

*The Beginning of 1941.*

SPECIAL AGENT DON EARLY HAS DEDICATED HIS VERY EXISTENCE TO THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY, BUT **MOST** DAYS HE ISN'T THINKING HIS ACTUAL **LIFE** IS GOING TO BE FORFEIT...

YARGH!

EARLY! IS THIS YOUR GARBAGE?

STOP, DAMN IT!

BASTARD'S LIKE A HURRICANE!

...BUT TODAY, WHEN HE LOOKED UP FROM A MOUNTAIN OF SABOTEUR INTELLIGENCE PHOTOGRAPHS AND FIELD REPORTS, FOR A VERY **FEW SECONDS**, EARLY THOUGHT HE MIGHT BE ABOUT TO **MEET HIS MAKER**.

BECAUSE HE SAW **SOMETHING** IN THE **EYES** OF RICHARD HENRY BENSON, THE INDIVIDUAL THE PUBLIC OFTEN CALLS "THE AVENGER," THAT WAS SIMPLY TERRIFYING.





BENSON, I'M SORRY! YOUR PEOPLE IN THE CELL--I CAN EXPLAIN!

DAMN IT, EARLY! THE ONLY EXPLANATION THIS MAN NEEDS IS A PRISON CELL! LOCK HIM UP OR SHOOT HIM IF HE FAILS TO COMPLY! WHAT ARE YOU MEN WAITING FOR?



I HAVE SPECIAL POWERS CONFERRED ON ME BY THE CITY, EARLY! SOMEONE HAS OVERRIDDEN THEM!

I'VE UNEARTHED A PLAN TO ATTACK OUR NATION. I NEED MY PEOPLE FREE, OR THE CONSEQUENCES WILL BE ON YOUR CONSCIENCE!



I WANT--

SHUT YOUR MOUTH, COPPERSMITH, OR I'LL HELP BENSON THROW YOU OUT THE WINDOW MYSELF.



I GOT TAKEN OFF THE CASE, BENSON. A SABOTAGE PROBLEM NEEDS MY ATTENTION.

COPPERSMITH WAS PUT IN CHARGE OF SECURITY ON THIS VALTERIAN ARMS ALLIANCE THING. HIS JURISDICTION TRUMPS THE CITY'S, FOR NOW.

BUT I HEARD WHAT HE DID...



I'VE BEEN ON THE HORN WITH THE F.B.I., TRYING TO GET THE DIRECTOR TO CLEAR YOUR GUYS, BUT I'M TOLD HOOVER MAY NOT BE BACK FOR A WEEK!

I'M STUCK, RICHARD, BUT I'M TRYING!



ALAN COPPERSMITH. I ASSUME YOU'RE THE BROTHER OF A MAN I ONCE MET NAMED RYAN COPPERSMITH, FORMER POLICE SERGEANT, 73RD PRECINCT. THE FACIAL STRUCTURE RESEMBLANCE STRIKES ME.

RYAN LOST HIS JOB WHEN I SMASHED A FORGERY RING THAT WAS OPERATING WITH IMPUNITY--OR ASSISTANCE--RIGHT UNDER THE DEPARTMENT'S NOSE.

LITTLE SURPRISES ME AS TO WHAT MEN ARE CAPABLE OF. YOU WIN, FOR NOW.





THIS... **OUTRAGE** IS A TEMPORARY THING, I PROMISE YOU.

RICHARD, WE'LL BE FINE. BUT THIS SLEEPERMAN-- YOU AND COLE HAVE TO STOP HIM.

WE CAN TAKE CARE OF **OURSELVES**. FIND PIERCE LONNE. FIND YOUR FRIEND.



SMITTY. BEFORE WE MET, YOU'D SUFFERED BEING PUT BEHIND BARS BY CORRUPT, CAPRICIOUS MEN. I **SWEAR** TO YOU I WON'T LET THIS STAND.

BOSS! IT'S **OKAY**. DON'T LET THIS SLOW YOU DOWN.



OF COURSE, THERE'S NO WAY THIS CELL COULD HOLD ANY OF YOU IF I WERE TO--

NO, RICHARD!



IF YOU BREAK US FREE, THERE'LL BE COPS ALL OVER THIS INVESTIGATION! DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO!

THANK YOU, ALL OF YOU.

WHEN THE AVENGER'S OWN PEOPLE ARE MADE VICTIMS OF INJUSTICE, HIS WRATH BECOMES FORMIDABLE.



BUT THAT WRATH MAKES A GREAT MIND **VULNERABLE**, TOO.

COLE? WHAT'S YOUR ETA TO NEW YORK?

I SHOULD BE THERE IN A **COUPLE HOURS**.

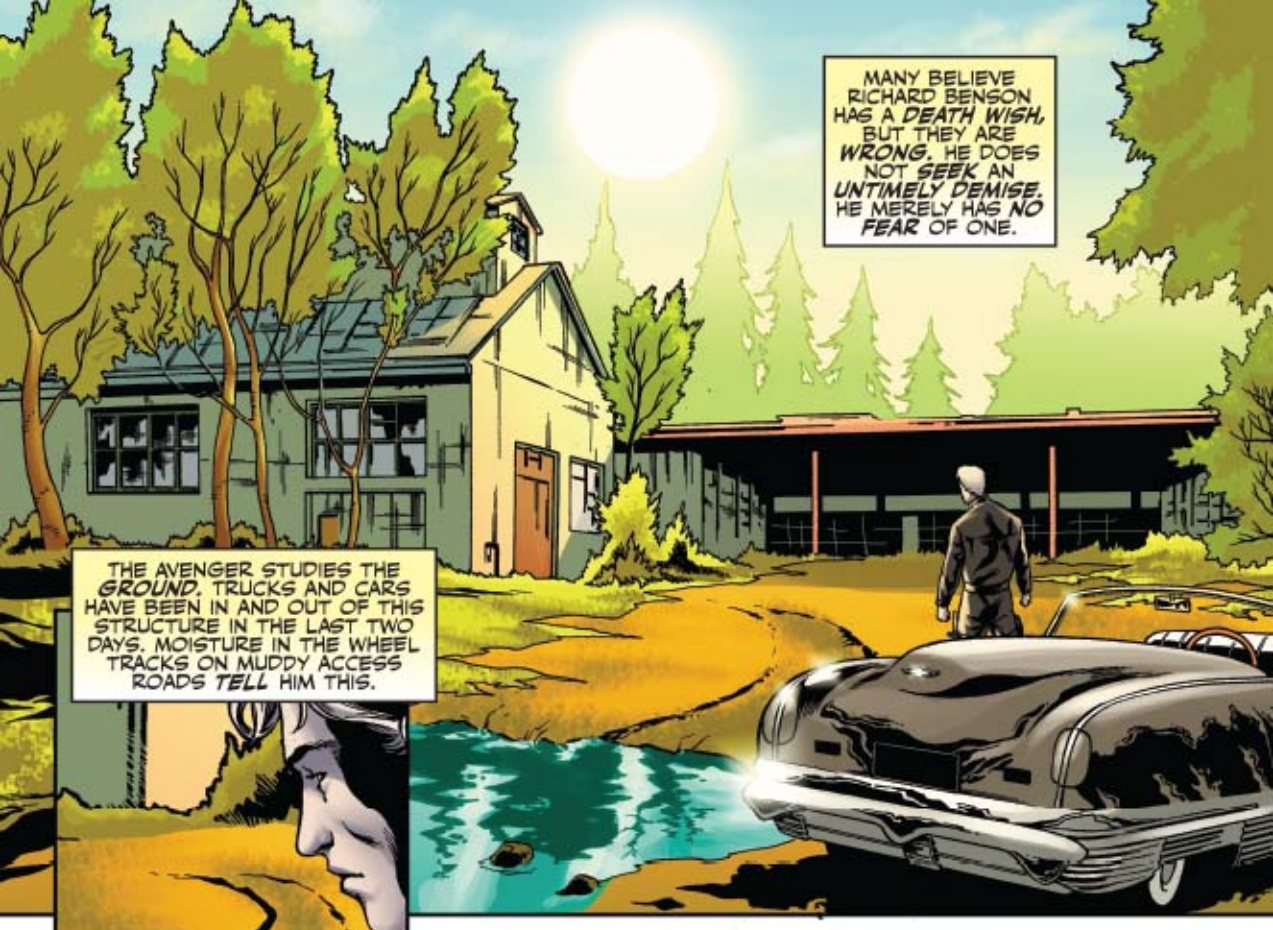
DID YOU FIND OUT WHERE THE **REGISTERED OWNERS** OF THE MEATWORKS ARE AT?




SURE DID! BUT IT'S CLEARLY A **BLIND**--AN ABANDONED BRICK FACTORY BUSINESS IN THE HUDSON VALLEY. BE REALLY CAREFUL IF YOU GO THERE, MAYBE WAIT FOR ME?

**NO TIME.**






MANY BELIEVE RICHARD BENSON HAS A DEATH WISH, BUT THEY ARE WRONG. HE DOES NOT SEEK AN UNTIMELY DEMISE. HE MERELY HAS NO FEAR OF ONE.




THE AVENGER STUDIES THE GROUND. TRUCKS AND CARS HAVE BEEN IN AND OUT OF THIS STRUCTURE IN THE LAST TWO DAYS. MOISTURE IN THE WHEEL TRACKS ON MUDDY ACCESS ROADS TELL HIM THIS.



THIS IS TOO EASY, THINKS BENSON. FATAL MISFORTUNE WILL SURELY AWAIT AN UNWARY VISITOR TO A PLACE LIKE THIS.



TIME FREEZES, BECOMES A MOMENT OF SILENT, INVISIBLE HORROR AND RAGE AS THE MAN WHOSE FACE BETRAYS NOTHING RECOGNIZES A TOY HE KNOWS YOUNG GENE LONNE HAD LOVED!



THE ENTIRE LONNE FAMILY WAS HERE, WHERE PIERCE WAS CLEARLY FORCED INTO CREATING A DISGUISE. FOR WHOM? PIERCE HIMSELF? THE SLEEPERMAN?

THE BENCH IS LITTERED WITH VARIOUS ITEMS, BUT THE AVENGER NOTICES THE COMPLETE ABSENCE OF DUST. THIS AREA WAS WIPED SPOTLESS BEFORE SOMEONE STARTED WORK HERE NOT LONG AGO. THE TRACES ARE THERE: LIQUID RUBBER, PLASTER OF PARIS, THEATRICAL MAKE-UP.





THE MIRROR PROVES TO BE THE UNDOING OF AN ATTACKER, AS BENSON LAUNCHES IKE, HIS THROWING KNIFE!

YOWWWWR!



GET ON WITH IT! YOU KNOW WHAT I TOLD YOU!



THE AVENGER'S OTHER COMRADE IN ARMS, HIS .22 CALIBER PISTOL, MIKE, IS AT THE READY.



TOBY CAN COVER HIM! YOU TWO-- WITH ME!

TIME TO CLOSE THE TRAP.



SHOULD SETTLE HIS HASH!

TOBY! OUT!



MIKE WHISPERS, AND A SOFT BULLET OF BENSON'S DESIGN HITS ITS TARGET'S SKULL WITH FORCE SUFFICIENT TO CONCUSS, BUT NOT SHATTER, THE MAN'S SKULL!

URK!

VIP