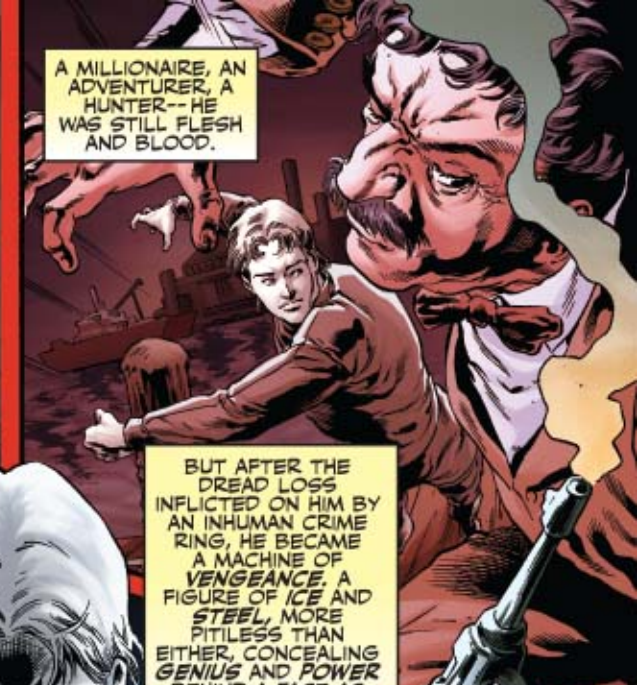



IN THE ROARING HEART OF THE CRUCIBLE, STEEL IS MADE. IN THE RAGING FLAME OF TRAGEDY, MEN ARE SOMETIMES FORGED INTO SOMETHING MORE THAN HUMAN.

SO IT WAS WITH RICHARD HENRY BENSON.




A MILLIONAIRE, AN ADVENTURER, A HUNTER--HE WAS STILL FLESH AND BLOOD.



BUT AFTER THE DREAD LOSS INFLICTED ON HIM BY AN INHUMAN CRIME RING, HE BECAME A MACHINE OF VENGEANCE. A FIGURE OF ICE AND STEEL, MORE PITILESS THAN EITHER, CONCEALING GENIUS AND POWER BEHIND A FACE AS DEAD AND PLIABLE AS A MASK FROM THE GRAVE.

ONLY BENSON'S 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.



PREVIOUSLY: WARNED BY A FRIGHTENED OLD WOMAN OF A "GHOST" HAUNTING HER TENEMENT, BENSON AND SMITTY INVESTIGATED TO DISCOVER A NEAR-INVISIBLE MAN WHO EXITED THROUGH A MYSTERIOUS DOOR.

BENSON FOLLOWED.

THE INVISIBLE DEATH

CHAPTER TWO:
ANIMAL CUNNING



CHIEF! YOU
ALIVE?
CHIEF,
SPEAK TO
ME!

THE DESPERATE
CRIES OF
ALGERNON
HEATHCOTE
SMITH
REVERBERATE
UP AND DOWN
THE INKY
SHAFT...

...ENABLING
RICHARD BENSON
TO SWIFTLY
CALCULATE ITS
PRECISE
DIMENSIONS,
AS A BAT USES
ECHOES.

EVEN AS HE
FREE-FALLS, HIS
COOL INTELLECT
WEIGHS ALL
FACTORS AND
ARRIVES AT THEIR
INESCAPABLE
CONCLUSION.

THIS IS NO
ELEVATOR SHAFT,
ABANDONED OR
OTHERWISE. NO
BUILDING OF THIS
VINTAGE WOULD
HAVE ONE.

A DUMBWAITER,
HOWEVER -- THAT'S
THE SORT OF THING
THAT WOULD LEAVE A
ROOF-TO-CELLAR
CAVITY ONCE IT WAS
EXTRACTED.



AND WHAT USE IS
A DUMBWAITER
WITHOUT
ACCESS PANELS
ALONG THE
ROUTE?

THE AVENGER'S
ICY PALE EYES
FLARE IN
TRIUMPH. HIS
SPRING-STEEL
MUSCLES
ACCOMPLISH
A MID-AIR
PIROUETTE.

HIS STRONG, SENSITIVE
FINGERS SLIP DOWN THE
WALL, SEARCHING FOR...

...SWEET
PURCHASE.

BOSS!

I'M FINE,
SMITTY.
MEET
ME IN THE
BASEMENT.

NOT WISHING TO
FURTHER ALARM HIS
ASSOCIATE, BENSON
TAKES PAINS TO
PROJECT A CASUAL
AFFECT EVEN AS A RANK
ODOR FROM BELOW
RINGS A NEW WARNING.

AT ADDING-MACHINE SPEED, HE CROSS-REFERENCES THE SCENT WITH MYRIAD SUBSTANCES STORED IN HIS VAST MEMORY. FINDING NO PRECISE MATCH, HE BRACES HIMSELF FOR UNKNOWN DANGER.

FORCING OPEN THE BASEMENT DOOR, SMITTY ENCOUNTERS YET ANOTHER DISTURBING SIGHT. SPATTERED OVER A BED OF RAZORED SPIKES IS A GREENISH JELLY THAT BURNS THE GIANT'S THROAT AND NOSTRILS. HIS EYES FEEL THE SHARP STING OF TEARS.

STAY BACK, SMITTY. YOU DON'T WANT TO BREATHE THIS STUFF TOO DEEPLY.

->HUCCH<-
WHAT IS IT?

PERHAPS MACMURDIE CAN TELL US.

OUR INVISIBLE ASSAILANT NO DOUBT EXITED FURTHER UP THE SHAFT, BUT SEARCH FOR HIM *NONETHELESS*. I HAVE TO PLACE AN URGENT CALL.

--TOO LATE, CHIEF. SHE SAID SHE HAD TO GO TO WORK, BUT SHE COULD BE REACHED--

--NOWHERE. MRS. MENTER WAS BAIT FOR A TRAP.



UNSURPRISED BY MRS. MENTER'S FLIGHT, THE AVENGER COOLLY INVENTORIES THE MYSTERIES OF THIS NIGHT.

A BRUTISHLY STRONG MAN IS AFFLICTED WITH TRANSLUCENCE. IS HE THE VICTIM OF SOME MAD SCIENCE, OR ITS PERPETRATOR?

A TRAP IS STRUNG WITH THE PRESUMED INTENT TO KILL DICK BENSON, PERHAPS BY FORCING SOME UNKNOWN CHEMICAL INTO HIS SYSTEM.

AN UNLIKELY SIREN SINGS HIM TO THE SNARE. IS LUCILLE MENTER A MERE PAWN, OR SOMETHING MORE?

CHIEF!

THE GHOST MAN IS LONG GONE. I FOLLOWED A BLOOD TRAIL ON THE GROUND FLOOR THAT LED OUT BACK TO AN EMPTY PARKING SPACE.

AND YOU WERE CORRECT. WHILE THE CONSTRUCTION ON THE SHAFT WAS NEW, NO ONE'S LIVED IN THIS FIRETRAP FOR YEARS.

EVERYTHING'S BEEN CLEARED OUT EXCEPT MRS. MENTER'S APARTMENT...

A DECOY. GO ON.

...AND I FOUND SOME RUDIMENTARY LAB EQUIPMENT IN 2A.

WHAT? DESCRIBE IT.

JUST AN OLD BUNSEN BURNER, A COUPLE OF FILTHY BEAKERS. NOTHING MUCH.

LET'S GATHER IT UP AND HURRY TO MACMURDIE'S.