

Martin Worth (Scriptwriter).

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Martin Worth became a regular writer for Survivors from the second series onwards, and became one of the show's most prolific contributors. His second season story *By Bread Alone* actually achieved the highest viewing figures, almost eleven millions, of the entire series. In a recent interview for TV Zone magazine he was described as a doom merchant, given that he not only conjured up obstacles in the way of the community in Survivors, he also worked with Terry Dudley on Survivors' sister series, *Doomwatch*. Martin started writing for television during the boom years of the 1950s when the independent companies were being formed.

"After studying at Cambridge, I went into journalism and then started writing for television when commercial television started. I had had several radio plays produced. There were more opportunities for young writers then than there are perhaps nowadays. There were so few of us. By the time I was really established I was in continuous work. For Ted Willis, I wrote several episodes for each of his popular drama series: *The Sullivan Brothers*, *Mrs Thursday* and *Sergeant Cork*. For Granada I wrote two plays for their *City 68* series and later several scripts for Philip Mackie's *Mr Rose* which Bob Holmes worked on as well. I had also been the author of the very first tele-drama ever done by Granada - a very free adaptation of a stage play called *Shooting Star* that Silvio Narizzano directed for Sydney Bernstein.

"For the BBC I contributed to many drama series such as *Dr. Finlay's Casebook* and then became script editor of *The Borderers* which was produced by Peter Graham Scott. He was the first producer of *The Onedin Line* for which I wrote at least twelve scripts. I also wrote for *Champion House*, *Sutherland's Law*, *Ryan International*, *Out of the Unknown* and an anthology of original plays under the umbrella title of *Menace*.

"For Anglia Television I wrote one of Orson Welles' *Great Mysteries*, a series of thirty-minute adaptations of short stories introduced each week by Orson Welles - not that Welles ever chose, read or saw any of the scripts himself, I believe. All his introductions to camera were shot on a single day somewhere in Paris.

"Before becoming involved with *Survivors*, I had worked with Terry Dudley on *Doomwatch* for the BBC. Kit Pedler, the co-creator of the series, was a scientist who was interested in the environment. I was originally engaged to write just one script for the first season, but it led to many more. The interesting thing about *Doomwatch* is that all the issues we covered way back in 1972 are still very much with us today."

Given the fact that Martin has worked both on *Doomwatch* and *Survivors*, does this indicate a keen interest in scientific and ecological issues on his part? "No, I didn't have a particular interest in scientific and ecological issues then but I probably do now as a result of working on those series. I very much enjoyed working on *Doomwatch* and with Terry Dudley the producer. We were able to explore all kinds of serious, fascinating, environmental and ecological issues. *Doomwatch* began as a kind of science-fiction, but by the time I was on it we were taking all kinds of subjects of concern to society generally and ecological matters. When *Survivors* came along, we went down the same path.

"Terry Nation invented *Survivors*, and the first series which bore his hallmark was straight-forward sci-fi, action adventure, 'after the bomb' etc. Terry Nation fell out with Terry Dudley because he Terry Dudley) wanted to make *Survivors* much more realistic and about the ecological issues that we were talking about in *Doomwatch*, which is why he brought me into it. So I only wrote from the second series and by that time he had the idea that the survivors ought to settle down to form a self-sufficiency community.

"What we were doing in *Survivors* had nothing to do with 'after the bomb', we were doing a series about self-sufficiency. At that time this was very much an 'in' thing. The book *Self Sufficiency*, by the Seymours was published about this time and became a best seller and was about how to do your own thing in the back garden.

"Writing for *Survivors* however wasn't really a question of needing any technical knowledge. I did one story in which we discussed the problems of getting methane gas out of manure in order to provide fuel. Now that was technical and we did a lot of research into how that might be done. We were determined not to cheat, but that particular episode was not at all about how to produce methane gas. I think that that was my first script, called *By Bread Alone*, which was in fact a story about a priest who felt he was the only man

left to put over Christian values. He was in fact a disillusioned priest and the story was a character study of him. He felt that because he was a priest that he had really lost his faith, yet if he admitted he had lost his faith there was no hope of anything spiritual. He was in conflict with the others in the community, they had to get on with making the methane gas and so on and not worry about preaching. That was really based on my father, who was a priest who I reckon had lost his faith.

"In the third series I wrote a story about petrol (Long Live the King), which was really an examination of money and the economy. The idea was that just as gold was the basis of currency or invented money, if gold didn't exist then another commodity could perform the same function. Our premise is that it would be petrol. If you could get hold of the petrol supplies then you were king! It was the petrol coupons, if I remember correctly, which became the currency. It didn't matter that Greg was by now dead. We needed a kinglike figurehead to rally around. The thing was not to tell anyone that he was dead."

The third series of Survivors sees a return to the wanderer format. Instead of Abby's search for her son Peter, we have Jenny, Charles and the others in search of Greg. What has Martin got to say about this dramatic move away from self-sufficiency issues? "I have a couple of things to say about that. The first point has to do with Terry Dudley who wanted to move the series on, and the second with the problems between the two main male characters. Dealing with the first point, this was Terry Dudley's weakness as a producer. We had an opportunity to stick with that community in South Wales for three or four series at least. We could have stayed there and developed it, but Terry always wanted to move on. I remember saying to him that if we move on we would kill the series, to which he replied that the series still had a long way to go. But I was right, because once we did move on, it achieved such a momentum that it was left with nowhere to go. The result was that Survivors died after three series when it could have gone on for much longer, as did Dr. Finlay's Case Book, which went on for seven years. With The Regiment he had a wonderful idea for a series about the British Raj in India in 1910. He did one series and I wrote an episode for it, but after that one year he wanted to move the regiment on. In 1914 the regiment was all killed off in the war and the series ended. But a series about the British Raj in India could go on for years given the vast quantity of material available.

"The second factor which influenced the change in format with in this third series was the conflict between the actors Ian McCulloch and Denis Lill, and it was this conflict which actually made me give in to Terry. He had said to me when they got on the later series that they were having all this trouble between Ian McCulloch and Denis Lill and didn't know what they could do if these two couldn't stand each other and a way would have to be found of doing the series in which they never meet. I remember coming to Terry and telling him that I had hit upon a way of solving the problem I suggested that at the end of the series Greg would go off in a hot-air balloon never to be seen again. He thought it was a fantastic idea and wanted to know more. I continued, 'He goes because he's made communication with people in Norway, and so goes off in this balloon with anybody else in the cast you don't want. Then in the next series, he can reappear, anywhere you like in this country and Greg can be the focus for some stories and Charles for others'. We were both fascinated by these two actors not liking each other. So then why not make the characters not like each other? That made good sense so by this time we were turning Greg into someone who wanted to get things going again, and Charles into someone who wanted to stay in his own community. He didn't want to get the country back on its feet again. The whole basis of his fear was that he anticipated all the horrors of 20th century corruption and everything else. His thoughts were, 'O.K., let's build a New World, but let's build it here'. Although Ian McCulloch would not appear in many episodes, his character, Greg, could thus be kept alive."

What does Martin remember of the last episode of the series, Power? "This story was the result of Terry Dudley having pushed the series too quickly towards a conclusion. The story itself was about restoring hydroelectric power up in Scotland. I remember going up to Scotland to a hydroelectric power station where I met a wonderful engineer who ran the station. He was a remarkable man and a real hands-on engineer. I remember spending a long time up there and he told me exactly what to do. I asked him to imagine a situation in which somebody enters a defunct and deserted plant and by some means has to get the plant working. What does he do? What mistakes might he make? I wanted all the details without any cheating. He responded brilliantly to the challenge. He showed me exactly what to do, even which switches to pull! I was shown that even if you got the power station working, a sub-station somewhere else had to be activated as well if the current was to get onto the national grid. So I insisted on visiting this sub-station too. We got into a car and drove to the mountainside where this sub-station was, and were then shown exactly how it worked. Getting it all right, doing that kind of deep research is very satisfying. If you do it responsibly you can always get dramatic values out of the difficulties you encounter.

"I remember an episode from Warship, one of the first naval series on the BBC. I was researching that on a frigate. It had a helicopter scene in it. This naval commander said to me 'I know you television people, you think he's just going to say 'scramble the wasp' and he will have jumped in and flown away in a flash. It takes ten minutes to get that helicopter off.' So I said, 'O.K., tell me, exactly! Let's build that into the tension.' He explained further that you had to fill in forms and so on. But that also could be built into the

tension. Can you imagine doing all that against the clock? In the Falklands War of course, they had to do it against the clock! Because I was told exactly all the boring details of how to build this thing up, I could build a major suspense sequence out of it by simply getting at the truth of it."

Which is Martin's favourite story for Survivors? "Law of the Jungle, the one with Brian Blessed in it. I have kept this script, and even now I give it to people if they wish to see samples of my work. This script only needs a very short note at the beginning of it to explain the situation. After that it is a self-contained play. We found this river and a railway embankment around Brecon. I really enjoyed writing that story. I didn't know Brian Blessed at the time but got to know him afterwards. I am a dramatist rather than a screen-writer, and I always prefer stories that are relatively self contained and take place in one place."

How long would it take Martin to complete a script from beginning to end? "All my life as a television writer I have always said a month. I always wanted four weeks to write a draft script and I suppose that's about average, sometimes I would do them a bit more quickly. I also wrote a lot on The Onedin Line. Once becoming a research writer on a series I knew I'd got work for the year."

Did Martin ever visit the locations down near Monmouth and was it exciting as a writer to visit the location where one's story was to be made? "Yes, I did visit the location a couple of times. When Terry Dudley asked me to do the series, after Doomwatch, he told me that the second series of Survivors was going to be based on all these people living down in South Wales, and that there was a community down there already doing just this! This was the first time that they could use these Outside Broadcast cameras. Up till that time a series like Survivors would have been done in the studios in London with film inserts done in Monmouthshire. That's the way all drama series had been done before. Terry was excited because now he had these cameras which allowed you to shoot, in television terms, anywhere out of doors. You could go within 2,000 feet or so from your Outside Broadcast base, which was tremendous. He thought this was great so he wanted to do the whole series down there, with everybody actually down there to live! The 'studio' was a little Outside Broadcast van he had down there. Of course, for a writer, all this was terribly exciting. I went down there and you could do scenes around, for example, an old gate which I'd seen. Then I'd notice a tree, for example. I remember one I did in which we had to put someone in quarantine up in a tree-house (By Bread Alone). The point is that that idea only came up because I saw the tree. If the tree hadn't been there we couldn't have done it. It was such a joy to be able to write in this way. Normally, as a writer, when you're writing for film, when you don't know anything about the location, you have to write and hope they're going to find a suitable place for your story. Nine times out of ten they can't find a suitable location so they change your script to match with what they have got. But in Survivors, we knew what they had down there and we could write around all of that. If you thought about somebody walking down an icy path and slipping and breaking their leg, you only thought about this path because it was actually there! Although it was very exciting to write for, I bet you it was hell for the actors! Most of them you see were used to living in London and being cooped up down there for the whole time that we were shooting must have been hard. They couldn't see their agents, perhaps they were losing other work etc, and I bet that's why a lot of the actors didn't want to do any more."

When Martin re-visited Callow Hill a couple of months after shooting had begun, he found that there had been many drastic changes in the original community which lived there. Martin blames the intrusion of the BBC film crew for these changes. "When I went back after shooting had started (and this is what I have always thought of as the real irony of Survivors), the original community that had been there growing their own food, producing their own methane gas etc. had been transformed completely. Whereas at first they had been extremely friendly and welcoming, now they had notices up saying, 'No smoking', 'Keep Out!' It was horrific, because we had driven out that community! When I had been shown on my first visit where they had eaten, this had been taken over by the wardrobe people! The places where they milked the cows was all full of technical equipment! The community hated this invasion. They didn't realise what was going to happen with camera crews and so on. So literally, when I went down there on that second visit, they wouldn't speak to anybody and they had shut themselves in. We destroyed that community. When we had finished there, the invasion of the film-crew had made all those people who had been practising self-sufficiency wonder whether they had been doing the right thing and people left the community, marriages broke up and when we left it that was the end of that community, they had all gone in different ways."

Does Martin believe that a new series of Survivors would have anything different to say? "No, I don't think so at all. As a viewer, I would be quite shocked really to see another series. If you have to look into a gloomy future for mankind, it is not because of the bomb or a plague. Since the end of the Cold War, we no longer have the moral justification for doing an after-the-bomb series. We all lived under the threat of nuclear war twenty years ago. The real threat today is the invasion from the east that's going to happen. China, for example, is so powerful in terms of its one billion people. It's been rapidly westernised and is pushing its way out. Russia is literally breaking up and there is such poverty in Moscow it's quite unbelievable. In eastern Europe there are countless refugees from Russia begging for food. It is no wonder there is a revival of Nazism and the West is doing absolutely nothing about it. You can't go on with five

percent of the world's population living off the other ninety-five percent. I could write a disaster scenario for a series, set in twenty years' time where you could get into this tragic area, but it wouldn't be because of nuclear bombs."