



**GARETH
HUNT**

How did you first learn that they were looking for a new AVENGERS partner for Patrick Macnee?

That came through my agent, and I was sent up along with - I should think - three or four hundred other people to do a series of screen tests; two of which I did with Joanna, and one of which I did with somebody else - and from that, luckily enough, I got the part.

Can you recall what you had to do in that screen test?

We did a scene which had been written by Brian Clemens. It contained a little action, a little bit of humour - it was really like an excerpt from one of the shows. I recall a funny moment when Jo and I sat on one of the ornate tables they were using and broke it - but that wasn't in the script! Screen tests are very trying and testing and you get a little nervous, but all in all, I think Jo and I came out quite well - and very luckily, we were chosen for the series.

As the role would prove very physical, were you given any special training? (Joanna Lumley, says that the training was something akin to an olympic crash course.)

The answer is YES! Jo and I used to visit the studios regularly for about six weeks prior to filming and, as Jo says, we did indeed get a sort of olympic training crash course ... running, falls, judo etc. There was this wonderful Judo lady who took us through the training, and then we did lessons with various other people. They certainly put us through the ropes, so we were reasonably fit when we started.

Did the character of Gambit evolve as you went along, or were you given definite guidelines as to how the character should be played? (i.e. Was the character 'fleshed-out' on paper?)

'Fleshed out' ... that's a sort of Brian Clemens' phaseology ... I think Gambit probably evolved as the production progressed. Brian had an idea of the character, of course, and we worked on it together. I would have liked him to have spent a little less time in suits and things like that, and we tended, slowly, as the series progressed, to get away from suits - but I was still in cardigans etc ... not quite me, but I think the character ... well, what I always tried to do, was to bring out the humorous side of Gambit, and that evolved further as the series progressed.

Your 'clipped' delivery of dialogue was very reminiscent of Patrick McGoohan's DANGER MAN character. Did you (consciously or otherwise) use his 'John Drake' character as a role model?

Well, I've got to say that I was never really conscious of it being 'clipped' delivery but, if you feel it as, it was pure coincidence because I didn't base Gambit on anyone. Gambit was an original character which came from myself, the directors, and obviously, Brian Clemens and the other writers, but it certainly wasn't based on anyone. It's interesting to hear that you thought it was 'clipped' delivery! (Gareth then adds - in an uncanny impression of Patrick McGoohan's voice: "Maybe it was - I don't know?")

Many of the stunts performed in THE NEW AVENGERS looked very dangerous. How much of the stuntwork did you handle yourself?

Correct, some were. A truthful answer would be around 60/70%. Both Jo and I became very involved in it. One didn't feel like you were playing a character totally, unless you actually did a lot of the stunts yourself and, as I said earlier, we were very fit in those days ... we were taught how to spin cars and do various 'dangerous' stunts - but obviously, when cars are turned over or blown-up - what one would call the really dangerous stunts, we were not allowed to do that due to the contract. (There were, however, certain things we did which we possibly shouldn't have done, but I think that sort of added to the excitement of it - I mean, I can remember diving through a window in Target, which I found quite exhilarating ... after being taught how to do it by one of the stuntmen of course, and even when one realises that 'sugar glass' was used, it can still cut your head - which it did mine.) So yes, we probably did around 60/70% of the stunts ourselves.

Were you given any special self-defence training to make the fight sequences realistic? Did you have any 'accidents' during any of the fight scenes? (It was reported that you accidentally kayoed a stuntman.)

Unfortunately yes, that's true. I recall that it was very late at night and we'd been filming up to about 9-o'clock in the evening, so everyone was feeling tired. It was in The Last Of The Cybernauts, and he had a Cybernaut helmet on. We were doing a karate sequence up and down a flight of stairs and ... well, all I can say is yes, karate seems to work and he did get knocked out ... but we're still the best of friends! As for the actual karate training. I did about eighteen months training with Tutzi Sazuki, and once I got into it, I rather enjoyed it. So most of the stuff we did we tried to make as realistic as possible.

Did you enjoy working with Joanna Lumley and Patrick Macnee?

Yes I did! Jo and Patrick were great to work with. We got on very well indeed and, as you know, we went to Paris and Toronto and were living out of each other's pockets quite a lot, so we needed

to get on. We were, of course, all totally different in our outlook to life and things, and I think it was that sort of mixture that helped us to make the show what I felt was quite a success. I mean, Patrick, being totally different to me, would be reading *The Sunday Times* in his shorts and things like that; dear Joanna would be discussing something political, while I was probably reading the *Daily Mirror* - but that was rather like what our characters were really.

Can you share any anecdotes (positive or negative) of working on the series?

Oh, Jimminy Cricket... there are loads I suppose, and one that springs to mind ... (Gareth pauses here then continues) ... Dave, old sport, I can't think of one! I may later on, so I'll come back to this one.

Brian Clemens has related that the production had a considerable amount of trouble with the vehicles that were used on the series - not you personally, but the whole team. Any comment?

Mmm, British Leyland. Well, the Rover was obviously not a production line model, so when we started using it, we used to have a funny back piece put on it so that no one would actually see the design. I think they had terrible teething problems and wrote-off one of the SJS's - or at least, one of the stunt drivers did when driving under a bridge that wasn't quite wide enough! We had a few bits and pieces of trouble, but the main difficulty arose from the fact that we only had one of each model - the company didn't seem all that interested in doubling-up on them ... which is a great pity when you consider how many countries the series goes to. I would have thought that they would have used the series as a sort of publicity or advertising campaign - the Americans seem to do that very well, while we lag way behind.

Not too long after *THE NEW AVENGERS*, you starred as Charles Bind in the 007 spoof *LICENCED TO LOVE AND KILL*. Though this was obviously a low-budget production, it was very enjoyable. Did you enjoy working on the film? (the character was, after all, very close to Gambit.)

I suppose it was a bit Gambit-ish. Incidentally, the script was very good indeed, but the guy who wrote it was hoping to spend about 50-million dollars on it - and ended up spending about \$100,000! Yes, it was fun to do, but it was low-budget and there were problems with the crew - that is to say that it was 'blacked', so it didn't get a general release. Still, there were some fun things in it, and I thoroughly enjoyed doing it.

As I still can't recall any anecdote from the *New Avengers*, there was a wonderful one on that film that might slot into your earlier question.

I actually fell out of a speed boat and nearly knocked myself out. What I hadn't realised, was that, if you're doing about 25-miles per hour when you hit the water, it's like hitting CONCRETE! (Incidentally, this scene was cut out of the finished print.)

I also did a sequence - also cut - while skiing in a three-piece suit and again, one finds that ones pockets fill up with water as one comes out of a glide, and I found that a difficult scene to do ... I'm rather sad that it ended on the cutting-room floor.

There were lots and lots of funny things that went on during that film - primarily because of its low budget ... very funny things. I recall that one sequence which started out as a Rolls Royce, finished up as an AJS 250 motorcycle being sawn in half!

Finally, do you have any message that you'd like to share with our readers?

First of all, I'd like to say a big thank you for all the interest you've shown in the series. I honestly don't know if we'll be doing any more - perhaps so?

At present I'm trying to write a series for Joanna and myself - I love getting involved with writing and things like that, and would love to work with Jo again. I'm working in the theatre at present, and I may be doing a film abroad a little later on, so things seem to keep ticking over. Jo and I keep in contact, and as I say, I'd like to work with her again and hope that one of the television companies might pick up this idea I have.

Once again, thanks for all your interest. Take care of yourself, and my kind regards to your readers.
