

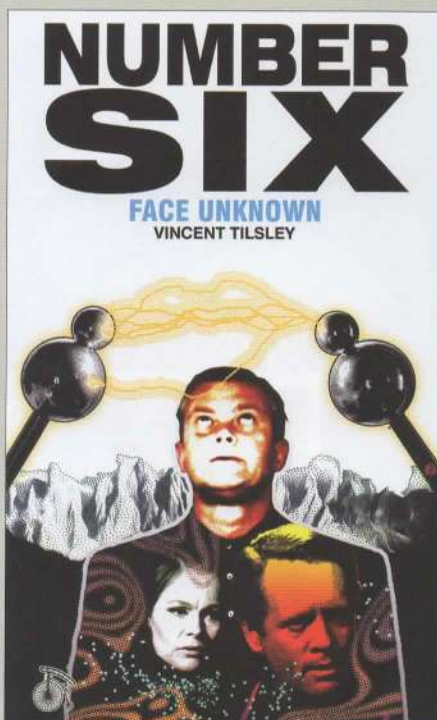
# Questions are a burden to others

## 5: Face Unknown (Do Not Forsake Me Oh My Darling)

### Point of Departure

The Do's and Do Not's of *Do Not Forsake Me Oh My Darling*.

by Dave Barrie



**T**his episode explores a number of *The Prisoner's* key themes. The nature of prison and identity, the global Village, and the use and abuse of power.

"I think Jung was aware of the inner self, and that's what we're here for. Other people see psychology as enabling you to adjust to society by getting you to fit in. Those are two totally different points of view. I go for the first one." **Vincent Tilsley**

Given the departure of script editor George Markstein, whose story arc had run its course over the first thirteen episodes, McGoohan and Tomblin were now in uncharted territory. With the stories increasingly departing from Markstein's structure as McGoohan followed his star, for the first episode of season two, anything seemed possible, and this experimental series could have gone anywhere, yet this first of four went back to what McGoohan was trying to escape from, namely *Danger Man*. Strangely enough, in my opinion it was these final four episodes (three seen as 'filler' by McGoohan), which largely sealed the cult status and longevity of the series.

### 1967. The Summer of Love...?

The hippie movement began life in the Haight-Ashbury area of San Francisco. It would have profound repercussions around the world, as youth embraced the counter culture ideas and ideals, which echoed down the decades and resonate still. For, like *The Prisoner*, the values being expressed were both of their time as well as timeless and *The Prisoner* did not escape this influence. Indeed, it embraced those values. Notably of course in *Fall Out*. It may have been that peace and love was breaking out and flourishing among the youth of the western world, but that summer, there was no such excitement in Borehamwood for those caught up in producing *The Prisoner*. Just pressure as the transmission dates loomed and the knowledge that more episodes were required.

Production on the first series had ceased at the end of April 1967. Post production and editing of these continued into May. During a projected three-month break a number of personnel, including Markstein, left to work on other projects. The two remaining key individuals, David Tomblin and Patrick McGoohan, had to carry the vision forward. *Many Happy Returns* was the last in the first series of thirteen to be produced. For George Markstein, it was the signpost: the way to go, to

escape the confines of the Village, and for *The Prisoner* to break out into the wider world.

Now plans for the final episodes had to be devised because there was a contract with CBS to produce a truncated second 'season' of four. (Originally they requested a total of 36.) Scripts were needed. Quickly. And they had a major problem - for one of these, the leading man would be absent!

To enable these four episodes to be made at all, McGoohan signed a contract to co-star in *Ice Station Zebra*. His fee would ensure the high standards McGoohan insisted upon were maintained. The Hollywood filming dates largely chimed with the summer break while the crew prepared to recommence filming in late August, but there was an awareness that McGoohan would not have finished the filming of this major blockbuster.

This concentrated minds.

The search for scripts resulted in a plea to the crew for ideas, which yielded Ian Rakoff's *Living in Harmony*, and two established *Prisoner* scriptwriters being approached; Terence Feely to adapt an unused *Danger Man* script and, drawing the short straw, Vincent Tilsley, whose script, *Chimes of Big Ben* had impressed. Tilsley had been amongst the first writers approached by Markstein, and that first script took no more than three weeks. Before his departure, Markstein whose parting was somewhat acrimonious, had contacted Tilsley, asking if he had any further ideas, the writer responded in the negative. Now his task would be to write a script with no leading man. He did not have the luxury of time.

"Patrick got an offer to do a film called *Ice Station Zebra* and it did clash...so I suggested that we transplanted his mind into another actor." David Tomblin<sup>2</sup>

By one of those quirks of fate, I had met Vincent at a meeting in London in 1980. At the time I was involved with producing what

became termed New Age Festivals, and this was a meeting of 'like minds'. Across the table was a rather dapper, bearded gentleman who carried an air of self-assurance. He introduced himself. I knew that the screenwriter of that name lived in Brighton, so after the meeting I approached him. He explained he'd largely moved on from script writing, and was now a psychotherapist. We did strike up a friendship partly because we both shared a similar worldview. Vincent was a generous man, and granted a number of interviews to those interested in *The Prisoner*, including a lengthy interview with me in 1981. He also graced our 2003 Portmeiricon, where not only was he interviewed, but actively participated in the 'Brain-Bash', his theme being "If *The Prisoner* was made now, as the 'cold war' was over, what themes would be relevant?" Participants had the chance to think this over then share their ideas at a subsequent session. For Vincent, a man of vision, it was things he termed "secular religions", like capitalism and communism. He talked about globalisation, the human threat to our planet (decades before these topics became mainstream). He didn't stop there, he proposed solutions. He suggested, to be a rebel, instead of shaking our fist, all we had to do was to reject consumerism, source or grow our own pesticide free wholefood and not buy into 'the system'. Vincent was very astute, foreseeing the future, just as McGoohan, in his way was determined to do. Both remained true to their individualistic outlook.

But all this is for a separate discussion, let us return to a script, that when first written was titled, *Face Unknown*, until Tomblin substituted the proposed title lifted from a western.

### Genesis of a script.

Vincent told this writer "I went in and saw Tomblin and Pat McGoohan. And it was either in that meeting or a few days later they came up with this idea about writing an episode that didn't have Pat in it and shouldn't take place in the Village". According to Andrew Pixley, writer of the *Network Guide to The Prisoner*, Tomblin originally entertained the notion of having another actor to play Number Six. Understandably, this was abandoned, before Tomblin settled on the mind swap idea. Vincent suggested a travelling circus visit the Village, and Number Six would disappear inside a magician's cabinet, but that too was rejected.

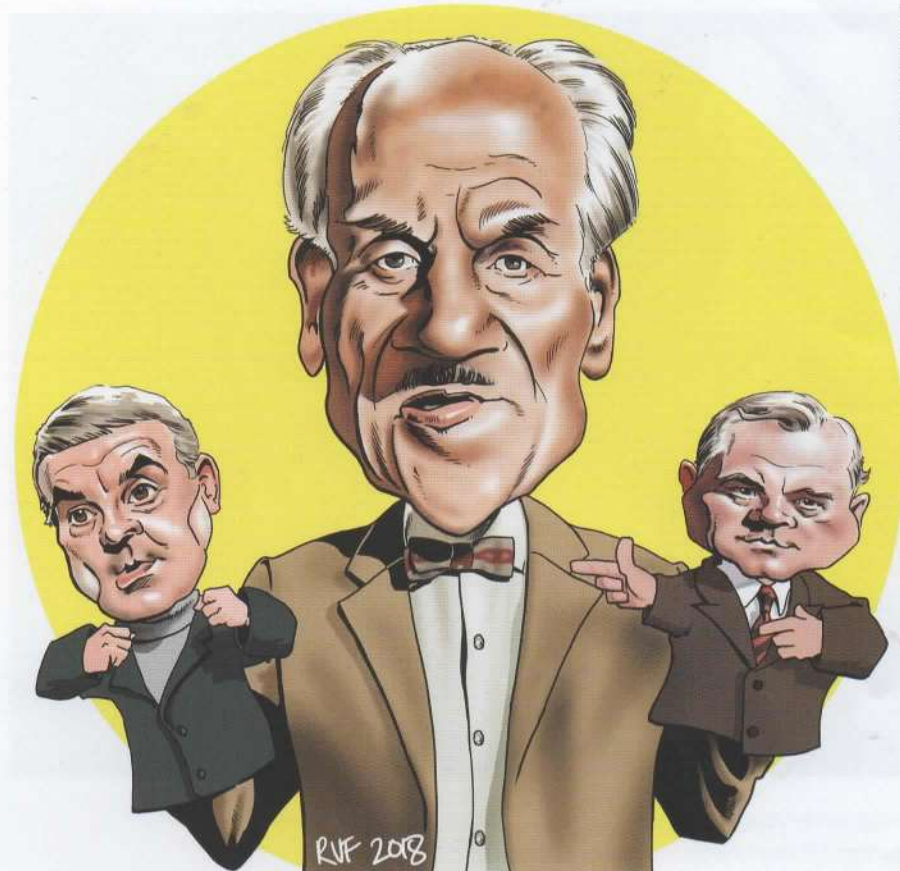


Illustration: Richard Farrell

In interviews for Society publications, Vincent explained, "I cooked up this idiotic story about a professor who could transfer the mind from one person to another.<sup>3</sup> It was a terrible idea, but the mind-swapping thing was all I could think of at the time... I was also feeling quite resentful when I wrote it—resentful of artistic integrity, or lack of it.<sup>4</sup> I expected to be called in and expected to have to do a major re-write.<sup>5</sup> The re-write was much worse than the original.<sup>6</sup>" Because of time constraints, Tomblin took it upon himself, and undertook two re-writes in mid August.

### The Script Snipped.

At one time member Bruce Clark wrote a series of articles comparing the original script with that which appears on screen, but I do not believe *Do Not Forsake Me* had this treatment. Perhaps, more than any episode, the original script differs greatly with what appears in the finished episode, but the broad outline of the story is not dissimilar. Tomblin made many changes, and with the return of McGoohan the series of flashbacks were inserted. Amongst the other major changes was the addition of the pre-credits 'teaser' sequence (which this writer thought both striking and captivating). Most of the re-writing eliminates a number of scenes set

in a darkened room with dialogue that implied collusion between the British intelligence department and a third party, possibly the Village, which was both an added dimension and layer of intrigue. An example of this is: Scene 45, Interior. Darkened room, Day. We see Sir Charles Portland on the other side of a two-way mirror looking directly into the office containing Villiers and Number Six (Nigel Stock.) Behind Portland, seated comfortably and smoking a cigar, is another man whose face we do not see. As the unseen man speaks Portland turns to look at him.

Voice: Where are you Portland? Moscow? Washington? Peking? I forget.

Portland smiles and continues looking through the two-way mirror. (It becomes clear in more excised scenes that Portland reports to the unseen man. DB)

Also a number of excellent and clever lines were cut. For example:

Discussing Number One -  
Number Two. Are we sure he isn't a machine?  
Number Six to Villiers, discussing Seltzman - He defected from both sides.  
How honest can you get?



The Mirror Crack'd... Nigel Stock having a bad day.

Seltzman to Village undertaker - And him? (Potter) Are you on different sides? Or just different ministries?

Another cut line from Number Two was - Machines. And we still think we're in control. Perhaps we've resigned and don't know it. (It has come to pass. Think 'Alexa'. Think the internet. Our personal information is being harvested for use by corporations.)

The above will give a flavour of how buried below the surface in an episode that fails to generate the excitement of others, there was a good script struggling to get out. In an ironic twist, this episode achieved what Markstein wished, after *Many Happy Returns*; it took the concept further away from the claustrophobia of the Village. Moreover it would have created ambiguity about the Village's relationship with the outside world. The imperfections in the end product have been discussed many times, no leading man, the reliance on unconvincing back projection, a number of plot holes. Even by the adventurous and mind-bending standards of *The Prisoner*, the mind-swap idea is pushing the boundary, and not least the fact that a reversal process is not needed as simply using the existing process would suffice. One also wonders if the remark that slide six is 'overexposed' and the tune, *My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean*, refer to McGoohan!

### That Ticking Clock

To put events in context it's important to examine the time period surrounding the completion of series one and preparation for series two. *The Daily Cinema* announced on Wednesday April 14th, 'Filming *Many Happy Returns*, last in current series, new series begins in August.' *Variety* added on Monday May 29th, 'Patrick McGoohan joins *Ice Station Zebra*'. The location sea shots for *Many Happy Returns* took place on June 6th and effectively the first series of thirteen were completed in July. *Ice Station Zebra* filming commenced June 19th and was scheduled to be complete by September 7th. This would allow McGoohan to return to Borehamwood not long after the summer break with filming on series two beginning Saturday August 26th. However, filming overran and McGoohan was not available until mid-September. Even then he had to return to Hollywood for further work in October. It was hoped that *Face Unknown* might be completed in time to slot earlier in the viewing order, in order to break up the Portmeirion heavy episodes. Optimistically it was slated 9th, but it was far from completion. With his return to Borehamwood McGoohan spent a single day for filming but called for a number of scenes to be reshot. There was then the music and being unhappy with the editing, McGoohan oversaw a second cut. Consequently it was not aired until November 24th.

### You are the scriptwriter, what would you do?

We can weigh up the pros and cons of *Do Not Forsake me Oh My Darling*, however, even though it has its admirers, it consistently trails in last place when polls have been conducted. Tomblin and McGoohan were under pressure, but to revert to a plot that was a conventional *Danger Man* spy story, is disappointing. To illustrate, I set myself the task of trying to devise a storyline that would have fitted the established framework whilst allowing for the absent McGoohan. In a single 40-minute car journey, I formulated not one, but four possibilities.

**1)** In 1979, as an homage to *The Prisoner*, a number of key Six of One individuals decided to produce our very own episode. The purpose was to demonstrate that we were not merely passive viewers, we could be active and actually make episode eighteen. That, we thought, would make the media sit up and take notice.

A script was devised, the casting done, props made or sourced, and the entire convention weekend saw an election parade, a chess game, a mini-moke chase around Portmeirion, and much else besides. It was a tale of the Village. Ambiguously titled, *By Public Demand*. The main characters included four individuals wearing tabards that denoted the four suits of cards, a jester who became an executioner, Number Two of course, and 'Everyman', a team of four representing the Village media who were numbered and subdivided with letters of the alphabet. Naturally, all was revealed with a twist at the end. It ran for around 45 minutes. It was shot on 16 ml, in colour. But, alas, without sound, the director intending to lay the sound track on later. Synchronising the sound presented a real problem. In short, it was never right, and that's why we hear so little of it today. Some years later another director saw ways it could be improved, and he did a first rate job. The plot was original, and it was colourful, fast-moving, making much of the Portmeirion location.

So that premise would work, as would another three dreamt up in that journey.

**2)** We eavesdrop on small groups of villagers that are discussing Number Six. By degrees we hear that no one has seen him, and then that guards had arrived and removed him to the hospital. Some villagers are nervous,

others concerned, one or two think about escape themselves. Then news arrives, he has escaped. Everyone and everywhere are searched. Reprisals. A clampdown. Obviously at the end Number Six would return in time for the next episode.

3) With so many Number two's failing, the powers above decide to send a fact-finding delegation to The Village. The current Number Two knows of course the reason for this high failure rate is Number Six, so again he is removed from circulation whilst the delegation attempt to discover the root cause. Cue a cat-and-mouse game between the two factions, which in turn affects the villagers.

That's three Portmeirion-centred plots. Let's consider one that is set elsewhere.

4) Because so many Number Two's have failed to extract information from Number Six, Number Two is summoned by 'his/her masters' to a venue away from the Village. Obviously this gives an opportunity to perhaps devise a replica Village...? Maybe we don't see the 'masters' at all. Communication being by other means. The plot could develop in a number of ways. Maybe there are delegates from other similar institutions around the World?

That's my contribution. Between now and this year's Convention 'Brain-Bash', give this idea some thought, and see if you can think of a plot or two.

#### Waiter, Kandersfeld, Welcome to the Village, sir. Audience sentiments.

Yes, it is understandable that this episode is the least favoured. However, there are those who champion it. Whereas very little discussion, (apart from production details, interviews, etc) of *Living in Harmony* or *The Girl Who was Death* has taken place, at least with this instalment, debate has ensued. Here is a selection of comments from members who enjoyed *Do Not Forsake Me*.

Number Six issue 5 (Autumn 1985) offers warm praise. Steven Ricks admits the episode is shabbily made and edited, but "Underneath a clever script emerges... The original script is strong and thought-provoking, but little of this reaches the screen." Clive

Gould enthuses, "It is incredible that this episode never seems to be mentioned in *Six of One literature*...Tilsley wrote a brilliant script...the episode is intriguing...the solution is satisfying", Mark Goodacre observes, "In this episode the real world does not dictate the plot. The story has a life of its own and minor characters, objects and events merely serve to enrich the plot." And two contrasting views of the casting of Nigel Stock, Stock "acts brilliantly to portray Number Six in his London home utterly bemused by the whole situation" (Clive Gould) "Nigel Stock was badly cast – in no way would his personality lend itself to McGoohan's powerful, intense performance." (William Malloy)

In *The Village* issue 25 (Winter 2000) Byron Lawson Joce gushes "I can wait no longer! (As this episode has not featured in print during his 5 years membership.) It seems I must write in praise of my favourite episode." He continues "More than any other episode here we have clues to who Number Six is, his background, his work, and what he was doing and why he resigned. In a well-argued piece he tells us this story gives the answers we crave. We know his activities before arriving in the Village and his friendship with Seltzman led to his abduction."

*Free for All* issue 13 (Winter 2005) contains a very exhaustive and entertaining review of the episode by Roger Langley, who praises the quality of the cast, and cites the 1976 Canadian publication, *The Prisoner Puzzle*, which states, "Possibly the richest, most complexly rewarding program in the series. The ending is sensational and the solution satisfying... Seltzman is the first personality we have met in this series whose powers for good are equal to the hero's. Like Prospero, he chose to break his magic wand, put away his terrible invention and resign into obscurity." Roger says "Perhaps it is being suggested here that he is almost a parental figure of Number Six, one who resigned once before as our younger hero has done since. There is an affinity between the two men but only one of them can become free. Is Death being hinted at here, as one's older alter ego leaves for the spirit world, while the younger, still in human form, struggles with life in general?"

I find myself agreeing with elements of the above, in their considered reflection on this understandably maligned offering. What

also mitigates is that accomplished director Pat Jackson, who already had three studio-bound *Prisoner* episodes to his credit, oversaw it. He brought in this instalment to a standard more polished than might have been in lesser hands.

#### Despite the Flaws?

In summary; cobbled together out of necessity, it's use of previously seen clips to ensure a presence of McGoohan, the stock shots, a *Danger Man* plot, Nigel Stock and dialogue that Number Six would never utter. And yet... If Tilsley's original script with its added dimension that hinted at another layer of intrigue had been used more fully, we could have had an example that may have better qualified for the *Prisoner* cannon. Stir in the echo of Prospero, the odyssey that Number Six embarks upon, the wizard who outwits the Village, the father/son relationship, the search for identity, the nature of power and its application for good or evil. The potential is there. But damned by the merciless sands of time.

I'll conclude with an extract of from a piece that I wrote for our periodical *Alert* back in 1978/9, some forty years ago.

*This episode is classical as a tale, and, as with any great philosophy, it has the facility of being interpreted on many levels, surely the hallmark of a true work of art. It may be viewed as an offbeat spy story, perhaps a statement on the nature of prison, or possibly, if the whole series is happening inside the Prisoner's head, then he is beginning to realise that his prison is not outside, but within him. Alternatively it may be allegorised even as a tale of a man in search of himself, a student aided by the guru or guide, by which he is able to find himself.* **DB**

#### Notes

Apart from the Society periodicals mentioned above, the quotes used are from:

- <sup>1</sup> *Free for All* Issue 7 Summer 2003
- <sup>2</sup> *Six into One* documentary 1984
- <sup>3</sup> *In the Village* 28
- <sup>4</sup> *No 6* issue 5 Autumn 1985
- <sup>5</sup> *In the Village* 25
- <sup>6</sup> *No 6* issue 5 Autumn 1985

Next issue - *Many Happy Returns*