

Spring, 1940.

SO...
YOU'RE
RICHARD
BENSON,
HUH?



THE MAN
THEY CALL
THE
AVENGER?

I AM.





I HEARD YOU WERE SMARTER. SURE, YOU SOLVED MY "MUSICAL MURDERS" AND DEDUCED HOW -- WHAT, AGAIN?

AMPLIFIED ULTRASONICS.

--HOW AMPLIFIED ULTRASONICS CAN TURN BONES TO POLENTA. THAT'S SCIENCE FROM THE OLD COUNTRY, BY THE WAY. THERE'S NO AMERICAN MONOPOLY ON BRAINS.



(ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DO THIS HERE?)

(NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT.)



ANYBODY SPEAK ITALIAN?

"ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DO THIS HERE?"

"NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT."

I'M SORRY I ASKED.

WHICH YOU AND YOUR UNDERLINGS JUST PROVED BY TRESPASSING INTO MY STRONG-HOLD.

ANY QUESTIONS BEFORE THE END?





WHAT IF BENSON'S NOT THE STUPID ONE?



TRAITOR! YOU LED THE AVENGER HERE!

SPUTCH



COSA DIAVOLO--?



THIS MEAN WE CAN ALL BE OURSELVES AGAIN? I COULD FEEL THE PLAY-ACTIN' STARTIN' TO TURN ME PRECIOUS!

THAT'LL BE THE DAY, MAC.
NELLIE, COVER THE BOSS. THE REST OF US SHOULD TARGET THE CLARINETIST BEFORE HE CAN--





RATATATAT

RATATATATAT



--AND THERE'S NO WAY TO BRAKE THIS THING!



SKREEEEEEEEEE



EEEEYONK





IN THE RAGING
FLAME OF
TRAGEDY, MEN
ARE SOMETIMES
FORGED INTO
SOMETHING MORE
THAN HUMAN.

IT WAS SO
WITH RICHARD
BENSON.

HE HAD BEEN A
MAN. AFTER THE
DREAD LOSS
INFLECTED ON HIM
BY AN INHUMAN
CRIME RING--

--HE BECAME
A MACHINE OF
VENGEANCE--

--A FIGURE OF ICE AND
STEEL, MORE PITILESS
THAN BOTH, MASKING
GENIUS AND POWER BEHIND
A FACE AS DEAD AS A MASK
FROM THE GRAVE.

ONLY HIS EYES, LIKE
PALE-GREY FIRE, HINT AT
THE DEADLY SCOURGE THE
UNDERWORLD INVOKED
AGAINST ITSELF--



--WHEN CRIME'S
GREED TURNED
RICHARD HENRY
BENSON INTO
THE AVENGER.

THE INVISIBLE DEATH

CHAPTER ONE: THE TRANSPARENT MAN

THE SLOW CATASTROPHE OF TIME HAS DONE ITS DREAD WORK ON BLEEK STREET, A SINGLE BLOCK TUCKED AWAY ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE OF MANHATTAN. STRUCTURAL SUPPORTS SAG UNDER, BLEACHED-OUT FACADES, AND ONLY THE PALE GLOW OF STREETLAMPS SUGGEST THE MEREST HINT OF LIFE.



IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE ANY PLACE A FRIGHTENED-LOOKING WOMAN WOULD GO FOR HELP--BUT LUCILLE MENTER IS HERE. SHE PRESSES DEEPER INTO THE SHADOWS WITH EVERY BRAVE STEP, HER AGE-CLOUDED EYES SEARCHING FOR A REASSURING SIGN.

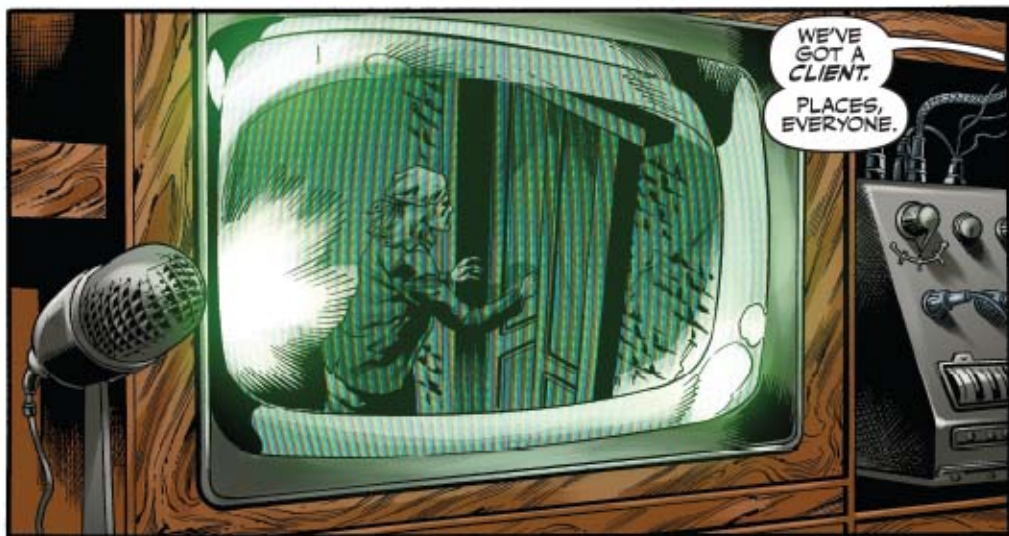


IF ASKED, SHE'LL SAY SHE WAS REFERRED BY HER NEIGHBOR, HILDA, WHOSE MIDDLE BOY GOT IN WITH A BAD CROWD. "THEY SAVED HIM," SHE WHISPERED. "ELSE HE'D BE IN PRISON, OR DEAD. GO TO BLEEK STREET.



"LOOK FOR THE SIGN."





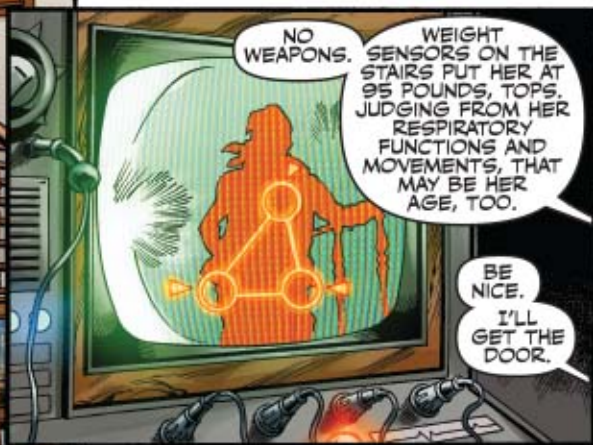
WE'VE
GOT A
CLIENT.
PLACES,
EVERYONE.



ONCE INSIDE, THE UNEASE THAT PROPELLED MRS. MENTER BEGINS TO MELT LIKE ICE. SHE KNOWS ORIGINAL PAINTINGS WHEN SHE SEES THEM, EVEN WITH HER OLD, FAILING EYES. SHE CAN SPOT A FINE TAPESTRY, AND THE CARPETING ON THESE STAIRS IS ALMOST TOO LUSH.



HOW COULD SHE BE WARY OF ANYONE WHO KEEPS SUCH THINGS OF BEAUTY?



NO WEAPONS.

WEIGHT SENSORS ON THE STAIRS PUT HER AT 95 POUNDS, TOPS. JUDGING FROM HER RESPIRATORY FUNCTIONS AND MOVEMENTS, THAT MAY BE HER AGE, TOO.

BE NICE. I'LL GET THE DOOR.



GOOD EVENING. WELCOME TO THE OFFICES OF JUSTICE, INCORPORATED.

COME IN, PLEASE. I'LL LET MR. BENSON KNOW YOU'RE HERE.

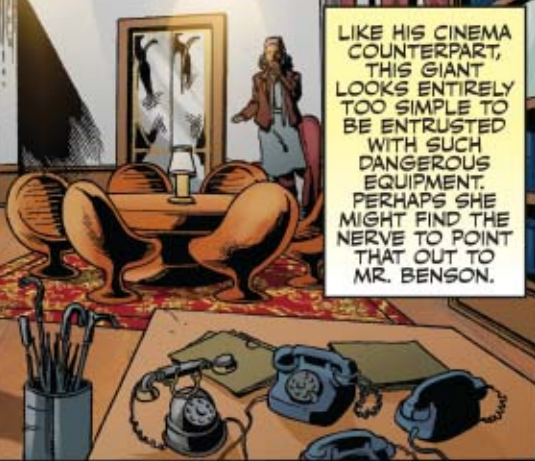


THE RELIEF LUCILLE MENTER FELT A FEW MOMENTS AGO VANISHES LIKE A SOAP BUBBLE. THE THIRD FLOOR POSSESSES NONE OF THE VESTIBULE'S REASSURING CHARACTER-- NOR IS IT MEANT TO.

RICHARD BENSON PLANNED EVERY INCH OF THIS LEVEL FOR MAXIMUM UTILITY IN HIS WAR ON CRIME. IT IS HIS HEAD OFFICE, WAR ROOM, LABORATORY, ARMORY, AND FORTRESS.



A LOUD CRACKLE WHIPLASHES HER ATTENTION TO ALGERNON HEATHCOTE SMITH, HARD AT WORK ON ONE OF HIS ELECTRICAL MARVELS. SHE HAD ONLY ONCE SEEN A MAN OF HIS MASSIVE SIZE ALONGSIDE SUCH OUTLANDISH GADGETRY: IN A FRANKENSTEIN PICTURE.



LIKE HIS CINEMA COUNTERPART, THIS GIANT LOOKS ENTIRELY TOO SIMPLE TO BE ENTRUSTED WITH SUCH DANGEROUS EQUIPMENT. PERHAPS SHE MIGHT FIND THE NERVE TO POINT THAT OUT TO MR. BENSON.



THE ABOMINABLE THING OF BRAIN AND EYES AND GANGLIA LUNGES SAVAGELY. IN THAT SPLIT-SECOND, BENSON'S KEEN EARS DETECT A SHARP INHALATION AND A RACING PULSE WHERE NO LUNGS OR HEART CAN EXIST.

THE MANIC STRENGTH OF THE "GHOST" BETRAYS SOLID MUSCLE AND BONE. EVERY LAYER, EVERY ORGAN OF A MAN IS IN VIVID EVIDENCE, SEEN OR UNSEEN.



IN THE PANDEMONIUM, THE AVENGER COOLLY REASONS THAT A CREATURE POSSESSING THE STRENGTH OF A MAN MUST ALSO HAVE HIS WEAKNESSES. ROCK-STEADY HANDS DRAW MIKE FROM ITS HIDDEN SHEATH.



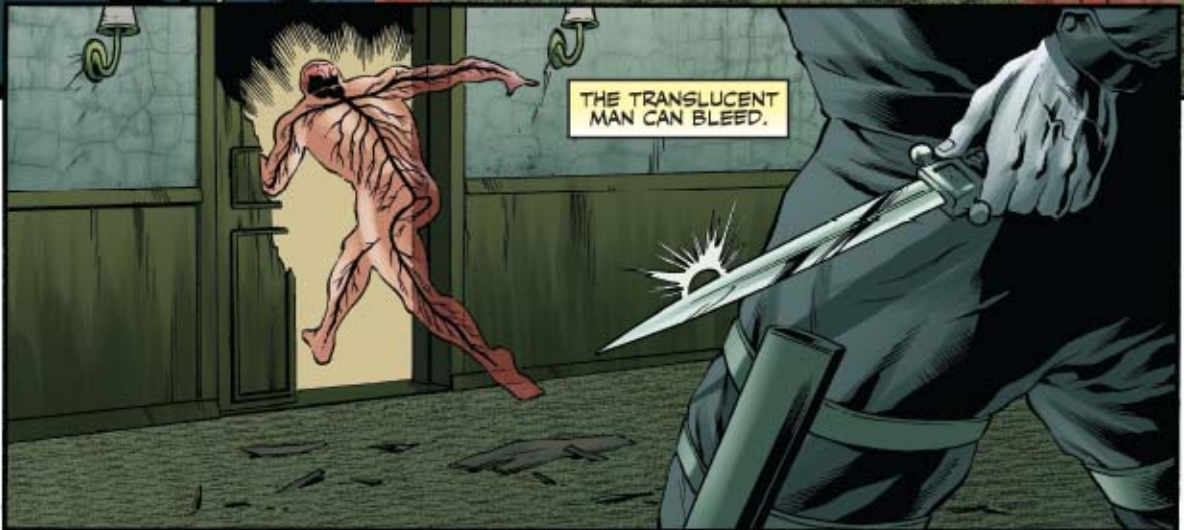
EYES OF STEEL-GREY FLAME DRAW A CAREFUL BEAD ON AN INVISIBLE TARGET.





THE BULLET CREAGES THE FLESH OF THE TRANSLUCENT MAN -- BENSON'S SIGNATURE SHOT -- BUT TOO IMPRECISELY. THE CREATURE WON'T GO DOWN EASILY.

STILL, THE BULLET PROVES ONE ESSENTIAL POINT.



THE TRANSLUCENT MAN CAN BLEED.



CHIEF, I'M WITH YOU. I'LL KEEP THE LIGHT ON THE THING.

THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY, SMITTY.



HE'LL LEAVE A TRAIL.

THE AVENGER'S PENETRATING EYES, AT HOME IN THE DARK AS IN THE LIGHT, FIND THEIR MARK.



IKE BITES DEEP. MORE BLOOD FLOWS. BUT THE THING KEEPS RUNNING. IF THE WOUND IS NOT TO BE THE STURDY CREATURE'S UNDOING, AT LEAST IT CAN PROVIDE A PATH FOR THE PURSUERS...

...A PATH THE AVENGER WOULD FOLLOW INTO HELL.



SLAM



CHIEF, PLEASE. DON'T.

WE HAVEN'T ELIMINATED THE POSSIBILITY THAT THIS IS ALL A TRAP.

WE HAVE NO WAY OF GUESSING WHAT'S ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT DOOR! YOU COULD BE WALKING IN ON CERTAIN DEATH!



I KNOW.