

TAKING A GAMBIT!



HOW many of us wait with bated breath before the screen on Friday evenings to see Thames Television's "New Avengers?" And who wouldn't like to swap places with blonde Joanna Lumley (Purdey) in her starring role along with Patrick McNee (Steed) and — of course — gorgeous Gareth Hunt, who plays Mike Gambit?

After a few weeks of watching Gareth Hunt in the dangerous world of master-plot and super-spies, you begin to feel he's always at home in a background of fast cars and glamorous settings.

So when I went along to meet Gareth, I was surprised to find

that he doesn't live in an ultra-modern London apartment, equipped with every conceivable electronic device, but in a rather dilapidated terraced house in Putney, which he's in the process of doing up!

And it turns out that he and Mike Gambit are different in other ways, too.

"I wouldn't always like to be rushing round, a regular action-man like Gambit," Gareth said as he made a cup of coffee in his temporarily make-shift kitchen. "I'm actually very domesticated. I love coming home and working on the house.

"Apart from that, I get a lot of enjoyment from archery — it's

great — very quiet and relaxing, but not Gambit's cup of tea at all!"

Is there any similarity then between Gareth and the role he plays in the Avengers?

"Yes, we're both a bit common," he said, laughing. "You see, Steed and Purdey are both pretty high-class characters. I'm supposed to be a bit of a rough diamond.

"And in life that's true as well. Patrick McNee went to Eton and later the guards, and Joanna's an army Major's daughter — but I'm a cockney from Battersea!

"That wasn't exactly the type of place where you said you wanted to be an actor — they'd

think there was something wrong with you! In fact, when I left school, Mrs Bradbury the careers lady looked at me and said: 'Ah! Hunt, you're quite tall — you'll make a good policeman. Next please!'"

BUT Gareth didn't fancy the police force, so with the same adventurous spirit as Gambit he joined the merchant navy, and at the grand old age of 15½ he was trooping round the world.

Then one day Gareth got fed up.

"When we got to New Zealand three of us jumped ship, got a cab and made the longest cab ride I've ever had. One hundred miles . . . and it cost us eleven quid and two watches!"

That little escapade landed Gareth with three months in prison.

"It taught me one thing," he said, "I never want to do any more time in jail!"

Back in England, Gareth finally decided he wanted to be an actor.

"I'm an Aquarian," he explained, "so I'm creative and inventive but it takes me a long time to push myself forward." But once Gareth makes up his mind about something, he's determined!

So he started at the bottom as a stage hand at the Windmill theatre.

"It didn't do much for acting," he said laughing, "but I learnt a lot about the theatre in other ways."

At the same time, Gareth's powerful masculine appearance came in useful — he got a job digging roads! But finally he decided to make a serious attempt at acting and went to the Webber Douglas Stage School for two years. After that, lots of stage plays came his way until he made the breakthrough.

"I did a year with the Royal Shakespeare Company and with the National Theatre . . . so, in a way if I ever had any sort of ambition I've fulfilled it," he said.

BUT now, luckily for us, Gareth is concentrating on TV work. "It's fabulous working on the 'Avengers' series," he told me.

"I'm learning such a lot, not only about acting — I'm now a black belt in Karate! We try to make everything in the series as authentic as possible, so I had to learn from scratch.

"Also, Purdey, Steed and I are as close in real life as we are on the screen. Patrick and I are both Aquarians, so we got on together immediately — and Jo's a super Taurean, so we can't help but be good mates!"

Gareth is obviously a great believer in astrology, so I asked him if he had any interest in



the occult and supernatural as well.

"To be honest," he replied enthusiastically, "I think I'm a little bit psychic. I started telling people's fortunes for fun, and suddenly I found that I could get impressions, rapid pictures of what would happen to them — and so far I've been amazingly right!"

As for himself, Gareth's only prediction is that he will start writing plays one day.

"I don't know when, just as I didn't know when I'd start acting, but I know it's in there waiting to come out!"

Till then, Gareth's only too happy fighting evil with his partners in the fictional Britain of the 1980's, and we're only too happy watching him!