

# Gareth's delayed opening Gambit

By IVAN WATERMAN

AT 15 he was a seaman. Then a butcher, baker and vacuum cleaner salesman. Failed at them all. So his success as Mike Gambit, John Steed's sophisticated sidekick in TV's New Avengers, is even more impressive.

"Don't ask me why," says 33-year-old Gareth Hunt. "Maybe I was cut out to be nothing other than an actor. But I got the message a bit late in life, didn't I?"

Too true. Not many top-liners start in the business at 26. And made such an immediate impact on the ladies, as he did, as Frederick the footman in *Upstairs, Downstairs*.

So what put the ex-sailor on the right course?

"To tell you the truth," says Gareth, "the reason I was such a failure as a salesman was because I devoted too much time to amateur dramatics.

"The managing director looked at my poor record and said he was sure I wasn't going to make as much money pushing vacuum cleaners as Hamlet.

"So I handed in the keys of the company car and went to drama school."

The first result of Gareth's search of stardom was disastrous. His marriage to a hairdresser went on the rocks.

## YOUNG

"Carol and I married when I came out of the Merchant Navy," he told me. "It was really a spur-of-the-moment thing.

"I was too young, I realise now. But it seemed like a good idea at the time.

"Our wedding night was hilarious. We couldn't afford a honeymoon, so back we went to our new home, one room and a bit in Tooting.

"I stayed up half the night chatting with the

landlord about his war experiences, which must have pleased Carol no end.

"Then I got on the landlord's bad side by trying to sculpt.

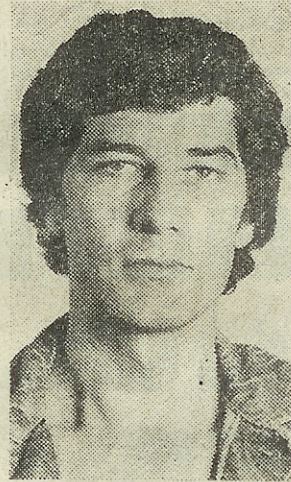
"I got a load of clay, made a bust, then stuck it in the oven to bake. The smell was awful and the landlord came storming up to complain.

"In the end he was so infuriated he threw my first and only work of art down the stairs, where it crumbled into pieces.

"But when I went to drama school and took an £8-a-week grant after earning much better money, it was very difficult.

"My family all thought, 'Here we go again. He must be mad. Another ten-minute wonder'—because of all the other jobs I'd had.

"Carol and I had been travelling along together and suddenly I went off on



Gareth Hunt: Got the message late in life

## Now meet Gareth's step-sister

☆ THE star model girl on the right is Christine Chamberlain, step-sister of Gareth Hunt, who is Mike Gambit of *The New Avengers*.

☆ Christine, 18, is out to be a winner in the London modelling stakes. She's certainly in good form!

my own course. So there was conflict."

They were divorced two years ago.

"We never got to the bitter enemies stage, so we're good pals now," Gareth says. "Our son, Gareth junior, who is eight, visits me most weekends."

## KICKS

Now he lives in Putney with his girlfriend, Carrie, a wardrobe supervisor. They have been together three years.

"I haven't ruled out getting married again. Carrie and I are very happy and our relationship seems to work the way it is.

"I don't think I belong in marriage at the moment."

How has his success as Gambit affected him?

"The pointing in pubs and in the street has just begun," he says. "But really it's an escape for other people, not for me.

"I don't do high kicks or somersaults when I'm away from the series.

"I'm not a physical person at all. When it gets to the stage when I'm being threatened by blokes who fancy their chances, then I'll be off.

"I'd like Gambit to have more of me in him.

"I'm pretty clumsy, so I thought what fun it would be to have him tucking a tablecloth into his trousers by mistake during a meal, and then stand up dragging all the food on to the floor.

"For the moment they want him to be smooth, suave and infallible, but I'd like to see some more humour from him."

Gareth's most bruising moment as Gambit came even before the series started. On a publicity trip to Paris he was downed by a 60-year-old Frenchman.

"This bloke was some sort of professor of the martial arts," he says.

"He wore a red leotard and black swimming trunks and carried a cane.

"He said, 'Hold a gun,' so I did—and with a swish of his cane the gun went flying and he whacked me around the ear as well. It really hurt.

"Then we did it again for the photographers and he hit me around my other ear.

"To prove the point he then not only kicked the gun out of my hand but also booted me in the groin.

"I was in agony and all the photographers were cheering and clapping."

I wondered what Gareth thought of his blonde Avenger, Joanna Lumley.

"There's an element of her that fascinates me," he says. "But she's not prey. She's a friend."