

**Never look in a mirror —
some day it may look back!**



MIRROR IMAGE

By DANIEL F. GALOUYE

THE thin trembling man leaned forward tensely in his chair, his face drawn. His eyes, set deep in their sockets, were dull and expressionless. Yet they were oddly alive with an irrepressible anxiety.

"I've got to get back." His voice was a grim whisper and his hands went white at the knuckles where they clung to the armrests as he tried to rise.

Two men, dressed in the short-sleeved, white uniform of the institution, stepped forward ominously.

Shuddering, the man sank back hopelessly into the chair.

Across the desk Dr. James Stanton studied him intently—for the moment disregarding the two older men who

sat on the doctor's right and left. "Perhaps, Professor Yardley," Stanton said pleasantly, "you will be allowed to return home—after we have finished our business here."

Yardley's lips tightened. "You have no intention of letting me go back to my laboratory." His pleading voice became acid. "But you can't keep me here!"

Leaning back in a chair that creaked under his broad frame, Dr. Justin Leonard smiled patiently and raised a bushy eyebrow. "There may be disastrous consequences if we don't release you, Professor?"

Yardley sighed forlornly but his tone was strong, his words resonant with sincerity.

ty. "The consequences, sir, are unimaginable!"

"To yourself?" Dr. Dennis Morgan, stout and bespectacled, leaned forward. "To us? Or to the world in general, Professor?"

Yardley ran a hand through his sparse white hair and dropped his gaze to the floor. "You'll never let me go," he muttered. His eyes darted accusingly from one observer to the other. "You're a commission, aren't you? You're to decide whether I'm mad! You're sitting in judgment on me!"

His gaze leaped from Stanton to the middle-aged woman who sat against the wall, her hands folded prudently in her lap. "You're responsible, Lydia!" he accused. "You arranged this!"

"Now, Uncle Baldwin," the woman answered indulgently, "we're only doing what we think best."

He turned to Stanton. "Don't you understand her motivation, doctor? I'm a wealthy man. I like to pursue scientific truths, no matter how unorthodox they may seem. I spend considerable money for equipment for my basement laboratory—money which might otherwise eventually pass on to my niece and nephew. But they don't want to wait! They—"

"Please, Professor." Stanton was reproving. "You mustn't excite yourself." He studied Yardley thoughtfully. Then, "All right, Professor.

I'll be candid. We are a sanity commission. We will decide your degree of mental fitness. Now, hadn't you better cooperate?"

Yardley relaxed. The two guards relaxed with him. "All right, then," he said submissively, "if there's no other way..."

"Fine!" Stanton smiled warmly. "Now, I understand—"

"Do you have a mirror?" the professor cut in.

"A mirror?"

"Yes, any reflecting surface will do."

Stanton looked wary.

Yardley explained, "A simple demonstration may save a good deal of time."

Stanton cleared his throat. "I'm afraid we shall have to stick to procedure. Now, I understand—rather, your niece tells me—that you have dedicated a good many years to the investigation of a certain theory."

"Thirty years."

"Will you tell us about it, Professor." It was a directive, not a question.

"As I have already said, it's unorthodox and you'll probably—"

"The theory, Professor," Stanton insisted.

"Very well." Yardley yielded, his words hollow with resignation. "Our world is co-existent with another. For every particle on this side—no matter how minute or how large—there is an identical

particle on the other. For every individual, every animal, every force here, there is a counterpart in the other world."

STANTON'S frown became a half-smile. Lydia Frame's did not. They traded glances. "The mirrors, uncle," Lydia suggested eagerly, "tell them about the mirrors like you tell everybody else."

Yardley stared reproachfully at her.

"There is more to the theory?" Leonard asked.

"More?" Yardley repeated. "Much more. As my niece suggests, I shall tell you about the mirrors. Reflecting surfaces—" his eyes flashed eagerly—"are not reflecting surfaces at all! There is no such thing as looking into a mirror and seeing an image of yourself! Mirrors are *windows*—windows that allow us to look into this other world which exists in us, around us, with us!" He paused, breathing erratically.

Stanton exchanged cautious glances with the other psychiatrists. The guards became rigidly attentive.

Yardley went on with more vocal restraint. "There is a force that exists between the reciprocal worlds or planes of existence ... a force which guarantees that every causal effect in this world will be duplicated in exactly the same space and time, in the other—"

"In other words," Stanton interrupted, suppressing an amused smile, "the force—"

"Let me finish!" Yardley cut in. "The reciprocal nature of the force determines that if you write a letter in this world your counterpart will write a letter in the other. If you walk in front of a mirror in this plane, the other you will do the same thing in the other plane. If you leave this building and proceed to another to stare into a new mirror your duplicate will do the same thing simultaneously."

One of the guards snickered, then shrank visibly and resumed his stern expression under Stanton's reprimanding glare.

"Does this have anything to do," Dr. Morgan asked, "with the — er — contraption you built in your basement?"

"Make him tell you about it, doctor," Lydia begged.

The door opened behind Stanton as a young blonde girl came in with a bulging file folder and deposited it on the desk.

Yardley staring through the open door, sprang to his feet. The guards seized his arms.

Stanton turned to follow the professor's incredulous stare into the other room. Yardley's eyes were locked on a full-length mirror that reflected his own erratic motions as he attempted to break free from his captors.

But they held on grimly and he went limp. "Good

Lord!" he exclaimed hopelessly. "They've got Yardley over there too!"

Unperturbed by the episode the blonde casually left the office, closing the door after her. The guards lowered the professor into his chair.

"You've got to take me back to the laboratory!" Yardley begged Stanton. "Don't you see that with both of us captured there's no one left to—"

"The contraption, Professor," Stanton reminded him.

Yardley sighed and his shoulders sagged. "Yes, I built what my niece calls a 'contraption.'"

"Two of them," Lydia corrected. "Two contraptions and the mirror, uncle. Tell them about it."

"Mirror?" Stanton questioned.

"Yes," Lydia explained. "One entire wall of the basement is a mirror. That piece of glass must have cost thousands. It's a single pane. Had to tear out the side of the house to install it."

Stanton returned his attention to the professor. "What are these contraptions?"

DISTURBED, Yardley ran bony fingers through his hair. "Twenty years, doctor," he began emotionally. "It took twenty years to detect the presence of the force, another five years to study it and another five to learn how to modify it."

"And now," Morgan sug-

gested, "you have mastered the force which insures that articles and actions will be duplicated between the two worlds?" He made a vain attempt to hide his smile.

Yardley shook his head. "Control it? No. Affect it? Yes. I learned that I could disrupt the force. By erecting a counter-field, I found I could effect actions in this world that were entirely independent of actions in the other. This counter-force made it possible for me to light a cigarette here and discover that in the other plane—the one seen beyond the mirror—I hadn't quite finished the previous cigarette . . . had evidently decided to take one more puff."

The guard nearer Yardley laughed again. This time Stanton made no attempt to constrain him.

"You mean," Stanton asked, "that your image in the mirror did not reflect *your* actions?"

"Crudely put that's what happened," Yardley replied. "But it required many experiments before I detected any such result. You see, even though at one particular instant the force might be disrupted, freeing me and the other Baldwin Yardley from reciprocating motions, it required several hours before the divergency of our movements across the mirror became perceptible.

"We speculated on the

cause. And we decided we were such exact duplicates, with identical reflexes and responses, that even though we suddenly became mutually independent, several hours would probably pass before one of us acted in an uncharacteristic manner—like impulsively extinguishing a cigarette prematurely.”

Leonard rose. “Really, Dr. Stanton, is it necessary to continue? I have another appointment—” he withdrew his fountain pen—“and I believe I’m quite ready to sign the form.”

Yardley sprang up, then sat down again as the guards moved toward him. “You’ve got to believe me!” he shouted. “Good God, Stanton! They’ve got to believe one of us Yardleys!”

Stanton motioned Leonard back into his chair. “If we don’t believe you, Professor ... then what?”

“Sir,” Yardley suggested gravely, “would you enjoy meeting yourself on the street? Finding yourself involved in an argument with two identical women, each claiming to be your wife? Can’t you appreciate what would happen? Millions would suffer unbearable mental harassment in the grim realization that a mirror does more than reflect images! The world would develop a phobia toward mirrors. Then, when the two worlds found out that entry was mutually possible,

each would become the limitless victim of the other’s vices.

“Wouldn’t it be simple to murder an enemy, flee to the other world and let authorities wrangle hopelessly over the identity of the actual murderer? And might not the Paris in this world assume that it was the rightful capital not only of this world’s France but also of the other world’s? Wars would start twice as easily, be twice as horrible and—”

“Am I to understand,” Dr. Morgan asked, smiling, “that you’ve found means of—er—walking through mirrors. Pardon—windows?”

YARDLEY went rigid with resentment. “You’re humoring me—all of you! Well, let me recount a recent experiment—number thirty-eight of the current series.

“I activated the dissonance crystal and waited for the charges to build up. As I stood patiently beside the amplification lenses, I stared at the Yardley in the mirror.

“He stared back at me. Then, suddenly he raised his hand and scratched his cheek! Mind you, he did this *before* the charge in the crystal had built up sufficiently to throw the inter-world force out of rhythm!

“That could mean only one thing—diverse movement was actually *independent* of subsequent exposures to the crys-

tal after the initial exposure! In simple terms—a single exposure is all that is needed to interrupt the force permanently. After that exposure it is possible for Yardley One and Yardley Two to continue acting independently!

“Furthermore any material object with which Yardley One or Yardley Two come into contact is also permanently removed from the field of reciprocating forces. I found that out in experiment thirty-nine, after turning off the ceiling light in the basement. Later a man from the equipment supply company made a delivery. He turned on the overhead light. *But the reflection of the bulb in the mirror did not light up!* What is more serious is the fact that as a result of the man’s contact with the affected light switch he will eventually be affected too, as will every object he comes in contact with! It’s a chain reaction.”

Leonard and Morgan looked at each other in evident annoyance. But Stanton continued to stare reservedly at the professor.

Yardley went on. “But back to experiment number thirty-eight, which I’m sure you gentlemen will find most fascinating. I had just—and I might add needlessly—activated the crystal and had observed that the other Yardley was already displaying independent movement. Confused, I walked over to the mirror.

He approached his own mirror too.

“‘Did you notice it?’ I asked.

“‘The free motion?’ he answered. ‘Yes, I noticed. Yardley, I’m afraid.’

“‘That the field might not have to be rebuilt each time we want to act independently? That, once activated, our divergent natures might continue independent of further field stimulation?’

“‘Then you’ve been thinking about it too,’ he said with something like consternation.

“‘I’m afraid so,’ I answered. ‘And I’m frightened.’

“‘Reciprocating insects buzzed around each of our heads, landed on our cheeks. We both slapped. I’m afraid the other Yardley was faster—his reflexes were a bit more accurate. He killed his insect. I missed mine.

“‘The surviving mosquito or whatever it was darted toward the mirror. *It flew through the mirror!*’

The professor was momentarily silent, staring at each of the psychiatrists in turn. “We hadn’t even considered the possibility that beside being windows between the worlds, mirrors might also be doors,” he continued. “I’m afraid that we were both stunned by the realization.

“But the other Yardley recovered first. He seized an ornate stiletto on his desk and hurled it at the mirror. *It came through!* Landed at my

feet. Then *he* stepped through—into *our* world!"

Stanton absently thumbed through a stack of papers on his desk, his chin resting on the back of his other hand.

"Naturally," Yardley went on, "we were elated at the discovery. We could see only the beneficial results. Two worlds with the possibility of an interchange of knowledge that each would acquire individually as the divergent development continued after we built a door powerful enough to encompass the entire world.

"But I'm afraid the beautiful icing successfully concealed the awful cake. On further thought, we arrived independently at the decision that contact would never be feasible—that the best course was for us to destroy the crystals and lenses and allow everything to return to normal.

"Sadly, we burned our notes and disconnected lenses and crystals. We left only the hulls of consoles which had housed priceless equipment."

Yardley compressed his lips. "But that did not return conditions to normal, gentlemen. Weeks passed and still Yardley and I were independent of each other—were showing no indications of being drawn back into the bi-universal design of reciprocity! And further experimentation proved the more horrible truth:

"Objects with which we came in contact were immedi-

ately being removed from the effects of the natural force! Lydia bought me a new desk lamp. The other Lydia bought the other Yardley a new desk lamp. The boy from Colfax's Department Store who delivered the lamp in our world walked out of the door a full ten seconds before his image left the basement wall mirror! When he returned the next day with a replacement for the dented base his image did not return at all!"

"HE didn't notice it?" Stanton asked, humoringly.

"I was behind the mirror housing at the time," Yardley explained. "He couldn't see my reflection. My overhead light was on, but the other Yardley's wasn't. I guess the boy thought the reflection was really an extension of the room.

"The other Yardley and I discussed the matter immediately with grave concern. And we were fortunate. By pooling our mental resources, we were able to design the counter-field—or reverse-image—reflectors.

"By building a powerful counter-activator we felt we would meet with success by flooding the entire area with sufficiently strong vibrations to rock ourselves and the objects we had come in contact with back into the reciprocity design. We would then destroy all the equipment and

discontinue the experiments."

Stanton asked patiently, "And this other activator—did it work?"

"You fool!" Yardley rose shaking. "Don't you realize that's the reason I must get back to the laboratory? Yardley and I had barely completed our work when your strong-arm men came bursting in."

There was silence in the room.

"Will you let me go back home?" Yardley begged. "Just for a day! That's all I ask! Just long enough time to activate the counter-reflectors. Lord, man—you've *got* to! Just think—each object I came in contact with will come in contact with other objects and those will influence still others in an endless chain reaction. It may take a few days—but soon there'll be pandemonium! And it will spread. It may take years—even centuries—but eventually the whole world will be freed from the force that insures reciprocity!"

"I'm afraid, dear uncle," Lydia said mildly, "that even if they did allow you to return home, you'd find things quite different in the basement."

"No!" he shouted hoarsely.

"Yesterday, just after you were taken away, the carpenters and moving men came. They removed the mirror first, then your other contraptions. Really, uncle, the base-

ment will make an excellent rumpus room—after they get it all cleared out."

The professor shook uncontrollably. "You've got to let me get more equipment!" he begged Stanton. "The counter-reflector must be rebuilt!"

The guards stood close to him, on the alert. Stanton merely stared pityingly. The blonde entered again and walked toward the desk with another folder.

"If I can prove it," Yardley demanded eagerly, "will you let me go back?"

Before Stanton could reply the professor reached into his inner coat pocket and withdrew a stiletto. The guards dived for his arm. The blonde and Lydia screamed in shrill duet.

But Yardley had already thrust his hand back over his shoulder. He hurled the dagger forward. Stanton ducked. The blade flew well over his head and into the reception room.

"Take him, boys," Stanton directed.

The sound of shattering glass came from the outer office.

"Damned good thing you ducked," said Leonard to Stanton as one of the guards locked Yardley's arms behind him and the other plunged a hypodermic needle into the wrinkled skin of his neck.

"You don't understand!" Yardley gasped, falling back into the chair. "I was only

showing that the stiletto would go *through* the mirror. It was the one that the other—Yardley—threw to me.”

His head lolled forward and he braced himself in the chair with difficulty.

“Fools!” Yardley rasped weakly, casting dazed eyes in their general direction. “Don’t understand ... periods of fluctuation ... happens once in a while ... when force slips back toward resonance ... happened often at first ... rare now ... soon permanent dissonance ...”

His chin fell on his chest and one of the attendants caught him to prevent his falling from the chair.

The guard said, “This bird had an answer for everything.”

Lydia rose and pressed a handkerchief to the inner corners of her eyes, although it was obvious to everyone that there was no moisture there. “Will he be all right, doctor?” she asked solicitously.

“As well as can be expected. We will send him to surgery immediately. There will be a simple leucotomy—an incision into the prefrontal lobe of the brain. You and your husband have already signed the necessary papers.”

“I know, but how—how will it affect him?”

“Oh, he’ll be quite all right—physically. There will be immediate relief of the psychasthenia. And in a few days he will be able to return home.

However, you will find him rather simple mentally. His personality will be gone, but he will not be a menace. I’m afraid he’ll require the constant attention of a nurse, though.”

“I understand, Doctor Stanton.” Lydia wiped her dry eyes again and left.

THE guards placed the professor on a table that was wheeled into the room and pushed him out a side entrance.

Stanton returned to the work at his desk.

Ten minutes later there was another buzz. “You’re wanted in the clinic, doctor. There’s a delivery boy from one of the department stores who is quite uncontrollable.”

“Tell them I’ll be there shortly,” he instructed absently, somewhat annoyed at the interruption.

Shortly after he walked into the outer office. The stiletto lay on the floor in front of the cracked and broken mirror. An irregularly shaped area of glass reflected only part of his image, the broken edge slicing across his hip and severing one of his legs.

He smiled wearily. The image smiled back.

“That was one hell of a case!” Stanton muttered, putting on his hat.

The reflection paused to wipe the sweat band in his hat and nodded agreeably. “Damned if it wasn’t.” **END**