

View

From Behind The Scenes

with
Brian Clemens



Q: When did you first become involved with "The Avengers" and why?

A: 1961 - when I wrote the very first "Avengers", a two parter starring Pat and Ian Hendry.

I then wrote for Honor Blackman - her debut and final episodes. In fact, I have written the first and last "Avengers" episode throughout each season. It has always been my lot to say goodbye to one girl and welcome the next!

I was brought in to produce the filmed series when they looked for someone who knew the "Avengers" tape show, but also had film experience. I was the only one to qualify on both counts!

Q: Why do you think that the show has been so successful? What is it about the program which holds such a loyal audience?

A: Because it has always been new, trend setting, it is uncompromisingly British, is FUN... and the love and care of all concerned comes across on screen. Plus the fact the outrageous format provides for outrageous stories... although many of the things we dreamed up have actually come true!

Also, because it is a very erotic show - it feeds the fantasy rather than embarrasses the eye. If you get the jokes, it is very blue indeed. If you don't, your maiden aunt can watch it with impunity.

Q: When writing or checking a script which is to be an "Avengers"/"New Avengers" episode, what elements must it contain? Are there rules which must be adhered to?

A: A new plot, or a twist - a unique "Avengers" twist - on an old one. We have always been fond of inverting the cliché... Mother is a man, Father a woman, the Sherlock Holmes character doesn't find clues - he plants 'em.

I also require at least three high spots - action or intriguing scene, a good up front teaser... and then we are ready to go, to put the jigsaw together.

Q: What considerations have to be made when filming a series for world-wide distribution?

A: The old Hollywood ones... is it tasteful, will they understand it across the world, is it made to the highest possible standards? Does the narrative hold up and pull you along - keep you watching?

Back of one's mind (and this probably comes under 'good taste' anyway) one has to be aware of the varying taboos in various countries. For instance, we are emancipated enough to be able to use the Union Jack in whatever jokey way we like - even sending it up if we want to. But not the Stars & Stripes! It is easy, too, to give offence, say in Muslim countries - we exercise care.

Q: Why have the Honor Blackman episodes never been shown in America?

A: They were on tape and - although shown in Canada - never travelled to the States. It WAS a very cultish in-show... and not as good as people like to remember it. It broke barriers, but on a

very low budget and it showed. Nowadays would have the same amusement value as... say... those old "Flash Gordon" serials that we sit back and enjoy while almost laughing AT them.

Q: There was a great stir when Diana Rigg decided to leave the show and a replacement was needed. How was Linda Thorson chosen for the role?

A: When a star leaves an established role there is always a great stir... and producers capitalize on it, gathering interest in whoever is going to replace her.

Linda was cast and brought into the show during a period when I had left it totally (due to various differences with the management).

Q: Why was it decided that Tara King would be such a different character from the previous two lady Avengers?

A: See above - when I was asked to return and take over, 2½ shows had already been shot and Tara King's character established. It was strange because I THEN sat down to write the takeover episode between her and Diana.

Linda would not have been my choice - she was (albeit very charming) very inexperienced and, to my mind, not British enough. Nor did she have that peculiar sense of humour that adds to "The Avengers".

This was why I brought in Mother - to give Pat someone to play comedy off and against. Despite that, some of the best "Avengers" ever written were in the Thorson period.

Q: Why did we see the addition of a third Avenger in the new series?

A: I had not worked with Pat for some years - time had passed - I was not sure just how an audience would take to him in vigorous action (in the final analysis he was as fit and able as ever, and the audience loved him). Nevertheless... in the previous series we had never had anyone for male YOUTH to

closely identify with and I thought it about time. Hence, Gambit... and the excellent Gareth Hunt. Also, it was called "The NEW Avengers" - and I wanted new elements.

Q: In an "Eagle's Nest" script which I have, it notes that Purdey's name had previously been slated as 'Charly'. Why the change?

A: 'Charly' suddenly became a heavily sold perfume - we did not want to confuse the public.

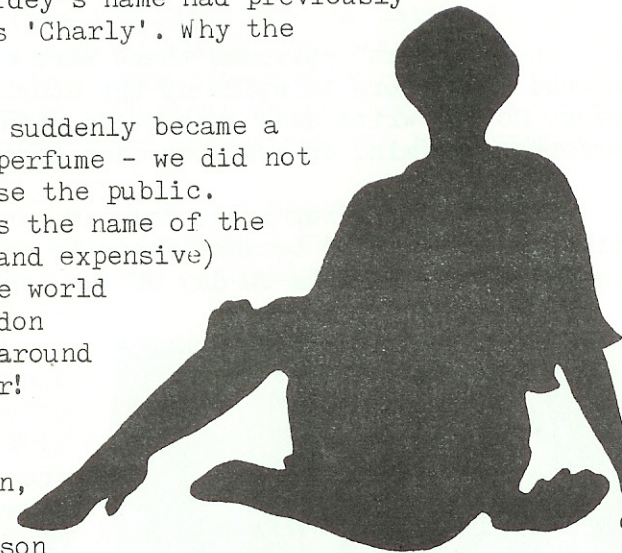
Purdey is the name of the most famous (and expensive) shotgun in the world - made by London craftsmen at around \$25,000 a pair!

Q: Were Honor Blackman, Diana Rigg or Linda Thorson ever considered for the "New Avengers" lead?

A: No. Honor was too old. Diana had moved on to greater things. I did not consider Linda... and anyway, as I have said, it had to be NEW. We got a million dollars worth of publicity from our search for the new girl.

Q: "The New Avengers" had a greater emphasis on reality and with less fantastical plots than the old episodes. Is there a reason for this, and do you believe that it has helped or hindered the series?

A: Yes - quite deliberate. The previous series had got a very loyal following... but not, in top success terms, a huge one. We never got Middle America (or its equivalent across the world) - the sort of person who took a quick look then clicked channels because they found it 'silly'. I added



some depth - annoyed the real "Avengers" fan, but picked up another few million others along the way. Our viewership on "The New Avengers" was higher than previous series. I was also preparing for the time when we might move out of studio (where fantasy can be built and controlled) and start shooting on location.

Q: In "Avengers" episodes there were many eccentric and odd characters to spice up the stories and add color. Do you write such characters with specific performers in mind or are they cast afterward?

A: No. We cast afterwards. You can never write with someone in mind because there is no guarantee they will be available on day of shooting.

Q: Who decided upon the assortment of vehicles driven by Avengers over the years? Why did Steed change from his vintage autos to a modern Jaguar for the new series?

A: I did. We changed to Jaguar for several reasons... practical, old vehicles go wrong, and they are one off, bump one and you have no replacement. I wanted to update Steed's image and

also uphold the British motor industry. It half worked.

Q: When writing a script, do you find it difficult to come up with new plots and story ideas?

A: Never.

Q: Are there any "Avengers" episodes which you favor over others? Any which you dislike? Why?

A: "Cybernauts", "Pandora", "House That Jack Built", "There Were These Two Fellers", "Joker", "Epic"... I have to choose quite a few of my own.

The only ones I dislike are the latter French and Canadian episodes ("Emily" was a terrific script potentially) - they were directed by competent people who had no idea at all about fantasy or "The Avengers". But we were forced into this situation by financing problems.

I have a tinge of regret about all my episodes of "The New Avengers" because I have not been paid a penny for any of them!!! Greater love of the series hath no man.

Q: Has there ever been an "Avengers" episode which you wanted to write but were unable to because of storyline, content, length, etc.?

A: No. I'm a pro and a pro can twist any idea, no matter how big the budgetary requirements, into a viable script.

Q: Have you ever considered writing an "Avengers" novel based on the series and characters?

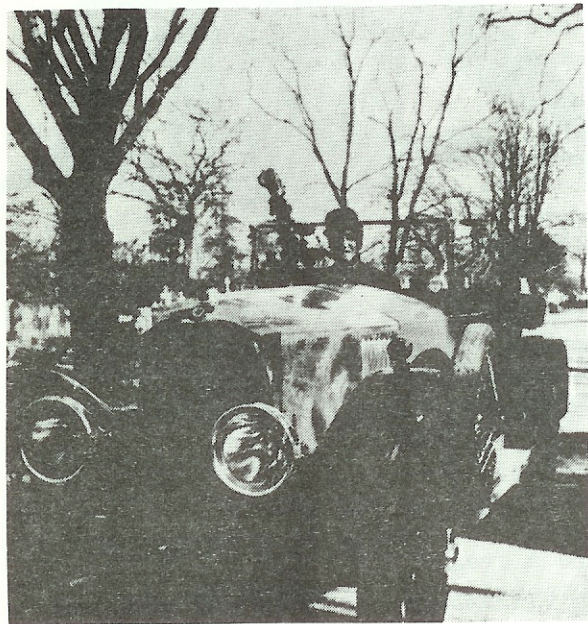
A: No. "The Avengers" is a VISUAL show - on paper it does not work for me. You have to hear and see Steed speaking the lines or it does not amount to anything.

Q: What is the latest news on negotiations for filming of more "New Avengers"?

A: It is possible there may be more. If CBS could put up a bit more per show - it's on!

Q: If additional episodes were filmed, would it be possible that portions might be shot in America?

A: I doubt it. The budget just would not stand it. Be nice if we could, though... Steed scrambling over



Mount Rushmore... up the Empire State ("I'm in a bit of a state, Mrs. Peel!").

Q: What about the idea of an "Avengers" or "New Avengers" feature film?

A: That is very possible. Negotiations are underway right now.

Q: Avengers Enterprises has another series, "The Professionals", with yourself, Albert Fennell and Laurie Johnson at the helm. Could you tell us a bit about the program?

A: "The Professionals" is absolutely opposite to "The Avengers" - an elite squad formed from servicemen, cops, mercenaries, etc... under the lead of ex-MI5 spy Jackson. Violent action filmed entirely on location in and around the mean streets of London with Martin Shaw and Lewis Collins as a kind of "Starsky & Hutch", but tougher, meaner, and not as in love with each other and themselves as that pair are (although I find the series very well done).

Q: Could you tell us about some of the work you've done other than "The Avengers"?

A: The thrillers mentioned on page 22 of your current mag ((issue #13)). Syndicated under "Mystery Theatre". I wrote the stories of ALL 43 of these! And scripted 39.

Children's serials. "The Golden Voyage of Sinbad", "See No Evil" (Mia Farrow), "The Corrupt Ones" (maybe called "Peking Medallion" in the States) with Elke Sommer and Bob Stack. I wrote pilot of "Secret Agent" - and many episodes. Pilot of "The Persuaders", episodes of "Protectors", "Quiller", "The Adventurer", "The Champions" (how that just missed... it was fore-runner of "The Bionic Man"), etc. I also have several stage plays touring the country. A comedy series, "My Wife Next Door", which might reach your screens this year... the list does go on a bit.

I have won two Edgar Alan Poe Awards, lots of

foreign awards for screenplays, including "Doctor Jekyll & SISTER Hyde", "And Soon The Darkness" (Pamela Franklin), "Captain Kronos" (which I also directed).

Quite a bit, in fact - and across quite a spectrum.

Q: What about your background and life outside of work? Very few viewers know anything of the man behind "The Avengers"!

A: I live on a farm in Bedfordshire, close to Woburn Abbey. I drive Ferraris. I shoot pheasant and partridge. I love to swim (at Pat's pool in Palm Springs). Drink wine. I like women. And some song. I love to write.

Q: If you had not followed your present profession what would you be doing now?

A: Unthinkable.

Q: In various interviews over the years, is there any question which you wished to be asked but never were?

A: If the interviewer is female and nubile: "Will you come to bed with me?" If male: "God, how did you get to be so handsome and virile?"

Q: Are there any additional comments you'd like to make or thoughts you want to share with "Avengers" fans?

A: Thanks for the support over so many years. Keep watching - and keep writing to the networks. Keep the show alive by keeping it in the ether, in everyone's consciousness. That way we may yet bring it back... even better!

((For those wishing to write and help with this most worthy cause... CBS-TV, 51 West 52nd Street, New York, NY 10019 USA. Write often!))