



The whole place is run by an enormous computer taking up an entire wall: shades of *The General*.

Josef K. appears to be high up in the organisation, his desk is separate from everyone else's, he can receive visitors and, like Number 6, come and go as he pleases. Except that he isn't, and never will be, free.

As far as accused persons are concerned, their whole lives change and they are consumed by the need to build up a case for their innocence and ultimately to convince one or more of the mysterious "Judges" of that innocence. These appear to be the ultimate authority but in reality no one seems to have ever seen one, or to have actually been tried by one, although everyone knows someone who knows someone, who knows someone, who has!

Needing an ally, Josef consults an advocate (played by Orson Welles), who he thinks might be able to build his case. He finds the house run by a nymphomaniac housekeeper accompanied a man who appears to be in residence and who is himself an accused person. The advocate seems to be sympathetic but unable to offer little but empty talk. The housekeeper tells Josef K. of an artist whose work involves painting portraits of the mysterious Judges, and who might be able to use his influence to help. He goes to see the man who lives in a ramshackle room at the top of a building which seems to be infested with hordes of sinister unruly children. Josef K. finds himself struggling against a torrent of these children up a narrow, almost vertical staircase. The artist's 'room' is actually a cage-like structure made from rough planks, with as many gaps as there are planks. Although he closes the door, the room is surrounded by the children who constantly peer through the gaps and jeer at the two men.

Despite the gaps in the walls, Josef K. becomes increasingly claustrophobic and is desperate to leave. The strange artist suggests he leaves by another door to avoid the children. Josef steps through, and is hit with the nightmarish realisation that he's back in the courthouse.



The view he gets of yet another endless, filing cabinet-lined corridor (left) is virtually identical to the one in *The Prisoner* opening sequence (right).

Once more he's faced with rows of accused persons, all rising to their feet as he approaches. Unable to deal with them, he panics, doubles back through the artist's room and breaks into a run. Somehow he's now at basement level and running scared through a rabbit's warren of tunnels pursued by packs of howling children in a chase sequence almost exactly duplicated in *The Dance Of The Dead* Prisoner episode.

Most of the main sets for this film were real places, and the main location was the vast crumbling edifice of the Orsay railway station in central Paris before it was renovated to become

the home of impressionistic art as the Musee D'Orsay.

The Trial could easily pass as a typical episode of *The Prisoner*. Many of the same elements are there and it resembles a blending of *Dance Of The Dead*, *Free For All* and *A Change Of Mind* in many respects, although whether the film actually provided direct inspiration for *The Prisoner* is a matter for speculation. There are lots of similarities, some might be coincidence, some might have been drawn from a pool of subconscious influences. Jack Shampan, the art director on *The Prisoner*, admits to bringing deliberate visual references from German expressionistic films, such as Fritz Lang's *M*, into his *Prisoner* designs and it wouldn't be surprising to find that *The Trial* was also on his list.



There's even a similar shot to the 'long corridor shadow' from *The Prisoner* opening sequence (right).

The film receives only rare showings on television, but is on US DVD from www.Amazon.com who list two versions, one of which has a few extras, such as an alternative opening. If you do get to see it, here are some of the more obvious parallels to *The Prisoner* to look out for.

- The hero is never properly identified, nor do we actually find out much about his personal life.
- The "Villagers" are unable to determine who is friend and who is enemy.
- The hero is revealed as a strong character with unusual skills, determined to beat the system at its own game despite the fact that virtually everyone else is apathetic.
- When Josef K. steps out of the ramshackle attic he sees virtually the same filing cabinet corridor shot as the one in *The Prisoner* title sequence.
- At one stage, Josef K. has to push through a strange crowd of people, all wearing identification numbers.
- *The Trial* and *The Prisoner* both carry a strong comment on the way the system manipulates and then discards people to protect its own status quo.
- Bureaucracy for its own sake is seen to be the ruling force in all of this and eventually leads to dehumanisation and a loss of identity.
- The chase through the tunnels is exactly the same as the chase through the tunnels under the Town Hall in *Dance Of The Dead*.
- Fundamental to *The Trial* is the inexplicable 'Law' which, like the 'Rules' in *Dance of the Dead*, is inviolable yet no-one seems to have actually seen a copy written down anywhere or can quote by which authority it is administered.
- The apparent authority behind the system is often referred to but never seen, except *maybe* at the end.
- The ending involves blowing things up!

The Trial is frequently listed under its alternative title *Le Procès*. Here are various DVD covers which have appeared, plus the film poster on the right. *Trial* is also on *Citizen Welles*, a triple bill. It was remade some 30 years later, with Anthony ('Hannibal') Hopkins and Kyle ('Twin Peaks') MacLachlan.

