

Girls, stop chasing n says Avenger Gareth Hunt

As the Upstairs, Downstairs footman his ambition was to be in films. Gareth is now world famous, in The New Avengers. He tells Ken Roche how it all ha

IT'S BEEN ALL GO for Gareth Hunt lately. Since he strode manfully into *The New Avengers* as a kind of sensitive, randy, professionally-trained thug-goodie, he's been grabbing more than his share of female response from the viewers.

There's many a girl who envies Purdey (Joanna Lumley) when Mike Gambit makes his abortive overtures to her. Only, unlike Purdey, they probably wouldn't spurn them.

Hunt, previously known as Frederick, the handsome footman in *Upstairs, Downstairs*, is in danger, he thinks, of becoming a screen sex object—and he won't have any of that. "I think you've got to want to be chased, and I don't," he says gruffly, attacking his duck à l'orange in Pinewood Studio's restaurant. "I've never looked on myself as a male sexual thing. For a start I don't think I've got those sort of looks. Anyway, I seem to get as many letters from men as women." He stops in mid-mouthful. "Good God, I hope that doesn't make me sound queer." Perishing the thought, he goes on: "I couldn't conceive of myself as a Redford or a Newman. If I'm in any category at all it's more Anthony Quinn. I mean, the face is a bit lived-in. Broken nose and all."

Born in Battersea, London, 32 years ago, he was an only child. His father, a coalman, was of Irish descent with a dash of Welsh. His mother came from the Isle of Man.

His father was killed in World War Two and some of his earliest childhood memories are of getting a lift to school on his grandfather's coal-heaped horse-and-cart. "It used to puzzle me how my grandfather always seemed to be so neat and smart, in spite of humping coal around.

"They're practically a thing of the past, those horses-and-carts. And although it's only a comparatively short while ago, I can't even remember seeing a cart in our street. We were always playing in the streets and on the bomb sites. They were good days when you look back."

After the war his mother married again and the family moved to Mitcham, in Surrey. Like so many youngsters of the time his early schooling was hit-and-miss. "I didn't really get stuck into any proper schooling until I was about eight."

The spirit of adventure emerged early in the diminutive Hunt. His mother remembers him un-tethering a carthorse at the age of three and leading it off down a country road. His mother was frightened of horses and she looked on horrified as the huge beast loomed over her son who was happily chattering: "Lovely gee-gee, Mummy."

At school he enjoyed his fair share of cricket, football, boxing and swimming. "I don't think I ever knew what I wanted to do at school. The one thing I did like was writing essays. My spelling

has always been atrocious but I had an inventive mind for making up stories."

His first encounter with acting came at school and at home he eagerly entertained whoever would watch. "I wasn't precocious—I was brought up too strictly for that—but I was always making up some form of entertainment."

An only child he may have been, but he loved being with the other kids. "I suppose I got a bit of a name for being the leader of the pack. I was forever getting into all sorts of trouble. Nothing serious, just schoolboy villainy."

But beneath the husk of developing manliness Hunt's inherent sensitivity was furtively trying to sneak out. He secretly enjoyed taking part in plays—and singing in the choir. "But as a child you kept quiet about the fact you liked it because most of your mates didn't like doing things like that.

and if you admitted to enjoying it you were being a bit poofy."

He thinks he would have been a top if it not been for his stepfather. He was a very strict man. "He'd gone from school into the Army, so you can imagine towards firm discipline. I'm grateful for it. Both my mother and I shared a sense of humour; I was always playing ha-tical jokes and I remember one school friend said: 'Hunt has an over-abundance of sensitivity that sometimes interferes with his work that sums it all up.'

Leaving school at 15, he went into the Royal Navy. "I vaguely wanted to be a sailor but didn't know how. Nothing, really, was properly gelled in my mind. I was a bit of a starter." One thing that *(continued)*



Now he's the Avenger, Gareth Hunt catches all the eyes... but he's also called Gareth, and he's also called Gareth.

Girls, stop chasing me says Avenger Gareth Hunt

Upstairs, Downstairs footman his ambition was to be in films. Gareth Hunt is now famous, in *The New Avengers*. He tells Ken Roche how it all happened

GO for Gareth Hunt lately. He strode manfully into *The New Avengers* as a kind of sensitive, randy, wily-trained thug-goodie, he's doing more than his share of work on the viewers.

The girl who envies Purdey (Joanna Lumley) like Gambit makes his abortive debut. Only, unlike Purdey, they probably won't meet.

He is known as Frederick, the footman in *Upstairs, Downstairs*, is in the process of becoming a screen sex object. He has none of any of that. "I think you've been chased, and I don't," he says. "I've never looked on myself as a duck à l'orange in Pinewood. I think, 'I've never looked on myself as a duck à l'orange.' For a start I don't think I'm good-looking. Anyway, I seem to get more from men as women." He stops in his tracks. "Good God, I hope that doesn't come true." Perishing the thought, he couldn't conceive of himself as a woman. If I'm in any category at all, I'm Tony Quinn. I mean, the face is like a duck's nose and all."

Gareth, London, 32 years ago, he was a coalman. His father, a coalman, was of a dash of Welsh. His mother was of Man.

He was killed in World War Two and his earliest childhood memories are of his school on his grandfather's coal-cart. "It used to puzzle me how it always seemed to be so neat and tidy, humping coal around."

It was a thing of the past, those days. And although it's only a couple of years ago, I can't even remember the street. We were always playing on the bomb sites. They were the only places you look back."

His mother married again and the boy moved to Mitcham, in Surrey. Like so many of the time his early schooling was a struggle. "I didn't really get stuck into schooling until I was about eight."

His adventure emerged early in the form of cricket. His mother remembers him unscathed at the age of three and leading his mother on the country road. His mother was frightened and she looked on horrified as the boy came over her son who was happily playing with his lovely gee-gee, Mummy."

He enjoyed his fair share of cricket, swimming and fishing. "I don't think I wanted to do at school. The one thing I was writing essays. My spelling

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But beneath the husk of developing manliness Hunt's inherent sensitivity was furtively trying to sneak out. He secretly enjoyed taking part in plays—and singing in the choir. "But as a child you kept quiet about the fact you liked it because most of your mates didn't like doing things like that.

and if you admitted to enjoying it you felt yourself being a bit poofy."

He thinks he would have been a total rebel had it not been for his stepfather. He was a very fair, but very strict man. "He'd gone from an orphanage into the Army, so you can imagine his leaning towards firm discipline. I'm grateful to him now for it. Both my mother and I shared a great sense of humour; I was always playing harmless practical jokes and I remember one school report that said: 'Hunt has an over-abundance of humour that sometimes interferes with his work.' I think that sums it all up."

Leaving school at 15, he went into the Merchant Navy. "I vaguely wanted to become an actor but didn't know how. Nothing, at that age, had properly gelled in my mind. I was a late starter." One thing that /continued on page 16



Now he's a *New Avenger*, Gareth Hunt catches all the girls' eyes . . . but he prefers to catch fish, with his son, also called Gareth

How Father Christmas became a new Avenger

continued from page 14/attracted him was travel. His only trip abroad had been a £20 school holiday through four European countries. It gave him the flavour and it was that which finally tilted him towards the Merchant Navy.

His first trip got him into bother, true to form. He went with some shipmates to watch limbo dancing in a Jamaican bar. "I got paralytically drunk on Bacardi and Coke and apparently caused some sort of fracas and said things I shouldn't have said—and finished up being thrown out down what seemed at the time to be about 30 steps. I took the hint that drinking was not really for me.

"So I didn't spend all my time ashore in the bars. I found myself becoming genuinely interested in the places I went to and I'd hire a bike and take a look around. I remember being particularly affected by the poverty the first time I went to Spain. It was Christmas and there were all these ragamuffin-type kids.

"So I went back to the ship, snaffled some gear and food, bought a few toys and dished them out. It was one of the most satisfying Christmases I've ever had."

In his early teens, girls were not a dominant part of his life. He went out with one occasionally, once suffering acute agonies of embarrassment when he lost a large portion of his trousers on a fairground amusement and spent the rest of the "date" safety-pinned together in the most uncomfortable places. "I covered up with an old raincoat I found, and slouched around with her looking like Columbo on a case."

He wasn't a girl-chaser. "They were a commodity one hadn't really discovered. Most of the time it was a case of a night out with the boys."

For six years Hunt roamed the world, wallowing in the adventure of it all. Then at 21, "more out of devilment than anything else", he and two mates skipped ship at Napier in New Zealand. They took a bus to Newport and then a cab about 100 miles to Wellington, which cost them all their money—about £11—and a couple of watches.

For the next year Hunt and his fellow-fugitives knocked around, filling a variety of jobs. He worked in a car factory, as a docker, as a washer-up, as a pipe-fitter and so on. They moved to Auckland where they be-

came friends with another ship-jumper. "He was a very funny fellow. He used to burn the furniture to keep warm and seemed to spend all his time drawing Walt Disney characters on the walls."

Then came the inevitable official tap on the door—and the party was over. The three absentees were kept in detention for three months while awaiting the next available ship back to Britain.

The pattern of odd jobs continued on his return—but during this time Hunt met and married his first wife Carol and they have a son, Gareth, now eight. Hunt and his wife remain, he says, good friends since they broke up; and he sees Gareth Junior regularly every week.

Occasionally he worked as a stage hand in the Windmill and Victoria Palace theatres in London and was all the time aware of the ever-louder call to act. He was working as a representative for a firm of shop designers and spending all his spare time with an amateur theatrical club. "It reached the stage where I was spending more time with the club than I was being a representative."

So he auditioned for the Webber-Douglas acting school, passed and got a grant. It was late to take up acting—he was 25—but he felt immediately at home. During his two years of study he realises, he says, that all his previous jobs had just been "acted out". Now, at last, he knew what he wanted to do.

"Suddenly it all came together. For the first time instead of clowning about, I worked.

"I felt I was putting my energies into something that was giving something back to me. I also discovered that real acting was bloody hard work."

ALTHOUGH it was "right" for him, the theatre was an odd experience at first. For a start none of his friends had any connection with the theatre and there was a feeling of catching up that spurred him on.

After that, he says, he was lucky. He immediately landed a small part in the television series *Frontier* and later went on to Bristol Old Vic and then to Coventry.

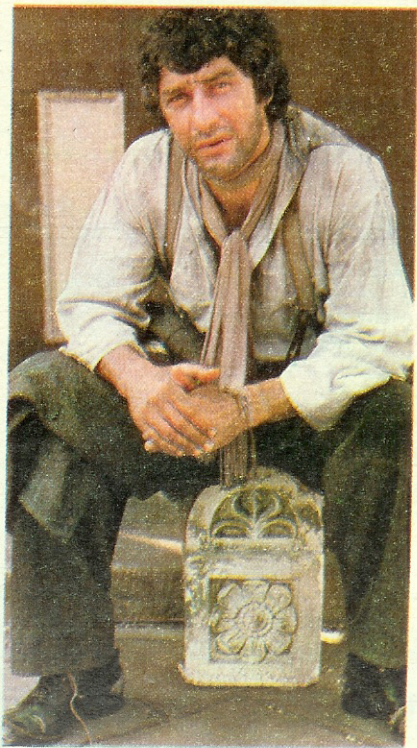
The Royal Court and the National Theatre carried him further along the road of experience. But it was, of course, Frederick the footman in *Upstairs, Downstairs* who brought him a measure of public acclaim.

The part of Gambit in *The New Avengers* gives him his widest audience ever—the series has been sold all over the world. "It's lots of fun, even if it is hard work. But I don't want to be 'lost' in the part for ever and I don't want to stay away from the theatre too long, either. It took me a long while to find it and I don't ever want to lose it."



The New Avengers

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Gareth Hunt (with co-star Joanna Lumley, top) is down and out in *Faces* and on top of the world in *A Tale of the Big Why*, two stories and two varied roles he fills in *The New Avengers*.