

BRIAN CLEMENS, the thriller writer who gave the *Avengers* its glossy coat, drives his blue Ferrari to a suite of offices in Pine-wood Studios, gets behind a desk of Gothic proportions, nods at the larger-than-life picture of Alfred Hitchcock, a fellow Leo, on the wall, and is set for another day in a super-charged world of fiction and finance.

It doesn't take long to say *The New Avengers*, but every second the series is on screen costs £38 to produce. At £125,000 an episode, the adventures of Purdey, Steed and Gambit are big business. The programme is watched regularly in 120 countries.

Last year, after the *Avengers* had been on the shelf for seven years, Clemens formed The Avengers (Film and TV) Enterprises Ltd., in partnership with Albert Fennell and Laurie Johnson. It was backed by more than £3 million of French money, the British film industry having declined the opportunity.

Clemens (46), who once worked as a London messenger boy, had helped write the original "pilot" episode for the *Avengers* in 1961 and was sacked from the series six years later. He now virtually runs the show.

He is dubbed "Mr. Avengers—the thrillionaire of television", although he takes no credit for the original idea and says he is nowhere near to being a millionaire.

But he is at the top of a precarious tree, now owns his sixth Ferrari and enjoys the exclusive privacy of his four acres of Bedfordshire.

To progress from Croydon, Surrey, where he left school at 14, has taken the kind of confidence and rosy conceit that allows him to ask at the end of the interview if I'm going to call him tall, dark and virile—and not care too much if I don't.

Virility, in fact, might be some sort of key. The high-powered world of elegant men and desirable women created against a lordly defiance of all manner of deaths and dangers must have special appeal to someone regarded as a sickly child.

"I had pneumonia in the days when they treated it with steam kettles," said Clemens. "From then on I was regarded as delicate. I couldn't ride a bicycle and I didn't learn to swim at school because I always had a note saying I mustn't take my clothes off."

National Service changed that. He was a weapons training instructor in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. Not only was he a good shot, he learned to swim and to ride a bicycle and became an athlete.

Clemens had wanted to be a journalist but decided he didn't have the qualifications. After National Service he was offered a job



Brian Clemens—on his sixth Ferrari, producing scripts like babies, and leaving the rough stuff to Joanna Lumley (below)

Mr. Avengers: the man who liberated Purdey

by Stewart Knowles



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN PAUL

with a private detective agency but it involved taking a course in Leeds and having been away from home for two years, he decided he didn't want to go away again.

Instead, Clemens worked as an advertising copywriter and wrote fiction in his spare time. In 1955, he had a script accepted by the BBC.

Called *Valid for Single Journey Only*, it was a thriller with Ernest Clark and George Colouris.

Before *The Avengers*, Clemens wrote scripts for *Mark Sabre*, *The Invisible Man*, and *Danger Man* and, more recently, contributed 38 stories to the *Thriller* series. He has also written a number of plays for the

stage. Recently, he wrote and directed a play based on the Moors murderer Myra Hindley.

But television, for which he has written himself as much a visual writer, claims most of his time. He is currently working on a spy series, *The Professionals*, with Martin Shaw and Gordon Jackson, to be seen on ITV this winter.

Like most writers who have immersed themselves in screenwriting to avoid the actor's exposure, Clemens is reticent about his private life. He was married for 10 years and has a daughter, but his life with another woman in the last few years.

"Brenda was a model," Clemens called. "We were divorced in 1978. I've no children. I have been married, but there have been a number of girlfriends."

One recorded incident in his life ended in tragedy. Diana Rigg, who had been Diana Rigg's partner during the *Emma Peel* series from 1965 to 1967, died of cancer in 1982. Clemens was married to her for 10 years and committed suicide last year.

Clemens has said that he produces scripts like women and babies. "They are with me for a long time then they come out of me."

He has written for all the *Avengers* girls, and it was he who cast Diana Rigg to replace original star Joanna Lumley. "I didn't do Diana Rigg good service. It made her a national star but I think I could have done more for her as far as television was concerned. She was a stooge to Patrick Macnee's *Man of Straw*."

But Clemens was not responsible for casting Linda Thorson as Emma Peel. "I think Linda was good in the part, although she's not good now."

Latest in a lush line is Joanna Lumley as Purdey in *The Avengers*. "I think we were ahead of our time with the liberated ladies, such as Cathy Gale and Emma Peel, and the next extension was *Women's Lib*, I thought, a woman like Purdey, so sure of herself that she can put her bra back on again."

"To find Purdey, I interviewed about 700 girls. I actually viewed 200, read scripts and screen tested 15."

"I knew Joanna Lumley was the right one. She is good to work with, witty, charming, feminine and elegant but can knock you through a plate-glass window."

Brian Clemens, a man who has created a fantastic world, has no desire to take a more active part in it. "I gave up playing boys and Indians when I was 14. I do get good ideas. I don't know where they all come from, but I know I won't live long enough to write all of them down."

stage. Recently, he wrote and directed a play based on the life of Moors murderess Myra Hindley.

But television, for which he sees himself as much a visualiser as a writer, claims most of his energies. He is currently working on a new spy series, *The Professionals*, starring Martin Shaw and Gordon Jackson, to be seen on ITV this winter.

Like most writers who can immerse themselves in scripts and avoid the actor's exposure, Clemens is reticent about his private life. He was married for 10 years and shared his life with another woman for 10 years.

"Brenda was a model," he recalled. "We were divorced in 1966. I've no children. I haven't remarried, but there have been a number of girlfriends."

One recorded incident in his love life ended in tragedy. Diane Enright, who had been Diana Rigg's stand-in during the Emma Peel *Avengers* series from 1965 to 1967, was with Clemens for 10 years until she committed suicide last year.

Clemens has said that he produces scripts like women have babies. "They are with me a long time then they come out quickly."

He has written for all the *Avengers* girls, and it was he who cast Diana Rigg to replace original star Honor Blackman. "I didn't do Diana a very good service. It made her an international star but I think I could have done more for her as far as the script was concerned. She was rather a stooge to Patrick Macnee's Steed."

But Clemens was not responsible for casting Linda Thorson as Tara King. "I think Linda wasn't very good in the part, although she is good now."

Latest in a lush line is Joanna Lumley as Purdey in *The New Avengers*. "I think we were always ahead of our time with the liberated ladies, such as Cathy Gale and Emma Peel, and the next extension to Women's Lib, I thought, was the woman like Purdey, so sure of herself that she can put her bra back on again.

"To find Purdey, I investigated about 700 girls. I actually interviewed 200, read scripts with 40, and screen tested 15.

"I knew Joanna Lumley was the right one. She is good to look at, witty, charming, feminine and elegant but can knock you through a plate-glass window."

Brian Clemens, a man at the centre of a fantastic world, says he has no desire to take a more active part in it. "I gave up playing cowboys and Indians when I was 12. But I do get good ideas. I don't know where they all come from, but I do know I won't live long enough to write all of them down."