

# THE WRITE STUFF

## Brian Clemens, sentenced to manual labour

### Part Two

Dan had a question about *The Professionals*. Was Brian concerned or disappointed that people didn't show as much interest in that show? "No. I am only disappointed because it means, commercially, that it hasn't sold to your part of the world." Was he proud of the programme? How did Brian think it stood up to *The Avengers*? "Well, it's more conventional of course. It's a straight-forward action show." Dan had never been able to understand why the company had the money to continue to produce *The Professionals*, but not *The Avengers*. It mystified him. "Well, it isn't really such a mystery. Like your country, the people who run the television industry over here are all idiots! They come out of University or whatever with a degree and have absolutely no idea of what a film camera looks like - but that's becoming true of all industries now. I mean, you get guys running a big motor company who can't even drive! In the old days at least he would know how to make a motor car. Here it's almost a virtue if you don't. In the old days, the great days of Harry Cohn and the Goldwyn's, they knew all about making pictures. They could make judgements on scripts and things - even if they were only instinctive. They couldn't write a script but nevertheless had a fair idea whether it was a good one or a bad one."

*Danger Man* [*Secret Agent* in the USA] came next. Who asked Brian to write the first episode for the [half hour] series? Did he know that it was the *premiere* episode? "Yes. Not only that, but I was employed on the series as script editor." I knew that, of course. What I was looking for was some background information on Ralph Smart. Despite the fact that Smart's name appeared on just about everything produced by ITC from the mid-Fifties and ten years afterwards, very few people know anything about him. Brian was eager to explain. "I'll tell you why - and I didn't realise this at the time - Ralph had a Guild deal, which meant that he got royalties from any script that had his name on it. So what he'd do, is to take everyone's scripts and change a couple of things and put his name on it! I'm not

sure if Ralph was born in Australia. He certainly made movies there. His name appears on a little movie called *Bush Christmas*, which was done about the time that they [the Australian Film Industry] were having success with the Chips Rafferty movies. His name pops-up on other movies too. He wrote for Will Hay. He has a credit on a Max Miller film. I worked with Ralph on *H.G.Wells' Invisible Man* series. The script editor was Ian Stuart Black, who went on to become associate producer on *Danger Man*, when I was script editor. The first one I wrote was *View From the Villa* - and there are several nice stories about that. Because some of it was set in Italy, we scouted around and found Portmeirion, well, that is to say that it was there and I think that we were the first company to ever film there. And, of course, Patrick McGoochan went on location there and it stuck in his head and he returned there to film *The Prisoner*. The other interesting thing is that the filming [of *Danger Man*] was all done by the second unit, we only sent Patrick and a couple of actors, and I remember Ralph Smart viewing the daily rushes and then the second unit director phoned in for comment and Ralph said 'The dailies are terrible. I don't like them. Go back and re-shoot this.' The director told him 'You'll never be a bloody film director!' The man they were talking to was John Schlesinger!"

Dan interjected his view that he had never understood why, when half the production people who had worked on *Danger Man* moved over to *The Prisoner*, Ralph Smart didn't. Neither Brian nor myself could answer this, of course, although Brian suggested that it was probably because Ralph Smart only had a deal on *Danger Man* "Besides which, he was getting pretty old by then and I think that it's probable that McGoochan didn't want him there. You see, Ralph got in with Lew Grade, then McGoochan got in with Lew Grade - first to do *Danger Man* and then to do *The Prisoner* - and I suspect that he didn't want Ralph..." I couldn't let the opportunity slip by to sound Brian out about the reasoning behind

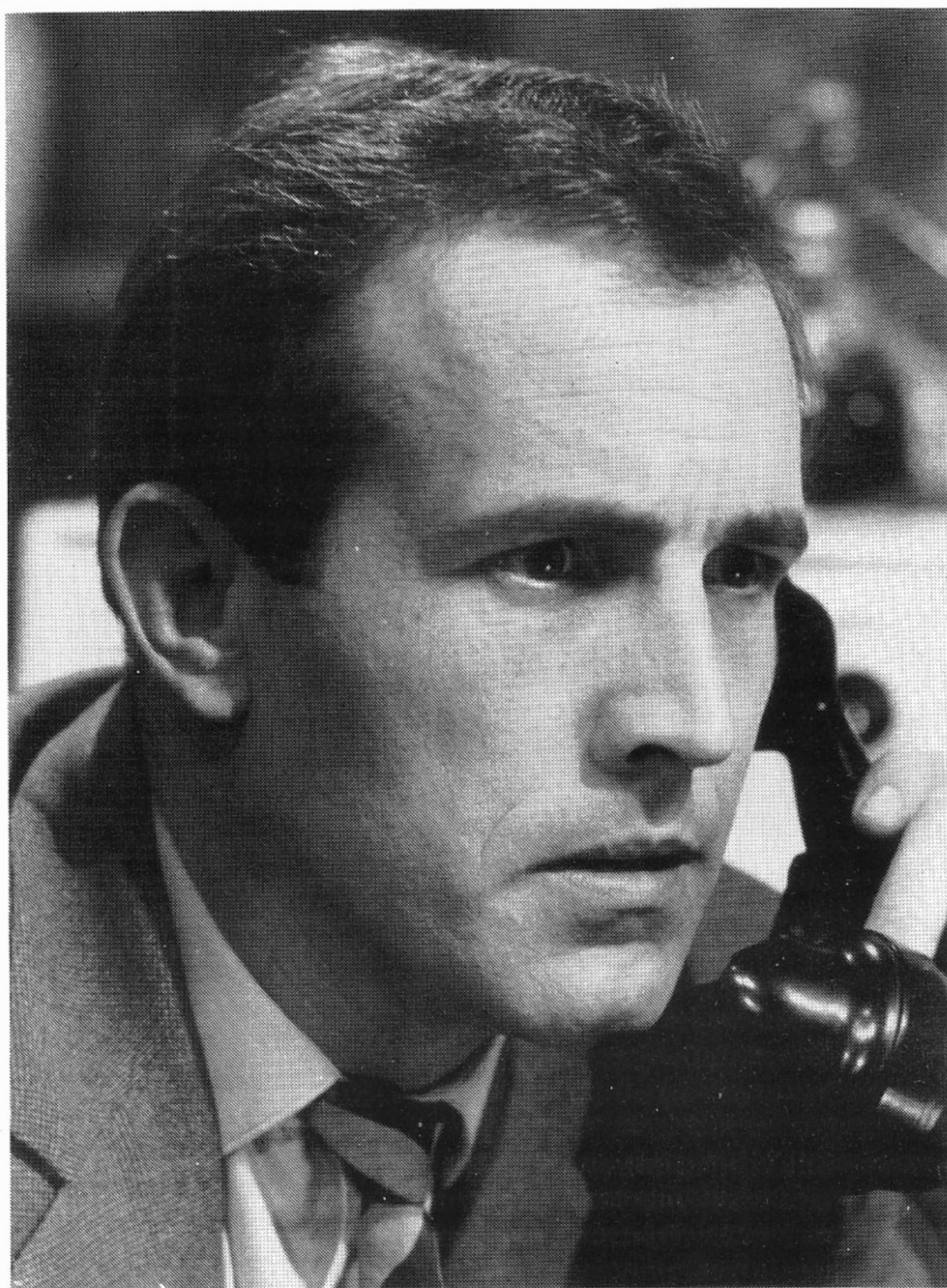
McGoohan opting to use numbers instead of names for the characters in *The Prisoner*. Did he believe, as do myself and hundreds more, that McGoohan took this route because had he used the name John Drake instead of Number 6, Smart, as creator of Danger Man, would have been entitled to a percentage of the profits? "Well, maybe. The prisoner situation actually existed during the war. What happened was that they had trained certain agents, gave them tremendous knowledge about where they were going etc., and then something happened and they couldn't go there anymore - their mission was aborted. So they were stuck with a man wandering around London with all this knowledge. What they did was to take some of these agents and put them on an island in the Outer Hebrides and they sat the war out. They couldn't kill them because we're not that kind of people. But neither could they allow them to be running around and be captured. George Markstein knew about these things because he was in Military Intelligence. So he created *The Prisoner* and then shipped out of it because Pat McGoohan sort of took it off in a wild way. But later, George sort of set the record straight by writing the book of it, *The Cooler*. It's the same thing, but the book is the *real* thing, whereas *The Prisoner* was *McGoohan*."

Dan pre-empted my next question. In so far as he could remember, Brian had written quite a few of the half-hour Danger Man scripts (Ed. **nine in all**) but had never done a story for the hour-long shows. Brian confirmed that he hadn't, which led me to ask him about David Stone. Who was he? "David Stone was an American, I think, who came into the series as a kind of American network overseer." Why had I asked this? I explained. Stone is credited with writing a Danger Man script [*The Ubiquitous Mr Lovegrove*] which, aside from being high on the list of everyone's favourite Danger Man stories, was 100% Brian Clemens. Stone's name never appeared again, but several people - myself included - had frequently asked the question: are David Stone and Brian Clemens one and the same? Obviously not, but from what Brian told me...? "Well, if it's the *story*, it could have been a story I left there. I don't really know, it's hard to prove now. But when you're script editing, you keep bashing out all these storylines and see if they grab somebody. When you leave the series, the stories stay

there... I don't know. It's possible."

It is true, of course, that ITC were turning out show after show in the Fifties and Sixties. Was Brian just on *The Avengers*? "Yes, we did just *The Avengers*. You see, what happened was this. ITC was Low Grade, and the great thing about Low was - and this will never happen again - if he liked it he made it - it didn't have to go through a committee." He explained what he meant. As mentioned earlier, he had recently completed a script for the *Highlander* TV series.. "I mean, this Highlander thing is ludicrous. They've had my script for a week now and they want to shoot it within another week - but nobody's come back to me with any comments! I think I know why. I'm sure that the girl in the Paris office who I sent it to likes it, but she doesn't know whether she likes it or not until she's heard what the other people, *The Committee*, has to say. This happens an awful lot now, the committee system. Even if I bump into a guy whose just read my script, he wouldn't say anything about it until he has heard all the other comments. It's a terrible situation. (Ed. **The script was filmed.**) But ITC was a big company. We were just *The Avengers* really." Brian had nevertheless written scripts for several ITC shows. "Oh, sure. I did those as a sort of holiday, a break. They were making their shows literally across the studio, their office was just around the corner from ours..." In which case, Dan asked, was he ever approached to write a story for *The Prisoner*? "No. I was too busy at the time with *The Avengers*. I think I would have been approached because everybody else was." He had done scripts for *The Champions* and *The Baron*. "The Baron was a favour, 'cause Terry Nation had really gotten himself into trouble and asked me if I would write him a script. So I did one - I did two eventually. Those were done on the Old Boy Network basis, with him and Dennis Spooner." I doubled back to an earlier subject, Ralph Smart, and asked Brian about the scripts that he had co-wrote with him. His reply set me back on my heels. "All the credits that he shares are his penned onto *mine*. *I never worked on his scripts*. Ralph always came in after they were written. It was a fait accompli."

It was something that we'd discussed dozens of times in the past, but an avenue we had never



fully explored: the origins of The Avengers. Everyone knew that Brian came in on the second story, *Brought To Book*, the second part of the introductory story *Hot Snow*, written by Ray Rigby, from a draft by Patrick Brawn... Anticipating the question, Brian stopped me there. "They were *written* at the same time. I knew where the first story was going to finish, so I just continued it..." This made sense, of course, Brian had to know how the first story ended. So, who was Patrick Brawn? I couldn't recall seeing his name on anything since then. "He was a script editor. He'd done things before, whether he did anything afterwards I don't know. If you look through the TV Times during the period you'll

see his name somewhere." Dan was eager to find out who had actually created the Steed character? I said that the name was in the first script [the Brawn draft handed in in November 1960] but in that one, Keel was called Dr David Dent. Brian corrected me and said that the Keel character came from *Police Surgeon*. I couldn't accept this and reminded Brian that Hendry's character in *Police Surgeon* had been called Dr Geoffrey Brent: obviously this had been changed sometime between the draft and the shooting script stages. Brian put forward his side of the story. "As far as I remember things, I recall being called in - probably with Patrick Brawn, certainly with Sydney Newman and maybe Leonard White - and it being explained to me that they had this series [*Police Surgeon*] and it wasn't that good, the only good thing about it being the character of a young doctor. They wanted to progress this into another series which Sydney Newman said they were calling The Avengers 'I don't know what the \*!#& it means, but it's a great title,' I always remember him saying that. I think that

what we were doing was what they do all the time now in America, which is, if James Garner is a big hit in a TV series, as soon as he gets out of it they put him in another series and he carries the audience - his fan club - with him." \*I acknowledged here that while I had always credited Brian with having created The Avengers, I like to think (and Brian could shoot me down if he wished to) that his finest hour was in taking the series he had worked on as a writer onto film, thereby creating the show as we know it. Brian settled for this. He was adamant, however, that he was there from the very beginning, from day one. I had no argument with that. Could we proceed from there? Brian nodded. So was it

right to assume that the early days must have been a somewhat hit-and-miss affair? "Oh, very. They did have some scripts in hand when we started, but it was hit-and-miss as to whether they would be used. There wasn't a committee like we have now, with network people - who don't know anything. I can remember it being a committee of bright people, like myself, Patrick Macnee, and Peter Hammond in particular. We'd all put in import. Pat would say let's put her in black leather - well, whether that's actually how it happened I can't remember, Pat may have said that, somebody did. I don't think anyone actually sat down and wrote a description of a girl in black leather who was emancipated and so-and-so - it just happened like that. What would happen is that someone would read the script and say 'I can't do that, why don't we do this' and it gradually *evolved*. The biggest evolution was the fact that we had no money! The biggest contribution to the beginning of the real Avengers - the Honor Blackman Avengers, not the Ian Hendry Avengers - was because they [ABC-TV] were running out of money; the budget was tight and the scripts were *ambitious*. It was Peter Hammond, myself, and other people who said, well, okay, so it's supposed to take place in London Airport. What we'll do is, we'll shoot past an aeroplane propeller and put an engine sound on it. This happened all the time. And then, when it carried on - when we had the money - we didn't show London Airport because by then it had become very much like a cartoon, very expressionistic, like German film noir. And it was helped by the fact that it was in black-and-white. When we went into colour, you'd get different sets of problems because you can't quite get that impressionistic thing in colour." Jumping backward, I asked why, having written just two stories for the Hendry series, Brian didn't write a single story for the second season [Blackman, Season One.] I thought this odd, particularly when I had seen and read (or thought that I'd seen and read) an inter-departmental memo to the effect that it was he who suggested, when they lost Ian Hendry, that Steed's partner be changed to that of a woman. Brian wouldn't take credit for this. "But it's not impossible because in that period there were only a few writers and everything was collected under one roof, so there was a great interchange of ideas." Yes, but that didn't explain why he didn't turn in at

least one story for the first Blackman season. "I think that I must have been on Danger Man or something - doing something else." Fine. So he returned at the beginning of the second Blackman season and wrote the season opener *Brief For Murder*, which included the 'biog.' for John Steed - the bit about him acquiring his wealth as a thank-you from an oil rich Sheikh. Or did it? This certainly doesn't appear in the episode I've seen. Was the biog. dialogue in the script? "Oh, yes. Certainly. It was quite fun to do back-up stories. We did it with Di Rigg in some way [in *The House That Jack Built*] because The Avengers hangs in space and just once in a while it was quite nice to grab onto an actually biography..." Seeing the show for the first time as an American, Dan said that it was quite nice to watch the series with no previous knowledge of the characters or the format. Indeed, the fact that he didn't know anything about Steed and Mrs Peel, or who they were working for, or why they were doing what they did, was very nebulous and strange. The fact that the two of them would show up, usually independently, at the scene and that they obviously knew each other and obviously worked together was fun. There was no superior then, like *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* with Mr Waverly or anything like that. He liked that and felt that they had lost this later on. When they went to the Thorson shows and the introduction of Mother, the mystery had dissipated. It wasn't until he had watched some of the Blackman shows [On the Arts & Entertainment channel] that he realised that it wasn't like that before. There had been superiors: One-Ten, Quilpie etc. "Well, actually, that began with the scripts that I wrote for the Blackman's, because they are *not* linked to One-Ten, One-Twelve etc. I take credit for that area of creation - and also the fact that we never used extras. That was the first thing I did when I took over the filmed series. I said that there will be no extras in this picture - the only people we'll see are the ones important to the plot. There were several reasons for that, the main reason being that I always believed that if we'd put Steed or Emma against a group of ordinary people standing in a line for a bus, they would look ridiculous. If they only inhabit their own world, it's like a pantomime, a fairy story. We never killed women either - *although there were a few that I would have liked to have done!* "Despite pleas from

myself and Dan, he refused to name names or be drawn further on this. "The Avengers was all one long crisis, really but enjoyable nevertheless. The Avengers was... all one great family. That's what I miss."

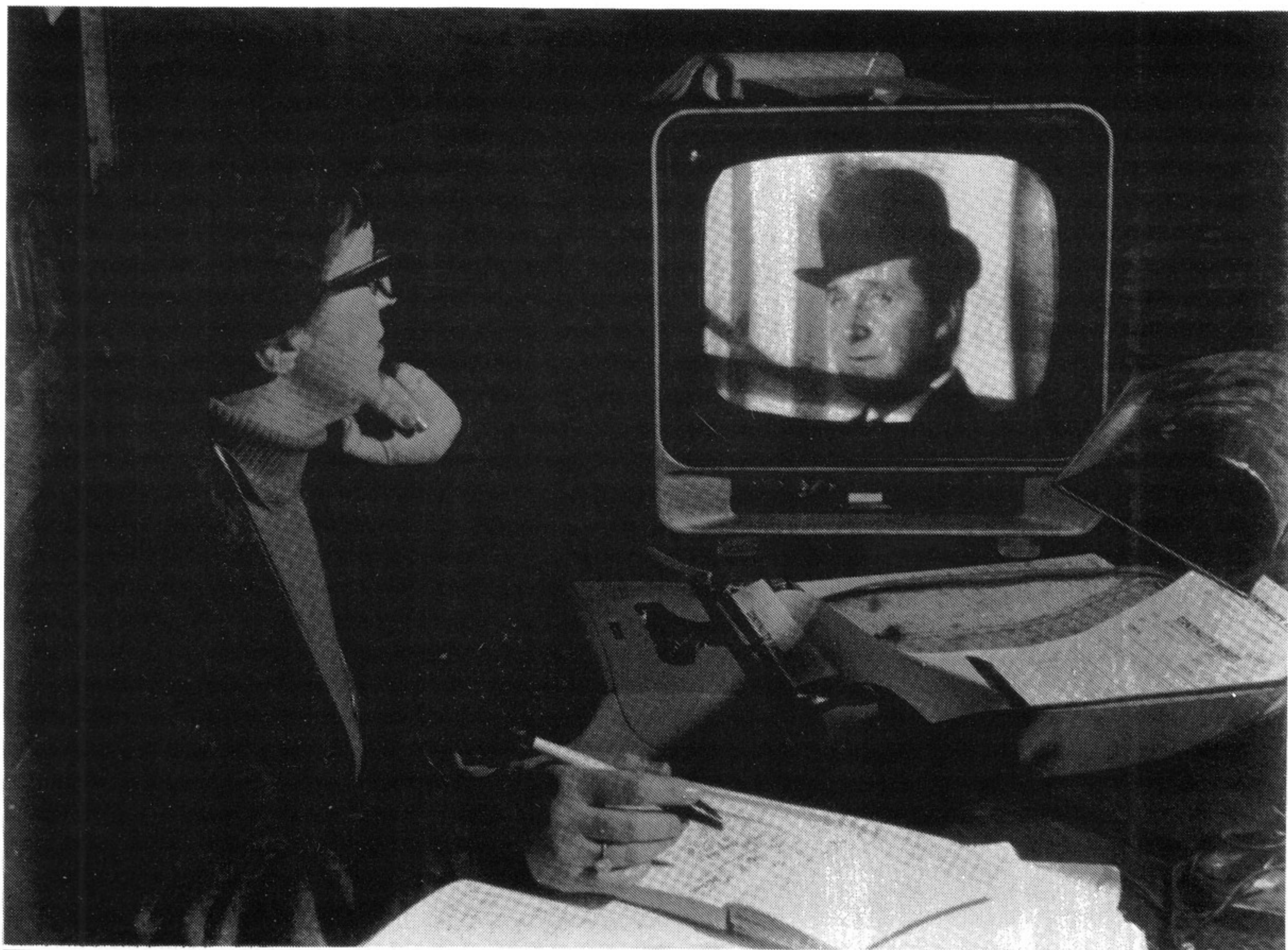
It was time to test Brian's little grey cells. Some-time during the second Blackman season, he had proposed the idea [to Howard Thomas] of doing an Avengers movie, for the big screen, in partnership with someone named Louis De Rochemont. Could he remember this? "Yes, but that wasn't my idea. My idea was to take the *series* onto film - but a film sounded good. Let's go back. Howard Thomas never understood The Avengers - what made The Avengers tick. He had been a sports reporter before that, and he was always wanting The Avengers to be involved at the Wembley Cup final... because they had lots of footage taken there in the archives. I told him that it wasn't that kind of series. As soon as you get into documentary footage, the series has gone! So I fought him - I had no power then, but I fought him all the way and that rankled... I think that had something to do with me being fired later on. So when I started saying that we ought to put The Avengers on film - or make a movie of The Avengers - and got Howard Thomas involved and interested, typically, he brought in Louis De Rochemont, whose main claim to fame was that he had made the movie *The House on Thirty-Second Street* - a marvellous movie, shot just like a newsreel. I met de Rochmont and he had no idea at all about The Avengers. It was ridiculous!" But the de Rochmont connection carried on for quite a long time? "Oh, yes. I thought, well, he's a Hollywood producer who has made some good movies, he surely must be capable of making The Avengers. In the past he had made stuff like *The Naked City*, so I went along with them. I even produced a storyline." (Ed. The project ground to a halt in 1963.)

Were there any great obstacles that had to be overcome when getting the filmed series under way? A crisis that gave him sleepless nights? "The Avengers was all one long crisis, really - but enjoyable nevertheless. The Avengers was all one great family. That's what I miss. It's curious, really, but it's the same on a movie, even if it's only a six week shoot, you become like a complete family. That's why there are so many

affairs on movies, because you are living out of each others pockets. And then the movie finishes. You go away and a week later you meet the same people again - who are not strangers to you. But that's gone."

I harked back to the time when he and his associates were booted off The Avengers at the end of the Rigg colour episodes and the reins were handed to John Bryce. When I had spoken to Cyd Child, she recalled that the production took a nose-dive. Indeed, she went on to suggest that Bryce and his team appeared to know nothing about film production: someone would set up the camera, someone cried 'Roll' and everybody would get on with it, race around and look busy. "Well, because John Bryce was not really a film producer, Gordon Scott sort of took over the practical aspects of the production and he brought in some pretty tired old directors that hadn't been any good when they were young, like Vernon Sewell. I remember that one thing I said when I came back and looked at these films [*Invitation To a Killing* and *The Great, Great Britain Crime*] was 'That's a tight line shot.' It had lots of people standing in a row - which was really a very old fashioned form of shooting. They had no television technique..." Dan didn't really understand this. Hadn't John Bryce produced the Blackman shows?... Yes. But he didn't really. He was *there*. If you were a producer in those days, you really didn't have to be very clever. You just sort of said 'I agree with that. Let's change this...'

Dan persisted. So what was so *bad* about the first two Thorson shows - other than the fact that they had given her a blonde wig. The way they were shot, Brian said, made them totally incomprehensible. Did he believe that they, Telemen, would have stayed around if Diana Rigg had remained on the show? "If she had stayed, I don't think that they would have fired us until we had come to the natural end of the series. But she was leaving and they took the opportunity to fire Albert and myself - and Laurie wouldn't work on the show with us gone." So, Dan said, after they had filmed these terrible episodes, they approached him and asked Brian to come back - which must have involved a great deal of hardship in the early stages. "Oh God, yes. When I came back... well, they asked me



## A continuity girl hangs onto Pat's every word ...

first, I mean, it's not generally known but *they didn't ask Albert back!* They asked me and I said I'm not coming back without Albert! I could have taken over totally as producer, instead of co-producer, but I wouldn't have gone back without Albert. When I came back, Terry [Nation] was script-editing and Gordon Scott was the on-line producer, and they were in a terrible muddle because Gordon Scott was saying 'We can't produce that, it will cost too much'. So Terry would go away and rewrite it and then come back and Gordon Scott would say 'No! We still can't do it. Go away and redo it again.' I came in and said 'Right! The first thing we do is we STOP! Terry will produce his script and then it's up to you the production team to facilitate it.' Otherwise, of course, this could have gone on forever. I made some hard and fast ground rules. I knew that Terry's script [*Invasion of the Earthmen*] wasn't terrible and because it was a long series

we could easily slip it in later, as a 'turkey,' so I said 'We'll put the other two stories on the backburner and we'll do *The Forget-Me-Knot* - let's get that going.' That's the first thing I did when I came back. Having cleared up the mess and got things on the way, I sat down and worked on *The Forget-Me-Knot* - which is a good episode, I think. (We nod our agreement.) I'm pleased with it because its the only time that Steed lost and got the girl in the entire series." (Ed. Which means, of course - as described earlier - that Di Rigg did indeed *return* to the series to film the entire episode, and puts paid to the opinion held by some that the episode was a Mrs Peel story, with the Tara King sequences being added later.) So, I asked, what instigated the reasoning behind this? Why did Brian believe that the time was ripe to have Steed's partner hand-over her position *on screen*. They had never done this before, despite Steed having changed partners on sev-

eral occasions. "Because we were in the middle of a run. It was okay to stop the series and then come back six months later with a new cast. In the middle of a run it would have been ludicrous. They wanted to kill her [Mrs Peel] off and I said I loathed this because the whole of your audience hates that episode: you know, you're in love with Emma Peel, so the last thing you want to do is switch on the set and see her killed..." Dan asked if he had ever considered the idea of simply recasting someone new as Emma Peel? "No - because we were in the middle of a run again. I would have done this on *The New Avengers* if Pat had been younger - I mean if the years hadn't have intervened, I would have certainly brought in a new Emma Peel. Definitely!"

Elizabeth Shepherd was their first choice for Emma Peel - and turned out to be the wrong choice. Who actually employed her? "Julian Wintle, originally - *without tests*." And what was wrong with her? "She had two things wrong with her. One, like Linda Thorson, she had absolutely no sense of humour - none. I mean, women with a sense of humour are very, very difficult to find. Jane Fonda has no sense of humour. If you watch her in *Plaza Suite*, which is a very funny part, she could only play it for reality, butch. Liz Shepherd was the same. But she also had a husband who was an actor - or boyfriend who was an actor - and, the old syndrome, he wasn't working but she was and he wanted to get in there [on *The Avengers*] *and she kept turning up with whole scenes rewritten!* Well, you can't have that on a television series. You might be able to tolerate it on a big movie if it's Meryl Streep, but not on television, and certainly not from an untried actress. One could put up with those kind peccadilloes if she was delivering on screen - but she wasn't. She was quite beautiful, really. Beautiful - but cold." From the photographs taken of Elizabeth Shepherd and Patrick Macnee strutting their stuff in [the first version] of *The Town of No Return* (see pics, loaned by Brian, on page 27) one gets the impression that they were going with another Honor Blackman type? "Yer - well, Julian was. I wasn't producer then, I was the associate producer and they didn't test." So they viewed the episode she had filmed with Patrick Macnee and decided that they'd blown it. Out went Elizabeth and in came Diana? "Yer - well sort of. She looked great, but you never really know... you

can never tell if it's going to work until you get your artistes working side by side..." Dan chipped in here, to ask if they went back to re-do *The Town of No Return* episode with Diana. He asked this because (and only the skilled eye of a professional magazine art director would have spotted this), when he had originally seen the Rigg b/w episodes, he had formed the impression that the first ones they did were shows like *The Cybernauts*, *Death At Bargain Prices* etc., because he had spotted that the typeface [used on the title credits] was different to the ones that came later: it was narrower and Di Rigg's semblance in these is slightly different, she looked younger. Brian wasn't sure about this, but they did cross over to *The Murder Market*. "We'd only done about two days shooting on that. Very little material had actually been filmed that couldn't be used. We certainly didn't have to reshoot that episode in its entirety, cause little of the material had been shot on Liz Shepherd. When we got Diana Rigg, we simply reshot again. But *Town of No Return* was obviously an whole episode, so we had to pull out all the bits with Liz Shepherd in them and reshoot them with Diana - this was done sometime later, of course. Even then, when we realised that we weren't using Liz Shepherd, we stopped production and spent two or three days on the floor running tests on about eight actresses." Diana Rigg being one of them. I reminded him that Diana herself is on record as saying that she thought that she had failed to impress. "No. That's not true, because we screen-tested about eight girls and we had this big showing. Howard Thomas was there, Julian was there, others came along - we were all there - and we ran these eight tests. At the end of it, I was leaning towards Moria Redmond with Diana Rigg second. It was a hung parliament, except for Howard Thomas or Julian, I can't really remember, who said they would go with Diana Rigg because she was a new face. I'd written little scenes for the tests because we wanted to see how they would work alongside Pat - I did the same for Jo Lumley on *The New Avengers*." I jogged his memory. Diana remembers having to race about with a gun in her hand, then place a bandage on Pat Macnee's hand. "On his *head*. Yes, that was the scene. He'd been shot and she had to bandage his head. Then they had a typical Avengers scene to do where they had to talk about anything but the bandage and I recall that

we had her then turn to the camera to show that she felt comfortable handling the props.” I explained that I had made exhaustive attempts to locate both this and all - or anything - from the unused Elizabeth Shepherd story, together with the two [John Bryce produced] Linda Thorson episodes, AND the Diana Rigg/Patrick Macnee promo teaser trailers. Despite my being confident that *I know where these are stored*, for whatever the reason no-one was prepared to grant me authorisation to view them - or indeed confirm that they *do* exist! Brian said he couldn't understand this. Someone must have them, probably on negative in the archives. (Ed. The search goes on.)

“He was very slim and tiny for a stunt man and he took a lot of stick from the crew because he used to sit around on the set wearing black leather and a wig!” - Cyd Child

Referring back to the letter Brian remitted to Brian Tesler in 1964 in defence of retaining the tag scenes (see page 18, *Stay Tuned* Vol2#3) I asked Brian what he could remember about the in-fighting, with Tesler or anyone else? “I had a great deal more time for Brian Tesler than I did for Howard Thomas. Tesler was, after all, simply doing his job. There were two sorts of people who overviewed The Avengers, ones who had literal minds and others who enjoyed it - that was the biggest battle. There were those who said ‘Can't we make them MI6? Can't they have a boss? Can't it be more real? Don't you think it's silly... all the usual objections which, if I'd answered, would have left us ending up with *The Saint* - The Saint with a girl! But Tesler was a good man. He later gave me the go ahead on *The Professionals*, without recourse to committees - although he turned down my original title *The A-Squad*. He didn't think that this was saleable as a title. A year later *The A Team* turned up...!”

And the battles - with other writers? I mentioned the oft-quoted Roger Marshall angst when Brian played about with Marshall's *A Funny Thing Happened On the Way To the Station* script. “It wasn't that *Funny Thing* was a bad script, it just wasn't an *Avengers* script. Dennis Spooner once said that The Avengers was in my head, that I knew what it was and what it wasn't, but I could never sit down and write a bible about it. I would know, instinctively.”

When I interviewed her, Cyd Child had dropped the bombshell that prior to her joining The Avengers on the Rigg colour series [as Diana's stunt double] *Diana had been doubled by a man!* Perhaps Brian had an anecdote or two? He grinned at the memory. “Oh, sure, all the time.

Billy Westerly. He's now an assistant director, you'll see his name on lots of things. He was very slim and tiny for a stuntman and he took a lot of stick from the crew because he used to sit around on the set wearing black leather and a wig! The stuntmen were always kidding him about this and were always saying things like ‘How about a date,

Billy?’ Why was this? There must have been other stunt *women* around at that time. “There was, but they all had huge backsides cause they used to be riding doubles. They just didn't have the figure. Diana was very slim, her figure was very boyish - no bum and no breasts.” (Ed. Look out for an interview with Billy Westerly. Coming up soon.)

Was the fact that he had made Emma Peel a dab hand with a sword (as evinced in the introductory sequence of *The Town of No Return*, when she teases Steed with an epee, and again, more forcefully, in *The Master Minds*) because her predecessor Mrs Gale had been handy with the weapon? “No. I'll tell you exactly why that was. I wanted to give her an entrance and there is no better entrance than to have someone doing this and that with a sword. She does so [to Steed, when he calls at her apartment in *The Town of No Return*] and then we lift her up. [See her in close-up] It was a theatrical device.”

Dan picked up on the fact that, despite the fact that we associate the Mrs Peel of the b/w shows with leather, they kept changing Diana's costumes from mini skirts to everyday two-piece suits and dresses. “Yes. There were several reasons for that. The main reason was that Diana got bored wearing leather all the time - you could always tell when a fight was coming up, because she magically changed into the leather fighting suit. When you're doing a long-running television series, you get ever so bored just getting in and out of the same old clothes -and it starts to



show. And also, we felt that the audience would get bored just looking at this girl in black leather all the time. (Dan and I shake our heads. No way.) There are also lots of problems with leather; it's pretty hard, the shine and the sound of it on the soundtrack..." Was this the reason they dropped the leather altogether and put Mrs Peel in the crimpolene catsuits? Her Emmapeelers. "That was just a change of image, really. I mean, she couldn't really be in black leather all the time, she had to have other clothes - it just happened like that. We took a really big chance in putting her into a mini skirt before we knew that it was going to take off. Then Alun Hughes came in and I think we put too much emphasis on the clothes because the merchandising didn't pay off like it should have done - because we were dealing with idiots. I mean, what we did was to create a style and go on screen and be seen by twenty million people *and the people who designed the clothes weren't equipped to push the stuff out into the High Street shops!*"

What was going on in Brian's mind, asked Dan, when he was asked to take a series that had been running for years in the UK on tape and put it on to film for the first time? Why didn't they stick with videotape? "Because you can't sell internationally unless you're on film - at least you couldn't back then. But when you're on film, the world is your oyster. You can see a woman in half without having to see them in half. With film you open things out. For a start, the fights got better. When we were making them on tape you were allowed a half-day's filming per episode - sometimes none - so you couldn't have car chases,

you couldn't have all the things an action movie should have. So that was a big, important change: the action was better. Also, we were able to have the music properly scored for the episodes. When they were doing it on tape they just had a studio engineer pulling it up and pulling it down - more often than not when he felt like it. We scored all ours, put music in there and spotted it to the milli-second: where it would begin and end and so on. So immediately it had *polish* - which is why they've lasted, because they are so well made."

Were all the episodes plotted in advance of scripting? How did Brian involve the writers? "What would happen - *always* - was that I'd be inter-



**Brian Clemens greets the new Avengers girl at the Thames TV launch party.**

ested in a writer and I would ask him to come into my office and ask him if he had any ideas. He might say 'I've got this idea about a golf course - a bunker on a golf course.' I'd say 'Where's it going?' Then we would sit down at the typewriter and in the course of that day - and it never took longer than a day - we would totally block out every minute of the film, including lines of dialogue that would present themselves. It was an instinctive thing. He'd say say-and-so and I'd say wouldn't it be better if, or whatever. And at the end, I would do a copy of what we'd done and he would take it away and write it. My theory was, always, if the writer got run over by a bus as he left my office, I could write it - and frequently, in fact most of the time, I did write it - when it came back, if it didn't measure up to what I'd imagined when we discussed it. I shouldn't think that there were ever more than 3-4 Avengers stories that were written by another writer that went in without me doing anything to them - and I can tell you about one of them. Terry Nation wrote *Noon Doomsday*. Terry's a great pro and he came in and I said 'Let's spoof *High Noon*. So we sat down and did this thing and he went away and wrote it - *and I didn't like it*. What happened, because he was working on something else by then, was that I rewrote it. Now Terry had never been rewritten in about fifteen years, so it came as a terrible shock to him. He *could* have done it the way I wanted it, but he'd been lazy and just knocked it off like he was used to doing on *The Baron*, *The Saint* and so on. We met up later and he admitted that it was a salutary experience for him to be rewritten. That was when I asked him to do the spoof on *The Maltese Falcon* [*Legacy of Death*]. He took a little longer to write that *and I barely charged a word...* and he also did another one [*Take Over*] because he *was* capable. Then I did a Baron story for him [*The Long Long Day*] because he was really under the gun and I said I'd got this idea and he said let's do it. I wrote it and handed it in and Terry came to me and said 'I've been sitting here editing on *The Saint* and *The Baron* for four years *and it's the first time that I've had a script that I didn't have to touch!* And I expected the same from him. I didn't get it the first time, but I got it with those second two scripts. There was another script [*The £50,000 Breakfast*] which I didn't like and didn't want to do... I had a big thing with Julian about

this..." Pausing to contemplate whether or not this took place after he had rewritten the Roger Marshall 'Station' script, he continued"... Yes, I think it was after Roger had fallen out with me. Whatever. Julian went to Roger and asked him to do this story (Ed. A rewrite of the *Death of a Great Dane* Marshall script for the Blackman season) and it came to me and I said I didn't want anything to do with it. It was produced, but I had nothing whatsoever to do with that one." Dan was keen to find out about the 'from a story by Anthony Marriott' writer's credit on the colour episode *The Living Dead*. Marriott's name never appeared again. Who was he? Why did he have the story credit? "Because Anthony Marriott wrote it *and it was terrible!* So I totally rewrote it and he took exception and asked for his name to be taken off the script."

The 'problems' Terry Nation encountered on *The Baron*. What exactly was Brian talking about? Was it because, as hearsay has it, Steve Forrest wasn't giving of his best and was making life difficult for everyone around him? "Perhaps. I heard about that. But that wasn't Terry's problem. Terry's problem was my problem, and everybody else's problem in television at that time, which was that there were only about five people who could write a film script - which was what we were looking for, an international film script. By international, I don't mean calling a lift an elevator, I mean... well, you'd get scripts handed in where Steed would say 'Let's go and have a cup of tea' - all the things I hate, even if it's a British series. They were full of things like that. But to get a slick, fast-moving script that was exciting and had a good hook that drew you into the story, that was difficult, always difficult. I suspect that it's still difficult today, because most of the stuff that I see on television isn't like that."

Dennis Spooner was quoted as saying that once you knew that the Thorson season was going to be the last, the show got wilder and sent up everything in sight. Was this a deliberate move? "No. That was Dennis speaking with hindsight. As you know, Dennis was my best friend, so I think I know why he said it. It was because it was on that series that Dennis and I became the best of friends and found that we shared a lot of humour. And suddenly, having worked on a

long-running series, the last bit was the most fun *because* we were working together. It was like Abbott and Costello... I think that was it, it was a bit of euphoria really. I mean to say that I didn't sit on anybody coming in with wild ideas, but we did pull them back sometimes. I don't think that any of the last ones were wilder than the first... I mean, *The Cybernauts* was about number four, and that's pretty wild!" Staying with the theme, Dan speculated that Brian had no option but to change the format slightly in order to accommodate the premise that Tara King was a young, *trainee* agent. "Yer. She wasn't married. She wasn't Mrs, she was *Miss* Tara King..." He paused before adding that he felt that this was a terrible name anyway.

Supposing that *The Avengers* *hadn't* sold to America, Dan asked, did Brian believe that it would have stayed on air in England? A good point. "Not as a filmed series, no. That would have been the end of it. I mean, we were naive, really. You couldn't have made thirteen episodes - not even five episodes - without selling them to America. In fact you wouldn't have even written a script without the Americans coming in or a co-producer putting money in, but they [ABC-TV in England] used their own money. That was why *The Avengers* was so unique, *because* ABC used their own money *and made it!* If we had gone to CBS or ABC [America] and said that we wanted to make *The Avengers* and they had said yes, they'd have said we don't want Patrick Macnee: the guy can't have a bowler hat, we can't have this, we can't have that, and it would have been *A Man Called Sloane*. I've always said that what we do best over here, and this was our best chance of selling in America, is doing those few narrow things that the Americans can't do, which is costume and a kind of spoofiness which I think... well, it's significant to me that all the Bonds are American movies really and they're always made in Europe. I think that if Bond was made out of Hollywood, they would have a harder edge to them..." Like *Die Hard* said Dan. "Absolutely!" But *why* did *The Avengers* become so heavily dependent on the Americans putting money in, Dan asked (give him a bone and he will gnaw away until he reaches the marrow.) Why did the series end? "It ended because the network liked it enough to put it opposite *Laugh-In*." And Rowan and Martin scored brownie

points. Yes, Dan knew that. So, was Brian saying that the series had become so dependent on American sales that *The Avengers couldn't* have continued after the American network dropped it? "It was the cost, the sheer cost of the production - although, if I'd been in charge or had it been my money, I would have kept it going because there can't be many series that ran as long as the show did. I mean, *The Avengers* conceivably could be running fifty years from now because it's almost a costume film; it doesn't date too much because everything was dated when we made it. Steed drove an old car and ..." Dan injected the thought that *The Avengers* doesn't date because it's not linked to any particular fad of its time. You can look at them now and there are no hippies, no Sixties pop music or anything like that, although, and this had to be considered, he had recently read a sad quote from Diana Rigg who, when she had seen an episode of *The Avengers* while in New York recently, said that it 'looked horribly dated. It looked like an old Joan Crawford movie.' Brian grinned. "Well, she was looking at herself. You can't ask actors about that. *The Avengers* doesn't date like a Hitchcock movie doesn't date."

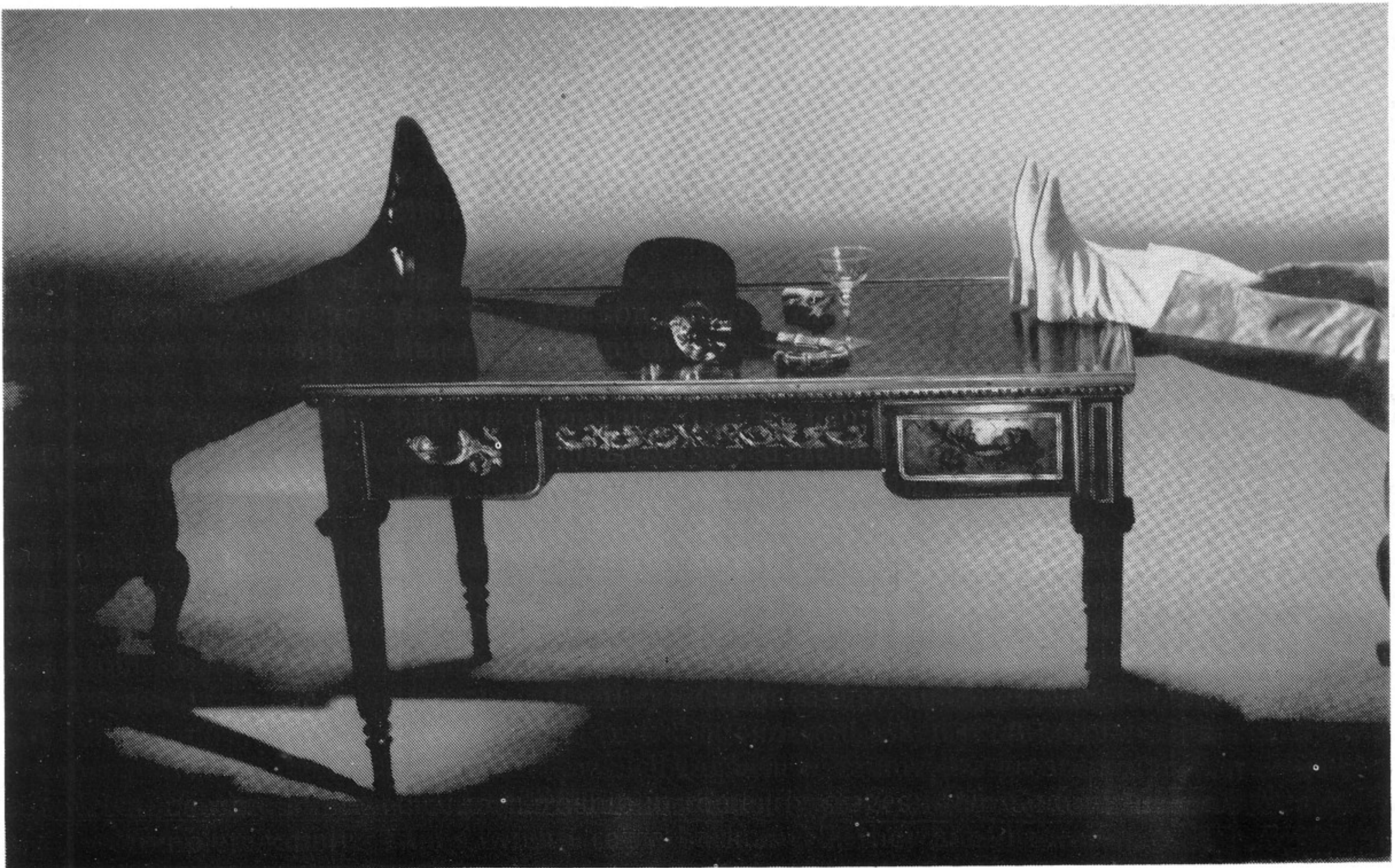
Picking up on his comment that *The Avengers* might have run and run if the Americans hadn't pulled the plug, I asked him about the Thorson series episode *Killer*, co-starring actress Jennifer Croxton as Lady Diana-Forbes Blakeney. From memos I'd seen, I knew already that Jennifer Croxton was only there as a 'filler' for Linda [who was taking a holiday break in Portugal]. Would he clear up the misconception once and for all that she, Jennifer Croxton, might have become Patrick Macnee's new partner if the series had continued beyond Linda Thorson's terms of contract. "A lot of people thought that we were trying her out. The answer is no. She did a great job, but if we were thinking of getting a new girl, it wouldn't have been Jennifer Croxton. Yer, lot's of people thought that, because she was kind of in the Emma Peel mould. But that was never our intention... *although it was intended in one way*. I'll digress and tell you a story about *Mission Impossible*. You remember the wrestler in that [we did, Peter Lupus]. Well, when they were running and the show was successful, he was giving them trouble - he wanted more money. So producer Bruce Geller told Lupus that they would

discuss this in his office: Lupus should come there at mid-day. He did so and as he stepped into Geller's outer office, he saw these six, good-looking wrestlers sitting there. He opened the office door, shouted 'I see what you mean' and left! So we encouraged the Croxton thing a little bit, because we were having trouble with Linda. I can't remember why (he did, a short time later, but you won't be reading about it here) but that's why we encouraged it. And it worked like a charm because Linda calmed down quite a bit. It was a good bit of psychology making her believe that Jennifer Croxton was a try out, that she was perhaps waiting in the wings."

Despite knowing the answer (well at least the part that is printable, readers can draw their own conclusions to the references made here), I asked Brian to give his reasons for the large YES and NO gold letters that hung on the wall in Tara's apartment. "Because, when Honor played Cathy Gale and Diana Rigg played Emma Peel, I always thought that the underlying back story was that they'd had a big affair and we now comfortable with each other and could become a team, doing other things. I thought that the underlying thing with Linda Thorson, Tara King, is *will they?* The

question was *have they?* Now it was *will they?* The yes/no thing was sort of psychologically there to reinforce that. Nothing was put there for no reason. I'm a great Hitchcock fan and Hitch never put a girl in a blue dress *because it was a blue dress*, he'd always worked that out because he wanted an effect." Dan humorously pointed out how the yes/no thing could have been misconstrued in the case of Steed and Dr Keel - or Steed and Dr King. We all laughed at this.

Sometime prior to the interview taking place, Dan had raised the point of rewrites with me, i.e. earlier [Blackman] scripts that had been rewritten for the Diana Rigg seasons. He asked Brian if he and the team had ever thought of rewriting any of the Hendry episodes? Some of these sounded crackingly good [from the synopses in my books]. "No. But we did do that at times. I did it with *The Charmers* [*The Correct Way To Kill*]. But then, because of the situation at ABC... well, we had this woman who worked as a press officer and invented the name Emma Peel (Ed. Marie Donaldson) and there was this big thing going on against me and against the series. They felt that *The Avengers* was becoming a big international



tional hit and they were carping because they were only holding onto the coat tails of it. So when I redid *The Joker* [from the Blackman episode *Don't Look Behind You*], she sort of engineered a thing that went into the newspapers saying The Avengers is so tired that they're re-hashing the old scripts... which really p\*ss\*d me off. I mean, she was destroying the show which she was there to represent, for entirely selfish reasons!"

Mid-way through the first season Blackman shows, Leonard White circulated a memo to the Avengers' production team that suggested that if they ever needed a new partner for Steed (i.e. in the event that Honor Blackman left the show), they need look no further than actor John Standing, who had played a character named East in the episode *School For Traitors*. White also nominated actress Fennella Fielding (Kim Lawrence in *The Charmers*) for the same position. Was Brian privy to this? What did he think? He had nothing to say about John Standing and, despite my comment that Fennella Fielding made a smashing foil for Pat Macnee, Brian's opinion was that her presence as Steed's sidekick "would have made it very British. She was *too* British."

Dan turned the subject around to *The New Avengers*. What was Brian running through Brian's mind when he was approached to do this? Did he want to make the show more realistic than its predecessor and not give Patrick Macnee the title role? Why hadn't he just gone back to a man and a woman working together? "I couldn't make Pat the centre, because, despite being an intellectual show, The Avengers has always had its fair share of action. Pat was that much older - seven years had passed. When I met him again, for the first time in about five years, he also had arthritis in one knee and was limping... you'll see that in some of the episodes. So, he was older, and I thought that the thing to do was to bring in a younger person to carry the action..." Dan said that he'd never considered The Avengers to be an action show. To his mind it was almost an intellectual show and he saw no reason why an older man and woman couldn't have done the new show. Brian nodded his agreement. "I love Pat dearly. If it had been down to me, I would have called it The Avengers, not The New Avengers, and I'd have had two new people. But

Pat was the *reason* the show was being made. What happened was, he did this French commercial with Linda and someone said 'Why don't we do it again?' I said 'I'm not working with Linda...' "Time for Dan again (see what I mean about giving the dog a bone) who pointed out that there appears to have been awful lot of sadness in The New Avengers plots. There are lots of stories about regrets, lost friendships, friends and colleagues that had gone bad. Had Brian realised this? He shook his head. No. Dan continued. There was the underlying theme of Steed getting older and sort of remembering parts of his life that had gone sour. Brian considered this while Dan said, as far as he was concerned, The New Avengers wasn't the light-hearted romp that say, the Thorson shows were. Even *Cinefantastique* magazine, when they reviewed the show, had said that some of the plots were very dark and angst-filled. "*I think they were dark because the French were in there!*" Brian snapped back with a grin.. "They didn't pay us the money. *Albert and I made one-and-a-half of The New Avengers. I was left owing about £70,000 and Albert was left owing about £80,000... we kept it going by not taking our money. . . !*" I threw in the fact that Jo Lumley had said on more than one occasion that Brian had several times paid both her and Gareth's salaries. "Yes, absolutely - because I would never see an artiste or a union member going without. I didn't take the money so that other writer's could get paid. It was always the cheque is in the post sort of thing. Then, *and this was the most reprehensible thing*, suddenly we sold to the network, which really, if we'd had the right guy in the first place, *we should have from day one!* I eventually got it sent to Edgar Gross, whose a big agent, and within a week he'd sold it. He sold it, of course, for a big slice of the profits - but that wouldn't have mattered had we sold it early because once you sell it to the networks the money starts rolling in. What happened was, sometime around the end of production, the big news broke that we had sold to the American network and Albert, who knew that everybody would now want a piece of the action, a slice of the gravy, set up a meeting between TF1 [the French], Film Finance and E.M.I. - because they owned the title The Avengers and had subsidised some of the studio costs - and Pinewood, who had given us free studio space against a percentage of the profits. The meeting

was set up for 12-o'clock - and don't forget that these were people with whom Albert had worked with for thirty years - and he got there and found that they had already held the meeting at 11-o'clock *and they'd all gone! And we got NOTHING - and have had nothing ever since!*"

Astounding as this sounds, Brian swears that every word is true. So where does the ownership of The New Avengers lie at the moment? Who has the rights? "With TF1, but we own the video rights, we own the negative for video." Hearing this, I offered the following for consideration. If they own the video rights, then why didn't they take more interest in ensuring that the PolyGram/Channel 5 Video product was up to scratch? By that I meant, why hadn't they given the video distributor access to *top quality film prints* and not, as had happened, poor quality product which, combined with the fact that PolyGram made little effort to get the product to the market place, went a long way in ensuring that The New Avengers videos had a very short shelf life. (Readers will know that The New Avengers vids are no longer obtainable.) Further, once the purchaser found that the episodes were CUT, they were loathe to buy more of the same. Brian insisted that he wasn't aware of any of this. Puzzled (shocked) by what I'd told him, he offered the following by way of explanation. "It's akin to employing a lawyer. You employ him to handle your case because he knows about these things. I'm not a distributor, we leave things like that to other people and expect them to give of their best, to get you the best deal. This is all news to me." Needless to say, he wasn't at all happy to learn about this and became even less pleased when I picked up on the subject of The Avengers video release situation. As I under-



stood things, there was a strong possibility that the Movie Acquisitions Company [MAC - at the time of the interview the current owners of The Avengers] were toying with the idea of releasing The Avengers on video SOON? But, of course, prior to MAC we'd had the Weintraub people, the Cannon go-go twins and E.M.I., all of whom had 'made provision' to release the product to video, none of whom got beyond the talking stage. Brian's thoughts? He was nothing if not damning in his reply. "Well, the whole thing is a total cock-up, because The Avengers has already been on tape in America, *pirated tape in America*, for ages!" I told him that it still was. "Well there you have it! It's bloody criminal. It's... well" (Ed. It's wise to leave things here. Brian's language turned quite strong, VERY strong, at this point and his diatribe well and truly poured scorn on the people "who couldn't see the noses on their faces." Needless to say, he was as delighted as anyone when I telephoned him recently to impart the news that The Avengers vids were finally GO.)