus of the enthusiast movement then gaining momentum and which is still both buoyant and active to this day.

Initially the author imagined that half a dozen fans would beat a path to his door. Instead, it marked the beginning of his interest in, desire, and attempts, to penetrate the veils to the very core of McGoohan's ambitious personal project. He has interviewed many of those involved in its making, made innumerable presentations, written countless articles, attempting to do this justice. Consequently,

this book is the result of over 50 years' fascination with, research into, and being held captive by The Prisoner.

The title states its purpose, 'What's it All About?', and weighs and evaluates the series, and aims to be an exploration, examination, analysis, interpretation, and consideration. It endeavours both to achieve this, yet also to go beyond, concluding that this radical television experiment is a tool that can not only stimulate our minds, but also encourage us to consider some of the timeless fundamental questions of life, even our relationship with the world, and just maybe discover some of the answers. It strives to fulfil exactly what Patrick McGoohan hoped that we, the viewer, might enact: to question everything.

Dear Reader, it was lightning in a bottle.

Introduction

"Has one the right to tell a man what to think, how to behave, to coerce others? Has one the right to be an individual? I (want) to make (viewers) ask questions, argue, and think. The function of any art is to speak ahead of the times, to herald warnings that are not obvious but which are there."
Patrick McGoohan.[1]

"The bravest, the classiest, and, without question, the most original television series ever attempted."
Tony Sloman the Prisoner crew, film librarian.[2]

"I remember distinctly driving down this street and thinking, here was a place for our man in isolation."
Patrick McGoohan.[3]

"I have always gone on record as saying how much I admired Patrick McGoohan, and I am very happy that I was instrumental in getting the production made, and also that it has proved to be such a great international success." Lew Grade.[4]

The purpose of this introduction is to address two questions. Firstly, what is the essence and appeal of a 1960s TV series that made such a significant cultural impact that; it transcended the medium; it influenced a generation, then evolved into common currency as it became part of the fabric of society, and is now recognised as a timeless classic that still has the power to affect individuals deeply. Secondly, perhaps more mundanely, nevertheless relevant, to address the question of how the episode chapters are structured, and what the reader may expect to encounter within them. Hopefully this will ensure the reading experience may be as rewarding as one would wish. As it unfolds, each episode perhaps overtly, but more often discretely, inserts serious themes, where it masquerades as an entertaining escapist drama. Over the series, our understanding of the 'Village', the plight of the prisoner, the series framework, and the story arc develops this intriguing puzzle.

Described as an 'allegorical conundrum', by its creator, Patrick McGoohan, the series employed mythology, nursery rhymes, archetypes, symbols, surrealism, and all paths lead to the timeless message of the individual's right to be individual. At its heart, it is the quest for the inner self that is the underlying strength of the series that guarantees its longevity. The joy of The Prisoner is the exploration and evaluation of the carefully inserted covert ideas, including posing a number of the bigger questions in life, which ultimately can only ever be answered by oneself. With hindsight it is perhaps not only the sixties' ultimate testament to that decade's insecurities, social concerns, understandable paranoia, belief in conspiracy theories, and yet, towering over these, rebellious youth, intent on creating a society based on peace, love, and freedom of the human spirit. Its enduring themes are even more relevant today.

Each of the chapters do not necessarily follow a set format. 'The Prisoner' chose not to, and that is good enough for this writer. Their lengths vary, because I believe, for example, the spiritual heartland of 'Free for All' has much more to say than the content of 'The Girl Who Was Death'. Upon consideration, and as a general trend, the reader may find the contents of each succeeding chapter adds to their understanding growing in depth and gaining in involvement. In each I explore, examine, and discuss the core themes, then research and review their wider implications. In addition to an attempt to give my perceived understanding, I augment key points to further interpret and clarify. Examples include imprisonment and dehumanisation in 'Arrival', politics and the press in 'Free for All', brainwashing and conformity in 'A Change of Mind', identity and individualism in, 'Do Not Forsake'. In general terms, each chapter primarily focuses on a single episode and its analysis, accompanied by a closer examination of the issues raised, then scored by what I have termed a 'Barrieometer', to weigh and rate its significance. Rather than leave the reader with a cold sense of closure, there will be six 'Points2ponder', that is ideas, concepts, that may spark the reader into pursuing their own voyage of further discovery. In addition, a number of suggested relevant books or films that I believe embody both selected and principal themes from that episode.

There have been many books written about this bold, innovative, radical, and challenging series. The production has been very adequately covered in a number of them, others have described the episodes content, and a precious few may have featured a little more. Yes, inevitably there will be an element of production information, however, primarily this book is one man's attempt to take a journey to the very heart of the series. 'Free for All' for example, embraces a great deal, the instinctive heartfelt views that McGoohan wanted so much to convey, that I felt it warranted some 20,000 words. As his daughter Catherine, confirmed to me, *"I think this episode is very iconic. I think he gets to say so much in this episode, it's quite prolific."*[5] To my knowledge, no one has discussed or written about why the prisoner should say, "Obey me and be free," in the dying moments of a betrayed victory. Or from whence the term 'Unmutual' originated. Or dissected 'Fall Out' to the extent I have sought. Also consider, when the P comes face to face with 'himself' dressed in his supposedly destroyed original suit; "We thought you would be happier as yourself." Again, (bar my own,) I can find no trace of a single observation regarding the scene's symbolism, regarding this key moment.

This book has been nigh on some 60 years in gestation, since I first was captivated by 'The Prisoner' in the autumn of 1967. Over the decades I have written many thousands of words, interviewed a great number of those involved in its making, held in excess of two score 'Brain-Bashes' at Six of One conventions, to discuss and debate the purpose of, and what the ideas expressed in the series are seeking to reveal to the viewer. Be in no doubt,

whether overt or carefully buried, that was the creator's intent. For this writer, apart from everything else, it was initially the scripts that resonated, struck a chord. Who were these scriptwriters? From where did they derive their inspired ideas? Obviously prime mover McGoohan was the dynamic vanguard, and in time I was fortunate to interview or correspond with a number of them, men of ideals, of passion. In a number of chapters, the writers may feature prominently.

The format, and deliberate intention, of its creator was something very rare, to ask the audience to question all that they saw and heard. Week by week, as the series unfolded, and the ideas and ideals became more embedded and emblazoned, the episodes progressively became more surreal, allegorical, and possibly downright bizarre, culminating with the crowning achievement, 'Fall Out'. The uniqueness, ambiguity, and realisation this experimental series would create debate, be argued over, would become an integral part of the social fabric. Its impact would echo on, influencing many, sparking university courses, conventions where the series was discussed, and over 50 publications devoted to its principal messages. In essence, the puzzle it presents to the viewer is basically that of life itself, and what that reveals is yet more timeless questions.

The series' allegorical trajectory did not evolve; from its inception, it was clearly intended. For ease, throughout, the Prisoner/Patrick is referred to as 'P', as in the original scripts.

The title of this book is, "What's it all about?" and the sub-heading, "Question everything." Let us attempt to do just that.

David Barrie September 2025

L to R: Robin Llywelyn, Catherine McGoohan, David Barrie.

1. Arrival
"What's it All About?" The Prisoner

"Man is born Free, yet everywhere is in chains." Jean-Jacques Rousseau.[1]
"I've seen Len, I've got the money … for … that idea that we've talked about for years."
Patrick McGoohan to producer David Tomblin.[2]

"It will be absolutely essential … to see the first segment for an understanding of the series … I've worked in a top security job and I've had enough so I resign."
Patrick McGoohan.[3]

"'Arrival' is the germinal script, which sets up the situation and launches us into the Village, the admission ticket to the world of Number 6."
George Markstein.[4]

"I locked myself in a room with George Markstein for one month and we came out with the first episode which Patrick took and embellished. The style of the series was his baby."
Producer David Tomblin.[5]

As the pilot, 'Arrival' is the most complex and information intense of all the episodes, its task being to introduce so many novel ideas and concepts, virtually all previously unknown, nor encountered. Not just a parallel world, but one that many might never imagine could exist. Just as 'Arrival' introduces the viewer to the world of 'The Prisoner', having to condense and compact many of the ingredients that will be more fully explored in forthcoming episodes, so this chapter devoted to the opening episode attempts to encapsulate the major themes, and the implications so vividly portrayed. Although 'Arrival' is of a mere 50-minute duration, to fully appreciate, this chapter is amongst the longest, as I endeavour to dissect, define, consider, and discuss, as we seek to evaluate all that we will encounter. There are a number of recurring themes, two being Orwell's '1984' and the question of individuality, for example. Both will feature in a number of chapters. There is so much to consider and reflect upon in this unique, innovatory, and imaginative series.

"Such Ideas Are Dangerous."
If the pen is mightier than the sword, then beware an idea, for that single inspirational flash may be the spark that changes the world, for there is no power on Earth that can stop an idea whose time has come. Patrick Joseph McGoohan had one such inspired revelation.

And so it Begins, Cue Thunder
Darkened sky. Menacing. Storm clouds. A crash of thunder. Then another. Merging with the high-pitched scream of a jet engine. Instant cut to a vast, deserted, runway, stretching to infinity. The shriek of the jet fades to absolute silence. Then, faintly

at first but rapidly rising in volume and urgency, the driving, strident, theme music begins, giving a thrill of excitement. From the horizon, a tiny speck hurtles at lightning speed toward the camera. It explodes into the lens with the crack of the sound barrier being broken. Shock cut to the driver. Grim determination writ in expression. Hair swept back by slip-stream. Face taut against wind pressure. Clearly a man intent on action.

It is day. From high above, the panorama of central London. The Lotus 7 flashes across Westminster Bridge. The camera zooms in to pick the ant-like sports-car as it purposefully aims at the entrance to an underground car park, engine screaming up through the gears. Taking a ticket, the barrier lifts, a symbolic gesture, and he is through. Ahead, the doors. Marked 'WAY OUT'. (This might denote the leaving of 'Danger Man', or this new series will be 'way out', a term then in use indicating something was 'extremely unconventional, unusual, or avant-garde'.) In a second even more emphatically symbolic action, the man decisively parts the two doors and strides though. Rapid strides down a corridor, in and out of pools of light, focus on his intense steely expression. A crash of thunder as, doors flung back, arms outstretched for a moment, (more symbolism), his presence fills the room. His gaze, his target before him, behind the barricade of a desk, an archetypal bureaucrat, mentally reeling as the man vents with force. He gesticulates angrily. The language would be strong if we could hear. Instead, each dynamic gesture is punctuated by a clap of thunder. Shielded by his desk, the bald-headed man says nothing. His unwelcome visitor removes an envelope from his pocket, and forcefully crashes it onto the desk, shattering crockery. Task completed, he storms out …

This introductory sequence possesses great energy and power. The viewer's senses are assaulted as never before. Rapid cuts, the like of which were unknown at that time, convey with both speed and clarity the scenario's initial premise. In effect, this entirety of 'setting the scene', at no point utilises a single utterance of dialogue.

Again, with great speed and quick cuts, many so brief as to be fleeting. First to the green, yellow-nosed sports-car ascending the ramp from the car park, the nose of a second vehicle edges in an unassuming manner from left. Now intercutting to a forced perspective view of row upon row of filing cabinets that recede to the horizon.[6] Seemingly endless. A drawer opens of its own volition. The camera zooms focussing onto a filing card. It has the man's face, and from corner to corner, two lines of the letter 'X' intersect, we deduce signifying closure in some way. Then, we see, the front of the drawer as automatically, it too closes, the single word 'Resigned' written starkly in capitals. Cut to Bayswater Road. The Lotus angrily darts out from behind a hearse, overtaking, engine in full cry. Northern bound: Park Lane. Now observed and discretely trailed by the hearse. Crashing down through the gears. Handbrake. Rachet. Home. He packs, obviously preparing to continue his journey. We cut to the hearse, now parked near, from which a sombre, cadaverous looking man in black has emerged and approaches the door.

Within: packing, brochures, passport, a jet of vapour hisses through the keyhole. He loses consciousness. Fade to black.

He awakes, a change in tempo. The sense of urgency is replaced by less frantic camera activity. Having set up the initial framework, the anger, the resignation, the abduction, with great economy and speed, we now are to be surprised by what happens next. The man has woken in his home, on the couch where he lost consciousness. Slowly he rises, makes his way to the window, and draws the venetian blind. The compelling music that accompanied these early scenes has been replaced by a far slower, gentler, softer piece. He stands in shock, for a moment. Then the viewer. In place of the expected, familiar, London scene, we have what is a classic perspective of Portmeirion. The main title appears, 'Arrival'.

Thus, the introduction to the pilot episode explodes onto our screens. Our senses stormed, we too, the audience, are also taken prisoner. The intrigue, the mystery, the dazzling cascade of imagery, the provocative and perplexing ideas, the surreal elements, are forcibly beginning to invade our minds and readily exert their hold and so grip us tight.

For fourteen of the subsequent sixteen episodes, a condensed version of this introduction will form part of an opening sequence that will act as a reminder of the series premise, a narrative recall, whilst here it is the first step in the unfolding drama itself. From 'Chimes of Big Ben' onwards, a second series of brief scenes, virtually all, bar one, struck from this episode, accompanied by a 'call-and-response' voiceover, will form the standard introduction, ensuring we are reminded of the series' intrinsic ethos.

"The best pilot script I have ever read." Patrick McGoohan

When interviewed for a 1984 documentary, McGoohan, confirmed, *"The best pilot script I have ever read. I asked them if they would mind if I put in a couple of things which they could throw out if they didn't like … we just went a little further in certain areas, the political area for instance."* Patrick McGoohan.[7]

The purpose of any opening episode is to introduce the characters, the situation, the location, the key themes, and give a sense of the series framework within which the premise will be established. It has to 'set the scene', define the genre, and enable the viewer to become familiar with what they believe or imagine how the series will unfold, whilst broadly portraying its storylines and the general direction of the series arc. Being so radically different to anything that had gone before, this was a serious business for 'Arrival'. To the credit of Markstein and Tomblin, guided and aided by McGoohan, they triumphed. Nevertheless, inevitably this introductory episode must by definition pose far more questions than it answers, as it seeks to both portray a world that the viewer has never encountered the like of before, the obvious challenges presented to the central character, also all the artfully concealed or hinted at ramifications.

Traditionally a pilot will enjoy a larger budget, significantly more preparation, and a higher level of both care and attention than what is to follow. As 'The Prisoner' would be exploring territory that would effectively be virgin ground, arguably creating a new genre, with its eclectic mix of psychological games, philosophical conundrums, social commentary, even prophetic vision, in addition

to its allegorical slant, the deeper themes of mystery, and above all, the necessity that the audience should be a part of the process, by questioning what they see. Therefore, the opening story was at the time reputed to be the most expensive hour of television ever produced. Unlike any other then current action/adventure series, 'The Prisoner', with all that the pilot intended to introduce, portray, and explore, had far more intricate ideas and mind-bending concepts to introduce and establish, if not explain. What singled out this introductory episode by comparison with virtually all that had gone before was, whereas most examples might be able to convey their concept quite rapidly, here the process continues until the last intense frame. As a result, when the first cut was assembled it ran to some 90 minutes. Given the audience were being presented with a scenario and a degree of complexity which had never been attempted, let alone seen before, the challenge was to cut the material meaningfully into its allocated 50-minute running time. McGoohan turned to experienced editor Geoff Foot, editor for David Lean's 1952 Oscar winning film, 'The Sound Barrier'. Given that McGoohan was very keen to be involved in every aspect of production, between the two of them they made a fine job of condensing the material, the final product so fast-moving it took the audience by storm.

Let us embark on an exploration and analysis of 'Arrival', as we need to fully understand all we see and hear to make sense of what is to follow as we explore this first of seventeen episodes that comprise 'The Prisoner' cycle. But before we return to the moment after the newly incarcerated abductee surveys in shock the view from his window, we should introduce Don Chaffey, who not only was a noted film director, ('Jason and the Argonauts'), but had directed McGoohan in several episodes of 'Danger Man'. The two had become friends; so naturally, in mid-June 1966 McGoohan approached Chaffey with a proposal, telling him of his new series. Chaffey was about to film in Ireland and told the actor, *"I said: 'Fine, you do what you like with it!' He said: 'No, I'd like you to direct the first episodes to set the style of it.' I just refused point blank and went off to Ireland."* However, McGoohan gave the scripts to Don's daughter. She read them and told her father, *"You've got to read these, they're compulsive viewing. I reckon you're going to have eleven million people loving to hate you every Sunday night if you make them."* [8] The Irish project wrapped in mid-August, so allowing Chaffey to sign up. The location footage for the first four episodes, the cinematic look, is attributable to his direction. Shot in sequence, 'Arrival', 'Free for All', then, 'Checkmate' and 'Dance of the Dead'.

Prior to the September 1966 Portmeirion shoot, the opening credit scenes were filmed toward the end of August, including the resignation office set, the artificially low roof reinforcing an impressionistic appearance. According to writer Andrew Pixley, *"The office set was built into the location, with the low roof forcing the impressionistic look."* [9] Markstein performs a Hitchcockian cameo, appearing as the man behind the desk. Tomblin recalled, *"He looked like a bureaucrat and somebody that would be in an office, and so he took the part."* [10] In 1979 Markstein told Six of One, *"A quite childish desire to do a Hitchcock. I also have a yen to play a villain, but above all it seemed reasonable and fitting that, as creator of the whole fantasy, I should be the man in the centre of the web."* [11] Many

wonder what is McGoohan saying as he hands in his resignation. In the 1990s this writer was involved in the hearing-impaired community, so asked a friend, who had been deaf from birth, if they could lip-read. They relayed to me, *"Right, you and me are finished, I'm through! I've …"*

With all the care and preparation that had been invested in the pilot episode, it is clear to see the results on the screen. We pick up from the shock the man, (whom we will now refer to as the 'P'), as he struggles to comprehend exactly what has befallen him. A resignation. The loss of consciousness. Awakening in his familiar surroundings, until, a very unfamiliar and disorienting view from the window. Now to explore this strange new world. This is constructed both intelligently and imaginatively in a succession of scenes that by degrees develop and introduce us to the Village and its social structure. Because 'Arrival' is the opening episode, and as such contains a wealth of essential information, so carefully constructed and by degrees revealed as it progresses, we should examine each of the four acts individually, briefly reviewing each, then as a whole to summarise.

Act 1

"What's the name of this place?" The Prisoner.

The P gazes uncomprehendingly out of the window, the amphitheatre of a village enclosing him, a neat metaphor emphasising his incarceration. But architecture the like of which never seen before. Then his expression of bewilderment, shared by the viewer. After eighty-six episodes of 'Danger Man' screened over some six years, the viewer too had become well accustomed and familiar with that series framework, is now equally as surprised, disoriented, as puzzled as McGoohan's protagonist.

He turns, confirming that the room is identical to the one in his London residence. Everything. He rushes to the door, purposefully exits, better to get a sense of his surroundings. He emerges onto a terrace. He sees more of the same. Early morning, silence. Empty. In a determined manner he walks under an arch into a square. Yet more multi-colour distinctive but not unattractive buildings jostle around the open space. To one side, a tower. He glances up. A figure peers down at him. Action. With speed he ascends. Face to face with the watcher. It is a stone statue. The brief succession of disorientating camera angles symbolically mirrors the man's confusion. He is bemused, as are we. This is the first indication that all may not be as it might seem, a hint of what is to come.

From his high vantage point, he looks about, even more perplexed. An entire village, the sea. From above him a bell is struck; in the distance a gaily coloured parasol is being opened. The village is coming to life. With the bell chiming, he descends, down steps, across the deserted lawn and piazza as the credits are screened. Four well-known guest stars, a supporting cast of quality, and he arrives at the cafeteria. The waitress is preparing to open for business. The tiles are being hosed down.

Waitress: *"We'll be open in a minute."*

P: *"What's the name of this place?"*

Waitress: *"You're new here, aren't you?"*

P: *"Where?"*

Waitress: *"You want breakfast?"*

P: *"Where is this?"*

Only then, after deflecting pointed questions three times, a consent to answer.

Waitress: *"The Village?"*

P: *"Yes."*

Waitress: *"I'll see if coffee's ready."*

Deflection again. It's an old but clever trick. When being asked a question, ask one in return. It regains the initiative. Beloved of politicians and sharp-minded thinkers alike, either adopt this strategy or deflect and retort with an unconnected topic. The P's persistence finally yields the fact there is a phone nearby.

With no other signs of life stirring, the P walks to the phone location, a candy-striped scalloped awning covers a stand on which a cordless phone resides. 'For information, lift and press', and a large penny-farthing symbol in evidence. No coin box, no dial, numbers, or further information to assist. Picking it up he hears a dialling tone, Pressing the connection, a velvet soothing-toned, but still business sounding female voice.

Operator: *"Number please?"*

P: *"What exchange is this?"*

Operator: *"Number please?"*

P: *"I want to make a call."*

Operator: *"Local calls only. What is your number, sir?"* (Her voice is still correct but there is an edge, her patience is wearing thin.)

P: (Looking in vain for a number) *"I haven't got a number."*

Operator: (Firmly and with finality) *"No number, no call".*

The phone goes dead.

By now the new arrival has regained his composure, and more than bewilderment and puzzlement, a grim tenacity is beginning to manifest. The viewer is intrigued. The P sees an 'Information Board'. A large map occupies the bulk, to the right a numbered list, reading down, '28 Fun Palace,' '38 Hospital', '14 Shop', '9 Taxi Rank', and so forth. A large arrow points left, 'Push and find out'. Briefly we see the board of buttons as he pushes for a taxi. The number '7' is absent. In 1967 viewers would not have noticed this, even playing a DVD today, the viewer still would not observe this fact. It is only by use of the pause facility and observing closely. Where the figure '7' should occur, we see totally random examples, '2c', '8c', or the figures '1', '6', etc. Why should this be? Is it significant? Are we meant to question this? We shall see. In any case, the response for a taxi is instantaneous. With the strident roar of an engine and a screech of brakes, a 'taxi' is present. It is driven by a young Chinese woman.

Driver: (Perfect English) *"Where to, sir?"*

The P is nonplussed and remains silent.

Driver: (Mistaking his pause, so in French) *"Where do you want to go?"*

P: *"Take me to the nearest town."*

Driver: *"Oh, we are only the local service."*

P: (Getting in) *"Take me as far as you can."*

P: (As they drive off) *"Why did you speak to me in French?"*

Driver: *"French is international."*

P: *"I suppose it's a waste of time asking the name of this place?"*

Driver: *"As a matter of fact I thought you might be Polish. Perhaps a Czech."*

P: *"What would Poles or Czechs be doing here?"*

Driver: *"It's very cosmopolitan. You never know who you'll meet next."*

Cut lines.

P: *"Why do you keep avoiding my questions"?*

Driver: *"Do I?"*

They continue to drive along various winding village roads and byways. This allows both the P and the viewer to see more of this extraordinary confection of a village. During this time, we begin to see more people as the Village comes to life, preparing itself for another day.

The taxi comes to a halt in Battery Square.

Driver: *I did tell you we are only local."* (The P rises and steps out) *"The charge is two units."*

P: (Puzzled) *"Units?"*

Driver: "*Credit units. Ah well, pay me next time."* (She gives him an odd wave of the hand. It could almost be a salute) *"Be seeing you."* (She drives away.)

Touché. This has been the P's third encounter with individuals he has conversed with since his arrival. The waitress who deflected his questions, the operator who imparted no information, and the driver who merely added to the mystery. He is no wiser as to his whereabouts, (as intended), the Village could be anywhere, and there is a definite cosmopolitan air about the place. In the 1960s Czechoslovakia, Poland, and China were very much part of the so-called 'Iron Curtain' Eastern bloc of Communist Countries. The episode has only been running for a mere six minutes, yet, with its pace, we have seen so much already that mystifies both the P and us. And this will continue. The eagle-eyed viewer will have noticed that both the waitress and the driver have worn small numbered badges, again with this curious canopied penny-farthing symbol.

In the square there is another, candy-striped scalloped sign that announces 'General Store'. Gazing through the window first, he enters. As he does so the shopkeeper, speaking Italian, is finishing serving a customer. Upon seeing the P, he breaks into English. The customer leaves. The P has been keenly looking around a well-stocked shop and knows exactly what he wants. A map. Now the mystery deepens. The black and white gives way to colour and both reveal a very stylised and loosely based map of Portmeirion, surrounded by 'the mountains' and 'the sea'. Somewhat ominously, the legend in large letters declares, 'Your Village'. *"Hire car?" "Only taxis."* Another customer enters, the shopkeeper, (sporting another of 'those' badges), diverts his attention. The P is defeated once more. Again, that salute, and the words, *"Be seeing you."* Having heard this again, the P reacts. If the viewer has sharp eyes, they will notice the shelves well stocked with assorted jars, tins, and the like, all featuring that enigmatic penny-farthing logo.

Exiting the shop, he has only walked a few yards, when another Village sign,

here with loudspeaker affixed, erupts into life. A mechanically cheerful voice, bubbling with automated zest, *"Good morning, all. It's another beautiful day."* There follows lively but not intrusive music. But something else captures the P's attention. He espies, shaking a duster, a blonde girl on the balcony of the cottage in which he awoke. He runs to intercept her. Reaching the entrance, newly installed outside, a canopied sign that declares, '6 private'. With a hum the door opens automatically. Entering, it closes. But no girl. Looking out of the window, he sees her walking down the steps. On the desk a vase of flowers, a child's doll, and resting on its lap, a card. Carefully written upon it in Albertus typeface, *"Welcome to your home from home"*.

Why should a doll hold the card? Perhaps because it might symbolise and represent the residents, the villagers, as perceived by the Village powers? We will encounter it once more in 'Checkmate'. Nearby, a conventional type 'phone of that time, labelled '6' emits a not unpleasing bleep. He grabs the receiver.

Operator: *"Is your number six?"*

P: (Looking at the dial, with apprehension, assuming it is merely the telephone number) *"Yes."*

Operator: *"Just one moment, I have a call for you."*

A click. (A new voice, warm, charming, and with authority) *"Good morning to you. I hope you slept well. Come and join me for breakfast. Number 2, the Green Dome."*

The phone goes dead. The P's face betrays a mixture of bafflement and incomprehension. His previous anger has given way. Recognition and enforced acceptance that he is impotent, no longer in control of his life, the initiative lost and a hostage to fate.

Fade to black. End of Act 1.

Pausing for a moment to reflect. We are now but a mere 9 minutes into the episode's running time. We have seen a man resign, be abducted, wake in a village impossible to label as being recognisable or identifiable to anywhere we might know. A disorienting mixture of architectural styles that defies categorisation or identity. If the symbolism of the 'WAY OUT' sequence was not lost on the viewer, then surely, even more emphatic is the symbolic death, an abduction by hearse? At this point, are we to take all we see as fact, or a mind's wanderings? This will prove to be a running theme. The man attempts to ascertain where he is but is thwarted. The pace has been fast moving, the viewer needing mental alacrity to assimilate all that is unfolding, as scene upon scene evokes mystery piled upon mystery, drawing us deeper in.

If, from a position of strength, from exercising the initiative, master of his fate, the P now finds all this swept from him, Act 2 will provide both the viewer and the P with the beginnings of an explanation upon which both he, and we, may begin to understand the dynamics.

"Come in Number 7, your time is up."

One further intriguing point of note worth remembering will only become apparent in time, and that is the Village's aversion to the number 7. When the P consults the information board, as the reader will recall, I pointed out the absence of the figure 7. The likelihood is that, without this being drawn to the viewers

attention it would pass entirely unnoticed, particularly when first transmitted, given the relatively poor quality of the then 405-line technology and that the shot only displays for a scant two seconds. Today of course, with recorders allowing a freeze frame, examination of the board reveals where there should be a 7, as I mentioned, there are numerals either duplicated or having a letter attached, as in, 6a etc.

Only by having an interest, being drawn into the show, will it dawn upon the viewer that the figure 7 never occurs. Then, further exploration, reading the scripts we find characters such as Nadia, in, 'The Chimes of Big Ben', originally was Number 7, and the maid in 'Free for All', was Number 57. These are examples of the consummate attention to detail that was not necessarily evident but ensured the show was of the highest standard of care. However, the question remains, why the decision to dispense with this particular numeral? Over the decades 'Prisoner' scholars have pondered this. For some obscure and enigmatic reason was the numeral considered unlucky? Or perhaps esoterically 6 + 1 = 7, and that might have foreshadowed 'Fall Out'.

Then again, was it a desire to steer clear of any association with 007 James Bond? Or possibly simply to create one more insoluble cryptic puzzle for the viewer to contemplate? Maybe it was simply that, back at the warehouse, the box of '7's was overlooked and thus missed? The answer is surprisingly prosaic, and in hindsight, quite obvious. Markstein wished to keep vague the physical location of the Village. To have used the figure 7 as we do in the UK, the Americas, etc. would have given a clue, whilst the continental form of 7 with the horizontal bar through it, would have implied one of the continental countries. Just as Triskaidekaphobia is a recognised condition being a fear of the number 13, so I will refer in subsequent chapters to Heptaphobia, as an aversion to the Number 7.

Let us now return to our consideration of this episode. If Act 1 was a series of evermore intriguing scenes, yielding no clues, Act 2 continues this theme, tempered with tantalising hints of what is to come. Answers. In a way, yes, but none helpful, yet also further puzzles and mystification.

Act 2

"I think We Have a Challenge." Number 2

Act 2 opens with the P making his way to the Green Dome in the early morning sun. The soundtrack is the children's nursery rhyme, 'Half a Pound of Tuppenny Rice', an instrumental version rather jauntily played as he does so. As the viewer will gradually register, nursery rhymes will be a recurring motif, particularly in the episode, 'Once Upon A Time'. Here the viewer is taken rather by surprise, rather expecting any accompanying soundtrack to feature music that would be more evocative of the serious and perhaps threatening situation the P finds himself in.

Unsettling the viewer is compounded when, arriving at an impressively ornate front door, he pulls the bell chain and we hear the resonant and mournful tolling of a church bell. Immediately the door silently swings open, to reveal a very tastefully decorated entrance hall. As the door closes behind him, P is silently welcomed by a midget butler, who motions him to a similarly elegant pair of doors which he

opens. The P studies what they reveal. Then from his viewpoint the viewer sees a pair of silver metallic doors, which to the sound of an electric motor, slide open. And we see:

A scene so unforeseen, an astonishing visual impact that demands and commands our full attention. A futuristic, highly stylised circular set. An impression of a vast space, high domed ceiling. Far, far away, a half-moon desk. Behind, a penny-farthing bicycle, off to one side what appears to be a rather tall glass cylinder emitting a warm glow of light. As we take in the unexpected scene, what appears to be a large black globe emerges from the floor and, as it does, it rotates to reveal it is in fact a chair. A man sits within. Smartly dressed. Polo neck, blazer, slacks, a smart, rather traditional scarf, and shooting stick completing his attire. As we will discover, he will be in his early forties, intellectual, smooth, and dangerously charming. *"At last. Delighted to see you."* The automatic door slides shut behind the entering figure. *"Come in, come in."*

The P steps forward, descending a ramp, a spotlight sears downward, intimidating, piercing, designed to emphatically project an atmosphere of power. However, our man is made of sterner stuff, and not to be cowed, as he takes the long walk to the desk. One wall behind him is filled by a large screen, a pattern of what appears to be recurring circular shapes which arrest our attention, as they ceaselessly and hypnotically flow. The viewer observes that here there is a marked absence of straight lines, much curvature, circularity and the circle motif itself is very apparent, as though it is a deliberate statement. We will shortly encounter this circular symbology in a three-dimensional form, more disturbing and shocking than we could possibly imagine.

Cheerily, *"Do sit down."* But there is no chair. Reaching out toward the desk, with the tip of the shooting stick, the incumbent presses a button. With a buzzing sound, a floor panel slides back revealing a circular hole, from which a dentist's chair emerges and ascends. A genial chuckle. *"I'm so sorry. I can never resist that."* Another flick of his stick, another button pressed, *"I hope you don't mind a working breakfast?"* A dining table ascends, the diminutive butler wheels in a trolley. Breakfast. The host, already knowing the new arrival's culinary tastes, finds humour as he offers and receives a guarded response. *"I suppose you're wondering what you're doing here?"* Now, having icily restrained himself, the P gives vent, responding, in a dangerous and seething tone, *"It had crossed my mind."* Then incandescent, *"What's it all about?"* Still calmly offered in return, *"Sit down and I'll tell you!"* A second chair rises. The P remains standing.

It is only now, after the puzzling early scenes, both the P and the viewer will discover why his abduction has taken place. This is the defining key scene, effectively we learn the series premise, and consequently an explanation for everything that will transpire and permeate throughout the seventeen episodes, until the very last revelatory frame.

The essence is the *"question of your resignation"*. And, *"A lot of people are curious about what lies behind your resignation. You've had a brilliant career. Your record is impeccable. They want to know why you suddenly left … Personally, I believe your story. I think it was a*

matter of principle. But what I think doesn't count. One has to be sure about these things … It is my job to check your motive … When a man knows as much as you do, a double check does no harm. A few details may have been missed."

So, there we have it! In a few well-written sentences, where each word is carefully chosen and weighed for maximum impact, it is now clear to both this new arrival, and to the viewer, with all its unexplained mystery, all that has led until now. Of course, the P has not been silent. Prowling like a caged animal, in rising righteous indignation, asking: *"Who brought me here? And who are they? What people? That gives you the right to poke your nose into my business. I've been checked."*

With an air of finality, *"I don't know who you are or who you work for and I don't care, I'm leaving."* Purposefully he strides to the doors. With a hum they begin to open, then, very decisively slide shut once more. Effectively, he is imprisoned.

Patiently, the man we will learn to know as Number 2 tells him, *"Have you not yet realised there is no way out? Look, I have something that will interest you."* As he holds up a file, there appears on the large screen, a swift succession of circular photographs, projected from an unseen source. This new arrival, as a baby, at a number of key moments in his life. Snatching the file, the P flicks the pages attempting to keep pace. Now he is disturbed. Number 2 continues his commentary. Cameras in this man's bathroom. He seems to even have access to the P's inner thoughts. A form of nakedness. The man struggles to process all this information, the prying into his life, so much has become the property of others, but whom? *"You see, there isn't much we don't know about you …"* (Note the subtle change from *"they"* to *"we"),* admitting with a note of concession, *"I had no idea you liked lemon tea."* With the smallest of victories, a note of sarcasm, *"The time of my birth is missing. 4.31 a.m. 19th March 1928, I've nothing to say."*

Conversationally, as perhaps he has done many times before, Number 2 attempts to penetrate the P's determined resistance. *"Do be reasonable, old boy. It's just a matter of time. Sooner or later, you'll tell me. Sooner or later, you'll want to."* Attempting to make the proposition both inevitable and appealing, *"Let's make a deal. You co-operate, tell us what we want to know, and this can be a very nice place."* Adding a further temptation, *"You may even be given a position of authority."*

This might win a weaker, lesser, more pliable and uncertain character over, but this arrival's resolve hardens, and his response – one of the most iconic and memorable lines oft quoted by this series' admirers, *"I will not make any deals with you. I've resigned. I will not be pushed, filed, stamped, indexed, briefed, debriefed, or numbered."* A pause, to emphasise, *"My life is my own."*

Number 2, still not convinced of his tried strategy not working, *"Is it?"* Pursed, *"Yes, you won't hold me."* Still unconvinced, *"Won't we? Let me prove that we will. Come. I'll show you.* (Picking up his stick and putting the file back on the desk), *"We can take this up later".*

It is now time to physically survey the location where the arrival finds himself. By helicopter. A series of aerial shots accompanied by a commentary informs both the P and the viewer of many important features, such as the community being completely both self-sufficient and self-contained, remote, with no way out

except, it would seem, by air. The official imparts information to his new 'guest', who replies with some humorous quips. *"It's quite a beautiful place really … almost like a world on its own." "I shall miss it when I'm gone."* And, *"… we also have our own little newspaper,"* elicits the response, *"You must send me a copy"*. The script sparkles. The Village too. Portmeirion's beauty is revealed to the viewer, the many moving figures below, none looking up as perhaps a helicopter is a familiar sight. In 1977, when Sir Clough watched 'Arrival' in the Hercules Hall at our first 'Prisoner' convention, afterward he said to me that, the film, *"Showed Portmeirion to great effect."*

Landing nearby, a Village canopied sign proclaims, 'Old People's Home', and a brief series of disturbing scenes. From the rear, accompanied by a few notes of sombre bass drum music, we see two figures dressed as undertakers, plying their trade, perhaps prematurely, but still rather chilling. The P is genuinely shocked to see several elderly individuals playing as children would. As they walk, Number 2 tells him, *"You see, you're looked after here,"* thoughtfully adding, rather suspiciously, *"as long as you live."*

A brief taxi ride deposits them at the clearly signed 'Town Hall' and the adjacent amphitheatre area. The streets are now busy, amongst the colourful cottages, villagers wearing brightly coloured clothes, capes, straw boaters, ensuring the P's dark suit appears very out-of-place amidst such colour. We see examples of an assortment of the Village buggies and other idiosyncratic transport. A band is playing the lively and energetic Radetzky march, the P's attention is caught initially by a statue of the mythological God Hercules holding the world aloft, then by a rather gay and yet mechanically cheerful female loudspeaker announcement, *"Your attention please. Here are two announcements. Ice cream is on sale for your enjoyment. The flavour of the day is strawberry. Here is a warning,"* a pause, *"there is a possibility of light intermittent showers later in the day. Thank you for your attention."* Trailing Number 2 toward the piazza, a further canopied sign gives the P cause for thought, 'Walk on the grass'. The viewer may be forgiven for a degree of perplexion at what they have seen, the costumes, that Village transport, the colour, music, statue, announcement, now, the very opposite instruction to that encountered in our world, 'Do NOT walk on the grass.' Ascending the steps up to what is a busy piazza, buggies, a tricycle, wheelchairs, more 'undertakers', a villager wheels a penny-farthing from the P's path. A couple bid him, a polite, *"Beautiful day"*. From a balcony, Number 2, *"They didn't settle for ages, now they wouldn't leave for the world."* Rebutting this observation, the P bitingly replies, *"You mean you brought them round to your way of thinking."*

This last statement is certainly worth considering. Just what methodology might one employ to achieve this? One might argue rationally, persuasively, perhaps with evidence. It depends on where coercion in some form replaces a balanced judgement and simple logic. One needs to be persuaded by intuitive clear insight that honours freewill. However, not all observe this. The further one veers from presenting truth, the greater the pressure, the immoral, the intimidation, the fear, may be employed. Like many regimes the reader may be familiar with, the Village uses such tactics that encompass brainwashing, subliminal implanting, and sheer naked terror.

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A Note from the Publisher

When we first mentioned the idea of a 'what's it all about?' book on 'The Prisoner' to David Barrie he was at once both excited and aware of what a mammoth task this might be. We also knew he was the best person to put it all together.

Having known David for many years, we knew to expect a book that would be in-depth, wide ranging and full of considered opinion, at the same time, one that wasn't afraid to raise difficult questions or be controversial when required. We find ourselves with the end result and what you could consider the definitive book on the subject.

We would like to thank David for his dedication, enthusiasm and commitment to this project that leaves no area undisturbed, nor concept dismissed or ignored. It may have been a project that took longer than he originally envisioned, but we believe it is worth the wait and effort.

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Is this the definitive book on The Prisoner? Only you the reader, can decide that ...

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