

Take heart 'Avenger' fans — Clemens is back

LOS ANGELES (AP) — It wasn't that English writer Brian Clemens was so anxious to do an American TV series that he arrived here script in hand.

Clemens, invited here to discuss the possibility of creating a show in the image of his "Avengers," had something else in mind. Like a fait accompli.

"I had only been asked for an outline," he said. "But if you get into lots of discussions with lots of people, you end up with a show like a camel. That's a horse designed by a committee.

"I see it only one way and that's the way I write it. I'm not being arrogant. If it goes off in a direction I don't see, I say let someone else write it."

Not to worry. The script was filmed as a pilot in San Francisco with few changes by Quinn Martin Productions and the pilot shows up on CBS Friday as "Escapade."

It stars Granville Van Dusen and Morgan Fairchild as two American secret agents, Joshua Rand and Susie, who take their orders from a computer named Oz. The computer has a mind of its own and is basically a third star.

If "Escapade" does make it to the air as a series, it could find itself on the CBS schedule with Clemens' "The New Avengers," the latest incarnation of the perennially popular spy spoof. The version of the English series most familiar in this country starred Patrick MacNee and black leather-clad Diana Rigg. In the new show, MacNee throws in his bowler with Joanna Lumley.

Although "Escapade" strives for the tongue-in-cheek flavor of The Avengers, and despite other similarities, Clemens insists they are not alike. He said, "It's like Phyllis and Rhoda. Both were comedies, both came out of The Mary Tyler Moore Show, yet they were entirely different."

Clemens' only previous experience with American television was back in the 1950s when he wrote an award-winning show for The United States Steel Hour.

"I make no attempt to capture the American idiom," he



Morgan Fairchild plays Susie in "Escapade" Friday

said. "If I had I would have been off by five years. It's like American writers who still have Englishmen saying 'governor.'"

"What I did was simply write it in good English and let the actors supply the idioms."

Clemens, a dapper man whose longish hair, moustache and

Van Dyke beard are streaked with gray, is a prolific writer. He said if pressured he could turn out a script in one day, although a week is average.

Besides creating The Avengers, he wrote the pilots for Secret Agent, starring Patrick McGouhan, and The Persuaders, starring Roger Moore and Tony Curtis. He's also written plays and movies. He wrote 16 of the 26 scripts for "The New Avengers," which he's also producing in London — along with another show, "The Professionals."

Clemens was asked why the English seem to have a knack for doing such tongue-in-cheek, James Bondian shows.

"Every time we've done The Avengers we've gone ahead and made it before selling it to a network," he said. "That way it doesn't get committee-ized out of shape. All the networks, here and in England, want to play it safe and not take chances.

"The trouble is everything is geared to the Top 10. BBC will take a chance with a different kind of program, as they did with Til Death Do Us Part, which became All in the Family in America. So when a network does take a chance the results can be spectacular, as with 'Roots.'"

Clemens said he tried to sell ABC on the idea of running a story over several episodes in 1973 and was turned down. It took "Rich Man, Poor Man" in 1976 and "Roots" last year to prove the idea had public appeal.

He said this was his first time to work in Hollywood. He was here in November, when he delivered the script, then came back in February to help with the casting and location selections. On his latest stay he was here for three weeks and flew back to London the day after the interview. While he was here he knocked out 26 story outlines for "Escapade" should it go to series.

"It's quite nice to start at the top here," he said. "I said several years ago I'd never come to Hollywood. It's a destructive city if you're hustling. I wouldn't want to be poor or unsuccessful because you're poorer and more unsuccessful here than in any other city I've known."