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Title: Phantom From Space

Date of first publication: 1940

Author: John Russell Fearn (1908-1960)

Date first posted: Aug. 23, 2021

Date last updated: Aug. 23, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20210851

This eBook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

PHANTOM FROM SPACE

By
JOHN RUSSELL FEARN

First published *Super Science Stories*, March 1940.

Space-Death was horrible and agonizingly painful. But was it final? The Venusian masters of the Earth in the year 2314 had cause to wonder when Eward Hilto, whom they had executed for treason, came back to avenge!

The young man and girl, both of them in regulation uniforms with numbers blazoned on their breasts, sat in silence, muted indeed by the quality of their thoughts.

They were alone here in one of the countless parks dotted about the lower quarters of the city for the convenience of the workers. Convenience! The workers never saw anything beyond the parks except the mightiness of the city that held them in its grip—New York, metropolis of the earth, master-city of 2314. . . . But no Earth man ruled that city. No dictator had brought it into being. War had begun to die in 1950. By 1960 it had become an abomination of the past.

Then after thirty glorious years of freedom had come the menace from Venus with its shadow of vast armaments. Invasion—a world undefended in arms and science—the destruction of a world lay at the feet of the slug-like hordes. Rapidly the victors had commandeered the bodies of newly slain Earthlings, transferred brains into them, breathed life into them, mated them, and now—

Hardly anybody knew which were true Earthlings and which were the children of the original Venusians. It was only known that the Venusians under the control of the Presence, ruled the earth.

“And what a rule!” breathed the young man, as his thoughts followed the path of history. “Merciless subjection! No quarter—no chance! We’re held down here by those master intelligences. Up there is power and science beyond our knowledge. Think what has been mastered—what *will* be mastered. . . . You and I, Lyra dear, all in the world to each other, born down here, hardly remembering our parents, never knowing that world wherein, according to some far gone statesman, men are created free and equal. . . . But why not? *Why* not?” he demanded.

“Hush, Eward!” the girl murmured, glancing round. “A spy radio may hear you. It sounds so much like treason. . . .” She shrugged slender shoulders. “After all, what can we do?” Her serious blue eyes searched the young man’s strong face in the lights from the city. “We’re powerless! Remember, your father tried just after you were born to overthrow this rule. . . . You have heard what happened to him.”

“Exiled for life—to Callisto,” Eward breathed, his fists clenched. “To rot out his bones for these filthy, inhuman devils—”

“Hush!” The girl’s voice was sick with anxiety. “Please, please hush! That’ll do you no good—”

Eward Hilto, to give him his full name—LT4516Z6 to give his number—stared up with bitter gray eyes at the city. As always, that terrific expanse of buildings overpowered him. He

put his hands to his ears as if to shut out the thunderous, everlasting roar of the machines in these lower quarters, closed his eyes and visualized it all. . .

The eternal workers, working for they knew not what. It was rumored that mastery over the entire universe was the ultimate aim of the Venusians. Everywhere machines of stupefying size. Mastery of the atom's forces, of space travel, of electrical intricacies, mind science. . . Had not the Presence picked the twelve finest brains of earth, had them disembodied and placed in machines, from which he absorbed all the knowledge he needed and added it to his own? Nothing, declared the oppressed, could stand against that!

"And until somebody has the courage to fight these monsters we'll remain under their yoke," Eward breathed, looking up again. "Lyra, why *should* we?"

Lyra Garfane smiled emptily. The lights caught the copper gold of her hair as she glanced at the city. "You'd defy that?" she muttered.

"Yes," he answered quietly, then suddenly took her shoulders in his hands and shook her gently. "Lyra, we're human beings, not animals. We *own* this planet; it's our birthright, same as it is the birthright of millions of other rightful earthlings the world over."

The girl got suddenly to her feet. "It's empty talk, Eward, and you know it! You can't possibly—"

She broke off with a start as a shadow fell, suddenly before her. A massive guard in official uniform stood grimly regarding them both.

"Need I warn you," he said slowly, "that such talk as yours is treasonable? This time you have been warned. Next time you know what the answer will be. Return to your lodge houses—instantly!"

"Why should we?" Eward demanded, jumping to his feet. "It's time there was a change—a revolt! We're forever taking orders, or else being spied on by rotten little pickups hidden in the trees of these damned parks and relayed to your headquarters—I'll see you in hell before I'll obey!" he finished with a roar, and simultaneously he lashed out with a powerful fist.

But the blow never landed. Lyra screamed a hoarse warning. Eward was aware of something smiting across his head with unbearable pressure. His knees gave way beneath him as he fell into darkness.

Eward returned to his senses slowly, aware of the sweet smelling fluids of the great workers' hospital. He opened his eyes to dazzle-proof lights, found himself gazing into a face of considerable age—a mass of lines and seams from an apparent lifetime of concentration. The eyes were those of an earthman, kindly and thoughtful. Very dark, they seemed, unless it was contrast of the white face and hair.

"All right," the man murmured, putting an instrument back into his smock. "You're O.K. now. . . I'm Elman Dalmer, the head surgeon," he added briefly. "You got a pretty nasty knock from that paralysing beam. . . Guess you shouldn't have resisted. As it is, I'm afraid I've only revived you so you can be sent to your death. . ."

He turned away gravely, and as his figure moved Eward found himself looking at the dejected figure of Lyra in the grip of the guard. The man came forward with a cold, bitter smile, his deadly gun leveled.

"You were warned," he stated callously. "Now the Council must decide the issue. Come! And try no tricks this time!"

Eward got up slowly from the long table, mastered his dizziness and walked forward. He looked at the girl, but she averted her face—not so quickly that he didn't see the tears in her eyes, however.

Under enforced silence they marched steadily through the endless galleries between the stifling, pounding machine rooms—into elevators, along more passages, into an area of gathering opulence, and so at last to the places where the two had never been, the administrative sections of the giant city.

Finally, they were thrust into an immense office with black lined walls, its only furniture a mammoth control desk with three granite faced men in dead black, direct descendants of the original Venusian conquerors, seated before it. Two were busy writing, did not even look up. The centermost raised a pallid, implacable visage, spoke in a voice that reminded Eward of a twanging steel wire.

“Well?”

“Disobedience, sir, following deliberate statements tending to insult the Presence and his Council.”

“Both?” The eyes were like those of a snake.

“Man, sir—Eward Hילו. Woman, Lyra Garfane, agreed, but tried to stop man's remarks. I thought it unnecessary to report direct to the Presence, so I brought them to you.”

The thin lips smiled cruelly. “Naturally the Presence cannot be disturbed with such trifles. All right—you know the rules. Space death for the man, week in solitary for the woman. That's all.”

“You can't do it!” Eward burst out passionately, dumbfounded at the inhuman nature of the sentences. “You just can't! We've got to have a fair trial! I demand to see the Presence—”

“Take them out!” The man turned back to his papers.

The guard was far too strong to overpower. He whirled the pair outside as though they were children, pressed a button in the wall and waited a moment. When two more guards finally came up he thrust the struggling, kicking girl into their waiting hands.

“Eward!” she screamed frantically. “Eward! Oh, my God— Not space death! Anything but that. . .” Her voice faded down the passage as she was marched away in the direction of the prison cells. Eward stood staring bleakly after her, then his dazed eyes turned back to the leveled gun of the guard.

“Move!” came the cold command.

He turned very slowly, his fists clenched, jaws taut. Thoughts were tumbling through his mind—thoughts of horror that he could not properly marshal. A week in solitary darkness for Lyra; death for himself!

To be fired from that heinous space gun, without protection, without anything—a human projectile into space to meet instant destruction.

“No!” he screamed suddenly. “It's beyond all reason! No!”

“Keep going!” the guard snapped, and shoved and bounced him along brutally until at last he found himself in the projection room facing that devilish contrivance that had come to be looked upon as the guillotine of 2314, though not half so swift in its effects.

He struggled with the ferocity of a madman as he was bound with manacles to the firing mechanism. He screamed threats, insults and abuse, all without avail. . . Then he subsided into muted horror as he saw the vent at the end of the machine's long chute open wide—wide to the starry black of the night sky.

“Treason is its own reward,” the guard said stonily. Then he drew himself up and raised an arm aloft, muttered mechanically, “The Presence is just! All honor to the Presence!”

His hand dropped, slammed home a massive pole switch. Broodingly he watched Eward’s helpless body hurtle like a thunderbolt up the chute, impelled by irresistible forces, until he vanished at the end, a living being hurled into infinity.

Lyra Garfane knew better than to ask for reprieve. The officials of the city, and the Presence least of all, never granted mercy, never recanted. So she took the only other course, submitted to her sentence without a word and for a week lay in her pitch dark cell thinking and grieving by turns, only stirring to eat the food brought to her at regular intervals.

As she lay on her hard bed, accompanied by the eternal muffled thunder of the city, strange thoughts chased through her mind—thoughts that somehow she could not relegate to any voluntary desire. She was acutely conscious of the death of Eward. She saw him pass into space with a vividness that made her wince. All around her she felt space’s awful darkness, its crushing cold, saw the friendless, blazing stars, the icy moon.

Time and again her efforts at sleep were disturbed by this vision; until after a day or two it was replaced by another one. She saw the earth with its teeming cities and busy seas, saw New York in particular, pyramidal in design—pyramids of windows and in each window shone a light. Beacon towers, mammoth aircraft, endless people, ceaseless industry. And over it all brooded the one on whom no worker had ever gazed. . . The Presence. She could not see him distinctly.

Indeed she wondered why she should see these things at all, when never in her life had she had the opportunity to see anything beyond this drab quarter of the workers. Yet somehow, deep within her, she knew that what she saw was absolutely correct.

Only when she was finally released from solitary into the blinding light of day did the visions become dim, and finally cease altogether. She returned to her work as a machine minder, crushed and beaten in spirit, mourning the death of Eward. He had become known among his loyal friends as the man who had dared too much.

A dulled mind is little use for concentrating on a complex machine. Lyra found that out. It was two weeks after her return from solitary; her thoughts had wandered to the dead Eward—then suddenly a fearful wrenching pain at her hands brought her back to agonized life.

She screamed wildly, tore frantically at fingers already in the grip of whirling cogs. Fingers, hands, sleeves, crushing bone. . . The workroom spun in a mist of anguish before her eyes. . .

She came out of the darkness again with an aching head and immovable arms. Little by little she recognized the white cot of the hospital, the clean fresh smell that always hung about the place. Before her was the face Eward had seen when he had recovered—Elman Dalmer, the chief surgeon.

“All right,” he murmured, patting her shoulder gently. “You’ll be O.K. now. Crushed hands and broken arms. . .” He smiled. “Soon put you right with our modern surgery, my dear. You should have been more careful.”

Lyra licked her dry lips. “I—I was thinking. . .”

“Of Eward Hilto?”

She nodded slowly, closed her eyes to compress bitter tears. The master surgeon patted her copper hair gently.

“Poor child,” he murmured; then more cheerfully, “But don’t worry. I’m the master of this department, and my orders are inviolate. I have decided that you need extra special care—and you know what that means. . .”

The girl opened her eyes again. “That—that I become a patient in your private sanitarium?” she breathed.

“More than that. Until I see fit to release you you will become my ward. Nobody save me knows the extent of your injuries, even their nature. I have hinted at non-existent internal complications needing months to heal. . .” Dalmer stopped, his rugged old face smiling a little. “I know the circumstances of Eward Hiltó’s death,” he said softly. “I realise the ruthless treatment that was meted out to him and you. I am still an Earthman, and my heart goes out to you, my dear. So young, so much you could do. . .”

He broke off, shrugged. “It’s settled then. You shall become my ward. Later, maybe, I’ll use my influence to get you out of that infernal workers’ department. . . Now sleep.”

Lyra could only smile her thanks. Movement was impossible and words were inadequate. With eyes that were still moist she watched Dalmer get to his feet from beside her and resume his normal work. . .

Dalmer was as good as his word, and of course his authority was completely unquestioned. In two weeks, her hands and arms healed, Lyra left the hospital—but she did not return to work. Under special orders a private car took her to Dalmer’s luxurious home in the influential quarters of the city and there she was handed over to a matron.

But even so the girl could not fully understand it all. It was too unbelievable, too good to be true that Dalmer, for all his well known humanitarian aims, should make such terrific efforts to single her out for comfort and happiness. Her own rooms, good food, every want attended to. . . Incredible!

She spent that first day in an atmosphere approaching what she imagined Heaven must be like—then when night had settled over the vast city there came a knock on her door and Dalmer himself entered, smiling, dressed in ordinary civilian clothes.

“Everything all right?” he asked, in his quiet, grave voice, pulling up a chair.

Lyra smoothed her silken gown in mute confirmation.

Her eyes searched his face—that very old face with its infinite wisdom, so compassionate and different from those who were in command.

“Nothing could disturb me if it were not for a memory,” she said slowly, staring at the city. “The memory of Eward, hurled into space. Ruthlessly, horribly killed. . .”

Dalmer said nothing, but his eyes watched her steadily. She swung round to him abruptly.

“Why do you do these things for me?” she demanded. “Oh, don’t think I’m not grateful; I am indeed—but I do wonder. Girls have lost their loved ones in the workers’ quarters before now, have suffered worse things than me, yet you singled me out in this particular instance. I—I don’t understand. Really, I don’t.”

“I hardly expected you would,” the surgeon shrugged, “but you may be perfectly sure I did not pick you out of all those unhappy souls for purely sentimental reasons. I had a very definite reason—and part of it I intend to make clear tonight.” He got to his feet suddenly. “Put on a wrap and come with me. I’ve something special to show you.”

Lyra looked her surprise for a moment or two, then she obeyed and preceded the surgeon out of the cosy room. He walked by her side down the spacious corridor, led the way down the

broad staircase with its chromium cased lights, and so at last to a panel that slid aside in the wall. Together they stepped into a brightly lighted but rather cold laboratory.

“Surprised?” Dalmer smiled, as the girl gazed round in astonishment.

“Well—yes,” she admitted. “I don’t understand how—”

“My private workshop.” Dalmer surveyed the machinery. “The work of a lifetime, known only to a trusted few, myself, and now you. Unless—” He paused, pondering.

“Unless what?”

“Unless those infernal Venusian scientists have been clever enough to track me down with their instruments. They know so much. . .” and the girl saw the surgeon’s lean, powerful hands clench remorselessly. Then he turned back to her and smiled a little. “So, my dear, you are privileged,” he murmured. “Nor have I the slightest hesitation at placing my trust in you. Now come here. . .”

He led the way to a maze of machinery. From her own experience, the girl recognized electrical apparatus of remarkable design, in the midst of which, held at the approximate center of four massive bar magnets, was a screen of ground glass.

The surgeon pushed a chair forward, the girl sat down to watch him finger an array of switches. By degrees the screen came to life, finally gave a perfect image of the blackness of space, smudged with a gray speck. Instantly the speck leapt nearer under the force of more controls.

“X-ray telescope,” Dalmer said briefly.

The girl hardly heard him. Her whole being was concentrated on that gray speck; her heart was slamming against her ribs with the twin emotions of wonder and joy. . . For that speck was a man! A man of stone gray, even crystallized, his very clothes merging with his flesh. He was motionless, lying on his back in the depths of space apparently in an orbit between earth and moon. His arms were straight at his sides, his eyes closed. . . An incredible phantom of a man, but none the less—Eward Hilto!

“Eward!” Lyra whispered, between half parted lips. “Eward—! But—but it can’t be!” she gasped, staring at Dalmer as he brooded over the vision. “Space would destroy him! He would burst apart—”

“Not so, my dear. No breath in his body and no pressure outside. His body remains intact. So does his brain,” the surgeon went on tensely. “Every part of him is intact! Out there in space is Eward Hilto, the man who wanted to avenge this Godless Age, and if the fates permit, he shall! The time has come!”

“But how is he—? Why does he—?” Lyra stopped, torn between conflicting emotions of fear, bewilderment, and hope. She did not know what to say: so much was unexplained. Definitely, Eward ought to be dead—torn asunder, and yet. . .

She watched Dalmer again as he snapped another powerful electrical machine into action. The tensity of electrical forces gathered in the laboratory. Lyra felt her limbs tingling. Fascinated, she watched the play of nameless forces between electrodes, the savage lavender glowing of a mighty bar projector reaching to the roof.

“Stimulus,” Dalmer whispered, sweeping back the white hair from his face. “Stimulus! Life current—energy to bring the spark of life into that floating body, to give power to that superhuman brain—”

“Superhuman!” Lyra echoed.

“In time you’ll see why,” the scientist breathed. “Watch as this power hurtles over the gulf of space to him and— There!” he finished dramatically, and pointed.

The girl jumped up from her chair, hands to her lips in amazement, eyes wide. The figure of Eward Hילו *had* stirred. About his gray head there hung the remotest suggestion of a lavender beam. . .

“Dalmer!” she screamed, swinging round. “What does it mean? You’ve got to tell me what —”

Then she broke off and turned in alarm at a sudden ripping, tearing noise. Instantly Dalmer slammed off the switches of his apparatus and swung round to face a cordon of uniformed men as they marched into the laboratory, taking care to avoid the hot edges of the secret door their flame guns had sliced open.

“So!” the foremost guard said smoothly, leveling his gun—and Lyra recognized him as the one who had arrested her and Eward. “We finally found you out, Dalmer! For months we’ve been taping you. Even the Presence himself has been at work with the Twelve Brain Computer, and now. . .” He shrugged. “You’d do well to explain your secrets. . .”

“I’ll explain nothing!” Dalmer’s rugged face set obstinately.

“This girl,” the guard went on, his cruel eyes turning to her. “She is with you, is she? She was the one who also plotted treason with Eward Hילו. I remember her now. So all three of you were in on it, eh? Very, very interesting. If you won’t talk, Dalmer, she undoubtedly will. We have methods, remember—”

“Don’t tell them anything, Doctor!” Lyra cried hoarsely, as her arms were firmly seized. “Don’t give anything away, please! I can stand all they can do to me.”

“That,” said the guard, “remains to be seen. Now march—both of you. We’ll see how much flesh and blood can stand, girl.”

Realising only too well the futility of resistance the two submitted to being forced from the great house—all of it under guard, they noticed, as they passed through it—and afterwards being led through interminable routes to the city’s great prison regions.

Lyra at last looked up, upon an array of glittering instruments, tremendously improved versions of old torture instruments brought into being by the mysterious Presence and his hellish minions.

“In God’s name, you can’t do this!” Dalmer panted, as the girl was forced, kicking and struggling, to a device resembling a new style of the Iron Maiden. “I’ll speak—”

“No!” Lyra screamed. “No—not yet! They can’t use me as a means to—”

“A fool’s courage,” the guard murmured, as the clamps closed round the girl. “Don’t you realise, woman, that that instrument will break your limbs one by one? Don’t you realise the delicacy of its adjustment, its brilliant system of extracting the last ounce of suffering from a victim before bringing death? You would dare *that*?”

Lyra hung her head, made a futile effort to move. Two of the guards moved to the controls.

“First, your suffering to wring confession from Dalmer,” the leader murmured softly. “Then, audience with the Council. . .” He raised his hand to give the signal for the torture to commence—but he never got that far. He stood with his hand half raised, lips parted, staring fixedly at something gray and indeterminate moving out of the shadows. How it had gotten there he could not imagine, neither could the rest of the men as they stood gazing. Only Dalmer gave a faint smile.

“What the hell is it?” demanded one.

The Thing became clearer—the figure of a man of stone gray, as though he were covered in chain mail. His eyes stared with wide, openly baleful hypnotism. The tight shut mouth was a carven line. Certainly he did not speak, but his thoughts battered into the brains of captors and captives alike.

“I come—to avenge!”

With that his two hands rose, the fingers pointing at the Iron Maiden. What happened nobody could properly tell, but the bolts and bars of the terrible instrument flew apart like dust and sent the fainting girl reeling to the floor.

“To such as you—*This!*” came the thought, utterly implacable.

The guards swung round to run, but they didn’t even take two steps. The hands went up again: from them there sprang visible streamers of electric energy, lashing forces which brought the guards to their knees. Their writhing bodies were stabbed through and through, hurled them into instant death.

Then the vision was gone—as though it had never been. Slowly Dalmer moved forward, lifted the slowly recovering girl in his arms.

“It’s—it’s all right,” he whispered gently. “Quite all right, my dear. . . That was Eward. He’s come. . . I knew he’d come. We’re safe—all the earth is safe. The day of reckoning has arrived. Courage, Lyra; all this was planned—by me. Now let’s try and get back to my laboratory.”

The slaying of the guards in the dungeons was unquestionably the foundation stone in a reign of terror for the Venusian masters of the world.

At first they refused to credit the rumors of a gray avenger in the form of the dead Eward Hילו who smote down without question—then as strange things began to happen, as their most careful plans were ruined, they had to believe.

Their ships of war were mysteriously destroyed overnight. Five thousand of them were permeated with some mysterious energy which had so altered their molecular structure as to cause them to fall steadily to pieces.

Two nights afterwards every armament dump in the city was rendered useless. Again, enigmatic radiations had been at work, this time to render explosive gases incapable of instant release. Instead they dissipated slowly of their own accord, without harm to the workers.

Nor were these mysterious assaults confined entirely to New York. From every city came the same cry of baffling attacks on the Venusians. Finally, the Presence himself went to work, got busy with the Twelve Brain Computer to make a perfect plan of counter-attack. His plan failed utterly. Desperate with fury he ordered the instant projection of one thousand suspected Earthling traitors. . . The projector broke down, utterly jammed.

Then a new tale reached the Presence. In all there were five underlings in his rule of the world, scattered about different countries in giant controlling offices—and Granjik, first of the Five, had seen the Gray Avenger! Five minutes afterwards he was found—stone dead.

One by one the controllers died—horribly. The Presence felt—saw—his rule crumbling. His minions had already panicked. Earthlings were revolting in their millions and gaining the upper hand, realising the Gray Avenger was their friend.

The Presence made a last desperate effort to avert the end. He locked himself behind his invulnerable walls and figured out details of a scheme to trap this illusive mystery man who struck without mercy. . . But through all the walls, through all the thousands of traps, the Gray

Avenger appeared untouched. For the first time the Gray Avenger and the enshrined Presence of the world met. . .

Only the Gray Avenger was seen thereafter. In the controlling chair of the Presence was a mass of ashes fanned by the roof ventilator. . .

And with the passing of the Presence hell broke loose over the world as the Earthlings made their final drive, aided as ever by the being who seemed to have the forces of the very cosmos at his finger-ends. . . Even when victory was assured and man had resumed his rightful heritage, the Gray Avenger did not depart.

He appeared again in a secret laboratory owned by Dr. Dalmer. Transfixed, still dazed by the events of the weeks, Lyra stood gazing at the gray, terrible being who had been the man she had loved. But Dalmer merely looked thoughtful, moved a switch on the board behind him.

For a moment the ghost of an expression crept over the gray, inexorable face—then Eward suddenly relaxed and crashed full length to the floor.

“Wait!” Dalmer snapped, as the girl moved forward. “Leave him. My apparatus will lift him. He has the cold of space about him and to you or me that would mean death. Wait a moment. . .”

Lyra nodded and stood aside as a cradle device lifted Eward onto the table. Dalmer went to work with thermostatic devices, and then started in on an operation in which the girl found herself forced to be an assistant. She saw scales removed and flesh grafted in place of them, saw the skull trepanned and brain surgery at its best. It seemed an endless procedure. . . . But at last it was done.

Yet even then weeks had to elapse for results, weeks which crept into months whilst Earthlings reformed their laws and fought their way back to normalcy.

Then one day the eyes of Eward Hילו opened, looked around him. From then on he recovered rapidly, at last was able to hear the reason for the strange memories which plagued him, and the girl too heard the explanation of countless things that puzzled her. . .

“In the first place, Eward,” Dalmer said, seated in an armchair in the corner of the bedroom, “when I operated on you for that blow over the head with the paralysing beam, I trepanned a portion of your skull as well and fixed inside a metal connection between the normal and subconscious areas of your brain. That, by medical law, gave you a complete brain. Normally we use a fifth of our brains, of course, the rest probably being there for evolutive reasons later. . . Also, I did something else.

“I infused into your blood stream a drug which I knew would so harden your body and heart that neither could be destroyed in your terrific rush out into space. Naturally, I knew when I worked that you would receive the death penalty. Clear so far?”

“Yeah, I guess so,” Eward nodded, frowning. “What then?”

“I took a gamble with the cosmos,” Dalmer said slowly. “I knew that with my drug your body and brain would be intact, though you yourself would be dead. I knew too that if your brain could be brought back to life it would be capable of terrific powers, as also would your body.

“I knew too that if the cosmos is what science claims it to be—that is, the very structure of infinite thought and power itself—you would unquestionably, once revived, come under the influence of that thought-sea all around you. I relied on the original theory of Jeans that the ether *is* mind, an observation proven by our later scientists. . .

“After you had finally reached a position where the gravities of moon and earth held you in a neutral field, I sent across space a radiation corresponding to the one which begot life on this earth in the first instance. My judgment was right, for it infused life back into your still undamaged body. Shock alone had been the cause of your first death. Life returned. Little by little your body built itself up to stand spatial conditions, even as a man can stand increasingly powerful electric charges by slow acclimatization. It was the law of adaptability, of course. You became a man of space.

“But with that return came knowledge, and the remembrance of your fate. And to your knowledge was added the even greater knowledge of the cosmos itself. Infinite knowledge of dimensions, powers, radiations—things denied to ordinary mortals. Further, your body was a medium for these forces and radiations, as a bulb is the medium for electric light. You could allow terrific powers to pass through you without harm because with a mind like yours you had mastered them, not they you! You see? Almost in a literal sense, you ‘held the wind in your fist’.

“The Twelve Brain Computer made things easier for you. It made the plans of the Presence twelve times clearer to you. With your power to pass through solids and in any dimension you accomplished the destruction of those beings you so bitterly hated, saved the girl you loved—Lyra, and the man who had protected her—myself. Again because of your love for Lyra you returned to this laboratory when your work was done. I closed a switch powerful enough to send a current forth to heterodyne your powers for a moment. In that brief period I hastily trepanned and broke your brain connection. The rest was simply a matter of restoration to normal by synthetic grafting and so forth. . .”

“Then,” said Lyra slowly, “the thoughts I kept getting whilst in solitary were from Eward?”

“Of course. His mind was not dead. Mind cannot die.”

Eward pondered through an interval. “Slowly the memory of it is fading,” he muttered. “For a while I was a God, impelled by only one purpose—vengeance. But now— You said you planned it all?”

“For twenty years and more,” Dalmer admitted quietly. “I couldn’t go into space myself because somebody was needed to control the instruments, and only I had the knowledge. I waited for the right man to come. I knew where he was. I knew that if Providence was with me he would finally reach me. At last he came— An accident with a paralysing beam, and you!”

“And—and you also sought out Lyra and protected her,” Eward breathed. “Why? Why us particularly?”

Dalmer smiled slowly. “Because, Eward, you are my son!”

Both Eward and the girl stared in dumbfounded amazement.

“So strange?” Dalmer chuckled; then shook his head. “No! I was exiled to Callisto, but I escaped, came back. I fought my way with medical knowledge to the place of head surgeon, always with my plans of revenge on the way. I knew where my son was; I knew of his aims. I knew where his loved one was too. I resolved my son should some day be the Gray Avenger. What more could a parent do than watch over his daughter to be whilst his son was destroying a Godless persecution?”

Dalmer said no more. He could not. Regardless of instructions Eward leapt out of bed and tore across to the armchair. Not a second later the girl was on top of him. Together they

smothered the helpless scientist under the enthusiasm of their affection.

[The end of *Phantom From Space* by John Russell Fearn]