



THE I CHECK

by Roger

The moves called out during the opening scenes of the Prisoner episode "Checkmate" are partly repeated and also not entirely logical. Perhaps this situation mirrors the series as a whole, with things happening more than once, as well as making little sense. In "Checkmate" (filmed under the working title of "The Queen's Pawn") the chess sequence takes up about eight minutes, including the arrival of the champion, the "Man with the Stick." This is one of the longest sections of a Prisoner episode and there are a considerable number of edits.

Filming the chess action was a lengthy process, with many set-ups and cuts. There are photos showing close-ups with just a few white squares in place. At other times the whole 'board' is laid, with a full complement of players. The spectacle is probably the most striking of the entire series.



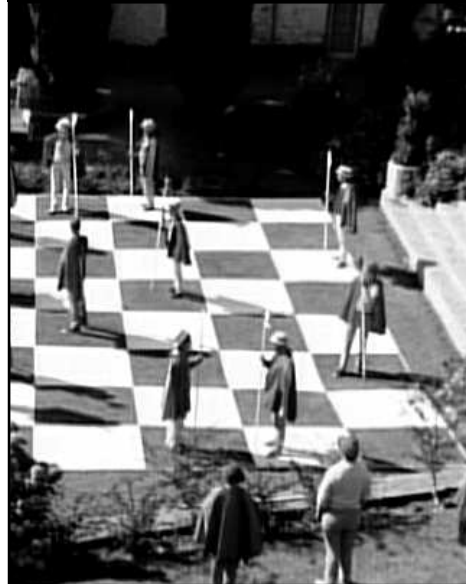
The 'board' was laid before the opening scene of "Arrival" was filmed. When that episode's title credits appear, the marks on the lawn from the now removed chess squares are visible as a green two-tone pattern left on the grass. The filming captures the setting in a surreal style. Two men in striped jackets and shorts bring to mind Tweedledum and Tweedledee from Lewis Carroll's "Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There." The butler

MOVES

N

MATE

Langley



oversees proceedings from the top of the bandstand (Portmeirion's Bristol Colonnade). It is not clear whether he is following the moves, or controlling them. Atop two tall ladder trestles sit the chess champion and his opponent. Thus we have the commencement of "Checkmate," an opening unlike any other in the series.

The game is able to proceed without interference from the Control Room supervisor, No. 56, or even No. 2, who visits the 'bridge' to check on events taking place outside on the lawn. The facial expressions of No. 6 indicate that he regards the whole display as a sham, a charade being performed for his benefit, or perhaps for the amusement of the Villagers. Whatever might be the purpose of the game, it is over far more quickly than a traditional match and the ending serves mainly to introduce No. 6 to the champion (and briefly to the 'White Queen').

Writer Gerald Kelsey may have had in mind that the story would reflect chess moves, throughout the later action. However, this does not happen and the early chess match is all but forgotten. No. 6 marks his newspaper on the chess page, but no other references to the game appear.

Therefore this review looks at the chess sequence itself, a spectacle revisited many times by Six of One, during Prisoner conventions in Portmeirion, across the years.





The moves during the game stack up as follows:

Champion: Pawn to King's four

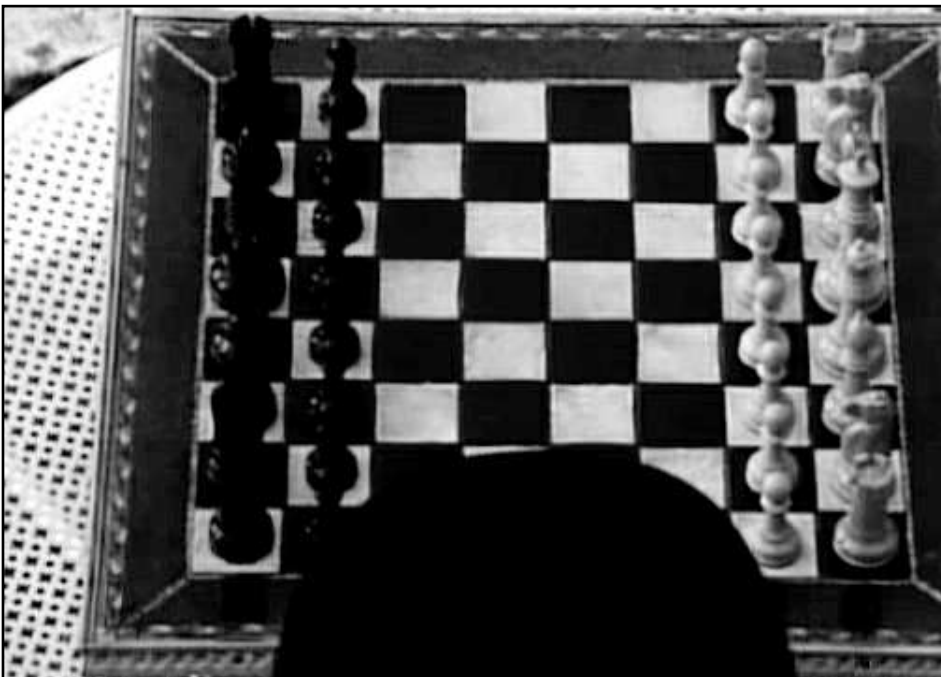
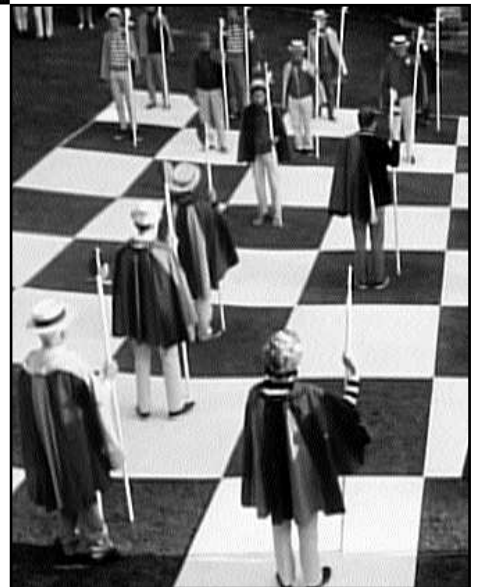
Opponent: Pawn to King's four

Champion: Knight to Queen's Bishop three

Opponent: Knight to Knight's Bishop three

Champion: Knight to Knight five

- Opponent: Bishop to Knight four*
- Champion: Knight to King's Bishop three*
- Opponent: Bishop to Bishop four*
- Champion: Knight to Knight five*
- Opponent: Knight to Knight's Bishop three*
- Champion: Pawn to Queen's four!!!!*
- Opponent: Bishop to Queen's three*



- Champion: Queen to King's three*
- Opponent: Bishop to Bishop four*
- Champion: Knight to Queen's Bishop three*
- Opponent: Knight to Queen three*
- (Various other moves all said together)*
- Opponent: Castle*

Rook: Check!

Opponent: Rook to Bishop's five

Champion: Bishop to Bishop's four

Opponent: Bishop to Knight's four

Champion: Queen to King's three - Checkmate!

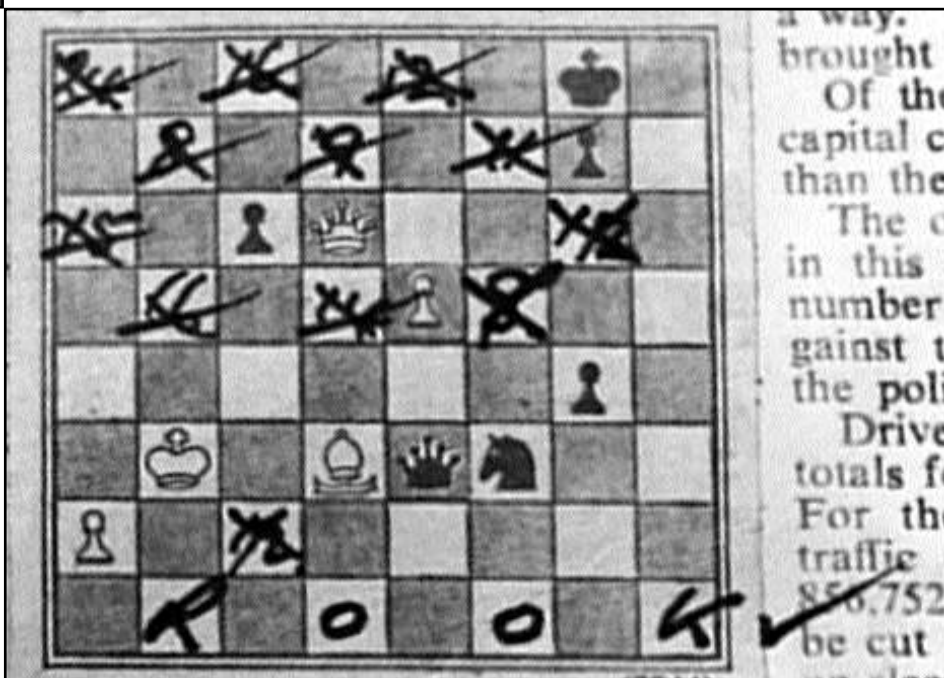
There is some ungentlemanly prodding of No. 6 with chess poles, as



he doesn't move when called upon to do so and there is the removal of the recalcitrant Rook, after he moves without authority. Thus the game itself and some of the goings-on within it, make for a very un-chess-like performance.

The many colourful capes, poles, squares, costumes and straw boaters must have made this scene expensive to stage. The event and Portmeirion's lower lawn were almost 'made for each other' and - apart from convention weekends - the grassy area seems empty without its squares and 'citizens.' However, "Checkmate" is not the only episode in which chess features. In the opening two stories - using the 'standard' running order - the game makes an appearance.

In "Arrival", the ex-Admiral is said, by No. 2, to be an "excellent chess player". The senior citizen later checkmates No. 6 at the end of the episode. Subsequently he offers the woman No. 9 a game, telling her "We're all pawns, my dear." In the following episode "The Chimes of Big Ben", the general is playing chess with No. 6 and says that he thinks he will make a set for the coming Arts and Crafts





Exhibition. No. 6 describes to No. 2 his skill in producing “mate in seven moves”. The Village leader asks how many the prisoner knows. “A few more,” comes the reply. “We must play some time,” says No. 2. “Certainly we must, by post,” responds No. 6.

Later, at the Exhibition, No. 6 asks the general if it is his chess set which the prisoner is inspecting, telling him “It’s very good.” The general particularly likes the King,

which he has made in the likeness of No. 2.

In Arrival, we see that No. 6 has a chess set on the shelf in his Village apartment, although we do not see him playing (and this would require him to have a visitor, to provide him with an opponent).

Apart from the occurrences described so far, chess seems to disappear from the Prisoner series during the other episodes. The chess squares are no longer seen on the lawn and the poles with their emblems are not seen, although capes remain a common item of daywear amongst the citizens. The game of chess would probably not appeal to the Village authorities as it is, by its very nature, built upon random choices, preventing the game being con-



trolled by one side, or by some overseeing authority. This tends to suggest that the game we see in “Checkmate” has no greater purpose than say the election parades in “Free For All” or the carnival processions in “Dance of the Dead”.

During the rest of the plot of “Checkmate”, the action veers away from chess completely. No. 2 is concerned with brainwashing - with the help of his

psychiatrist - the 'Rook' and the 'White Queen', while No. 6 is rounding up a band of conspirators in order to plot an escape. The two sides come together at the end, with No. 6's plan failing because of 'one false move', on the part of the 'Rook'. Clearly the 'piece' has been playing on both sides and has therefore caused No. 6's game strategy to collapse. At the end of "Checkmate", we see a pawn being placed on the Butler's chessboard, indi-



cating that No. 6 is once more under the full control of the Village. Interestingly, there is little reference to the 'King' in this story, he being set apart from the other pieces, in the same way that No. 1 is not part of the general community. In the end, unlike the case with chess, nothing in the Village is black or white, with events being unpredictable for a Prisoner like No. 6. Until he - like others before him - accepts confinement and complies with the Village's requirements, they will be subjected to all manner of unpleasant experiences and types of coercion. Others know their place - as with pieces on a chessboard - but No. 6, like the 'Rook' will always rebel and refuse to 'play the game'.

No. 6 also plays a word game with the psychiatrist:

Cat	Dog
Brave	Shy
Desk	Work
Hope	Anchor
Anchor?	The Hope and Anchor. It's a pub I used to drink at.
Tree	Leaf
Home	Away
Return	Game
Love	Game
Game?	Tennis
Table	Chair
Ship	Shape
Red	Sail
Free	For All

