

VILLAGE ARSENAL (from Free For All magazine, 2006)

Throughout the Prisoner series we see many fascinating weapons used by the Village. Whether the giant white guardian sphere (once referred to as Rover) can be classed as part of the weaponry is for debate. Also, the methods of coercion, containment and brainwashing provide other psychological methods. It is interesting to look at all of the items in the arsenal available to No. 2 and his security team, administrators and supervisors.

In Dance of the Dead, No. 2 refers to "this panoply of splendour" and it is a comment which always perplexes. Is she referring to the arsenal of weapons in the Village, giving the expression its true meaning? A panoply would, for example, in olden times be a splendid suit of armour. The Village may well have defence systems, although it seems that all we ever see in episodes are instruments of aggression. Of course, nowadays, whether a country is claiming its weapons are defensive or offensive is often a moot point. Whatever the situation, let's take an episode-by-episode trip through the armoury and wouldn't it have been fun if there had been a Village "Q" character, as in the James Bond movies.

In Arrival we are introduced to a number of systems or controls which feature in other stories. The element of coercion and containment is introduced early on; here it is obvious from the scene in the central piazza when the young man is killed by the white ball. Much of the weaponry could be described as security devices: see-through-wall cameras, statue seeing-eye cameras, remote control of helicopters. At the end of the story, it is once more the white sphere which shepherds No. 6 back to his open prison.

In The Chimes of Big Ben, an **electrified floor** is about the only candidate which can be offered up as an example of a weapon. Of course, in that story the more effective tool was the double-agent status of Nadia. However, the apparent weapon used against her was at least enough to convince No. 6 that she was both a victim and a prisoner, like himself.



In A. B. and C. drugs are clearly to the fore. The weapon here is the simple use of persuasion, putting thoughts into No. 6's dreams and manipulating dialogue when he 'meets' with other people. When the fight back begins, No. 6's own main weapon is his strength of will, being able to beat No. 2 within his dream, neither having to be awake, nor physically in combat with the Village leader.

The **truth test** in Free For All is an interesting weapon. No. 6 once again through his own strength of character is able to manipulate truth and lie to mask the real position. In modern interrogatory techniques, a lie detector can be 'beaten' by various drug-related means, or by a practised approach to answering questions. Such techniques must have been in their infancy when The Prisoner was made but it was an interesting look ahead to see how one man's mind cannot be penetrated while he still has enough resistance to use the present weapon back against those deploying it.



The Schizoid Man has a weapon in human form, being No. 12, or Curtis as he was once known. All that happens within the story is a sham and so many of the instruments used by the Village, to check fingerprints or mental ability, have to be seen against a background of No. 2 wanting to trick No. 6. In fact, the prisoner has his own telepathic rapport, with the girl Alison, although this does not lead to any chance of escape.

In The General, the giant Village computer can be used apparently to detect treachery. However, it is not much of a weapon as No. 6 can defeat it simply by asking the simple and unanswerable question "Why?". There is a sophisticated broadcasting system seen in this episode, although it is not really a weapon. However, stretching a point, it could be said that the ability to brainwash the population by feeding them historical and other facts, could over time be corrupted so that they are moulded as well as being taught.

In Many Happy Returns, the only 'weapon' is the long reach of the Village. Its arms and tentacles stretch apparently around the globe and can draw No. 6 back in whenever wanted. However, this is not really a Village-based story and we see subterfuge in play, which is often the main weapon within the spy world.

Turning to Dance of the Dead, brainwashing is on display, from the beginning of the story. Once again, No. 6 is resisting attempts to put unwanted thoughts into his head. The other poor unfortunate, Roland Walter Dutton, was less successful and eventually is reduced to a mental wreck. No. 2 has a proud boast in this story about the powers of the Village and indeed they do seem mighty.

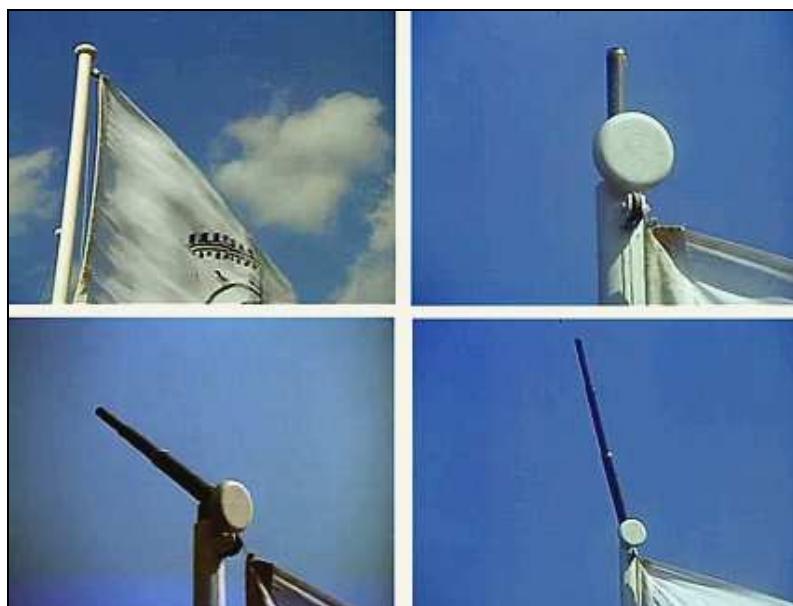
Perhaps the main weapon is having the entire community at the disposal of the Village leader, she being able to control the crowds to act as she wants them to do. However, there is

one real ‘weapon’ in Dance of the Dead which is the Town Hall **force field**, preventing No. 6 from entering the power base in the Village, unless he is permitted to do so.



In Checkmate, apart from dehydration and conditioning, the Village seems content to let the prisoners fall out amongst themselves and form alliances or feel mistrust, as the mood takes them. Of course, the large white sphere is always on hand to keep people obedient, just as the guardian entity did its work in the preceding episode, Dance of the Dead, when No. 6 runs away from the Village centre and is pursued by the beast along the shore.

Hammer Into Anvil has a number of technical devices, such as decoders, fingerprint comparison testers, handwriting evaluation devices, psychiatric assessments and even a tranquilliser **dart-firing flagpole**, needed to bring down a pigeon which No. 6 releases carrying a written coded message (a ploy to trick and destabilise No. 2 and his team).



It's Your Funeral offers a film editing suite with hidden cameras and, alarming by today's standards, a suicide bomb in a seal of office. Whether the new No. 2 wants No. 6 to foil the assassination plot or not is never entirely clear. Perhaps No. 6 would argue that the greatest weapon on display in It's Your Funeral is the evil side of No. 2. Maybe all Village leaders have to become evil only while in power, as the outgoing No. 2 seems less so.

A Change of Mind is a sinister episode in which a lobotomy process suggests to No. 6 that he has had part of his freethinking mind removed or nullified. Fortunately, his own inner resolve gradually comes back to the fore and once he is aware that the process used against him is a fake one, he is able to summon up his strengths and use them to defeat the current No. 2. The drug Mytol which is used against him, is something which becomes an effective tool in his hands and by switching teacups, he neutralises No. 2's assistant and even manages to use her to his own advantage in unseating No. 2.

The most impressive gadgetry in the series must be the mind transfer process in Do Not Forsake Me Oh My Darling. There is only one problem as far as No. 2 is concerned, the equipment exists outside the Village and it is sought after by No. 2. This is a strange departure in storylines for The Prisoner because it is a screenplay which has the Village really wanting No. 6 to help them, to track down Professor Seltzman and lead them to him. The end of the episode is a shambles, as No. 2 allows No. 6 and Seltzman to do a triple mind swap, thereby letting the Professor escape and restoring No. 6 to the status quo. Somehow, No. 6's respect for the Professor is something which helps him protect the older man, and the Village authorities have nothing to match this level of resolve.

In Living In Harmony, although the whole episode is a hallucination, we are on fairly safe ground in assuming that there are some quite strong drugs in play here. In The Girl Who Was Death, perhaps No. 6 was still recovering from those same drugs, as he was quite inventive in creating a fairy story about a fictional foe, Sonia Schnipps. He introduces his own weapons into the tale: poisonous gas; spikes; machine guns; grenades; exploding candles and even a rocket which is a lighthouse.

In Once Upon A Time the Village is again using drugs or some electro-manipulation to bring about a regression in the mind of No. 6. By taking him back to his childhood and through his schooldays and young adult years, they hope to pinpoint the time when he became rebellious. The weapon is a powerful one, but becomes too much so, as No. 2 and No. 6 change places and the former dies.

We reach at last Fall Out and apart from the obvious weapons on display, such as machine guns on camera booms and the final rocket, there is only one thing which is being sought: in Fall Out, the final goal is freedom. Other past or prospective world leaders might have wanted to rule the planet, or to destroy enemies, or to keep the population under control, to do the leader's bidding. However, Fall Out is quite a departure from the earlier stories as we have been brought up on a diet of No. 2 wanting to break No. 6 and extract his secrets, but in the final story we are cheering on No. 6 as he makes the walk to freedom.

And so is the desire for that elusive state, freedom, the strongest weapon we have within us? Is freedom something which we would fight for, against all odds and despite all weapons being used against us? It might be argued that survival is a more important process, but this state is really just part of the condition of being alive. If the Village weapons had beaten No. 6 and crushed his spirit, No. 2 would have won, reducing No. 6 to being no more than a compliant number within the community. Which is why we applaud No. 6: his own personal weaponry was much more sophisticated, enduring and effective.



Village plus Rover, versus No. 6.