

AVENGER GARETH CONFESSES: 'I'M JUST

● BEHIND the chiselled jaw, smooth talk and fast action of Steed's sidekick Mike Gambit in *The New Avengers* series, there lies a true romantic. Actor Gareth Hunt, 32, who plays the role says he's about as far from his tough guy screen character as you could get.

"I hate guns," he admitted with an apologetic grin when we met for a drink in a West End pub. "A gun is such a *final* object. I've been out shooting twice in my life, but I've never shot anything with a gun — it would break my heart to kill any animal that way. Blasting things out of the sky is something I'm not into — and that goes for people too!"

Gareth does shoot sometimes, however. With a bow and arrow. He goes to archery classes near Chessington, and you couldn't find a more romantic sport than archery. "But I'm not an avid enthusiast for any sport," he says. "I haven't got the competitive spirit. I do keep pretty fit though. I work out at a gym, I swim and I play a bit of golf."

All of this helps keep him in trim for the stuntwork involved in his Gambit role, which he insists on doing himself as much as possible.

"I wouldn't do anything too hairy. The first time you dive through a plate glass window it's scaring, but it happens so quickly you don't have much time to think." Noticing my shocked expression, he added with a quick grin, "It is sugar glass, you know. And I did practise the forward roll through it several times."

Then there was the day when Gambit had to hang on to the wing of a plane as it took off.

"That was supposed to be done with a dummy," he says wryly. "But on the day of filming someone forgot to bring it, so I did it myself. I went across a field on the wing but not right up in the air."

Gareth is still acclimatising himself to sudden recognition after seven years as an actor. The first stir he caused — particularly among lady viewers — was as Frederick the footman in *Upstairs, Downstairs*, and now *The New Avengers* has brought him even wider female fan mail and people point him out on the street.

"I do get embarrassed by it," he confesses, "but I realise it is part of the job. It's a bit nerve-racking if you are out somewhere and in the midst of your own thoughts and someone suddenly asks you for your autograph. It gives you a jolt to realise you are public property. But I can understand it," he adds, flashing a quick smile. "If I had met Roy Rogers in the street when I was a kid, I'd have been over the moon!"

Gareth's childhood was spent in Battersea where his father (who was killed in World War II) and grandfather were coalmen. When Gareth left school he worked briefly in a factory, but couldn't stand the boredom, so joined the Merchant Navy. At one point, he and two shipmates jumped ship in New Zealand and worked for a time in a car plant,

but they were caught after a year and deported.

Back in England, he became a door-to-door salesman and also joined a theatre club, spending so much time there that he was finally forced to make a choice. He chose acting.

Gareth has worked with the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, and some of his happiest times have been in rep. He's been married, divorced, and has an eight-year-old son named after him. He is still friendly with his ex-wife, but now lives in Putney with his girlfriend Carrie, a freelance wardrobe supervisor.

He admits his new-found fame and success worries him, as does the thought of being typecast as a Gambit character. "I don't know whether it's a good thing to do a television series like this or not," he says thoughtfully, sipping his beer. "I'm not too sure what I've got myself into, because as some doors open, so others close. Television after this might be difficult to crack — a case of 'follow that' so to speak. I think perhaps I should head back to the theatre next, or do a period film — something completely away from the modern idiom. After being safely esconced at Pine-wood studios for all these months, it's a question of self-confidence."

Gareth finds interviews for acting roles can sometimes be a hair-raising experience. "I went to see Fellini at the Dorchester Hotel about *Casanova*. There was no reply when I

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knocked at the door," he recalls with a chuckle. "Suddenly Fellini appeared along the corridor and I realised I'd been knocking at the door of the bathroom! Another time, I had an appointment with director Richard Fleischer, and as I walked into the room the doorknob came off in my hand."

He didn't get either part!

One of his main concerns is that after a while, directors tend to put an actor into a certain category, a situation Gareth would hate.

"I really do think that two years of your life is long enough to spend on this kind of character," he says. "A lot of people think Gambit is a bit of a male chauvinist pig, and you can't inject too much reality into a fantasy series. After all, it's not *Kojak* or *The Sweeney* or *Batman* — it has a uniqueness which tends towards farce.

"Gambit is like a dream really. He's what a lot of people would like to be. I'm just acting out other people's fantasies, like James Bond."

Gareth downs the rest of his beer, courteously signs an autograph for a man who has been hovering nearby, and heads for the door to check his car hasn't been towed away. The unobtrusive blue Volkswagen is just where he left it. "People expect me to be a millionaire driving around in an XJ6," he says with a sigh. "Well, I'm not, and Alexander The Beetle does me just fine!"

by Sue Clarke

APRIL 1977

