

# TRIVIA WITH A VENGEANCE

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"That's the most obscure fact I've ever heard in my life," said my son, who was studying for the New York bar exam. "Not even in the Trivial Pursuit game do they have that question ". I was only asking, if he was so smart, what was the name of the first of the original three "Avenger" ladies?

The return of **The New Avengers** to TV brought other such profound things to mind. **The New Avengers** comes back at the beginning of every summer, like the swallows to Capistrano, on "The CBS Late Night Movie" (11.30 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays) and they go away again around Labour Labor Day.

These are not new "New Avengers" I'm talking about. They are the old "New Avengers", which first ran in 1976-77. And they are certainly not to be confused with the old, original "Avengers", the exciting British spy-comedy adventure series with the ingenious plots that first ran on ABC through 1969.

Watching "The Avengers" new and certainly old, is an experience like taking a bubble bath - you just luxuriate in them. It's not so intellectually challenging as the Carson show or Joan Rivers. But it's a field fraught with stimulating topics of discussion, such as Who was the first of John Steed's three associates?

Everybody knows Diana Rigg was Emma Peel. And Linda Thorson was Tara King. But Honor Blackman was John Steed's original

partner in the British version of the show. She later went on to fame, playing Pussy Galore in the James Bond film **Goldfinger**.

The second-most-difficult trivial question is: Which of Steed's angels (the stunning ladies who assisted Patrick Macnee as Steed, wealthy ladies-man-about-town; the dapper, unflappable man of taste and breeding who spent his leisure time foiling espionage plots; the man with the umbrella, bowler and Bentley) was your favourite?

An axiom in the field is: Episodes with Linda Thorson are no good. Nobody seems to like Thorson, except for Bill Boggs, who later married her. He saw her in **Noises Off**, and the rest is history.

She was terrible as Tara King. She was so squeamish, always screaming at danger. She wore more restrictive clothing than Emma Peel and couldn't fight properly. She tore at the hair, punched the nose. She couldn't handle her dukes and duchesses like her predecessor.

Diana Rigg, the fabled Emma Peel, was accomplished in all of the martial arts - karate, judo, Siamese boxing. She could even fence - epee, sabre, whatever blade they threw her. Whatever you could do in a black leather jump suit, she could do.

Emma Peel was some heroine. "This lady was so ahead of her time," as Laura (Choo



Choo) Ackerman, president of Motley Inc. of Syosset, observed in the 1970s, "while Carol Brady was wondering about waxy buildup and Mrs Partridge was being helpless ('Well ...'), Emma was out there socking it to them."

Obviously, I am biased. I happen to think Diana Rigg was one of the sexiest women ever made.

My loyalty to Emma Peel has been somewhat shaken this summer, sad to say. I had been taking another look at Steed's new co-avenger or "the girl," as she is known in the cliché vernacular of script-writing, an incredibly awesome spy-fighter named Purdey.

"Miss? Mrs? Ms?"

"Just Purdey," exclaimed Joanna Lumley, the actress who plays her in the episode called **The Midas Touch**.

Purdey has a great name (she's named after the rifle, I assume), a terrific smile, wears the weirdest, most outlandish clothes. But remember, this was 1970s London, and they're probably knock-offs of Mary Quant or some St.Martin's dropout.

She is on the athletic side, too. In **The Midas Touch** she climbed over a chain-link fence in her fancy dress. Pantyhose? Forget it, that women must wear gym shorts. She also ran in high heels after the bad blokes. I'd match her against Carl Lewis - in high heels, of course. She could even beat Eric Idle in a drag race.

What legs! They should be registered as deadly weapons. Her fighting style is a lot of shoulder-high kicks and straight right blocks. She has the greatest kicking

legs I've seen on TV since Pat Summerall worked for the New York Giants.

What legs! Or am I repeating myself? "They start at her toes and go up to her mouth," one British TV critic said. In England, where they tend to get overwrought about these things, Purdey is known as a "stockings and suspenders girl", lots of glimpses of thigh, not pantyhose, a man's woman, a male chauvenist pig's dream.

Every so often, Joanna Lumley will do something that makes me pass out with excitement. While she and Steed are speeding through the streets of London in a chase scene, upsetting pushcarts on Petticoat Lane, an orange lands in the Aston Martin and she calmly feeds her partner at the wheel segments by hand, all the while discussing who directed "The Treasure of Sierra Madre." I guess I'm truly a Purdeyman now.

"The New Avengers" also has "the Boy" added to the cast, joining Steed as the co-heartthrob. "The Boy" is Mike Gambit, played by Gareth Hunt. He also has nice legs. Gambit helped British women survive the Bay City Rollers demise in the 1970s.

As Suzanne Castine of Westbury, who is doing a doctoral dissertation on the meaning of Gambit in Western Civilization, explained: "Gambit is (heavy sigh) Gambit. I can hardly breathe when he's on the screen."

What's the matter, John Steed is not such a sex symbol anymore/

For anyone who is fixated on this, or

any other scholarly question about "Avengerdom," Steve Maurer of Middle Village tells me there is an organisation called S.T.E.E.D. "The Society for Television with Emma and Everything Delightful."

Everything delightful, of course, refers to all aspects of "Avenger" lore, including Steed's partners, other than Emma.

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