



The Write Stuff

Brian Clemens, sentenced to manual labour

At Brian's invitation, we met at his home in Bedfordshire, spent a short time chatting about television (over coffee, brewed by Brian - he also serves a tasty vintage in wine) then drove to a restaurant near to Brian's home.

The audio-taped interview began over lunch, with an open discussion about movies and Brian's involvement in **Highlander 2** in particular.

Struggling to get the portable recorder's microphone to remain upright on the dining table (I'd left its stand outside in Brian's Ferrari 400 GT), I asked Brian what had happened to his original screenplay for the movie? Most of what he had scripted was cut out and far from being 'prequel' to the first Highlander film (as was originally intended by the producers) **Highlander 2** is little more than an exercise in SFX and action. "The thing is that I did a script which a lot of people thought was a lot better than the one they shot. This had a little more depth in it. I always think that with a good SFX film, that you can't believe in the characters unless you're involved with them. That's why the Terminator films are so good - because they're about machines and

"I used to write and illustrate story books for myself and I told my father what I wanted to be. So when I turned ten he bought me a manual typewriter - that's how I became the fastest two-finger typist in the world!"

Brian Clemens, speaking to
Ray Frensham, for
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things, but they're also about people. So Highlander went to arbitration and some bits of the construction are mine, but I lost out on the screenplay credit. I'm not sorry about that because it's a rotten film. I've never been able to watch it all the way through. I liked the first movie though - after I'd seen it a couple

of times." He had mentioned earlier that he was in the final stages of completing a script for the Highlander television series (most of his comments being lost while I was attempting to do a Heath Robinson repair job to overcome the absence of the recorder's microphone stand). I asked him to repeat what he'd told us. Was this a one-off script? Would he be writing more? "No, just the one. Well, they might ask me to do another, I don't know. It's a co-production between the French and the Canadians again ..." (Ed. A reference to The New Avengers situation, which led myself and Dan to express out doubts that the Highlander tv show would have any longevity.)

Dan said that what he liked best about Brian's work, particularly his Avengers scripts, was the fact that there

was always a lot to listen to: a lot going on in the dialogue. Not just one-liners, there was a lot of interplay there. How did Brian approach the scripts? What was important to him? Was it the plot? Even **The New Avengers** had a lot to listen to. "Oh, sure. Well, it's the nature of the show. It's quite nice to be able to write flowery dialogue, get away with it and know that it's going to be shot. It depends entirely on the kind of thing I'm writing. For instance, when I did the **Perry Mason** shows (he has written three of the new Perry Mason tv feature films) they are very, very dependent on dialogue. It's not what I call exciting dialogue ... it's only interesting because you want to know 'who dun it?' But good movies should be very sparse on dialogue - really good movies . . . A very interesting thing was said to me some time ago. When the first film print of **The French Connection** was sent to Tokyo, for them to buy it, they forgot to dub it - forgot to put the Japanese translation on the print - and all the Japanese people who saw it, in a foreign language, understood it ... They knew exactly what was going on. I think that that is the measure of a good movie. In a good western you know what's going on basically. You really hardly have to hear the dialogue. Good movies are visual, that's why they're movies. I mean, writing for television and writing for movies is quite different. The trick in a movie is to never give the hero plot" Pausing to sip from his wine glass, he considered this for a moment then continued, using the Bond movies as an example of what he meant. "Unfortunately, towards the end of the Bond movies, particularly the Roger Moore ones, I think they made tremendous errors. They gave plot to Roger - who is sometimes a plot in himself I mean, if an audience is bored it's better that they are bored with a subsidiary character and not the lead. The other thing they did is that they kept putting young girls in Roger's bed - which made you think how old he was. If he'd been there with a slightly more mature girl, rather than a bimbo, you kind of accept that; you don't think to yourself 'Oh, he must be 60 now.' I think that was bad news." I passed the comment that this was how Brian had handled the character of Steed in **The New Avengers**: by giving him girlfriends, but women of the more mature variety. "Exactly!" Dan injected his own point of view. As far as he was concerned (and neither Brian or I argued otherwise) any single episode of **The Avengers**, especially the black-and-white Diana Rigg/Patrick Macnee shows, were better written than most of the Roger Moore Bond movies. For instance, Dan acknowledged that he could sit and listen to "Castle De'ath" or "Silent Dust," or any of the b/w Rigg episodes, and get more enjoyment from them than from a lot of the movies and television show being made now. Dan (who audio-tapes everything and listens to tapes while travelling to and from work) believed that most of today's out-put was being written for 12-year olds - an audience who yap all the way through a cinema film and pay scant attention to what is happening on the screen. Brian nodded his agreement. "That's why the soundtracks are so terrible. They go to the trouble of

having someone write the scripts and then they make the film in such a way that you can't hear what you wrote. That's why it's lovely to see a David Lean movie. Having a great many modern films, it's lovely to see pristine lighting used as part of the atmosphere. I keep saying that television has no lighting - speaking generally. I mean, they never tell stories with lighting, so they?" (Dan and I shake our heads.) "When you think of all those marvellous old gangster movies ... you know the ones I mean, the film noir, when it was all done with shadows on the stairs and you suddenly knew the mood and what the guy was like who lived there, just through the lighting man."

Dan wanted to know if Brian enjoyed watching contemporary films? "Not all of them. But I see everything ... I must have seen every movie that's ever been made." Such as, Dan asked, citing **Bugsy** and **The Silence Of The Lambs**. Brian thought that **The Silence of The Lambs** was okay. "But I don't think that it was as good as people said it was. I don't know why? I saw it in the cinema and I thought that the print was a bit muddy. There it was, up on the big screen and there was one track that wobbled ..! We wouldn't have allowed that on **The Avengers**! We would have re-taken it. It was a hand-held camera sequence and it wobbled ... and it wasn't even because he was stalking her! It was quite a long tracking shot. If that had come up in the rushes of **The Avengers**, we would have redone the entire sequence. Also, it was a kind of ridiculous story really, wasn't it?" (Dan nods his agreement.) Saying that I thought the story was okay, I asked Brian if he had read the book? Yes he had - and agreed with my opinion that both the earlier Hannibal Lecter novel "Red Dragon," which provided the screenplay for the film **Manhunter**, made for a better movie. Dan agreed. He'd watched both films back-to-back [on video] and thought that **Manhunter** was the better film because it didn't have the "baggage" (his word) of Anthony Hopkins and Jodie Foster. He also thought that actor Brian Cox (as Lecter) was very, very good in the role and far more believable than Hopkins' over-the-top performance. Brian gave a wry grin. "It's funny, really. Because as you know, in America - particularly in America now - if you spit on a convict it's a civil rights case. The idea of a chap being all tied-up in this cage and made to wear this leather face protector was ridiculous!" He cited the Cathy Bates/James Caan movie **Misery** as being one of his personal favourites from today's crop of blockbusters. "**Misery was** frightening! I really liked her. I thought she was really frightening - far more frightening than Hannibal Lecter ... and Brian Cox was more frightening than Anthony Hopkins!"

Dan had the feeling that when Brian was doing the Diana Rigg b/w shows, there was a period in there when he believed that they were trying to do little horror films. He explained what he meant by this. There were moments say, in "A Surfeit of H2O," when Emma Peel is looking around and spots the guy lying in the mud, and again in "Too Many Christmas Trees," when she is walking through the darkened corridors, which the

team didn't carry through to the Rigg colour episodes. Why? Brian put this down to the lighting. "It is very difficult to get suspense - especially when making stuff for the television screen, where one has to work to different lighting strictures. The format you shoot on, by actually making them for television where you know that there are going to be a few points in them that go down just a few points in the transposition stage from putting it on film to seeing it in your own home. So maybe it was that I don't know. We may have changed our lighting man." (Ed. *They did.*)

Dan pursued this. It wasn't, he suggested, just that, but the overall **character** of the episodes that were different. The b/w shows had been much **darker** in execution. Stymied by this (a rare novelty), Brian confessed that he had no answer for this: "Although I would have thought that 'The Joker' followed through on that

level - although a far better script was the Linda Thorson one, 'Pandora.' That was certainly a far better idea." I interjected the thought that while Brian hadn't had the opportunity to see the Blackman story "Don't Look Behind You" (The Joker MK1) since it was originally televised in the mid-60s, he would now be able to compare the two episodes, courtesy of a videotape I had prepared for him. To my thinking - and I was convinced that he



would agree when he viewed the tape - the Blackman version was streets ahead of "The Joker" rewrite. Dan confessed his liking for the Rigg colour remake. In fact - and Brian simply had to answer this - one of the things that had struck him when watching The New Avengers, were the references to the Avengers episodes: oblique references such as actor Peter Jeffrey doing the German accent in the "House Of Cards" episode. Was that a deliberate reference to the character he had played in "The Joker?" Delighted that Dan had picked up on this, Brian replied "Oh, yes. Definitely - well, sort of ..." Never one to allow an opportunity to pass by, Dan ploughed on. Acknowledging that he thought that it was better in a way that Brian had given the Ian Hendry character a new name, Gunner (not Keel) in The New Avengers episode "To Catch A Rat," and had kept Steed and Gunner apart throughout the entire story until, in the last scene, Gunner declares 'I know I'm 17 years late, but welcome back,' he wanted to know why Brian had settled on this? Asked about this many times, Brian was happy to be able to clear up the mystery once and for all. "What happens, you see, is that the scripts are written a long time

before you cast. So that character was written as Gunner and it was locked into the script - there was no way to change it. It wasn't written for Ian Hendry. But once we knew that we had got Ian, I thought, well, there must be some people who will recognise him as the old Doctor Keel, so we might as well have a little fun. And like a lot of things we did in The Avengers, it was very subtle, you had to look for it." I registered my opinion that one finds lots of little nuances everytime you view the show. Brian nodded. There were never any shortages of references that underpinned the dialogue.

Dan picked up on the song used in "The Joker." For years he had listened to that "wonderful, weird, guttural German ballad." Where had this come from? Was it composed and written by Laurie Johnson? Brian credited himself with writing the words and acknowledged that Laurie had composed the music.

Restating his opinion that "The Joker" was a better version of the old-dark-house plot device than the Blackman original - indeed, it was probably his all-time favourite Avengers episode, Dan confirmed that he had even enjoyed the South African radio version. Did the producers of the radio show have to clear the rewrite of the story with Brian and EMI? Brian shook his head. No. He hadn't been consulted about this.

EMI licensed the radio thing themselves. What's more, until I told him so, he hadn't been aware that Laurie [Johnson] had supplied the soundtrack music for the radio show. (Ed. Authorised or otherwise, music composed by Laurie was used in the radio broadcasts, with both his Avengers main title theme and several cuts from his "Synthesis" jazz suite being used as incidental music.) Untroubled about the rights and wrongs of this, Dan said that he was delighted to be able to hear a third version of Brian's masterpiece - this time complete with a totally new German song sung in the background and a voice-over narration which told the listener what was going on.

Back at Brian's home, I reminded Brian that he had once used the voice-over narration device himself. This is heard as the opening sequence on several of the early Rigg b/w film prints shipped to America ("Crimes against the people and the state ..." etc) Dan wondered if Brian could remember who narrated this? He couldn't, but believed that he was just a voice-over guy, brought in to narrate just that one piece. "That chessboard sequence was only added because the Americans

bought the show and wanted to get the feeling that they had a franchise, which I tried to resist because as soon as you start to lock Steed and his partners to being M15 or M10, then you start to lock in everything to a certain extent ...” Like bringing in Mother, Dan said, intimating that the show went in a different direction when Brian left the series. “Mother was a deliberate thing because of Linda. I left the show between Diana and Linda, and when I came back ...” Cutting Brian off in mid-sentence (not an easy thing to do), I asked him to explain *why* the Telemen production team had been - to use the correct terminology - **booted off the show?** Why were the reins snatched away from them when they had a worldwide hit programme on their hands? “Well, this is a very British thing ... I mean, if we had been in America, the company responsible for the show would have come to us and said ‘What next Fall series do you want to do, boys?’ Instead of which they fired us!” Yes, But why? “It was internal politics. You must remember that The Avengers began life as a taped show for ABC TV, with John Bryce ... well, it was mainly Howard Thomas who sort of lost control of the show, and Julian Wintle came in and wanted film people, people with experience - which included me, because I began in films, and of course, Albert [Fennell] who was very experienced. And at the end of the show, when it was showing on network television and doing very well, they thought ‘This is easy. Anyone can do this.’ So they got rid of us. It was during this period that they cast Linda Thorson. I would never have cast Linda ...” I picked up on the fact that John Bryce and his production team produced two episodes during this time: “Invitation To A Killing” and “The Great, Great Britain Crime.” “ ...And ‘Invasion Of The Earthmen’,” Brian said. “This only works because Terry Nation wrote it. Terry was a pro, although it is still a story that I wouldn’t have allowed to happen because it’s not really an Avengers story.” Dan suggested that the episode is better suited to the **Doctor Who** series. “That’s significant, because Terry wrote for Doctor Who and created the Daleks. That story only works because Terry is such a great pro. When I came back they had already made these episodes and I said ‘Christ! In mid-stream we suddenly had The Avengers - a show that was still running on tv - **and the girl has changed!**’ So I looked for a way of covering the change-over. There had to be a way, and I insisted on writing ‘The Forget-Me-Knot.’ So, did he actually write the Mrs Peel scenes and the hand-over sequence on the staircase leading up to Steed’s apartment *after* speaking to Diana Rigg, to ask if she would appear in the episode? “Yes. Diana was fine and agreed to do it.” (Ed. Which finally puts paid to the opinion, expressed by others - some of who really should know better - that this episode was an unfilmed Avengers script, rewritten by Brian to accommodate the introduction of Tara King and bid a farewell to Mrs Peel.) “This was before she started looking towards her Damehood and started knocking the show that made her a star! When she’s buried at Westminster Abbey, people will say ‘Oh, it’s the Avengers girl.’” (Ed. Brian was joking, of course. At least I think he was! We will return

to this and Brian’s comments about being removed from the show.)

Dan wanted to know why after the team had completed the Diana Rigg monochrome season, they went on to produce something like 18 colour episodes, then took a break in production before filming the remainder of the Rigg colour season? In Dan’s opinion - an opinion that is shared by several other respected tv buffs - the Rigg colour season was filmed in two distinct blocks. As he elected to point out, the last few colour episodes **looked different** and the “Mrs Peel, We’re Needed” teasers were absent. Adamant that there was NO break in production beyond the usual interval for holidays, Brian gave his reasons as to why the teasers were dropped. “The Mrs Peel, We’re Needed teasers were originally put in because the Americans wanted something out front. When they stopped wanting it, we didn’t do these any more. So those things were because of the network. They were our prime buyer. If we didn’t have the network, we wouldn’t have been making them.” I pursued this. Using the tag scenes as a starting point, I raised the subject matter of the Brian Tesler connection (documented in a previous edition of this magazine by Graham P. Williams). As I understood things, Brian put up a tremendous battle to retain these when Tesler seemed intent upon kicking the vignettes into left field. Were the tag scenes written into the scripts at the direction of the American network people? “Are you talking about the b/w shows? The driving-off-into-the-sunset in various modes of transport?” I wasn’t. I meant the self-contained colour series tags. “Well, I always had those in mind. The reason we had the tags was not because the Americans wanted them, but because of the way they **showed** them. You see, on American television they play a little bit of the episode, then show several minutes of commercials. Then comes the teaser, followed by more commercials. Then three acts -with commercials - and the show ends and you are back to the end credits. I said ‘Nobody stays around to watch the credits, but they may stick around and watch a short amusing scene.’ I was proved right because it became a big thing with the viewers wondering what they [Steed and Mrs Peel] would be doing for the last couple of minutes.” I reminded Brian (who had forgotten about this) that he and Tesler had locked horns on more than one occasion about the inclusion of the tag scenes in the script. Indeed, Brian had written Tesler a three-page letter in defence of retaining the tags “come hell or high water.” Handed a copy of this, he acknowledged surprise that he had ever found the time to write any letter, to Tesler or to anyone else - let alone a three-page document. His memory refreshed, he confirmed that he had been prepared to go out on a limb over the retention of the tags.

I steered the subject back to “The Forget-Me-Knot.” Brian picked up the story where he had left off. “I came back into the show on a Thursday, I think, and told them that before we could even begin attempting to make something out of these episodes, we had to shoot a Diana Rigg hand-over story. So I started writing this on



Friday. I finished it on Saturday and we started shooting it on the following Monday or Tuesday. So that was the kind of deadline one was under. The thing about a television series is that it's the success that kills you. You make, say, fifteen or so, then suddenly you sell to the network and they want one episode a week. You don't make one a week, you make one a fortnight, so you pray for pre-empts - that there is going to be a World Series [in Baseball] or something. So you're really under the gun. For instance, the very last show ["Bizarre"]. When we finished this, it came off the floor and we edited, dubbed and added the music to it - and the story was shown on American television exactly seven days later! But we were geared for it ..."

Dan recounted how, back in the 60s, the shows were screened in America one week after the other for twenty-six weeks in a row. It would then go into reruns. They didn't do that now. Using **Star Trek: The Next Generation** as a case in point, he explained that they run six/seven weeks (starting at the beginning of the season) then have three weeks of re-runs **right in the middle of a season!** Then they play two or three more new episodes and run another three weeks of re-runs. So what happens is that you get all your re-runs **through the season**, with the last episode going out months later than it normally would have done because they've had time to catch up. The Avengers team couldn't do this of course. They had to go straight

through. Brian responded to this as one might expect. "In those days, when the network said they liked the series, they would give you an order for thirteen. Now they give you an order for six and do exactly what you say. They show them - they might even repeat a couple of them, to see how they're doing in the ratings - and then say 'We'll have another ten.' But it wasn't always thirteen then. Thirteen and twenty-six were the magic numbers. The only thing that broke them up was the pre-empt, like if the President was speaking on tv or they had some major sporting event." Pausing to sip from his wine-glass and light up his second cigar of the day, Brian jokingly passed the remark that all of this had started about four hours earlier, when Dan had asked him about bringing Mother into the series. (*Ed. It was actually some two-and-a-half hours into the interview - which lasted for well over six hours! - Brian knew now I guess, that the head-to-head was going to be exhaustive in content, with little room allowed to him to give us ad-lib, off-the-cuff replies. Full credit to him then, that at no time during the meeting did he show signs of unease or impatience.*) He had started to explain why Mother had been written into the scripts - so, why was he? "The reason for Mother was because Linda was forced upon us. We came back and it was a fait accompli - Linda was there. I saw instantly that she was young and she was Canadian - two pretty bad things to be when you are supposed to be a sophisticated partner for Steed - and

she had *no sense of humour!* A lot of women don't. It just so happens that Diana had, and Jo Lumley had a wonderful sense of humour. But Linda had nothing. So I thought we needed someone for Pat [Macnee] to play off, to get some humour into the dialogue. So I invented Mother." Dan put forward the fact that while Brian had used Mother in "The Foget-Me-Knot," he [Mother hadn't appeared in the first batch of five or six episodes screened in America. Then, when the show came back for the final year, Mother was there. Why is this? Neither Brian or myself had an opinion on this unless, as suggested by Brian, things happened like that because of the way the episodes were aired in the USA. Whatever, Dan freely confessed that he for one hadn't liked the direction that the show went in after that. He thought that the series got silly and he missed the sophistication of the Rigg b/w shows in particular. Okay, granted that they weren't miniaturising people or having characters have their brains switched, but it most certainly wasn't the show it had been when it was just Steed and some woman in some interesting atmosphere, solving some kind of crime. It simply wasn't as good. He'd enjoyed them of course. But he considered that the Thorson episodes were just a little bit too lightweight. What was going on in Brian's mind at that point? Was this really what he had in mind? Agreeing that the series had become a "little bit more science-fiction orientated," Brian said that it just happened that way. Never eager to let go of the bone, Dan conceded that the production values on the Thorson series were better than anything that had gone before. Indeed, when he had watched the Blackman episodes recently [on the Arts & Entertainment cable network] and then viewed a Thorson episode, he had found the difference astounding. Watching the Thorson episode was like watching a movie. Pointing out that the Blackman stories were made live on tape, with no edits, Brian summed up the difference. "If they shot for 52 minutes [on the Blackman show], that's how long it took to make it. They [Honor and Pat] were always running around and the scene would always end on Pat whenever Honor was meant to be in a different location in the next scene. This was so the camera could hold on him as she raced across the studio floor to be ready for the next set-up ..." Or, as I pointed out, Patrick and Honor would be dressed in, say, trenchcoats, with a cravat or scarf tucked in tightly around their necks to disguise the fact that they were already wearing the outfits that they would be seen in in the next scene. A brisk trot across the studio. The removal of the topcoat and the neck-warmer and hey-presto, 24 hours had passed by.

Mention of Blackman shows allowed me the opportunity to nudge Brian's memory and remind him that he had once 'appeared in a Blackman story, the self-penned "The Charmers." He couldn't recall this. I explained. The sequence takes place when Steed, visiting the opposition's headquarters, spies several photographs pinned to the wall: the other side's 'Most Wanted Agents.' There are five photographs in all, the second space in the top row being blank. Opposition

agent Keller [Warren Mitchell] turns to the wall and pins a picture of Steed into the empty space, immediately adjacent to the snapshot of the most wanted agent of all - one Brian Clemens, priority Number One on Keller's hit list! Grinning at the memory, Brian remembered writing this into the script. "We did those sort of things a lot. But people do that. There's a famous story about a Humphrey Bogart movie, known here as **Murder Incorporated**, in America as **The Enforcer**. It's a very good movie. He goes into a morgue where we see all these feet with name-tags on their toes. If you stop-frame your video on one of them it says Katherine Hepburn!" Dan recalled that The Avengers team did the same thing in the Rigg colour episode "Murdersville," when Steed prompts Emma to telephone the authorities. "This will be something to tell the children," Steed tells her. Emma gives him a quizzical stare. "Hmmm?" Steed explains: "Little Julian, Albert, Gordon and baby Brian!"

The mention of Julian Wintle's name prompted me to ask Brian to describe Julian's role in the making of the series. Who actually founded Telemen? "Julian employed Albert and Laurie, and I actually went to meet Julian and Albert for the first time because - and this may explain what happened later - Richard Bates was the editor [on the Blackman series] and John Bryce was the producer. Julian and Albert had met both of them, separately, and they realised that John Bryce didn't know anything about making a film series. He'd been protected by the system; protected by Richard Bates employing good writers like me, really. It came to a situation where they [Bates and Bryce] thought that they were going to retain their jobs - and they didn't. I was offered the job that one of them hoped that he was going to get. I was given the job because I knew about film. They didn't know anything about film, they'd only worked in television." I already knew this and confirmed that I was looking for some insight into how the filmed series came into being. How did the team approach the responsibility of taking The Avengers onto film? Who was responsible for the Genesis of the 'new' Avengers format? "Always in television, it's the writer, and I'm responsible because I wrote the first three scripts - although they didn't appear in that order of transmission - and I commissioned the rest. So the first three scripts set up the series." Just like that? With no consultation with Julian and Albert? "No. Because I'd worked on the series before you see. Their only input at that time was whether it was too much to shoot - that it was viable. So they left me alone. They wouldn't have left me alone if the scripts hadn't been good, of course ..." He paused for a second before adding. "I mean, Julian really never had much of anything to do on the show, except to have the facility of a good producer in choosing the right people." Dan interposed the comment that Wintle had nevertheless received the on-screen credit: Produced by Julian Wintle. "Of course. But he didn't have any input. He didn't say 'I don't like this script. I don't like that and so on.'" I reminded Brian that Wintle also had a 'consultancy' credit on the



Thorson series. "That's right. Because of his contract he wanted to keep his piece of the action going and to do that you have to have a credit. We didn't begrudge him that, of course." Using the music-scoring of an episode as an example, he described a typical meeting with Julian Wintle in the recording studio. "Laurie scored for each episode and Julian would come in and hear the music. He'd get up at the end of it and say 'I don't like that score - fix it!' then leave. He didn't say that it was too loud or whatever. That's what a good producer does. He goes away, having put you in a stir, and you'd think 'We'd better listen to it again, perhaps he's got a point.' That was typical of Julian's input. Not creative. Almost destructive. But that's a producer's job. He gives everyone below him the questions and trusts them to come up with the answers."

And Albert Fennell? Despite my three books and frequent sorties in Avengerland, I still didn't know enough about Albert to be objective about his input and give him full credit for his work. Perhaps Brian would shed some light on the 'quiet man' of the team. Exactly what was Albert all about? His reply came as something of a surprise. "Albert, God bless his soul. The British Film industry is littered with Fennells. One of his family, Elsa, was an Academy Award winner. Jack Fennell ran Pinewood Studios. Albert's son, Robert - who passed away - worked on *The Avengers*. His dad was Studio Manager at Gainsborough. I'll tell you a story which sums Albert up. He really shouldn't have been in the film industry - although he was ever so good at what he did

- he should have been running a retreat for Jesuit nuns or something. However, after *The Avengers* was finished, he was trying to mount another series. And I found this millionaire who really wanted to finance the show. We had a project and everything and we had a meeting with this guy, who was really hot about the idea and wanted to give us two million quid to start it. We all got on very well. Just before the end of the meeting, Albert, who knew that the guy was ready to put up the money, told him that we were confident that we would all make a lot of money. But then he said 'I must point out that you could lose it ...!' So we never got the money! That was very typical of Albert. He was honest to a fault. He was very, very good at creating a shooting schedule. He was ever so good at public relations, 'cause we were doing *The Avengers* and *The Professionals* for years and we never once had a strike, or anything approaching it." Anticipating that I was looking for something more on Albert's actual input on *The Avengers*, Brian illuminated the fact that Albert was probably one of the best film editors he has ever worked with - although he wasn't an editor. "He would drive the editor mad. He would sit by his shoulder in the editing suite and stay there for hours trying to get, say, the sound of the right fly buzzing and so on. I learned more about editing from Albert than I ever learned from an editor. People don't do that anymore, not even on big movies. When we made *The Avengers*, we cared about what kind of fly it was and when it appeared - because we used sound effects to create our atmosphere. That was Albert's main

thing." Pausing for effect, he told us that Albert was his own worst enemy when it came to promoting himself. "He's dead now, and if you go through film reference books like *Halliwell's Guide*, you won't find his name a great deal - *but it should be there*, 'cause when we were doing our first Hammer movie and I said I wanted a producer credit on it, he said it doesn't really matter, everybody in the industry knows who did it. So, he ducked a lot of credits that were due to him."

It was Dan's turn again. This time he wanted to know if there was any connection between Brian, Albert and Hammer Films? Brian said no, not really. They had only become involved with the Hammer people after The Avengers had ceased production. But hadn't Dan spotted Brian's name on *Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde*, *Captain Kronos - Vampire Hunter* and a movie that came out right after The Avengers ended, *And Soon The Darkness*, in which he'd felt that the female lead, Pamela Franklin, was a sort of ersatz Linda Thorson. There were several other Avengers names there too: Robert Fuest, Laurie Johnson ... Did the team decide that the time was right to get into the movies? "That one [And Soon The Darkness] came about when Bryan Forbes took over the running of the studio and was looking for product. We came up with this idea and he said we'll do it. We made it for £245,000 - then." Dan dug deeper. Was it true that Brian had worked - uncredited - on *Doctor Phibes*? "Yes. I wrote the last seven minutes of the movie and a little bit in between." Staying with movies, Dan brought up the subject of the Disney film *Watcher in The Woods*. He'd never seen this on its first release but recalled that the film was promoted in the *New York Times* with a full-page ad. It opened, played a few venues for about three days, then closed and seemingly disappeared off the face of the earth. He then read a review in *Cinefantastique* magazine that said: 'Brian Clemens is the very antithesis of a Disney film. The key to any Clemens script is lies.' (Brian grinned at this.) The review ended by suggesting that the movie opened unfinished, and had had something to do with a winged alien from another world tagged onto the end. What was this all about? Dan had viewed the film recently on video, sans any winged alien. "It was from a book. I was asked to write the screenplay. It has three credits on it now, Gary Davis and Rosemary Anne Sissons. Anyway, I did the first draft and when I was breaking it down I told them that I didn't think that the book worked as it stood. I was working with Ron Miller, who was Disney's brother-in-law or something. They insisted that I wouldn't do it as there were certain ingredients that I wanted to bring in. They wouldn't allow this. They shot it and it didn't work. It didn't actually open unfinished. It opened but it had the wrong ending. So they took it back and reshot the ending and it brought it a little closer to what I had in mind. If you read the book, it's one of those unresolved stories. You finish it and think, now what was that all about?"

This seemed as good a time as any to delve into the early part of Brian's career, beginning (natch) with his

tenure as scriptwriter on the Danziger Brothers, television series. This was where he met Philip Levene? "No, I met Phil much later in the day." This surprised me. Philip Levene had apparently worked for the Danzigers. Brian's eyebrows creased. Was I certain of this? Well, yes - at least I'd been led to believe so. "Well, I didn't know that. I certainly never got to meet him. But that's not surprising really because the Danziger's would never let me go anywhere near to the studio. If I'd have walked into the studio they would have said 'Why aren't you at home writing?' " Where exactly was the studio located? "*The bus station at West Mithering!* No, seriously, it was converted out of the bus depot. It was M.G.M., then wherever they could hang their hat. You know my favourite story about them. They used to say 'We have these sets of the Old Bailey, a submarine, a Venetian palace, a Western saloon. Go away and write us a ninety-minute film featuring them all - by next Friday!' You could write a romantic thriller, a murder mystery, but the plot had to encompass whatever sets they had inherited. How I came to meet Phil Levene was ... I was out late one night driving home and they were running a programme on the radio called 'Just Before Midnight', a kind of *Twilight Zone*-type spot for radio. The one I was listening to had been written by Phil Levene and I thought, that's a kind of strange, bent mind, he'd be good on The Avengers. So I got in touch with him and that's how we met." Who exactly were the Danziger Brothers? Were they rich guys who decided to produce television shows? "They made one movie in America called *Man On The Eiffel Tower*, with Charles Laughton. One of them was married to a Goggenheim, a rich Jewish family from New York who ended up owning hotels - I believe that the London Mayfair is still theirs. Then they got into producing films for television and just churned them out, hundreds of them, including *Mark Saber*, *The Man From Interpol*, *Richard The Lionheart*, *The Vise...*" (Ed. For those not in the know, Mark Saber was about s detective with a difference: The actor who played him, Donald Gray, had lost an arm during active service. His lack of punch, both physically and character-wise, didn't deter the television viewers from tuning in to the show. The programme was a resounding success. More than 52 episodes were made - well over half of them written by Brian. Three months after it ended its run, the detective returned as *Saber of London*. Brian's input this time around being two dozen or more of the 83 episodes.) So, what difficulties were inherent in writing thriller scripts for a one-armed sleuth? "Well, we never referred to the fact that he only had one arm. In those days we wrote a script a week *for every Danziger show!* In fact I remember that way back then, we had just the three channels: ITV, BBC1 and BBC2 and at 8-o'clock one night I'd written everything!"

Dan wanted to know what was going on in Brian's mind at the time. Did he write from instinct, about anything? Did he pick up on something he had read about in the newspapers? He obviously had no time to compose each page of the script. Was it just a case of knocking it out, being a professional and just doing it?



Conceding that he didn't have the time to have anything going on in his head, Brian admitted that he'd been lucky, because everything he'd written had been made - so he could learn from his mistakes. He'd never had a script turned down? Not once? "Not with the Danziger Brothers. I wrote 39 scripts for them - there were probably more, some I don't remember." (Ed: He's right. There were more. Well over 50 at the last count, including *Mark Saber*, *Saber of London*, *The Man From Interpol* and *The Vise*). "They [the Danzigers] always said, pinch from the best. So I rewrote **High Noon** and called it 'The Spanish Sword' and re-set it in the Crusaders' era." (Ed: This is probably 'King Arthur's Sword,' an episode from the Danziger Brothers series *Richard the Lionheart*.)

Saying that he had read somewhere that Brian never did research, but wrote things off the top of his head and then went to the reference books, Dan asked if he still worked this way? Brian nodded. "The thing is, you don't have to research anything too deeply, because everything I write is for the layman - who wouldn't know the difference anyway. Novels are different. In a novel people can look at a line eight times and say, I don't think that's right. On television or in film, it's gone. If they're thinking about whether the hardware is wrong, then the film isn't working." Had he any ambition to write a novel? "I nearly did... I did a book of short stories, which only got published in Germany! Writing novels is too much a risk on my time. Supposing it wasn't published, I would have wasted a year of my career. It's a bit of a waste."

Suggesting that Brian had kind of anticipated Clive Barker when he wrote and directed the *Captain Kronos* movie. Dan asked him how he felt when the film had only made a small ripple in the big pond known as the British Film Industry? If the movie had done phenomenally well, Dan felt confident that Brian's

career might have gone in an entirely different direction. He may well have gone on to become a major writer/director like, say, Oliver Stone, or even (and this brought a twinkle to Brian's eye) the Stephen J. Cannell of Britain, writing, producing and directing his own work. Was Brian proud of *Kronos*? "I like it, yer. I think that it's quite a good movie. It was my intention that it would take off and I would do several *Kronos* movies. I also thought that it would have made a terrific television series. But it never sold. It hardly played anywhere here. It was almost used as a tax loss. You know, it escaped rather than being released. It appears in a lot of guides now - even *Time Out* like it!" Would he have liked to have carried on directing? "Yes. Because by the time I had finished *Kronos*, I had learned to do it better." In which case, Dan asked, why hadn't he directed on *The Avengers*? "I could have done. I knew that I could do it. But I didn't think that it would have done me any good. I knew that it would be hard work. And at the end of it I would have just directed an episode of *The Avengers*. I felt that I was better off staying on features." To do this, of course, one had to become a member of the A.C.T.T.? "Yes. I applied for my ticket [in order to get his producer credit] and they turned me down! So I wrote to them and pointed out that I had been in the industry 11 years and had provided millions of people with work. I got my ticket! Once you had this you could become a director or anything else."

Returning to *The Avengers*, I asked Brian to explain why, between them, he and Philip Levene had scripted nine-tenths of the *Rigg* colour episodes? Was I correct in assuming that this was due to the fact that A.B.C. TV in the USA were at the time engaged in a dispute with the Writer's Guild over overseas residual payments for their work? Brian considered this for a moment and replied: "No. Definitely not! The reason that Phil and I wrote most of the scripts was because I couldn't find enough

writers with the flair needed to write for the show." A comment which led Dan to ask what had happened to all the writers Brian had used on the Rigg b/w shows: people like Martin Woodhouse - whose name he had seen on a mystery novel in his local library, complete with a back cover credit: Creator of the TV series The Avengers! (We all giggled at this.) Or Colin Finbow, writer of "A Surfeit of H2O?" Brian's reply was far from what we expected. "Colin Finbow didn't write a word of A Surfeit of H2O! Funnily enough, he's now a director. He was a schoolteacher in those days, who had written a play for television which I quite liked - and in those days I hired writers on the basis of things I'd seen them do. Colin just couldn't write film and he couldn't write television. The whole of 'A Surfeit of H2O' is mine. John Lucarotti was a writer and I didn't touch 'Castle De'ath.' He's now living abroad. All of Phil Levene's scripts were re-written by me - although the construction remained totally Philip's. Phil was like Linda Thorson, he had absolutely no sense of humour whatsoever. So, although his scripts worked in terms of the plot, he had none of the things that made The Avengers, The Avengers." And Roger Marshall? "Most of his stuff went through unscathed. When it didn't, though, he fell out with me ... and it's funny that twenty years later, it still rankles." (Ed: Brian was referring to comments made by Roger Marshall in the Channel Four Without Walls documentary, when he said 'It [The Avengers] suddenly became Brian Clemens' show.') "Well, I wouldn't dream of telling Dean Hargrove how to do a Father Dowling Mystery episode if I was writing for the series. It's his show. If he says Father Dowling wouldn't !^*! a nun in a corner, I accept that he knows these things."

Dan wondered if Brian had ever written under the pseudonym Norman Hudis? Brian shook his head. Why had Dan asked this? Dan explained. Several episodes of *It Takes a Thief* and *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* carried a credit in the TV guide: written by Norman Hudis, followed by the credit, in parentheses, The Avengers. Brian was mystified by this. He had used the name Tony O'Grady - but only when moonlighting from the Danziger Brothers. (Ed. This isn't quite true. He penned several scripts under the name O'Grady when he was employed on the Blackman Avengers: *The Protectors* [ABC-TV, 1964] and *The Baron* [ITC/Filmmakers 1966/67] when he was working on the filmed Avengers.)

Stating that he found it difficult to believe that when Patrick Macnee and Diana Rigg stepped onto the studio set they would look at a script and say 'Oh, this doesn't sound right - let's change it,' Dan asked about the improvisation that Patrick, in particular, places so much stock in. How much of what he and Diana have said over the years is correct? "None of it. Not a word. I've got the scripts to prove it! Compare these with what was shot and let's see where the improvisation comes in. There wasn't any. What used to happen, occasionally - and happens all the time in TV and movies- is that you get into a scene and find that, say the door wouldn't open or the window wouldn't close, so they'd send for me. I'd go down to the set between takes and between us we

would work something out which was acceptable. As for all that making the lines up, they'd like to think that they did. After all this time I dare say that they believe that they did."

I'd made reference in my books that someone had been sent over here by ABC-TV in America to oversee the Thorson series. Was this, as I believed, Gordon L.T. Scott? "No. Gordon Scott was the money man. When you make anything, there's always a fight. The creative people come sliding down and take off like Concorde and the accounts people move in and say hold on. They pull you back all the time. Gordon was really in charge of the money ..." For the American backers, the ABC network? "No. He was E.M.I. - an ABC (UK) man. What happened was this. At the end of the war - the second world war - when Britain was making hundreds of those stiff-upper-lip movies, they were making this film about the army. Gordon Scott was a Major in the Gordon Highlanders, and he was employed as technical adviser on the picture. He liked what he saw about the film business, so when he was demobbed he found himself a job in the industry and eventually became a production manager. Even when he got a production credit, which he did on several movies, he was really just a superior production man who would say things like "We're running two days over schedule and over-budget, so we'd better do this...!" So if the American guy I'd referred to wasn't Gordon Scott, who was the man responsible for representing the American network's interest? "There was never any interference. There was a time when a particular bod was causing friction. I had a private word with him and said 'Look. If I tell the network what you're doing, then you'll be on the next plane home.' We never had any further trouble out of him. So that was nothing more than him trying to justify himself being there by saying 'Can you call a lift an elevator?' etc. I said no. He was quite a nice guy really and we went to the courtesy of showing him the first cut of every episode and so on. So, no, they didn't have any input at all - and there's a reason for that. Because we made them before we sold them; it was an existing show that they had bought in to. And, because they - nor anybody else - ever really realised what made The Avengers work, they were frightened. For instance, I think that they would have loved to have gotten rid of the bowler hat - or Steed even - because he wasn't the American-type, conventional hero. But they were never sure if the success of the show was because he wore a bowler hat!"

To be continued next time, when we'll learn a great deal more about the inside story of The Avengers, and publish - for the first time anywhere - EXCLUSIVE, never seen before, pics of Elizabeth Shepherd and Patrick Macnee working together in "The Town Of No Return" (see 'Last Shot' pic for preview) Share Brian's views on The New Avengers, The Avengers On Stage, the Bond movies and, well, a whole host of goodies that you won't find anywhere else and certainly can't afford to miss.

