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MY LOVELY AVENGERS

● **Left:** Joanna Lumley . . . "I'm in love with her brain."
● **Right:** Linda Thorson . . . "Most highly sexual and exciting woman."



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THE JEAN ROOK INTERVIEW

given me instead of the old Bentley.

"We are going on for another 13 episodes. After that, I suppose we'll just keep on examining old Steed. People think I was awfully clever to invent him, you know, but actually he was born of utter despair.

"My first week on The Avengers, in '61, the producer said, 'Pat, you're basically dull, you're fired.' I was wondering that night what on earth to do, when I started thinking of my father, Dandy Macnee—he was a horse trainer—and the way he dressed.

"Thinking of him reminded me of Leslie Howard in 'The Scarlet Pimpernel', Ralph Richardson, very smartly dressed in some other film, and my old commanding officer in the Navy.

RELIEF

"So I rolled them all into one, bought a coat with an astrakhan collar, and turned up next day at the studio wearing that lot. They said I looked 'exactly like eighteenth century man', re-hired, me, and I'm still here, doing it.

"Of course, I'm not always sure what I'm doing," he said, shrugging into a casual thick-knit cardigan, which must be as much a relief, after Steed's tight waistcoats, as taking off your corsets.

"I mean I've been Steed for so long, and I know him so well, I once reached a point where I just couldn't seem to see him any more.

"I was losing him. Then, one night on telly, I saw Benny Hill impersonating me. He was on the phone, with all hell obviously let loose on the other end, saying all sorts of calm and flippant things to whoever was supposed to be on the line having hysterics.

"I thought, 'my God, that's it—that's the way to play Steed.'

"Since then I've had no worries. I just impersonate Benny Hill."



Diana Rigg: awesome

blonde. In fact I
an awful lot of sex
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you could say I'm
experience and
instead of expecta-
riosity.

she'd have me, I'd marry her like a shot, but it's her brain I'm in love with. That girl is terrifyingly intelligent. If we had to work in Hong Kong, I bet you she'd turn out to speak perfect Chinese."

Macnee founded The Avengers when his first leading lady, Honor Blackman's black leather pants were so new they squeaked. "Actually, I invented her black leather bit — not to put sex in the series, but so she could do all the judo and physical stuff without showing her knickers."

How does he compare the four faces, not to mention bodies, of the Avenger girl?

"I never do," he said, with Steed-style gallantry. "Honor was marvellous, and she did a lot more for Women's Lib than most people realise."

"Before she came on, playing Cathy Gale, dressed in black leather and chucking men about, girls like her were treated like dumb little English blondes.

"She had an identity, and the power to say to a man, 'I'm doing this and I'm doing that, and if you're not going to do it, I'm throwing you over my shoulder.' I honestly think it made women watching at home feel they wanted to be more forceful and different, and that they wouldn't be trampled on."

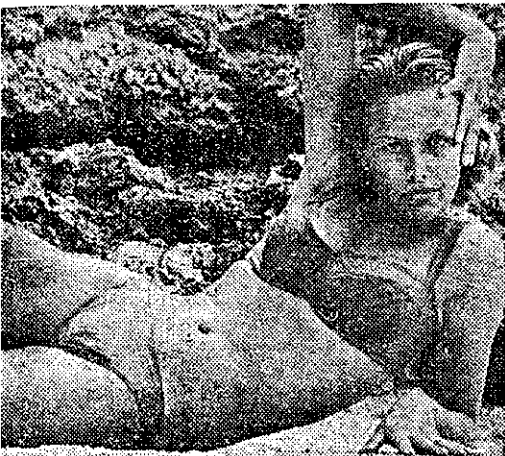
STRENGTH

After Ms Gale, he stood up, as best he could, to the storming Diana Rigg as Emma Peel. "I was in terrible awe of Diana—still am. One day they're going to make Di a Dame for her acting," he said.

"She acted so much better than I did, she made me feel like a faulty violin trying to keep up with an orchestra.

"She was so Yorkshire about everything too. There's a great inner strength in women who come from Leeds.

"When we were working out routines, she'd say, 'Oh, come along, Patrick, there's only one way to do it.' After that I didn't like to say I'd seen 140 ways of doing it, so I usually did it hers."



"She did a lot for Women's Lib"

RRRE TWIST IN THE PLOT... HOW BENNY HILL PUT NEW LIFE IN STEED