

IN THE LAND OF DARK DREAMS AND LONE SHADOWS

A REAPPRAISAL OF THE ENIGMATIC EPISODE DANCE OF THE DEAD WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM WRITER ANTHONY SKENE AND EDITOR JOHN S. SMITH

It is a warm late summer's afternoon. The year is 1966. I am in Portmeirion. The reason I am here is all round me. On holiday nearby I learn that Patrick McGooohan is filming his new series in the fantasy village created by Clough Williams-Ellis. I travel over to it for the day. I see McGooohan and several other well known faces from television. To one side are several large squares laid on the lawn, looking for all the world like a chess board big enough for humans to participate as pieces. In front of me, on the piazza, are four Mini-mokes and a large crowd of people dressed as though for a carnival. Well, it all looks very odd, but that's film-making. Must watch it when it's screened.

Little did I realise the impact that "that series" and the episode featuring the carnival, *Dance Of The Dead* were to make upon me, as when I first watched it, it has echoed down the years.

Far more than any other episode of *The Prisoner*, *Dance Of The Dead* has captured my imagination and intrigued me. Considered to be one of the seven key episodes, and one of the first in production, it contains all the elements that are essential to the surreal world of *The Prisoner*.

As the quest of Number 6 unfolds in some sort of logical order, we are suddenly presented with this eerie, dream-like story in which Number 6 stresses that he's new to the Village. He then acquires a radio set and is subsequently put on trial for flouting the rules in the form of possessing the apparently illegal radio. For, despite the fact that *Dance Of The Dead* was one of the first episodes written and went into production as part of the first batch of four, it appears as eighth in the series because McGooohan decided to put it to one side uncompleted. Perhaps because without an obvious single thread of a plot, or without the ending specified in the script he thought it would seem even more confusing

than *The Prisoner* already was. We shall return to this later.

Indeed this episode arouses mixed feelings, with some members considering it baffling whilst others think it brilliant. Ask

Dave Barrie

the question "What is *Dance Of The Dead* about?" and many people are at a loss to say.

I hope that this will be the most complete appraisal to date of this key episode and the Anthony Skene script. With this in mind I hope to share with you my admiration of *Dance Of The Dead* and to be able to do that I had to undertake a little investigation. This involved checking where the original script differed with the finished product. For those newer members who may be interested, Bruce Clark wrote such an article for a past issue of *Number Six* magazine. I shall be referring to it in part. I also contacted John S. Smith, the Editor of this particular episode, and most important, and essential, I asked writer Anthony Skene if he would be prepared to talk about his work. He kindly agreed to do so, for the strength of *Dance Of The Dead* lies in his well crafted script. An evocative script that has the virtue of encapsulating the essence and atmosphere of the series entirely successfully.

KAFKA IN WONDERLAND

If one were to apply the term "Kafkaesque" to any one episode in particular, this would be the prime candidate. There are a wealth of ideas and detail in evidence. This episode appears constructed as a labour of love, and perhaps it was.

As the strongest and maybe the most self contained episode in the series, *Dance Of The Dead* gives us the clearest opportunity to witness *The Prisoner* working successfully

on more than just one level. More so than any other episode, this cleverly constructed tale can be viewed on a number of planes. Of course it could be a straightforward story without any hidden dimensions. However, it is easy to view it as a dream or nightmare, a variation on the legend of *Orpheus*, the perspective of a madman, and certainly as a fantasy. Indeed, one might be forgiven for thinking that Number 6 had wandered into "Wonderland" or a Grimm's fairytale.

I will illustrate these different interpretations by either pointing to a relevant scene, or by drawing on outside sources as necessary. Of course it may all be a trick of the Village because as the story opens we see Number 6 is conditioned in some way, and is connected to an electrical apparatus.

Of course everyone has their favourite episode, some are straightforward one dimensional stories with a particular theme, whilst others are veiled comments on aspects of society, for example *Free For All* and *The General*. Yet, I feel, more than any other episode, the dark haunting undercurrents, the dream-like qualities, allegorical nature, and ambiguous dialogue emanating from Anthony Skene's script demands, that after the bars slam we are left feeling mentally stimulated.

Dance Of The Dead succeeds in creating an atmosphere unlike no other episode. Whereas *A Change Of Mind* is hard and brittle, or *Once Upon A Time* is claustrophobic and abrasive, Skene's story unfolds at a gentle pace. A dream-like quality is induced, and without realising it we are lulled into this seductive atmosphere. Having cleverly conjured up this air of intangibility we are almost as surprised as Number 6 when he discovers the terror and ruthlessness that lurk beneath the exterior of the Village.

Until that point the action, such as it is, is not conventionally paced, and the story unfolds relying on the subtlety of action and

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the wit of the spoken word. There is no conventional scrappy punch-up by which our hero is required to prove his prowess. It is the battle for his mind and the pursuit of him by the terrifying, mindless mob that stretches both his abilities and our imagination.

Somewhat like the different vintages of wine that Number 2 tantalises Number 6 with, *Dance Of The Dead* has all the ingredients and the right balance, depth and subtle hues for a cracking tale. This episode is complex and has matured well. In no other episode is there such a contrast between the gay carnival atmosphere of the Village and the sinister, horrifying callousness of the Village administration. It is a well ordered society governed by ruthlessness so effective that human bloodlust and anarchy can be orchestrated in the form of a mindless mob who, to order, would tear Number 6 limb from limb.

The clever layering and multifaceted script allows *Dance Of The Dead* to question the themes of tolerance, individuality, trust, rules and society's norms. We see that what is accepted behaviour by a majority, may still be wrong. Number 6 represents individual

and independent thought. The Village represents the need of many people to be told what to think, and their desire for conformity. They are intolerant of a different way of thought. We see that to be an individual is to be ridiculed, reviled and persecuted. Number 6 is a victim of the herd instinct.

The same has happened throughout history, where original thinkers are persecuted, from Jesus Christ to Galileo, from the religious witch-hunts of the 17th Century to the McCarthyite witch-hunt of the early 1950s in America resulting in what became known as the "Hollywood Ten". These were ten free thinkers who refused to follow the herd, and by remaining true to their beliefs found themselves blacklisted. Incidentally, if you wonder why some of the scripts of the 1950's series like *Ivanhoe* and *Robin Hood* are so good, it's because it was the only work some of the ten could get, by writing them under an assumed name.

In *Dance Of The Dead*, Number 6 is not interested in bringing anyone around to his way of thinking. He has no wish to impose his views on others. This tale is a passionate

plea for tolerance, for independent original thinkers to be respected.

Philosophically, this story raises interesting questions. Not only does Number 6 dare to flaunt his individuality and independence, but this leads to some wonderful exchanges on the rights of the individual. For example:-

Number 2: You do as you want.
Number 6: As long as it is what you want.
Number 2: As long as it is what the majority wants. We're democratic in some ways.

Or when Number 6 holds his own suit up for the maid to see:-

Maid: What does it mean?
Number 6: That I'm still myself.
Maid: Lucky you.

Number 6's cryptic comment is totally lost on the shallow maid. For Number 6 it is an important moment, for he confirms he has not lost himself, despite being surrounded by people exhibiting all the logic of the asylum or a nightmare.

And where "rules" are concerned.

Girl: It's the rules. Of the people, by the people, for the people.
Number 6: Takes on a new meaning.
Girl: You're a wicked man.
Number 6: Wicked?
Girl: You've no values.
Number 6: Different values.

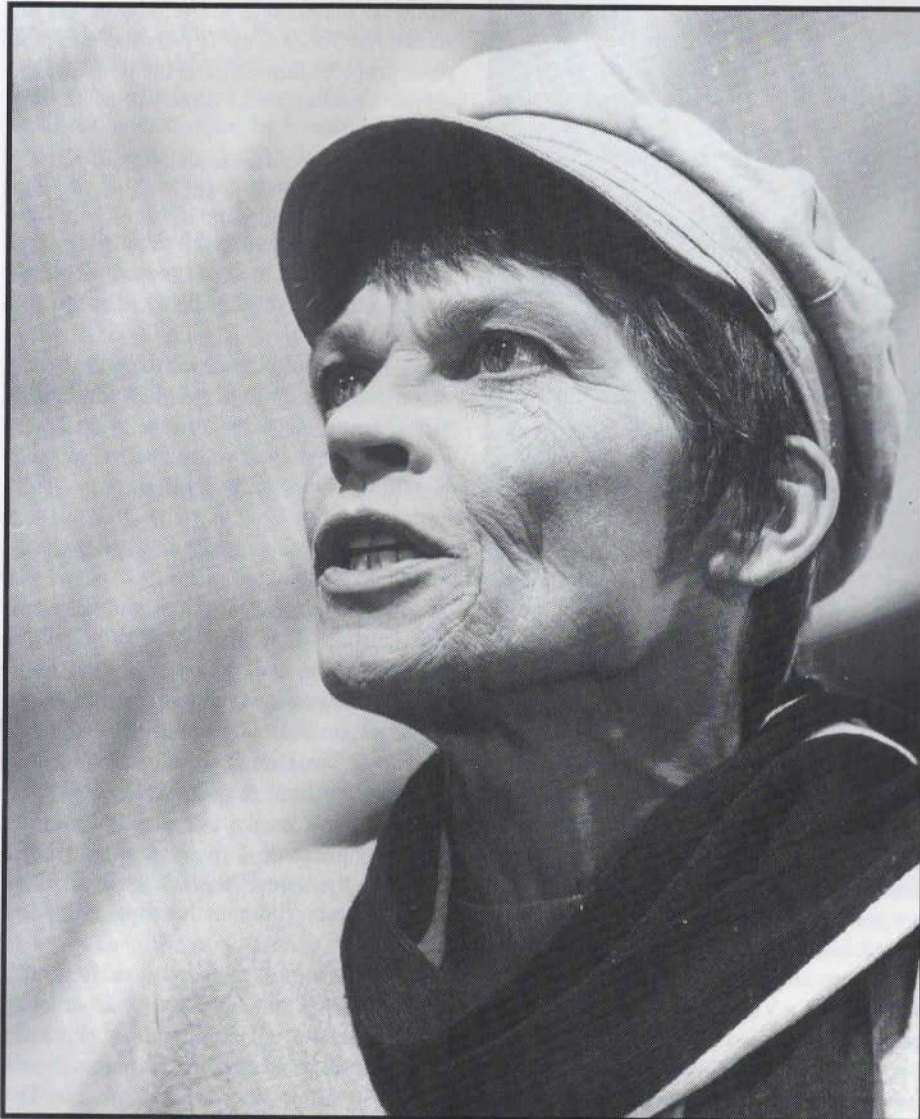
The Doctor was to have uttered the following:-

Doctor: We're none of us safe in our beds until everything is known about everyone.

A pity such a biting comment on privacy was axed from the final version.

Of course everyone remembers the classic encounter on the beach that John S. Smith was to be captivated by: the exchanges between Number 6 and Number 2 as Peter Pan. Every time *The Prisoner* mentions an object from his real world Number 2 counters with an object from the world of the Village. Returning to the theme of the asylum at the end of the altercation Number 2 concludes: "Then you are mad".

There are other scenes that are equally memorable, as when Number 6 makes a night-time escape bid from his cottage via the balcony, or frightening, for example, when Dutton appears as the jester or the mob's chase of Number 6 through the subterranean





corridors, or Number 6's solitary prow through a succession of corridors and rooms to where he finds the key to a door hanging on a hook. He is accompanied by eerie music. Indeed I found the sequence so reminiscent of *Alice in Wonderland* that I half expected to find the White Rabbit scuttling nearby.

However, amidst such haunting imagery, amidst a multitude of ideas, humour, subtlety, the clever plot with many facets, there is dialogue that is certainly thoughtful, at times profound, and even poetical. For example, listening to the illegal radio on the Belvedere, Number 6 hears, in measured tones:

"Nowhere is there more beauty than here. Tonight when the moon rises the whole world will turn to silver. Do you understand? It is important that you understand. I have a

message for you. You must listen. The appointment cannot be fulfilled. Other things must be done tonight. If our torment is to end, if liberty is to be restored, we must grasp the nettle even though it makes our hands bleed. Only through pain can tomorrow be assured."

After being interrupted by Number 2 and his Observer, the radio continues: "That was practice dictation at sixty words a minute". Dictation it may be, but this message has an element of ambiguity, for it could be aimed directly at Number 6. The radio adds "Here is a passage from the wartime memoirs:" We are left in doubt, as perhaps we are meant to be. It's an enigmatic message, and I wondered if it was Village generated, or from an outside source.

Anthony Skene was to tell me later: "I got the idea of the radio message from the

coded wartime broadcasts of the BBC that were intended for our secret agents or the resistance movement in France. This particular message is original and there was originally an additional line of dialogue that went on: "...and that is the end of today's English by Radio." From this I draw the conclusion that the message Number 6 hears is from an outside source, and not from the Village.

Until he told me that there were two possible scenarios floating, both seemed credible. Firstly, the radio message, the corpse washed up on the beach, and the radio Number 6 finds on the body are all part of a plot by the Village to trick Number 6, and bend him to their will. The second possibility is that the corpse is genuinely washed ashore, and the radio is a true link with the outside world. As we now know the message is from an outside radio station, the trial is also a genuine affair. However, without the benefit of reading the script or talking with Anthony Skene, the product we see on the screen becomes even more effective as a puzzle.

Another important point about the corpse, and Number 6's plan to use it as a means of attracting attention from the outside world is contained in the voice over. On the screen McGoohan, as he puts the map, the photograph of himself, and the note into the corpse's pocket, utters these words:

Number 6: To whoever may find this.
[That is all]

The script says: Number 6's voice-over: "I'm going to be murdered. If I can't escape, I must know my killer will be brought to justice."

We would then hear the dead man's voice continue: "You'll find him hiding in a village by the sea. I don't know its latitude or longitude, I hope this rough sketch may help you find it. I attach his photograph so you'll have no doubts."

To me, this makes for greater clarity and understanding.

I asked John S. Smith about this point. John had taken the matter up with McGoohan, and McGoohan had come back with the completed voice-over, having done the whole sequence, and said: "Use this."

As I am raising questions, let's turn to the script and not only look at some of the other changes made, but also at how the episode got its title. I always assumed that it was from the 'dance' that we see prior to the trial. However, it seems that there is another possibility.

This information is gleaned from both the script itself and the Bruce Clark article. I do not note all the changes because Bruce's article was five pages long, I only wish to mention certain relevant points. The

alterations I'm omitting do not change the plot or atmosphere, and for those interested enough, I'm sure the back issue of *Number Six* magazine featuring the article is still available.

In the original script we read: "P gets out of bed and goes to the window. Faintly, the sound of London traffic. It dies as he opens the curtains." We don't hear this in the episode itself but it certainly adds an interesting dimension. Prior to making his nocturnal escape attempt, we hear the soporific voice attempting to lull him to sleep. The script reads: "To the voice is added the beat of a metronome. The slow count of a sleeper's heart." and "Music and voice suddenly stop. The slow relentless beat thumps on". Skene describes the atmosphere as "hypnotic". Later in the woods, Number 6 sees two men filling in a large hole. The Doctor is in attendance, Number 6 overhears:

Digger: All done, sir.
Doctor: We can't leave bodies lying about, can we?

Rather gruesome. Later the male Number 2 appears dressed as Jack the Ripper in time for the carnival. However the single most important difference for us is that the ending is different. This is the original: Number 6 is confronted by Number 2 in the telex room, whereupon Number 2 says: "A man can only die once. And you're already dead, aren't you? In our little room?" Number 6 is then led by Number 2 to the girl observer. Number 6 says: "I'll never give in Being dead does have its advantages." It is then that he smashes the telex. The script reads: "Turning to the girl he adds: "Shall we dance?" They leave Number 2 surrounded by the broken parts of the telex. They return to the ballroom where a hectic formation dance is in full swing. They join in. They all dance as if the devil is playing. Continue the music faster and faster. The Village is brightly illuminated. No-one about. Pull back so the sea comes between us and it, until the Village is only a glow in the darkness of night. END CREDITS.

Bruce wrote: "This ending would have added even more surrealism to a story already bordering on a dream-like state."

I spoke to John S. Smith about this ending. Both he and I agreed it would have made a better climax, and would certainly have elevated the episode even higher in both our estimations.

So why did we not have 'the Dance'? John tells us the story. He had taken the episode over from Geoff Foot, the original editor. As he shaped the episode he realised the tale ended with the chase by the mob. He was sure the original ending hadn't been

shot. By now, this was months after, so John had to use the material he had to create the most satisfactory ending possible. Hence *Dance Of The Dead* failed to have that final madcap whirl.

MASQUE OF DEATH

One theory that has been put forward as to the episode's title was that it in some way was derived from the 1964 film *The Masque Of The Red Death*. Directed by Roger Corman, the film has on the plus side outstanding photography by Nicholas Roeg (who went on to make *Don't Look Now*) and a striking script by Charles Beaumont and R. Wright-Campbell. Into Poe's short story they have introduced a degree of mysticism. The Red Death, in the form of a red robed, monk-like figure is seen as a deliverer, a saviour. At the end, when Death is unmasked, he wears Prospero's face. (Prospero is the devil-worshipping villain).

Echoes of the unmasking of Number 1 by Number 6? Other relevant points are that whilst the Red Death wears the colour that Prospero and his disciples forbid, thus does Number 6 wear his own clothing, normally forbidden by the Village. The characters in *The Masque Of The Red Death* live in fear of the plague, so in *Dance Of The Dead* the

script is rich in description. For example, when Number 6 is exploring the corridors and rooms that lead to the little room that contains the corpse. Skene outlines "a Germanic horror of a long, narrow room at the far end, no larger than a postage stamp is another door", and, at the carnival "the people titter and it sounds like ghosts." Descriptions like those conjure up a nightmare world. In a previous issue of *Number Six* magazine John S. Smith was interviewed and when asked about *Dance Of The Dead* he had this to say. Previously he had only worked on studio-bound episodes.

"I was getting short of work so I agitated to complete an episode which Pat had dismissed and left on the shelf to be patched up later. It was titled *Dance Of The Dead*. I fell in love with it because it had all the magic and vitality of what the series was about it was a mixture of theatre, cinema and fantasy I'll never forget the scenes on the beach with Mary Morris dressed as Peter Pan, and the long shadows created by the late sun. That atmosphere was the essence of the series."

I talked to John about his involvement. As stated the episode, unfinished, had been put on the shelf by McGoohan. ITC were pushing for more episodes, John told



characters live in fear, both of the Village, but ultimately of Number 6 and his individuality. As the film approaches its climax, there is a masked ball. Death, the Red Robed figure moves silently amongst the revellers. In response to his touch, they sink slowly to the floor. Both their life, and their dance, over. It remains a nice theory but with no basis in fact.

Apart from the highly imaginative vision that would have been the original end for *Dance Of The Dead*, Anthony Skene's

McGoohan he had time on his hands, and McGoohan, who was at saturation point with work, told him to go ahead. John felt that this episode, shot months previously had been neglected. He was told by McGoohan: "See what you can do with it." He added: "If you have an idea do it." So John went ahead. He had all the trims, and he felt nothing had been junked. It was the ending that caused the problems. As events had moved on there was no possibility of returning to Portmeirion to do any re-shooting. Time and money would

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not have allowed this. So John edited the episode using the shot material and formed the ending as we know it.

According to John, it is true that Trevor Howard was being considered as Number 2 for this episode. At the time he lived in the village of Arkley, literally a footbridge away from *The Prisoner* studio on the other side of the A1. He and Don Chaffey were both regulars at The Gate village pub. However it didn't happen because Trevor was away shooting a film. Mary Morris was selected to be Number 2. John enthused about the beach scene. "Don Chaffey was a craftsman. A shot like that is very difficult to set up. To achieve that dramatic sky effect takes a lot of setting up. The sun goes quickly." Both John and I shared similar feelings about the character Dutton. "A very sympathetic character. A classical clown's face. A face straight out of *Orphee*, the classic film.

This was in November 1966. *Dance Of The Dead* went into post production as episode number four. *The Chimes Of Big Ben* was entering production as number five in the series. It was at this point that Leo McKern entered as the Number 2 character for *The Chimes Of Big Ben*. John felt that, at this time, Leo was seen as a permanent addition to the team of McGoohan and Don Chaffey as Senior Director.

In a letter John writes: "When I discovered *Dance Of The Dead* and saw the rough cut my imagination was fired and perhaps the skill of the old masters who had influenced me in my impressionable formative years drove me to complete this disregarded episode which had all the fantasy of the Village my other episodes lacked, or was I conditioned and programmed to discover this ailing episode as a reward by Number 1."

A fantasy? Let's see.

If you read my article "I'm independent, don't forget" in the Spring 1993 issue of *Number Six* you will remember I mentioned a number of films as possible influences on *The Prisoner*. Apart from *The Masque Of The Red Death* I cited three classics. Chronologically the first is *The Cabinet Of Dr. Caligari* directed by Robert Weine. Consider the following description: "A visual world, twisted and tortured, reflecting a world of confusing ambiguity and paranoia in which nobody is to be trusted." *Dance Of The Dead* perhaps? No, this is how *The Cabinet Of Dr. Caligari* has been described. This 1919 film is an outstanding example of the early German expressionist film-makers art. Expressionism is best defined as the portrayal and externalising of man's inner state and turmoil. Indeed, Virginia Woolf admired its capacity for visualising inner emotions, and, as she put it, "to show the shape of fear." The plot concerns a somnambulist (sleepwalker)

who is under the control of an evil carnival showman. At the film's end we realise the whole story is nothing but the distorted ravings of the madman who narrates the tale. It is his point of view. In fact the showman is our storyteller's kindly physician. A possible parallel with *Dance Of The Dead*? *Dance Of The Dead* is laced with fear and impending darkness. It is as though Number 6 were roaming in the nocturnal world of the subconscious.

COCTEAU TWINS

In the 1940s Jean Cocteau made two outstanding fantasy films. Both are haunting and poetical. *Le Belle et la Bête* is very atmospheric and features statues whose eyes follow our heroine as she glides through a deserted palace whose corridors are lined with mirrors. She passes silently in search of an elusive figure. *Orphee* is, of course, based on the Orpheus legend. *Orphee* is intrigued by a series of mysterious radio messages that he believes are specifically for him. He gains free access to the underworld by passing through a mirror to where there is a trial, not of him, but of the Princess of Death. Similarly Number 6 also gains free access to the Village underworld normally denied him.

If you follow my line of reasoning it becomes apparent that *Dance Of The Dead* is possibly a dream, certainly a fantasy. Perhaps, as in *The Cabinet Of Dr. Caligari*,

powerful enough episode to stand on its own, in isolation. Not only can it do this but it will continue to stand as the legitimate heir to the school of fantasy founded by the likes of Weine and of which Cocteau was a master.

A fantasy then?

If *The Prisoner* poses more questions than it answers *Dance Of The Dead* contributes a higher percentage than most. It was with a hope of obtaining answers that I posted a letter to Anthony Skene, asking him if he might help me on my quest. He was kind enough to reply in the affirmative, and over a period of time he has been more than helpful, and always ready to answer the most trifling query. Halliwell describes Anthony Skene as a "British playwright who came to notice with ingeniously plotted contributions to series... He likes the challenge of writing to a formula... writes fizzing satires... He has contributed to a wide number of series over the years as well as scripting both original plays and adapting material for plays."

What I present to you now, in some sort of order, are the comments he made.

SKENE PLAY

Our story begins in 1965. Anthony Skene has written a couple of plays for Redifusion Television for series entitled *The Seven Deadly Sins*. The first was titled *In the Night*. The story happened in real time. Clocks and watches showed 9.02 and were in sync



Number 6 is an inmate in an asylum. After all, we only see his, possibly distorted, perspective. Remember the original finish? Certainly many of the ideas that were in the original script became toned down or modified. Perhaps it was considered just too extreme.

However as an example of the fantasy genre *Dance Of The Dead* is both rich and complex, with one advantage that it is a

until the play's end at 9.58. The commercial break was even accounted for. Skene describes it as "A jigsaw of things happening to desperate people."

I don't remember that play myself, however I do remember the second offering. I watched it riveted to the screen. George Markstein also watched it. Let me tell you of it. Remember, my memories of this play are twenty-nine years old! I'm assured by those

who saw the re-make some years later that I have the plot right!

THE FILE ON HARRY JORDAN

A ruthless young man, Harry Jordan, sits an examination to join a big corporation as a junior executive. He passes and joins the company. He doesn't realise, but in fact, he has filled in the form in such a way that the company has selected him! Nothing and nobody stand in his way on his rise to the top. There is an air of mystery about who runs the company. Jordan is intrigued. He has to find out. The lift only ever goes as far as the twelfth floor, despite the number thirteen appearing on the lift buttons. Jordan determines to find his way to the thirteenth floor. He succeeds. He is greeted by a silent dwarf butler and meets "the man behind the big door" who runs the company. Jordan is told that he is the chosen one to take over the corporation. There is only one drawback. He can never leave the suite of rooms he has now found himself in. There is no way out. Too late, as the man makes a silent unobserved exit, leaving Jordan with the butler, Jordan realises he has been trapped.

Of course, this was a year before *The Prisoner* went into production. A final word about *The File On Harry Jordan*. The 1965 version starring Barry Foster is the version I remember and that Anthony Skene remembers with affection. He says: "The original 1965 black and white production was brilliant. Barry Foster as Harry, and directed, as Fritz Lang to the manner born, by Joan Kemp-Welch. It was yonks before the VCR, but it was not live, it was on Ampex tape." A few years later it was re-made with Shane Bryant and Skene was so mortified he switched off halfway through. It is this second version that some members have seen courtesy of Simon Coward. The first version was recorded, and somewhere in some forgotten vault or dusty attic, it lies awaiting re-discovery. On the strength of these two plays, Markstein contacted Skene and asked him to write for *Danger Man*.

Skene came up with a plot about the Cannes film festival, but it was never used because *Danger Man* came to an end. Markstein and Skene got on well together, and as a consequence Skene was invited to a meeting at Elstree to discuss the new series, which as to be made in colour for CBS in America. It was accepted that *Danger Man* and *Number 6* were one and the same.

When the idea of *The Prisoner* was put to Skene there was not a scrap of paper to refer to. *Arrival* hadn't been written. He says: "I saw not a single piece of paper. The show (rather more perhaps than most) was a cosmic void. They sat there waiting for ideas, an



approach, an attitude." He adds: "A free hand? Oh God yes." Skene returned home from Elstree with a headache, and, when at a loss, turned to the idea of a trial. A concept he had used before. "If I'm stuck, I do a trial," he told me. A film that Anthony Skene mentioned to us as a possible influence was *The Devil And David Webster*, also known as *All That Money Can Buy*. It features a trial.

"Once I gave George an idea, a drum-head trial, he said "proceed,"" writes Skene. You have to remember, with no firm ideas about the world of the Village, it gave him the opportunity of writing a number of ideas into the script as well as having to incorporate a certain amount of establishing. He mentioned "headaches" and elaborated. "My headache was facing such a trying task."

I asked him about Trevor Howard being mentioned as a possible Number 2. "At the initial meeting I wondered how we were going to get guest ladies in. I was told, "Oh, Number 2 will be some big star - write it for someone like Trevor Howard or Alec Guin-

ness, both of whom were too big to guest a TV show. I was delighted with Mary Morris. I went on to work with her in other things. She was at her most enigmatic since *Thief of Baghdad*".

I asked him about the noises we were to have heard near the beginning of the episode, but in fact we don't; the heartbeat as Number 6 awakes, and the sound of London traffic as he gets to the window. Were they to be in Number 6's mind? "No, they were to have been Village created."

As far as the scene with the radio message on the Belvedere is concerned, who would have sent it I queried, as this particularly intrigued me. It was then that he told me of the additional line of dialogue, that having been deleted, leaves us with some ambiguity.

Having completed *Dance Of The Dead*, he submitted it and it was accepted. He never received a production script. "You never do," he says.

He was then asked to write another episode. By this time money was running

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low. Skene continues. "Tomblin wanted to do an episode using lots of stock shots he knew about. Number 6 in front of back projections of Morocco." Skene thought he could do something better, so went away "put on my wellies and traipsed over the backlot." The story became *A, B & C*. He added: "The church door, the French street were all left overs from *The Dirty Dozen*. Other bits too." He continued: "People think writers spend their lives on a chaise-longue."

A point to ponder with this particular script is: when McGoohan was wondering how to finish the series and who would be Number 1, did he hark back to *A, B & C* and remember that "D" was Number 2. Parallel thinking

Referring to his third script, *Many Happy Returns*, he says: "By which time George was at Thames. This was to have been the final of the thirteen. Number 6 gets out, but has to be recaptured in case the show continues."

Anthony Skene summed up. "It was just a job one of ten or so that year." When I asked him if there were any of his works that he felt in particular he would like recognised, he replied, modestly, "Not really. It's all last year's newspapers."

Anthony Skene moved on to other projects, a number of them with George Markstein, and our story moves on several years.

One day a letter dropped through his letter box. It was from a student in Ontario who was studying the now legendary Ontario Education Authority sociology course. For readers who may not be familiar with this course, it uses *The Prisoner* as a tool in its teaching. The course notes mention the film *Orpheus*. So this student decides to ask Anthony Skene direct. Skene's first reaction was: "This course has been thought up by

some shrewd cookie." He wrote to me "Revelation! When I wrote *Dance Of The Dead* I must have been wearing Jean Cocteau's old Fedora hat."

To digress, as a matter of interest some other questions from the O.E.C.A. course include "Does *Dance Of The Dead* qualify as poetry?" and "What insights could the works of R.D. Laing bring to this episode." The actual *Orpheus* question is: "In the Orphic myth, Orpheus descends into the underworld to rescue Eurydice. What elements of the Orphic myth are reflected in *The Prisoner's* situation in this program?"

Despite these connections with *Orpheus* I feel *Dance Of The Dead* is wholly original. After all, it is inevitable that this episode, indeed, *The Prisoner* as a whole is compared to other imaginative films or works of literature. Anthony Skene crafted a first class story around the simple plot of the illicit radio and the subsequent trial.

A CARNIVAL OF SOULS

In this story we have the splendour of a carnival, imaginative use of village exteriors, courtesy of Skene's plot and Chaffey's direction. There are haunting interior sets, and a quite striking group of characters.

In the original script Number 2 would have become Jack-the-Ripper. With the arrival of Mary Morris it was suggested she could dress as Old Father Time. This, fortunately was superseded by the character of Peter Pan. A possible reason for this choice was that Mary had played Peter Pan on the stage some years previously. Whatever the reason, it was an inspired choice, for it allows us to pose another puzzle. Perhaps another tenuous connection to *The Masque Of The Red Death*. Prospero has freely given his soul away to the Devil, Peter Pan, the boy that never grows up, casts no shadow. In many

'primitive' cultures it is widely believed that creatures that cast no shadow have no soul. We are, however, saved considering this because, on the beach, Number 6 says to Peter Pan "Mr. Peter Pan with his shadow."

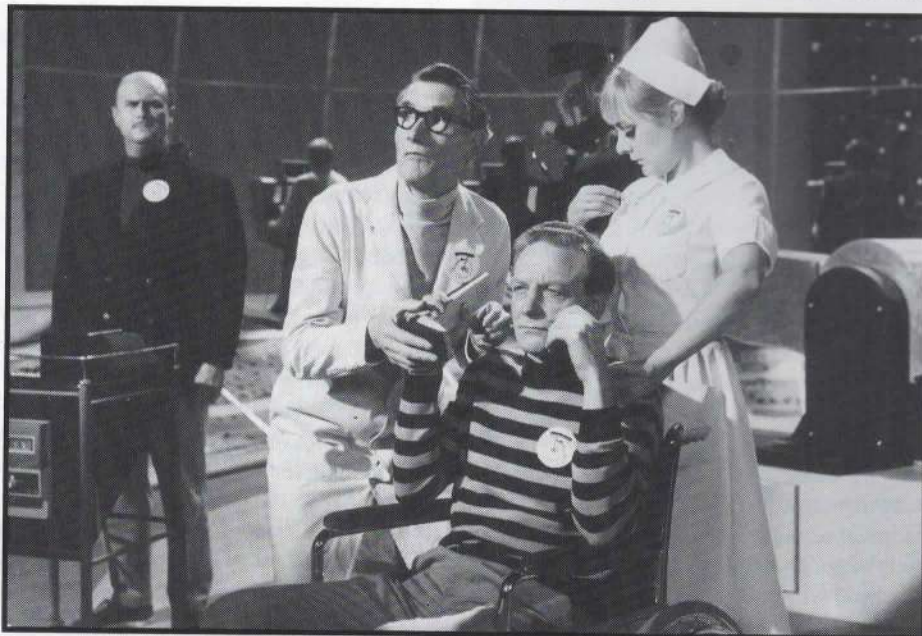
Other characters in this tale dress appropriately for the carnival. Indeed, from being just an anonymous number, their true character emerges. The Observer becomes Bo-Peep of course, keeping a watchful eye on her flock. The Maid, the Doctor, and the Town Crier all assume the apparel of ultimate power, Queen Elizabeth I, Napoleon, and Caesar. Dutton of course must play the Fool. The characters are richly etched. Mary Morris as a ruthless Number 2, Alan White a forlorn, defeated Dutton, Norma West as a too sensitive, confused Observer who is beginning to question her allegiances and Duncan Macrae as a deceptively chilling doctor. Indeed the doctor is a bogeyman, the stuff of nightmares. I am reminded of the last two lines of the nursery rhyme *Oranges And Lemons*; "Here comes the candle to light you to bed, and here comes the chopper to chop off your head." I imagine the doctor wandering, always searching, for his next victim, meat-axe secreted somewhere on his person.

Number 6 of course retains his integrity in this topsy-turvy surreal world and is Mr. Tuxedo, not realising his fate until the last, even then in disbelief. Everyone gets the good lines too, even the minor characters. For example, a bitchy Camilla Hasse as the Night Supervisor commenting on Bo-Peep's drop of guard remark regarding the death of Number 34, "I got to know him quite well." The Night Supervisor retorts, "He didn't know you, did he?" Very cutting.

Of course one important character doesn't get a line at all. She doesn't need one. The black cat. Yes, the cat is written into the original script. Number 6 could be forgiven for thinking that the cat is a friend, until betrayed by the feline. Number 2 laughs, "She works here too." I can't think of many films where a cat has such a crucial role. Perhaps it's symbolic.

Obviously the carnival costumes are symbolic, but there are many other symbols evident throughout the story. In the dialogue, the scene on the beach for example, or the trial. Perhaps the carnival itself is a symbol for some yearly sacrificial lamb to sanctify the flock.

On a wider scale the episode itself is symbolic. I find it full of menace and foreboding. It is concerned with death. The corpse on the beach, the body being buried in the woods, the death of Dutton's personality, the near death of Number 6 as the mob seek to tear him limb from limb. The bland dead look on the villagers faces as they take part in the carnival parade. The figure of Napoleon wearing the





black cap. Number 6 being told he is already dead. The laughter like ghosts" in the script, and the idea of Number 2 being dressed as Jack-the-Ripper. Perhaps one reason why the latter never happened was because the episode might have been too frightening. This carnival of souls is lightened by the colour of costumes, the 18th century music and interiors, and Number 6 surviving intact through this nightmare world to face another challenge. Add Peter Pan and we have the symbol of eternal youth.

Dance Of The Dead defies easy rationalising. Its apparent slow pace deceives, for we are dazzled by a cascade of ideas and biting one-liners that say more in a few seconds and make more points than many feature length films. Should the mooted *Prisoner* film be made I would suggest that apart from an introduction that this script could offer a solid framework of ideas and inspiration. But of course it's Hollywood so they'll overlook it entirely and go for a far less

mystical and magical approach. When Anthony Skene, an admirer of Cocteau, discussed *Orphee* with me he remarked that "nowadays it creaks a bit." I venture to suggest that the same will not be said about this episode. Time will not erode its impact.

To conclude, it could successfully be argued that this cleverly plotted story could be a dream or a nightmare for the references are many. It could be a tale from a madman's perspective for there are indications that this could be so. Certainly it is a fantasy, or any one of half a dozen other possibilities. I hope I have made a case for seeing this episode on more than one level and have answered some questions. I hope I have posed even more questions.

One conundrum I have not addressed is the photograph in the dead man's wallet. It shows the dead man, and we assume his girlfriend. We see it for a split second. They are sitting on the edge of the pool on the

Piazza. The script does not specify this. Is it carelessness in production, or deliberate? If the photo was planted on the corpse by the Village, Number 6 would recognise the surroundings. Should I play this game? Which game would I be playing? You see, the questions go on. And I also haven't seen "the Rules".

Anthony Skene was given free rein to use his imagination, and surely this story is about death and rebirth, a powerful statement on tolerance and an eloquent plea for individual's rights; a blow against mindless conformity. Add the original end, with the mad dance and it would have been a triumph of surrealism that would rank alongside anything the cinema has attempted. It is a thumping good yarn. If it were to be shown second in the series it would elaborate and develop the framework initiated by *Arrival*. It would add depth, complexity, and emphasize the dark side of the Village. Instead, perhaps to hold the audience's attention we have a series of episodes that tell clear stories with defined plots. By being screened eighth *Dance Of The Dead* remains an anomaly.

Perhaps you see why I embarked on my own odyssey to understand this episode more deeply, and consequently appreciate it more fully. It is the finest and perhaps the most thought provoking. After all there is a school of thought that believes the original idea for *The Prisoner* came from George Markstein. It was only after McGoohan saw its potential that the series became as surreal and allegorical as we know it today. If this is true where did Markstein get the concept? Apart from other ideas, was it remembering *The File On Harry Jordan*? After all it contains many of the ingredients of *The Prisoner*. I've added another strand to the argument of the genesis of *The Prisoner*.

I hope this article has shed a little more light on the enigma that is *The Prisoner*, and on the contribution of Tony Skene in particular. A man, who by applying his imagination and skill, gave us so many memorable moments and images connected with the series.

Finally I would like to address the enigma of the Telex machine. Does Number 1 send signals via this device? If Number 6 smashes it why should it continue sending messages? Its all just part of *The Prisoner* puzzle.

"None of us is safe until everything is known about everyone."

I like my dream.

I have many people to thank for help in the preparation of this article. It would never have been possible without the help of Dave and Julie Jones, Simon Coward, Bruce Clark, Steven Ricks, John S. Smith and of course Anthony Skene