

As one of "The New Avengers," Gareth Hunt took his fair share of deadly chances.

# Gambit

## A Fine

By MARGARET BAROSKI

**G**areth Hunt is upset and angry. New York is grey and rainy, and the British sex comedy hit, *Run For Your Wife*, in which he has been playing Detective-Sergeant Troughton, has been abruptly cancelled. "What's really sad is that it was just beginning to get word of mouth here," Hunt says, with a touch of asperity. "Obviously, there was a percentage of people who didn't like it, but 99 percent of the people enjoyed it." He points to the unfavorable *New York Times* review. "The reviewer should say up front, 'I didn't like it, but the audience laughed.'"

Known in the United States primarily for his role as swash-buckling special agent Mike Gambit in *The New Avengers*, Hunt terms the ex-mercenary soldier, superb athlete, crocodile wrestler, pilot, race car driver and expert shot, "James Bond's poorer brother." For two seasons, Hunt traded the *Avengers'* brand of witty repartee with Patrick Macnee, returning as John Steed and Joanna Lumley, the cool yet spicy female counterpart to Hunt's action-oriented Gambit.

### Non-Tough Guy

A more mature Steed entertained some lovely lady friends on the show, but the fact that there were two young and sexy agents who were possibly attracted to each other added another dimension to the storyline. "Gambit supposedly had a long string of women who were floating about," Hunt explains, "but the fun of the show was: Had he and Purdey ever got it together? We never answered that question." He hastens to add that the sexual angle was never overdone, as he feels it was in other shows. "Sometimes, you would get into a situation where it was, 'Oops, she's half-dressed!' But there was no total nudity. Jo was in suspenders once, which she didn't like very much, and she was in some very attractive clothes, but there wasn't an obvious trend to make her overtly sexy. The trend seems to be that you need to put in a certain amount of innuendo, but how far do you go in bedroom scenes? You don't mind doing that as long as they're correct for the piece, if they're not slipped in just for the sheer hell of it."

The idea of overt sexiness seems to bother

MARGARET BAROSKI, Pennsylvania-based writer, profiled David Greenlee in STARLOG #140.



New Avengers Photos: Courtesy CBS



"I need to get into gear; I might do a TV series or a film," says Hunt.

Hunt; although he has been dubbed a sex symbol, he has never seen himself as one. "I don't think anyone ever can see oneself as a sex symbol," he says. "You just play the part. A glamour boy is someone like Christopher Reeve or Jeremy Irons. I'm more like—hopefully—Albert Finney, Anthony Hopkins or Richard Burton. I'm aligning myself with some super people there; sexy, but in a different way."

Gambit's wardrobe consisted mainly of elegant three-piece business suits, but the producers of *The New Avengers*, Albert Fennell, Brian Clemens and Laurie Johnson, had originally planned to make him a real swinger, wearing jeans and leather jackets. Hunt would have preferred that they had. "The nearest we got was a cardigan. I wore jeans maybe once. It's very difficult doing a karate fight in a three-piece suit. You do split the trousers!"

Fennell, Clemens and Johnson had seen Hunt playing an ambitious footman named Frederick in *Upstairs, Downstairs* and asked him to test for them with Lumley. Hunt got the part, but ended up juggling his filming schedule with his role as Guildenstern at the National Theater, filming early in the morning at Pinewood Studios, then appearing on stage in the evening. His screen test was memorable. "They set the scene, I came through the door and there was Purdey. We sat down on this really old piece of furniture and it broke in half! And the director looked at me and said, 'Hmm, a clumsy Gambit.'" Hunt laughs, then adds more

speed. "That is what I wanted Gambit to move into; I wanted him to be fallible. I like Jim Rockford [of *The Rockford Files*] because of that. I would like to play the guy who can't take care of himself; you know, at the day's end, he shuts his fingers in the car door."

Gambit never shut his fingers in the Jaguar's door, but the *New Avengers* set was still fraught with dangers. To prepare them for the fight scenes and other action sequences, Hunt and Lumley completed a course of circuit training with the English judo champion, honing their reflexes so that they were able to do most of their own stunts. "Jo was marvelous," Hunt recalls. "When you saw her go up in that helicopter, hanging on and drinking champagne, that was Jo." Reminded of a scene in which Gambit leaps onto the wing of an airplane, Hunt laughs. "That was a bit mad, but that was me. I also did some of the fight sequences. Some of the driving scenes I didn't do, but they taught me to spin the XJ; that used to be scary, but great fun, as long as I wasn't paying for the car if I pranged something! I split my head open once, and it's gone in a fraction of a second in 'Target,' when we go through the course where we have to shoot all the dummies; that was the one that sold the show to America. I did a dive through a window. As you dive, you have to do a forward roll, and then you have to shoot. On film, it doesn't look very death-defying," he notes, "but it is because you must go through at a certain amount of speed."

Some stunts left him bruised or worse. "In Canada, we were doing a shot at this Greek's multi-million-dollar house—never allow a film unit to come shoot in your house, it's fatal—and I had to go through sliding doors. The director said, 'Run through and dive.' I said, 'You have to put the sugar glass in.' Sugar glass is misted, so he said, 'I can't see you, you've got to come closer,' and I said, 'If I come through like that, I'll catch the drapes, which will pull the pelmet down.' 'No, no, it'll be all right, Gareth.' I do it, and I haven't got enough

speed. I hit the curtain, bash my head, the lot comes off, and there's blood and panic! That cost a lot of money."

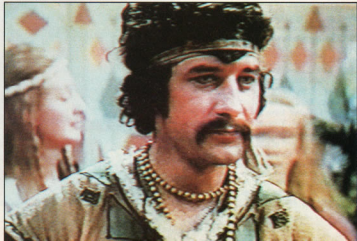
He remembers the weather in Canada with good reason. "It was freezing cold. We were out on the lakes, and Patrick and Jo each had a Winnebago, and they forgot to get me one, so I remember changing behind a tree, freezing. I said, 'Excuse me, is there any chance of me getting one?' and they said, 'Oh, we'll get you one, but you're being difficult.'"

## Disbelieving Youth

Born in Battersea, England, Hunt was an adventurous, curious, imaginative child who found early on that he had a talent for performing and making people laugh. His father had told him that the family's wind-up record player actually contained a tiny orchestra, and, chuckling, Hunt tells of the time he tried to get them to come out. "I must have been about six or seven. I was so upset when there were no little men there. I really believed it, like I believed in Father Christmas. I really wanted there to be a Father Christmas, and I couldn't believe it when I was told he didn't exist. Suddenly, life was getting hemmed in because all these things that I believed in were cut away. I suppose that's why I was drawn into the escapism of watching. I went to yearly pantomime, and to see Shakespeare once—I was taken by the school—but I was asked to leave because I was blowing bubbles. I didn't understand it. I loved going to the cinema; every Monday, my mum and I used to go, and I was weaned on things like *The Crimson Pirate*. Just glide away on the fantasy and believe it."

Hunt's memory of leaving school includes vocational guidance from Mrs. Bradbury, his teacher: "Stand up, Hunt! You're quite tall; you'll make a good policeman. Next! And that was it," he recalls. "So, I applied to go in the Navy." On his discharge from the Royal Navy, he found a job as the southern area representative of a shopfitter's firm in Lancashire. Bored, he joined the Mountview Theatre, an amateur dramatic

Hunt doesn't remember the moustache, but he does recall the menace that Doctor Who fought on the "Planet of the Spiders."



company in Crouch Hill. But, being a traveling salesman got in the way, and the director presented him with an ultimatum—did he want to be “a bloody shopfitter or a bloody actor?” The choice was obvious. He left Mountview for a scholarship to Webber-Douglas, where he studied for two-and-a-half years.

After graduation, Hunt worked in repertory theatre in Coventry and found that directors also thought he made a good policeman, notably in *This Story of Yours*, which later became a Sean Connery film. His career eventually led him to the BBC, to the role of Thomas Woolner in *The Love School*, and into an elevator heading up to the BBC rehearsal room. As Hunt tells it, “A guy got on the elevator, looked at me and said, ‘Are you an actor? Would you like to do four episodes of *Doctor Who*? Meet me at lunchtime.’ It was the series’ producer, Barry Letts. You can spend months going to the BBC and getting absolutely nothing, but I got the job in the lift!”

The story was “Planet of the Spiders,” and Hunt played a mustachioed hero-type named Arak. “God! That’s a trip into the past!” he exclaims. He doesn’t remember the mustache, but he remembers the spiders and Liz Sladen. Working with Jon Pertwee, he recalls, was “lovely; he used to do skin-diving and snorkeling and he was in the Navy, so we had a common denominator. Poor old Jon was going through purgatory because he had a crushed vertebra, and he would really be in agony. I thought he was very, very good as the Doctor—he was one of my favorites. And the first Doctor [William Hartnell] was marvelous. I can remember watching, as a child, the first episode of *Doctor Who*. Brilliant idea. I would do *Doctor Who* again. I don’t watch many of them, but if I’m flicking around the channels, I’ll watch it, because many of my friends have been in it.” Although he’s not a “101 percent” science-fiction fan, he also loves watching shows like *One Step Beyond*, *Star Trek* and *The Twilight Zone*.

In his film career, Hunt has made, among others, *The World Is Full of Married Men*, *Licensed to Love and Kill* and the campy spoof of horror films, *Bloodbath at the House of Death*, in which he worked with Vincent Price, whom Hunt describes as “very funny and full of Hollywood stories. I was an avid listener, having admired and watched so much of his work. It was great fun working with him; a great character and a great sense of humor.”

### Unsuspecting Hero

Gifted with comedic timing, Hunt most recently appeared in a popular British TV sitcom, *That Beryl Marsden*, which was eventually cancelled because Southern Television lost its franchise. He has done three TV movies produced by Albert Fennell and Laurie Johnson and based on Barbara Cartland romance novels, *Hazard of Hearts*, *The Highwayman* and *The Lady and Dangerous Love*. Hunt also played Ian Hubbard in a film of Alan Ayckbourn’s play *A Chorus of Disapproval*, and starred

For two years, Gareth Hunt played sexy special agent Mike Gambit alongside Patrick Macnee’s John Steed and Joanna Lumley’s Purdy as *The New Avengers*.



with Joss Ackland and The Pet Shop Boys in their film *It Couldn't Happen Here*.

After *The New Avengers* ceased production, Hunt did *Deathtrap* on stage for a year, then was tapped for what turned out to be a decade’s worth of Nescafe coffee commercials. “I made a lot of money,” he says with what sounds like wonder in his voice. “It was the longest job I’ve ever had in my life. It was only last year that I stopped doing it, and I don’t think there was anything wrong with it,” he states, a bit defensively. “You’re in this business to work, and to earn money, right? If I had been in the theater, I would still have done the TV commercial. They made me an offer I couldn’t refuse. I created a character, and I must have been quite good doing it because they employed me for 10 years.”

While Hunt doesn’t feel typecast, he finds that people in England recognize him most often from the Nescafe commercials and from *The New Avengers*, although he remarks that what you know him from depends on how old you are. He has done some directing, formed a production company, pitched storylines to the Don Taffner office, talks about doing a project for

satellite television, and is presently working on stage, but he still notes good-humoredly that his career “needs a kick up the ass at present. I might do a TV series or a film, or write something. It’s me, really, not my career, that needs a kick in the ass. I need to go into another gear.”

As for *The New Avengers*, Hunt agrees with Macnee’s assessment (in STARLOG #126) of its three-handed configuration. “The show came about because [former Avenger] Linda Thorson went over to France and did a commercial for champagne, and this French guy, Rudolph Roffi [a TV and film executive], suddenly decided, ‘We must do *The Avengers* again.’ I agree with Patrick totally that it should have been Patrick and another Emma Peel, or Patrick and another Emma Peel and two younger agents. It was very difficult to write for that threesome.”

There was no animosity among the cast concerning their lines, but Hunt is realistic about what gradually happened. “My part was muted. The scissors were put in here and there to cut it down.” But, he adds philosophically, “It’s not how much you’ve

(continued on page 64)

## Hurley

(continued from page 33)

*Trek: The Next Generation*, rumors of massive writer turn-over and of his rewriting pen running rampant over other people's scripts. He considers this for a moment, deliberating how he wants to respond.

"Part of the problem," he starts, "is that at the beginning, there were people who were doing that show that really didn't understand other people too well. I'm not saying that I'm a great politician. Usually, I say what's on my mind, and as a result, I can be a little abrupt and brusque. I'm not talking about that. It's worse to keep people in the dark than it is to turn on the light and tell them they're fired. So, how people were handled that first year hurt a lot of feelings."

"But there's a thing that happens in Hollywood that is really the truth. Hollywood is a place where, if you can dance, you can make it. Anyone can get a chance to dance. People don't necessarily believe that, but it's true. If you beat on the doors out here, the doors are going to open, you're going to be invited in and they're going to say, 'OK, can you dance?' And then you dance. If you can dance, they say, 'OK, stick around.' If you can't, they say goodbye. Now, you may bang on some more doors and get another chance. If you can, you move up real quick in this town. If you can't, you're pushed off to the side and become very strange. Many things happen to people who are pushed out to the side. But it all comes down to whether or not you can dance. I went from writing my first script as a freelancer on *Miami Vice* to story editor to supervising producer to co-executive producer in a matter of two-and-a-half years. Those are just title jumps, saying nothing about the incredible money jumps.

"There's another thing you have to understand. Because of the way I am, I put people's noses in it a lot. That means I can be difficult to work with, so that with the kind of personality I have in a working situation—not in an interview—there's a tendency to look and see if there's a way to get rid of me, which people would, if they could. But since I can put it on the page, they suffer me. No matter how rank your personality may be, if you can dance, they're going to keep you around."

Maurice Hurley pauses again, trying to summarize his feelings on this issue, without getting into specifics.

"There's a reality," he says. "If I leave a show like *Star Trek* and become the executive producer of another series, you have to look at these other people who are bitter about their experiences on the show and say, 'Well, after you left *Star Trek*, what did you do?' And see what the level of success is. Did a studio like Universal come to them and say, 'We're going to pay you an enormous amount of money just to be here?' You have to look at what they did before and at what level, and what they do after and at what level. In that way, you learn a lot about who they really are." ☆

## Hunt

(continued from page 55)

got, it's what you do with it. If you start counting your lines—"God, I've got only 60 lines, and I've got no fights; I don't even feature in the end"—then I wouldn't really want to be involved."

A fan of the original *Avengers* series, Hunt, unlike Macnee, believes that the new series was a success. "It was sold to ganglands of different countries, including America. It has to be one of the most widely-sold shows. It sold to South America, and—this is a true story—Mark Sinden was filming down there and was mistaken for me. His car had run out of petrol [gasoline], so he signed about 20 autographs, and they gave him a gallon of petrol!"

Seven episodes of the second season were filmed in France and Canada, and Hunt blames the show's cancellation on high production costs, which turned out to be twice the amount that had been estimated, caused, in part, by the scarcity of available TV crews. "The Frenchman who was backing it ran out of money," he clarifies. "You couldn't go to Canada and take six or seven weeks to shoot one episode, and, unfortunately, that's what happened toward the end. It was just one of those things; it was expensive to do. Going to Canada enhanced the show, but maybe we didn't have the right crew to do it."

In retrospect, Hunt remembers the series and its cast with fondness. "I would love to work with Jo again; Jo and I hit it off very well." And of Macnee, he enthuses, "A lovely. Good old English character, an Old Etonian. He really is what you see on the screen. A very nice character, reads the *Times*, and probably is Steed."

Hunt's still excited about the *Avengers* concept itself. "They were always a bit before their time. They could go round and find another Patrick, another Emma Peel and another Gambit and carry on again. It has the right appeal."

Lately, Hunt has been busy in London, fulfilling the remainder of his contract with *Run For Your Wife* in the role of Stanley Gardner. He now keeps fit by swimming and playing tennis, and is an avid golfer. He's the father of three boys, and is passionate on the subject of the environment. He has no grand illusions about what he does for a living. "My job is entertainment," he states firmly. "I'm not there to get across any great messages. I don't want to be Prime Minister; I just want to be an actor, make people laugh, make people cry and say other people's lines. And if I believe in the lines, then I'm going to do the show to the best of my ability."

He would like to work in America, but points to the *Times* review: "Cap in hand here is very difficult, especially if somebody has given you one of these." Then, laughing, Gareth Hunt says in a very good W.C. Fields imitation, "If there's any producer out there, I'm free." ☆

## Scott

(continued from page 59)

The prejudices are less openly expressed. There's very little of it at the buying level if you're good enough as a writer."

Scott agrees that the women's movements helped change the prejudices "as well as having a whole crop of stupendous female writers. And you have women reading much more than they used to, also. But according to a recent *Locus* poll, there are more women in science fields and science-fiction writers than there are women reading science fiction."

"Some of the old writers are, I think, less receptive because it's not what they're used to. I haven't had any problems per se. Occasionally, social interactions were more awkward than I would have expected in a collegial relationship. There are people who are not comfortable with someone of my age, sex and short hair and didn't quite know what to make of me. It has been more a social thing than a professional thing."

Scott also has advice.

"I do think that if you want to write science fiction, you do have to be careful to not be typed as a fantasy writer. And I'm not putting down fantasy. I feel it's technically a more difficult genre. But there is still a perception, among the readership especially, that women write fantasy and men write science fiction, and that's often allied with the thought that fantasy is an inferior field."

"It's more difficult for a woman to develop a loyal readership in science fiction simply because there's this group who won't read stuff by women. I once had a guy come up to me at a convention and say, 'I don't read stuff by women, but your stuff is good.' I just didn't know what to say. I wish I could change such perceptions."

Melissa Scott says her future will include a persistence of writing. One nearly complete draft is presently entitled *Mighty Good Road*. Scott is also now starting research in to the American Civil War, "and who knows where that will lead me."

But wherever it does, she insists she will maintain her attitudes of what science fiction is all about.

"The first thing fiction does is entertain. That's something I feel very strongly about. Once beyond the entertainment factor, the most important thing SF can and does do is express change, and I'm using that in the entropic sense, to show change continues and it's not necessarily bad. To show that all these things are possible and that choices made now will influence what happens eventually and that the change is inevitable."

"You hear so many people bemoaning the 'good old days.' These aren't the good old days my grandparents talked about. They didn't sound that wonderful with kids dying of polio. Change is not necessarily for the better, but it need not be for the worse. It must certainly happen and," notes Melissa Scott, "science fiction is the only genre addressing that directly." ☆