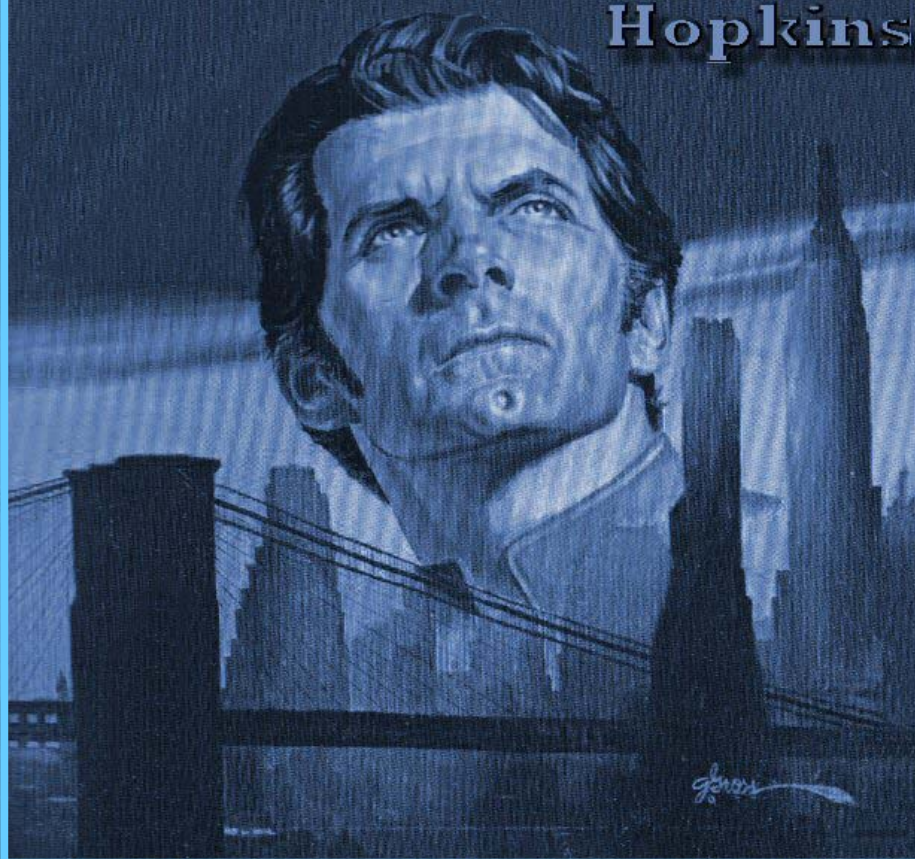


# THE GRAY NEMESIS

by  
Howard  
Hopkins





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HOWARD HOPKINS



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## THE GRAY NEMESIS

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**\*by Doug Ellis**

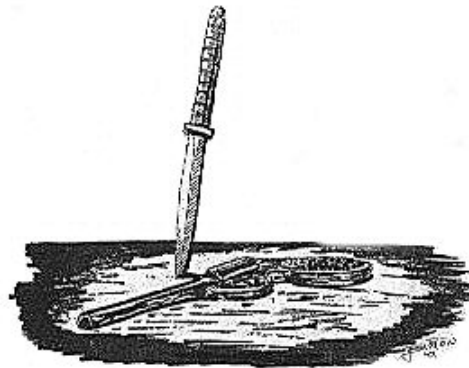
**\*\*by Will Murray**

# THE GRAY NEMESIS

In the roaring heart of the crucible, steel is made. In the raging flame of personal tragedy, men are sometimes forged into something more than human.

It was so with Dick Benson. He had been a man. After the dread loss inflicted on him by an inhuman crime ring, he became a machine of vengeance dedicated to the extermination of all other crime rings.

He turned into the person we know now: a figure of ice and steel, more pitiless than both; a mechanism of whipcord and flame; a symbol of destruction to crooks and killers; a terrible, almost impersonal Force, masking chill genius and super-normal power behind a face as white and dead as a mask from the grave. Only his pale eyes, like ice in a polar dawn, hint at the deadliness of the scourge the underworld heedlessly invoked against itself when crime's greed turned millionaire adventurer Richard Henry Benson into—The Avenger!



Dedicated to Paul Ernst, reluctant Avenger

# THE GRAY NEMESIS

## INTRODUCTION

In 1939 Street & Smith was in a horse race with their magazines. Two fiction thoroughbreds, Doc Savage and The Shadow, led the pack. Trouble was, these stallions far out-distanced the remaining nags such as The Skipper and The Whisperer, which were of the same genetic stock but underfed, and the prospects of relying on two aging bellwethers were less than glowing.

What to do, what to do?

Well, raise a new horse, of course. One combining the mighty strength and presence of Doc Savage yet the sleek winning lines of The Shadow.

Easy.

Or so you'd think.

First the trainers were called in: Business Manager Henry W. Ralston and editor John L. Nanovic; second, the jockeys: Lester Dent and Walter B. Gibson. After all, you needed the best, especially with the Mystery mules nipping at your hooves.

This new horse would have to be something special, indeed.

He was.

And he wasn't.

As a character, this new pony, called The Avenger, was special, a persona so remote and well-developed he sprang from the page into pulp history and success in paperback years later. What more could they ask for?

Well, strong sales might be nice.

The Avenger combined the best traits of Doc Savage—a public figure of easy access to the oppressed, a headquarters filled with magical gadgets, quirky assistants—and The Shadow—a grim presence driven by base urges, intrigue and suspense in the dubious world of politics and big business, and a commanding demeanor unchallenged by even his crew. It was perfect.

Anyone reading Mr. Ernst's stories for the past decade and a half would swear the guy was full of murder, mayhem and mischief. Actually, Paul himself insists that for him, adventure exists only in typewriter ribbons. This from a fellow who, with his wife, has been systematically murdering as many people as possible (in fiction, of course) from the time he settled his family on a Bucks County, Pa., farm, ten years ago.

Paul Ernst first took up writing as a career in Chicago several years before his move to Pennsylvania. If you



**PAUL ERNST**

**On a Bucks County farm, Paul Ernst is busy with his fictional murders.**

are still dubious that he is such a placid individual, listen to what he regards as the most exciting thing he has done in his whole life.

"Honestly, I've never done anything more violent than running out of tobacco in a blizzard and having to walk to Bill White's store, a mile away."

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

Now, they needed a jockey.

Another problem: the jockey didn't want to get on the horse.

It took a lot of incentive, \$750 a novel and ready-made plots, to convince Paul Ernst (1899-1985), a veteran pulpster who had penned many a horror and science fiction tale, as well as mystery and adventure, to saddle up. Even then, he took the job with great reluctance (Ernst is quoted as saying *The Avenger* was his “poorest writing”, but in a later interview he remarked they “must have been better than he thought” if so many fans loved them). He had visions of bigger and better things—the slicks—but Nanovic gave him the cash, the idea and the plots, so the choice may not have been that tough after all.

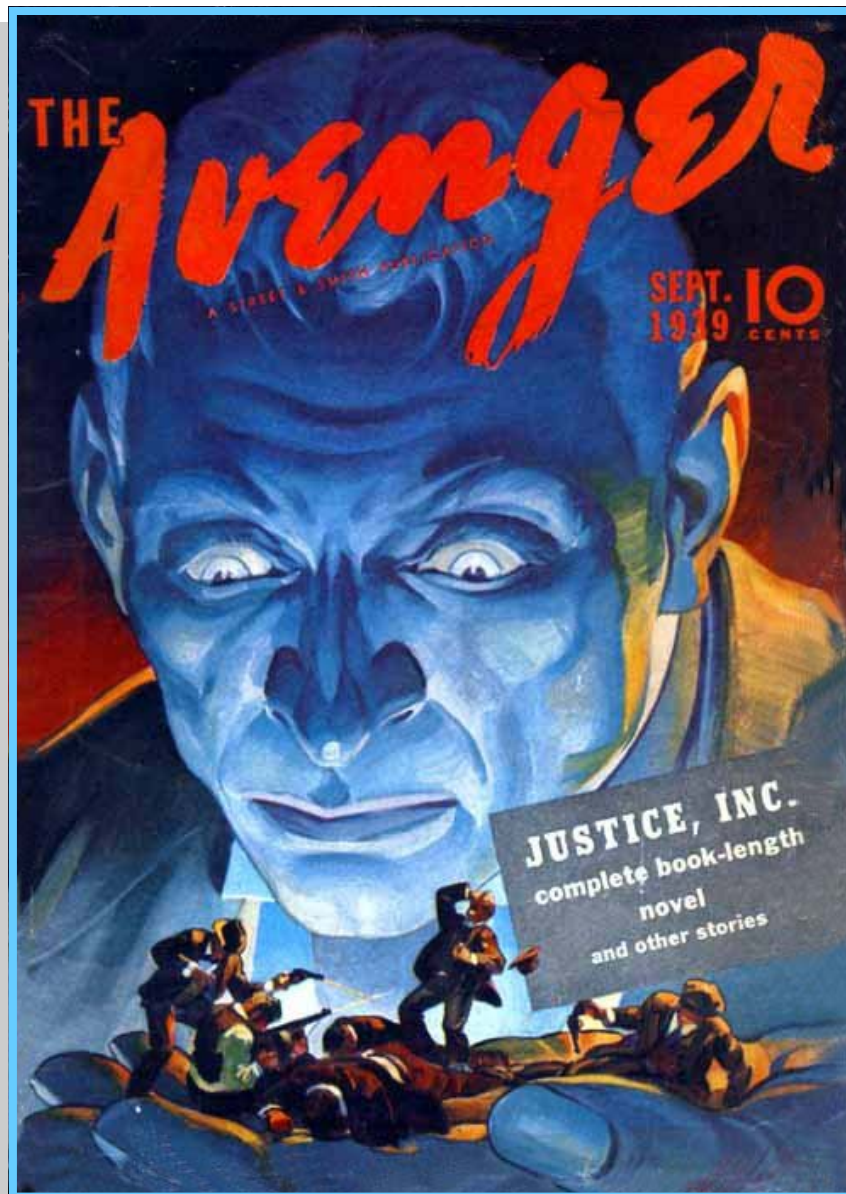
Despite Paul Ernst's lack of enthusiasm for the character and his joblike approach, he was perfect for the job. And despite his claims that *The Avenger* was some of his poorest writing, it was a quantum leap above most other pulp series. (It can be argued from a technical standpoint his work surpassed Gibson's, whose prose sometimes took on the quality of an archeological dig's slowness, and Dent's, whose brilliant characters, until the late 40s, were sometimes surrounded by choppy writing and loose plotting. But that is for the literary critics to debate. Enough to say, *The Avenger* under another author is now unthinkable.) Paul Ernst breathed life into the series, made it his own, and had it come along in 1933 instead of 1939, likely it would have been a huge success. At least its chances of survival would have been better.

But his horse got tangled up in its hooves and fell in 1942, after a paltry 24 issues. *The Avenger* faded into musty magazine history—until revived to great success 30 years later in paperback. The series proved so popular, in fact, that after the original 24 tales ran out a new writer, science fiction author Ron Goulart, who added 12 tales, was hired to continue the series. Goulart was the wrong choice for the stories because he liked the character even less than Ernst, and disliked Ernst's writing style. For the second time, *The Avenger* horse stumbled and fell, this time breaking a leg.

This book presents my history of a character favorite second only to Doc Savage. His literary life was way too short and I for one would love to see, or write, new adventures starring Richard Henry Benson. I, using Ernst's original novels as well as Goulart's new tales (with a heavy emphasis on the originals), have tried to be as in-depth and meticulous as possible. This book has been corrected, expanded and reset from its original versions in *Golden Perils # 1* and *The Gray Nemesis*. Articles have been added on the Tepperman Avenger shorts, DC Comics and radio versions, as well as on the covers and the Goulart Avenger books. I wish to thank Doug Ellis for his article on the radio Avenger. As of this writing, all known scripts have been reprinted in Doug's excellent magazine,

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

*Pulp Vault.* Thanks to Chuck Juzek for titling my first two articles. Thanks to Will Murray for allowing me to reprint his Avenger Publication Table from his article "Origin of an Avenger" as published in *Nemesis, Inc.* #77. Last but certainly not least, I am indebted to John P. Gunnison for providing the original pulp art from *The Avenger* Magazine, without which the Avenger Illustrated section and interior art throughout this book would not have been possible.

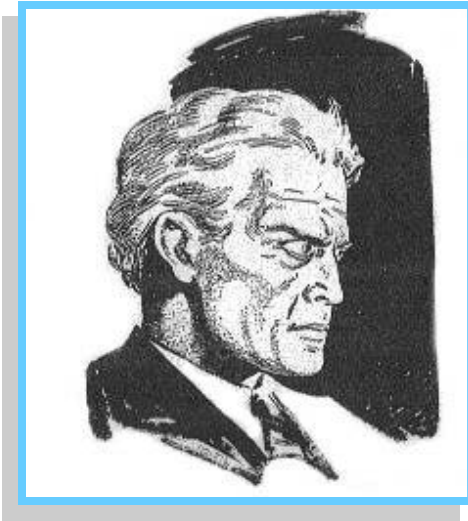




# THE GRAY NEMESIS

## ONE: GRAY VENGEANCE

If millionaire adventurer Richard Henry Benson could turn back time and journey back to that fateful day in 1939, many things would have been different. Had he that gift, he could have avoided the terrible tragedy that would tear his life apart, leaving him nothing more than the shell of a man. Unfortunately,



though he is a man blessed with many extraordinary powers, he cannot change time.

Richard Henry Benson is not a large man, no more than five-feet-eight inches tall, barely tipping the scales at 160 pounds. His age is quoted as "somewhere in his mid-thirties. Just old enough to have a veteran fighter's experience; just young enough to have the fire and endurance of youth."

A fire, after the events of *Justice, Inc.*, replaced with a raging inferno.

The sun glared from a sapphire sky that day at Buffalo Airport. All seemed serene, yet something, an electrical snap of foreboding, crackled in the air when Dick Benson, his wife and small daughter approached the ticket counter, demanding three seats aboard the next flight departing for Montreal. Benson's wife's mother lay on her deathbed there, and it is imperative they reach her side at the earliest possible moment. As fate would have it, his wife's mother was not the only person slated for eternity that day.

The counterman rudely informs Benson seats are no longer available on the small plane scheduled to depart within the hour. But Benson has no choice; they simply must get there. Dick's eyes flash like "gray flame" and no one bars his way as he forces himself and his family onto the outgoing sky vessel. The plane taxis, lifts off the runway with them aboard—into oblivion.

Things go smoothly at first, though there exists a certain tenseness among the other passengers. Still, Benson can't understand why he'd been denied passage. Only six other people occupy the seats; three remain empty. Everything's fine. On edge, he begins to let go, relax, deciding to wash his hands in the bathroom. "Richard had a mania for cleanliness." Although this mysophobic tendency would not persist for the remainder of the series, the damage is already done.

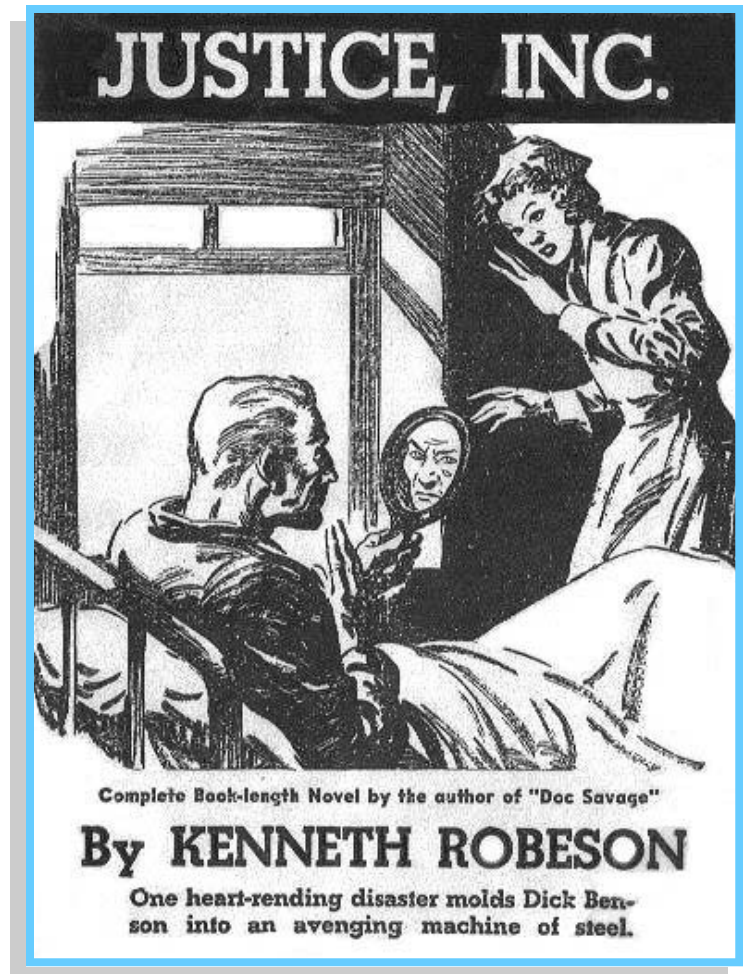
## THE GRAY NEMESIS

Little does he know that when he bids goodbye to his family for the moment, it is for the last time.

On returning from the bathroom, Benson discovers his wife and daughter missing, their seats still warm. A shiver of apprehension courses through him. Something *feels* wrong, though he can't tell what. He asks if they are ill, hoping the feeling is unwarranted.

Then things begin to lock into place, a jigsaw of despair and hopelessness. His world flips upside down, beginning a chain of events that would shackle his emotions until the day he died.

None aboard the plane will admit to having seen his family. He must be mistaken—or crazy. He boarded the plane alone at Buffalo. Images flash from his memory. His mind races with crazy, bizarre thoughts. Something deep inside him snaps. He goes berserk, drawing a gun on the other passengers. His nerves burn with white fire. A scar sears across his soul. His torment is incredible, beyond the limits of human endurance. During the melee, the pilot clubs Benson from behind, ending his suffering with unconsciousness. Benson flitters in and out of awareness, trapped in a black world of distorted images and unbearable sorrow. He awakens briefly when the plane lands, yelling, struggling, praying someone will tell him



## THE GRAY NEMESIS

it's just all some sort of horrible nightmare.

The nightmare is only too real.

Lapsing into blackness again, he remains so for three weeks, awakening in a hospital. Somehow, something is different. He has changed, and changed incredibly. In effect, Richard Henry Benson never did wake up. Someone—*something*—else did. No longer is he the man who left Buffalo, a man filled with hopes and dreams for the future. No, these things are gone, now. Forever.

In fact, he is barely a man at all. More of a machine, a terrible, almost

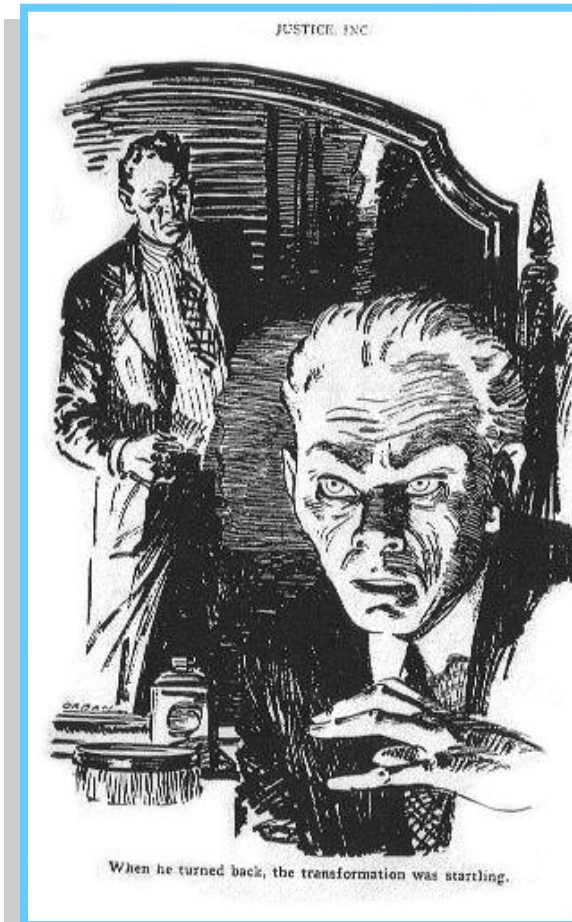
inhuman force, capable only of feeling the terror of being alone. He is trapped in a world of ice and frozen emotion, with nothing to live for, everything he ever loved torn away from him. A single purpose drives his empty existence: to find the reason his wife and child were snatched from him just when he was starting to live—and destroy the evil responsible.

Shock has done incredible things to him: bleached his hair snow white and paralyzed his facial muscles so that he can manipulate them into any shape he chooses. This recompense, little though it may be, he will use to crush the bastards who turned him into some kind of dreadful inhuman machine.

"He had gone into the place a man. He had come out a machine; a machine of ice and slow fire; a powerful engine geared to only two things—the recovery of wife

and child and the destruction of the force that had acted so fantastically against him."

In his broken shell was the scourge the underworld would come to fear at the mere whisper of his name—The Avenger!



# THE GRAY NEMESIS

## TWO: THE GRAY NEMESIS

*Justice, Inc.* describes Richard Henry Benson as being of average height and weight—these are probably the only aspects of the man with the steely eyes that can be considered at all average. Though of medium build, Benson's musculature defies scientific explanation. Ounce for ounce its tensile strength is twice to three times that of normal sinew and muscle fiber. A superhuman strength packed into

a compact frame. He turns this incredible power against those who seek to oppress the innocent, men too clever for the sluggish and sometimes bumbling ways of the law.

This strength is nothing if not spectacular. In the baffling case of *The Yellow Hoard*, wherein a murderous band of criminals devastate the city with peanut-shaped explosives in an effort to acquire some clay bricks hiding the secret to a fabulous cache of Aztec gold Benson hoists a stone slab weighing in excess of 400 pounds as if it were merely a manhole cover (equaling The Shadow's feat in *Xitli, God of Fire*). Twice in the course of the series he brings the giant Smitty to his knees (*Justice, Inc.* and *Tuned for Murder*). In *The Sky Walker*, while he and Smitty are investigating a man they suspect to be of the criminal persuasion, Benson and the giant find

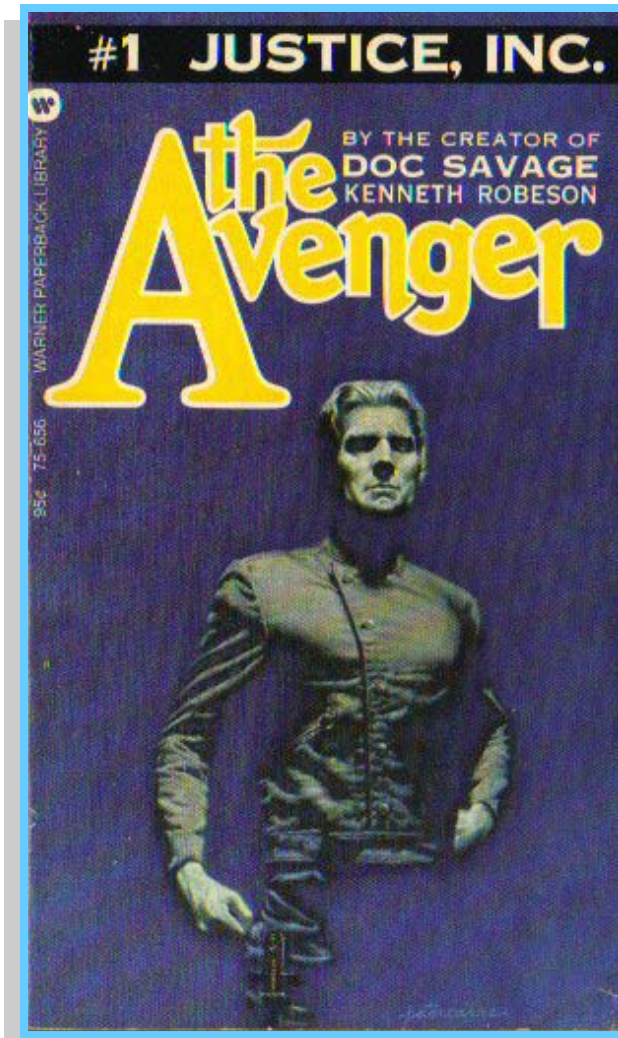


themselves trapped in an elevator doomed to crash nine floors below because a criminal has severed the steel cable. The Avenger miraculously grips the floor sill through a gap in the doors and holds the elevator suspended in midair while Smitty takes over. Although catching the sill would be enough to snap off an ordinary mortal's fingers, Benson next performs an equally amazing feat. He

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

climbs atop the cage and ties the steel cable into a knot, allowing Smitty and an unconscious elevator operator to reach safety. (Doc Savage underwent a similar episode in *Dust of Death*, but in that case a natural air cushion halted the plunge.) This fantastic, though improbable feat is accomplished just in the nick of time, as the cable untangles and the cage plunges nine floors, splintering into so much kindling at the shaft bottom. Later in the tale, when Josh has to return to that same building, Benson dryly remarks that he should take the stairs.

Other examples of Benson's strength abound throughout the tales. He can easily shoulder and carry the 285 pound Smitty. His back muscles are powerful enough to shred his coat merely by expanding them. Numerous novels state no



man alive can break his grip. A later novel, *Nevlo*, proves this wrong, however, as the apelike beast does manage to snap his hold. At the time, Benson's hand is thrust through a crevice in a rock barricade and the beast is blessed with unusual strength, so it is excusable. In *Midnight Murder*, the final Avenger saga, his grip is so strong he is able to grasp a locked door knob and twist until the mechanism surrenders.

He is a steel gray bar, cast from torment, gifted with amazing vigor and ability, as well as power. The Avenger's speed and coordination also far exceed normal limits. It strains the eye to keep up with his swiftness and catlike movements.

*Pictures of Death* shows his coordination to be so magnificent he is able to grasp with his toes a towel that has been stuffed down a shower drain and pull it free. At the

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

time, he and Mac are trapped in an air-tight shower cabinet filling with water, so this ability comes in quite handy. Mac doesn't think any other living person can duplicate this feat.

Benson's movements make the normal man's appear slow and awkward. He is chained lightning, liquid flame.

So well-coordinated and swift are his hands, he snatches a maddened pigeon out of mid-flight in *The Hate Master*. He can cover 100 yards in nine seconds

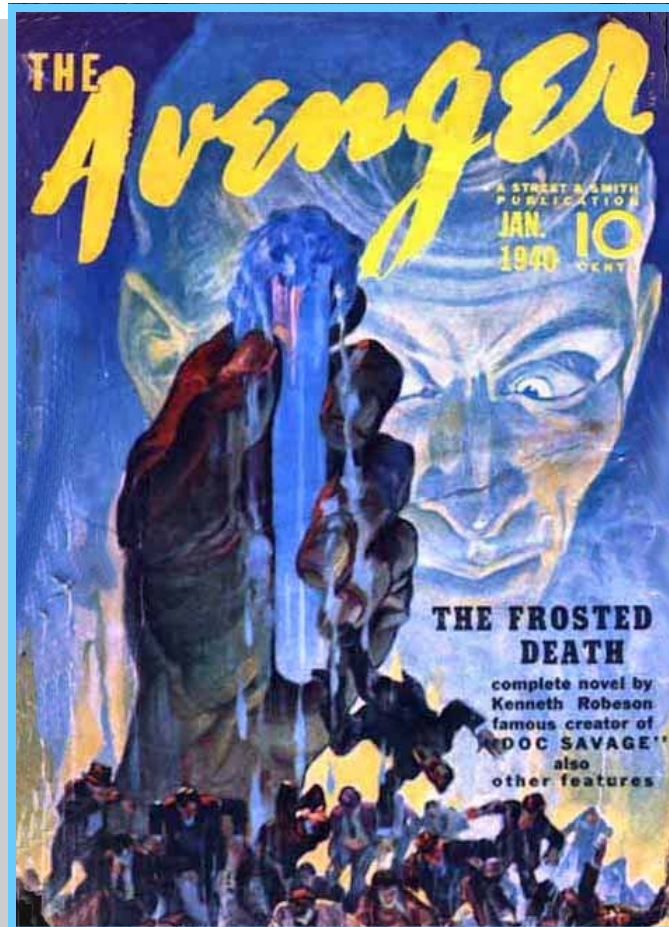
flat (fast for 1939). Like Doc Savage, his literary cousin, he can travel through interlaced tree tops in the jungle, as well as in northern areas (in *The Frosted Death* he does this while approaching a cabin in the Maine woods. Anyone living in this area knows how difficult this feat really is).

Not only are his physical powers amazing, but his accomplishments in other areas are of equal note. They encompass every field, science through art. In each endeavor he is a genius.

He has mined the arctic and Antarctic and completed several jobs for the French railway in North Africa as an engineer. In his teens he

spotted rubber in South America, led native armies in Java, made aerial maps of the Congo. In his thirties he mined emeralds in Brazil, panned gold in Alaska, found diamonds in Transvaal. He acquired millions through minerals in Peru and boasted engineering feats in Siam (Thailand), Arabia, and just about every other far corner of the world.

*Justice, Inc.* states he made his last half million in an Australian amethyst



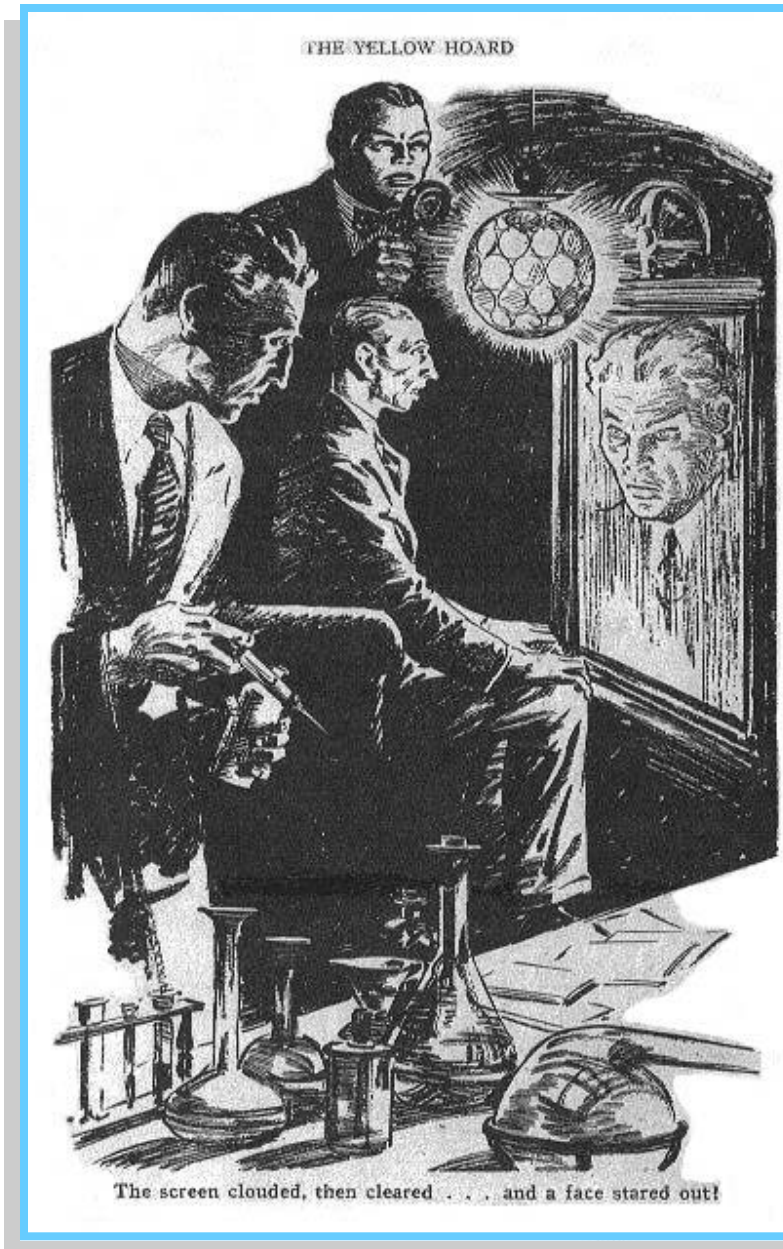
## THE GRAY NEMESIS

venture, though, in his next adventure, *The Yellow Hoard*, he would acquire many millions more.

His genius flows through every field. He is a top-ranking physician, without peer as an Egyptologist and able to decipher Aztec hieroglyphics. A whiz in any branch, take your pick.

Perhaps as a chemist he is foremost. In *The Green Killer* he quickly develops a cure for the hideous disease transforming men into apelike creatures. In *The Black Death* he comes up with a remedy for the malady of the same name. His uncanny ability leads to the solution of the "slow motion disease" in *Death in Slow Motion*, saving two of his aides affected with the virus from certain death.

In the curious and violent exploit of *The Hate Master*, Benson finds himself baffled for the first time



## THE GRAY NEMESIS

in his career. A mysterious red compound turns men and animals into maddened demons bent on attacking and destroying anything in sight. When one of his aides, Cole Wilson, contracts the sickness, Benson is forced to try a serum that may kill Cole rather than cure him.

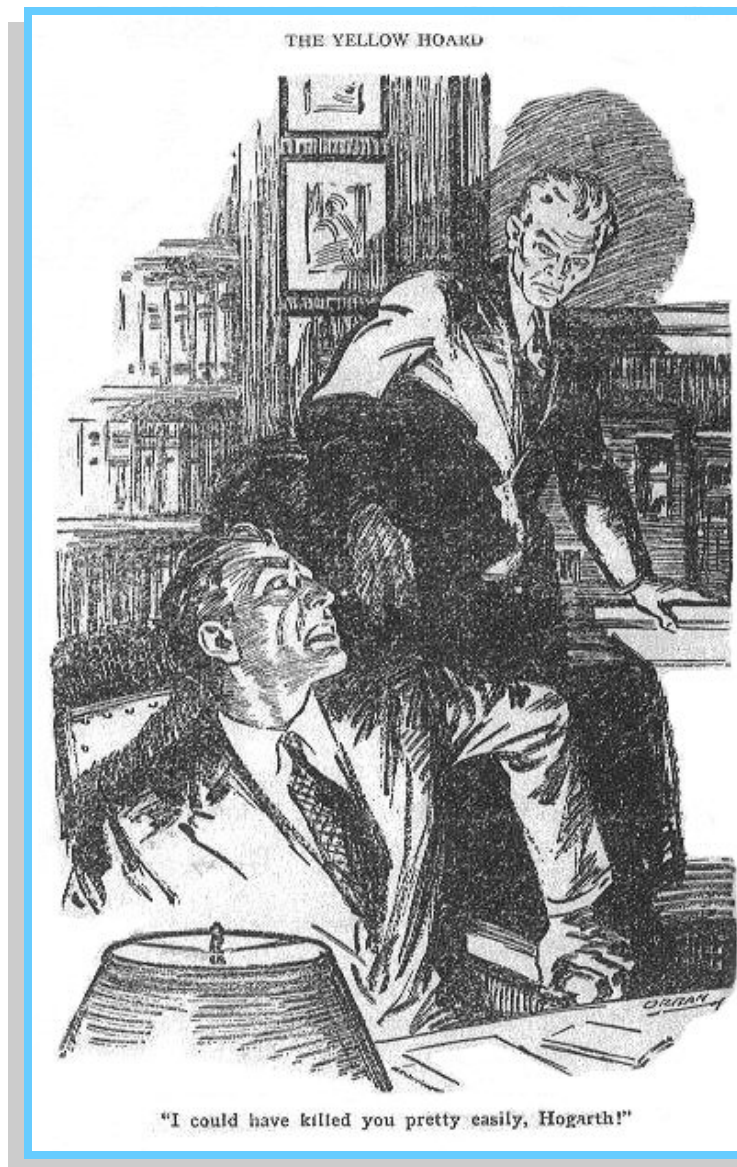
He invents new operating techniques and designs many new and useful surgical instruments for hospitals.

He's fluent enough in dozens of languages to speak them without an accent. In *Death in Slow Motion* he knows even the obscure Hungarian dialects of

Transylvania.

He regains consciousness fully alert, even when it is the result of a blow, an animal-like ability he shares with Doc Savage. He possesses amazing recuperative powers.

Benson's list of further accomplishments is impressive and seemingly endless. He is one of the world's greatest experts in aerodynamics. He has been a pearl diver and learned techniques enabling him to hold his breath several minutes while under water (another trait he shares with Doc Savage). He can bend his thumb into his palm and compress his fingers together to make the





## THE GRAY NEMESIS

circumference of his hand no larger than that of his wrist, a feature that comes in handy in *The Glass Mountain* when some locals mistakenly try to hang him for murder. He slips out of the bonds to leave behind some very irate and embarrassed self-styled lawmen. This ability enables him to slip through handcuffs on many occasions.

He is one of the best judges of men and has friends in all walks of life.

For a man in his mid-thirties (*Midnight Murder* places Benson in his twenties, so he was apparently regressing in age as the series progressed), these accomplishments are quite remarkable.

are left to wonder Avenger's abilities accomplishments not have the same scientific

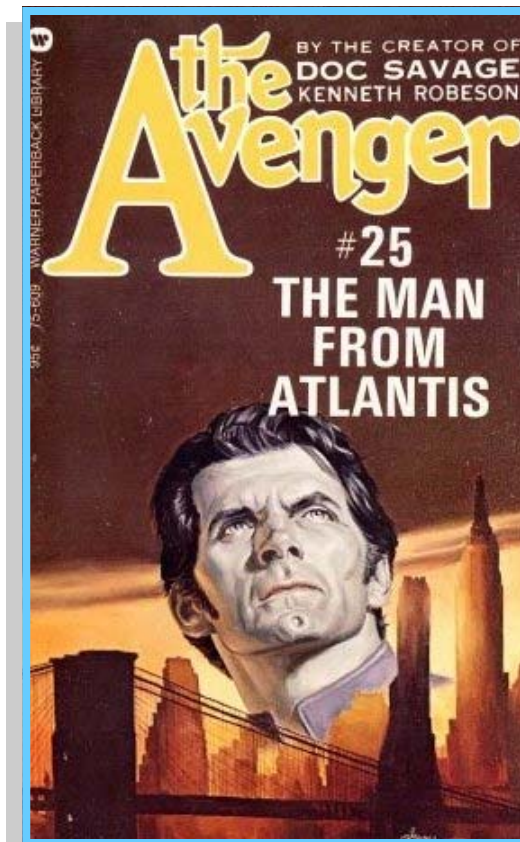
Savage and was experienced than

In his spare art connoisseur. leads a man to try Nellie a copy of Dock" in the *Pictures of Death*. man tumbles from window to his Benson can view manages to acquire later on, causing all problems for bad guys.

He also loves to several pieces of Metropolitan Museum. He spends most of his leisure hours at this hobby. (When does he get any?) Like Doc Savage, he is a composer of rare merit.

As a pilot he rivals Doc and The Shadow. Even so, his plane (and car) bill alone would be enough to halt his crime-busting career if he weren't hugely wealthy. One novel states he has a hanger at La Guardia with at least half a dozen planes. Another later novel brings the count up to an even dozen.

As stated, in *The Yellow Hoard* Benson adds to his already vast wealth,



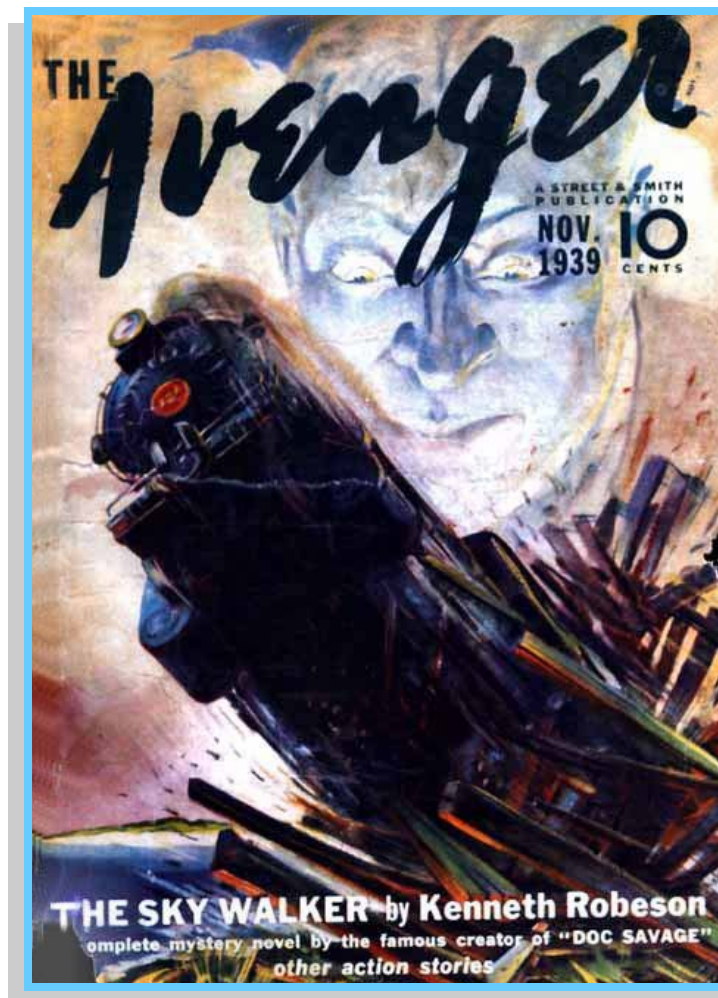
are quite Readers, however, just where The and came from. He did intensive upbringing as Doc years less The Shadow. time, Benson is an This love of art to sell Smitty and Gauguin's "The opening events of Unfortunately, the a fourth story death before the painting. He the piece anyway manner of himself and the

sculpt. He has work in the

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

furnishing enough capital to support his band indefinitely in their crime-busting campaign. While hunting the vicious murderers of Professor Gray, following a trail of clay bricks and an emerald belt, he becomes heir, through Nellie, to a hoard of Aztec gold, much the way Doc Savage did in his adventure, *The Man of Bronze*. It is donated to Justice & Co. (by the time of *Stockholders in Death* the name of the group is changed to the more familiar one of Justice, Inc.) by Nellie to advance their fight against the underworld.

In this saga Benson is starting to receive recognition from the authorities. By



the time of *The Devil's Horns*, not a police chief in the country doesn't know him on sight. Support is given handily, and in the aforementioned novel he is even invited by the law to Ashton City to clean the streets of an evil crime syndicate, reminiscent of The Shadow's *Gangdom's Doom*. *Midnight Murder* states The Avenger is an honorary member of the New York City Police Department, a captain, *The Flame Breathers* mentions he is an honorary aide to the Secret Service.

Not that The Avenger is totally with impunity where the authorities are concerned. In the

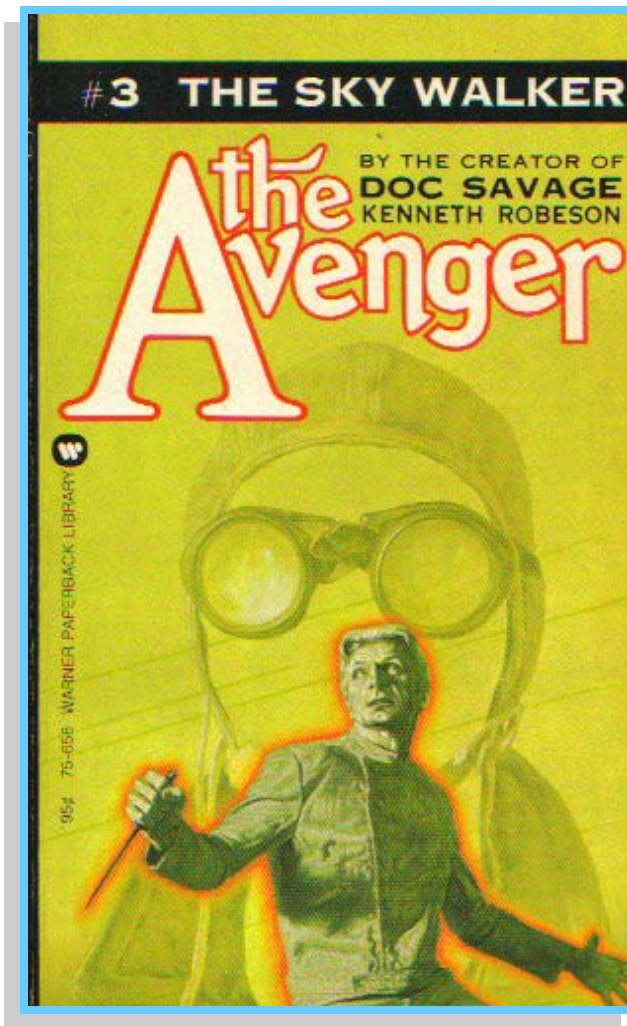
mysterious and eerie *House of Death*, he is charged with murder and seemingly tossed into the slammer. Unbeknownst to the police, who exhibit their usual pulp efficiency, Benson has switched places with an actor friend, enabling The Avenger to trail the real culprit secretly.

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

In *Nevlo* Benson is wanted for extortion.

The government actually makes every effort to exclude him from the case of *The Man From Atlantis*. In fact, Agent Don Early considers The Avenger more of a competition than a help in most post *Midnight Murder* adventures. Still, when compared to the episodes Doc Savage and The Shadow had with the law, Benson's run-ins are trivial (if you can call being charged with murder trivial).

Unlike his bronze counterpart, Benson sports no code against toting weapons.



He carries two: a small gun affectionately called "Mike" and a needle-sharp throwing knife dubbed "Ike."

Mike, the gun, resembles a piece of thin blue tubing, barrel almost as long as that of a target pistol. Its small size holds only four .22 caliber bullets and can easily be secreted in a holster strapped to Benson's right calf. In addition, it is equipped with a small silencer. Benson uses the tiny "peashooter" to "crease" the skulls of criminals, causing unconsciousness instead of killing them. He rarely misses, but it does happen. For the most part, these small slips can be forgiven. In *The Green Killer* he misses a monkey man, but the target is moving and thirty yards away. In *Three Cold Crowns* he makes an error in judgment that costs a criminal a piece of his ear.

Most of the time he is extremely accurate with his

eighth-of-an-inch skims. In *The Frosted Death* he creases a man, twice, from an elevated position and at a distance of one-hundred yards.

To his left calf he straps Ike. The knife is eight inches long, sharp as a razor,

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and double-edged, with a reinforcing spine. The handle is hollow to aid in throwing. With it he can hit a fly speck at fifty feet. In *Justice, Inc.* he snaps a button off Mac's coat when the latter is curious as to how effective such a "wee weapon" could be. He uses both weapons expertly with either hand. Throughout



the course of the series they save his life many times over and he calls them "true friends."

The only other weapon, besides his plentiful gadgets, he ever carries is a small spring gun capable of ejecting gas pellets. In *The Black Death* his aide, Cole Wilson, totes a similar weapon.

Benson never kills with these weapons (with the exception of the sudden departure from this code in *Three Gold Crowns*, where he deliberately offs a crook with Mike by shooting him in the neck).

Unlike Doc, who suddenly adopts his no-life-taking policy after a few issues of bitter violence. The Avenger series provides us with a reason for Benson's reluctance to kill: "In his extreme youth, he had been forced to kill a man. The memory of it still bit and cut." Like Doc's comrades, however, The Avenger's aides don't mind an occasional slip, especially the giant Smitty.

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

Benson's skill with other weapons is just as remarkable as that with Mike and Ike.

In *Justice, Inc.* he knocks out a crook by hurling an axe and beaming the ruffian with the handle end. Lucky for the crook he wasn't dealing with The Spider.

If Benson's bitter memories prevent him from directly killing a criminal, they certainly don't hinder him from letting them set themselves up to die in their own deathtraps.

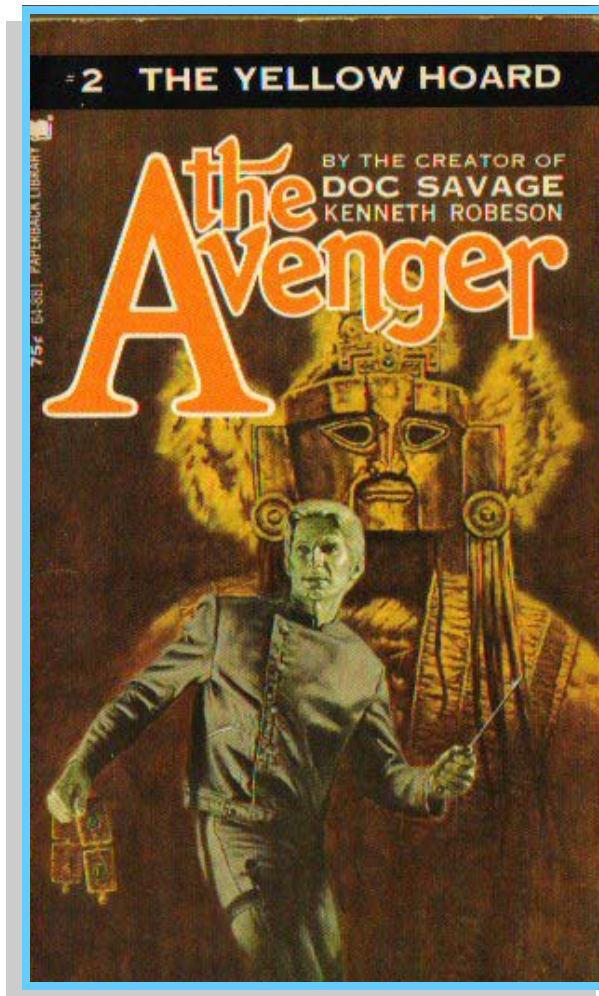
This trick he adopts from Doc Savage and carries to new heights. In the very first of The Gray Nemesis' adventures, he maneuvers the criminals into a position wherein they seal their own doom, setting the tone for the rest of the series.

In *The Yellow Hoard* criminals trying to blow up a cliff by planting explosives in a rock crevice to bring tons of stone down upon The Avenger and his gang, only succeed in burying themselves.

In *The Frosted Death* the bad guys intend to infect the Justice members with the strangling gray mold, thereby sealing their own fate with the deadly disease.

In *The Glass Mountain* the Pawnee Rain God seeks to annihilate The Avenger by drowning him in a cave flooding with water, but the criminals are the ones who end up more than just wet behind the ears.

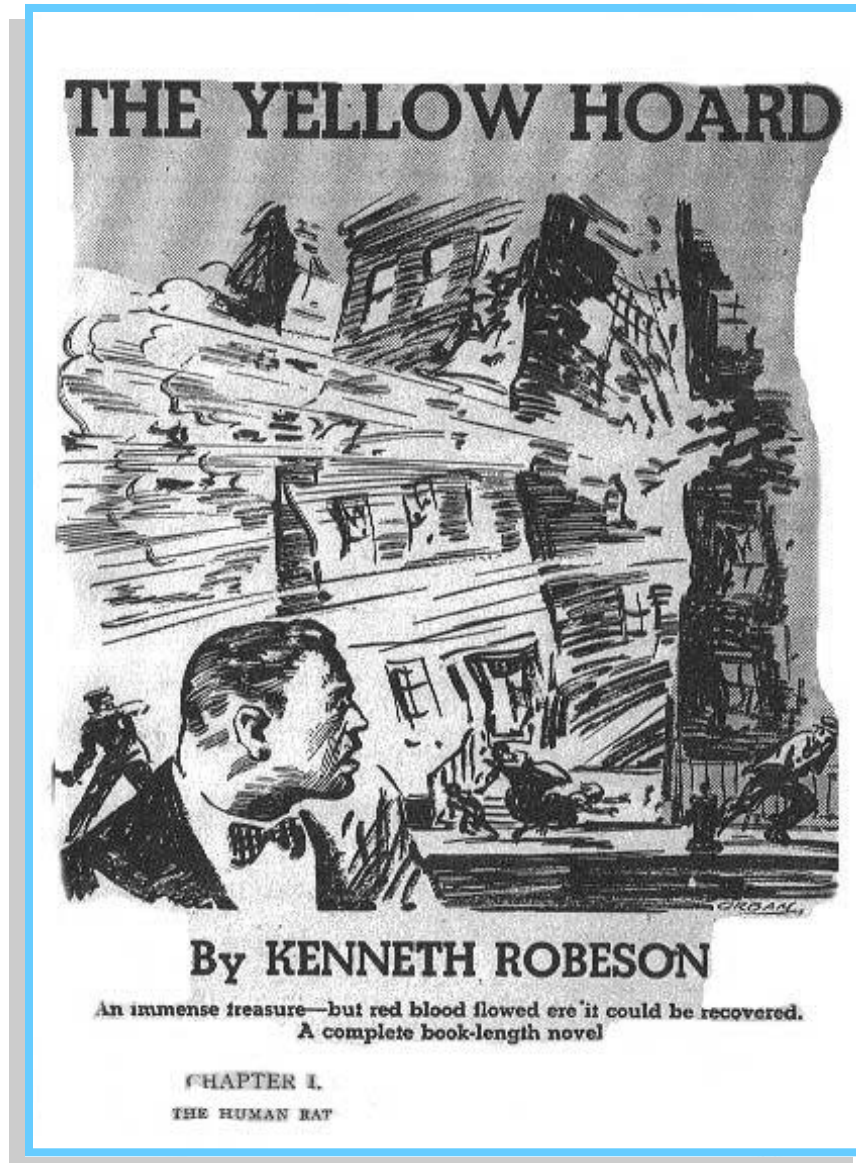
In *The Sky Walker* criminals are destroyed by the military when the invisible plane they are flying suddenly becomes visible. The Avenger has poured aviation gasoline into the compound that renders planes transparent. Well, he warned



## THE GRAY NEMESIS

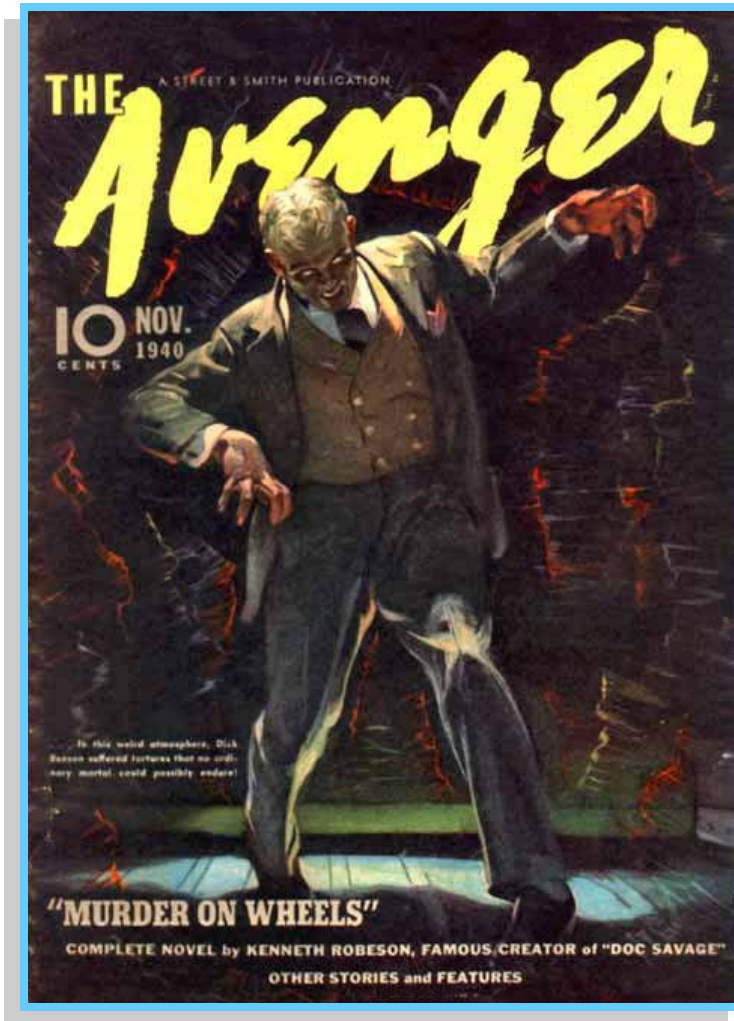
them.

In novel after novel The Avenger's genius saves the police the trouble of dealing with some master criminal, as well as saving the court system lots of time and



paperwork. If the no-goods choose to bring harm to him and his aides, they make their own fate. Here is a system Doc would readily condone, though perhaps The Shadow or The Spider would disagree. They preferred the direct approach—putting as many holes as possible into a particular foe.

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*The Devil's Horns* presents us with a glimpse into the psychology of the man with the glacial eyes. This adventure states that Benson is totally without fear. He doesn't care if he dies. In fact; he'd welcome it. "He wanted to die. Fate, with proverbial perversity, was keeping him alive."

It is *The Avenger's* suicidal habit to simply walk right into traps instead of avoiding them. There is always something to be learned from traps, a new bit of information, a small piece of the puzzle. If he were killed, as someday he knew fate would loosen its ironic grip and a knife or bullet would find his

heart, then he would be free. "The sooner he died, the sooner he would be with his wife and daughter again." (This obviously gives Benson some sort of spiritual side, though such beliefs are never directly dealt with in the series,)

In the fast-paced *Stockholders in Death* he walks right into a nest of criminals, twice, only to waltz right back out again. In a number of exploits he comes to the very brink of death only to cheat the Grim Reaper of his catch at the last possible moment.

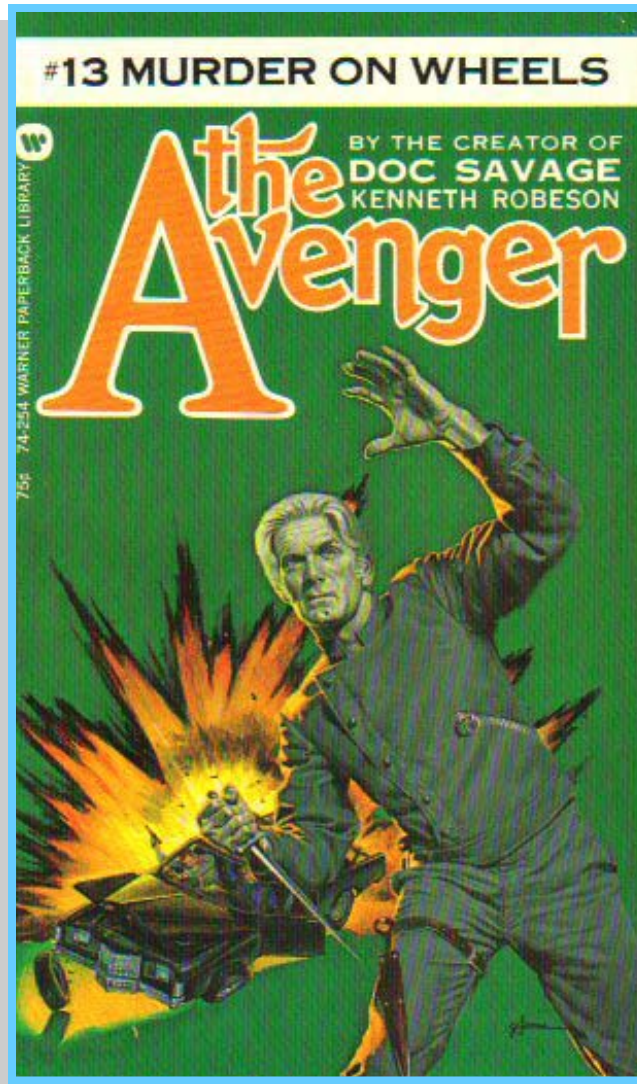
During the events of *The Yellow Hoard*, while exploring an underground cave a rock ledge collapses and sends him plummeting into a subterranean river many feet below. He nearly drowns, spared only because it is the dry season and the

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river is not as bloated as it normally would be.

*House of Death* finds Benson, Mac and Smitty trapped in a spooky old house on an island off the coast of Maine. They manage to fall through a trapdoor in the floor into a room filling with rats (rooms filling with rats seems to be an Ernst favorite as he uses the same device on Mac and Nellie in *The Hate Master*). They barely survive this episode, as soon after they are trapped in another room, this one with a descending ceiling that threatens to squash them like so many grapes.

To say Benson is totally without fear may be a slight exaggeration, however. For his own life he cares little. But when harm threatens one of his trusted aides,



he fears mightily. Numerous times throughout the series he is in turmoil, awaiting the answer he knows must someday come: one of his friends has made a mistake, a mistake that has cost him—or her—his life.

Fortunately, that answer never comes.

Although Richard Henry Benson is a machine of justice, a thing of revenge, he never seems entirely comfortable with his name tag, The Avenger. Many sagas state he never calls himself by this name (this is contradicted in *House of Death*, as at one point in the novel he says "The Avenger never takes a life." This seems to be the only instance it occurs, so perhaps Ernst slipped while recounting the Gray Fox's words, or the person doing the note taking, usually Nellie or Smitty, was in error on this account).

Normally, he introduces



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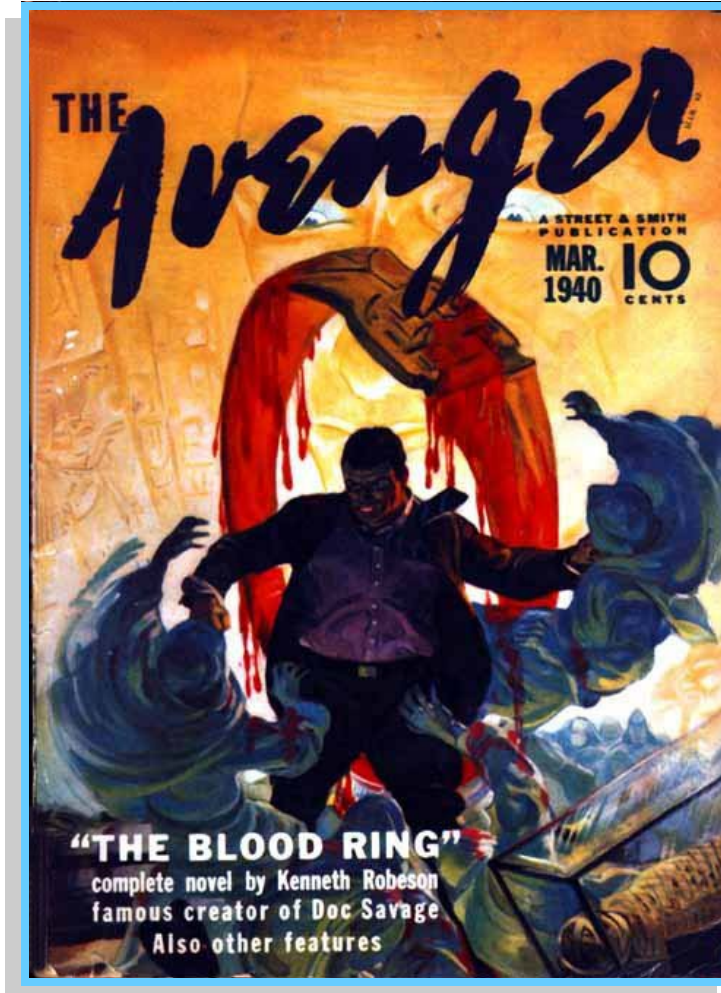
himself as Richard Benson. However, in the mysterious case of *The Sky Walker* he oddly gives his name, to Josh, as Henry Benson.

Unlike Doc Savage, Benson never seems to have the same problems (if you could call it a problem) with members of the fair sex. Many of the beauties in the series are inclined to become attracted to The Avenger, but with one gaze into those remote glacial eyes, one glimpse into a world of hopelessness, pain and personal tragedy, they realize it is useless to pursue any sort of romantic endeavor.

The only romantic inference, save that towards his wife, hinted at is in *The Blood Countess* by Ron Goulart (many Avenger fans don't consider these "modern" tales legitimate entries in the series).

In this adventure, Benson journeys to south America to see an old flame he dated in his college days, who had recently been smuggled out of occupied Europe. On arrival, he learns his past love is suspected of having committed a number of grisly murders reported to be the work of a vampire. The Avenger spends a good part of this novel in a clammy underground prison, being kept unconscious with drugs by the Nazis.

Benson does rebound to clear Elizabeth Bentin of being one of the undead, but the girl doesn't exactly get the cowboy in this case. Fortunately, dashing Cole



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Wilson is around to help with the mop up, else Benson might have been forced to call upon Monk Mayfair to do the honors.

When Benson undergoes the shock transforming him into the deadly crime-fighting machine known as The Avenger, his features change remarkably. First, his jet black hair bleaches a snowy white, making him appear much older than he actually is; second, his facial muscles become paralyzed, unable to move of their own volition. His face looks like a mask or something that might have been dug up out of a cemetery. This trait has its advantages, as he discovers he is able to

mold his face into any shape he chooses. Even the imprints of crooks' fists when they hit him are retained in his putty-like features ( a particularly gruesome occurrence that gives more than one unsavory individual nightmares).

He is dubbed "the man of a thousand faces," sharing this title with Secret Agent X, a master of disguise.

In the first two novels he uses whatever is handy to pull off a disguise. In *The Yellow Hoard* he adapts tree bark into a reddish paste so he can make up



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as an Indian and infiltrate a criminal gang.

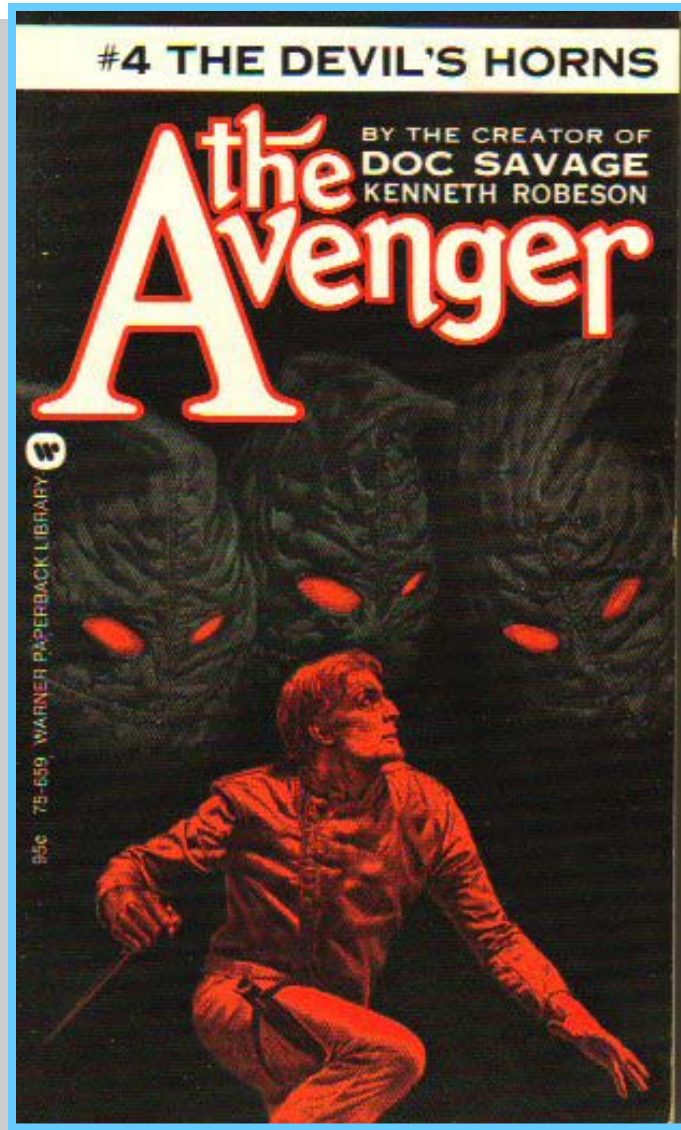
In succeeding adventures he carries a makeup case with him, as Doc sometimes did, almost everywhere. *The Devil's Horns* contains the first description of the case: it is small and extremely compact. The top holds several dozen tissue-thin, semi-spherical cups of glass that can fit over the eyeball to change its hue. There are rows of glasses in various shades and styles. Two trays of wigs and everything else an experienced make-up artist would carry complete the case. A tiny mirror on the inside of the lid furnishes feedback as The Avenger prepares his disguise.

In addition, there are lifts that slide into his shoes to alter his height, and all his suits have inflatable rubber bladders

to increase his stature. He owns closets full of suits in every style and shade.

After the startling events of *Murder on Wheels* return the use of his facial muscles, he uses plastics to change his now mobile face. Later, by the time of *The Wilder Curse*, he begins injecting a drug into his facial muscles to temporarily return them to their paralyzed state.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature associated with The Avenger is his eyes. They are like ice in a polar dawn, chips of stainless steel, diamonds glittering

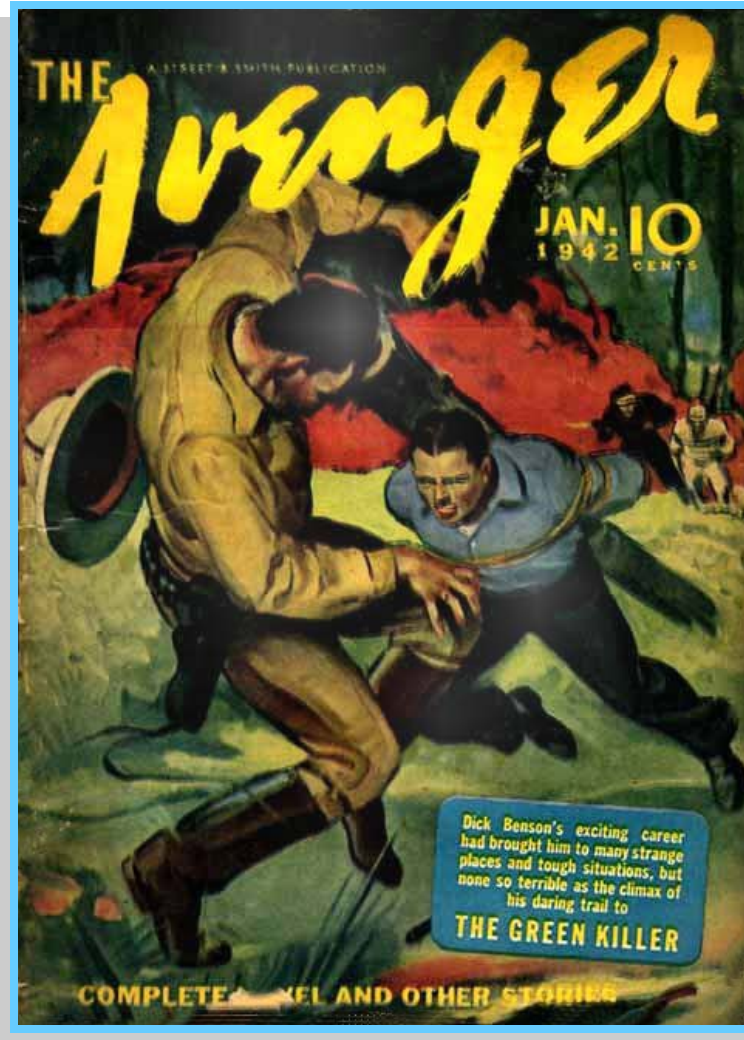


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under a pale arctic moon. They are a pale gray, almost colorless, enough to give anyone falling under their basilisk gaze a case of the shivers. Even his aides are not immune to their frosty chill.

Like Doc's flake-gold eyes, Benson's glinting icy orbs possess the power to hypnotize. In *The Blood Ring* he mesmerizes a girl holding him and Smitty at gunpoint, while she is in an agitated state. In *Stockholders in Death* and at least one other novel, he hypnotizes a bank guard to gain entrance into the bank after-hours (for a good reason, of course).

In *The Green Killer* Benson hypnotizes a German officer into giving him two planes so he can fly into the Brazilian jungle in search of a lost friend.



During the events of *River of Ice*, The Avenger has his first, and probably only, failure with altered consciousness, though in this case it can be forgiven as the girl he is trying to mesmerize is already under the spell of another. Criminals have inserted a piece of sharp steel into her brain, at the base of her skull, to turn her into an automaton. By the end of the saga, The Avenger succeeds in removing the object and restores her will.

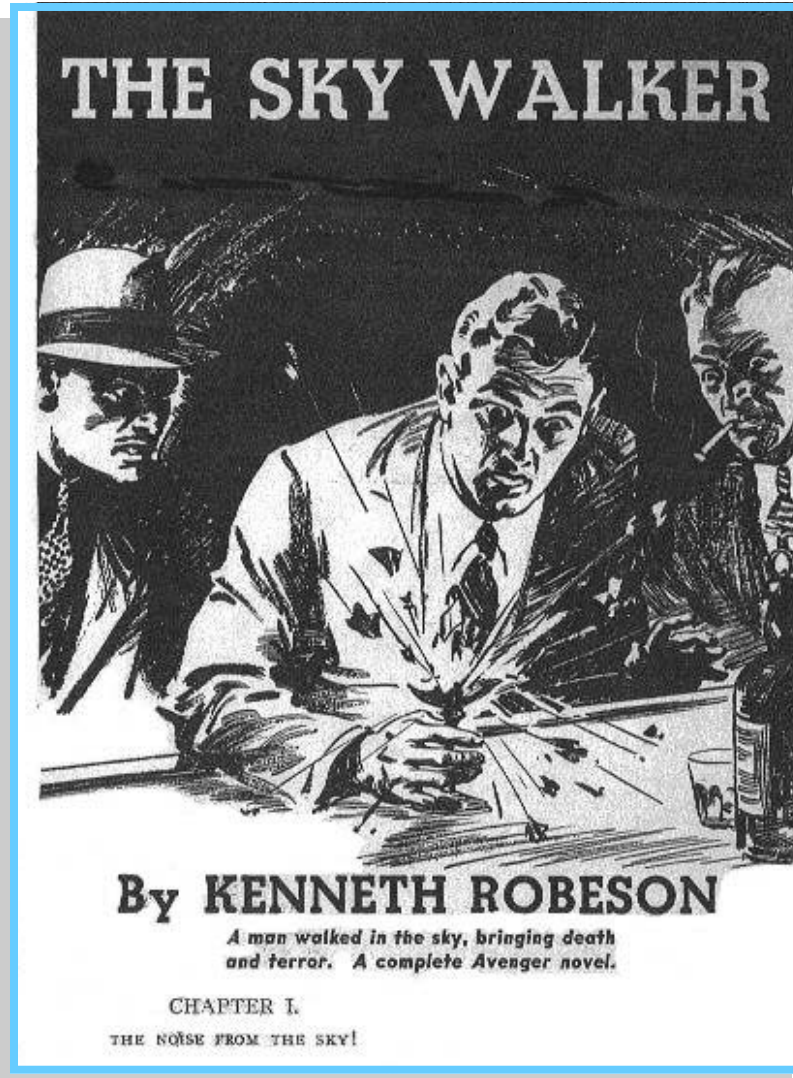
After, and during, the near-fatal episode of *Murder on Wheels*,

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The Avenger undergoes a second shock that marks a startling turnabout in his career and probably sounds the death knell for the series.

Benson finds himself drawn to Michigan to investigate the disappearance of a new "supercar." Three-quarters of the way into the novel, he confronts the deadliest challenge of his career. Having disguised himself as a worker at the Marr Plant, where the supercar is being produced and whom is having more than its share of problems with sabotage, Benson conducts an investigation after hours, hoping to find a clue leading to the perpetrators. He senses he is not alone in the darkened factory. Suddenly, someone springs upon him, someone

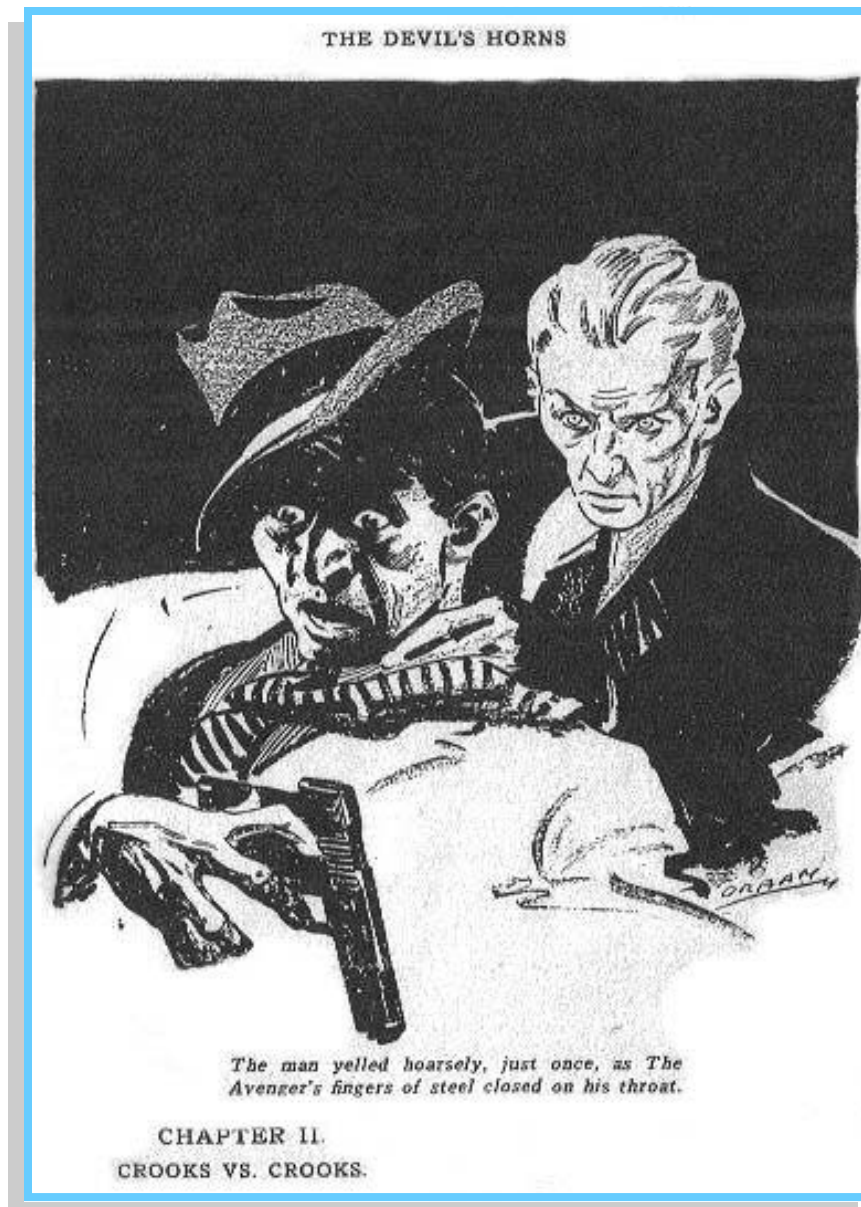
immensely strong, nearly equal in power to The Avenger himself (this person later becomes an aide). For the first time in his exploits, he is outwitted, maybe a bit too easily, it seems. Tricked into a ray tempering machine responsible for giving the metal of the supercar its incredible strength, he is trapped. A low humming, emanating seemingly from within his head, ululates through the interior as the current is switched on.



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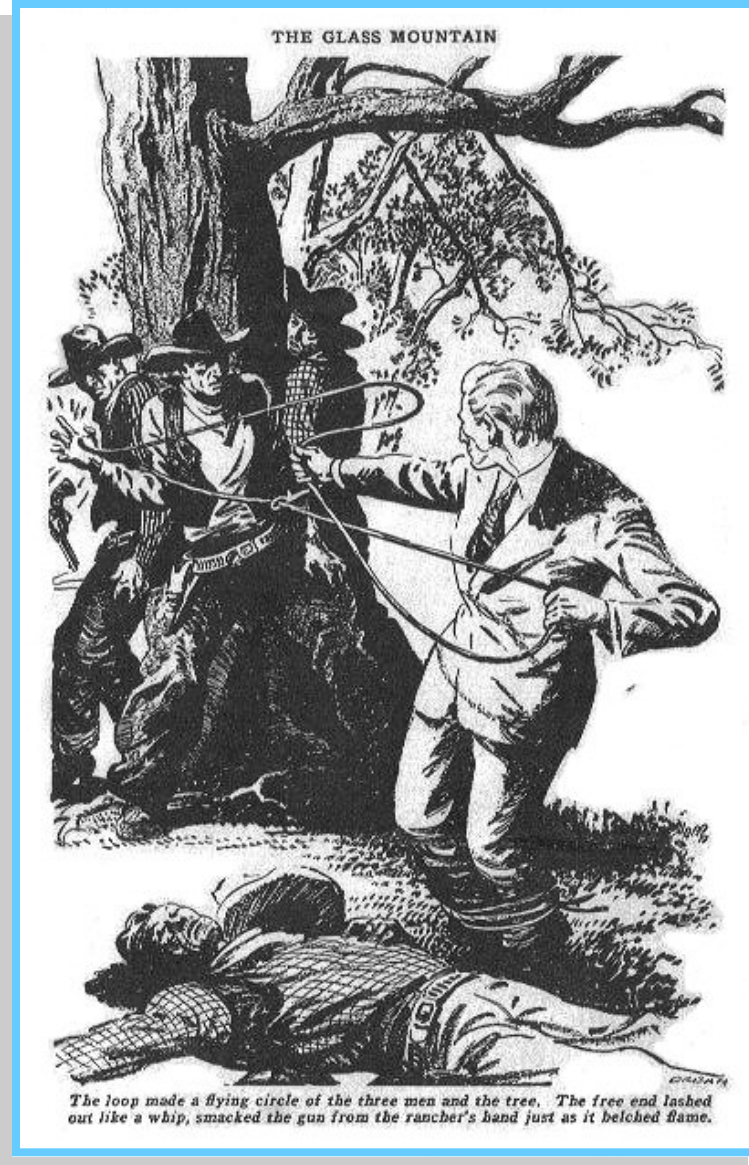
"Every atom of his body was bursting like a tiny bomb! He was simply an inert mass of torment!" His muscles scream with pain, jerk with spasm. He lapses into blackness.

The next morning he awakens sprawled on a pile of pipe. Whoever turned on the power when he tricked The Avenger into the ray contraption had been merciful. Another minute more of the sizzling ray bombardment and the world



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would have been less one Richard Henry Benson. When the morning crew discovers him, they think he is a new worker, not the man whose place he had



taken when he infiltrated the plant the previous day. Something is wrong. But what?

When he returns to his temporary headquarters, his aides are astounded. For his glacial features now appear entirely normal. "It was an unbelievable thing. His face had expression." No longer is he in the disguise of the plant worker, because where his frozen claylike muscles had once held whatever shape he prodded them into was now feeling, expression-capable muscle. "Now, after a second horrible shock to his nervous system, his face was as it had been nearly two years ago."

His face isn't the only thing changed.

In place of his cap of snow-white hair is complete baldness! When his hair grows back, by the beginning of the next novel, it comes in its original color, jet black.

Most changes are cosmetic, however. While he is now capable of expressing

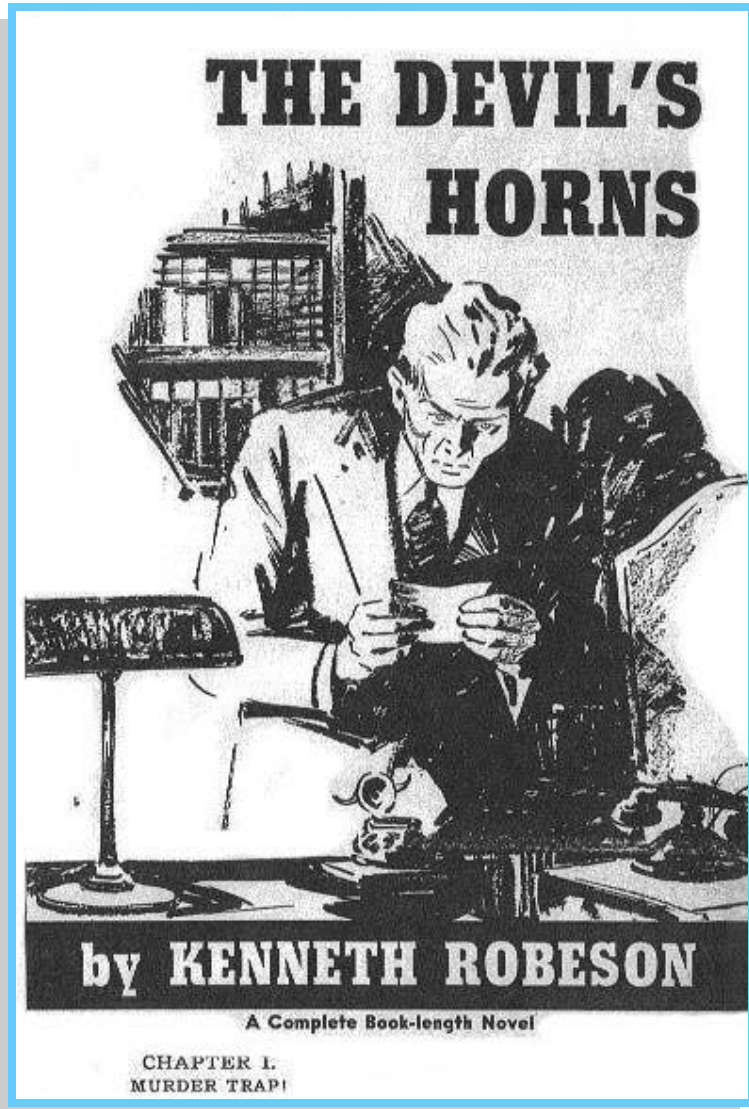
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emotion, he rarely does. His countenance remains a motionless mask. His soul still retains the scars. The only feeling he permits is one of vengeance.

He takes to wearing black or dark suits in further adventures, instead of gray ones. Where he was once the Gray Fox, he is now a black panther (this title is also bestowed upon Josh, the black member of the group). A few times in succeeding novels editors slip and he is still called a gray fox, owing to revisions on Before-Change inventory novels.

All else stays the same: he remains a machine; a cold, icy mechanism of retribution dedicated to the destruction of crime and those who seek to impose their fiendish ways upon the innocent. Those unable to fend off an onslaught from some criminal organization too powerful for the police.

Benson develops an espionage system unparalleled in efficiency (except possibly by Doc or The Shadow's), which ranges from clerks in rental agencies, men in stores, boys at newsstands, subway workers, to a host of people following trades that expose them to every aspect of public life. Unlike Doc Savage, The Avenger doesn't have a criminal-curing institution from which to

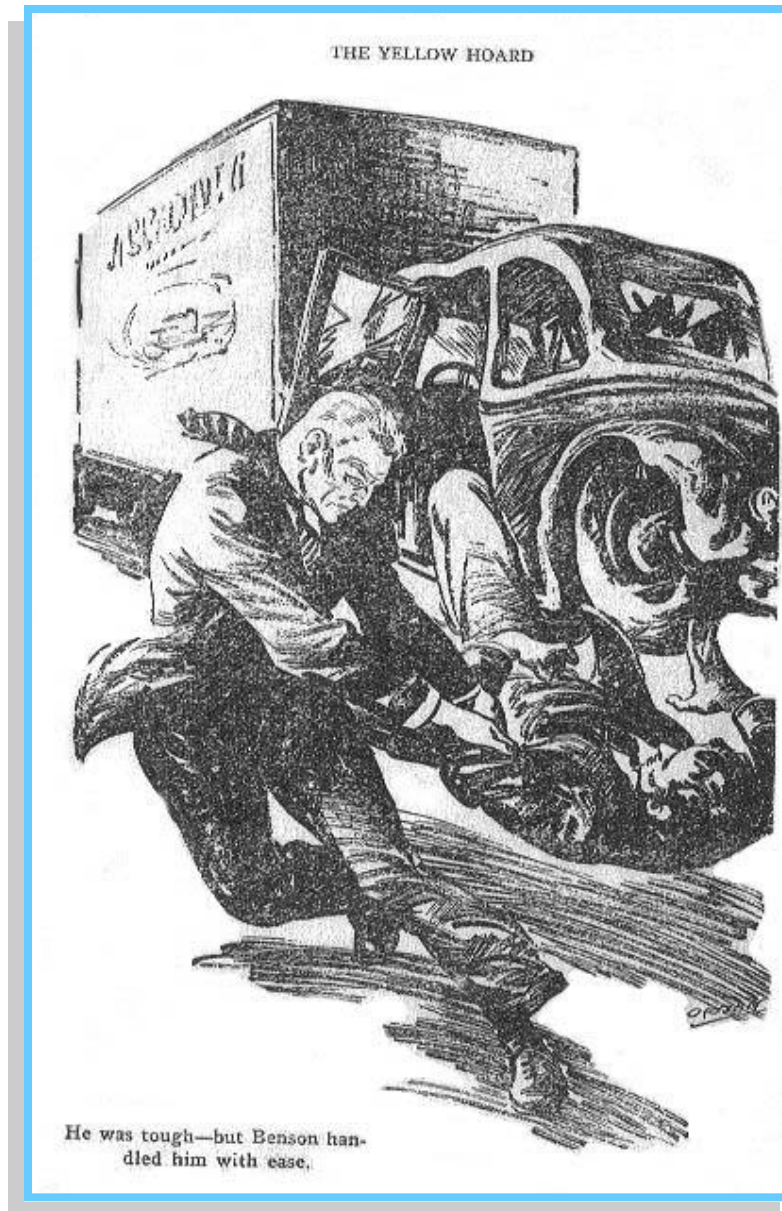




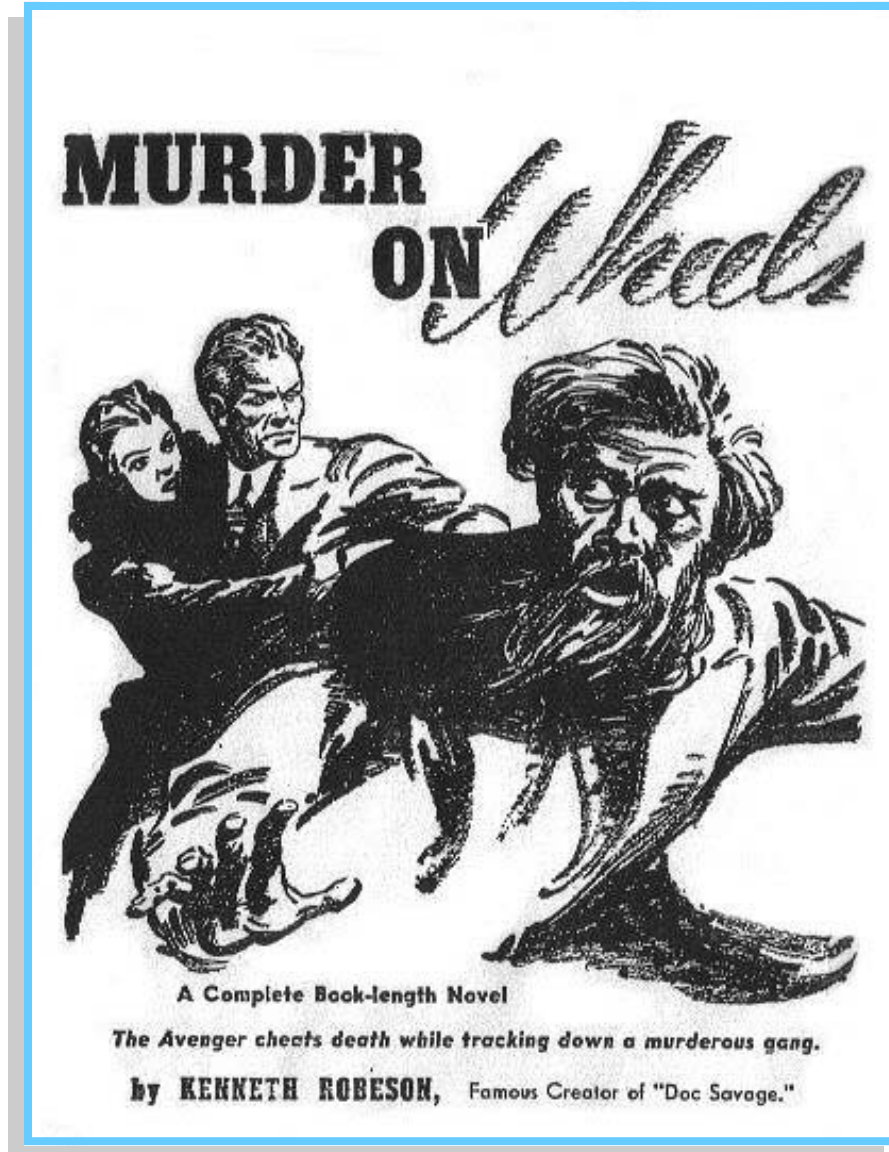
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recruit, so he must hire off the street. Or perhaps Doc sends him graduates; he had enough of them and the war took most able-bodied men.

Benson, despite the second shock, remains the relentless righter of wrongs, a scourge to the lawless. An icy indifferent machine whose life still contains nothing to live for, no promise, no future, no love. He stands alone, a cold



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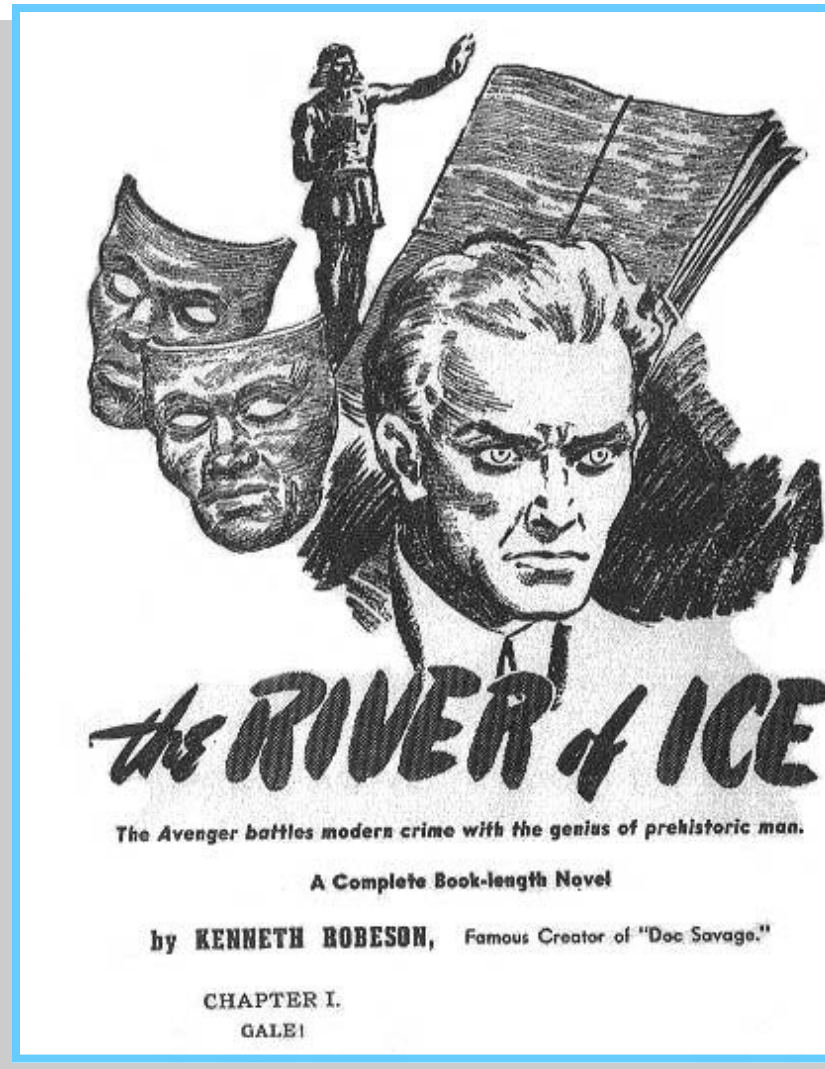
impersonal force; something less than human, yet, somehow, something more. One desire rages inside him: making those and their ilk who had taken so much from him pay and pay and pay. Until one day when a supercriminal emerged too powerful even for him. Then, finally, his suffering would end.

Perhaps, over time, some of this desire dissipated because after *Midnight Murder* he no longer seems to feel the same raw burn, the same dreadful fire. A raging inferno has guttered, flaring occasionally but with less intensity. The flame quivers, shivers, at times almost blinking out. He becomes more human as

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the veil on insanity slowly lifts. He shows up at the hospital with toys when Rosabel delivers twins. Perhaps he remembers another time, another life, the birth of his beloved daughter. This is surely not the machine. No, more the Richard Henry Benson that existed before the awful shock that imprisoned his soul.

The Avenger didn't have a long career and since nobody seems to know what happened to him after the exploit of *Demon Island*, we can only speculate as to his end. Nothing is heard from him beyond 1943. Perhaps some genius of crime finally caught up to him. The last seen of him is when he receives a letter from an unknown source, stating his wife and daughter may still be alive. (This was to



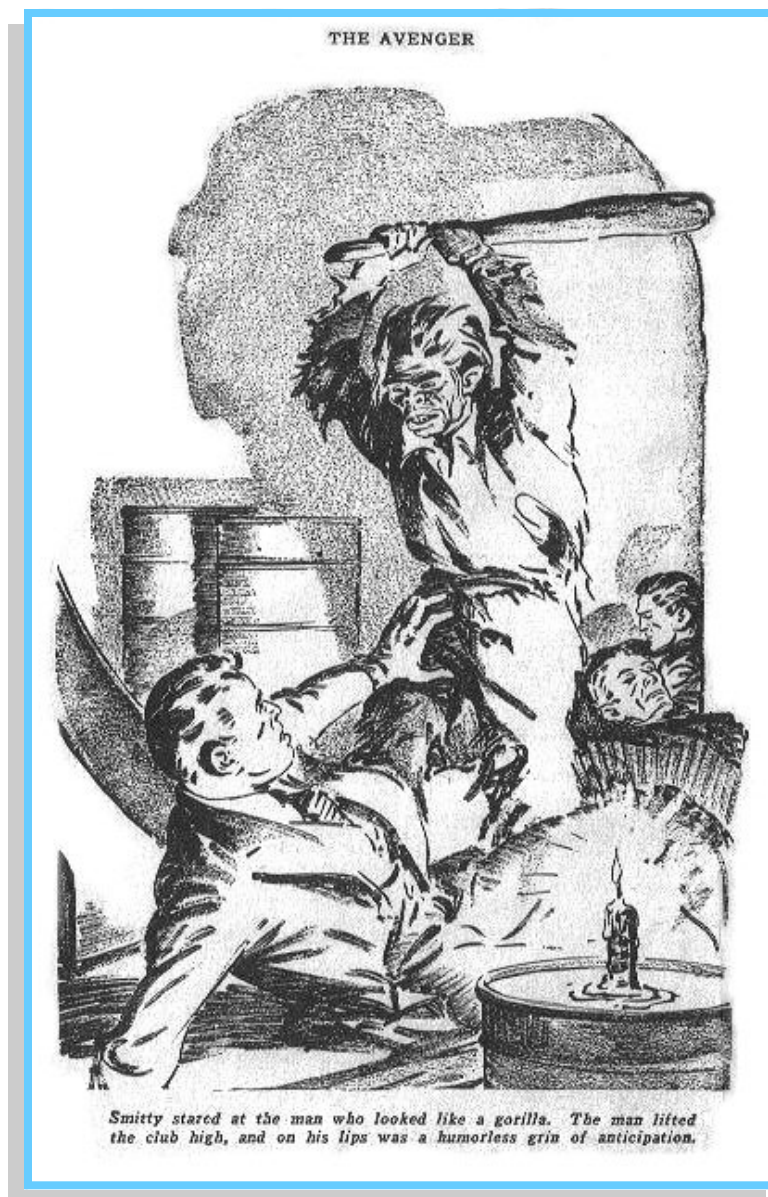
be a trick of the Iron Skull according to Ron Goulart, who dropped the hint in an effort to coerce Warner into continuing the series.) Just what became of Richard Henry Benson is simply unknown. His aides vanish shortly thereafter. Maybe the Iron Skull hastened his doom. Maybe a third shock, one of finding out his wife and daughter

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weren't really alive, was too much and he called it quits. Or maybe facing his pain, instead of harboring it, set him free and there was no longer a need to exact vengeance.

Or perhaps, in unwritten tales, Benson and his aides battled again and again. I'd like to think so.

Whatever the case, Richard Henry Benson was one of the greatest crime-fighters of the pulp era. And one of the most tragic.

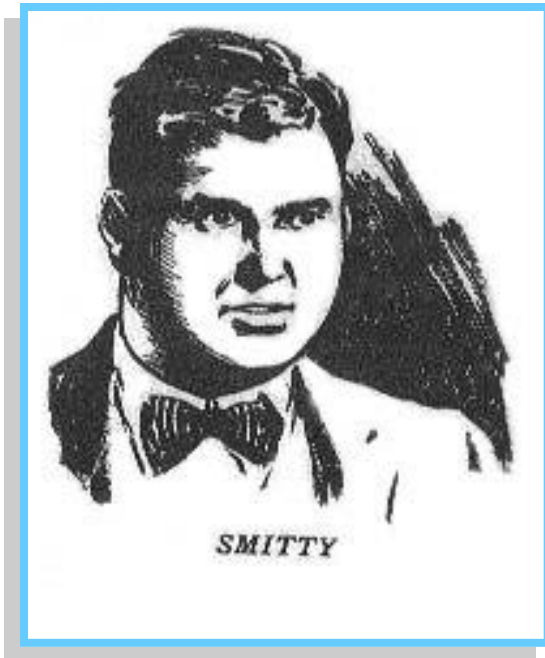


*Smisty stared at the man who looked like a gorilla. The man lifted the club high, and on his lips was a humorless grin of anticipation.*

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### THREE: SMITTY, MOON-FACED GIANT & ELECTRICAL WIZARD

Algernon Heathcote Smith makes his first appearance as a chauffeur, working for Mister Arnold Leon in the second half of *Justice, Inc.* Looking slow and dull-witted, he is intently browsing



through a textbook titled "Radioactive Phenomenon" while awaiting his employer to finish his business at the home of millionaire John Lansing.

He boasts gigantic proportions: six feet nine inches from the toes up, carrying a massive 285 pounds of rock-hard muscle and gristle. His chest is so large, 53 inches cold, his arms won't hang straight at his sides. He wears a size nineteen collar and size fifteen shoes (which still doesn't put him in competition with fellow aides, Mac and Josh). With china-blue eyes and a gentle moon face, he looks as harmless as he is big.

Benson discovers just how harmless he is when investigating the Lansing home and is set upon by the "gentle giant."

Smitty mistakes The Avenger for a police officer, after a kidnapping occurs at the Lansing estate. A few years back, Smitty had been framed for stealing platinum while working on a new invention called television and had spent time, a year to be exact, in the slammer for the crime. In his mind, there was no way this little average-sized man was going to take him back to jail. If he went this time, he knew it would be for good.

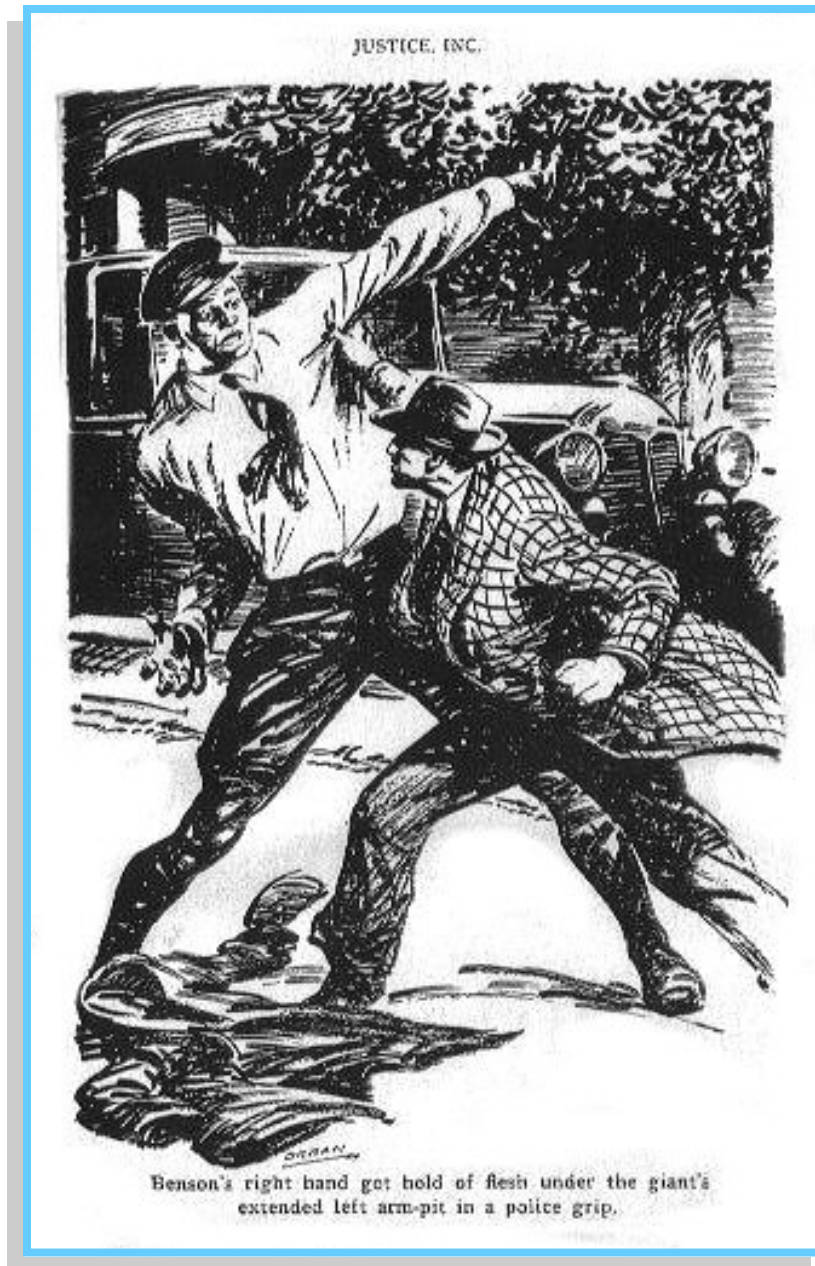
Smitty and Benson both get the shock of their lives. The little average-sized man brings the giant to his knees—the only man ever to do so—and The Avenger picks up a new aide.

Algernon Heathcote Smith, Smitty if you cared for the present arrangement of your features, graduated Mass. Tech. as an electrical engineer extraordinaire. His many gadget contributions throughout the series are remarkable. Everything

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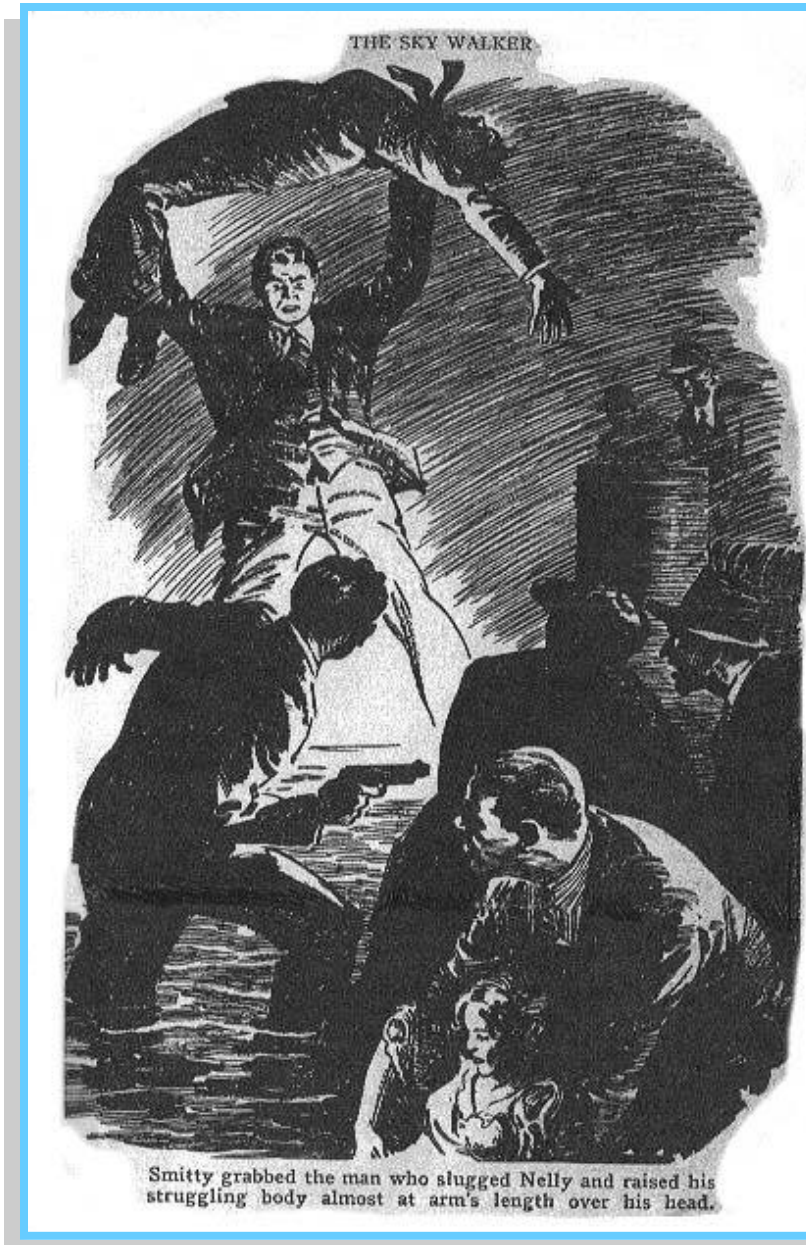
from the tiny belt radios the group is equipped with to a new and superior type of television (no doubt this particular invention makes him the proudest, considering his previous conviction). He spends countless hours tinkering with new and helpful gadgets.

In *The Flame Breathers* he is working on a television-radio combination that



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fits into a box the size of a cigar case. In a later novel, Cole remarks the wave of the future is towards smaller and more compact things (to which he adds Smitty will be in trouble unless he finds a way to shrink himself). Cole is half right: electronic devices got smaller but people got taller.



According to *Nevlo* he is tinkering with a new kind of heating element that will take a 500 percent overload without burning out.

For all his vast size, Smitty is almost as agile as *The Avenger*. Many a villain is amazed at the speed at which this slow-looking giant can navigate. Only one incident appears contrary to this statement in the entire series. In *The Hate Master* Smitty's ankles are chewed to pieces by maddened guinea pigs because he is not as agile as an ordinary girl

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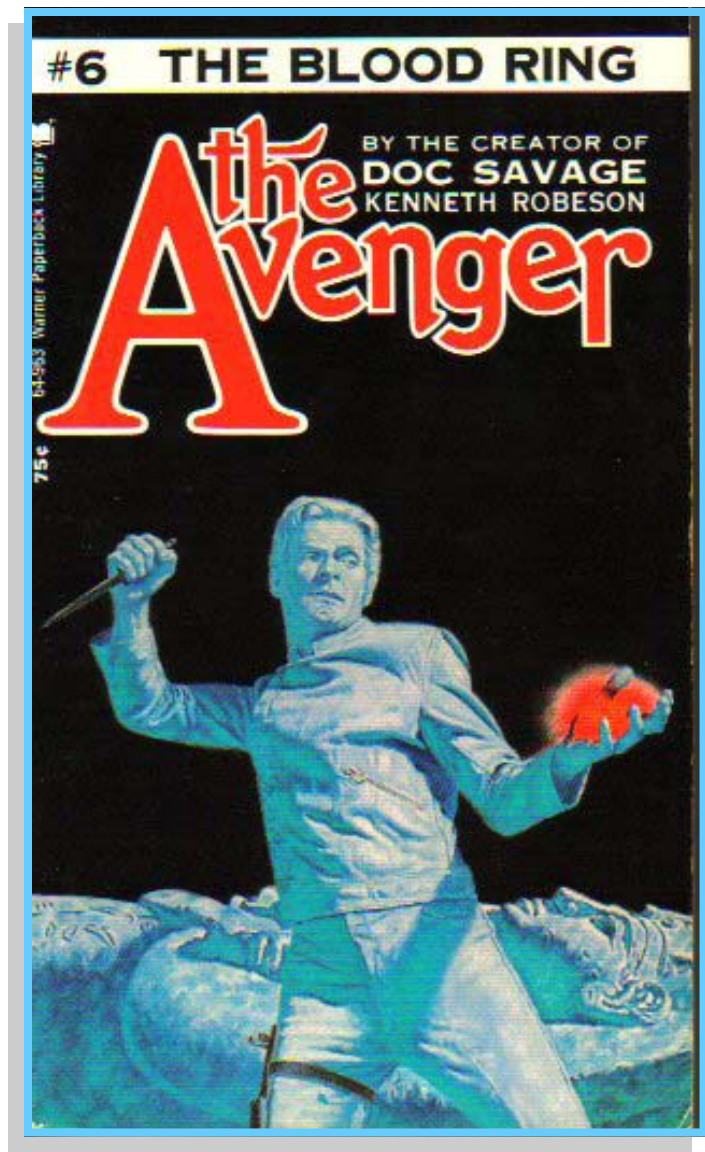
trapped in the room with him.

In the remaining novels, however, he is saved often by his coordinated swiftness.

Like Andrew Blodgett Mayfair and Theodore Marley Brooks, Smitty carries on a running feud with another member of the group—the sandy-haired Scotsman, Fergus MacMurdie. Mac is probably the only person who can call Smitty by his real name and survive to tell about it. But even Mac knows the giant's limits. They habitually down each other's experiments and endeavors in their respective fields. And if Mac isn't around to tease the giant, Nellie usually is.

While Smitty's personality is normally placid, two things can arouse the moon-faced giant into an enraged bull elephant: mention of his true name and harm threatening the diminutive Nellie Gray. When danger befalls the tiny blonde, he turns into a dwarfed King Kong, a human tank, charging through doors and gangsters, bowling them over like tenpins.

In *The Sky Walker* Smitty can't stand to see Nellie knocked around by mobsters and goes berserk, cracking their heads together. At least one of the ruffians will





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never bother anyone again.

In *The Happy Killers* Smitty saves Nellie from being run over by a carload of criminals, only to have the tiny blonde yell at him while he is untying her because he let the criminals escape. All in good fun, though.

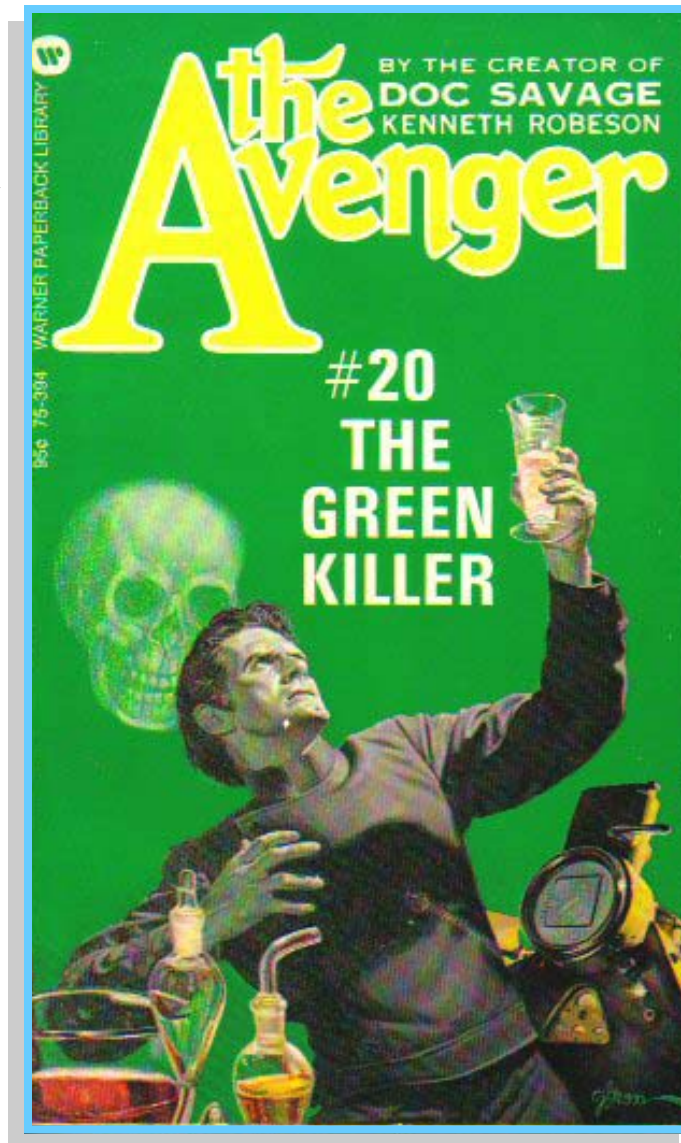
Generally, he only manages to get himself, and others, into trouble when he risks his life for the lovely Miss Gray. He charges in wildly, paying little heed to surprise or stealth. His only thought: rescue the love of his life. Nothing else matters and nothing stands in his way.

In early tales it's suspected, though they continuously rib each other, that this lumbering giant cares much for the dainty Nellie Gray. By the time of *The Devil's Horns* it's a fact. Why else would he fume

whenever danger threatened her? He can't sit still like "lumps on a pickle" with her in trouble. Nobody, including Benson, can hold him back.

It is also obvious the tiny blonde reciprocates the emotion. She saves him from criminals in *The Green Killer* in much the same fashion Smitty saves her—by charging in recklessly.

In *The Wilder Curse* Nellie jealously says to Smitty: "To you any female under sixty that isn't in a sideshow, is a poor little thing that needs help." Smitty



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helps this along by remarking, constantly, how pretty one of the damsels is, enraging the blonde no end.

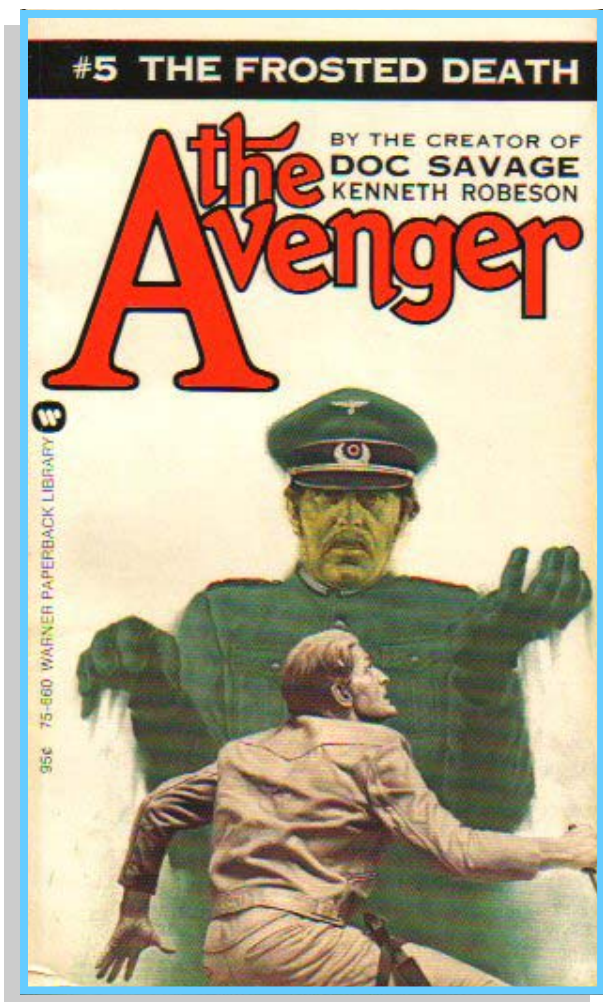
But whenever it looks like the end of the line, Nellie can always be found beside Smitty, hand in vast paw. A number of instances when it looks like the finish they admit to each other that the opposite is "rather swell." With the danger over, however, neither will admit to having said it.

Nellie isn't the only one prone to fits of jealousy, either. Many exploits find the giant fretting that Nellie may find the too-good-looking Cole Wilson a bit too interesting. In one adventure, he goes so far as to relate his feelings on the subject to Josh, who quickly quells his misgivings.

Smitty's ponderous strength is second only to that of his chief. The Avenger. His feats are amazing. In *The Blood Ring*, while trying to save Nellie from being sacrificed to an angry Egyptian god, he pushes over two massive stone pillars like a modern day Sampson, arms ripping through his coat sleeves, blood spurting from beneath his fingernails.

"What Smitty took hold of usually disintegrated." When he grabs a villain's leg, he simply squeezes, causing excruciating pain to the crook. He never learned to box; he merely throws a punch and whether the thug has his guard up, it doesn't matter.

During the events of *Justice, Inc.*, while he and Benson are being held captive in a stone cell on an island in the middle of the great lakes, he snaps the chains shackling him to the stone floor. In the same novel, he picks up a crook and holds him at arm's length two feet above the ground.



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In *The Yellow Hoard* he uproots an eighteen inch thick tree to save Nellie, Mac and himself after they are trapped in an underground cave while searching for a lost cache of Aztec gold.

Like Benson, he has the ability to wrap his hand around a locked door knob and twist the mechanism into submission (that is, when he is not bursting directly through them).

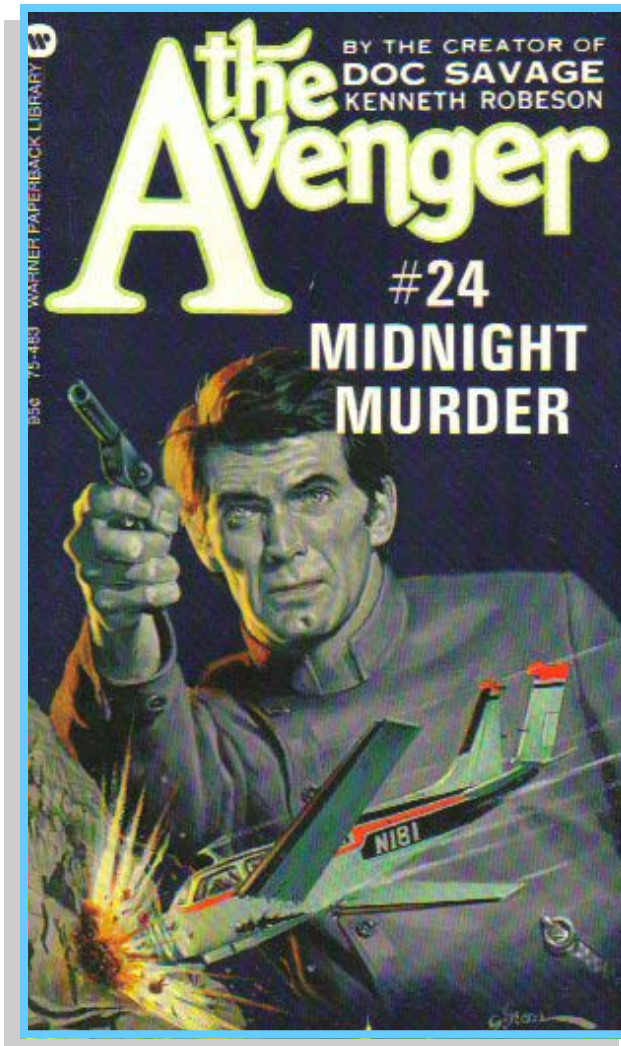
He can snap quarter inch hemp simply by expanding his chest.

In *Nevlo* he breaks through a steel-shielded window while trapped in a hospital room flooding with poisonous gas. The doctor confined in the room with him gasps in amazement because the shields were designed to prevent just that sort of crazed patients. counted on Smitty,

In *The* and *Midnight* quite capable bars out of Nellie says if with his back head, he might brain.

Like Monk can bend a in half with his

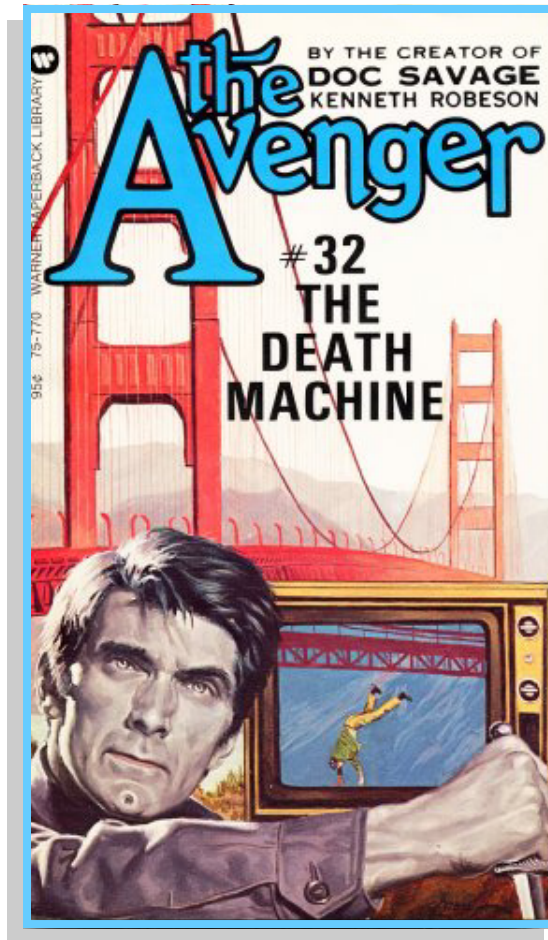
His favorite simply down on the crook's head, senseless. In *Murder* this against him as, the influence of device, he uses Mac (no doubt wish for all the called him Also like doesn't



thing with They had not anyone like however. *Devil's Horns Murder* he is of yanking windows. he thought instead of his have half a

Mayfair, he silver dollar bare hands. blow is hammering top of a knocking him *Tuned for* trait is used while under a criminal's the blow on a suppressed times he Algernon). Monk, Smitty exercise,

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depending on his rigorous lifestyle to keep him fit. Even so, he is severely winded after chasing a blimp, on foot and on bicycle, in an effort to save Josh from criminals in *The Hate Master*.

He is not framed quite as often as some of the other members of the band, but in the distressing events of *The Devil's Horns* he is set up for murder. This worries him, as a rap like that would keep him in jail, or worse, for a long, long time, due to his past encounters with the law. Fortunately, in a classic chapter, Benson, in disguise, remedies the situation by breaking him out of the hoosegow.

In *Tuned for Murder*, which is one of the giant's toughest adventures, he acquires a welt across his belly because he isn't wearing his cellulglass underwear. Why he isn't, is never explained.

Smitty becomes the recipient of numerous diseases throughout the series, despite never being naturally ill a day in his life. In the strange, near fatal events of *Death in Slow Motion*, he contracts the slow motion sickness, a form of super-fast-acting anemia. The Avenger is like a caged animal trying to find a cure. If he doesn't, Smitty will die. To make matters worse, Mac also comes down with the malady and the two of them share a room while Benson struggles to find an antidote. Smitty, however, is a bit more rash than Mac and decides to not stay bedridden. He was never one for taking things lying down and he wasn't about to start now. Instead, he goes after the men who caused the disease, promptly getting himself caught and endangering his life further.

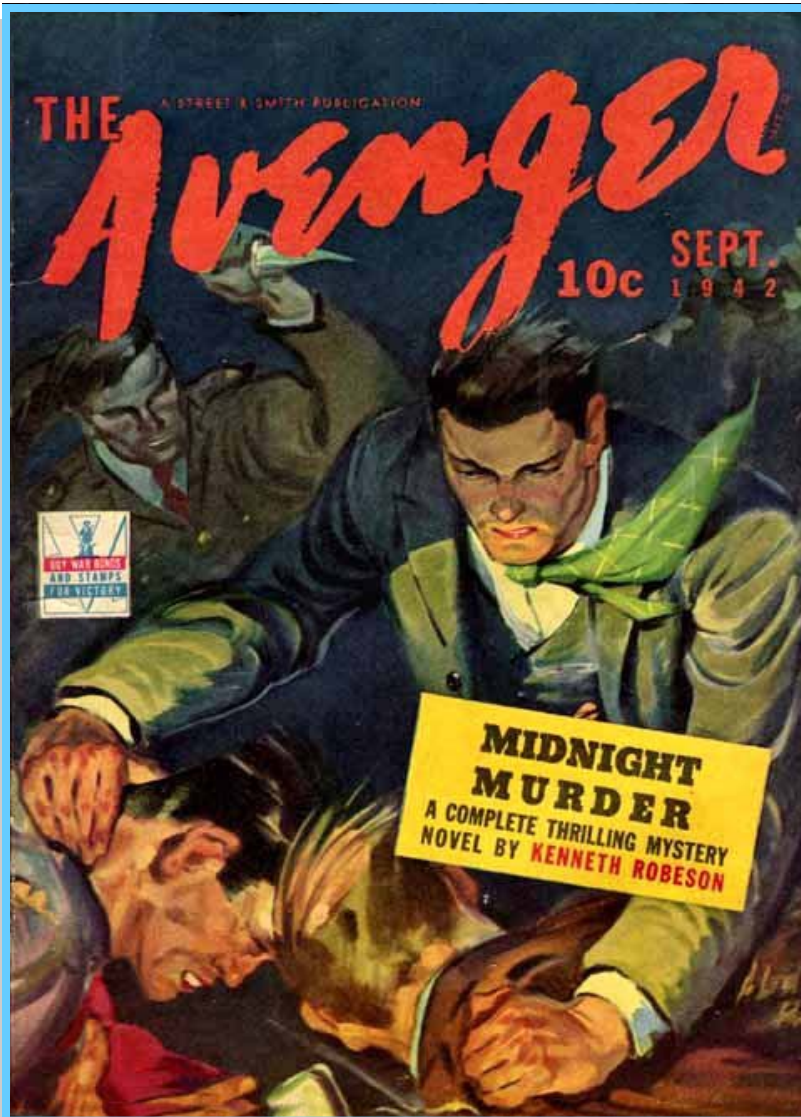
In the Doc Savagelike case of *The Green Killer*, a clan of monkey men nail him with a poison dart tipped with curare, while he is trying to rescue a girl from their hairy clutches.

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But The Avenger, always a step ahead (well, almost always), has already worked out an antidote for the deadly poison. He hadn't had a chance to test it, but when Smitty staggers into Bleek Street headquarters, he has little alternative. Fortunately, it works.

It is never stated how many languages Smitty speaks, but from the above-mentioned novel we know he speaks German with an accent. All of the aides can communicate with sign language.

Smitty is the catalyst for a number of adventures, especially in the later tales by Goulart. The eerie events of *Black Chariots* begin with Smitty journeying to California to visit old friends for a reunion. It is his first "vacation" in ages, but destined not to be a week of fun in the sun. Before he knows it, he gets tangled up with flying saucers and Nazi spies. Well, he isn't exactly the relaxing type, anyway.

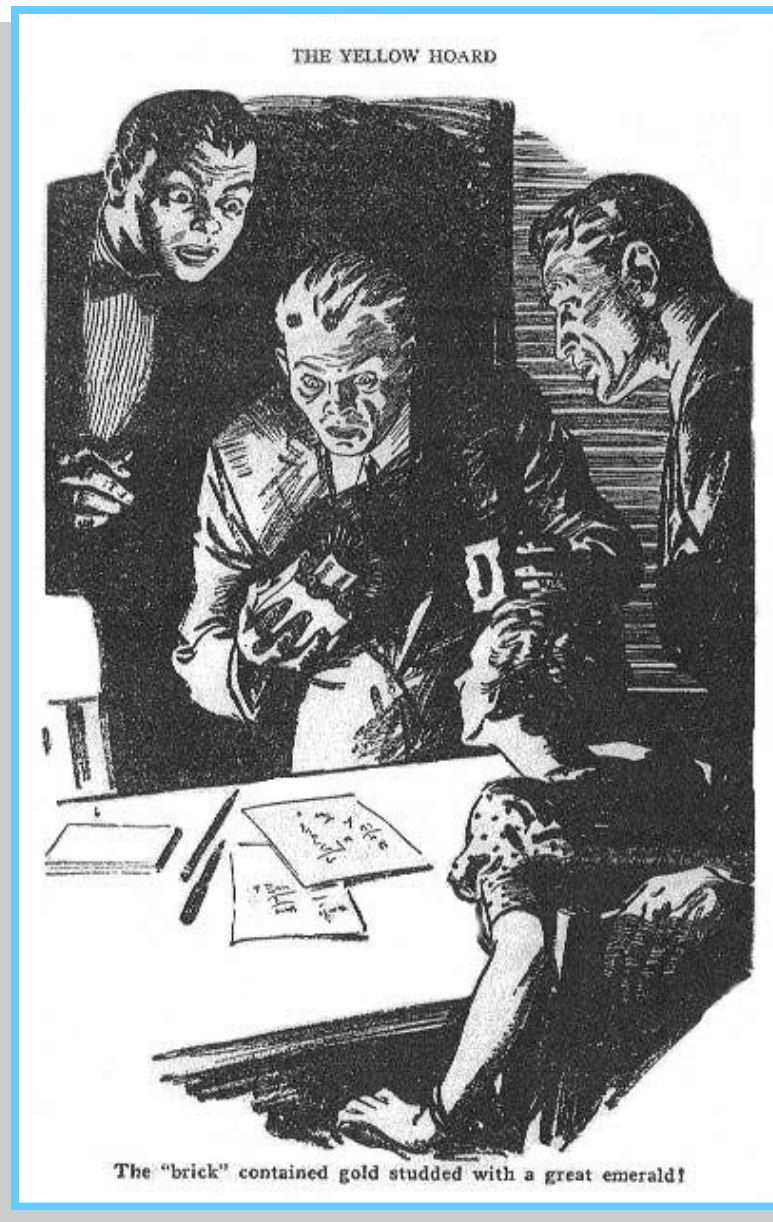


## THE GRAY NEMESIS

*The Cartoon Crimes* mentions Smitty was named after his kooky uncle. It is back to California where, while attending an electronic engineering convention (which he never gets to), he meets up with this eccentric relative, who is nearly blowing up the hotel where Smitty is staying, for the first time in years. Uncle "Algie", as he is called, is a peculiar crotchety inventor, from whom Smitty seems to have gotten his talent, with a passion for the innocuous expression

"Excelsior!" By the end of the novel, which involves a deadly new machine that causes people to commit suicide, Smitty has picked it up. The novel, fittingly enough, is titled *The Death Machine*.

Algernon Heathcote Smith was both a genius and a valuable aide to the man with the frosty eyes. He was introduced in the very first saga and played a major role in every novel thereafter. Wherever he is today, I'm sure he and Nellie are walking hand in hand into a purple sunset.



## FOUR: FERGUS MACMURDIE, MASTER CHEMIST & SCOTS PESSIMIST

Fergus MacMurdie makes his first appearance in *Justice, Inc.* as a field worker at Buffalo Airport the fateful day Dick Benson boards a plane that shuttles him, and Mac, into destiny.

When Benson returns to the field to punish those responsible for killing his family, MacMurdie is the only one who'll admit to what conspired that day. For cooperating with The Avenger, he nearly gets his Scots head blown off.

The dour Scot is described as a bit over six feet tall and thin enough to give a tailor nightmares. He sports coarse red hair arid sandy ropes for eyebrows perched over bitter blue eyes. His hands, when doubled into fists, resemble a pair of ivory bone mallets. The size of these monstrosities rival the hamlike paws of Renny Renwick.

In *Justice, Inc.* Benson thinks Mac probably owns the biggest pair of feet he has ever seen, though at the time he hasn't met Josh. These feet get him captured in *The Devil's Horns* because they stick out from under the curtain in back of which he is hiding a good six inches.

His feet are not the only part of his anatomy that is oversized: he has huge red ears that look like boat sails.

He alone of the group has lost as much as Benson to criminal plotting. He shares the same burning desire to rid the world of crime, though he has taken the shock somewhat better. His bitter blue eyes still reflect the bleakness and pain of his loss.

Like Smitty, he hates men who look like rats. The men who killed his wife and small son looked like rats.

Years back Mac had owned four drugstores . He was happy, making a



## THE GRAY NEMESIS

living—until one day when a crime ring invaded his life, trying to coerce him into paying protection money for his stores. He refused and the criminals retaliated by blowing up his largest establishment. His family was inside. After that, he no longer cared what happened to him. He let the stores slide and drifted from job to job until fate placed him at Buffalo Airport.

By the time of *The Yellow Hoard*, Benson sets him up in his own drugstore on Waverly and Sixth, with his own chemical lab in the back, one of the most complete in existence.

He is a licensed bacteriologist, completed medical was so poor. Like aides, Mac has a dour personality.

"Fergus most peculiar trait. was going his dour Scotch the most dreadful sure to happen any he looked on the life.

"But when an in which there conceivable way almost cheerful, sure success."

Smitty calls disgusting also adds Mac an undertaker.

Though all the band are

wealthy, he grudgingly parts with a dime and complains about going out of business if Josh eats too many more maple-nut sundaes. He shares this quirk with Doc's man, Long Tom Roberts.

In moments of stress he has a habit of rolling his *r*'s, but seems prone to this anyway from time to time.

Like The Avenger, he doesn't much care if he is killed during one of their

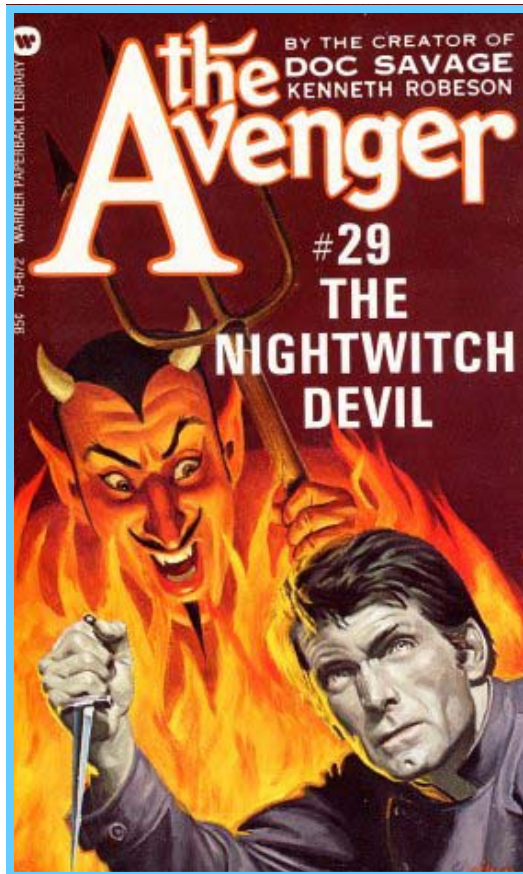
pharmacist and though he never school because he all The Avenger's few quirks to his

MacMurdie had a When everything smoothly, it was nature to predict things that were minute. Always gloomy side of

emergency arose seemed no out, he grew and predicted

him nothing but a Pollyanna. He should have been

members of the immensely





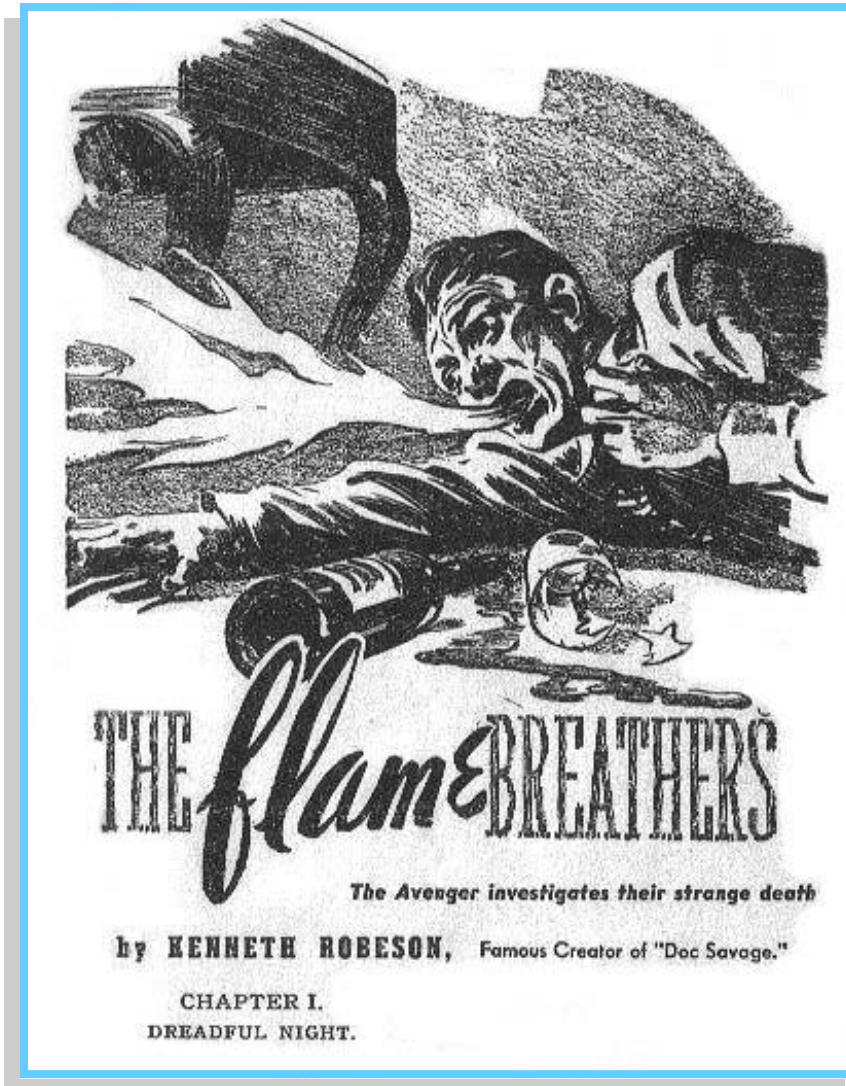
## THE GRAY NEMESIS

adventures. He doesn't fear death.

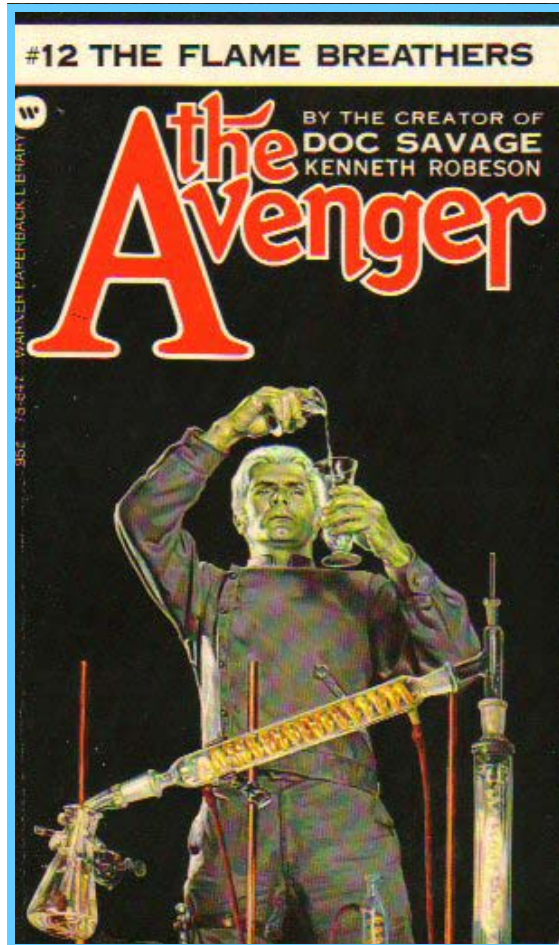
He is responsible for many of the chemical devices the group uses in their escapades. In *The Yellow Hoard* his first significant contribution is that of a gas so volatile it can knock a man out in three seconds flat.

In *The Flame Breathers* he perfects a pellet that when snapped between a thumb and forefinger blots up a huge amount of poison gas.

In *The Frosted Death* he finds a cure for the disease of the same name. He works in his lab day and night, searching for the answer. Josh calls him "a great man."



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As with Smitty, not all Mac's inventions are successful. In *House of Death* he is working on a local anesthetic that kills pain instantly. Unfortunately, it also kills skin.

In *Nevlo* he is still working on it, and since by the end of the series he still doesn't have it, we can assume he gave it up.

Mac manages to be jailed once in the series, just beating out Josh and Cole, who seem adept at avoiding the authorities in frame ups.

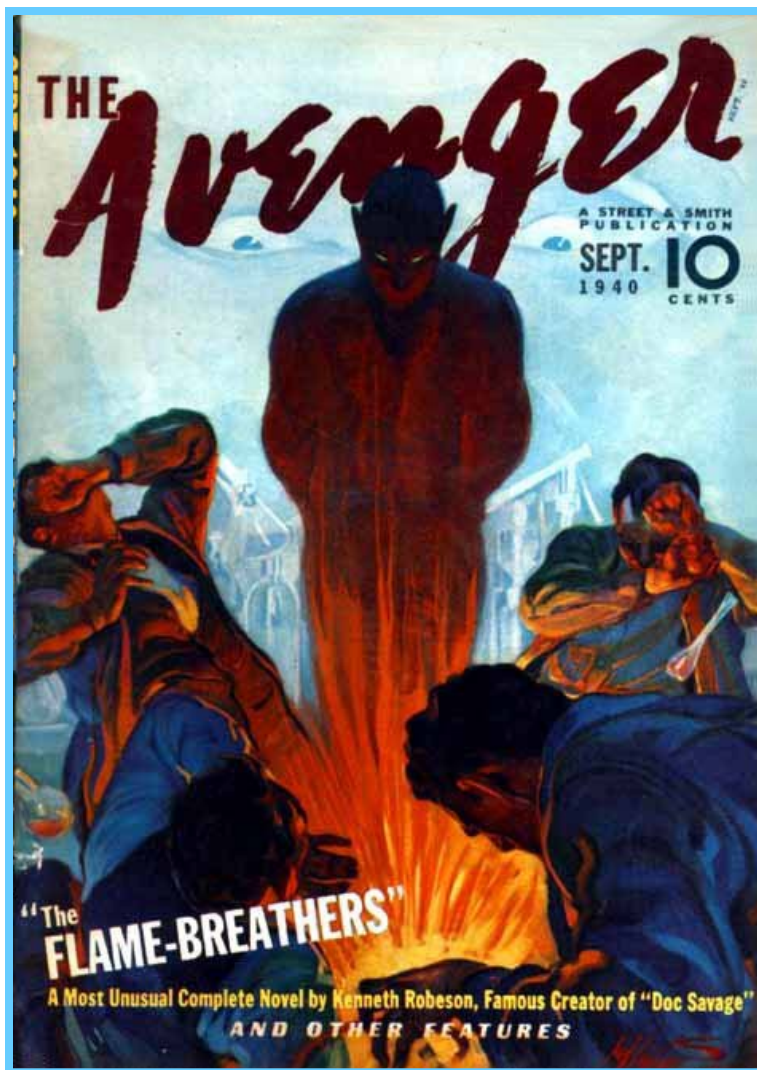
Perhaps first and foremost he loves arguing with Smitty. He constantly teases the giant about the "toys" he is working on. He roars with laughter at their first meeting in *Justice, Inc.*, after he discovers Smitty's true name, proceeding to call him "Algie," much to the big man's disgust. Mac is probably the only one who

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can call him that and still walk around on two legs.

He catches two of the maladies brought about by criminal masterminds. A villain gives him a dose of "the frosted death" in the novel of the same title, and he picks up a case of "slow motion sickness" in *Death in Slow Motion*.

It is Mac who starts off Goulart's eerie novel, *The Nightwitch Devil*. While visiting a friend, biologist John Royle, in Nightwitch, Massachusetts, he tangles with devil worshippers, witchcraft, black magic and Nazi spies, in a tale that may have been inspired by *Hex*, the Doc Savage adventure. He is supposed to be

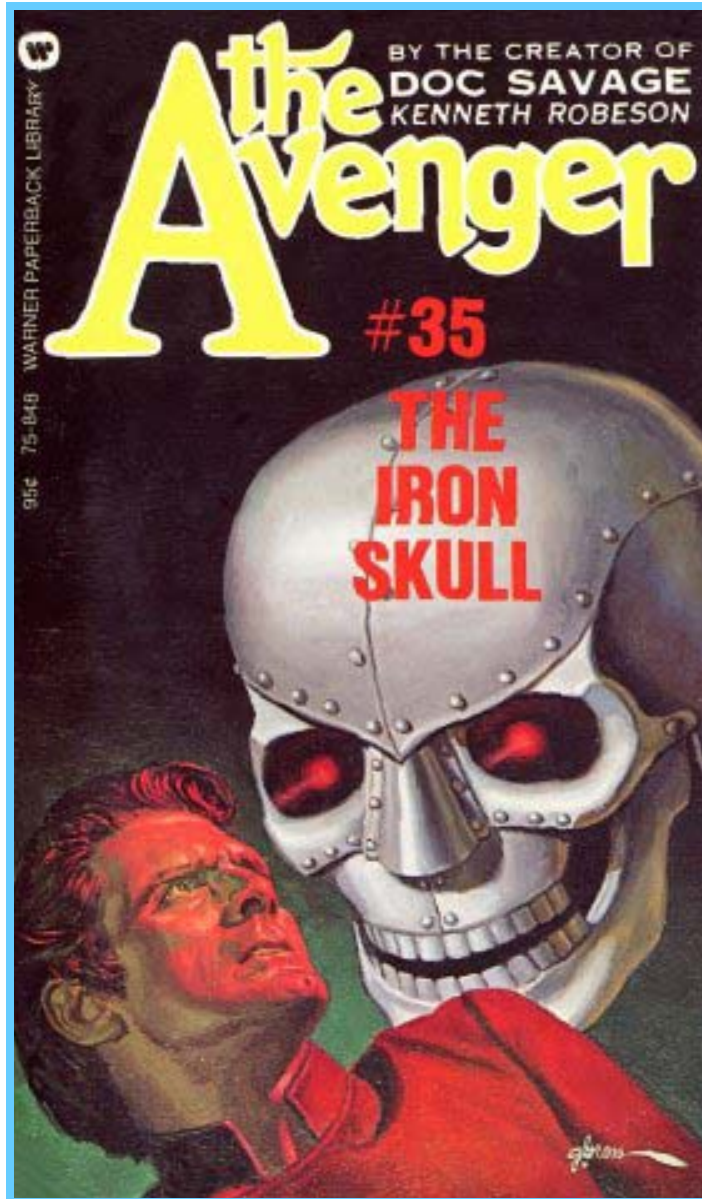


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on vacation.

In the puzzling case of *The Iron Skull*, Benson sends most of the Justice team to Connecticut because Mac has been missing for a number of days.

To make events all the more perplexing, Smitty is strolling down a New York street when he spots Mac stumbling along the sidewalk ahead of him. Suddenly, Mac explodes, nearly making Smitty an ex-member of the band. Spectators pass



out and race for the toilet when they observe Mac's severed head rolling around on the sidewalk, wires protruding from the neck. Luckily for Mac and the other team members, it is merely a robot doppelganger, set to detonate in Justice headquarters. Cold weather caused the thing to blow up early.

Mac is the first, and second to The Avenger, most driven member of Justice, Inc. He is with Benson from the beginning saga to the last. His irascible personality endears him to the other members and to the readers.

Perhaps Mac is now with his family again, finally finding the joy and fulfillment he was denied in life before he met Richard Henry Benson. In pulp hero Heaven he and Smitty are probably still arguing.

## FIVE: NELLIE GRAY, BLONDE POWERHOUSE & PORCELAIN DOLL

Smitty first encounters the diminutive Nellie Gray when he sees her exiting a schoolhouse, accompanying a small boy, where she works as an instructor, a job she would not hold for long after the opening events of *The Yellow Hoard*.



When she is ambushed by a rat-faced denizen of the underworld, Smitty gawks in amazement as the petite blonde wipes the pavement with the crook. She looks as if a sideways look would make her crack, so to watch her prevail against a crook at least a hundred pounds heavier is little short of mind-boggling.

Nellie has yellow-bronze hair that frames a delicate face, according to *The Yellow Hoard* (this may have been an attempt at invoking images of Pat Savage in the readers' minds, as later tales state her hair simply as blonde), and the finest pink-white skin you'd ever care to see.

*The Yellow Hoard* also describes her eyes as gray, though later yarns don't support this. At the beginning of *The Devil's Horns* they are cited as blue.

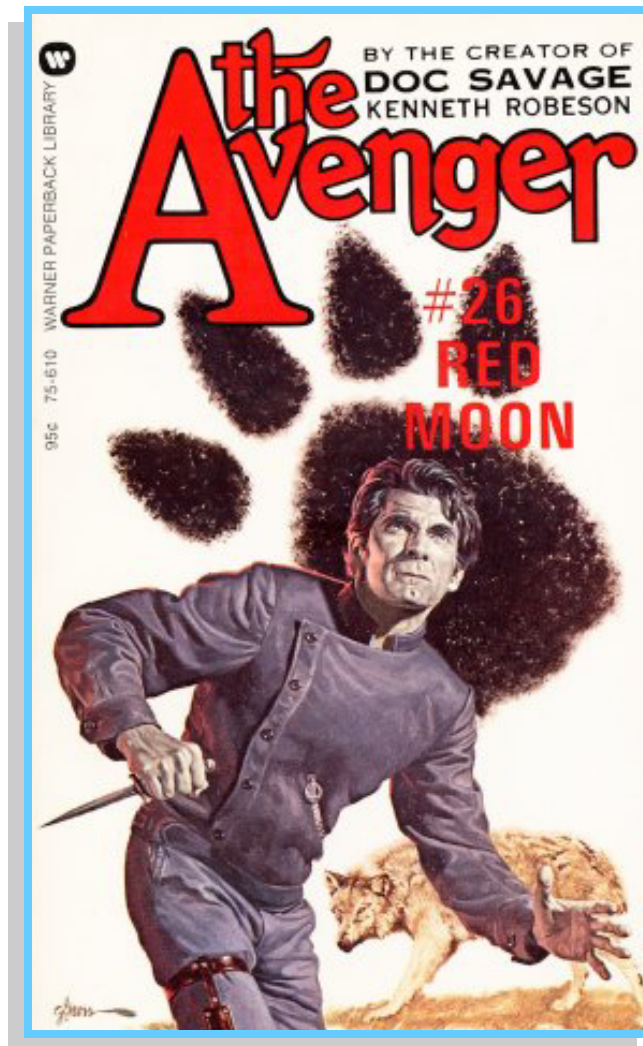
She stands a sliver over five feet, nudging the plus side of 100 pounds. "She looked like a dish of peaches going somewhere to be eaten with cream." She wears a number three pump on dainty little feet that can kick the stuffing out of criminals twice her size.

She attended Vassar, studying such defensive arts as jujitsu, boxing and wrestling. Her superior skill with the martial arts saves her from being sacrificed to an Egyptian god in the perilous case of *The Blood Ring*.

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*The Yellow Hoard* gives her age at "around twenty-three," She resembles a doll cast from the finest Delft, a pert pretty thing to be set on a pedestal and admired. Not Nellie Gray. No way. She is as feisty as Pat Savage and much more capable than the sometimes dim-witted Margot Lane. Unlike Pat, however, she is a legitimate card-carrying member of the group, a bottled hurricane, not just an outsider trying to hone in on The Avenger 's deadly cases.

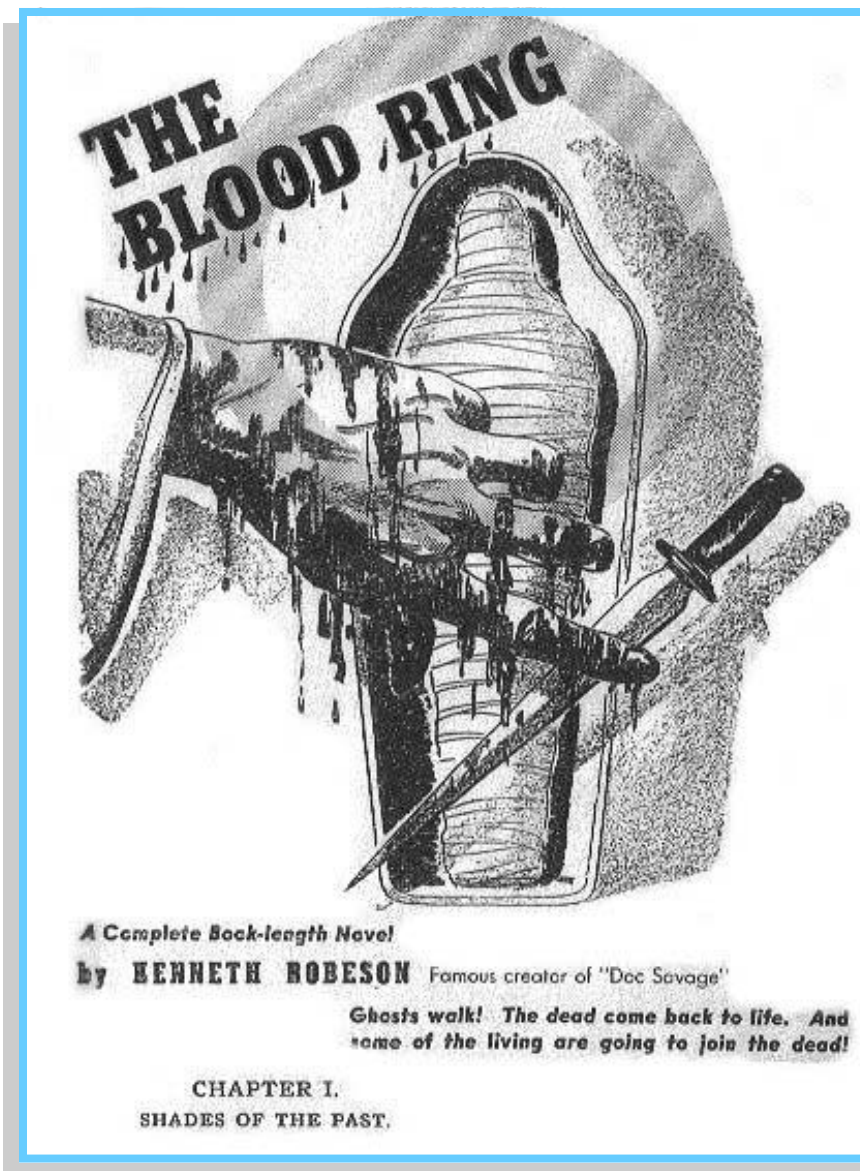
Nellie first meets up with the Justice boys after her kindly father, a retired archaeologist, is murdered by criminals trying to secure the Mexican bricks he brought back from his last expedition.



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They get one of the bricks and frame Nellie for the grisly murder.

The Avenger exonerates the blonde barracuda by pointing out to the simple-minded police how the murder could have been committed otherwise. At first, Nellie suspects Justice, Inc. is just another band of crooks bent of prying the secret of the bricks from her. Not until the end of the novel does she realize who they really are. By this time, she wants to join up with them. Benson readily accepts. She is also the heir to a vast deposit of wealth, which The Avenger tries



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to give her after the criminals destroy themselves.

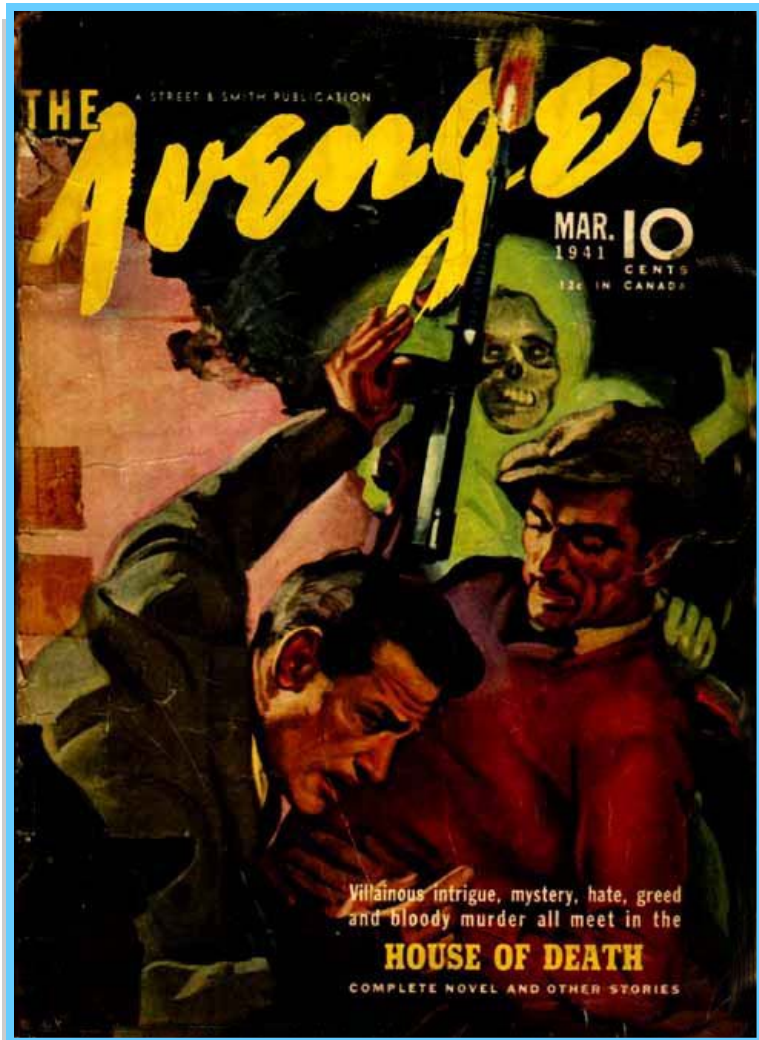
"It's ours," she states. "We share alike. But I have a suggestion to make.' She stared very seriously at Benson. 'I'd suggest that we leave it where it is as a sort of permanent and tremendous bank deposit, to be drawn on in a perpetual fight against crime. And I'd like to join in that fight...Crime killed my father. I want to wipe that out by working against crime. With you.'"

Nellie sports many skills valuable to Justice, Inc. and uses all of them to her utmost ability throughout the course of the series.

She can take a marksman's medal with a gun, swing from tree to tree in the same fashion as The Avenger, read lips—as all the group can—and has more courage than a steeplejack (though in *The Happy Killers* she admits a phobia for mice. Chills skitter down her spine when she spots one darting across a floor while searching a gloomy old house for clues).

She is versed in woodcraft and wilderness ways, having accompanied her father on many of his expeditions into the interiors of the South American jungles.

She tends towards the impulsive side, though Cole Wilson bests all the crew in this trait, darting into trouble at the drop of a hat. Like Pat, she is disappointed when left out of any excitement. Smitty calls her a "reckless little witch." He





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wastes no time in rubbing it in whenever he has to get her out of a jam.

But when the giant is threatened, she is like a queen bee, buzzing back and forth with worry. She cares much for the moon-faced engineer. So much so that by the time of *Pictures of Death* they are at the Pink Room of The Coyle Hotel, dancing, an unlikely pairing of big and small. "Smitty and Nellie, as a couple, had to be seen to be believed." However, the evening doesn't conclude without Nellie getting in at least one dig: she calls him the "world's worst dancer."

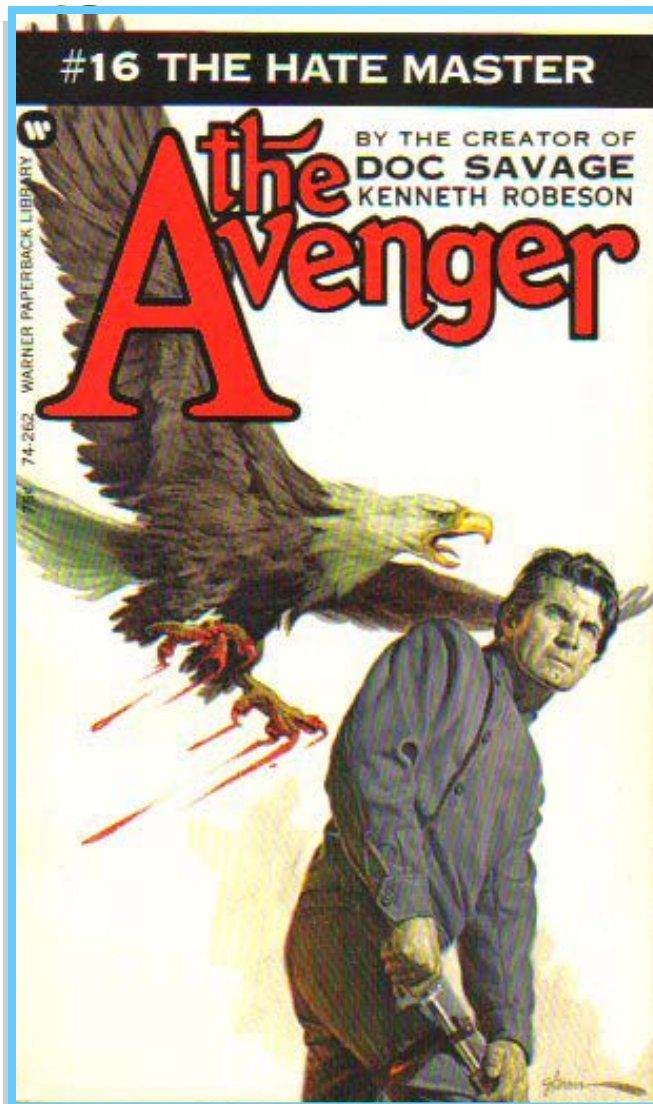
*The Devil's Horns* reveals Nellie is an accomplished singer. In this exploit,

she wrangles a job as a songstress at a club suspected by The Avenger as being a front for criminals. It is, and we're off on another exciting exploit with the tiny blonde package of dynamite.

She is nearly killed time without number during her escapades and Smitty is not always around to save her.

In *Nevlo* she is tossed off a cliff by a gangster, only to turn the plunge into a perfect dive into the ocean. If the water had been a shallow pool instead of a deep furrow, her crime-fighting career would have ended early on.

In *The Hate Master* she is jailed for a murder she, of course, didn't commit. While sitting in a Maine slammer, she discovers her troubles are far from over. The cell begins to swarm with a thousand maddened rats! If she was scared of one small mouse, this must



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be heart-stopping for her.

After the rats are finished off, thanks to MacMurdie, the jail is converged upon by a mob of angry townspeople, who have been given, unknowingly, a dose of the hate serum. It's not a pleasant adventure for the diminutive blonde.

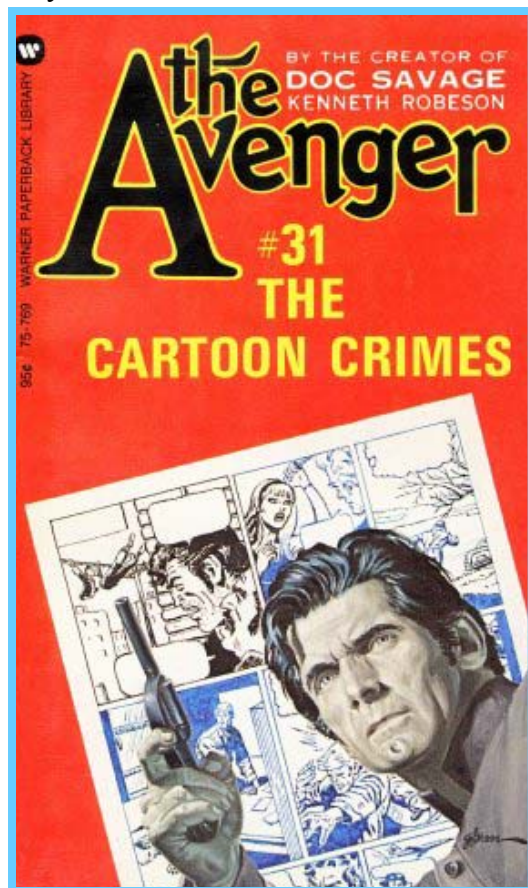
In the mysterious case of *The Blood Ring*, she is nearly done in a number of times. The same is true with a percentage of the tales. These close calls are not enough to make her give up her adventurous career, however. Like Pat, excitement is in her blood.

By the time of *The Man from Atlantis* her memory seems to be slipping as she now needs to take notes during the tales beyond this point. She is the one transcribing for The Avenger's files, from which Ernst and Goulart appear to have written the adventures. The notes for the Goulart stories must have been vague, indeed.

*Red Moon* states she has relatives living in Brimstone, Connecticut. Where they came from is unclear as her father was the only relation cited before this point. It is while on her way to visit her Aunt Jenny and Uncle Jake she encounters a body torn to bloody shreds sprawled in a snow bank. All clues point to the work of a werewolf and before the adventure is over, she nearly becomes the creature's midnight snack.

It's Nellie who starts off *The Cartoon Crimes* as well. While visiting her friend Jeanne Lewing, she discovers the woman's husband has been having strange visions of comic book characters come to life—characters he created. Before the tale concludes, the rest of Justice, Inc. witness flying men and "Wonderman" dashing across the New York countryside (no doubt Cole Wilson got a personal kick out of this, being a Wonderman fanatic).

Nellie Gray was a valuable and trusted aide to The Avenger. Perky



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and exciting, she held her own, and more, against the male-dominated team. The other female member would not see nearly as much action. We last see her in the closing pages *Demon Island*, brooding over Cole's impending marriage to the

lovely Heather Brail, arm in arm with Smitty, parading around a spooky island in search of a gangster's hidden loot.

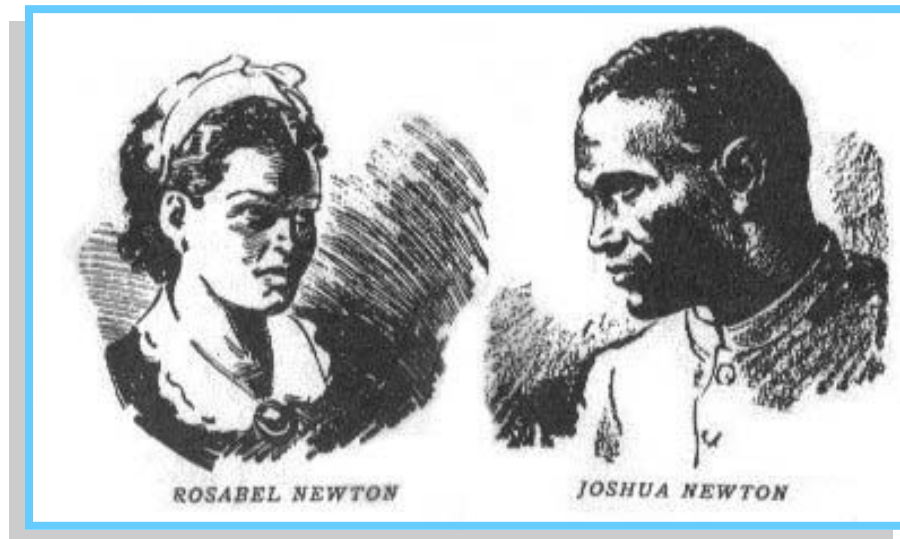
Nellie became my favorite character the moment I met her, with Smitty, outside the schoolhouse. A case of love at first read (but don't tell Pat). She and Smitty may have shared many more glorious adventures together. We may never know. At any rate, she remains the prettiest, and sometimes toughest, aide in the annals of Justice, Inc.



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## SIX: JOSHUA ELIJAH & ROSABEL NEWTON, WALKING ENCYCLOPEDIA & BLACK TIGRESS

When we first encounter the team's only husband and wife members, it is viciously fighting off the criminals who murdered their employers, the Gant brothers, in *The Sky Walker*. Benson comes upon the scene while investigating the mysterious building crumblings apparently tied in with a man walking in midair. The Avenger helps Josh and Rosabel vanquish the remaining no-goods and realizes they would be valuable editions to Justice, Inc.



Josh is described as a lanky Negro who normally moves so slowly, with eyelids drooping somnolently over black eyes, he is nicknamed "Sleepy." His feet are even larger than MacMurdie's and he moves with the slow, shuffling gait expected of a black man of the era (this was the 1940s, remember. While progressive, Street & Smith's liberal attitude had some reins).

When Benson first meets him, Josh speaks with "ahs" and "suhs." The Avenger tells him he doesn't have to talk that way, as he is obviously well educated.

"There was no accent or Southern slurring of his words." Josh talks as society expects him to only when around unfamiliar people. He calls it "good protective

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coloration." This trait fools a number of criminals over the course of the series.

Actually, Josh and Rosabel are honor graduates of Tuskegee Institute. Josh is sharp and alert, with a brain like an encyclopedia.

Rosabel is described as a pretty Negress with liquid dark eyes. They are fiercely devoted to one another, charging into action without heed whenever the other is endangered.

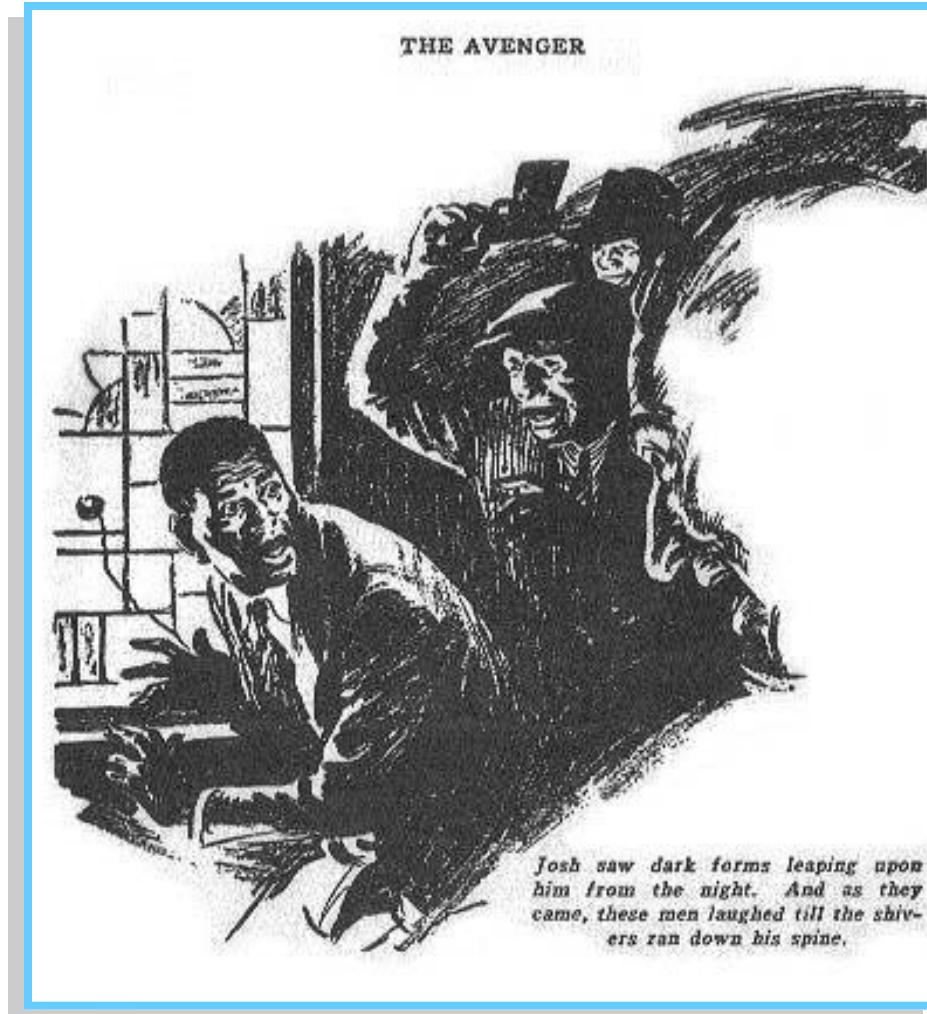


In chapter four of *The Sky Walker* they join up officially with the Justice gang, solidifying the membership until the advent of Cole Wilson in the thirteenth saga, *Murder on Wheels*.

Josh hates physical exercise so much he doesn't move if he doesn't have to. Smitty says Josh wouldn't climb a flight of stairs if his life depended on it (though he does, after considerable thought, in his debut novel, after Benson and Smitty have a bit of trouble with the elevator). Josh simply replies, "Neither does a cat."

He is somewhat of a dusky philosopher. "It is only when a houn'

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dawg barks that folks pay attention to him, when he sleeps in the sun, they let him alone," says Josh of his put on Southern drawl.

Though he is the least powerful of the group, he is still more than a match for any two men. He is a black panther when aroused, Rosabel a black tigress. *The Devil's Horns* states he is an expert marksman and boxer. Rosabel can more than hold her own in any knock-down drag-out fight when her lanky husband is imperiled. She carries a .22 caliber pistol beneath her dress. Josh seems not to need a weapon, preferring his bony fists in a fight.

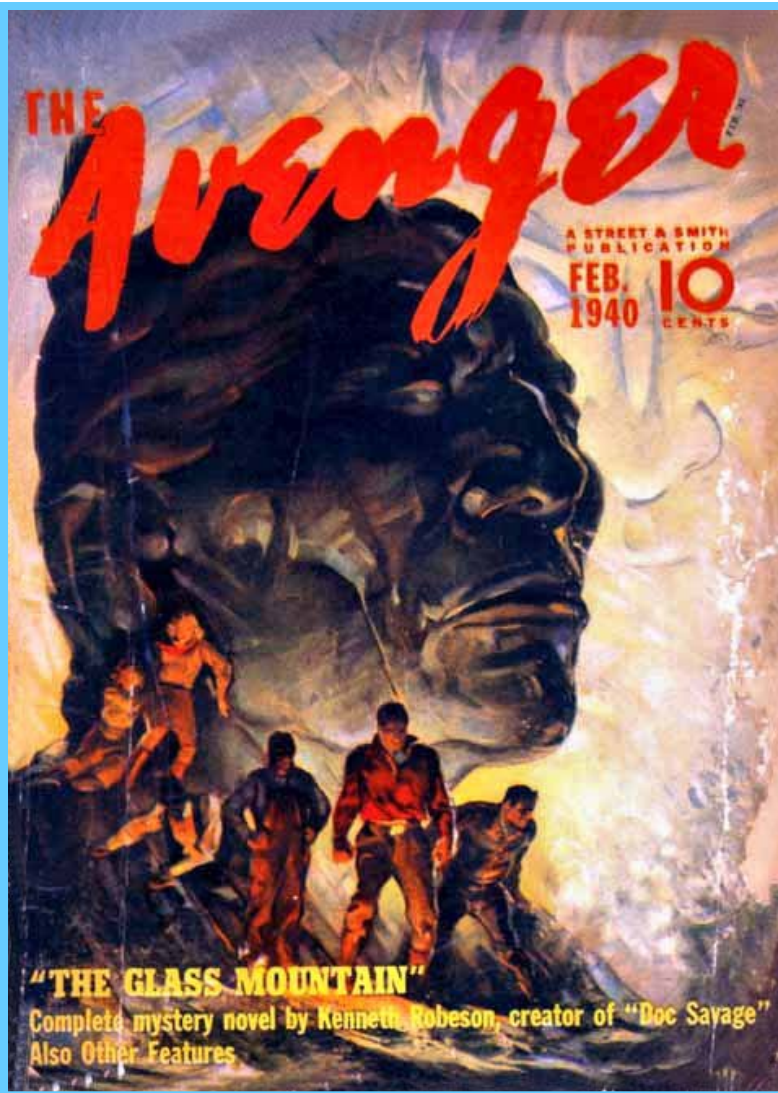
Josh's favorite pastime while awaiting orders from Benson is sitting in Mac's drugstore gulping maple-nut sundaes, sometimes six at a shot. Mac says it's a wonder Josh doesn't look like a string of beads with all those sundaes in such a skinny body. Mac also worries that Josh will eat him out of business. During *The*

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*Devil's Horns* he eats four in an hour and a half. Surprisingly, he never gets sick.

Josh and Rosabel probably see the least amount of action because they are husband and wife, as well as being limited by social prejudice. Usually, their action is confined to playing a maid or butler in one story or another.

In *The Devil's Horns* Josh pulls a particularly clever trick on a black worker for a suspect, to wrangle himself a job as servant. He scares the devil out of a man who has apparently been doing something he shouldn't have with somebody else's wife.



In the same story, Rosabel plays maid to Nellie when the latter poses as a singer for a night club.

In the classic Avenger yarn *The Blood Ring*, Rosabel is again a maid. In the same tale, Josh is assigned to guard the Egyptian room in the Braintree Museum, because he "blends so well with the darkness." After spotting an Egyptian mummy shuffling around the morguelike place in the dead of night, he hastily gives up the security business.

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In *Tuned for Murder*, while acting as a shoeshine boy at a suspect's factory, he narrowly escapes being thrown into a cauldron of molten steel. Only his catlike reflexes save him from looking like someone's bronzed baby shoes. The experience gives him quite a scare, however.

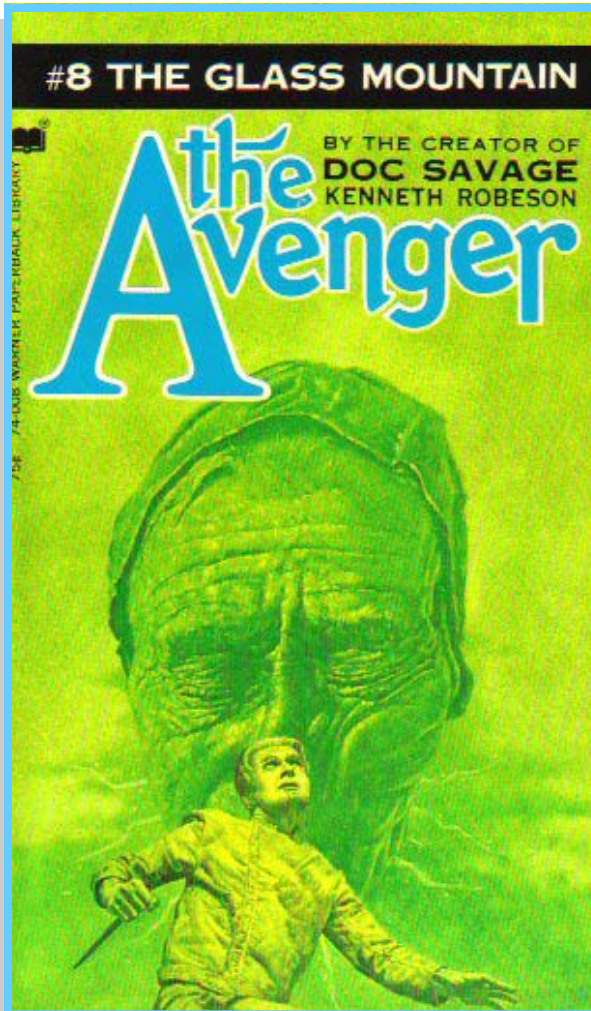
In the mysterious case of *The Smiling Dogs*, it is Josh and Rosabel who discover the answer to the red midget and green dashound manifestations by catching the perpetrators in an abandoned store.

Josh begins the deadly events of *Death in Slow Motion* by picking up a sick bum he finds

along the street not wanting to be Josh, being the he is, made it brings the Mac's drugstore lucky enough the "slow sickness", members don't

In *Midnight* pierces his leg. playing a trick criminals, think he and his He has bullets from the and replaced blanks—except revolver. When decides to put a Josh's leg, the wounded. It is control Josh motionless and bluff.

Josh has the distinction of member of Justice, Inc. to have died in an adventure. This occurs in *The Glass Mountain* when, acting as a cook on a tunnel building project, he is struck down by a blast of lightning from an angry Pawnee Rain God. The Avenger applies all



staggering (the bum did picked up, but humanitarian his duty). He derelict to for aid. Josh is not to acquire motion though other fare as well. *Murder* a bullet Benson is on a gang of making them crew are dead. removed the gang's guns them with for the leader's the crook bullet into aide is really with amazing remains pulls off the

dubious being the only

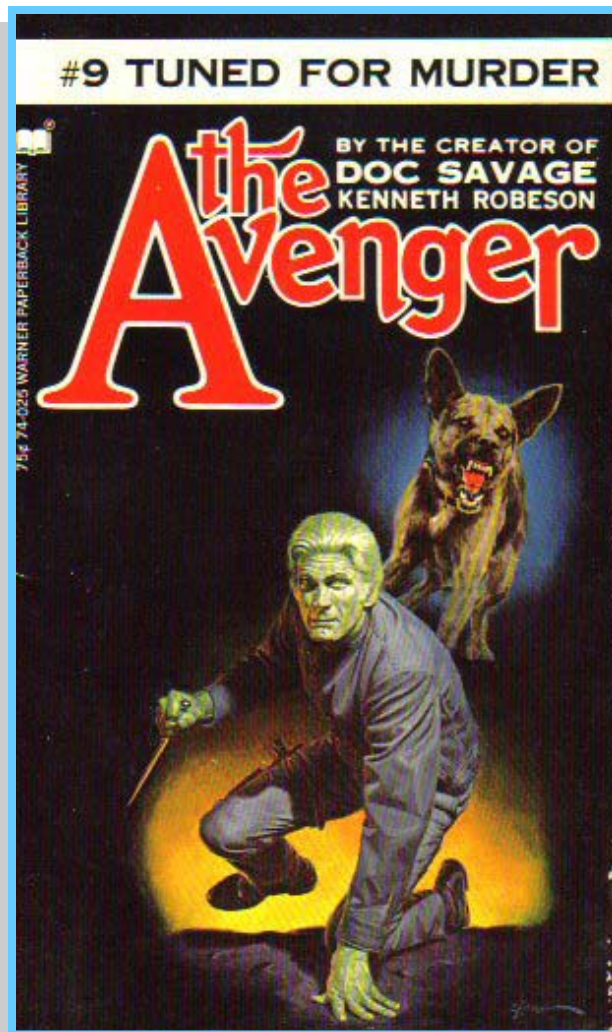


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his tremendous medical knowledge in limited facilities to save the lanky Negro. He does, and after a few minutes of roaming the spirit world. Josh is back amongst the living (Doc Savage accomplishes the same feat, saving Monk and Ham, in one of his adventures).

The experience doesn't seem to leave any scars, as he is back on the case shortly thereafter. By this time, The Avenger, with his usual foresight, has taken the precaution of providing all his men with rubber-soled shoes, so Mac escapes with nothing more than a severe shock when he is hit a short time later.

In the *Devil on the Moon*-like adventure *The Man from Atlantis*, an odd occurrence takes place (odd for a pulp adventure series, anyway). Rosabel, in an



unusual twist, becomes pregnant. Apparently, the couple didn't spend all their time chasing crooks. This effectively removes Rosabel from crime-fighting for the rest of the series. Josh becomes a bit less reckless now that he is going to be a father. They have twins, a boy and a girl, which puts a crimp in the bet Cole was trying to make with Nellie. This all occurs in *Black Chariots*, where we see a strangely human side of the machinelike Avenger, who walks into the hospital carrying a teddy bear and rattle.

Josh's appearances dwindle after this, mostly limited to finding a name for the babies. He is much less eager to get shot at or blown up than he used to be.

Josh and Rosabel are unique characters for their time. As the only black members of the elite cast, they

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

demonstrated The Avenger's deep respect for human life and liberty, regardless of color or creed. At a time when few restaurants would admit black humans, Benson treated Josh and Rosabel with as much respect as the other members of the team. The only limits were those forced upon them by society.

Although never used to their full potential, they were nevertheless a quantum leap above the stereotypes evident other pulp fiction magazines.



## SEVEN: COLE WILSON, DASHING ENGINEER & FINAL MEMBER

Cole Wilson spends most of *Murder on Wheels* thwarting the other members of Justice, Inc. He makes his entrance early on in this tale, struggling to keep the lead damsel out of the clutches of killers who have stolen the Marr supercar.



He is young, brash, just under six feet tall (*Three Gold Crowns* states he is five-feet-eleven), and rather striking in looks. He has straight brown hair, combed high off the forehead; a heavy jaw; alert black eyes and the look of an Indian. He never wears a hat, preferring to forgo the fashion trends of the day.

He attended the best schools in the country and garnered a brilliant record as an engineer. Because of this ability, he is summoned to Washington in *Nevlo* and *Death in Slow Motion* on an important government defense project. In *House of Death* he is in Detroit on an unspecified engineering assignment.

*Murder on Wheels* reveals that the inventor of the supercar, Phineas Jackson, practically adopted Cole when he was a homeless orphan of twelve. Cole retains a fierce loyalty to the sometimes eccentric inventor.

This novel also states he has a tendency to be a bit on the radical side in his political leanings. "He didn't seem to hold any particular political belief, but he was always popping off in radical ways." "Kind of like a baby Robin Hood," says Josh.

His uncanny strength and speed make him almost an equal to The Avenger. In fact, it is Cole who tricks Benson into the ray tempering machine at the Marr plant, causing Benson to revert to his normal pre-shock self.

He is the most impulsive member of the band, always charging into a

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

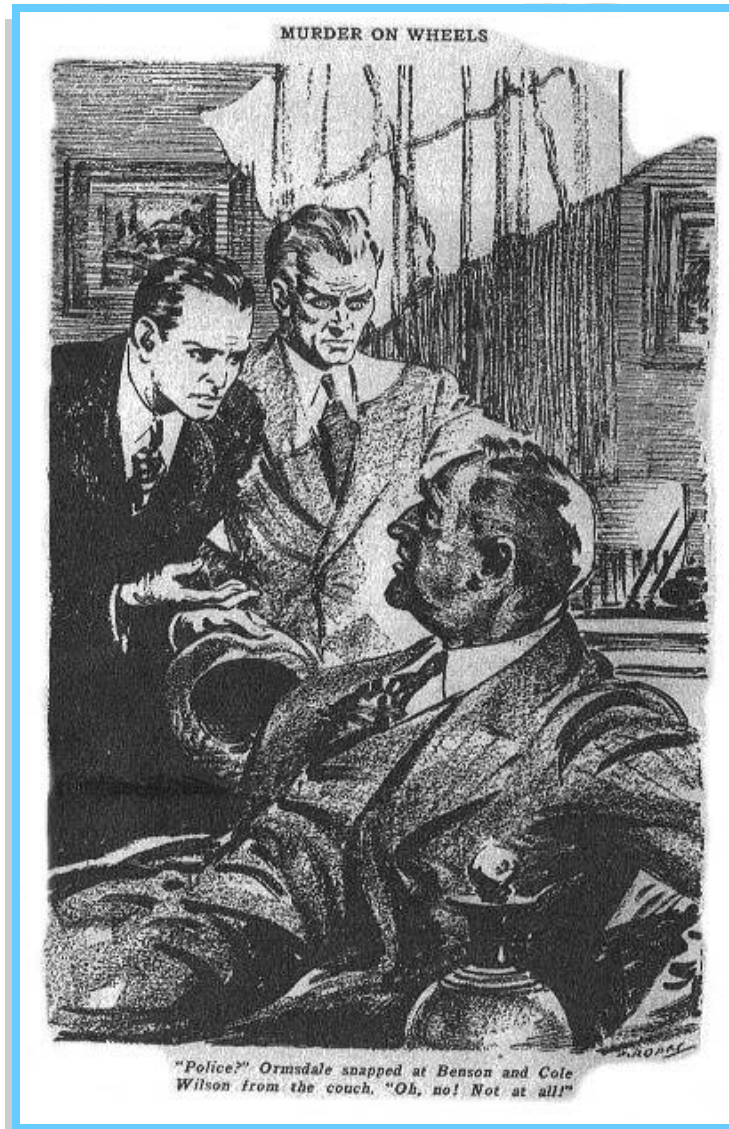
situation with his heart instead of his head (unless you count Smitty's rampages every time Nellie is in a jam). This habit leads to a number of near misses on his life and an equal number of captures. Sometimes, however, his impulsiveness leads to the saving of a life.

Of the aides, he is the recipient of most of the biological weapons employed by a criminal genius.

In *The Hate Master* he is forced by criminals to drink some of the hate serum and tries to kill The Avenger (strangely, though most novels cite Cole as almost

an equal to The Avenger in speed and strength, Benson easily overpowers him.)

In *The Black Death* Cole grabs a flower box delivered to Justice headquarters and contracts the hideous "black death". Shortly before this incident, the Black Wings Cult leader had forecast death to all members of the band. As with the previous adventure, The Avenger's cure may cost Cole his life. (Oddly, it is stated in this novel that the townspeople who acquired the malady by drinking tainted water would recover eventually anyway, as the serum wears off when ingested. Why it wouldn't have worn off on Cole is a



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mystery.)

The only reason he doesn't pick up the "slow motion sickness" is because he is out of town at the time.

Like Benson, he has a no-life-taking policy. Even so, in *Pictures of Death*, he accidentally hits a crook too hard and rids the underworld of another crony.

The only weapon he ever carries is a small spring gun that shoots a .22 pellet containing some of MacMurdie's anesthetic gas. This little pea-shooter can snap a pellet some eighty feet.

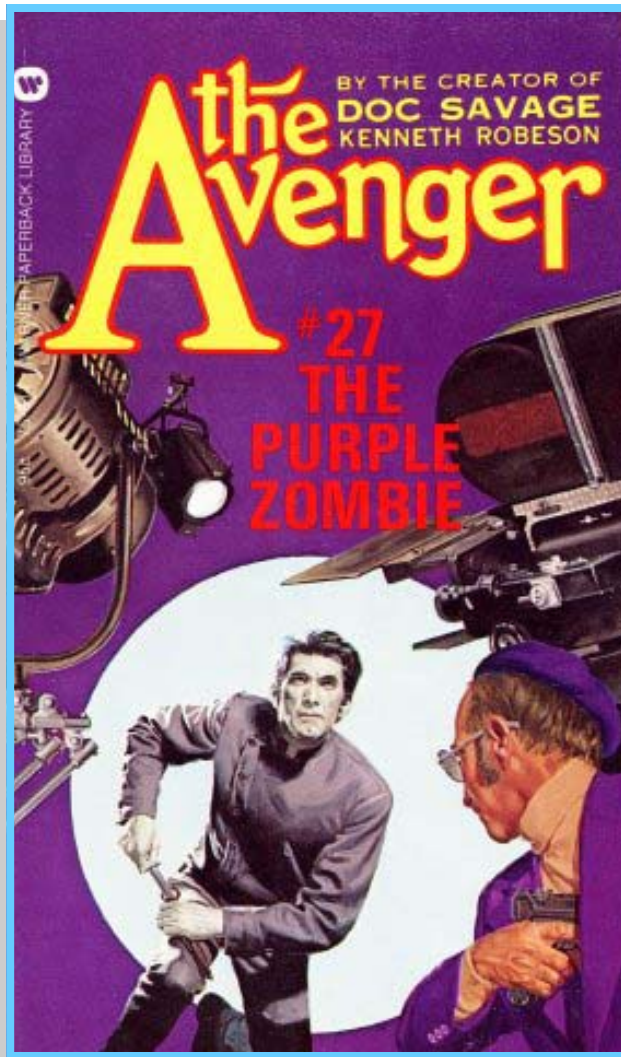
By the time of *The Man from Atlantis* Cole takes on a more dominant role in the group. In this tale, he becomes flippant, wise-cracking left and right. This adventure speaks good

though it is not where he picked

He is on in *The Purple* as with the members who take vacations, short-lived.

knows it, he is with the dead and spies on the set being directed friend, Terrance He is also with the lovely Heather Brail, he falls in love of the

At a party. Cole "old Friend" Cranston across is not known if was involved in if the real was in the room



reveals he reasonably Portuguese, explained it up. "vacation" *Zombie*, but, other have tried to this one is Before he embroiled walking German of a movie by his O'Malley. embroiled actress with whom by the end adventure. spots his Lamont the room. It The Shadow this case, or Cranston that

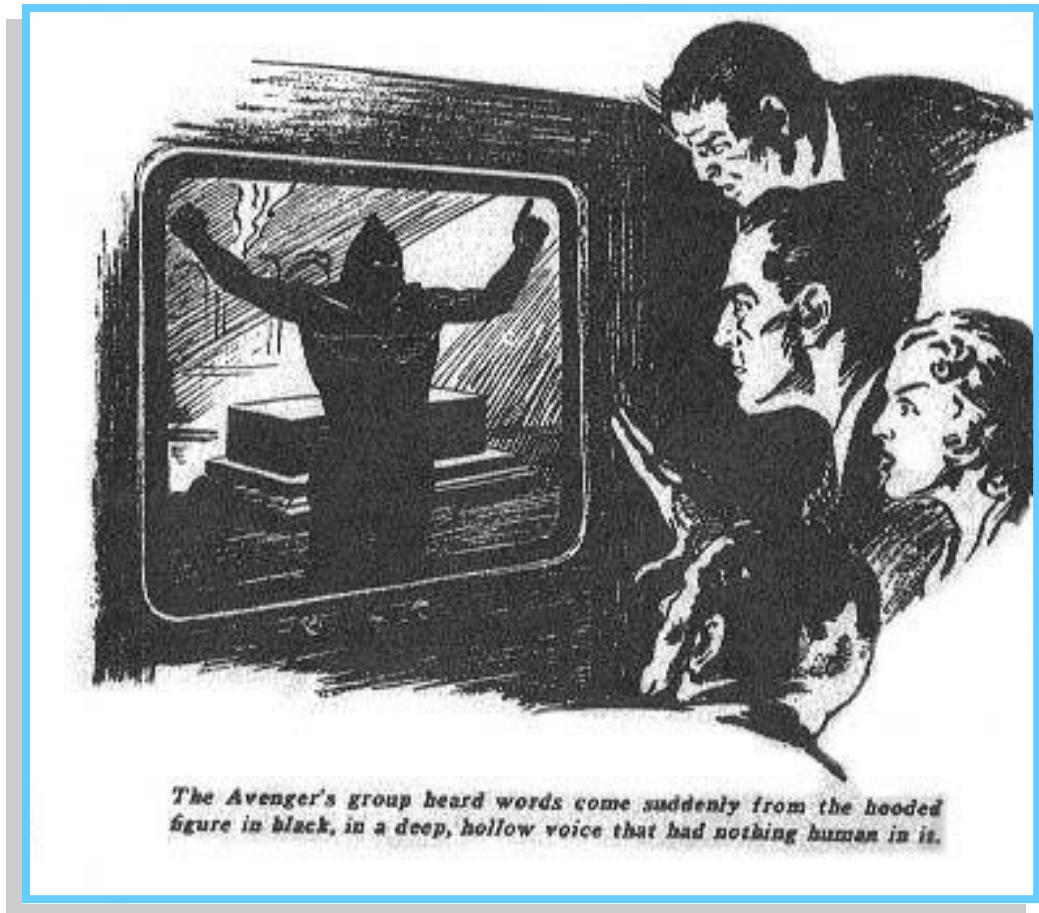
## THE GRAY NEMESIS

occasion, or which one Cole considered his friend. Perhaps, if it were The Shadow, the Master of Darkness felt the case was better left in The Avenger's capable hands, as he had his hands full in Chinatown at the time.

Cole would encounter Heather Brail and Terrance O'Malley again on the set of the director's next feature film in *Demon Island*. This time it would signal his doom as a single man. The dashing, impulsive Cole Wilson would ask the lovely movie queen for her hand in marriage. Of course, she accepts. This would make Cole the second married member of the group. Would Cole really tie the knot? Smitty doesn't think so. "He ain't the kind of guy to settle down," says Smitty. He calls Cole a boy at heart, all excited about saving Heather from the ghosts and ghouls of the hexed island.

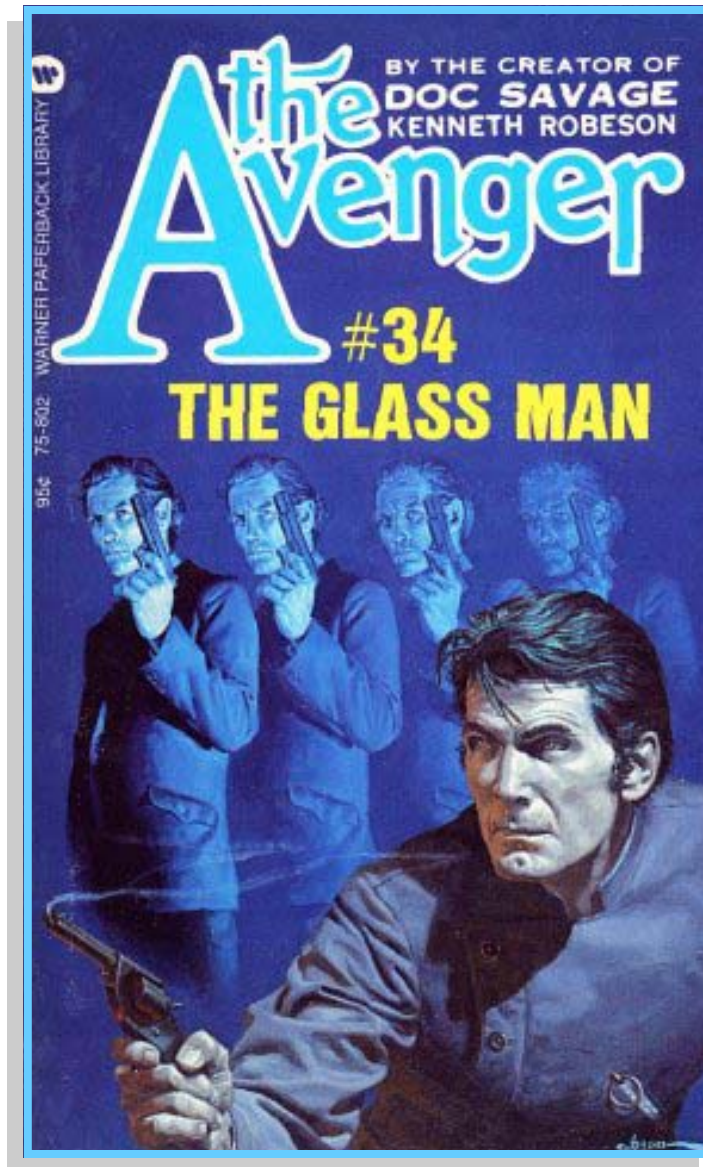
While Cole's marriage to Heather seems doubtful, he was always doing things impulsively, so maybe it happened. Whatever the case, I'm sure he accompanied The Avenger on many more cases after the terrifying events of *Demon Island*.

Cole Wilson was the last member to join the elite group of crime-fighters and



## THE GRAY NEMESIS

possibly he never quite fit in. He always seemed like a fifth wheel, unmotivated by the avenging desire that linked the rest of the band. They had each faced the horror of losing something they loved. Cole saw it as kicks, excitement, more akin to the attitudes expressed by Doc's men. Perhaps by the final adventure he decided he had had enough and it was time to settle down. If he stayed, his impulsiveness may have gotten him killed shortly after *Demon Island*.



## EIGHT: MACMURDIE'S DRUGSTORE, WIZARD'S DEN

MacMurdie's Drugstore squats on the corner of Waverly and Sixth. It is a wizard's den, a magical place where wondrous compounds and electrical masterpieces are birthed in the never-ending quest to obliterate crime. It is golden, much like the Hidalgo Trading Co. from Doc Savage or the B. Jonas office from *The Shadow*; one of the staples of *The Avenger Magazine*.

An ordinary-looking structure, it houses one of the most complete chemical and electrical laboratories in the world, surpassed only by The Avenger's lab at Bleek Street headquarters (or possibly Doc's on the eighty-sixth floor).

The pharmacy part accounts for only one third of the total floor space, lending



a front of innocence to the apothecary. Lining the walls are counters carrying everything a modern drugstore should contain: powders, pills, creams. On one side is a prescription counter and pharmacist's desk. The other side boasts a long marble soda fountain where Josh and Cole can be found devouring maple-nut sundaes, or, in Cole's case, reading the newest pulp magazine or Wonderman comic book, while awaiting orders from The Avenger.

Occasionally, there is a young boy of nineteen with intelligent brown eyes {and a valuable



## THE GRAY NEMESIS

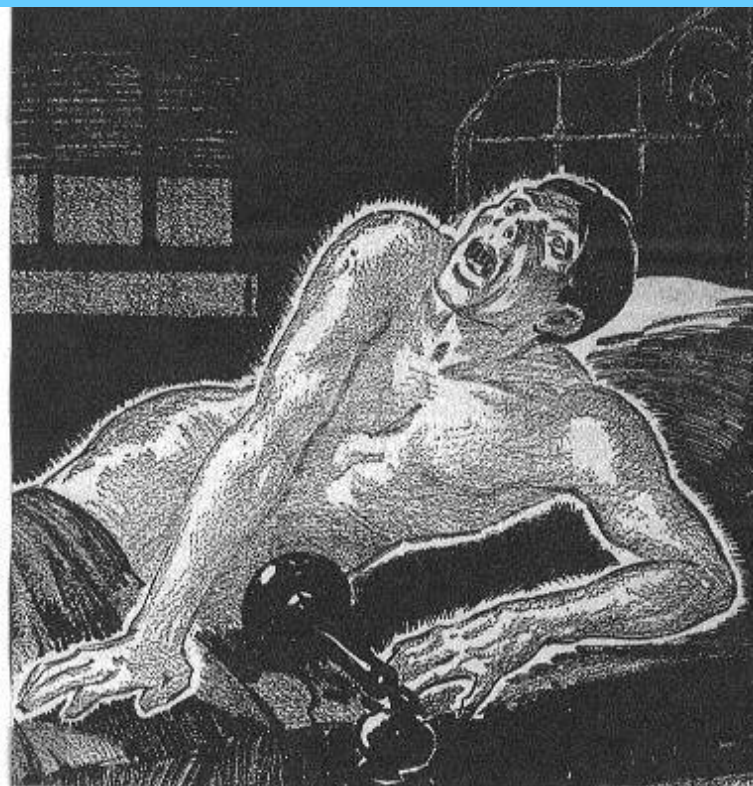
habit of being totally incurious as to all the queer things going on in the back of the store) working behind the counter while Mac and Smitty toil in the back room.

An iron door bars the entrance to that room. At times the door proves a hindrance. In *The Black Death* a girl tricks Mac and locks herself in the lab.

Behind the iron door is an enormous room that takes up the remaining two-thirds of the floor space. To one side is Mac's chemical apparatus: beakers, retorts, jars of mysterious compounds, Bunsen burners and rows of glass tubing. *The Frosted Death* states there is also a half-ton microscope with super magnification powers occupying a good section of the corner.

On the opposite wall is everything you'd ever need to invent anything electrical. All the paraphernalia that could have been dreamed about by an advanced electrical engineer. This is Smitty's part of the lab.

"Along the rear, taking up about two equal spaces, were the results of the



### FROSTED DEATH

A Complete Book-length Novel

by KENNETH ROBESON

CHAPTER I.  
THE GLASS CAPSULE.

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

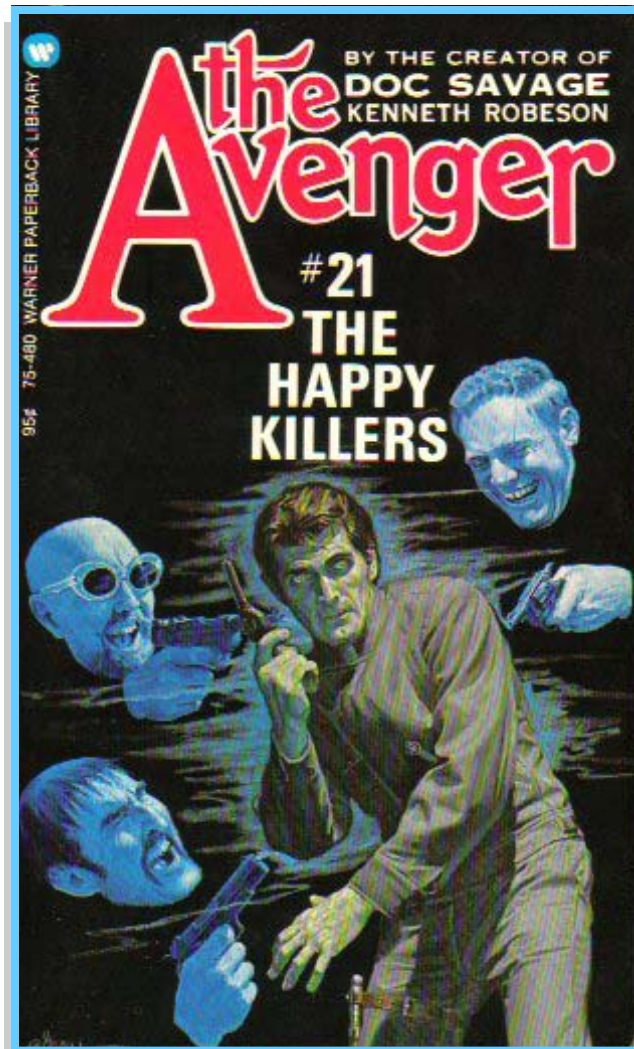
work of the two." Cabinets are stocked full of vials containing drugs unknown to chemists because they come from the brain of MacMurdie.

Beside the cabinet sits another that contains a mysterious gray screen. This is an advanced television designed by Smitty. "In it, he had put the work of other men, changed and bettered by his own work, and principles and devices of his own invention."

This electronic wonder is connected with another like it at Bleek Street headquarters. Mac and Smitty use it to contact The Avenger when something unusual happens near the drugstore, or when they have discovered something important to case.

Many of start at or at small part of store. Smitty brings persons who an explosion opening pages *Hoard*. Josh bum there to perplexing *Death in Slow Maniacal* crooks attack *The Happy* and Mac are discussing in *The Man* when, through glass spot a woman by a gang of Mac better part of *Death* in this for an antidote mysterious

mold. This novel reveals there is a secret tunnel leading from the back of the store to an exit on Waverly Place. This tunnel is often used by The Avenger



the present

the adventures least occupy a the yarn at this

two injured were caught in there in the of *The Yellow* brings a sick begin the and near fatal *Motion*. laughing the place in *Killers*. Cole quietly trivial matters from *Atlantis* the big plate windows, they being attacked criminals. spends the *The Frosted* lab, searching to the smothering

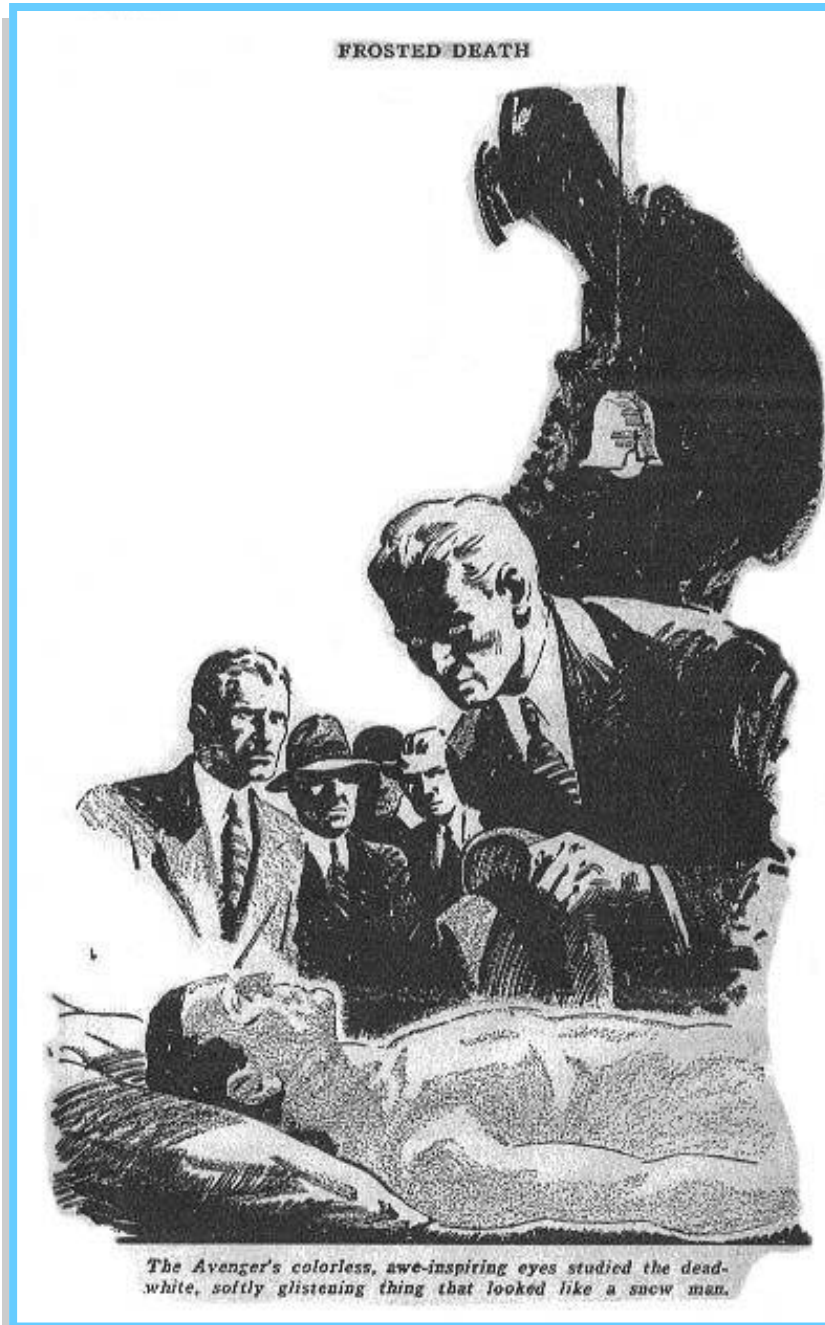
## THE GRAY NEMESIS

when he wishes to enter the store secretly. In this instance, Mac uses it to get the cure for the "frosted death" to Benson before criminals, who are watching the

place, waylay him *en route* (they do anyway).

In *Dr. Time* a bomb is delivered to the store in a baby carriage. The device goes off, giving Cole quite a scare, but it is only a smoke bomb and some firecrackers, sent as a warning from Dr. Time to keep Justice, Inc. off the case (like that would work).

Mac's drugstore is a fantastical place, wherein many adventures and plenty of action takes place. Magical things occurred there; probably they still do.



# THE GRAY NEMESIS

## NINE: JUSTICE HEADQUARTERS

In the bowels of Manhattan is a street only one short block long. Its ominous name hints at the person who inhabits the dwelling taking up most of the expanse: Bleek Street (strangely *The Happy Killers* paperback version has it as Bleeker Street. In the next adventure, it is again Bleek). On this little-used avenue resides the headquarters of the world's most elite band of crime-fighters,

Justice, Inc.

On the north side of the block-long street squats the windowless back of a huge warehouse, which stands vacant and boarded up, a skeleton of a building. A loft building and small stores finish out the south side. The Avenger owns or leases all the buildings on the block, so, in effect, he owns the entire street.

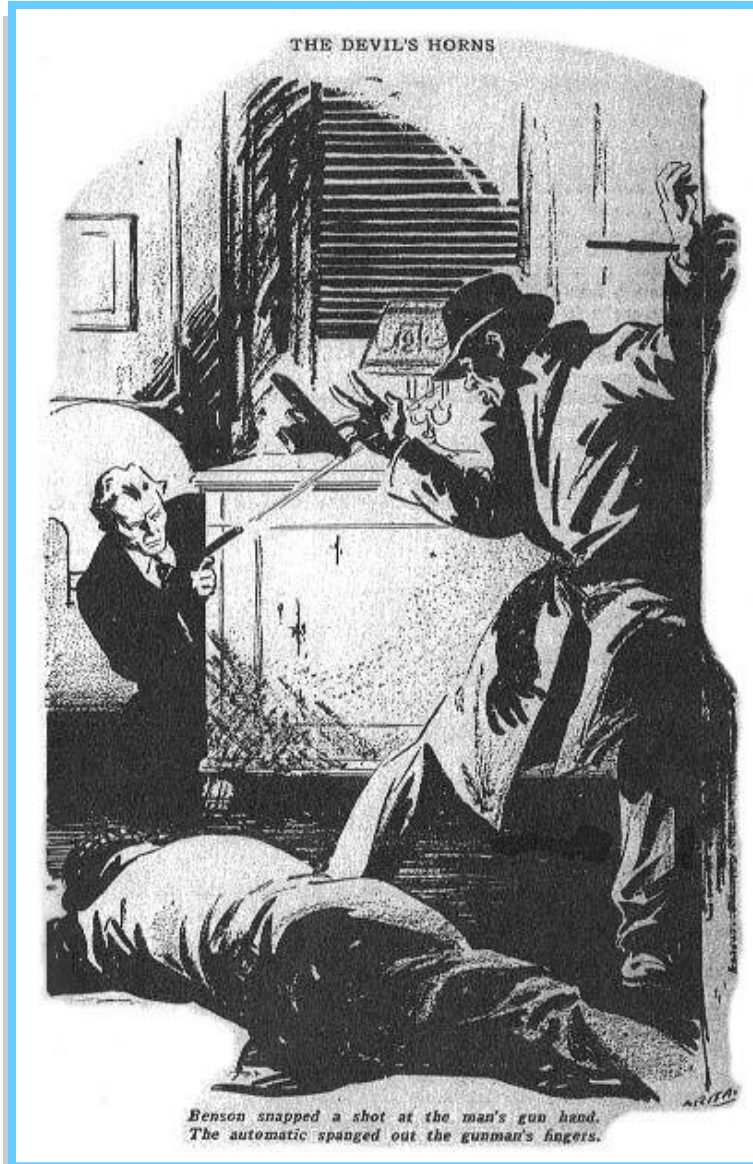
Tucked between the shells of buildings on the south side, stand three old and dingy, narrow brick buildings, each reaching three stories in height, that have been thrown into one. The left and right building doors are triple locked and bricked over from



## THE GRAY NEMESIS

the inside. Only the center entrance is ever used. A small unobtrusive sign in dull gilt letters sports the legend "Justice". (by the time of *The Flame Breathers*, the sign says "Justice, Inc.")

Upon entering the structure, a visitor finds himself standing in a small vestibule, facing a stairway that leads to the second and third floors. A light blinking on in the top floor room indicates the entrance of a visitor. A television screen shows a precise picture of the person to those monitoring in the upper room. A tiny camera, mounted behind the Justice sign, can snap photos in day or night through the aid of infra-red rays.



*Death in Slow Motion* states the stairs are richly carpeted and the tapestries hanging on the walls are worth a fortune.

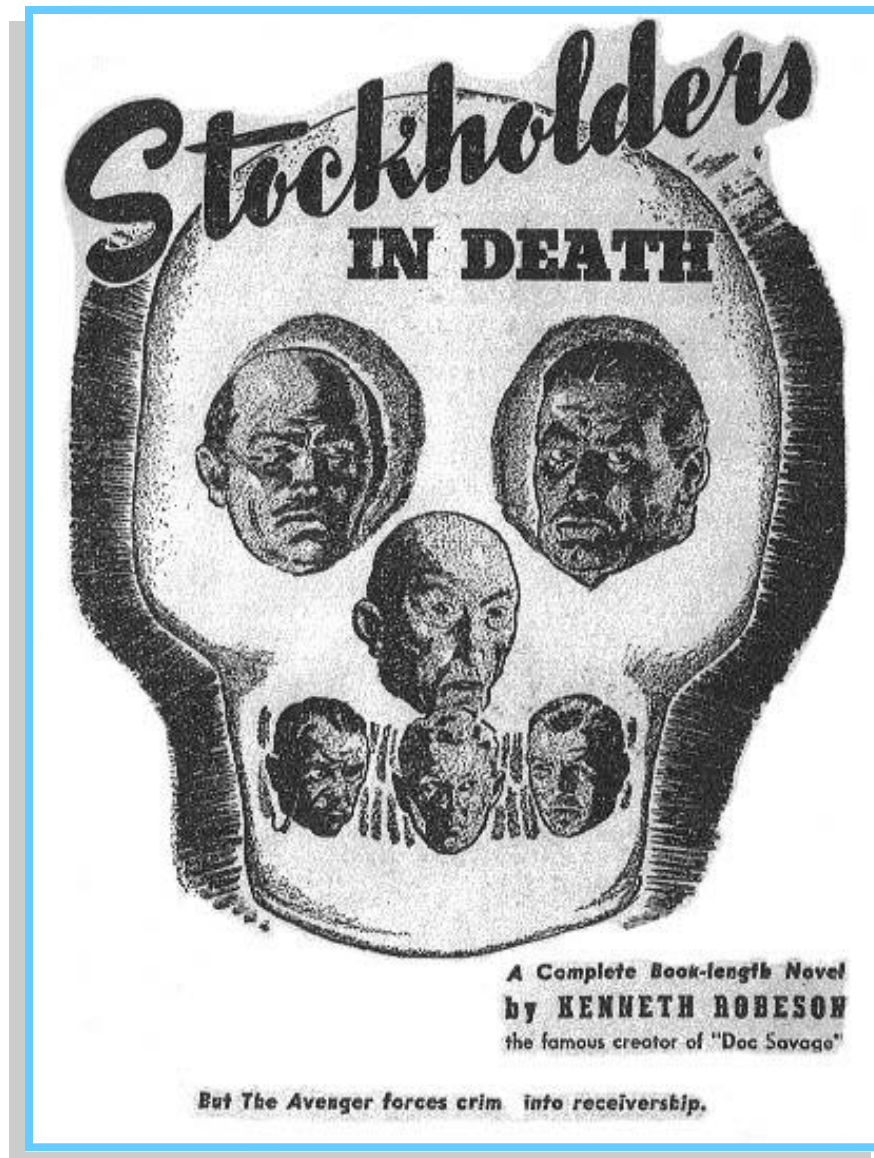
In *Pictures of Death* the stairs have been replaced by an elevator and regulated to use as an exit. In *The Happy Killers* the stairs are back again.

A small sign on frosted glass at the second floor waiting area bears the legend: "Another flight up please." In some yarns, visitors are screened there.

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Also, a small colored indicator warns The Avenger if the entrant carries a weapon. In *Pictures of Death* a villain intent on stealing a fake painting of "The Dock." bypasses that alarm by carrying in a vial of nitroglycerin. Benson remarks the situation would have to be remedied after this near fatal incident.

*Pictures of Death* also states the elevator can be sealed to prevent anyone from getting off on a floor other than the one at which they were supposed to. Or, in the case of a criminal, from escaping (this would have been of little value in the above case; it wouldn't be prudent to restrain a criminal toting nitro as the



# THE GRAY NEMESIS

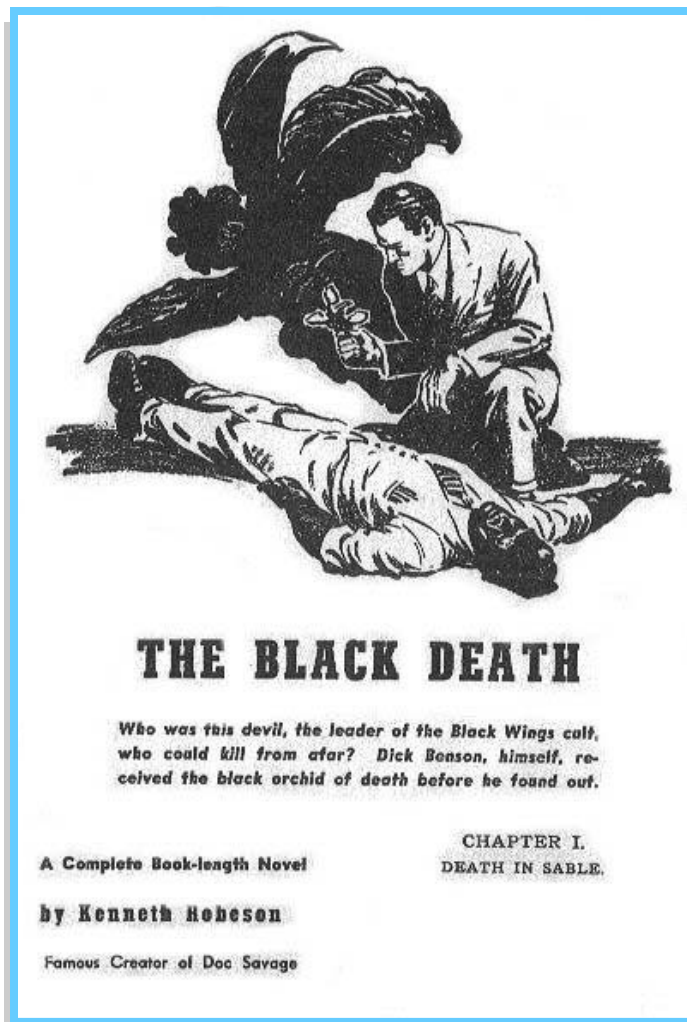
resulting explosion would destroy more than just the elevator).

A bullet-proof glass panel can slide down in front of the door (much like the one Doc Savage employed in *The Monsters* and many of his adventures). This shield saves Benson from being riddled with machine gun slugs in *Stockholders in Death*. Smitty passes his hand over a spot in the wall to lift the panel in *The Green Killer*.

The top floor of the dingy building is actually three huge rooms merged into one. It resembles a combination of lounging room and work shop, sixty by one hundred and

In the large round Spaced room are big chairs and a near the rear Also near the windows, from the Avenger's on which battery of rows of lights. A and soft announce the the phone. The rear provide a low roof of a garage and fronting the All the are equipped appears to be blinds, forty-five angle to let

In reality, these are cast from nickel alloy and are embedded into the masonry to deflect bullets. They prove quite effective, though why Benson didn't install



five feet. center sits a table. around the leather letter divan windows. rear thirty feet door, is The big desk, rest a phones and indicator small light buzzer ringing of

windows view of the one-story the building next street. windows with what Venetian slanted at a degree in sunlight.

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

bullet-proof or reflective glass as an extra precaution is a mystery. Also, the room is totally soundproofed.

Smitty's television, housed in a tall cabinet, squats in one corner of the room. What appears to be a giant canary cage, six feet by six feet in dimension, occupies another. Benson uses this to imprison a criminal, much to the rogue's discomfort, in *The Yellow hoard*. It's an effective tool for prying information from unsavory characters.

Against the east wall is a cabinet lined with fine guns. Hung on another wall, myriad types

of bows and arrows. In *The Green Killer* a girl grabs one of these weapons and tries to impale another guest, who is seemingly the victim of the dreaded monkey disease.

Another ceiling-high cabinet holds a bunch of bottles and vials, which contain many of The Avenger's concoctions.

The second floor houses The Avenger's super laboratory, where he spends much of his time inventing gadgets and antidotes to aid in vanquishing crime.

This floor includes the aides' private quarters, and a suite of guest rooms. In *The Frosted Death* the lovely Miss Sangman stays in the "blue room." A switch on The Avenger's desk can actuate a blue light alarm if any guest leaves his or her room.





## THE GRAY NEMESIS

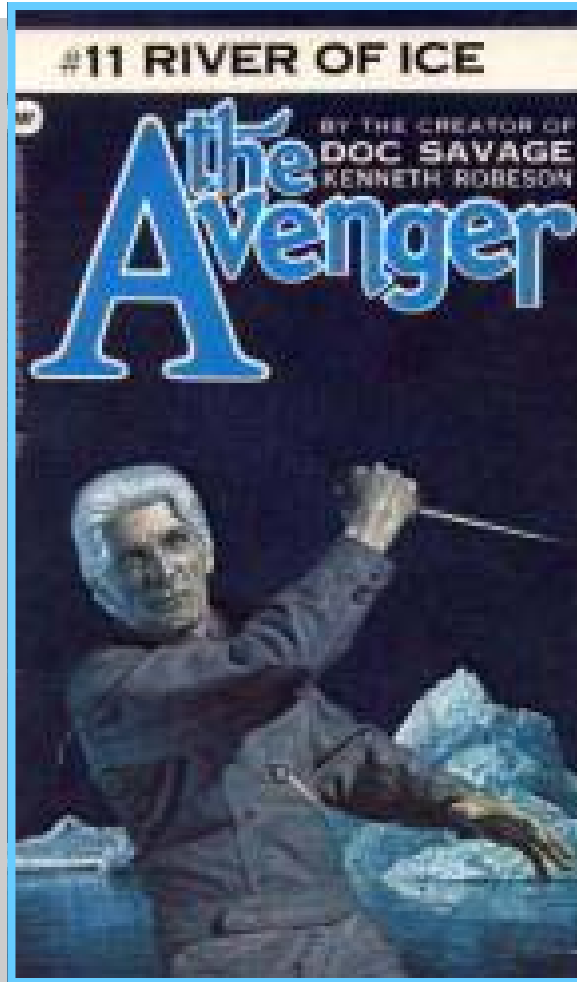
The second floor corridor ends in what appears to be a solid brick and plaster wall. Appearances can be and are deceiving. "He (The Avenger) pressed a certain spot. The end of the hall, five by seven and one-half, moved a little. The entire wall was a secret door leading out onto a garage roof." Benson employs this exit in *The* to capture two lurking outside

A special to the basement, Benson's special

*River of Ice* of vehicles at "a By *Midnight* at the end of adventures, increases to and light trucks, specific equipment. A by an electric door to the A basement the vacant the corner.

*Stockholders in* passage winds tunnel that cables and The tunnel ends opening a block away, which three-car garage belong to the

building next door, but is actually not part of that building's structure. It comes in handy in the above-mentioned novel when The Avenger and his aides use it to escape the police surrounding Justice headquarters.

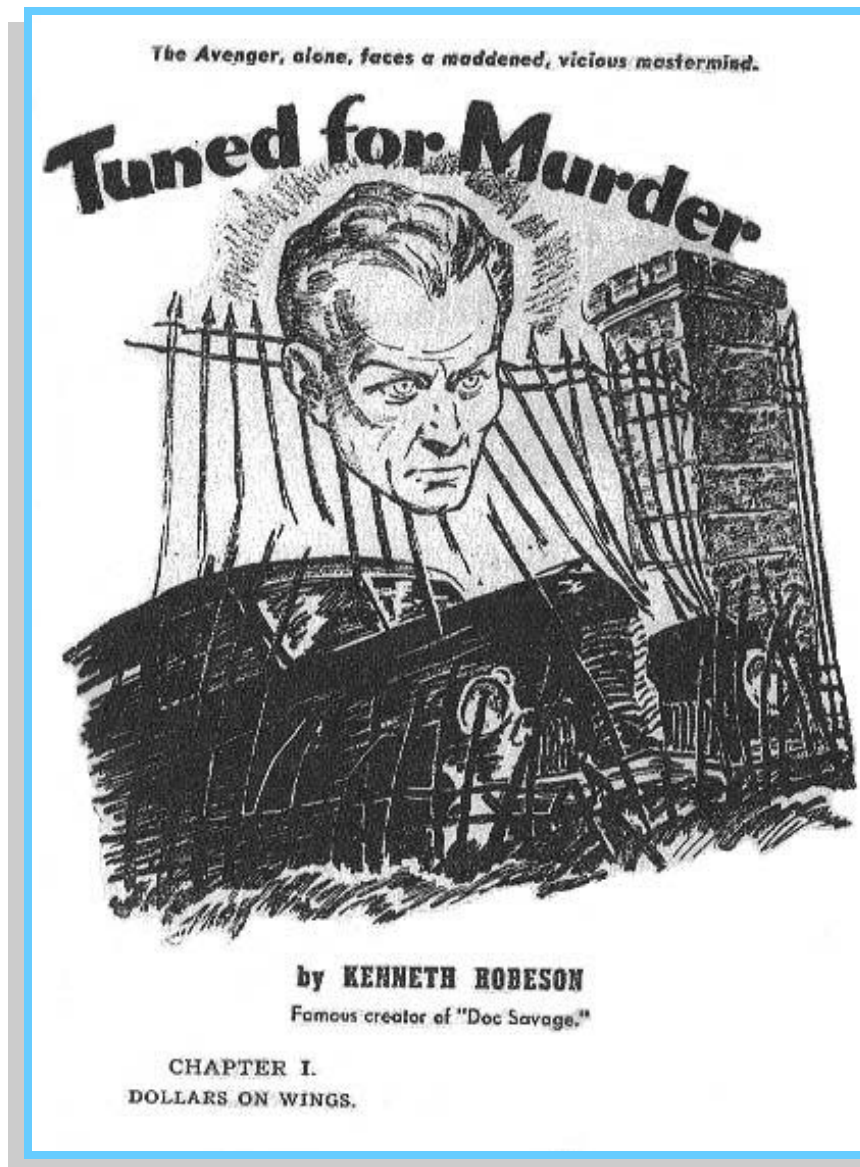


*Frosted Death* criminals the complex. elevator drops where all cars are housed. puts the number dozen or so." *Murder*, unlike Doc's their number over thirty cars each with a function and ramp operated eye opens the street. passage leads to warehouse at According to *Death*, a secret to a street houses the city's steam pipes. at a concealed and a half leads into a that appears to apartment

Bleek Street's Justice, Inc. headquarters is a veritable fortress that closely parallels Doc's eighty-sixth floor citadel. Yet in its own right, it is unique. It

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never sustains the devastation Doc's does, nor is it the scene of so many apocalyptic battles. But it's a special place; a haven for the innocent, a sanctuary for the oppressed. Many strategies were plotted there, many crime puzzles pieced together. An icy gray glow shines there in the minds of all Avenger fans, centering on the top floor room of that dingy building. As with the bronze aura illuminating the eight-sixth floor of Doc's abode or the eerie blue sheen emanating from The Shadow's sanctum, it always will.

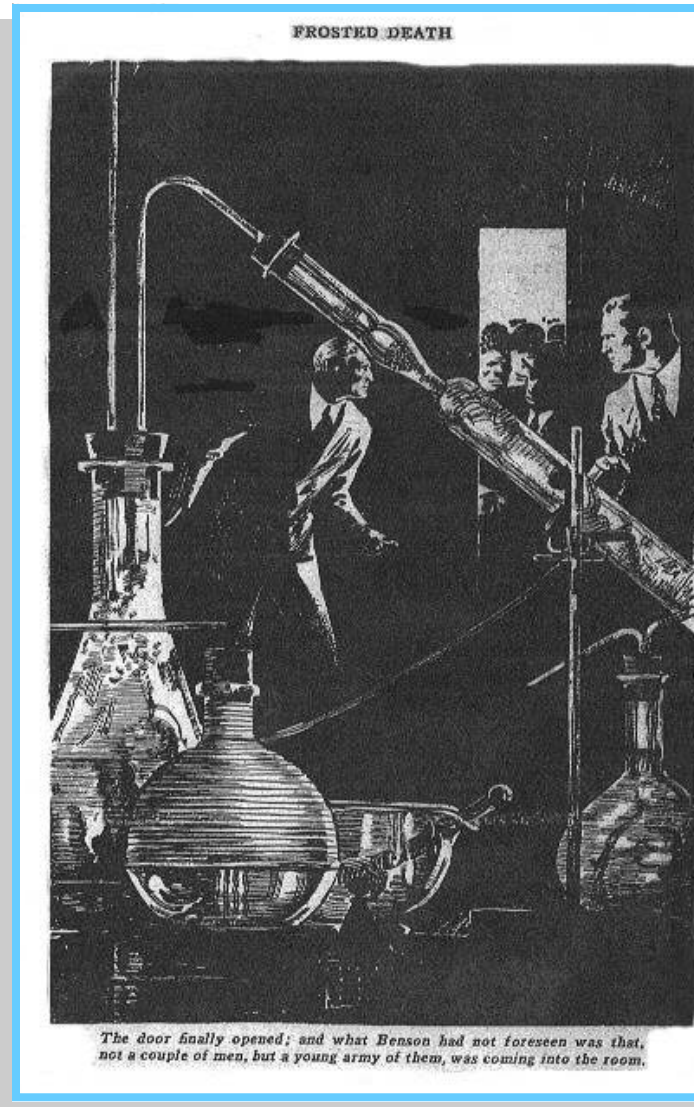


# THE GRAY NEMESIS

## TEN: GADGETS, INC.

Anyone disappointed in the fact that Doc Savage wasn't firing off as many gadgets in the pages of his magazine in the early 40s, must have received at least a modicum of satisfaction when *The Avenger* hit the stands. Benson and his gang use them continuously from *The Yellow Hoard* onward.

The first of these gadgets is Smitty's television. As the series progresses, Smitty tinkers and improves the design. The biggest change occurs in the eerie



case of *The Black Death*. He invents a small black box that attaches to the side of the large set at Bleek Street headquarters. This enables The Avenger to scramble transmission to discourage uninvited viewers. Smitty is awaiting transmission from Mac when a mysterious scene begins to emanate from the screen.

An image materializes on the grayish glass. It forms into the outlines of a large cryptlike room with gothic arches and walls of heavy stone dripping with moisture, as if the eerie chamber were deep underground. Smitty is flabbergasted. He says it is a million to one shot that anyone else would have another

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set as sophisticated (Long Tom Roberts thought so, too, in *The Yellow Cloud* before weird things showed up on his set. Perhaps he could have enlightened Smitty).

In the center of the screen, an image takes shape, a shadowy pair of wings, black and foreboding. "It whispered of evil, a horror somehow beyond horror."

The figure of a man garbed in a black robe, the white outline of wings traced on his chest, appears as if from nowhere. Words, sounding like nothing human, emanate from the figure. He declares death for another figure that has mysteriously appeared in the chamber, handing the unknown what looks to be a piece of crumpled black tissue paper. The figure taking the tissue suddenly turns black and the image blurs from the screen. The Black Wings Cult leader has spoken!

Before the events of *The Black Death* conclude, even The Avenger is condemned to death by the malevolent potentate and receives the black orchid of doom.

In Smitty's excitement about this invention, however, he forgets the keys in the ignition of one of The Avenger's specially designed cars, which is promptly purloined by a man who was on his way to Justice headquarters to enlist Benson's help.

All of Benson's cars are bullet-proof and crammed with innumerable gadgets, but this vehicle that the unfortunate man steals is his most deadly equipped. The man careens through crowded New York streets, bounding over sidewalks and



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injuring scores of people. It is a miracle no one is killed.

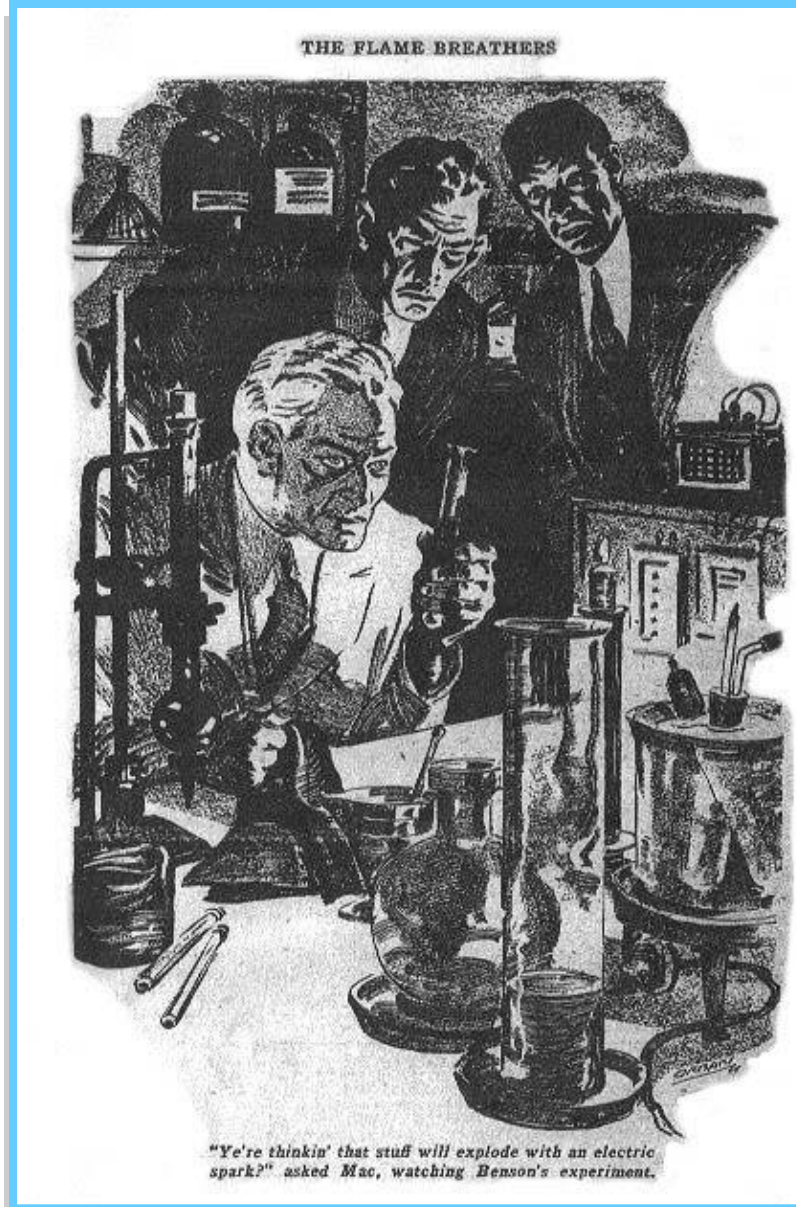
During the escapade, the fugitive fiddles with buttons lining the dashboard, unleashing many of The Avenger's secret weapons.

Steel rods spring out from beneath the car, snatching an impatient youth attempting to dodge traffic and pinning him to the side of the car. After being hauled on a whirlwind ride through the city, you can bet this youth will be a hell of a lot more cautious crossing the street in the future.

Another steel bar snaps from the back, snagging and towing along a parked car.

In agony, close to death, the half-crazed driver jabs yet another button: machine gun slugs spray the sidewalk and splinter windows. Concrete chips and glass shards fly.

At last, it is over. The man dies, a victim of the virulent "Black Death." The

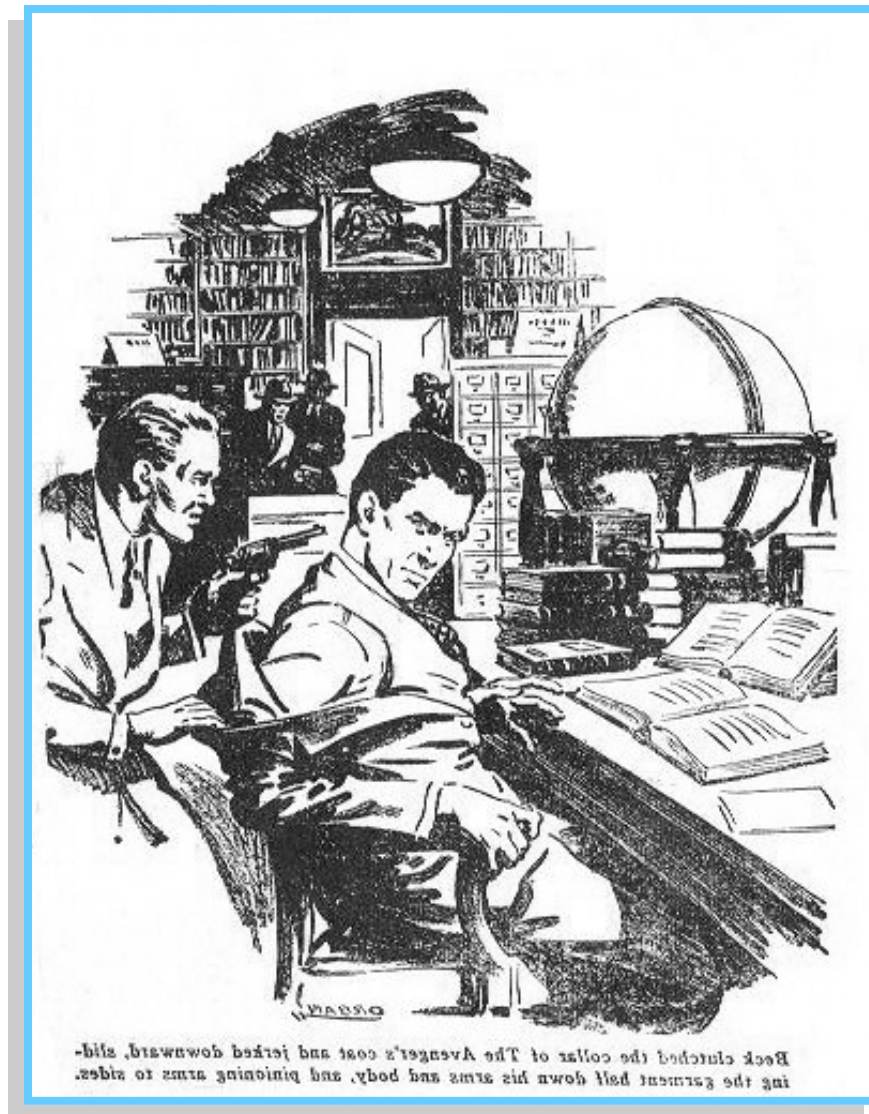


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terror of the careening juggernaut is ended . Nellie blasts Smitty for being stupid enough to leave the keys in the car, but Benson does not. It is not his way and Smitty feels bad enough.

By the time of *The Sky Walker* Benson begins to employ colorless odorless knockout gas on criminals. These pellets, invented by Mac, are close cousins to Doc's thin-walled globules.

In *The Devil 's Horns* Smitty invents a little belt radio no larger than a cigar case that is contoured to the waist. Used for communication when danger threatens or some new piece of important evidence arises, these ingenious little



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devices function over a distance of forty miles, farther if conditions are right.

In *The Frosted Death* Benson designs a tiny pocket microscope, which he uses to analyze some of the "Frosted Death" germs. Slightly larger than a fountain pen, it has three tiny legs that disengage from the sides to form a tripod. It boasts an incredible power of 800 diameters.

In the same novel, taking a leaf from Doc Savage, Benson starts to carry a small collapsible grapple attached to a very thin silk line. He keeps it at his waist for easy access.

This novel reveals Benson's pockets contain enough chemicals to stock a laboratory. Like Doc, he is a walking pharmacy.

In *The Blood Ring* The Avenger and his aides start wearing bullet-proof underwear invented by Benson. Called celluglass, the stuff is stronger than spun steel, strong enough to

prevent almost any size slug from penetrating, though the wearer receives a nasty bruise and a hell of a jolt.

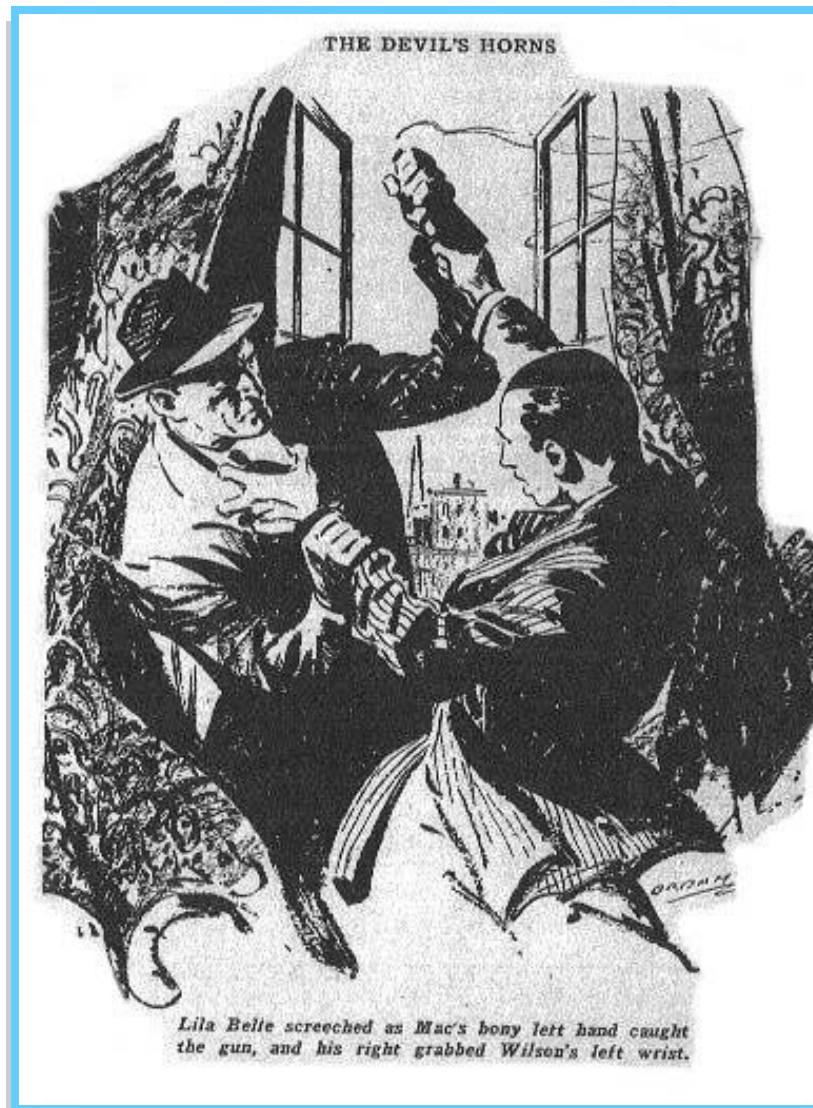
Also in this novel, Benson first employs his atomic bombardment cylinder, a



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device ingenious enough to make any professional in the field of science weep with envy and awe. This device enables The Avenger to ferret out an explanation for the talking mummy at the Braintree Museum.

In *Stockholders in Death* Smitty comes up with a radio hook-up system that is wired to The Avenger's headquarters through a radio held to a constant wavelength. Benson uses it to trick criminals into thinking he is at Bleek Street instead of following them.



In the same tale, Mac invents a chemical so volatile it can be ignited by a candle flame at twenty feet.

He also comes up with a gas capable of counteracting all other gases, with which The Avenger and his crew soak their coat lapels (in Nellie and Rosabel's case, their handkerchiefs).

This yarn gives us Smitty's first recording device for telephone calls. He improves upon this model in *The Wilder Curse*.

The Avenger in this tale attaches a tube to all his cars that is capable of expelling a gas bomb. That saves them from having to open the windows when



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danger is at hand.

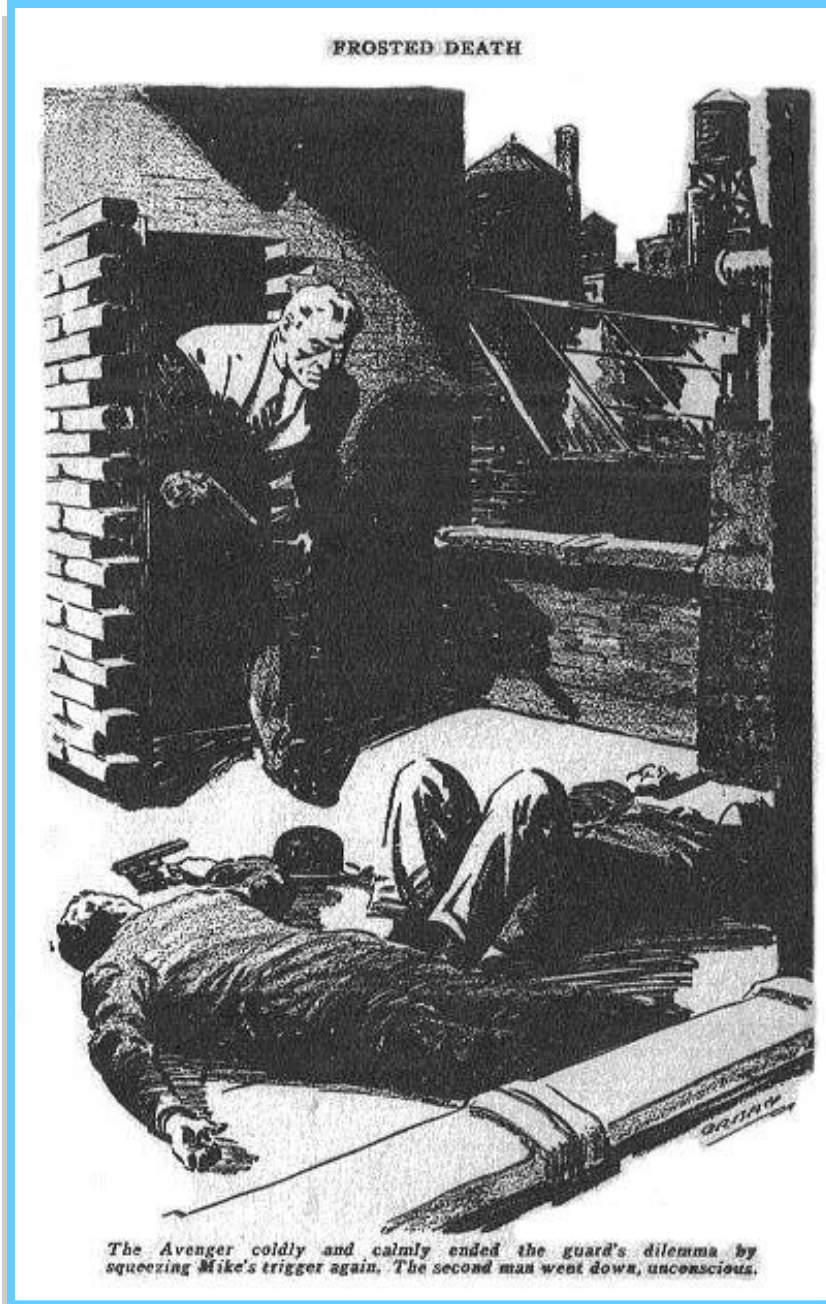
In *The Glass Mountain* the group begins to use little nose clips that counteract gas, most likely an improvement on the ones Mac used to avoid contracting the "Frosted Death". In this saga, Benson escapes drowning when trapped in a cavern filling with water by installing the clips.

Also in use in this tale are Mac's new phosphorous tablets that light up darkened rooms or tunnels.

*Tuned for Murder* brings

us special night glasses, invented by Benson, that gather light where none seems to exist.

In *The Smiling Dogs* Benson uses a tiny blowtorch whose fuel consists of

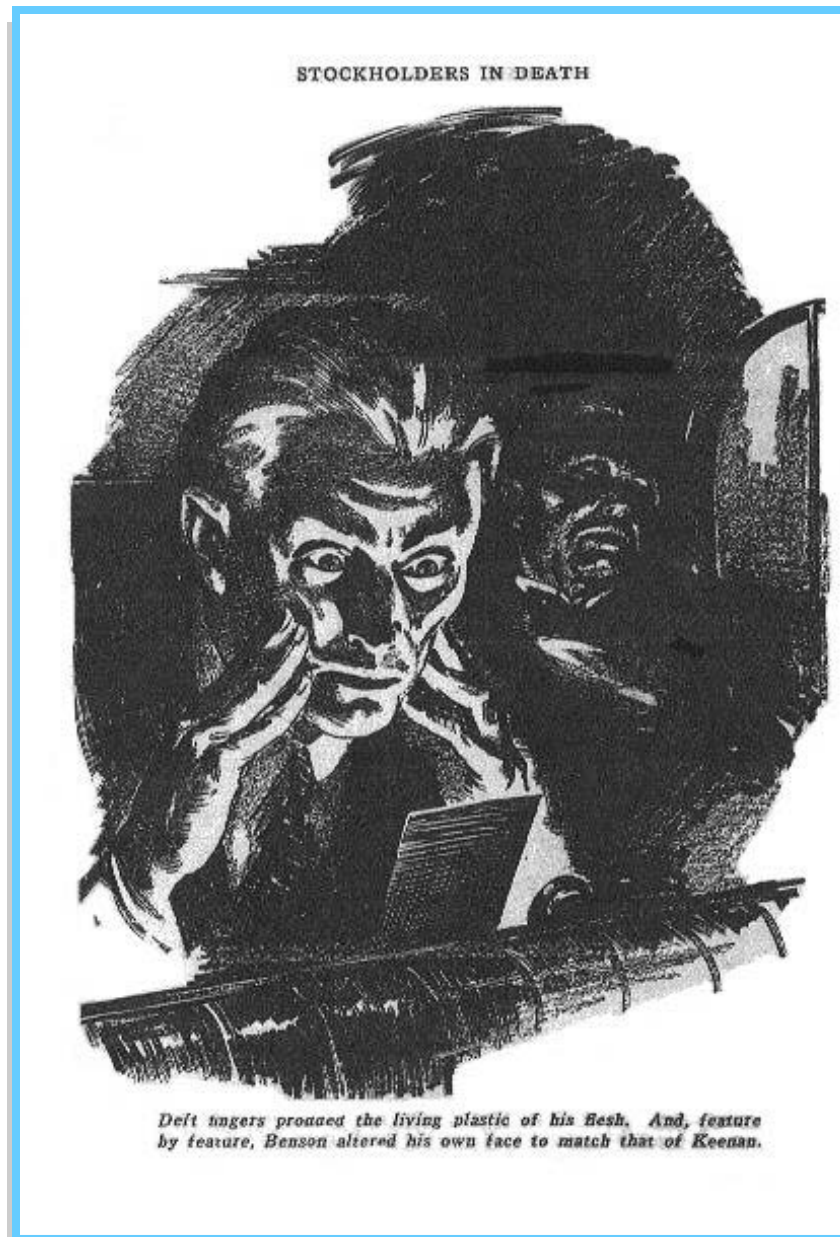


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several pellets, crushed and moistened, able to produce a terrifically hot blue flame. The device resembles a tiny perfume atomizer and saves Justice & Co from a particularly sticky situation during the closing pages of this tale.

In *River of Ice* it saves Benson and Smitty, who are locked in a freezer stacked with dry ice, from sure death.

In this tale, Benson employs a hypo to squirt an inky liquid in order to escape



## THE GRAY NEMESIS

criminals. The liquid is used again in *The Flame Breathers* when he is held up by a gang in the Utah desert. This time it spurts from a false knot in his tie.

*Murder on Wheels* cites a tiny knife that snaps out from Smitty's belt, enabling him to slice through the ropes that secure him.

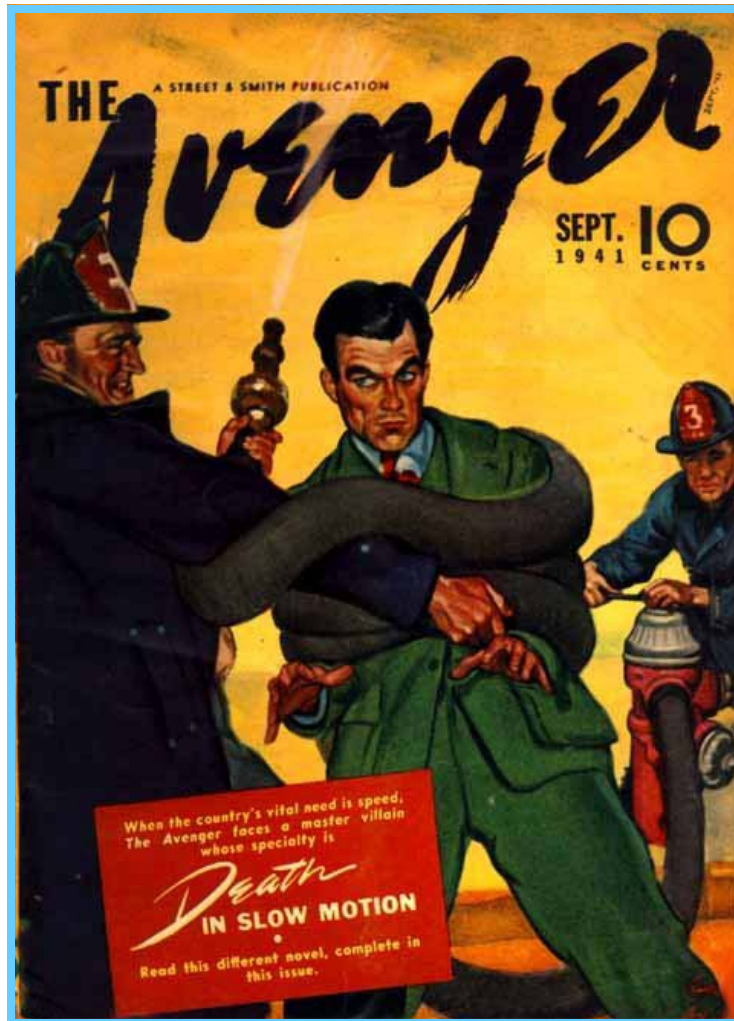
The same tale informs us that The Avenger has installed a clamp-down arm in his cars. With the press of a button, a padded bar snaps across the thighs and upper body, preventing the passenger from being thrown from the car or hurt in the case of a crash. It saves Benson from being knocked out or injured when the Marr supercar smashes into his vehicle head on, spilling it.

In *Three Gold Crowns* Mac invents a gas that can be used to extinguish fires.

In the same tale, The Avenger has implanted a small wire serrated with numerous tiny teeth in his vest. It is capable of sawing through a steel bar if given enough time. In this case, it saves Benson from being run over by a train after villains have tied him to the tracks.

In *The Hate Master* The Avenger invents a special steering arrangement that enables his car to be driven from the back seat. The trick gives crooks some tough moments in this bloody tale.

In *Nevlo*, after crooks cut through the base of a radio tower Benson has mounted, to send him



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plunging two-hundred feet to the ground, The Avenger saves himself from certain death by engaging a thin, transparent compact parachute that can be folded into a size no larger than a cigarette pack.

In the same tale, he carries a camera no larger than a lady's compact. This he uses to snap pictures of the mysterious man-beast, Nevlo.

*Pictures of Death* cites a master key arrangement sure to cause locksmiths nightmares. It involves a set of blanks of common sizes and shapes that are stamped from plastic. This plastic has the consistency of semi-hard rubber and retains the shape of any impression made in it. All Benson has to do is thrust a key into a lock, twist, then draw the blank out and cut along the dents.

In *The Green Killer* Mac invents a gas called the "persuader". It is a form of truth gas. Nellie and Smitty use it to question a suspect, but unfortunately for Nellie the gas is none too particular whom it affects. After she inhales a whiff, Smitty promptly jumps at the chance to question her if she really had gone dancing with Cole at The Pink Room. In reality, they went to pick up some information about espionage Cole wanted. As one can well predict, this provoked a rather lengthy and violent quarrel between the two.

*Midnight Murder* boasts a plethora of interesting gadgets. The most significant is a plane of Benson's devising that can morph into an autogyro. With it they land at the scene of a plane crash where there is scant room.

Another invention from this tale is a signal flare disguised as a fountain pen, which enables Benson to escape



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from crooks after they trap him in a barn.

Still another is a substance resembling yellow paint. Nellie employs it to track criminals to Connecticut.

Not all the gadgets used in the series were the exclusive property of Justice, Inc. Some were used, and used well, by criminals against the team.

In *The Yellow Hoard* the chief villain uses tremendously powerful exploding peanuts to wreak havoc and destruction on New York City, as well as to bury Benson & Co. under tons of rock. Of course they only succeed in bringing the mountain down upon themselves.

In *The Sky Walker* the criminals obtain a substance that can render planes invisible.

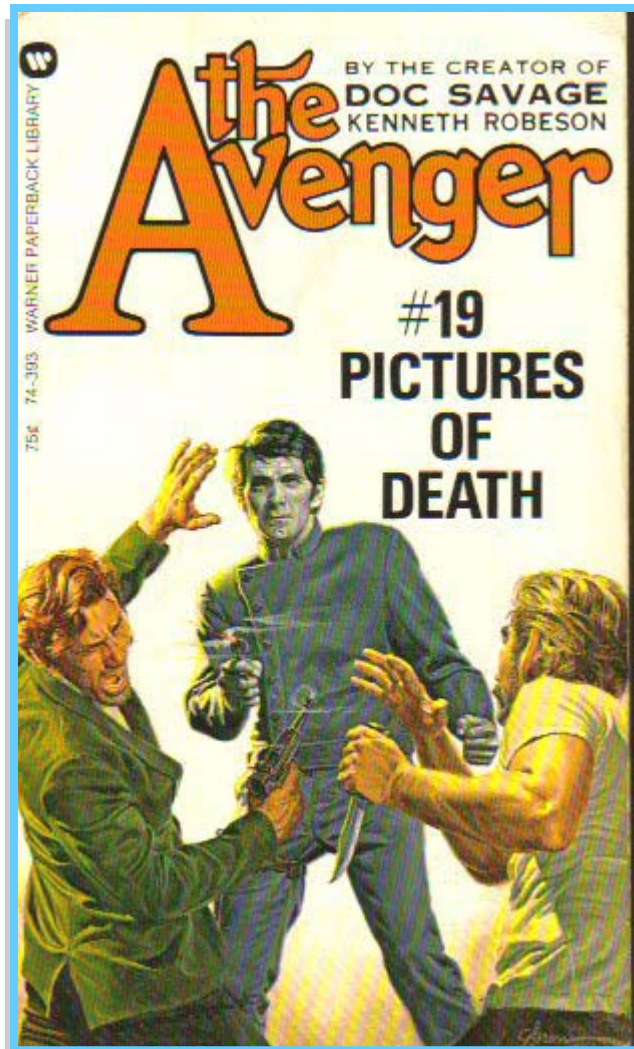
They also control a ray capable of leveling skyscrapers.

*Blood Ring* transform people into walking Egyptian figures. Through gadgetry, a criminal mummy speaks.

The main gadget in *Murder* is a disk that produces a high-pitched whine capable of hypnotizing its victims.

*Ice* the lead villain conspires to light material in the cave of Little do they know it requires the power of the glacier to fuel it and once removed it is totally useless.

The scope of gadgets in *The Avenger*, short series, for such a nearly rivals



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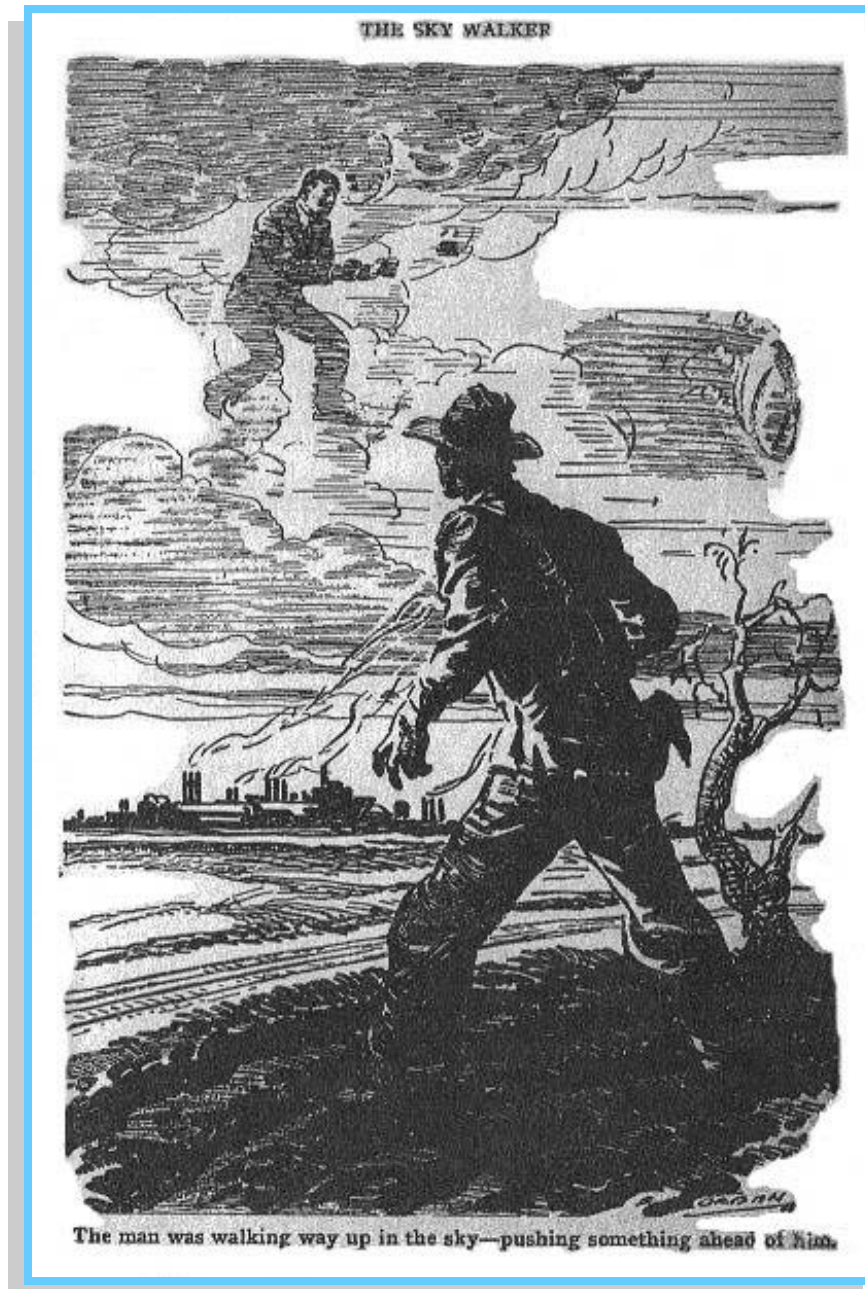
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that found in the pages of Doc Savage. Certainly, it helps fill the void after Doc abolishes (almost) his vice. Although a percentage of the gadgets resemble or even copy Doc's, many are unique and fascinating inventions that propel the series through countless pages of excitement and great escapes.



## ELEVEN: THE TEPPERMAN AVENGER

After *The Avenger* Magazine faded due to the war paper shortage and sagging sales, Richard Henry Benson and Justice, Inc. fans found their hero, pitifully, shunted to the back pages of Street & Smith's *Clues Detective* pulp, plus a one-



### DEATH TO THE AVENGER

by Kenneth Robeson

*For Dick Benson to refuse a killer's demand would mean Nellie Gray's death. And he refused!*

#### CHAPTER I. PROWL.

The Avenger was on the prowl tonight.

Swiftly, the word spread through the slimy alleys and the dark corners of the great city's underworld. Hard men who flaunted the police and scoffed at the law sought hurried cover as the word reached them.

At fly-specked bars, in closed and shuttered rooms, men buzzed in fur-

tive whispers: "What's he after? Has anybody got the dope? Who's The Avenger gunning for?"

Those were the questions which flew around on the wings of fear.

Down at police headquarters, Inspector Cruikshank listened to the whispered voice of a stoolie over the phone and hung up with a worried frown.

"It's The Avenger," he said to Dolson, his chief aid. "He's on the hunt. They say he's out for big game. What the devil can he be

shot stint in the bowels of *The Shadow* Magazine. This buried Benson's colorful career until Warner resurrected him in paperback in the early 70s. These stories are drab, mediocre and out of character.

With this move from his own magazine came a change in authorship that greatly contributed to the demise of the series. Veteran pulp writer Emile C. Tepperman, well-established for his work on *The Spider* and *Operator #5*, was chosen for the series, which lasted a mere six installments

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before The Avenger met his premature end, literarily speaking, that is.

These tales don't even compare to even Ernst's worst outing (generally considered to be *Midnight Murder*, though *The Hate Master* comes close); they're not even in league with Goulart's inferior modern yarns. They are wholly terrible. The author seemed cramped and had apparently done little research into the character—or either just didn't care or was told by editors to change the character—before undertaking the writing task.

The first of these short tales, *Death to The Avenger*, starts off atypically, beginning a downhill slide that continues with each succeeding installment. Consider the opening line from *Death to The Avenger*: "The Avenger was on the prowl tonight." Benson hunts ace criminal Gregorio Ruiz, who is likewise plotting to remove The Avenger from his own path. Benson hatches an elaborate plan to grab one of the notorious gangster's henchmen, creating a false fire alarm at the courthouse where the underling is being tried. Though this story sticks closest to character, the plot is somewhat off base with the novels. Other characters show slight changes in behavior also, especially, Nellie Gray and Smitty. Tepperman has an irritating habit of calling Smitty "Algy", which would have pleased the giant no end as fond as he was of his given name.

In the second entry, *A Coffin for The Avenger*, Benson fights the deadly spy calling himself "The Black Tulip," an intimidating moniker if ever there was one. This story is a study in minor. Benson seems disposed to showing emotion, at times smiling openly. Cole Wilson suddenly understands Hindustani, which he supposedly learned while surveying for the British government five years previously in India. For the first time the phone number for Justice, Inc. is given: Liberty 1-1111. In a later short, an alternate line of Liberty 2-2222 is cited.

*Vengeance on The Avenger*, the third story in *Clues*, finds Benson light years out of character. He smokes, a habit in which he never indulged in the novels, and has become progressively more violent. He carries a small pistol in his pocket, with which he promptly nails a crook in the heart, killing him instantly. Gone are the no-life-taking policy and head creases. Mike and Ike have been retired. Also gone are the trademark manipulative endings.

*Calling Justice, Inc.* is one of the better shorts with a good build-up that the author throws away when the ending slams to an abrupt halt. Nellie has auburn hair, now; Smitty and Benson tote .45s like The Shadow. Nellie, reminiscent of Nita Van Sloan, gets tortured for the first time.

*Cargo of Doom* finds The Avenger in another spy story, in which Benson again shoots a crook between the eyes instead of creasing him.

In the last Avenger story, *To Find a Dead Man*, which appears in the back of *The Shadow Magazine*, Benson completely disintegrates a crook's face with a gun blast. Tepperman seemed bent of stripping The Avenger of his last



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remaining unique qualities and reducing him to just another violent crime-stopper. Only the names are the same.

Granted these stories are too short to properly develop The Avenger persona, but few, if any, of Ernst's ideas and innovations survive into these entries, and it appears the author didn't even bother to try.

Tepperman, at best, seemed ill-at-ease with the writing form. After fashioning a decent beginning, he would end in a distinctly anti-climactic manner. Perhaps he would have been more at home in a longer format, but wherever the blame lies, these entries certainly suffered.

Josh and Rosabel never appear in the shorts, neither does Fergus MacMurdie. Cole Wilson gets on stage once, but briefly. These stories resemble more The Spider, violent and more emotional, lacking the frosty sparkle of Ernst's work.

These tales are hard for any Avenger fan to enjoy at all, even when taken as separate entities from the novels. A few good moments shine through, few and far between. Benson's fake fire scene is well-conceived and executed in the first story. The Black Tulip had his moments and given more space and a better name, who knows? *Vengeance on The Avenger* has an interesting story line involving a crook's lust to get even with Benson after, though the time frame can be argued, The Avenger let him off the hook ten years earlier.

Whatever the case, they are an addendum to The Avenger legacy and if you are a completist of Avenger material, you will want to acquire copies of these adventures. Tepperman may have been a good pulp writer, but he was a poor fit for this series. Too bad Paul Ernst couldn't have done them; they may have continued much longer.

## **THE TEPPERMAN AVENGERS:**

### **In *Clues*:**

Death to The Avenger  
Coffin for The Avenger  
Vengeance on The Avenger  
Calling Justice, Inc.  
Cargo of Doom

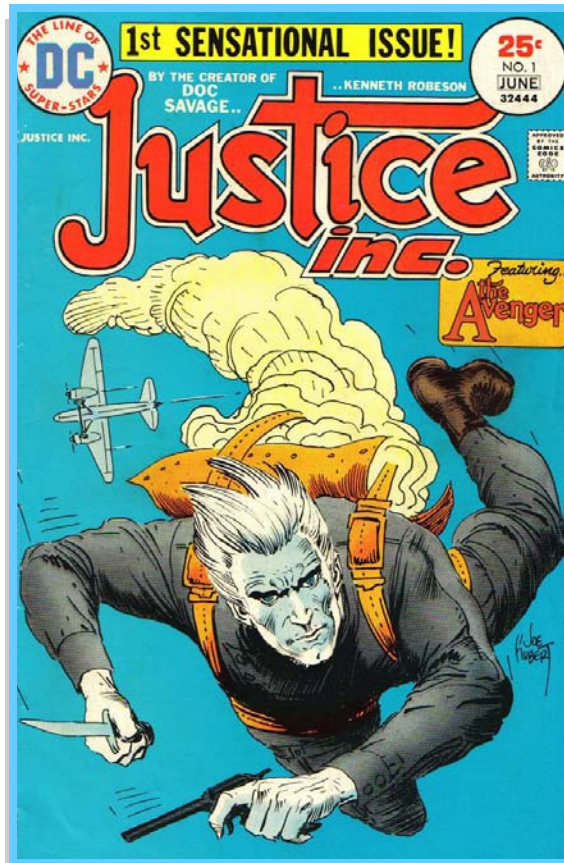
### **In *The Shadow*:**

To Find a Dead Man

*Thanks to Rick Lai for providing copies of these Avenger shorts...*

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## TWELVE: THE DC COMICS AVENGER



The early '70s saw the inception of some of the great pulp heroes into comic book form. It met with, unfortunately, little success, at least as far as monetary gain for the publishers was concerned. Doc Savage less than set the world on fire in a color version over at Marvel, while DC issued a fair adaptation of The Shadow.

It was in this Shadow adaptation DC sought to bring another great pulp figure into their fold, that of the icy-eyed man-machine, The Avenger.

In the meantime Doc grabbed his bronze suitcase and checked out of the Marvel Hotel after a paltry eight issues. He checked back in for a short stint in black and white (as well as two minor appearances with Spiderman and the Thing), again for eight issues. The Shadow, perhaps the best adaptation of the

three, loaded up his .45s and, pardon the pun, booked after twelve issues.

So what of Richard Henry Benson? Well, he didn't even last that long—a scant four issues to be exact, as if the ratio of running time in the original pulp was mathematically proportionate to the running time in the comic.

Blast.

*Justice, Inc.*, as the comic was titled, was in the opinion of most the poorest of the comic versions. However, the ill-fated magazine had its good points (which cannot be said of later DC abortions).

First, it gave Avenger fans a chance to see their hero in living white. Smitty was there, as moon-faced and powerful as ever; Mac, too, though introduced in a different fashion than in the pulp, r's trilling, bone-mallet fists flying. Even Josh and Rosabel showed up for the party. Too bad the coach turned into a lemon at

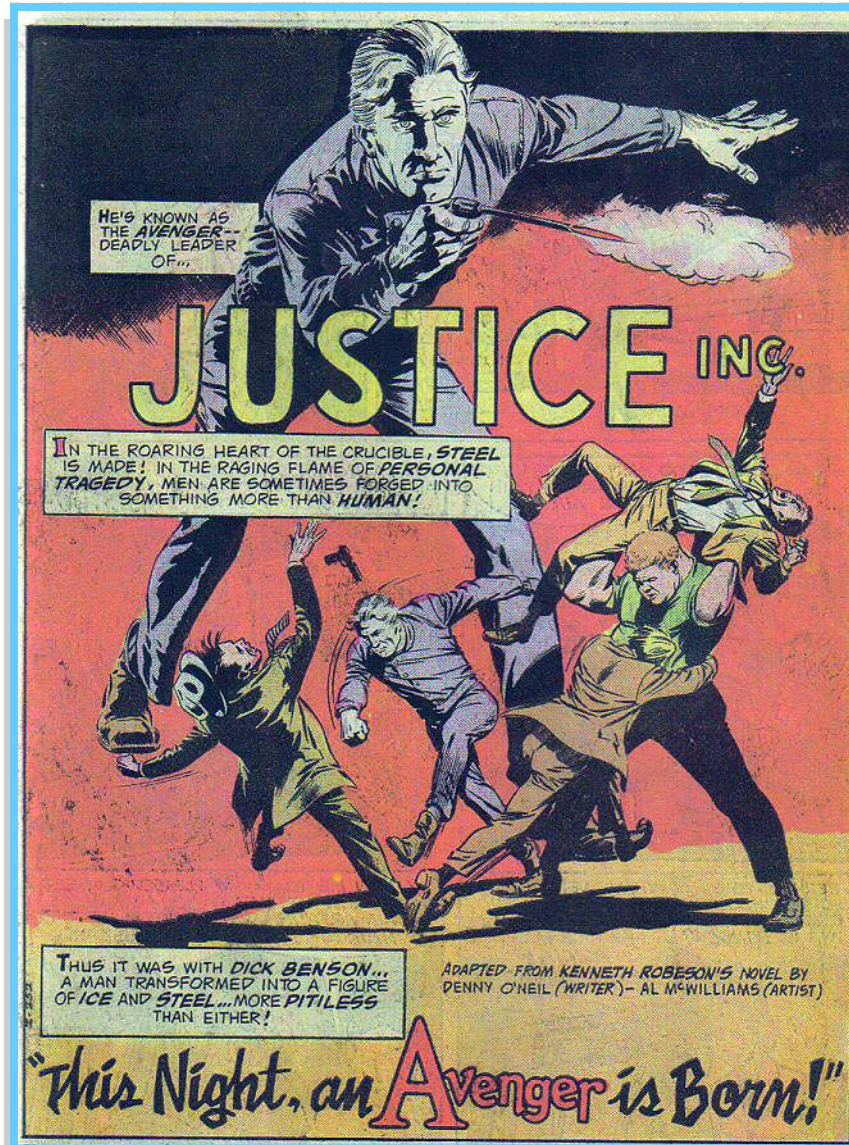
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midnight.

The first issue really wasn't that bad, albeit a bit cramped. Two issues would have been better, three more like it, but DC probably shied away from this because of the trouble at the Marvel Hotel with two-part adaptations for Doc.

Number 1 was, as the book's title indicated, an adaptation of *Justice, Inc.*, the pulp novel. It stays fairly close, though Mac is notably absent from the book. The drawing, done by Al McWilliams, is nice throughout the issue. The cover, by Joe Kubert, is passable. The back of the book features a brief article on The Avenger by Allan Asherman.

Number 2 is an adaptation of *The Sky Walker*. Already, the magazine begins to slip. Veteran artist Jack Kirby takes over the art chores, cover and interior. I have never liked his work and cared for it even less on The Avenger. The adaptation is fair at best. Josh and



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Rosabel are introduced, as in the original, but something is missing. A big something (or little, depending on how you look at it); namely, the skipping of *The Yellow Hoard*, thereby bypassing The Avenger's secret cache of Aztec gold



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and, most importantly, the blonde bombshell, Nellie Gray. Justice, Inc. without Nellie is like TV without a picture tube. The back of the issue contains another



article by Mr. Asherman, this time on Justice, Inc. in the movies, which unlike the Doc movie never campily appeared.

Number 3, *The Monster Bug*, sees the slip become a headlong plunge. To introduce Mac, an original story is penned for the comic. It features the return of Colonel Sodom, who had appeared in *The Shadow* comic only to be defeated by

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the Master of Darkness. Sodom has obtained a drug that transforms men into dribbling monsters. He sprays this drug on Mac's family because he wants Mac to teach him to make more of it, which I suppose is as good a reason as any. The Avenger bursts in and tries to help, but cannot prevent the death of Mac's wife.

Mac, predictably, joins forces with Justice, Inc. and eventually they turn Sodom's own device against him (as was the tradition in the pulp series),

finishing off the evil doctor for good. The back of the issue carries the first letter column.

The fourth and final Avenger comic "epic", *Slay Ride in the Sky*, starts off with another cover by Kubert. Interior art is still by Kirby. The tale isn't bad. It concerns an insurance rip-off scheme involving exploding seagulls that take down planes, and ends with a blimp-board battle, which turns to flames as some of the little buggers explode against it. The yarn is more in line with the pulp version, but still no Nellie!

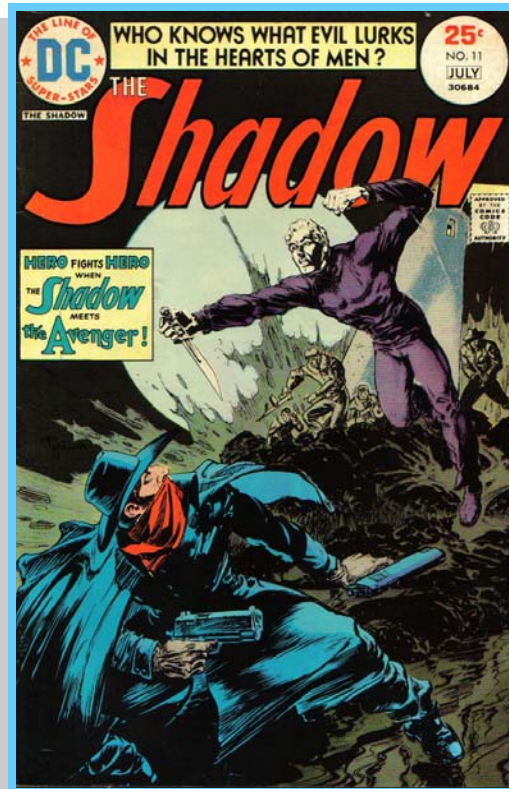
Then, it's over;



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The Avenger comics are no more. An unfitting end for the man of ice. Or is it...?

Upon closer look, these four exploits in The Avenger legacy reveal that they aren't all bad. True, they could have been longer and better drawn, but the stories are definitely better than the Tepperman shorts. At least we get a brief look at the man with the glacial eyes in the comics medium. Maybe the tastes of most comic collectors and readers just weren't ready for pulp heroes. Whatever the case, most Benson fans will want to get a look at them. The Avenger also appears in comics form once more, in the eleventh issue of The Shadow comic, which is a



pretty good, if cramped, tale involving the two crime-fighters against Shiwan Khan.

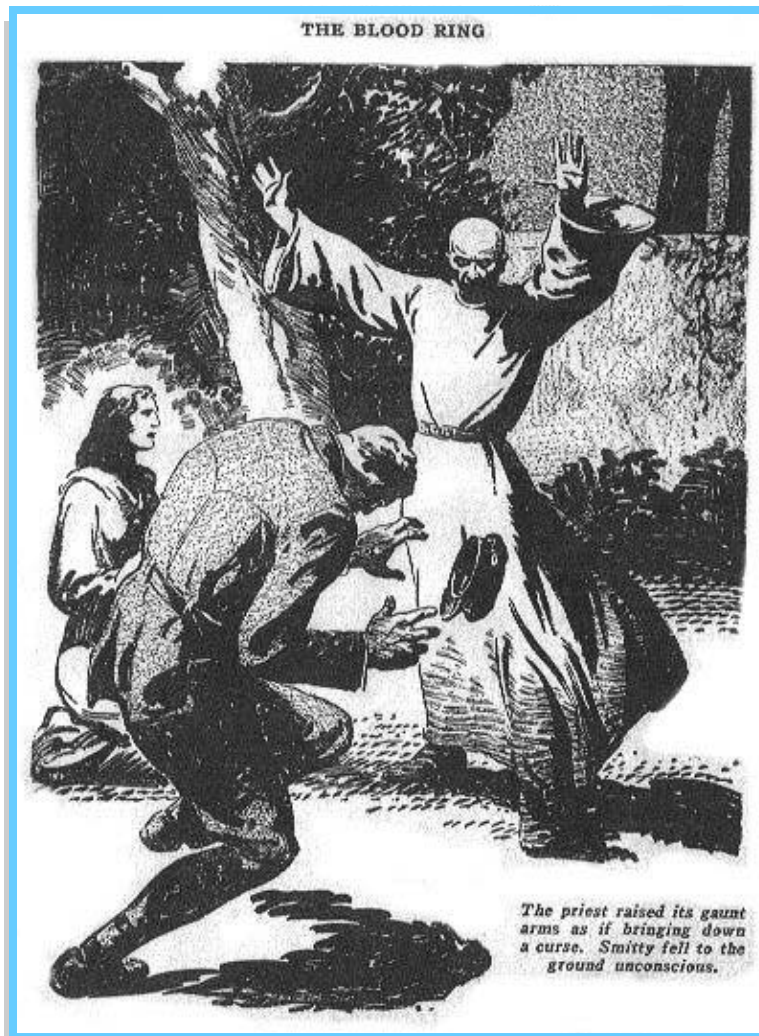
ADDENDUM:

Since this article's publication, The Avenger (more or less—mostly less) reappeared in DC Comics, again in issues of their modern version of The Shadow. The character was almost unrecognizable. Then, in 1989, Benson, or what was left of him, got his own two-issue mini-series. The artwork looked as though somebody puked watercolors. The story line was garbage. Even an Avenger completist would be advised to skip them.

## THIRTEEN: BROADCASTING BENSON

Most pulp fans know that between 1945 and 1946 The Avenger was the hero of a radio show. But in those 26 episodes, The Avenger was not Richard Benson. Instead he was Jim Brandon, a famous biochemist, whose twin inventions—the telepathic indicator and secret diffusion capsule—made him into a sort of second-rate version of The Shadow.

However, Richard Benson—The Avenger—and three other members of Justice, Inc.—Smitty, Mac and Nellie—also made it onto the airwaves. In episodes adapted from the novels by Paul Ernst, as well as some original



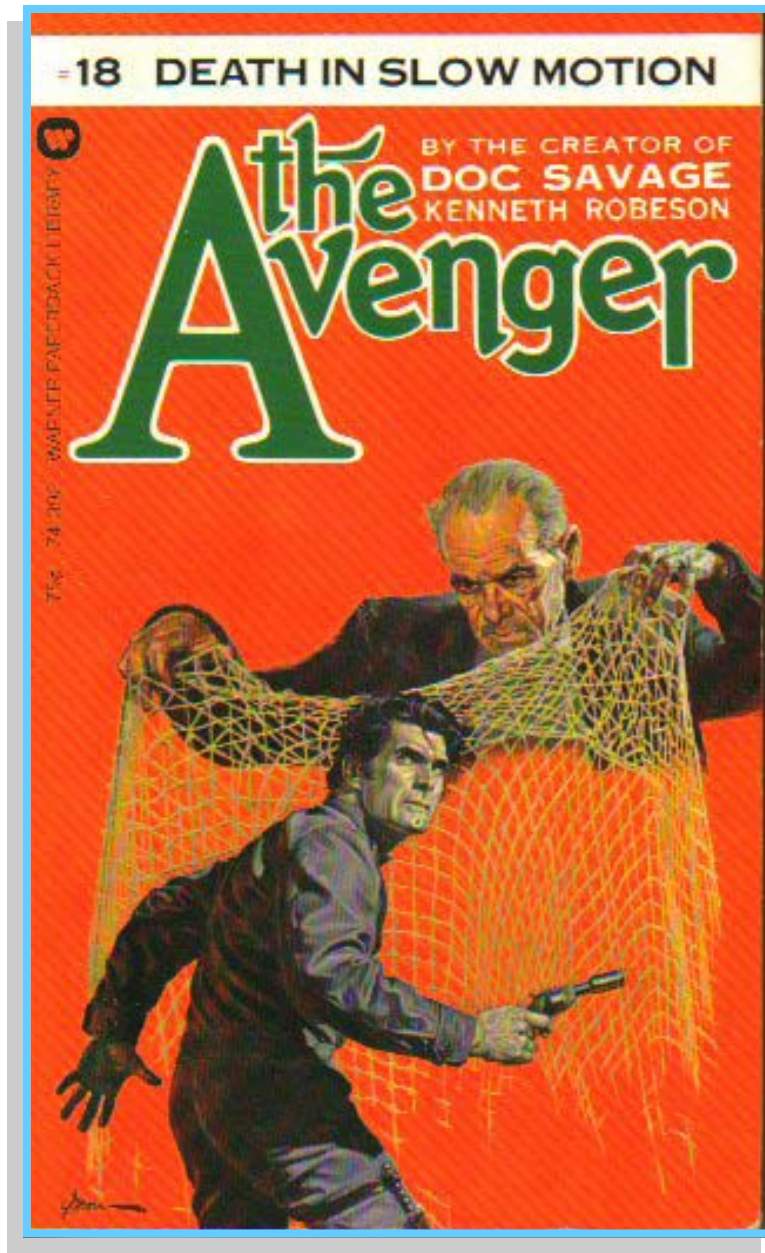
episodes, The Avenger starred on radio during the same period that he was appearing in his own Street & Smith magazine. Unfortunately, not much is known about this radio series. None of the recordings seem to have survived, and I haven't found any mention of it in any books on old time radio.

According to the radio listings in the *New York Times* for 1941-42, the first Avenger radio show ran for 62 weeks. This probably represents a full season of 26 half-hour episodes, followed by 36



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weeks of reruns. Unfortunately, the titles—let alone the scripts—for most of these episodes are lost. The series first aired on July 18, 1941 over station WHN in New York City, and broadcast for the final time on November 3, 1942 (you may notice this doesn't equal 62 weeks—the show missed seven weeks spread throughout this period due to various sporting events). For the first seven weeks,



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the show aired on Fridays from 9-9:30 pm; thereafter, the show was heard on Tuesdays, with the time changing every few months. Episode titles which are known are as follows:

Week 2—7/25/41 The Hate Master  
Week 3—8/1/41 Tear Drop Tank  
Week 5—8/15/41 River of Ice  
Week 6—8/22/41 Three Gold Crowns  
Week 7—8/29/41 Blood Ring  
Week 8—9/2/41 The Devil's Horns  
Week 9—9/9/41 The Avenger

Concerning the two episodes listed whose titles are not taken from a novel: *Tear Drop Tank* seems to be an original episode, but *The Avenger* is an adaptation of *The Yellow Hoard*. Considering that by the time the 26th episode was aired on January 6, 1942 (presumably the last episode before reruns), only 20 Avenger novels had been published, it's obvious that many of the episodes must have featured The Avenger in all new adventures. The only scripts which seem to have survived are the seven whose titles are given on the list.

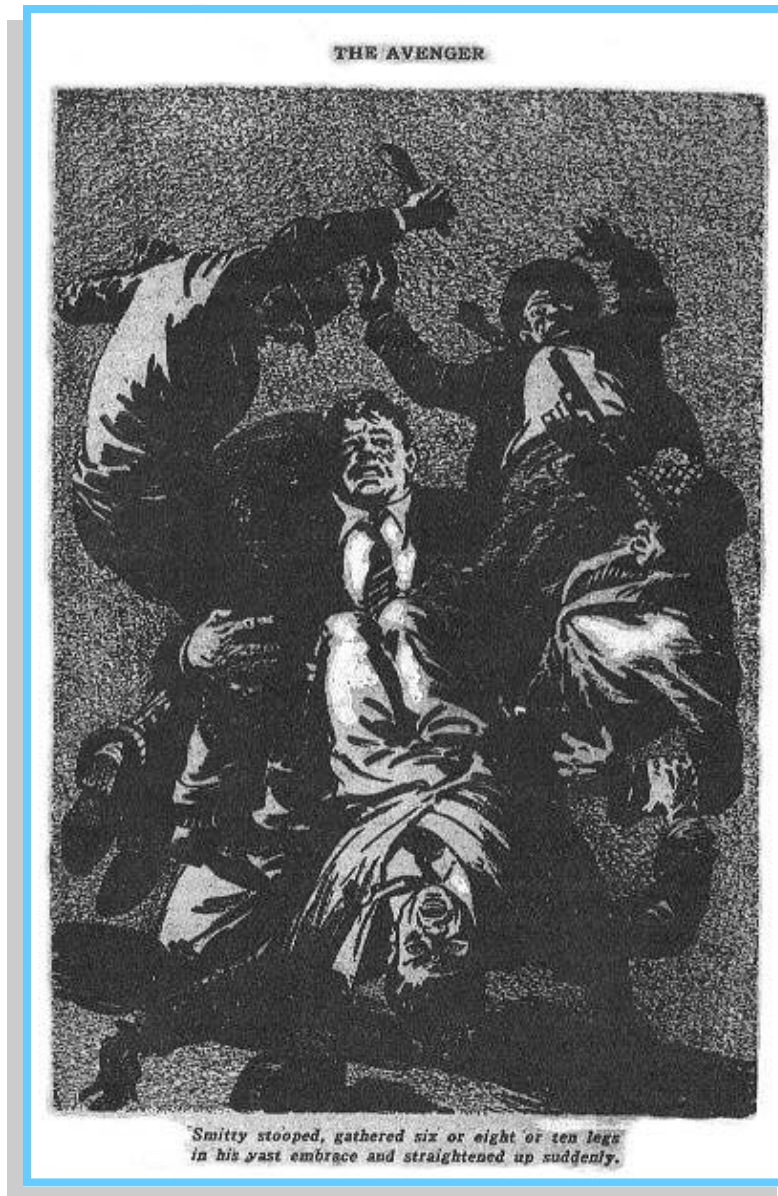
It's anybody's guess as to whom was behind the series. Unfortunately, none of the extant scripts contain a list of the cast or production crew. All that can be said for sure is that the author of the final four scripts that survive was Maurice Joachim, as he is actually credited at their close. No author is given for the first three surviving scripts, but the



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writing style is so different that it is likely they were the work of at least two other individuals, who identities may never be known.

While *The Avenger* was a presentation of WHN, it aired on a number of other stations as well. One of the scripts, *The Devil's Horns*, contains not only the normal closing, but also a "special closing for the recording," which omits mention of WHN. The attached copy is from the pages of *The Black Death* (May

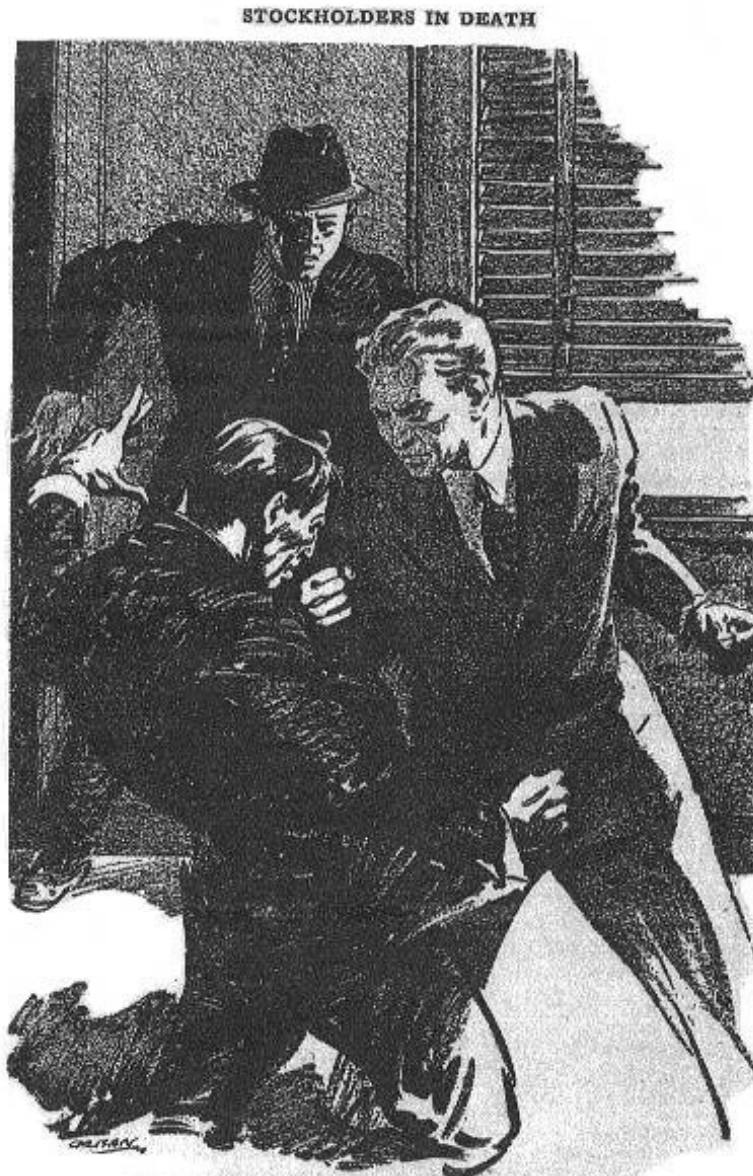


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1942):

“The Avenger continues on the air, over Station WHN in New York City, and quite a few other stations. More and more stations are requesting the program,

and we hope, very soon, to give you a list that will be practically nationwide. In the meantime, if there's a station that you'd like to have get the program, tell us. We'll do our best to book The Avenger in your locality so you can all enjoy these fine dramas.”

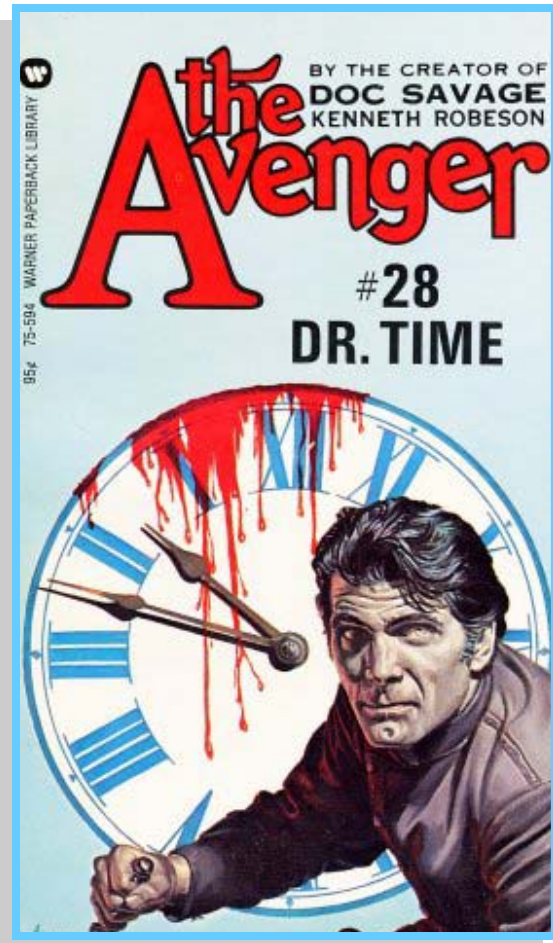


*Benson's fist lanced out. Luckow stopped as if he had banged into a stone wall and sagged to the floor.*

(Editor's Note: All the above listed scripts have been reprinted in Doug Ellis's excellent pulp journal, *Pulp Vault*. These are a must for Benson fans, as one of the titles is an original Avenger story.)

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### FOURTEEN: COVERS, INC.



My first experience with Avenger covers came via the paperbacks published by Warner Paperback Library. These, in my opinion, were minor masterpieces. At the time—I was twelve, I think—I didn't even know these exciting tales came from the pulps, let alone had cover art. In fact, I didn't know what a pulp was, nor was I aware that the Kenneth Robeson house name didn't belong to the same author who wrote Doc Savage—the reason I began reading *The Avenger* in the first place.

Anyway, years later, after I had been edified by numerous pulp fanzines and books on the subject of those crumbling pages and their lustrous pulp prose, I attended my first pulpcon and saw for the first time a number of *The Avenger* pulp covers (Now, of course, through the miracle/curse of the Internet, they are available out there for all to see, or simply flip through the electronic pages of this book).

I have to admit, weaned on the gorgeous paperback paintings (more on these later), I really didn't care for the pulp covers entirely. At least past the early few, which had a certain transcending majesty to them. They were mostly drab, uninteresting, expressing none of the power and composition of the paperback paintings by Peter Caras and George Gross. Gems? Hardly. More like coal or feldspar.

However, in retrospect, I have mellowed. Scanning the covers I now see more to them, perhaps a sapphire here, a ruby there. Some of those mid-range covers, though—past *Murder On Wheels* and basically until the end of the series—still

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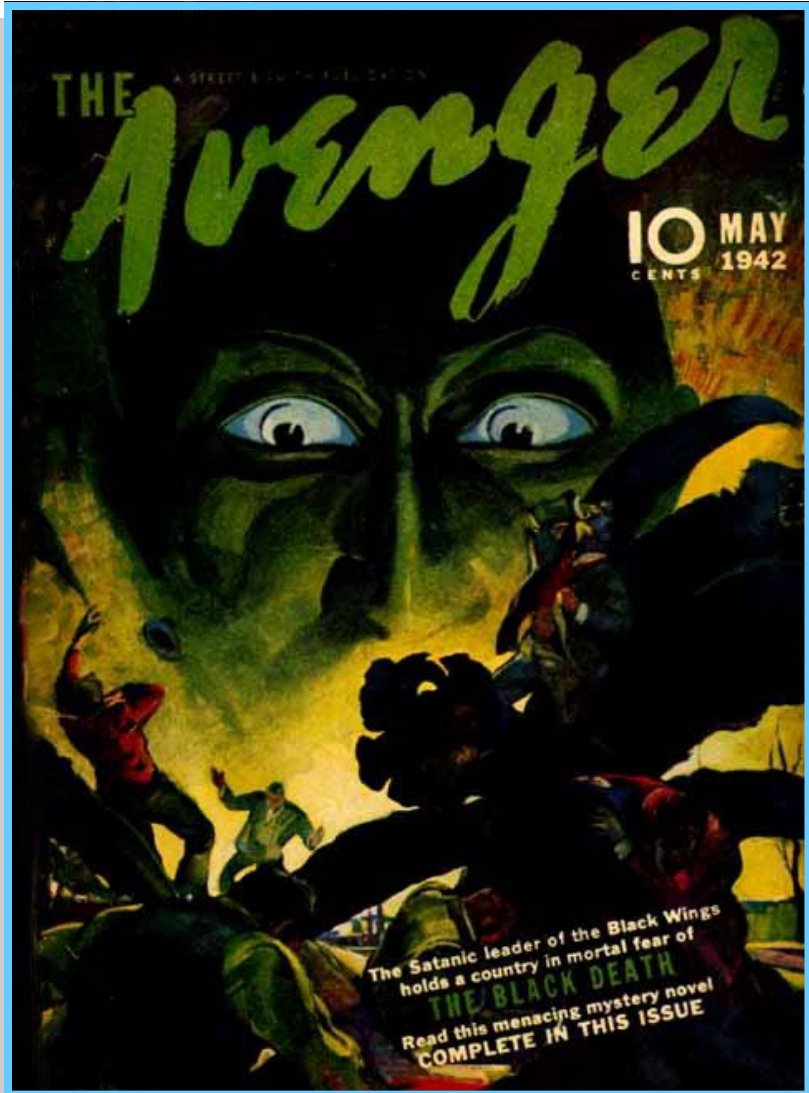
leave me as cold  
as a naked  
Eskimo.

The initial covers are quite lovely. *Justice, Inc.* is striking and icy, like a polar dawn—to swipe a phrase—a perfect accompaniment in most respects for the novel contained within. The Avenger brims with power—over evil, crooks and probably even Walmart, had it existed at the time. That looming frozen face, those merciless, frosty eyes...As with the lead novel itself, something about it rises

above the medium in which it appears.

The following cover for *The Yellow Hoard* comes close, exhibiting snap and intensity, and even *The Sky Walker* crackles with raw strength.

*The Devil's Horns* and *The Frosted Death* lose a little something, likely because the glacial visage of Benson becomes somewhat transparent, as if he is fading into the background more than reigning over it. On *The Blood Ring* it nearly disappears, and, interestingly enough, Smitty is still portrayed as a black man—he was originally supposed to be, as attested to by numerous interior illustrations in the premier novel, but by this time Josh and Rosabel Newton had been added, so I wonder if the cover artist got the memo. Perhaps the covers



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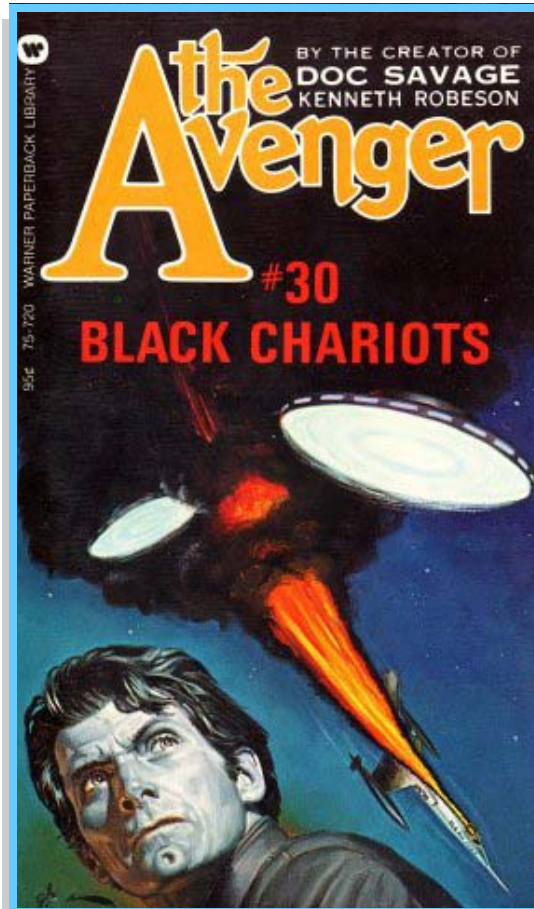
were painted too far in advance to reflect the change, though obviously covers beyond *Murder on Wheels* could not have been, since they reflected the change in Benson's hair color. Whatever the reason, readers must have wondered.

With later covers sapphires and rubies appear more like jade and quartz. After *Murder on Wheels*—a cover that sizzles with electricity and is atypical of the series—the artwork grows rather vapid, much akin to some of the Doc Savage cover art at the time (some might say *The Shadow*, too, though I consider these somewhat better). They mostly stay that way until the end of the run, though *The Black Death* reverts to the looming portrait of Benson and is a big improvement. *Midnight Murder*, the final Avenger novel of the forties, is disappointing and lackluster, representative of the artwork prevalent on most hero pulps of the time.

Yet even while the early covers display solid work, composition, scope, and sense of cold power, it is in the Warner Paperback Library paperback reissue where the Man of Ice reaches the pinnacle of his painted greatness.

These covers are glorious. The first cover is reminiscent of the first Doc Savage reprint, *The Man of Bronze*, by Bama. Peter Caras rendered The Avenger in ice and blue, have merged with cerulean shadow. Remote, entirely powerful, it is a masterpiece of coverwork. Caras remained with the series through book eight, *The Glass Mountain*. His best work was probably on the second book, *The Yellow Hoard* and book six, *The Blood Ring*. His painting for *The Sky Walker*, an uninteresting and drab study in yellowish tones, was probably his poorest.

With book nine, *Tuned for Murder*, George Gross takes over the artistic chores and remains with the series until the end. His covers seem to improve with every outing. *Tuned for Murder* is somewhat bland in concept and the next,



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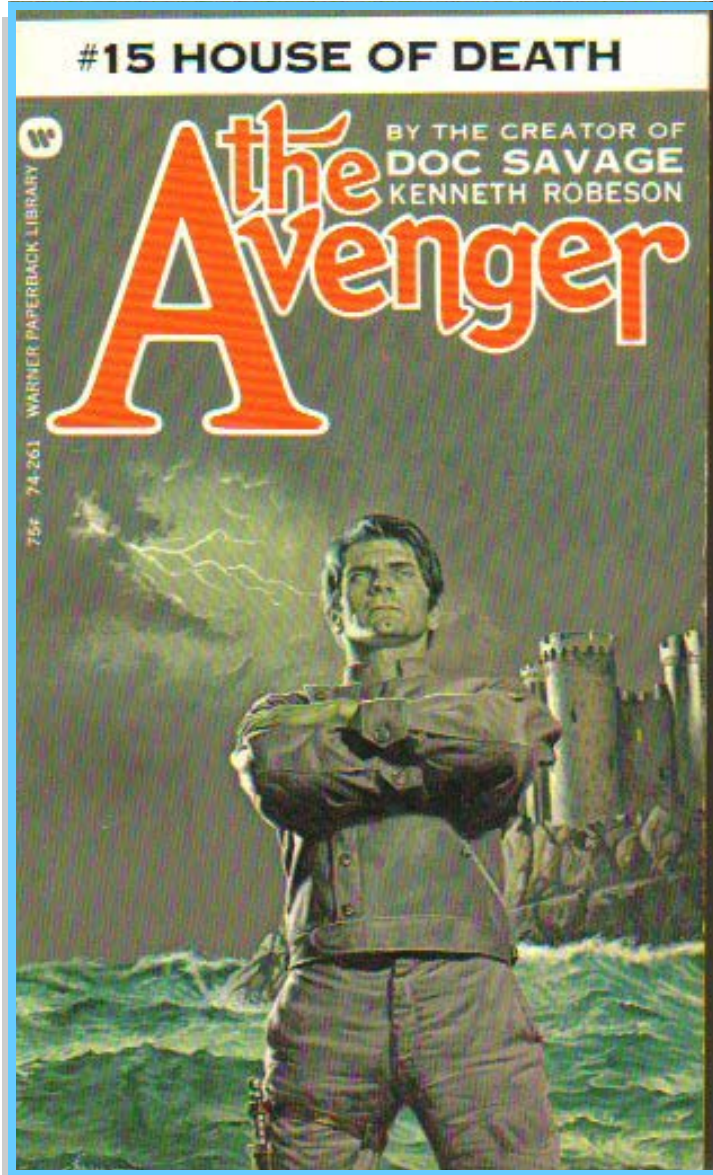
*The Smiling Dogs*, is in the same ballpark. But with book eleven, *River of Ice*, Gross renders a stunning and icy classic. Notable after that is the eerie gray-toned *House of Death* and emerald-hued *The Green Killer*.

It is with the twenty-fifth book, *The Man from Atlantis*, Gross really hits his stride. Nearly all covers from this point on are brilliant, from the symbolic,





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blood-dripping clock of *Dr. Time* to the intense blues of *The Glass Man*. In fact, the covers outshine the weaker Goulart stories by far. No doubt these covers contributed not a little to the hugely successful paperback run, though, alas, they couldn't save it after Warner made a poor choice in authors to continue the tales. It's a pity; one can only dream of what marvelous paintings might have come from Gross's brush.

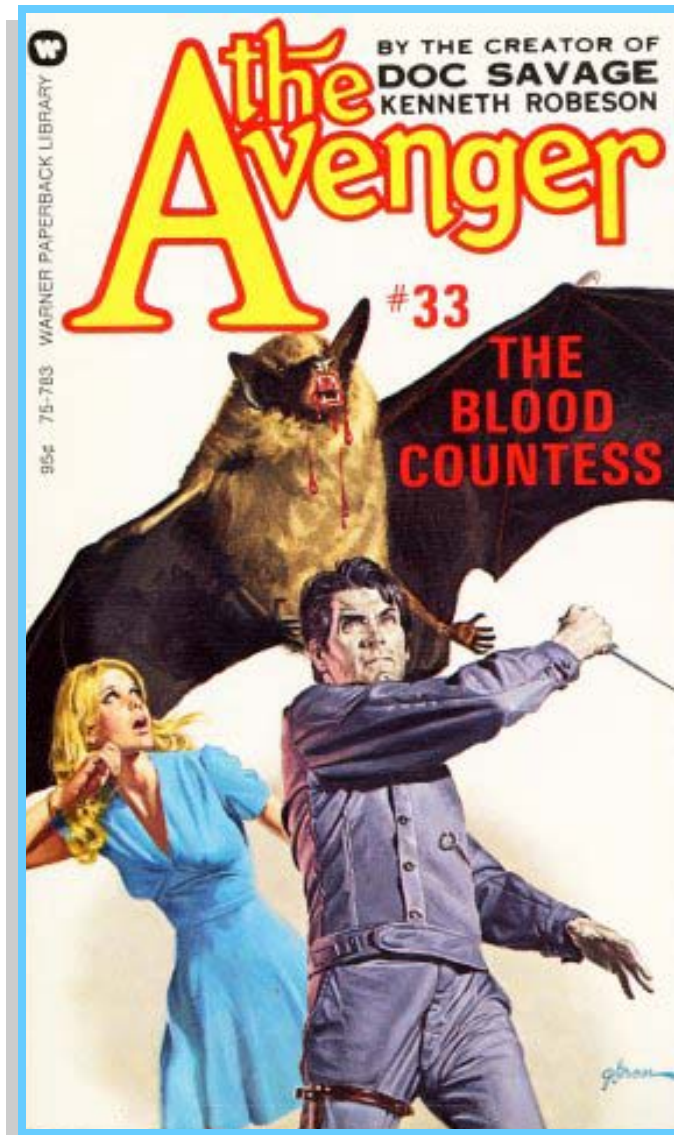
Most Doc Savage and Avenger fans know the same model was used for both series, an expert poser by the name of Steve Holland. A close look at the books of both characters reveals Holland's facial structure and trademark poses (Gross did veer from Holland's looks on *The Death Machine*,

where Benson somewhat resembles Robert Conrad, so perhaps he worked from memory or used another model for that cover.)

These covers, pulp and paperback, have been reproduced in their entirety throughout the pages of this book for fans to enjoy. Few series characters equal them (Doc Savage and The Shadow paperbacks being among the elite). Perhaps one day there will be more.

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### FIFTEEN: WHAT WENT WRONG WITH THE GOULART AVENGERS?



Even as a kid with no knowledge of just how many original Avenger novels there were, I knew something was different the night I bugged my mother to drive me to the local Mall to pick up the latest adventure of Benson & Co. The novels came out like clockwork; I knew a new one would be there. I wasn't disappointed. At least until I got it home and started reading it.

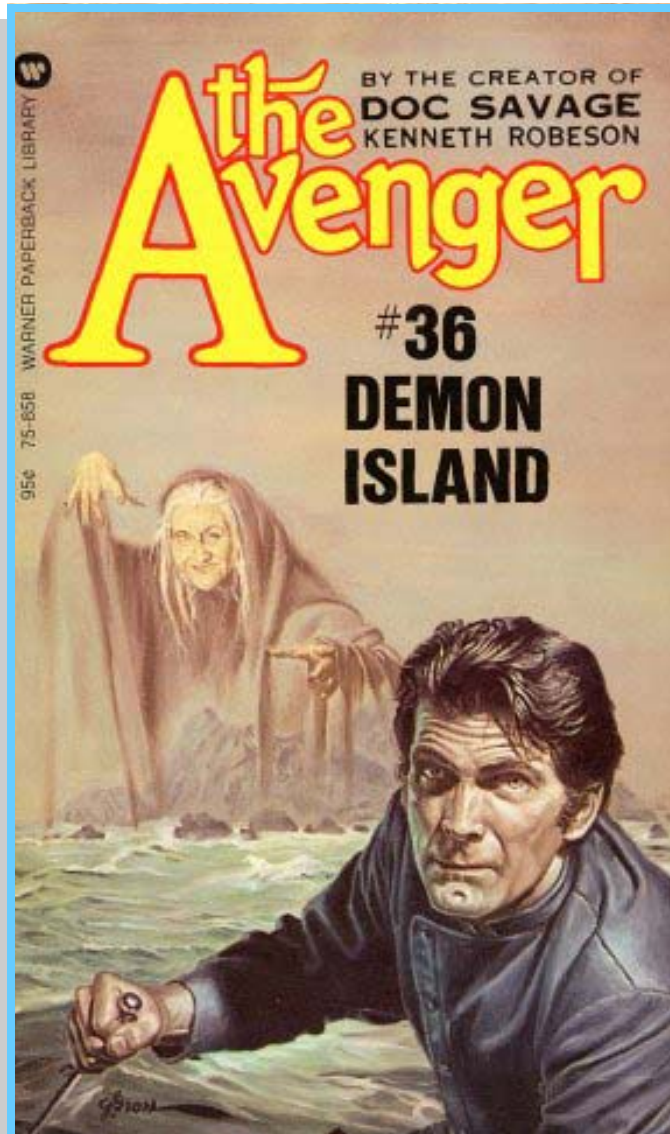
The book was number twenty-five, *The Man from Atlantis*. The cover was brilliant, maybe the best in the series. The concept reminded me much of Doc Savage's *Devil on the Moon*. All the ingredients were there—except for one: the author had changed and I didn't know it. I suspected something was different the moment I started reading it. It just felt different. Characters

weren't acting quite right, scenes weren't as vivid, the plot wasn't as structured and intricate. And it was shorter. Much shorter. Almost as if it were an outline of an adventure instead of the real thing. At that young age, I still enjoyed the

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book to an extent, but it left me wanting, unsatisfied, in a way none of the previous twenty-four novels, even the weaker ones, ever had. Sort of like biting into a low-fat donut.

More followed. I still made my monthly trek to the Mall, grabbing the latest book. The covers were all superb, the titles inviting, evocative, the blurbs promising. The stories promised grand adventure. Flying saucers whisked through the desert skies; Cartoon superheroes sprang to life, running amok; an



evil mastermind sent victims on trips through time; the Devil terrorized a small Massachusetts town; a vampire stalked the steamy streets of a South American town; an invisible man raised havoc in the West; a machine drove innocent victims to suicide.

But the tales never quite lived up to the expectation, to what had gone before.

With book number thirty-six, novels were no more. With *Demon Island* The Avenger faded into history for a second time.

It took me years to learn the name of the author behind the final twelve books, and it was a surprise when it came. Ron Goulart. Author of many excellent science fiction novels, or so I am told. I don't know. I have never had the desire to read one after sampling

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his work on *The Avenger*. Maybe I'm a little bitter. Maybe I feel Benson deserved better. Whatever the case, the series suffered under his watch.

Goulart proved entirely wrong for this series. The stories themselves are minor, the plots pedestrian, never fully realized. Far too many involved spies and poorly integrated gimmicks. Gone were the manipulative endings *The Avenger* was so famous for. Added was a degree of silliness that might only have appealed to ten-year-old readers (Smitty listens to soap operas, has daffy relatives and *The Avenger* buys teddy bears). Characters step out of their familiar roles. Smitty and Mac's feud deflates like a soufflé after an oven door slam. Cole turns into a wise-cracking joy boy and, worse, becomes the focus of the books. Benson himself seems secondary, sapped of any menace or power. Josh and Rosabel get nearly no action, especially the latter, who becomes pregnant.

What caused this? What exactly went wrong? Why did an experienced author seem so clumsy with the reins? I wish I knew. According to Will Murray in his article *Origin of an Avenger*, Goulart cared for *The Avenger* character even less than Ernst, though Ernst brought much more skill and sophistication to the tales. If that's true, however, why leave a maddening hook at the end of the *Demon Island* in an attempt to secure its continuance? Goulart also disliked Ernst's style on the series, though it was far superior to the comic book toned one he used (supposedly intended to be more like Dent's Doc Savage style but it doesn't even come close).

It's obvious Goulart did little research on the series. It's hard to believe he read many, if any, of the books and his disdain for pulp fiction has been alluded to in quotes from him in various interviews. He obviously preferred Cole Wilson, but even there he had little grasp of Wilson's character as set down by Ernst. The plots monkey Doc Savage more than *The Avenger*, but even there they are poor attempts. No complaint on the titles, or even ideas, but the execution was lacking, the spirit exorcised. The books have a deadening sameness to them, though an occasional innovation sparks and fizzles. If he is responsible for one exemplary contribution to the series, surely it is his villain, *The Iron Skull*, in the novel of the same name. The potential there was vast, especially in light of the fact that if *The Avenger* series had a major failing it was the lack of a truly outstanding adversary. Credit where credit is due.

In some peculiar way, I can enjoy these novels, though most Avenger fans cannot. Mostly it's nostalgia for that long-ago time as kid I waited with bated breath for each new adventure, plus the brilliant Gross covers that evoke warm memories. It's a shame they will never be more than that, and a bigger shame they signaled the death knell for the series.

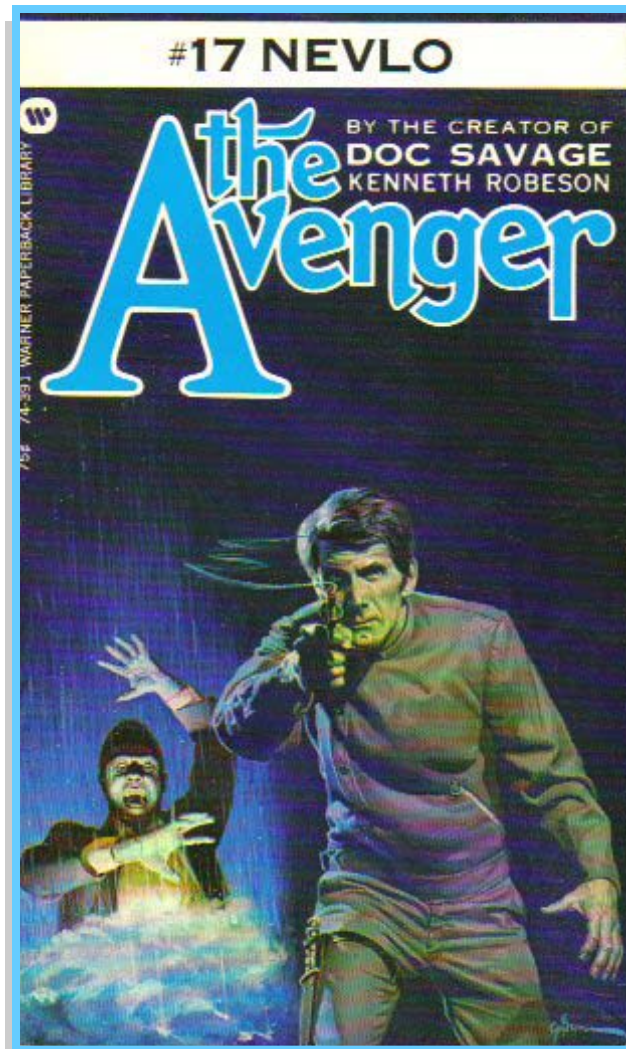
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## ADDENDUM ONE: THE ADVENTURES

9/39 *Justice, Inc.*: Millionaire adventurer Richard Henry Benson, on a plane bound for Montreal, returns from the laboratory to find his wife and daughter have mysteriously vanished. None of the other passengers will admit to having seen them. Shock drives Benson temporarily insane and when he awakens in a hospital room three weeks later, his hair has turned snow white and his face has become paralyzed. He vows to destroy the ring that killed his family. Along the way he picks up two aides to help him fight crime as Justice, Inc.

10/39 *The Yellow Hoard*: A mysterious trail of Mexican clay bricks and exploding "peanuts" surround the death of a kindly old archeology professor by criminals. A priceless gold and emerald belt leads Benson deep into the Mexican jungle in search of a fabulous lost treasure of the Aztecs. Nellie Gray joins the cast of troubleshooters.

11/39 *The Sky Walker*: A mysterious droning emanates from the sky. A man is spotted walking across the heavens. Buildings crumble and collapse like matchsticks. Josh and Rosabel join up with Justice, Inc., solidifying the group for the first twelve issues.

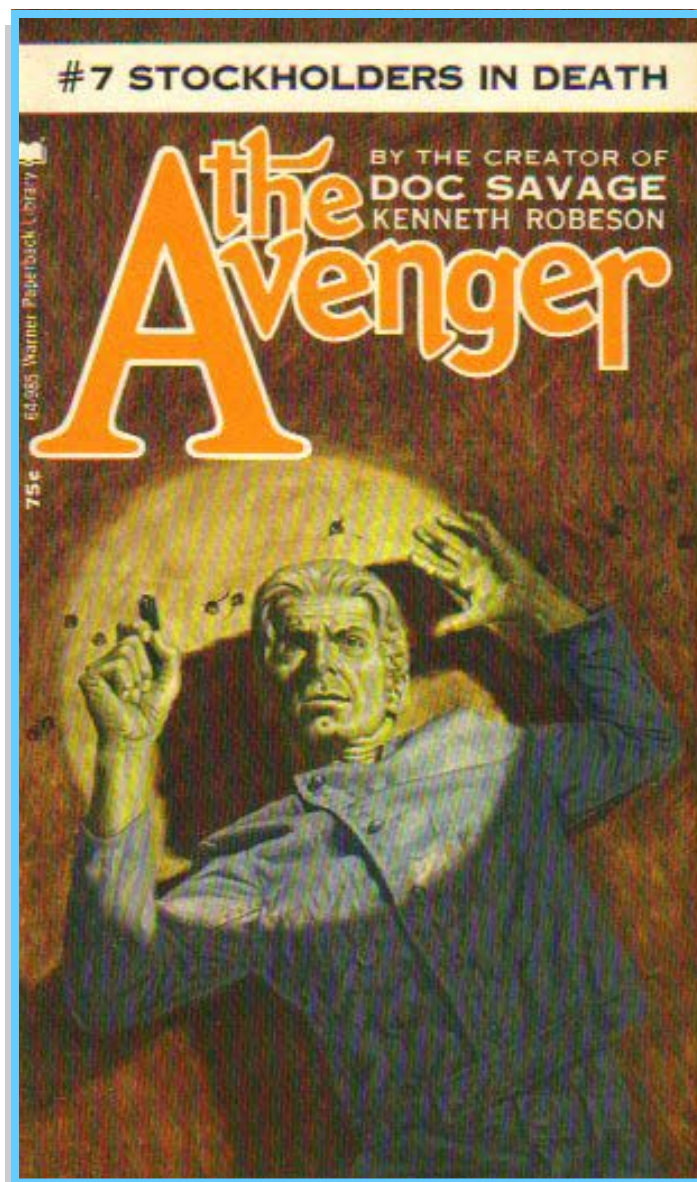


## THE GRAY NEMESIS

**12/39 *The Devil's Horns:*** Benson travels to Ashton City to wipe out a crime ring and find an answer to the mystery of the "Devil's Horns."

**1/40 *The Frosted Death:*** A deadly plague erupts in New York City, threatening to envelop the entire country with a smothering white mold that resembles frost.

**2/40 *The Blood Ring:*** Ancient Egyptian priests roam the streets of Washington, D. C. A sacred ring, pale red until dipped in human blood, spawns a 600-year-old curse that appears to bring the dead back to life.



**3/40 *Stockholders in Death:*** Missing securities lead to murder and mayhem in the business world. The Avenger fights for his life as two gangs try to destroy him and gain control of millions.

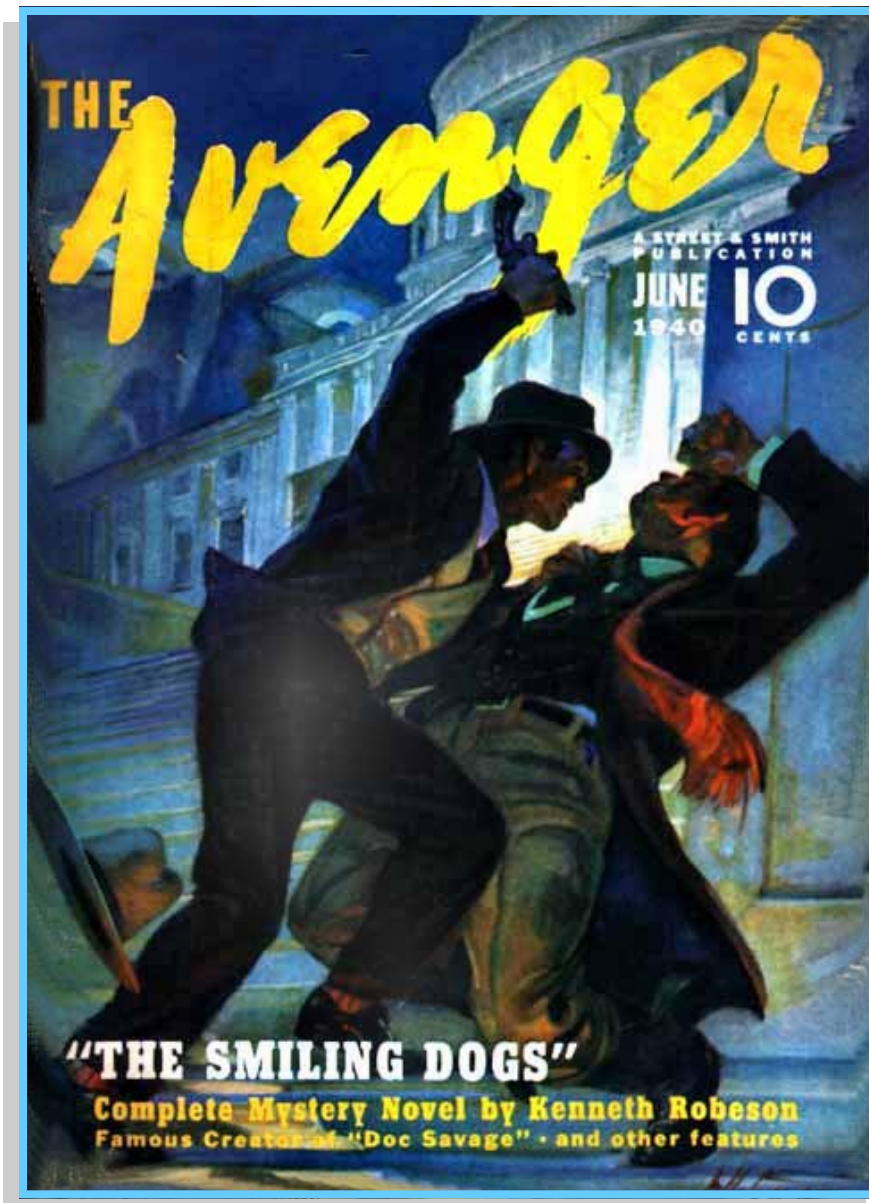
**4/40 *The Glass Mountain:*** An Indian rain god is loose on an engineering project. A misty cloud filled with deadly lightning bolts terrorizes the crew.

**5/40 *Tuned for Murder:*** A high-pitched whine and a howling dog are the only clues to malady that turns men into robots. A secret new military weapon holds the answer to a terrible mystery.

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

**6/40 *The Smiling Dogs*:** A little red man leading a green dashound ties in with a sanity test bill—and murder.

**7/40 *River of Ice*:** From the bowels of an ancient glacier spring the relics of a long forgotten civilization. An ancient manuscript describes an operation that transforms men in automatons.



## THE GRAY NEMESIS

**9/40 *The Flame Breathers:*** Three scientists die horribly, exhaling streams of flame. A fantastic new fuel powers cars and planes to incredible speeds.

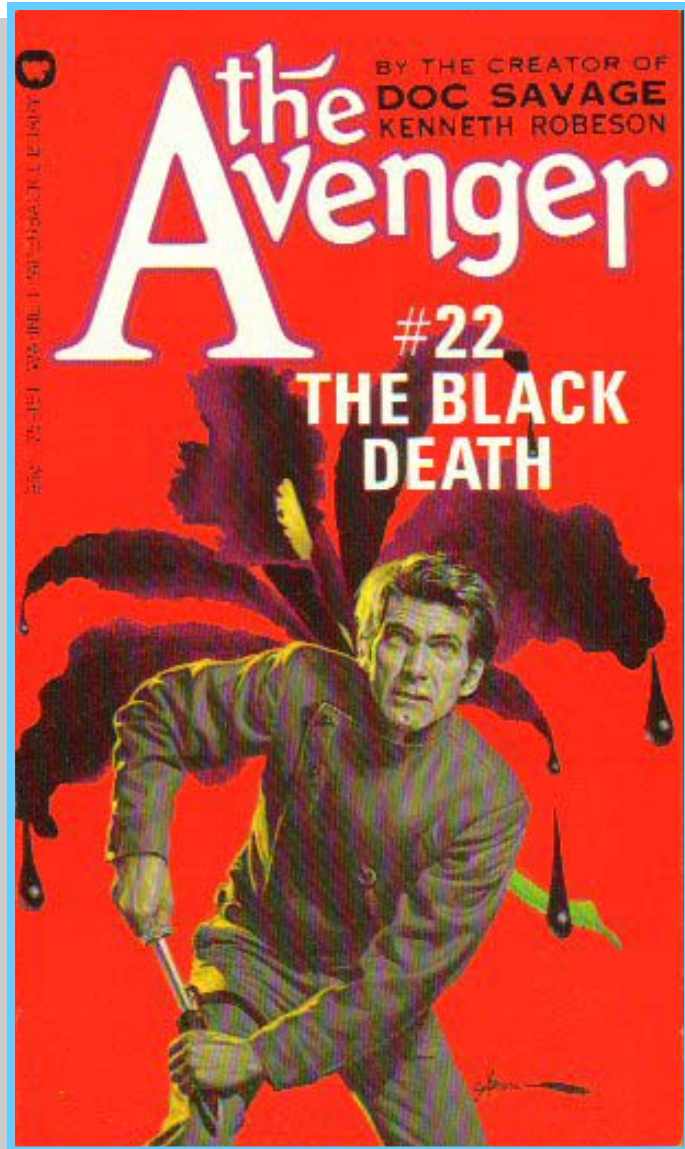
**11/40 *Murder on Wheels:*** A fantastic new supercar falls into the hands of criminals. The Avenger faces the deadliest test of his career as he is transformed back into Richard Henry Benson. Cole Wilson becomes the final member to join the cast.

**1/41 *Three Gold Crowns:*** Three gold crowns and a dentist's forceps are the only clues to a grisly murder on the railroad tracks.

**3/41 *House of Death:*** Terror, hidden in a set of gold medallions, threatens one of the most powerful families in America. The Avenger and his crew travel to a mysterious island off the Maine coast and find themselves trapped in the "House of Death."

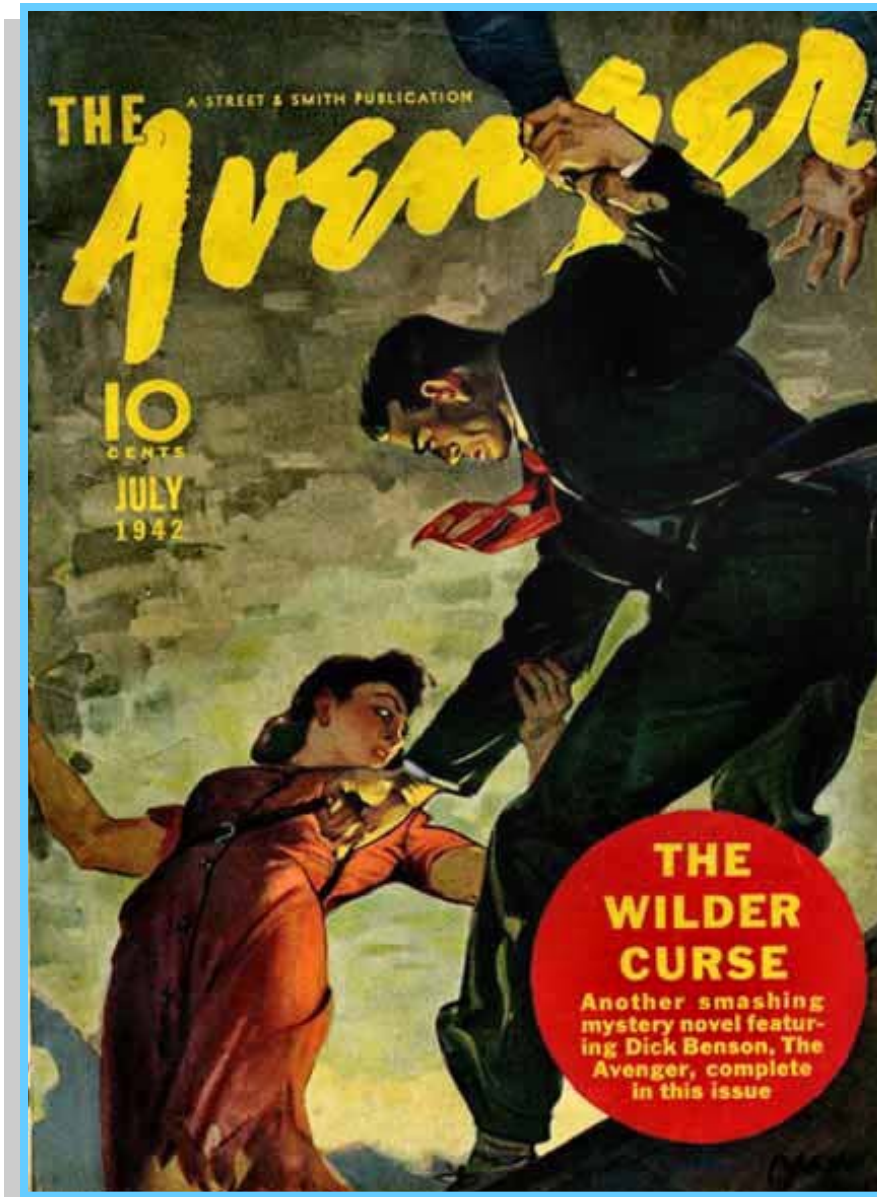
**5/41 *The Hate Master:*** A serum drives animals and men insane with hate. A twisted dwarf climbing his way to the presidency wages an all out war with the forces of Justice, Inc.

**7/41 *Nevlo:*** A terrifying force stops all power, even cars and planes. A gorillalike creature with superhuman strength stalks the countryside.



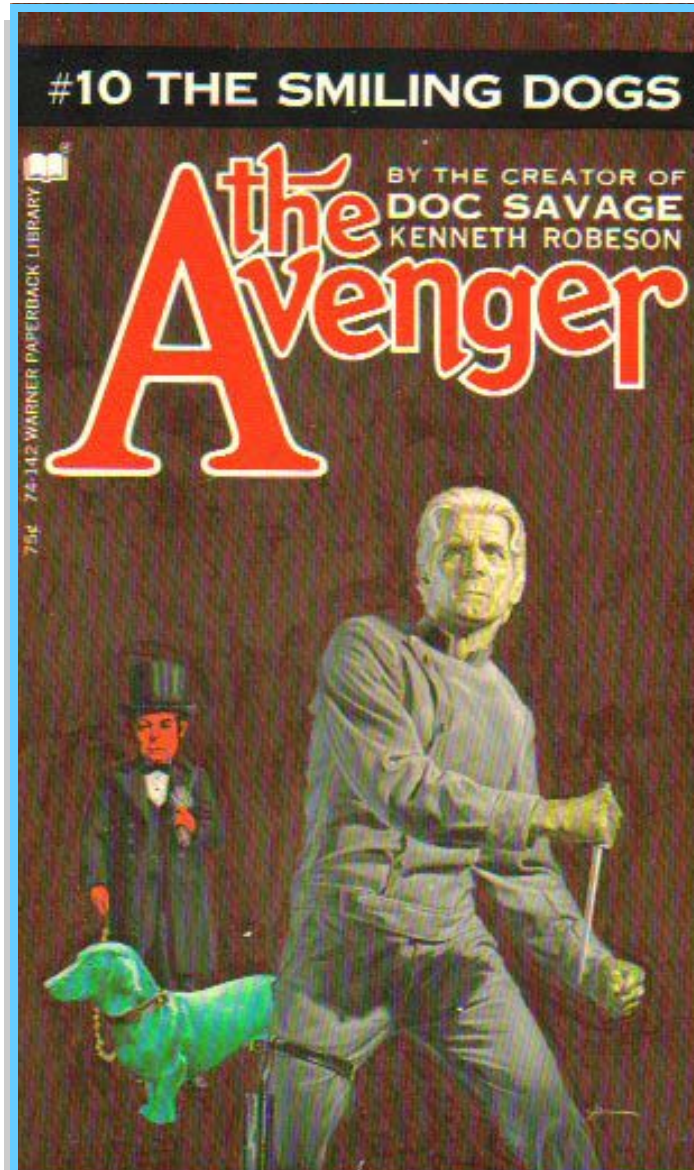


## THE GRAY NEMESIS



**9/41 *Death in Slow Motion*:** A horrible disease causes workers in the nation's rubber factories to slow down, then die. Before long, the disease spreads, threatening to sabotage the war effort. The Avenger must find a cure before the dreaded malady kills two of his aides.

## THE GRAY NEMESIS



**11/41 *Pictures of Death:*** Stolen art is smuggled into the country with hidden messages intended to bring disaster to the nation's defense plans.

**1/42 *The Green Killer:*** A deadly malady turns men into apelike creatures. The Avenger must find a cure for the disease and stop a gang of cutthroats from finding a fortune in priceless emeralds in the steamy Brazilian jungle.

**3/42 *The Happy Killers:*** A formula turns gangsters into superhuman maniacal murderers.

**5/42 *The Black Death:*** The Black Wings Cult leader forecasts death and all who fall under his curse die horribly, their bodies turning black.

**7/42 *The Wilder Curse:***

A scuffling sound then gruesome horrible death point to a man long dead.

**9/42 *Midnight Murder:*** A plane carrying a secret military weapon crashes, killing all aboard. The Avenger races a gang of foreign spies to find the device.

**6/74 *The Man From Atlantis:*** A dying green man collapses in the street, clutching a gold medallion that appears to have come from the fabled sunken city of Atlantis.

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

**7/74 Red Moon:** A series of bloody killings point to a werewolf. Terror surrounds a government research project.

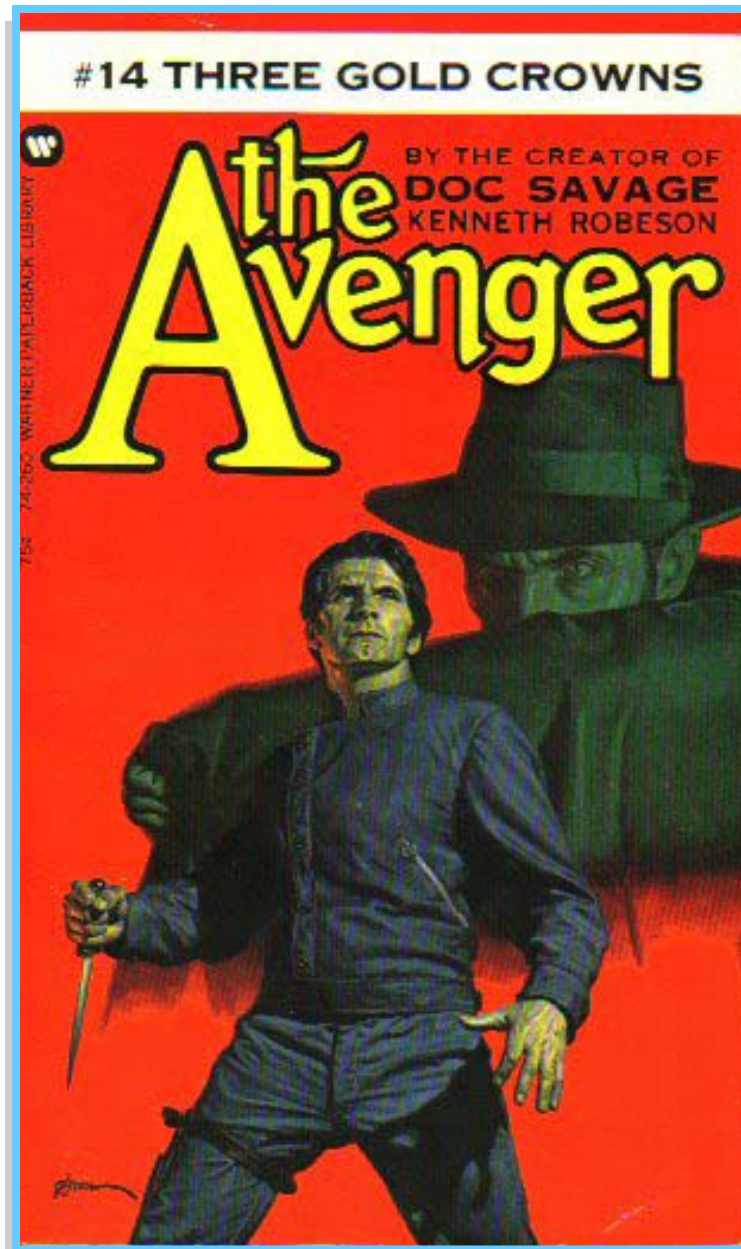
**8/74 The Purple Zombie:** Terror and the living dead stalk the set of a new movie. Spies seek to control the force that can resurrect the dead.

**9/74 Dr. Time:** Four men suddenly find themselves journeying back in time. A kidnaper claims to hold their families captive in another era.

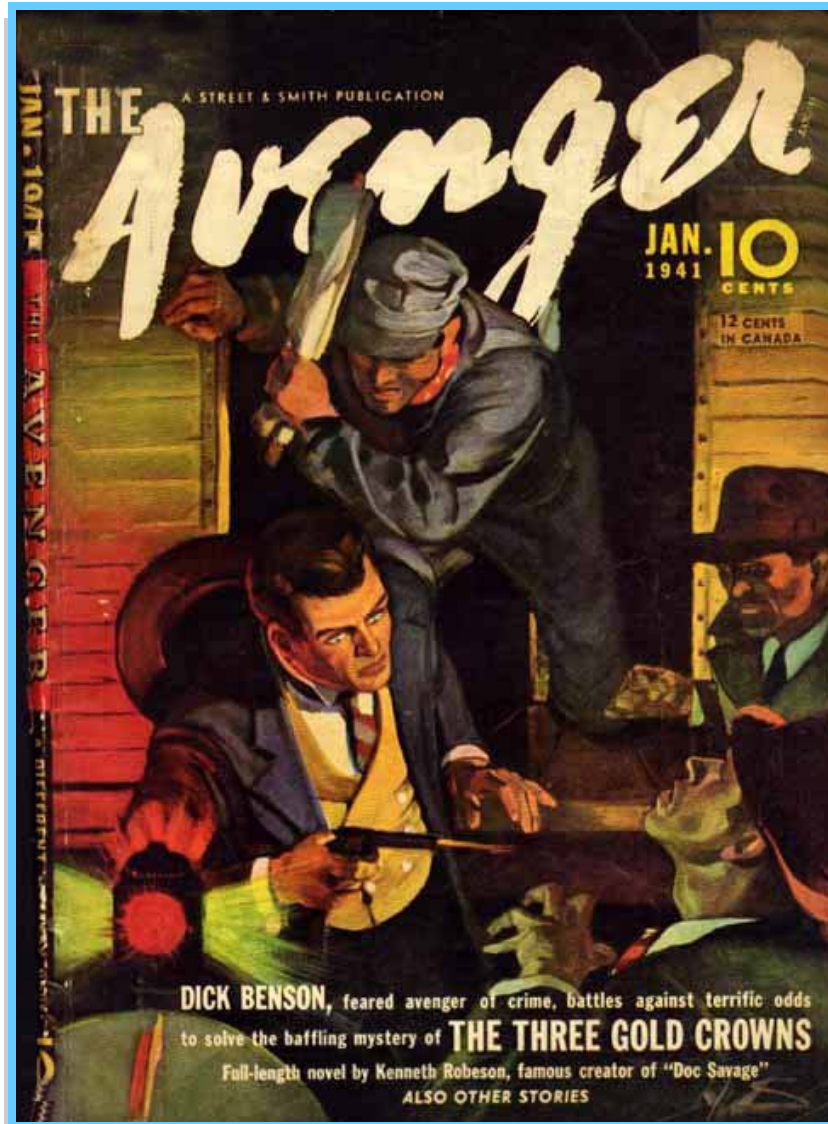
**10/74 The Nightwitch Devil:** In the spooky old town of Nightwitch, Mac encounters devil worshippers and black magic. A spy ring thrives in an underground labyrinth.

**11/74 Black Chariots:** Strange dislike objects glide through the night sky over the California desert, terrorizing planes.

**12/74 The Cartoon Crimes :** Cartoon characters seem to be suddenly springing



## THE GRAY NEMESIS



to life. Wonderman flies through the night.

**1/75 *The Death Machine*:** A mysterious machine controls men's minds, causing them to commit suicide.

**2/75 *The Flame Countess*:** A wave of gruesome murders in South America seems to be the work of a vampire.

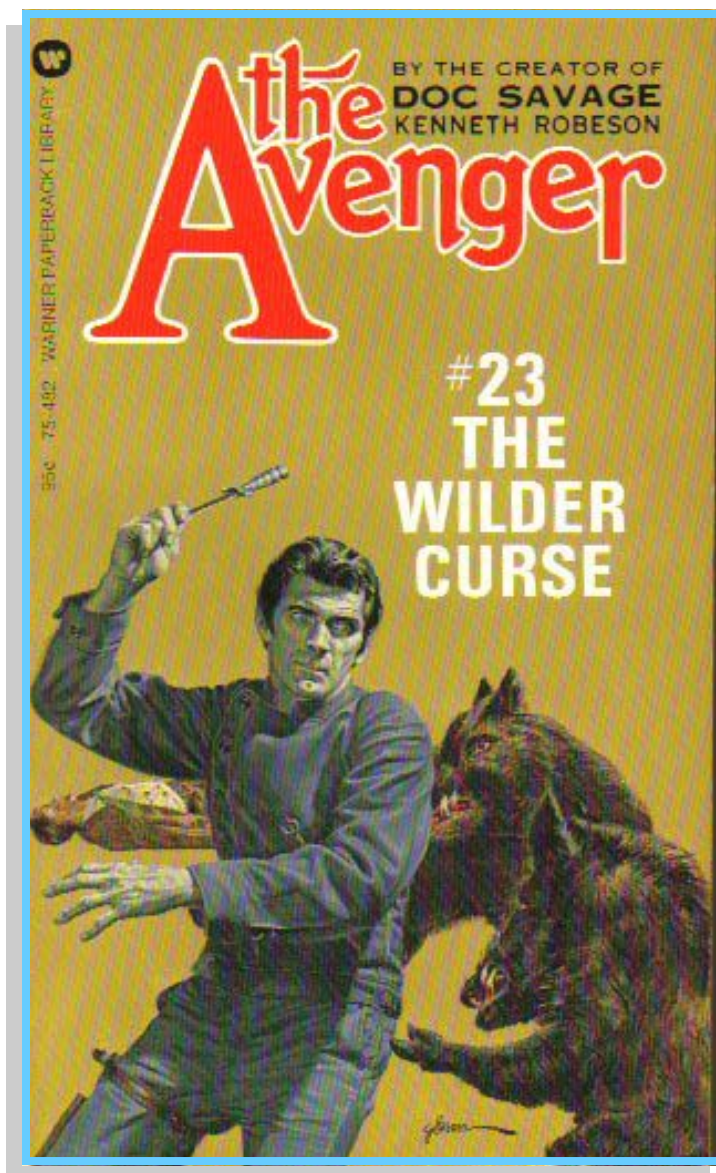
**3/75 *The Glass Man*:** Murders are being committed by what appears to be an invisible man. These are tied in with the vanishing of an eminent scientist and

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

the activities of a Nazi spy ring.

**4/75 *The Iron Skull*:** A superhuman criminal—part man, part machine—seeks to destroy Justice, Inc. and control the New York underworld.

**5/75 *Demon Island*:** Terror and ghosts haunt a movie set on an island off the California coast. A fortune in stolen loot lies buried in the midst of the eerie manifestations.



# THE GRAY NEMESIS

## ADDENDUM TWO: PUBLICATION TABLE

### THE AVENGER NOVELS by Paul Ernst

Published Title	Submitted	Original Title	Published
Justice, Inc.	2/14/39	The Avenger	9/39
The Yellow Hoard	3/8/39		10/39
The Sky Walker	4/6/39		11/39
The Devil's Horns	5/8/39		12/39
The Frosted Death	5/31/39	Frosted Death	1/40
Tuned for Murder	6/27/39		5/40
The Glass Mountain	7/25/39		2/40
The Flame Breathers	8/15/39		9/40
The Blood Ring	9/11/39		3/40
Stockholders in Death	10/9/39		4/40
The Smiling Dogs	11/27/39	Case of the Smiling Dog	6/40
The River of Ice	12/6/39	River of Ice	7/40
Nevelo	1/11/40	The World-Shaker	7/41
House of Death	2/6/40	The House of Hate	3/41
Death in Slow Motion	3/5/40	Murder in Slow Motion	9/41
Murder on Wheels	4/10/40		11/40
The Three Gold Crowns	5/14/40		1/40
The Hate Master	6/18/40		5/41
Pictures of Death	4/30/41	Red as in Ruin	11/41
The Green Killer	5/21/41		1/42
The Happy Killers	9/16/41	The Laughing Killers	3/42
The Black Death	11/6/41		5/42
The Wilder Curse	1/22/42	The Thornton Heights Murders	7/42
Midnight Murder	2/10/42	The Remote Control Murders	9/42

### In *Clues Detective*

### by Emile C. Tepperman

Death to the Avenger	4/28/42		9/42
A Coffin for The Avenger	6/22/42		11/42
Vengeance on The Avenger	9/23/42		1/43
Calling Justice, Inc.!	11/10/42	The Zaharoff Treasure	3/43
Cargo of Doom	12/8/42	Cargo of Doomed Men	5/43

### In *The Shadow*

To Find a Dead Man	2/12/43		8/44
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### In Warner Paperback Library By Ron Goulart

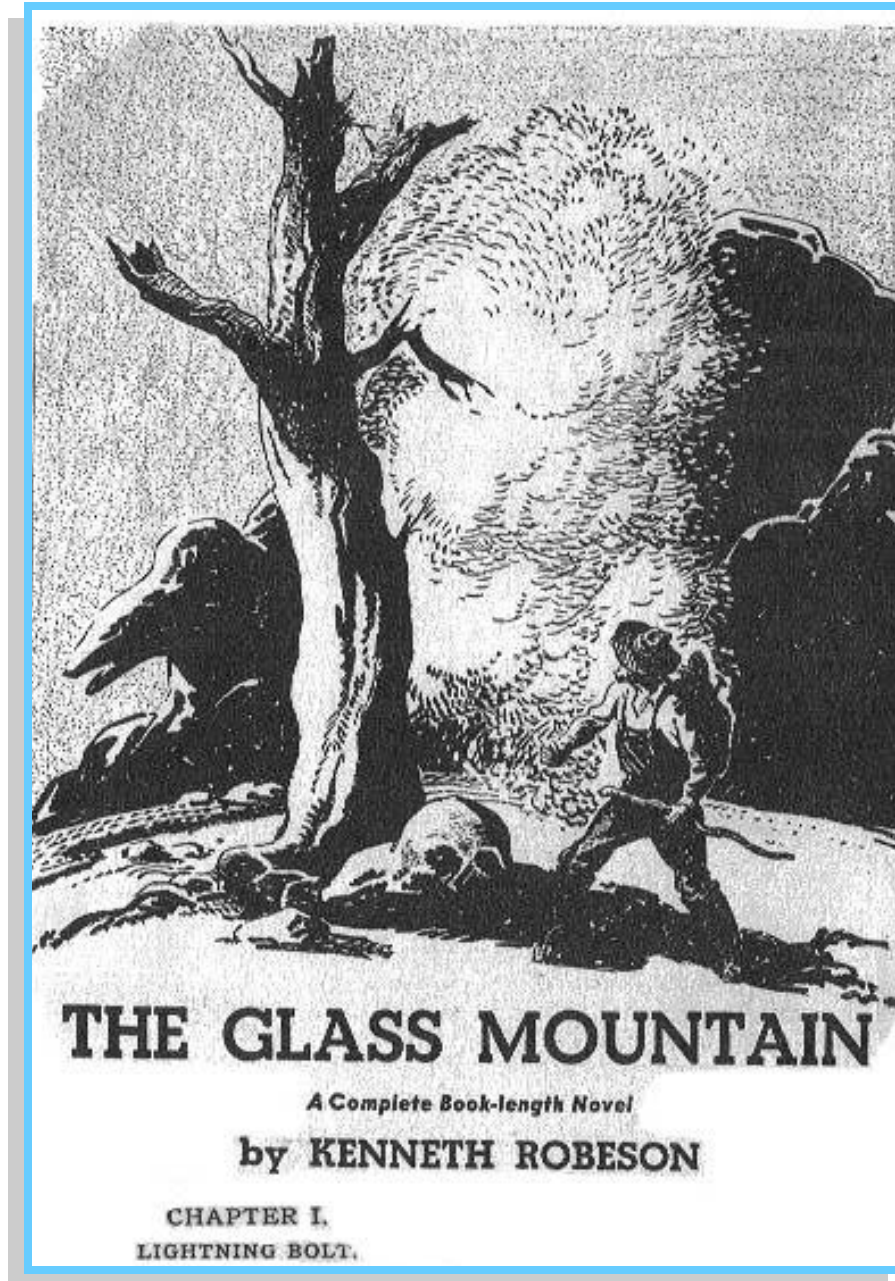
The Man from Atlantis	6/74
Red Moon	7/74
The Purple Zombie	8/74
Dr. Time	9/74
The Nightwitch Devil	10/74
Black Chariots	11/74
The Cartoon Crimes	12/74
The Death Machine	1/75
The Blood Countess	2/75
The Glass Man	3/75
The Iron Skull	4/75
Demon Island	5/75

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

### AVENGER ILLUSTRATED



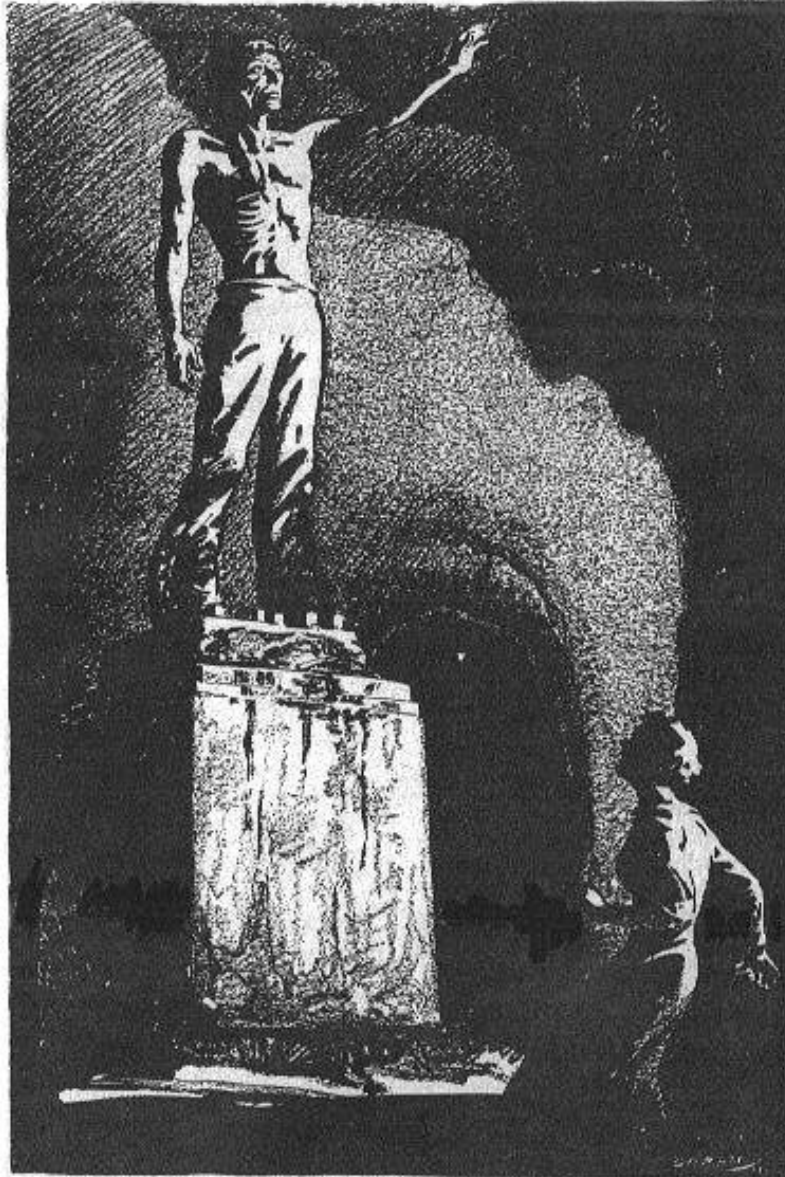
# THE GRAY NEMESIS





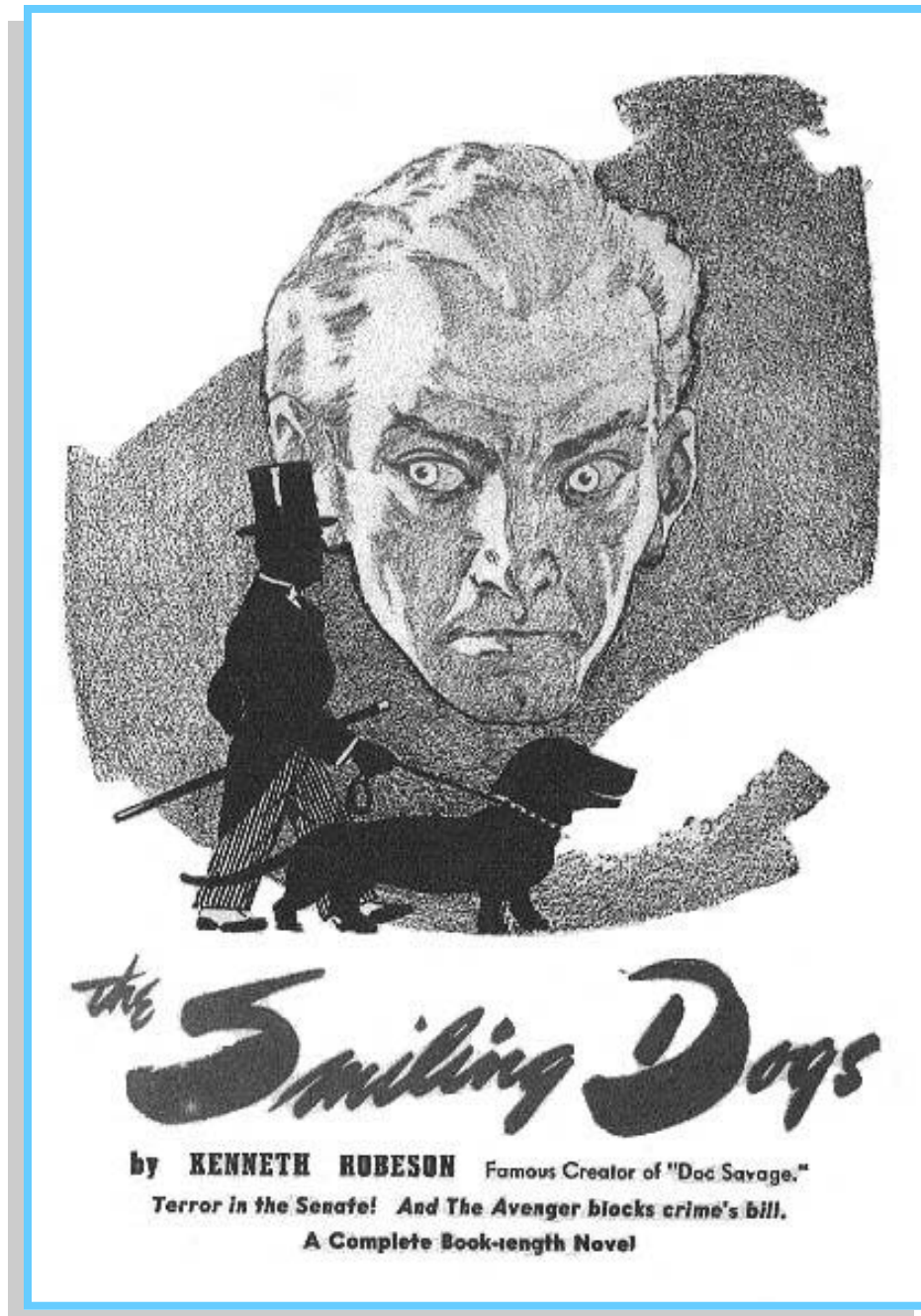
## THE GRAY NEMESIS

THE GLASS MOUNTAIN



*Nellie stood before the rough stone statue. The statue of the Rain God!*

## THE GRAY NEMESIS



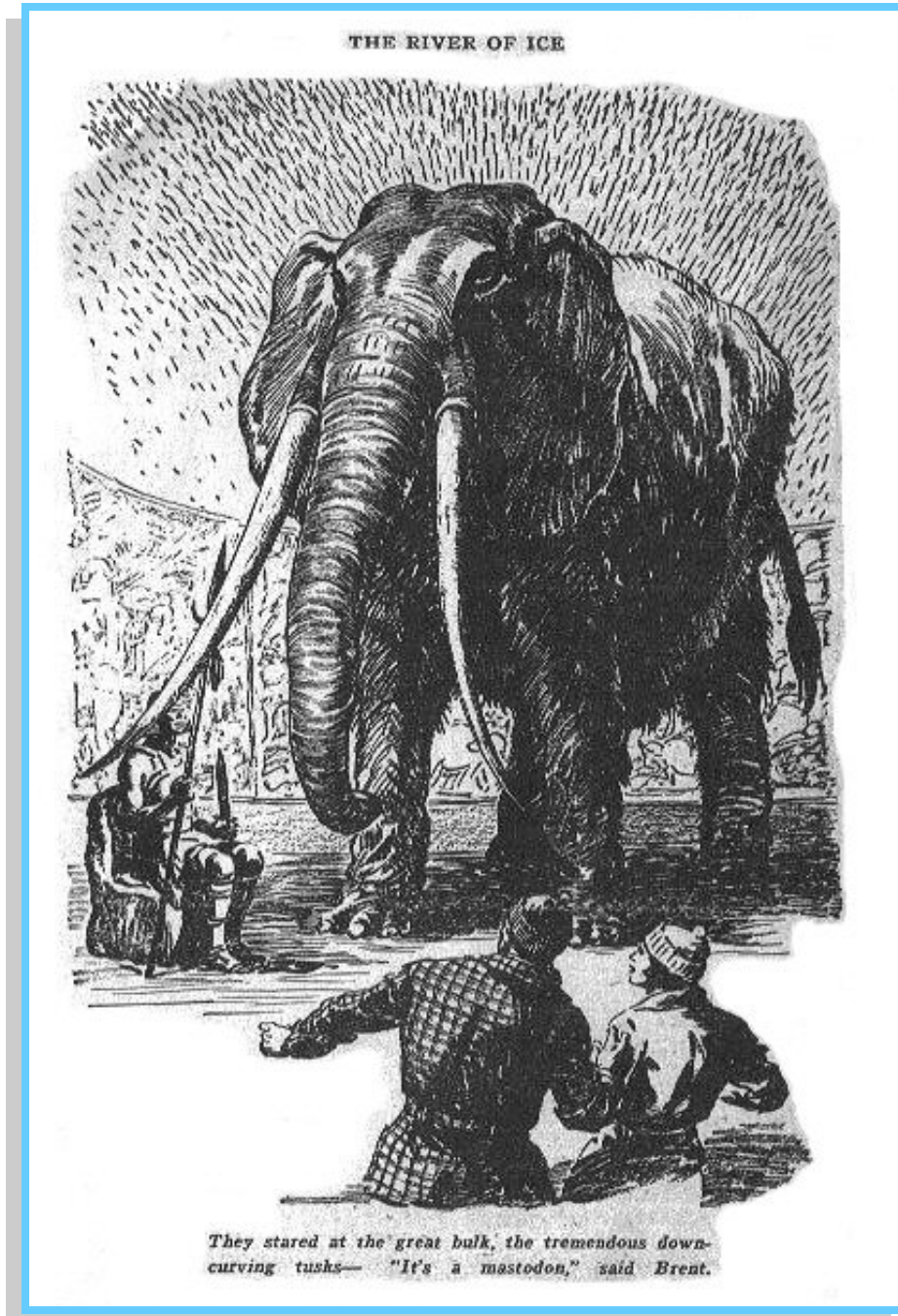
## THE GRAY NEMESIS

THE SMILING DOGS



*Mac and Smitty were looking at the steam column—rather, at a little, bright-red man in the live, hot heart of it.*

# THE GRAY NEMESIS



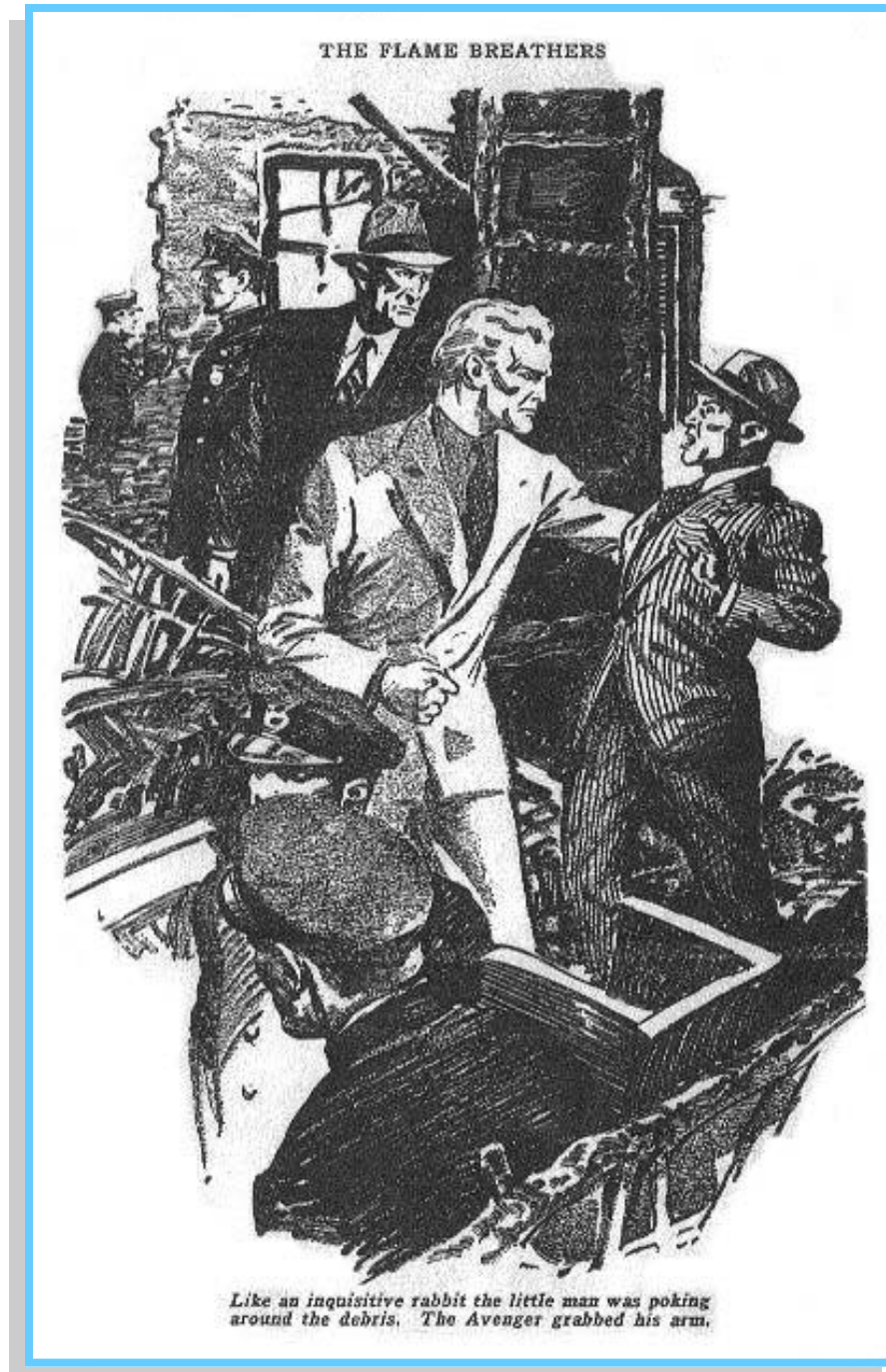
## THE GRAY NEMESIS

THE RIVER OF ICE

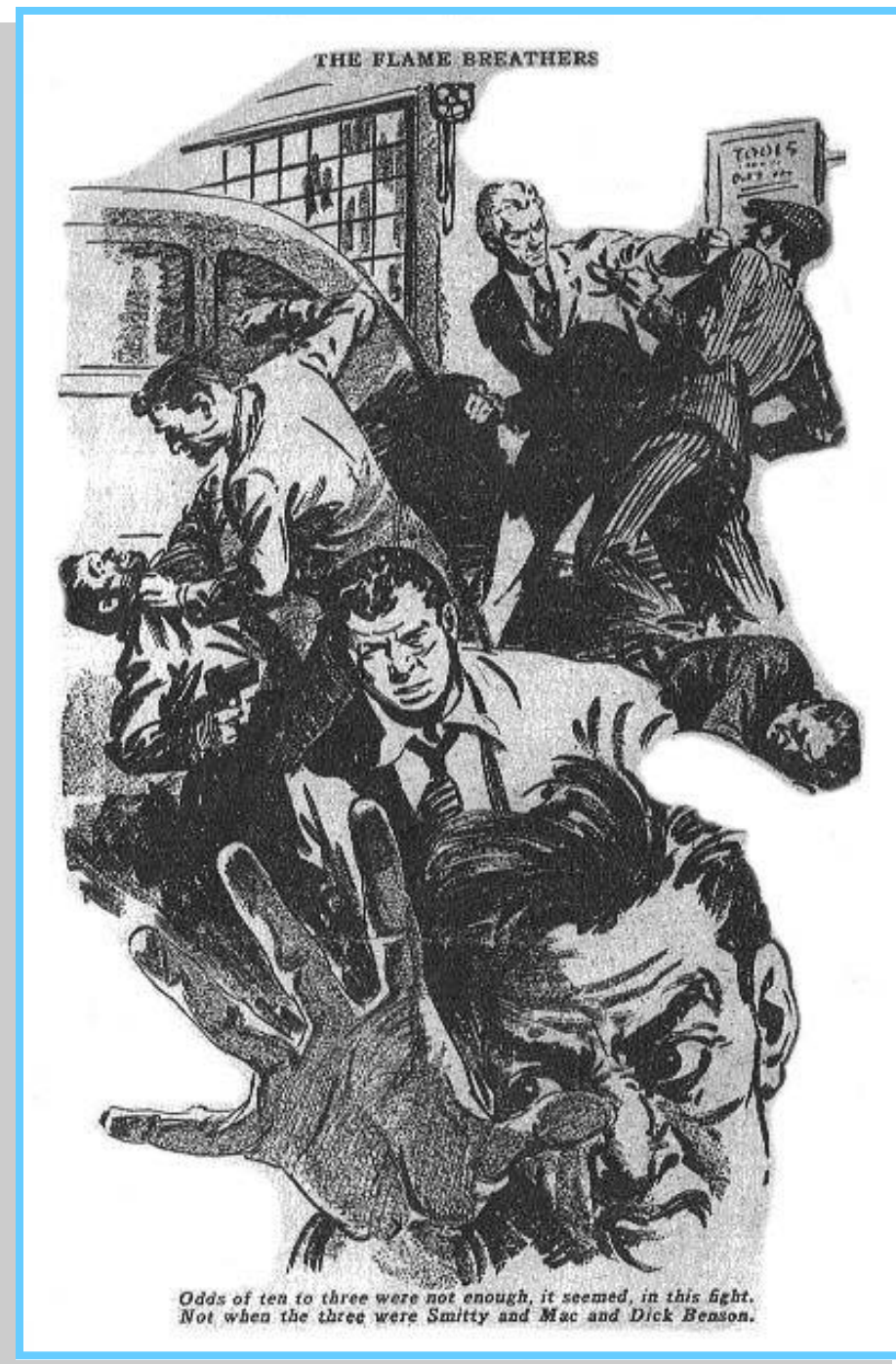


*"Some of the dry ice, Smitty," said Benson. He was playing the thin lance of fire over a section of the glass-block wall.*

## THE GRAY NEMESIS



## THE GRAY NEMESIS



## THE GRAY NEMESIS

# THE GOLD CROWNS



*Marked by Murder, Mystery and Death, they  
were the elusive quarry of The Avenger.*

**A Complete Book-length Novel**

by **KENNETH ROBESON**, Famous Creator of "Doc Savage."

**CHAPTER I.  
DEATH'S DOORWAY.**



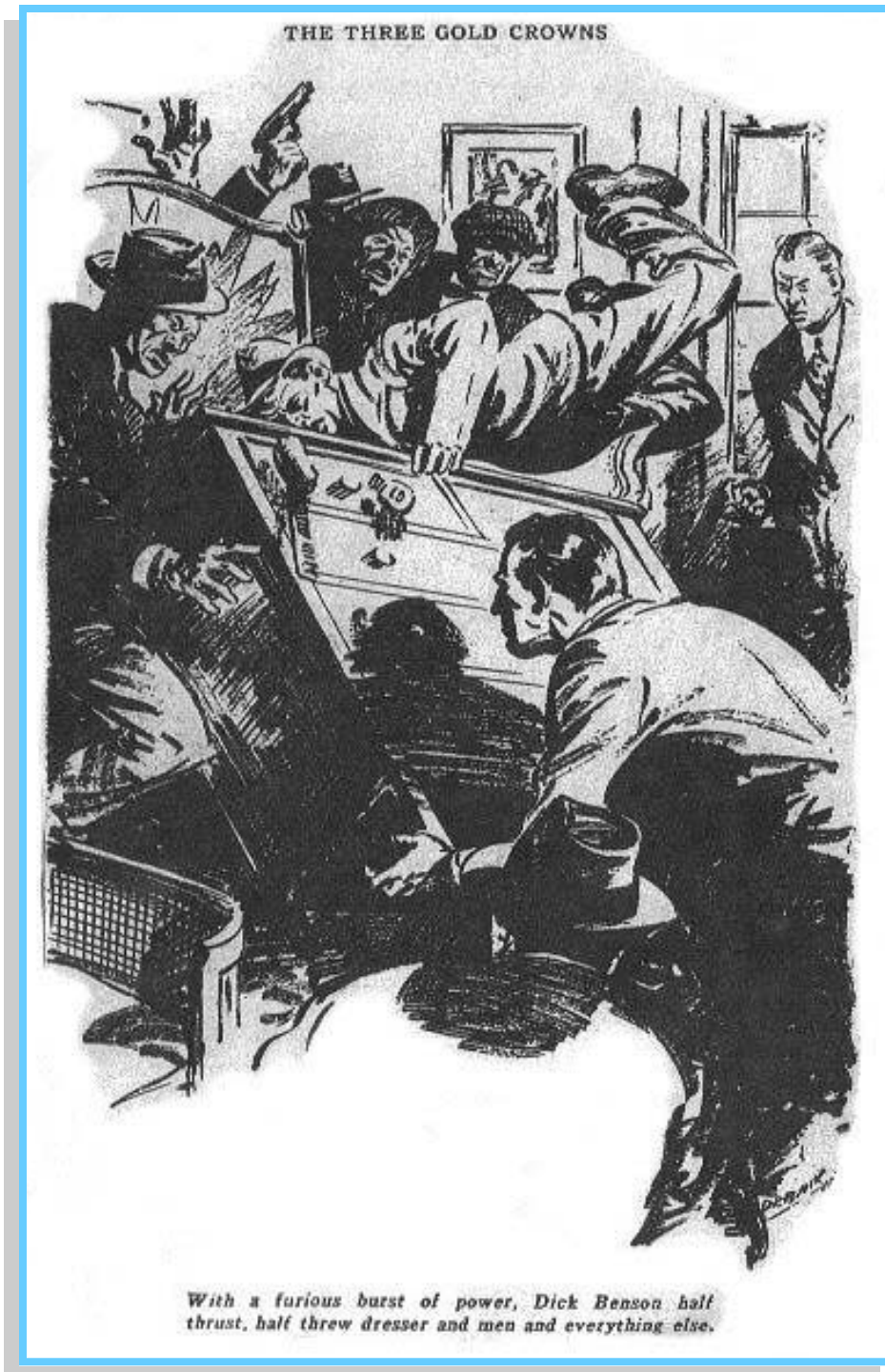
## THE GRAY NEMESIS

### THE THREE GOLD CROWNS



*Harriet tried to dash for a window as the hands of the shadowy figure reached for her throat.*

# THE GRAY NEMESIS



## THE GRAY NEMESIS



# HOUSE OF *Death*

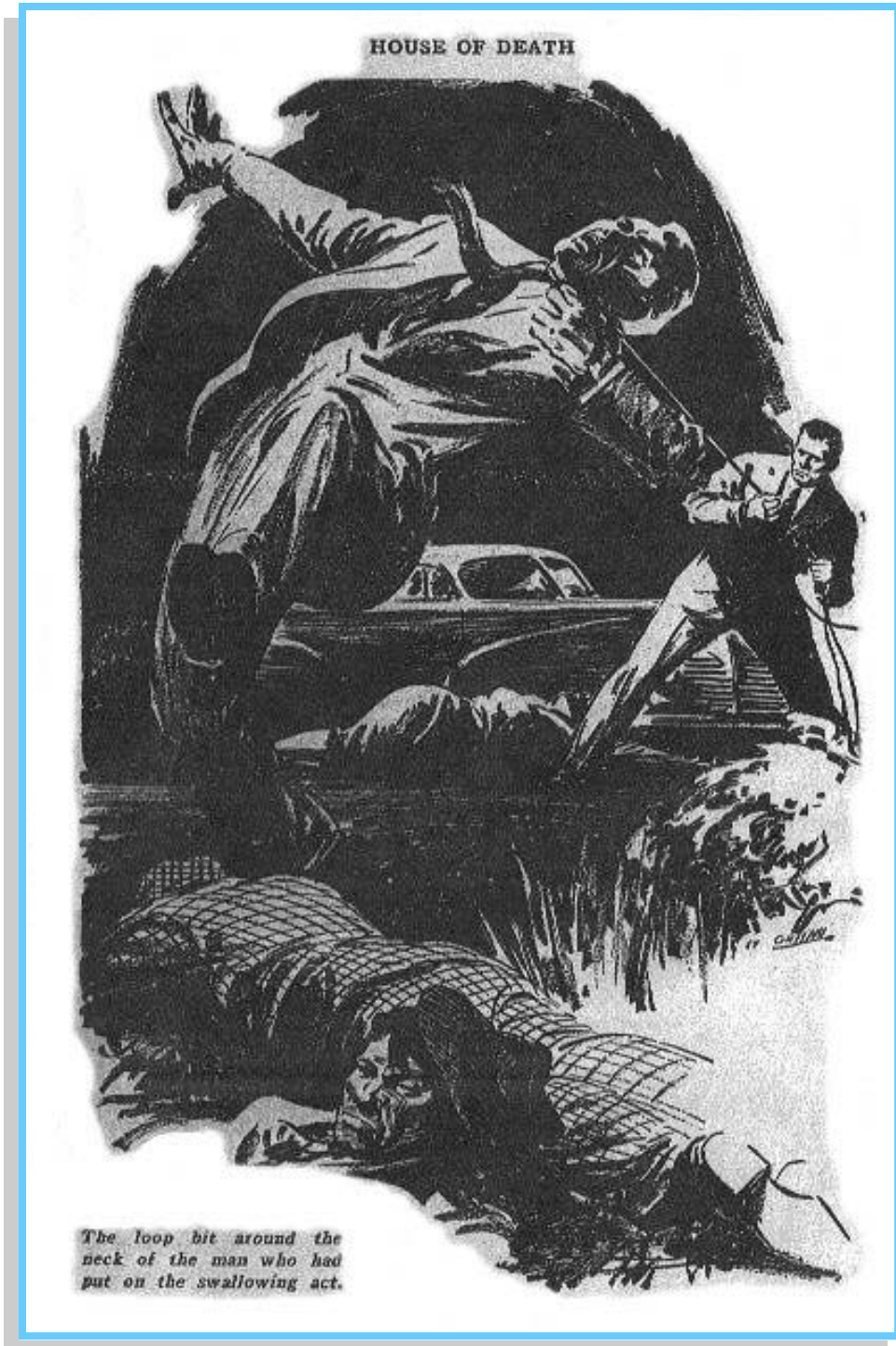
A Complete  
Book-length Novel

by **KENNETH ROBESON** Famous Creator of "Doc Savage."

*What was the meaning of the gold medallions that made brother fight brother and embroiled The Avenger in a death struggle?*

CHAPTER I  
THE GOLD COIN.

# THE GRAY NEMESIS



## THE GRAY NEMESIS



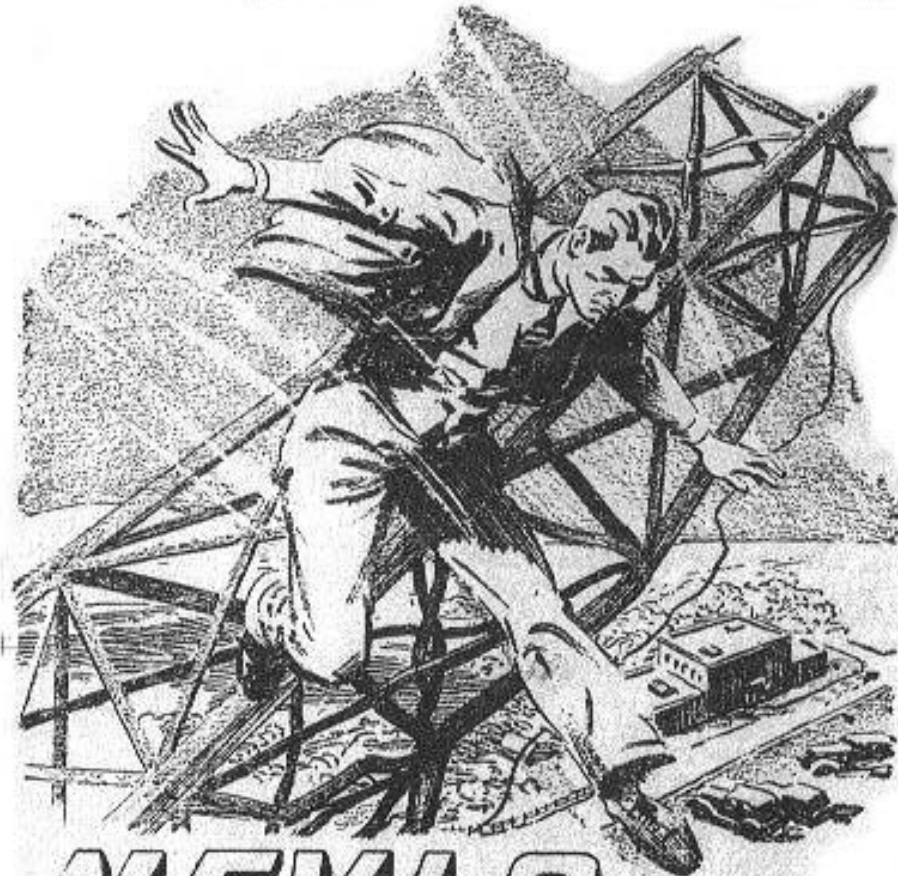
A Complete Book-length Novel

by **KENNETH ROBESON** Famous Creator of "Doc Savage."

*A satanic weapon, so unbelievable that it defies man's power, becomes part of a treacherous political scheme that The Avenger must stop.*

CHAPTER I.  
RED AS RUBIES.

# THE GRAY NEMESIS



## **NEVLO**

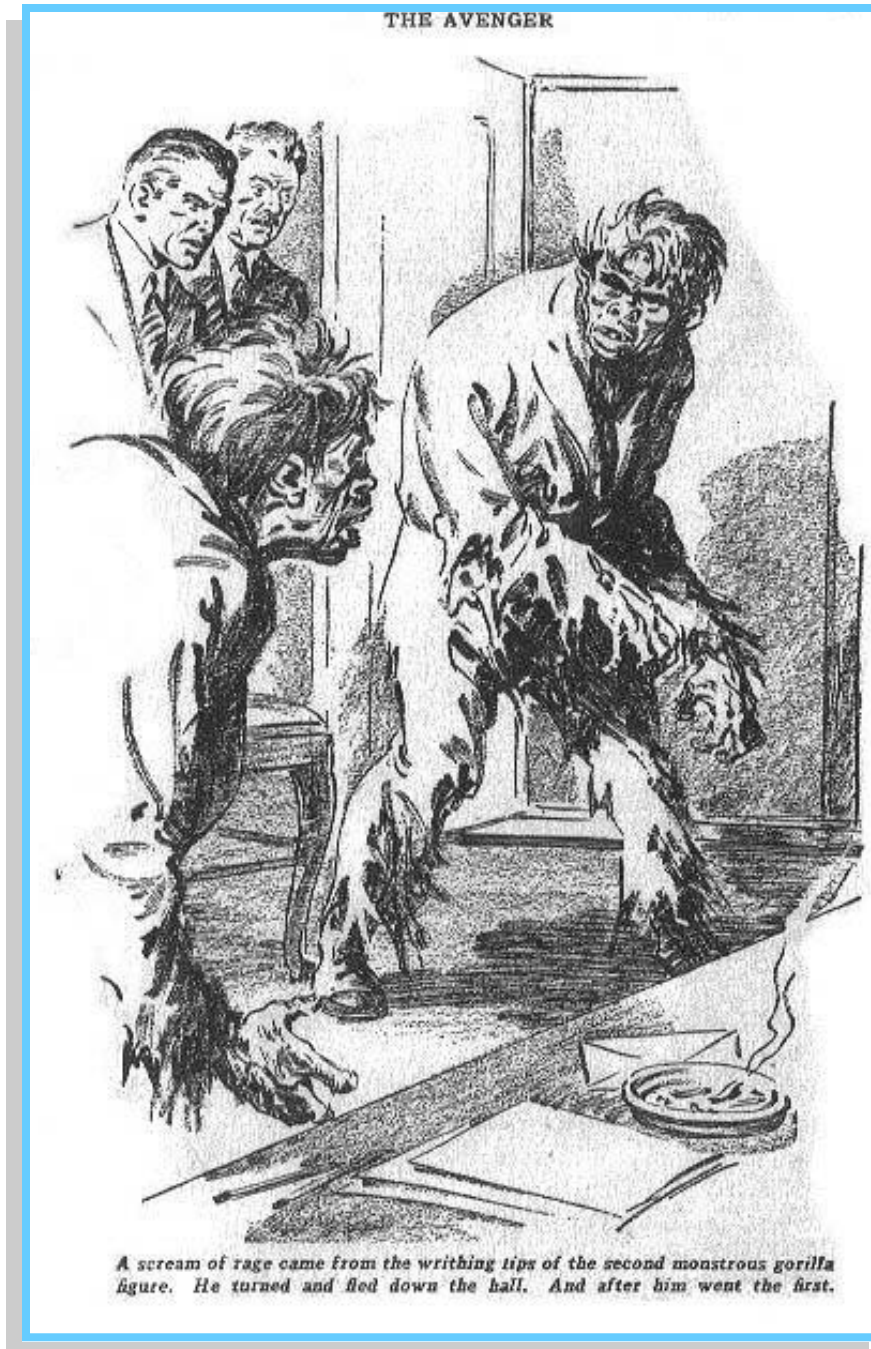
**A Complete  
Book-length Novel**

by **KENNETH ROBESON**, Famous Creator of "Doc Savage."

*A blackout of an entire continent—no light, no power anywhere—and Lick Benson, The Avenger, had to bring the master criminal to justice or bear the blame for it all!*

**CHAPTER I.  
DEDICATION.**

## THE GRAY NEMESIS



# THE GRAY NEMESIS



*From the war-torn continent came treasures of the world's finest paintings; paintings that any art patron would give all his wealth, even his life, to own. But when Dick Benson was given a chance to buy one, he learned that these priceless works were*

## **PICTURES OF DEATH**

**A Complete Book-length Novel**

**by KENNETH ROBESON,**  
Famous Creator of "Doc Savage."

**CHAPTER I.**  
**A LONG WAY DOWN.**



## THE GRAY NEMESIS

PICTURES OF DEATH



THE AVENGER



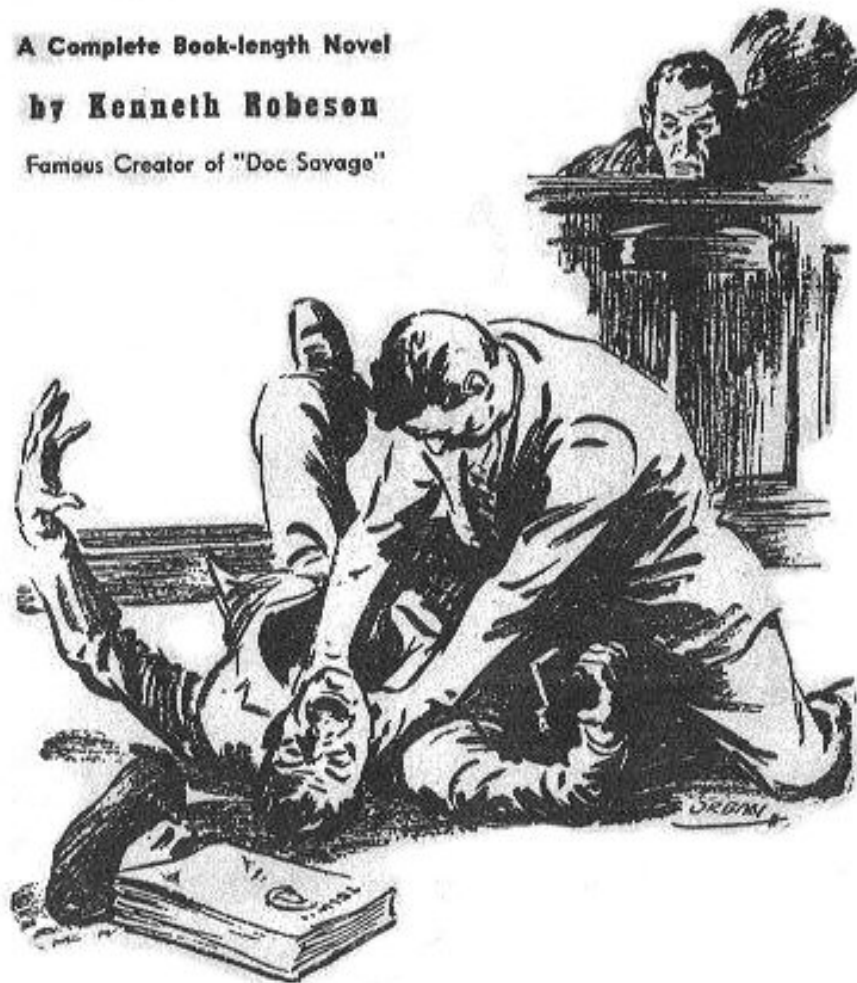
*"I won't swallow that! I won't I tell you!"  
The man licked dry lips, staring—staring at  
the vial of red liquid in Dick Benson's hand.*

# THE GRAY NEMESIS

A Complete Book-length Novel

by **Kenneth Robeson**

Famous Creator of "Doc Savage"



*Murder was the funniest joke in the world to these killers, and only a fatal bullet would halt their laughter. The calm, grim coldness of The Avenger was pitted against the murderous glee of*

## **THE HAPPY KILLERS**

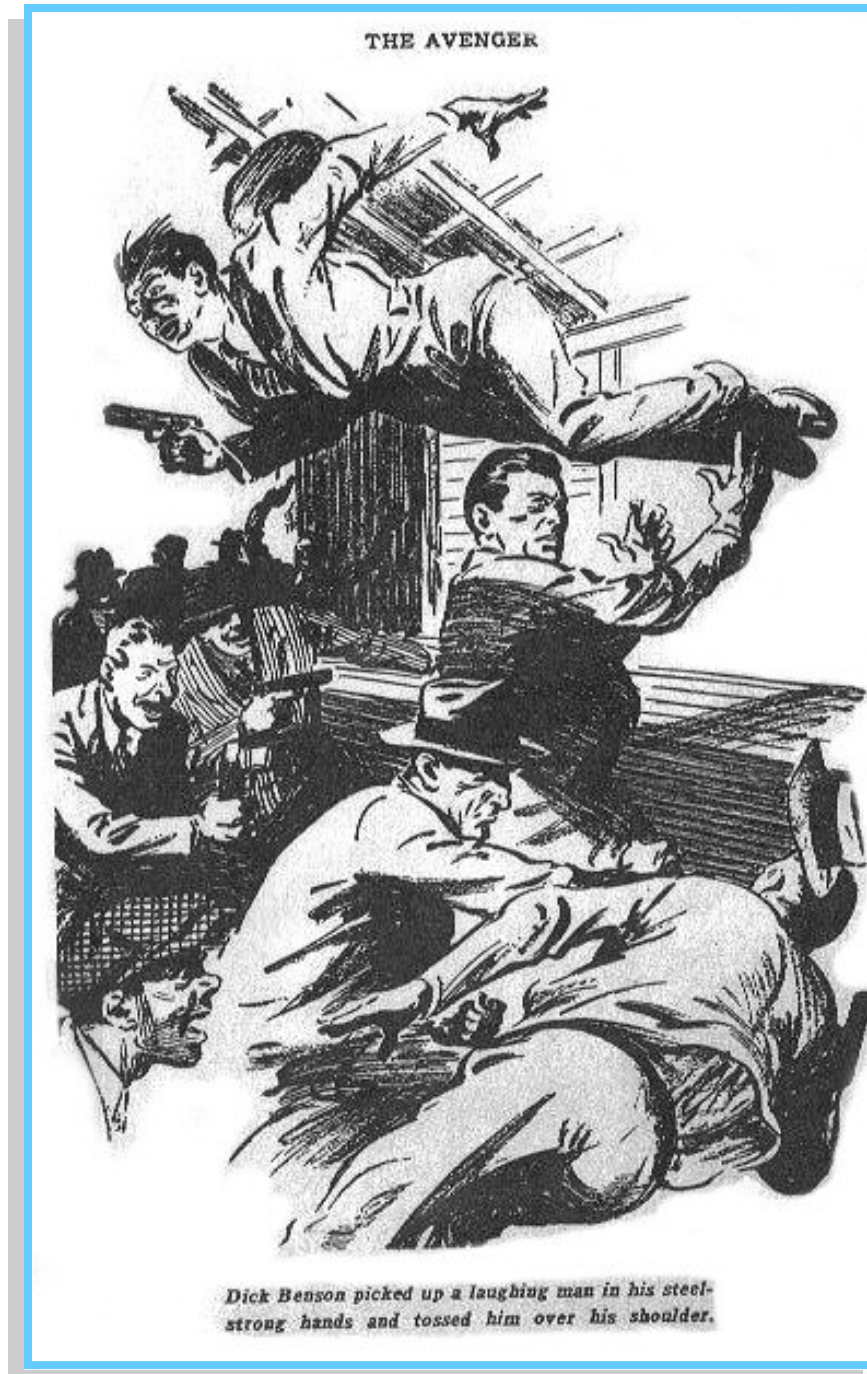
## THE GRAY NEMESIS

### THE HAPPY KILLERS

*Before Mac could even get his arms up, a gun cracked down on his head!*



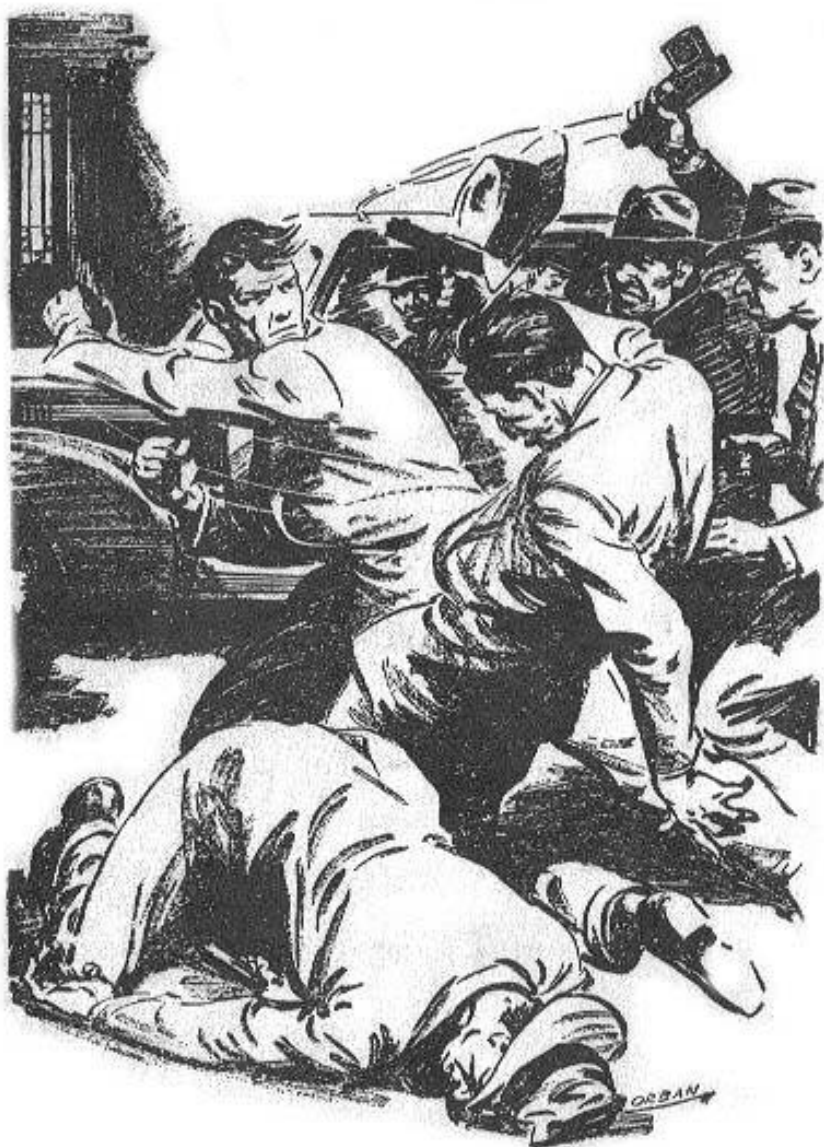
## THE GRAY NEMESIS



*Dick Benson picked up a laughing man in his steel-strong hands and tossed him over his shoulder.*

## THE GRAY NEMESIS

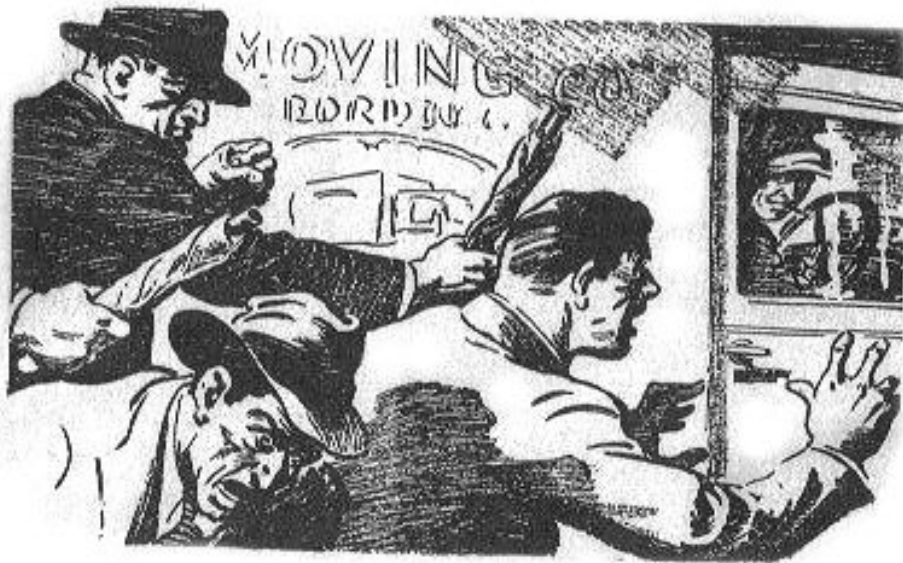
THE BLACK DEATH



*When one of the gunmen started to kick Dick Benson, who had fallen, Cole went berserk! Roaring, he knocked the man a dozen feet away and turned to two more.*

# THE GRAY NEMESIS

*The curse of death, declared by a vicious criminal to be delivered upon four men by The Avenger himself! So Dick Benson had to defeat these victims' efforts to kill him—to save them!*



## **THE WILDER CURSE**

*A Complete Book-length Novel*

by **Kenneth Robeson**, Famous Creator of "Doc Savage."

CHAPTER I.  
THE CALL OF DEATH!

## THE GRAY NEMESIS



*"The next time you try to break in here,  
I'll shoot you on sight!" Marsden yelled.*

