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The last episode of *The Prisoner* is on Saturday at 7.30

IT ends this week . . . the nightmarish cat-and-mouse game of spirit-sapping tortures, subtle, scientific brainwashing and malignant mind-probing . . .

All the will-bending, talk-inducing techniques employed against the luckless Number Six. All his abortive escape bids and rather more successful table-turning techniques.

The last episode of *The Prisoner*, most bizarre thriller series ever, is at hand. The moment when viewers will expect the answers to the questions they have been asking since this intriguing, two-level blend of special agency and science fiction began 16 curious episodes ago.

This is Patrick McGoochan's series. He devised it, was executive producer and starred in it. He had a hand in writing every script and directed a number of its episodes. Never before has one man been so responsible for a series, let alone such a remarkable series.

Before it began he said: "If people don't like it, there's only one person to blame—me!"

Well, people have liked it. They have also been confused, baffled, bewildered and irritated by it; by its gimmicky switching of characters playing the oppressive Number Two; by its secret symbols like the old bicycle and the mute midget butler; by its timeless gadgetry and strange, convoluted plots.

I sought McGoochan's end-of-term views on the series. His aides shook their heads. Pat had not talked to a journalist since the series started on the screen, they said. He had been working day and night, they said. He was no seeker after personal publicity, they said. He preferred to leave the public to pronounce on his work, they said.

But the unpredictable Pat declared that he would talk to me about the series.

Now, I have seen Pat relaxed, talkative and charming. I have heard how brusque and crushing he can be when a newspaperman attempts to probe his more private thoughts. When I talked to him he was supervising the cutting of this week's final episode of *The Prisoner*. And he acted like Number Six at bay, fighting to preserve his secrets from a new Number Two.

He volunteered nothing, answered laconically, or with two questions for the one asked. It was a magnificent, exasperating performance.

What, I asked him, were his feelings as his series came to an end?

He shrugged that off. "I've done a job," he said, crisply.

"I set out to make a specific number of films. I've made them. The series has come to an end. It's just the end of a job, that's all."

Had he achieved all he hoped to achieve when he embarked on the project?

"It was meant to be controversial and it has been," he said. Pressed further, he added: "If it has failed in some respects it's a pity, but I don't think it has. Letters I've received have been fascinating. Some of them aren't at all complimentary but the pros outweigh the cons. Eleven million people watched it every week. What more do you want?"

Was the stirring of controversy his main aim?

"Who said so?" Pat demanded. "Are you saying that? Oh, you're asking. The series was posing the question, 'has one the right to tell a man what to think, how to behave, to coerce others? Has one the right to be an individual?' I wanted to make people talk about the series. I wanted to make them ask questions, argue and think. I like to provoke argument at all times. I'm

Patrick McGoochan talks...

by ANTHONY DAVIS

provoking it now."

Thus provoked, I told him the thing that bothered me most about *The Prisoner* was the absence of any continuity between the episodes; that there was no logical progression in his captors' extraordinary attempts to break him, no logical pattern to his escape bids—or, indeed, to anything else.

He snapped back. "Let me ask you two questions. You're living in this world? You must answer 'yes' to that," he went on helpfully, without a pause. "Do you find it always logical? No? That's your answer to that."

I said some people had found the obsession with medical experiments on Number Six verged on the sick or sadistic.

He was back fast again. "A man died after a heart operation. You read about that? How about that operation? Do



Patrick McGoochan a man of many parts in *The Prisoner* series . . . here he is in the role of director. Now it is the end

you find that sick or sadistic?"

And so the conversation went on, mainly question for question.

I asked at what stage he decided on the ending? This brought a clear answer. "I envisaged it from the beginning. In a series like this, you have to know at the outset what you're aiming at. You have got to know the ending before you can begin. So I had the idea for the final episode first of all and took it from there."

And would the final episode answer all the riddles?

"What riddles?" he demanded. The riddle of what country the village is situated in, who runs it, and who is Number One? I asked.

"No," he said. Pushed further: "No, it doesn't."

A programme company spokesman was more informative: "The answers are there, in fact, but not in black and

white, not answered straightforwardly at surface level. The viewer will still have to use some imagination and read between the lines."

I can add a little to that. I have seen a synopsis of the final episode—titled "Fall Out." It's written by Pat. Directed by Pat. Starring Pat. And I can tell you that most of it is set in an underground cavern beneath the village, where Number Six is on trial.

With Pat's permission I can tell you that Number Six is confronting a former Number Two (played by Leo McKern), whom viewers saw meet his death in an earlier episode.

But with the devious-minded McGoochan in charge, there is much more below the surface than appears.

Footnote: Pat was firm on one point. Will *The Prisoner* ever return in another series? "Definitely not," he said.