



Phantom

By Gary L.M. Martin

Chapter 1: The Last Ghost Hunter

"Don't go," Alanna said, putting her arms around Gerard. Actually, of course, it was Alyssa putting her arms around Clarence. The short, dark haired Jewish woman wrapped her arms around the tall, black muscular man and pressed her heavy Semitic breasts against him. But while it was Alyssa's arms and Clarence's body, those in control at the moment were Alanna, inside of Alyssa, and Gerard, who was inside of Clarence.

Alyssa Kleinberg and Clarence Norman were *Samaritans*, those few who were trusted with the secret of existence of *kalaks*, because they freely gave their bodies for the use of others. Alyssa, of her own free will, let Alanna Maskirovna inhabit her body, just as Clarence Norman

did with Gerard. They were aware of everything their *kalaks* said and did in their bodies, and they could still control their own bodies, when not directed by their riders. But at the moment, Alyssa let Alanna control her utterly. She knew how much Gerard meant to Alanna.

They had only been seeing each other for 18 months, a very short period of time in the enormous lifespan of a *kalak*, but during that time Alanna had grown very close to Gerard. Of course, Alyssa and Clarence went along for the ride. If Alyssa had refused to go along, Alanna would have respected her wishes, she was sure of it; but after some initial awkwardness, Alyssa quickly found something quite appealing in Clarence Norman's large, black body.

Clarence's body was tall, and muscular, and strong; and the first time Alyssa cupped his large hands, she knew she was in for other surprises as well. Clarence turned out to be an incredible lover, and before long Alyssa grew to crave his noble African rod. And as he made love to her, with Gerard inside of Clarence and Alanna inside of *her*, Alyssa found herself doing her own mattress dance with Clarence, who smiled at her during the ritual of reproduction in a way that convinced her that it was really *him* and not Gerard doing the dancing.

And so Alyssa was also sad that that Clarence was leaving, and concerned for him.

"I have to go," said Gerard, through Clarence's mouth.

"Don't," Alanna groaned in Alyssa's throat. "It's too dangerous."

"The Penguin must be stopped," said Gerard, feeling the warmth of Alyssa's sagging Jewish breasts against his strong black chest. They felt like warm eggplants that were wilting in the summer heat. He liked them nonetheless because he associated their warmth with Alanna.

"Let someone else do it," Alanna pleaded, pressing her body against his all the more tightly, in an effort to change his mind.

"Others have tried."

"And they have all failed," said Alanna, looking him squarely in the eye. "You're the last ghost hunter. If you go, you won't come back." She grinded her chest against his. How she longed to feel his naked black body against hers!

"I am a Phantom," said Gerard.

"Marco was a Phantom, and he never came back," said Alanna.

"I have to try. The Penguin must be stopped," said Gerard.

"Then take me with you!" said Alanna. She saw doubt in his eyes and hope bloomed inside of her. "I'm a Phantom too. We'll double our chances."

Gerard considered for a moment, then he shook his head sadly.

"Why not?"

"The Penguin is very wily. He would find a way to use you against me," said Gerard. He saw the disappointment on her face. "In any event, you are needed here."

"I am?" Alanna frowned on Alyssa's face.

"You are. If I fail, you will be the last Phantom remaining in the Circle, and the only one who can stop the Penguin."

Alanna opened Alyssa's mouth to object, but Gerard put his lips over hers. For a long moment neither spoke. Then Alanna pulled back and said, "Make love to me, Gerard. One last time." She couldn't bear to let him go without feeling his turgid blackness inside her one more time.

Ghosts, or *kalaks*, were rare.

Ghost Hunters, or *kalaks* with the ability to sense other *kalaks*, were *exceedingly* rare.

Kalaks could be sensed by other *kalaks* when they were floating free. But when they took a host, they could only be sensed when they wanted to. They could "dim" themselves and go dark to detection from most *kalaks*.

Except Ghost Hunters.

"*The Earth will burn.*"

That was the message that the Penguin had sent to the Circle.

It was no idle threat.

The Penguin had been responsible for numerous massacres. He has caused the USS *Harpax* to crash upon landing at Gilmore Field, killing everyone aboard; he had caused the explosion of the Experimental Quark Reactor in Sevastopol, vaporizing the entire city and creating a new inlet for the Black Sea; and he had blown up the Eiffel Tower in Paris, which, while only killing a handful of Frenchmen, struck a major symbolic blow to Gaulic phallic pride.

Three Ghost Hunters had been sent after him.

There was Miriam Frelander, she of the confident smiles.

Miriam never returned.

There was Gavin McGuinness, a steady, clear headed hunter.

Gavin never returned.

And then the Circle, realizing its errors almost too late, sent Marco Antonelli, a full Phantom. Miriam and Gavin, for all their Ghost Hunting skills, were mid-ranking *kalaks*, powerwise.

And then Marco never returned.

And so Gerard de Montpellier, the last Ghost Hunter, born in the year 1854 in southeastern France, was sent. Alanna had argued bitterly against it, but the Circle had overruled her.

Gerard smiled as he sniffed the air around Grand Forks Air Force Base.

The Penguin was here.

He had spent several weeks on the Penguin's trail. Each time he picked up the scent, he began to get more and more of an intuitive sense where the Penguin had gone next.

And finally, he had tracked him here, to Grand Forks Air Force Base. Clarence was wearing the uniform of the territorial armed forces of the United States of America; and of course, Gerard had had the necessary identification to enter the base. The ability to fabricate such things as needed quickly became a given in his profession.

"Do you see him?" Clarence asked, with a little anxiety in his voice.

Clarence was a good man. There wasn't a lot of choice among Samaritans, as they were very few in numbers. That was why Gerard was glad that he and Clarence got along so well. And yet... Clarence was always nervous on a mission. Well, that couldn't be helped.

"No... wait," said Gerard. He suddenly set his sights on an officer, entering a supply shed.

It was *him*.

Gerard quickly started walking to the shed. What was the Penguin doing in there? It looked like a maintenance shed. What could he possibly want in there?

Gerard entered the shed, his wits on full alert. He had no weapon, he had no need of weapons; he himself was the weapon.

The shed was filled with grey utilitarian shelves with supply parts on them. Gerard walked from one to the next to the next... and then he ran out of shelves.

"Where did he go?" Clarence asked.

"Are you looking for me?" another voice asked.

Gerard spun around, but it was too late. The Penguin grabbed him with his arms, and send powerful psychic energies flowing into him.

Gerard gritted his teeth and tried to fight back. At first he had some luck slowing the flows. But the Penguin was strong. *Too strong!* Before long he felt his very psychic being starting to melt away. In the background he heard Clarence screaming.

In his last few seconds, Gerard found himself transfixed by that face, that half white, half black face with dark eyes that had seen every horror imaginable.

"So very good to see you," said the Penguin, in a musical voice. And then Gerard found himself crying out, and everything went black.

The Penguin dusted off his hands as he looked down at the burned out shell that had once been Clarence Norman. That was the fatal weakness of ghost hunters; they were always over confident.

Because the Penguin also had the rare, rare ability to hunt ghosts.

The Penguin smiled, and looked down at the body. "You were hardly a challenge, were you?" he said accusingly. Receiving no answer, he said, "Well, I'd better be off to destroy the world, then."

Chapter 2: The End of the World, Part I

It was nothing personal.

All right, it was *intensely* personal.

The Penguin was set on destroying the world. A world which had mocked, serially abused him, and then rejected him utterly.

It was only fair.

But the Penguin had nothing personal against the other officers in Bunker Number Four. As he walked around, shooting each man with his standard issue compression pistol, set on maximum (of course!), he realized he felt no malice towards the other Nova Missile Officers in Bunker Number Four.

None at all.

The Penguin had actually managed to kill three of the officers before the other two became alerted. There were always six officers to a bunker.

And the Penguin was number six.

Officer Number Three cried out, and that alerted Number Four, who cried out, "Shooter!" and ducked below his console, drawing his weapon.

Officer Number Five was not nearly so quick, and the Penguin caught him gaping with his mouth open, still processing the sight of seeing one of his fellow officers gun down *another* of his fellow officers.

The Penguin blew a fist sized hole in his chest with a compressed energy bolt.

Officer Number Four stood up and, aiming carefully, blew a hole in the Penguin's chest.

The Penguin looked started for a moment. He looked down at the hole in his chest. Then it slowly started to seal up.

Now it was Officer Number Four's turn to let his mouth drop open. But not for long. The Penguin disposed of him with a single shot.

As the Penguin sat down at a console, he ignored the blares of alarms. They would not get down here in time. He studied the procedure he had sucked out of the minds of one of the Nova Command officers, who had briefly been his hosts for at time, and started operating controls. Within moments, a new protocol sounded, and a computerized voice said, "Warning. Missile Bank Four in final stages of launch."

"Yeessssss," the Penguin said, with a sultry smile. He checked the holoscanner, and made sure he was in the right command menu, and then he saw it.

The holographic LAUNCH button.

"Goodbye, cruel world," The Penguin chortled, and slammed it with his fist.

And then....

Nothing happened.

Nothing at all.

The alarms continued to blare. The missiles sat in their silos.

For you see....

The Penguin was full of malice.

The Penguin was full of hatred.

The Penguin wanted to destroy the world.

But the Penguin never bothered to take the time to learn that *two* officers were required to launch the Nova Missiles.