

DOC SAVAGE

George Pal's

THE MAN OF BRONZE by Edward Felipe

"Who is Doc Savage? To the world at large, Doc Savage is a strange, mysterious figure of glistening bronze skin and golden eyes. To his amazing co-adventurers — the five greatest minds ever assembled in one group — he is a man of superhuman strength and protean genius, whose life is dedicated to the destruction of evil-doers. To his fans he is the greatest adventure hero of all time, whose fantastic exploits are unequalled for hair-raising thrills, breathtaking escapes and blood-curdling excitement."

So says the Bantam Books blurb writer. And as we enter the Second American Depression, the Thirties return to us. They shoot horses, don't they? Yes, my little chickadee, they do. Fashion, music, films and attitudes are swinging back to the skeptical, cynical mood of those days, with the added perspective of thirty-odd troubled years.

Who is Doc Savage? He was born during the Depression, born full-grown as heroes are. *Doc Savage Magazine* ran from March 1933 to Summer 1949, for a total of 181 issues. All but 16 of these full-length novels were written by Lester Dent under the house name of Kenneth Robeson. Dent resembled Robert E. Howard in some ways: a soft-spoken husky six-footer who put extravagant adventures down on paper. However, Dent was nearly as adventurous as his creation, being a pilot, sailor and

mountain-climber. He died while treasure-hunting in 1959, ten years after Doc faded from his magazine and five years before Doc returned to a new medium.

Beginning in October 1964, Bantam began to reissue the series in paperback, and soon settled down to a schedule of one issue a month. By 1974 more than

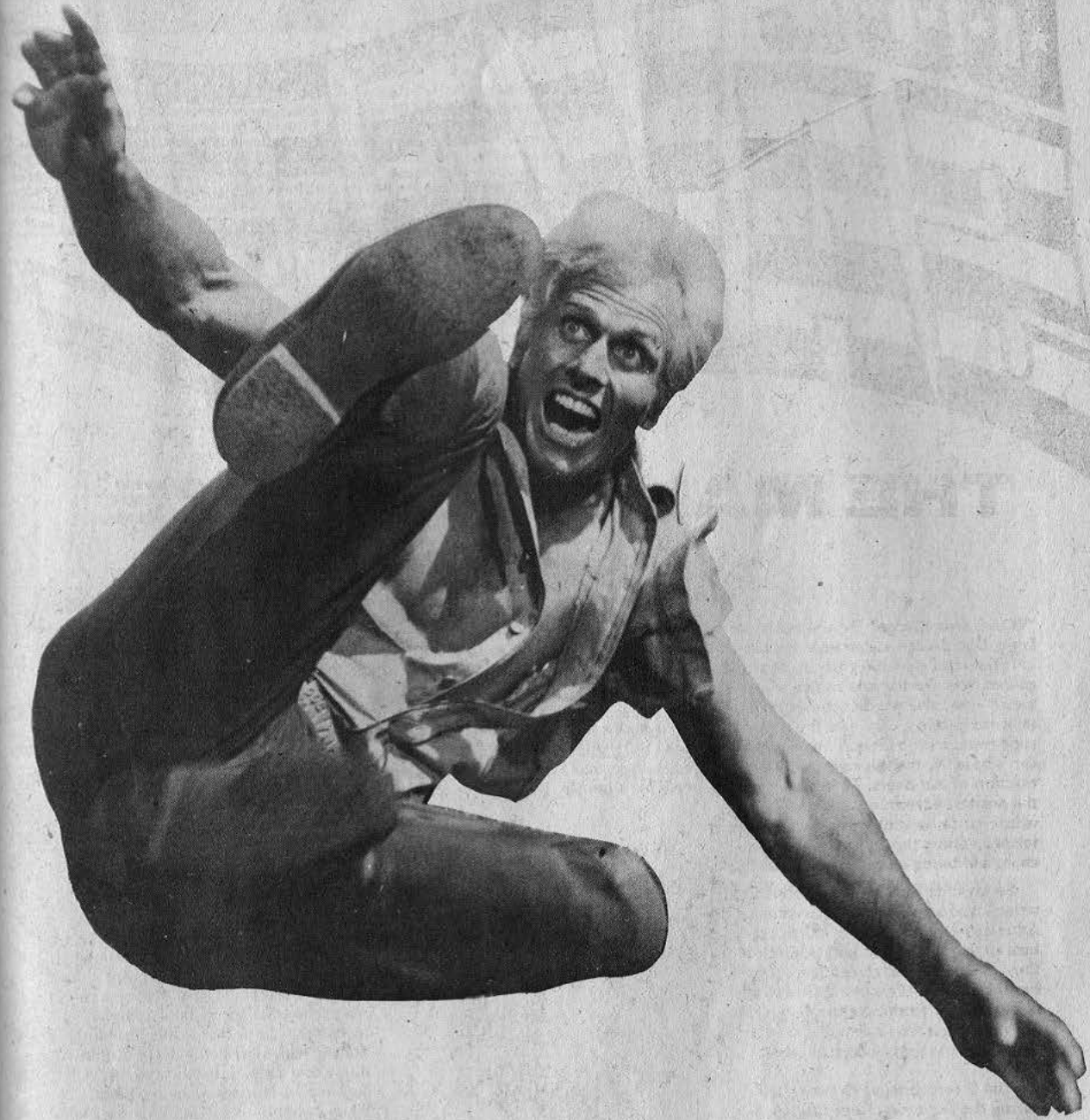


eighty have been released and no end is in sight. The ultra-realistic covers are painted by James Bama, who for some reason attires Doc in a shredded shirt each month.

Who is Doc Savage? He is Clark Savage, Jr., raised by scientists to be the theoretical perfect man. Due to a program of what seem to be isometric

exercises taken for two hours every day, Doc is a physical superman—six feet seven inches tall and muscled like Conan. Due to time spent in the tropics, his skin is a metallic bronze color. We are never quite told why his eyes are so strange, the irises having the appearance of whirling gold flakes with hypnotic powers; but his cousin, Pat, has them, so it's probably a family trait.

The physical aspect of the Doc Savage concept comes across fairly well. Doc's athletic abilities are consistent and acceptable. As far as his genius goes, the result is not so convincing. Raised by those same scientists to be a Renaissance man, Doc is the acknowledged leader in every field, more knowledgeable and perceptive than specialists in those fields. As far as simple technology goes, Doc is fine, building gadgets which are being perfected now, thirty-odd years later. In some ways, he was a forerunner of James Bond. When it comes to explaining his science or his philosophy, Doc fares badly, seeming rather simplistic and even naive. Realizing early in the saga how difficult it is to script a character with superior intelligence (see how much less prolific Moorcock's Elric is than Howard's Conan), Dent used two techniques for handling Doc's mind: first, he makes our hero very taciturn, never speaking more than necessary and usually not explaining his ideas or plans to anyone.



Doc Savage (Ron Ely) leaps feet first into the face of a new generation. Doc was the 1933 invention of Missourian Lester Dent (under the pseudonym Kenneth Robeson) who wrote 165 of the 181 Doc Savage novels, turning out a 60,000 word pulp novel a month for 15 years. Dent died while treasure hunting in Florida in 1959, but Doc Savage lives on—resurrected by George Pal, Bantam Books, James Bama and Marvel Comics. Stuck in the sordid mid-Seventies as everyone is, Doc is surely needed these days to straighten things out.

DOC & THE AMAZING 5

RENNY

William Lucking plays Renny, the world's greatest engineer. Lucking, born in Vicksburg, Mich., graduated in 1963 from UCLA, where he worked his way through college as a private investigator. After study with Jeff Corey at the Pasadena Playhouse, he made his stage debut as John F. Kennedy in "Macbird." He did numerous tv shows, made his film debut in 1969 in HELL'S BELLS and during a motorcycle scene in HAROLD AND MAUDE, Lucking lucked out—a broken leg that kept him away from the cameras for two years and almost produced chimeras for two years.

HAM

Darrell Zwerling plays Ham, the world's smartest lawyer. Zwerling, a former Pittsburgh optometrist, decided to become an actor in 1913, appearing in tv commercials and on Broadway ("Room Service"). In 1973 he went to Hollywood and made his film debut in Otto Preminger's SUCH GOOD FRIENDS and snared feature roles in THE HOT L BALTIMORE, OUR TIME and Polanski's CHINATOWN.

JOHNNY

Eldon Quick plays Johnny, international expert on geology and archaeology. Eldon wanted to be an actor ever since grammar school days in Phoenix, Ariz., where he wrote, acted and produced. Majoring in drama at U. of Ariz., he went into acting in N.Y.C. (studied with Wm. Hickey at Herbert Bergoff Studio). 1957: started 9 seasons of summer-winter stock for Phoenix's Sombrero Playhouse, American Shakespeare Festival (Stratford, Conn.) and many off-Broadway theaters. Lately was in "The Mizer" at Mark Taper Forum and "Absence of a Cello" at Huntington Hartford (Los Angeles).

DOC

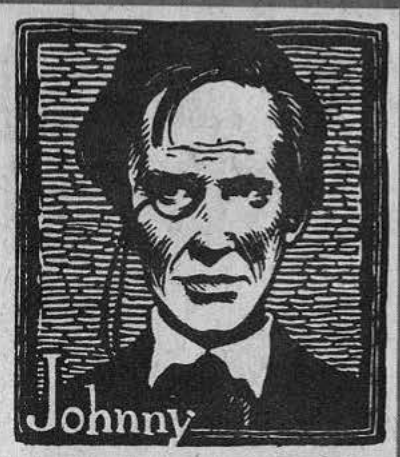
Ron Ely plays Doc Savage, the Man of Bronze. Hundreds were interviewed for the role, 20 finalists were given screen tests, but only 6' 5", 235 lb. Ron had the goods. Born in Hereford, Texas, Ely worked his way through school as an oil rig roughneck, won a scholarship to the University of Tex., and made his movie debut in SOUTH PACIFIC, followed by NIGHT OF THE GRIZZLY, THE FIEND WHO WALKED THE WEST and others. His first tv appearance was on FATHER KNOWS BEST, followed by MALIBU RUN and his famed TARZAN portrayal. He's tremendously popular in Europe because of the foreign-dubbed telecasts of TARZAN, and this international popularity was undoubtedly a factor in the casting of Ely as Doc.

MONK

Michael Miller makes his movie debut as Monk, the world's greatest chemist. The Chicago born actor excelled as a comedic performer at Wright Jr. College and the University of Illinois, appeared for four years at Chicago's Hull House Theatre, two years at the Pittsburgh Playhouse, and was a member of the improvisational Second City. He's also adept at drama: "The Three Penny Opera," Pinter's "The Lovers" and Beckett's "Play." His tv appearances include THE DAVID STEINBERG SHOW and LOVE AMERICAN STYLE.

LONG TOM

Paul Gleason plays Long Tom, the world's greatest electrical wizard. Born in Miami, Gleason attended Florida State, and, in 1966, studied with Lee Strasberg at the Actor's Studio and began his stage career in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," followed by "Gingerbread Lady." He made his movie debut in SUNSHINE LADY, directed by Bruce Dern. Recent tv work: BRONSON, MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE.



Paul
Orban's
1934
DOC
SAVAGE
illustrations



This has the added tactical advantage of allowing Doc to solve the mystery while the other characters (and the reader) can be kept in the dark for most of the story. Secondly, as Dent explains in "The Squeaking Goblin":

"Doc Savage did not conduct himself on an intellectual level. He had a remarkable faculty of making himself seem one of whatever group in which he might find himself."

As STAR TREK fans recall, people are uncomfortable and resentful in the presence of superior intelligence. While Doc is like Spock in having an emotionally retentive personality, he is apparently more successful. Doc's stern, non-sense facade never falters, thus perhaps missing a potentially dramatic scene and leaving him not fully developed.

Gimmicks are an integral part of the Savage formula. They change and develop as Doc experiments and discards, or as Dent dreams up or forgets. Some are clever and understandable, such as speaking Mayan in the presence of enemies, or carrying glass capsules of anesthetic gas. Some are a little more far-fetched, such as the thimbles tipped



THE FEATHERED SERPENT STRIKES!

with drugged needles, which give Doc the touch of sleep. Other recurring gimmicks are the Fortress of Solitude (which was swiped for Superman, along with Doc's first name), and the crime college, where brain surgeons operate on criminals and reform them medically.

One character, even one like Doc, is much too limiting for a new novel each month. Doc has five aides, each a master in his field: a chemist, a lawyer, an electrician, an engineer, and an archaeologist. It must be remembered that not only could Doc beat them all up, he was better in each one's field than any of them. This is no slur on them, of course, but it does reduce their heroic stature.

The use of these aides has never quite seemed fair. Two of them, Monk and Ham, quickly developed into favorites and generally squeezed the other three out of the picture altogether. One particularly regrets the fate of Colonel John "Renny" Renwick, the engineer, who was never given enough characterization. A six-foot-four sour-faced misanthrope with immense disproportionate fists, he reminds one a little of Howard's Solomon Kane, and he deserved more exposure than he got.

There are many flaws in the Doc Savage books. Dent's writing has been justifiably criticized, and he made no secret of the fact that he had a master plot diagram laid out for all his stories. If one gives thought to the challenge of turning out a hundred-odd page novel a month, every month, a formula plot is a welcome idea.

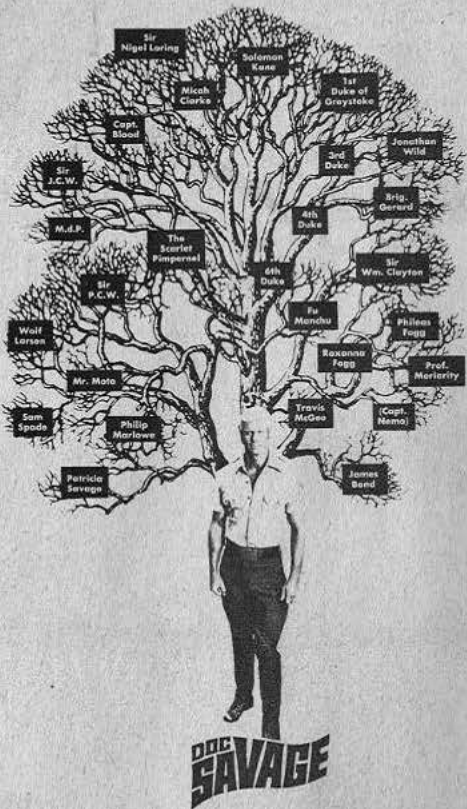
Indeed, part of Doc's appeal is his set, rigid plot-line. With a few exceptions, each Doc Savage novel featured both a mysterious villain and a weird

Below: 1937 DOC SAVAGE cover painting by R.G. Harris. Facing page: 1934 DOC SAVAGE covers by the great Walter Baumhofer who painted 60 covers a year during the Thirties for such mags as WILD WEST WEEKLY, THE SPIDER and SPEAKEASY STORIES. Each Baumhofer masterpiece, based on a short synopsis of the story (which he never read), netted him a grand total of \$75.

Left: Marvel's DOC as rendered by renaissance mediaman Jim Steranko. Right: Ron Ely and George Pal. Note Steranko artwork at Pal's elbow.



The Geneological Chart of the Immortal Doc Savage



menace or gimmick. The villain provided much of the interest, for a number of suspects were always provided and Dent was adroit at concealing his fiend's true identity. He was, perhaps, not as subtle as a mystery writer like Ellery Queen, but these were adventure tales, and he was fair with his readers. This "Who's the Mastermind" is one of Doc's major drawing cards. The menace or gimmick often had a prosaic explanation which tied up all loose ends.

Those who say that individual Doc Savage books may be weak are correct, but are also missing the point. The Doc Savage books are not a trilogy or a con-



SAVAGE author Lester Dent

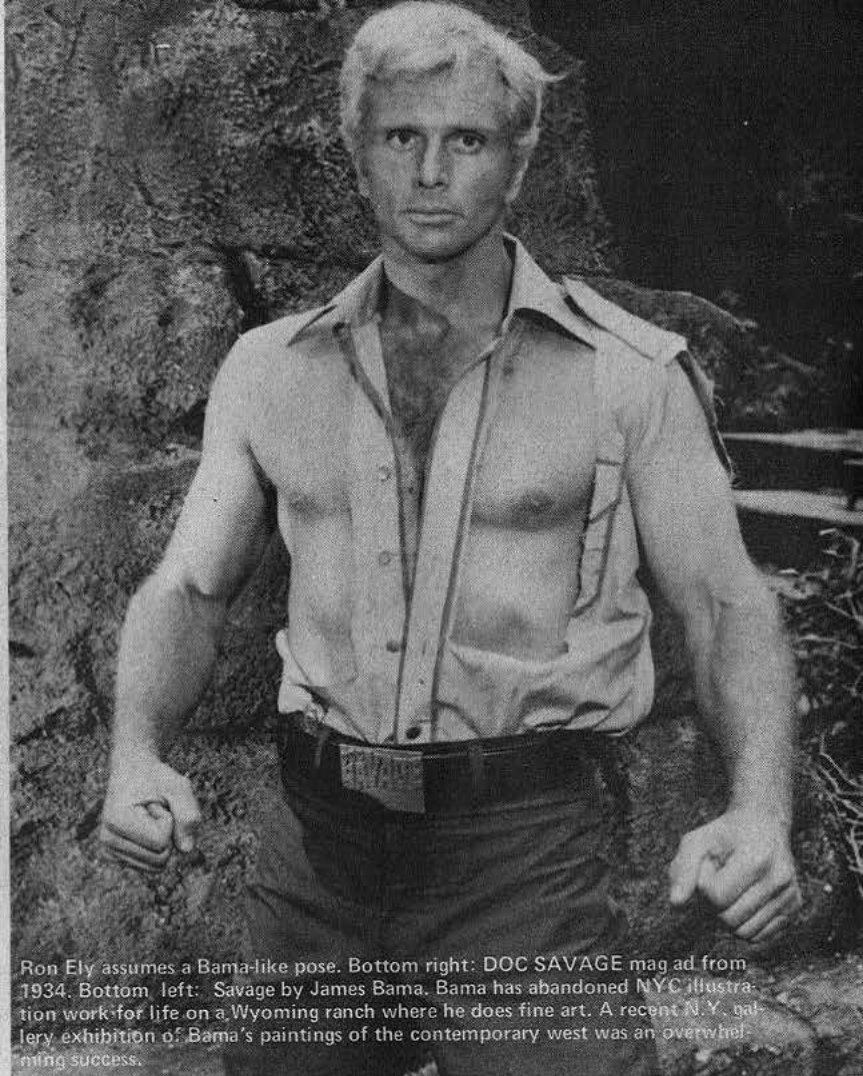
SAVAGE director Michael Anderson explains the intricacies of his location camera setup to producer George Pal.



secutive series. They are a saga combining the ultimate hero with all imaginable elements of science fiction, weird fantasy, heroic fantasy and crime drama, with a sizable charge of action in each segment. One does not single out an individual book for study. Rather, the reader makes Doc a habit, and buys the new novel each month, taking the epic as it comes. It's not great literature, but it doesn't have to be. There is room for all tastes and all genres, and Doc Savage has his own, as the continuing success of the Bantam reprints to a new generation can attest to.

Who is Doc Savage? He is a hero. Like Burroughs' "Tarzan," Howard's "Conan," Doyle's "Sherlock Holmes" and Fleming's "James Bond." Dent's *Doc Savage* has survived the death of his creator and thus earned a special kind of immortality.

— Edward Felipe



Ron Ely assumes a Bama-like pose. Bottom right: DOC SAVAGE mag ad from 1934. Bottom left: Savage by James Bama. Bama has abandoned NYC illustration work for life on a Wyoming ranch where he does fine art. A recent N.Y. gallery exhibition of Bama's paintings of the contemporary west was an overwhelming success.

