

DEATH BY PROXY

Malcolm Jameson

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DEATH BY PROXY

By MALCOLM JAMESON

When a Dangerous Axis Spy Appears in Two Places at the Same Time, Cliff Hayward, America's Ace Scientific Agent Finds Himself in a Tough Spot!

Perhaps it was the oppressive darkness, which impelled Cliff Howard to get up and draw back the curtains. For a moment he stood looking out over the moon-lighted, blacked-out capital, then stretched out again on the leather couch in the office.

It had been his hope to get in at least a few hours' sleep before morning. His plans for the marvelous QQ-gun had been completed late that night and he wanted to be as clear-eyed as possible when he presented it in the morning to the

General Staff. But a vague restlessness, almost an uneasiness, had thwarted him and sleep would not come.

Beyond the locked and bolted office door he could hear the tread of the sentries ceaselessly pacing their posts in the brilliantly lit corridor. Within, the details of the darkened office, now illuminated by the beams of the moon, pouring through the securely locked window, stood out distinctly to his gloom-accustomed eyes.

There, in the opposite corner, stood the clothes rack on which his major's blouse hung, a symbol of rank which meant little to him. He was, primarily, a scientist. His glance shifted to the broad desk where lay his drawings and descriptive letter, ghostly white in the moonlight.

What would not Hitler's generals give for a peep at them! But it was not likely they would get the desired peep. This War Department annex was too well guarded.

Hayward took off his shoes, and relaxed again on the couch. He must have another try at sleep. Then, abruptly, he sat up, startled by he knew not what.

Wasn't that the slow breathing of another man, the squeak of slightly moved furniture?

From his dark corner beside the window, Hayward stared into the gloom that enveloped most of the office. Reason told him no one else could be in the room, yet a sixth sense insisted there was.

Suddenly, unmistakably, he saw the intruder. A man of good height, was standing in the far corner. Startled and amazed, hardly able to credit his eyesight, Hayward sat up and stared.

The man moved forward and stepped into the band of moonlight. He drew back the chair as if it belonged to him, and calmly sat down at the desk. Reaching out, he pulled the drawings to him.

Now clearly visible in the pale light, Hayward could see that the intruder was hatless and wore his hair in a crisp Prussian pompadour. It was at this moment the prowler produced the flashlight and cast its pencil-like beam onto the ray gun drawings. There was a swift intake of his breath as he comprehended the nature of what lay before him.

Hayward had seen enough. With elaborate caution, he eased himself off the couch, thankful for the quietness of his unshod feet. Then catlike he sprang and caught the intruder in an iron grip. The chair overturned, spilling them both in the deep shadow beyond the desk. Hayward loosened one hand and smashed a blow into his adversary's face. There was a grunt and a muffled curse in what sounded like German. Tightening his clench, Hayward tried for a headlock. And then—his hands were empty!

Incredulous, he lashed out about him savagely, amazed that the man had slipped out of his grasp. But the man had vanished! Hayward was alone in the room. With a growl he

sprang to his feet, found the wall switch and snapped on the bright lights.

Hayward stood blinking, staring in disbelief around him. There stood the desk, the couch, and the clothes-tree but the mysterious prowler had indeed disappeared. Only the overturned chair and the crumpled rug were evidences of what had happened. But Hayward was positive he had neither slept nor dreamed. His right hand, still tingling from the blow he had struck, attested the reality of the incident.

He strode to the door and examined its fastenings. The spring lock was on, and the inner bolt was shot. No man could have passed through that door and bolted it behind him. Nevertheless Hayward opened the door and saw the three sentries stationed there. They told him no one else had been in the hall. All were trustworthy men.

Hayward shut the door and inspected the fastened window. Dust lay in its cracks and the burglar alarm was intact and in good order. After searching the room minutely, once more, he gave it up, smiling crookedly. He was being absurd. It was, of course, a dream. A realistic dream, no more.

Then he saw the alien flashlight lying under the desk on the floor!

On the afternoon of the day following this incident, Hayward paid a visit to the office of the Senior Security Officer. Messengers were coming and going. The SSO talked, from time to time, over the telephone.

"Frankly, I think you're working too hard," said the Security Officer. "Call everything off for awhile, get sick leave, and go to one of our sanitariums for a good rest. You're having hallucinations, that's all."

"But the fingerprints, the flashlight, the photos, the description, and my black eye," insisted Hayward, aghast at the man's scepticism. "You can't laugh those off."

"I can't laugh off three thousand miles, either," said the SSO. "I admit your identification seems perfect. This, this—what's his name?"

"Ernst Haeckel."

"Ernst Haeckel may possess the miraculous ability to be in two places at once, but I don't believe it. And you'll have a tough time making a jury believe it. And don't forget you'll have to convince a jury's he's a spy and a traitor."

"I'm not forgetting," said Hayward sourly. He stared down at the heap of documents in his lap.

To his mind they were sufficient evidence. On top lay the report of the Bureau of Identification. They had found fingerprints on the flashlight, two more of the same on the desk top, and a smudge on the chair. The prints were identical with those of one Ernst Haeckel, formerly registered as an enemy alien, but since naturalized. Hayward glanced at the card.

Haeckel, Ernst. Born Germany, 1908. First entered U.S. 1933. Visited Germany annually until 1936, not since. Occupation: college professor, teacher of physics, writer of technical books, lecturer. Now head of Physics Department, Pottsdown Polytechnic College, Pottsdown, California. Stands well in profession and has good reputation. No known connection with German-American Bund or other subversive organization.

A photograph had been taken that very morning in California and radioed to Washington. It showed the man with whom Hayward had fought. Most significantly this picture disclosed the man had a bruised and swollen eye, and a slight cut on the cheek.

Hayward doubled up his fist and regarded the scuffed knuckles thoughtfully. Not many hours earlier that fist had thudded into the eye of some one who was the double of this man and who had the same whorls and loops on his fingertips.

"This is the man who broke into my office last night," said Hayward doggedly, slapping the documents on the desk. "I knocked him over, and socked him."

"And then he vanished!" The SSO burst into a loud laugh. Hayward found it peculiarly irritating. "My dear fellow, you are overwrought."

"Don't 'my dear fellow' me," growled Hayward testily. "Shoot me the rest of the stuff your operatives have uncovered and we'll call it a day. What I do about it after that will be my business."

"Very well," said the SSO, picking up a memorandum pad. His thoughts were obvious. He would humor Hayward and get rid of him. After that he would wash his hands of the silly case.

"To begin with," proceeded the Security Officer, "you must bear in mind the difference between here and the West Coast. Your alleged encounter took place shortly after two o'clock, which would be a few minutes past eleven last night, California time. The moment the fingerprint identification report was received, we got our western operatives on long distance and they went at once to Pottsdown Polytech to investigate.

"Dr. Ernst Haeckel was found and questioned. So were other persons. Last night Haeckel was seen twice by two instructors who were grading student notebooks in a room opposite to his laboratory. They state he entered his laboratory, which he uses for conducting experiments, at quarter of eleven. They heard the whir of a machine he has built there. At about ten minutes past eleven it suddenly stopped and Haeckel came out, looking rather agitated. He hurried down the hall without dropping in to say the customary good night. Both professors agree Haeckel's manner was furtive, but attribute it to the fact that he had just had an accident and did not want to be seen with a bruised face."

"Hah!" snorted Hayward.

The SSO showed annoyance. "Please! Haeckel admits freely he was out of sight from eleven to eleven ten, but ridicules the possibility of making a round trip to Washington in ten minutes. And he says he misplaced the flashlight some months ago and supposes it must have fallen into criminal hands. As to the black eye, he accounts for that by the laboratory accident."

Cliff Hayward could not repress a frown at this information.

"Hmph," he remarked. "How come an enemy alien has a secret laboratory in times like these?"

"He obtained permission to conduct psychic research. His experiments have nothing to do with military matters. Dr. Haeckel is the world's foremost specialist in Psychoscopies."

"Psycho-what?" exploded Hayward, sitting bolt upright. "What kind of pishposh is that? I hold a Ph.D. in physics, and I never heard of any such branch of science."

"It has to do with—er—psychomorphosis, or something like that," said the SSO lamely. "Spectral materialization and that sort of thing. A variety of spiritualistic activity, so to speak."

"Bosh!" commented Hayward, rising in disgust. "Well, I'm going to take your advice. I'm applying for indefinite leave."

That airtight alibi is too much for me."

"I think you're wise," said the SSO, blandly. He missed the biting sarcasm of Hayward's words.

Cliff Hayward did not make undue haste in leaving Washington. He was now convinced that Ernst Haeckel was an international spy and the man who had entered his room. He was also certain he was dealing with a dangerously clever opponent. Hayward's own procedure, therefore, was circuitous. By discreet inquiry he learned a number of things. More than one government agency reported that many of their plans and decisions were known to the enemy almost as soon as they were made. Yet painstaking investigation had failed to reveal the source of the leaks.

Technically speaking, Hayward had no case against Haeckel whatever. Circumstantial evidence was nullified by the manifest impossibility of his having been on the scene of the crime at the times of their occurrence. Moreover, motive could only be inferred. There was nothing to show Haeckel had conveyed information to the enemy. No court in the land would entertain charges without proof.

Hayward spent a few days at the Congressional Library, learning about Haeckel's Theory of Psychoscopies. For jerkwater Pottsdown Polytech, bucked up over having a celebrated foreign scientist on its faculty, had published all his papers on the subject.

Hayward often felt impelled to hold his nose while digging through the treatises, so outrageously bad they were, yet he

found them absorbing reading. Despite his ejaculations of "Poppycock" and "Rubbish," he plowed on, growing surer than ever he was dealing, not with mistaken science or the pseudo-science of a charlatan, but a clever smokescreen to cover an ominous activity.

In the end he gathered up the pamphlets and turned them back to the librarian. They bore the titles, "An Analysis of Multidimensional Phantasmal Structure," "The Psychoscopic Approach to Psychomorphism," and "The Fundamentals of the Psychoscopic Theory." It was the last and seemingly most profound that disgusted Hayward most.

Psychoscopy, as nearly as he could make out, was a weird hodge-podge of telepathy and clairvoyance, seasoned with spiritualism and pure hokum. By using ESP as the connecting link, Haeckel had managed to tie up his fantastic theory to the neo-Einsteinian doctrine of the interrelation of time, space and gravity. Leaving out the many pages of meaningless mathematic symbols, it all added up to the claim that Haeckel could project himself through space and occupy at will the "soul" of any disembodied entity.

"A nice out, if he can do it," growled Hayward, thinking of how impossible it would be to convict a ghost of crime. "I don't believe it but I'm flitting out to California by the next plane, for a look."

On the plane west he tried to unsnarl his tangled hunches. Of one thing he was positive. It had been no ghost his knuckles had struck, but Ernst Haeckel. Hayward racked his memory regarding space-time warps and such other

legerdemain of modern physics. But no science could account for what had happened. These questions were still plaguing him when his taxi rolled up to the main building of Polytechnic.

"Yes, Dr. Haeckel is here and will be glad to answer questions," he was told by the Registrar. "You should come tonight at ten when he has his regular public seance."

"He has public showings?"

"Oh, yes. He's been holding them for the last four days. Hereafter, he expects to give demonstrations regularly. Lately he perfected his technique."

"I see," said Haeckel. He believed Haeckel had become alarmed at the close squeak of the week before, and had arranged to establish ironclad alibis. Hayward's curiosity reached fever pitch. Heretofore the man had done his space-jumping from behind closed doors, but his arranging for witnesses indicated that he could indeed be in two places at once. If so, the open spaces would certify, since he was here, he could not have been elsewhere, despite any momentary glimpse or fleeting contact such as Hayward had received. It made the problem vastly more difficult, too intricate for existing legal procedure. Hayward would have to solve the man's method, and then deal with him outside the law. It promised to be tricky business.

Later in the evening he returned to the Physics Building for the lecture. Haeckel's laboratory was about thirty feet square, carpeted in black plush, with the walls painted a dead black and brightly illuminated. The "psychoscope" stood in the middle of the room. A semi-circular row of seats faced a stool that was the only piece of furniture in the other half of the room. A number of well dressed men were already seated in the chairs, but Hayward stood for a moment, sizing up the details of the strange machine.

The machine consisted of three huge oval lenses, each as high as a man, ranged one behind the other on a stand. Between each pair stood a giant vacuum tube, and atop the end lenses were helical coils which served as antennae. Hayward recalled the description in the pamphlets. The inner antenna was supposed to pick up the operator's "soul," push it through the first lens, and on to the last, where it emerged to mingle with the "lost soul" somewhere in the great outside. The tubes furnished the power for the operation, converting the operator's "psychic energy" to "electromagnetic-gravitational quanta" in tune with the sought for alien spirit. So ran the mumbo-jumbo.

Hayward seated himself and looked at the magazine the usher had handed him, an issue of "True Phantom Tales." One of the articles was marked in blue pencil. It concerned a maniac who had been lynched in a nearby town. According to legends, his ghost still haunted the dark lanes of the village, jumping out from behind bushes and yelling "Boo!" at pedestrians.

Hayward got no further than this. A stir among the persons about him caused him to lift his head. The eminent Dr. Ernst Haeckel had entered the room.

Hayward could not repress a start. The brusque Prussian who strode into the room and glared about him was the identical man who had invaded his office. There could be no mistake about that. After favoring the spectators with a curt nod, Haeckel walked over to the machine, adjusted several dials, picked up what appeared to be a portable control pad, and seated himself on the stool. Then he sat back with a bored air to await the introductory remarks. A bewhiskered gentleman, obviously one of the faculty, got up and began talking in a drier-than-dust voice.

He described the machine. But the thing which interested Hayward was the assertion the machine could only be used by Haeckel personally, since it was "especially attuned to his psyche and therefore ineffective or dangerous in other hands." At length the professor cleared his throat and delivered himself of the business of the evening.

"Tonight," he said, "Dr. Haeckel will resume his studies of the Maniac Ghost of Mossdale, as he did last evening. Newcomers have been furnished with an account of the ghost's habits. You all know we have in Mossdale tonight a committee of psychic research workers who will check on what the doctor reports. Later they will convey to us their findings. On another night you who are here may go into the field and see the ghost in action. What we are demonstrating here is that machine-controlled telepathy is a reality.

"One more word. It must be understood that Dr. Haeckel acts solely in the capacity of an observer and a reporter. He is in no way responsible for the existence or actions of the spectre of Mossdale. I thank you."

Hayward expected the lights to be dimmed but this was not done. Haeckel merely punched a button and the tubes began to glow and make a small purring sound. Everyone watched Haeckel, who simply stared ahead, saying nothing. Hayward noted down the time.

"He is testing receptivity," whispered the announcer. "Sh-h-h."

The test took the better part of a half hour. Then Haeckel clicked more switches and resumed his glassy stare, and again Hayward noted the time.

"We're in Mossdale now," said the announcer. Presently Haeckel began to speak in a dead, flat voice.

"I am in the shack where they killed me," Haeckel droned. "I take shape. I step out into the night. There are men hiding behind the trees, watching me, and they do not appear to be afraid. Aha, I will fool them! I will vanish. Ha, I have vanished."

There was a considerable pause. "Now a block farther on and there is no one in sight," went on Haeckel. "Oh, it is the servant girl that works for Mrs. Simons. I lie in wait. She

comes. I spring out and shriek at her, and she runs, terrified. Ha, ha, ha!"

That went on for a while longer, with variations. Later Haeckel fell silent, twiddled with his dials, and continued to sit.

"He is regaining his own personality," murmured the professor in charge of ceremonies. "It is quite a shock to enter an alien personality. He is fatigued. Be quiet."

Presently Haeckel came to with a jerk and snapped off the current. He bowed stiffly to the audience and stalked out of the room. Then a loud-speaker was cut in and the master-of-ceremonies let the witnesses listen in on the phone call from Mossdale. It was the chairman of the investigating committee reporting. He confirmed the materialization of the ghost, and its quick disappearance. No one had seen him clearly. But they added, citizens had reported the apparition to the police. The Simons maid had collapsed from shock. That was the end of the message.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said the professor, dismissing the crowd.

Hayward walked back to his hotel. He felt slightly dazed. He could not fathom Haeckel's purpose. When Hayward reached his room, he went to bed, more mystified than ever.

At breakfast next morning he came upon an item in the paper that aroused his suspicions afresh. It was an AP item under the Washington date line. The paragraph read:

Between one and two this morning a watchman in the State Department fired a shot at a man engaged in rifling the desk of one of the under-secretaries, but failed to hit him. The prowler vanished just as the watchman was pulling the trigger. The watchman was rushed to St. Elizabeth's Hospital, for observation.

"Hmm," murmured Hayward, taking out his notes. Between ten and eleven, local time, was when Haeckel was "testing." Could he have used the interval to make a flying psychic trip to Washington? If so, he had admirable control of his emotions. The only movement Hayward had noticed during the seance was the occasional lifting of Haeckel's foot.

"Foot!" Hayward jumped as the thought hit him. Why, of course. The actual current control was a foot switch concealed beneath the carpet. In the Mossdale sequence Haeckel had evaded the psychic research committee by lifting his foot to cut off the current. Thus Hayward had found one more piece of the jigsaw puzzle. However Haeckel managed his cross-country projections, it was clear that he had them under control at all times. Let his pseudo-self be endangered and he could instantly extricate himself by breaking the connection. When he had seen the watchman about to fire, he saved himself by lifting his toe.

As Hayward ate eggs, he digested his newest hunch. He decided the middle part of the seance was staged to provide an alibi. The test period gave time for a spying expedition. The third and last phase, the so-called "rest period," allowed Haeckel an opportunity for reporting to his employer. If space meant nothing to the psychoscope, why could he not jump as readily to the Chancellory in Berlin as to Mossdale or Washington? Small wonder the FBI had failed to find suspicious connections! Nothing tangible existed.

Hayward attended two more seances. No startling event happened, which was not astonishing as it was not likely that Haeckel's astral double would be surprised in the act of spying on every occasion. So Hayward speculated about what would have occurred if the watchman's bullet had hit before the specter vanished. Would Haeckel have dropped dead on the stool? Probably. For when Hayward had walloped the spectral counterpart, Haeckel, in California, blossomed forth with the shiner. Hayward decided to take a little trip to Mossdale.

At Mossdale, the next afternoon, Hayward interviewed the town policeman. He was a big, outspoken man named Timothy Trigg.

"Spook, my eye," exclaimed Trigg belligerently. "Alonzo Snood has been dead these ten years, and he's never stirred in his grave until them dotty long-haired spook hunters started foolin' around. Forget it. Don't pay no attention. I been walkin' the street around here at all hours and I know."

"But what about the Simons' maid?" asked Howard.
"Something scared her."

"Just a fool, pretendin' to be a ghost. Let lay hands on him and I'll break every bone in his body! I won't arrest him, not me!"

"You're a man after my own heart, Trigg," said Hayward.
"Listen to this."

Hayward talked to Trigg for an hour, telling him much of what he suspected. He felt that the honest constable was a man to be trusted. Trigg nodded and made a few suggestions of his own. Then they planned their strategy for that night and parted.

It was Hayward who saw the ghost first, at about half past ten. Trigg had told him that the so-called apparitions occurred only in the darkest spots, so Hayward had hidden himself in a hedge alongside the darkest path he could find. There was a street light a block away, too far off to lighten the path beside which he waited. He turned his back on the light expecting Haeckel would come from the opposite or dark direction. But it did not develop that way.

What Hayward heard first was the crunch of feet on gravel. Since it hardly seemed likely a materialized astral body would have weight, he twisted his head, expecting to see some belated Mossdale citizen approaching. Then he received the surprise of his life. The man who was advancing could be seen only in silhouette, but he looked solid enough, and remarkably like Haeckel. Yet when he came squarely

between Hayward and the street light, the concealed watcher gasped. The light showed through his body!

Astonishment swept over Hayward. How could a phantom be solid enough to have demonstrable weight, yet gossamer enough to transmit light? It was true that the light appeared dimmer and slightly blurred when viewed through the specter, but it shone through nevertheless. But Hayward had no time to unravel the mystery, for the astral Haeckel was abreast of him and passing. Hayward gathered himself for the spring, then leaped.

He struck from behind, reaching this time with both hands for the throat. What his fingers found was solid, despite its transparency, and he tightened them with all his might. The "ghost" made strangling sounds and writhed in his grasp.

And then, as in Washington, the specter vanished. Hayward tumbled forward on his face, clutching nothingness. He hit the ground hard, rolled over and sat up grinning. A swift glance at his watch told him the time. It was 10:52. He concluded, and concluded rightly, that the haunting was over for the day. He hurried to the small station house, left open for him by Trigg, who was in ambush at another spot. The moment he got there he telephoned Pottsdwn, a person-to-person call from the chairman of the Psychic Research Committee to Dr. Haeckel. Presently the reply came back. It was not from Herr Doktor, but from Pottsdwn central.

"Dr. Haeckel has been taken ill," said the voice sweetly.
"Will anyone else do?"

"Ill? Is he too ill to talk? It is important."

"Sorry. He can't talk just now. He has a bad attack of coughing."

Hayward hung up.

"He ought to cough," he muttered, "after the way I squeezed his windpipe. I must look for finger bruises on his throat tomorrow."

When Trigg came, Hayward told him what had occurred.

"He'll come again, Trigg. Sooner or later you'll get a crack at him. Remember this, unless you knock him out instantly, he'll vanish. The only way I know of to bring him down for keeps is to hit him with a baseball bat. And," he added grimly, "If it don't work, try shooting."

"I'll do that," promised Trigg. "There's no law against taking potshots at ghosts."

It was a week after that, despite nightly seances, before the constable, Trigg, got in his lick with the club. That night Hayward was in the laboratory. When the blow was struck in distant Mossdale, Dr. Haeckel's jaw dropped and his face went lax. The next instant he toppled off his stool, and as he toppled the current went off. Haeckel was only stunned momentarily, for by the time the excited onlookers reached him, he was scrambling to his feet. He took off his headset,

rubbed the back of his head, and murmured something about having used too strong a current. The witnesses went back to their chairs. Haeckel looked at them uncertainly, as if willing to call it a night, but at the sight of their expectant eagerness, he reseated himself, altered the dials, and started the machine again.

"He is going to brazen it out," thought Hayward, in grudging admiration. "Not everyone would go back for more after being laid out with a baseball bat."

Haeckel resumed his monologue. Hayward noted he had put himself in an altogether different spot in Mossdale. Haeckel's astral self roamed on, met two frightened pedestrians and roused their fears by laughing at them horribly. Then he said he had entered a little lane near the haunted shack wherein he dwelt in daytime. At that point the seance came to an abrupt and dramatic end.

Haeckel, as always, was wearing light-colored clothing, and gazing into the lens with his usual deadpan expression, when suddenly his face was contorted with pain. Simultaneously a bright red stain spread over the breast of his snowy shirt. With a shriek, he fell forward on his face. Instantly spectators dashed to his aid. One was a doctor. Another a sprightly young girl reporter from one of the news services who rushed up and started to take copious notes.

"Everybody stay as you are," called out the doctor after a swift examination. "This man has been shot. This must be investigated. I'm taking him to the X-ray room."

Everyone sat uneasily after the doctor and patient had gone, each regarding his neighbor with suspicion. Which of them had fired the shot? And how?

Presently the doctor came back. He wore a puzzled expression.

"I would have sworn that was a gunshot wound," he said. "The entrance hole is characteristic, and the clavicle is splintered, but there is no hole of exit, and no bullet inside. It is inconceivable that a bullet would go in a half inch and then cease to exist. It must have been an old wound which reopened."

Talking excitedly, the guests began to leave. Hayward rushed to a phone.

"It's no good, Mr. Hayward," came Trigg's voice over the wire. "I waylaid that feller and knocked him cold, but he disappeared. I connected all right, and—well, he just wasn't there. Then I think he'll pop up near the haunted house, so I go there. Pretty soon I see him coming. That time I used my gun. I never took more careful aim. I hit him all right, 'cause I saw him fall, but when I ran over to him there was nothing on the ground but a spot of blood about as big as my hand. Cussed if I don't believe he is a ghost."

"Keep your shirt on, Trigg," advised Hayward. "You did fine. But we'll have to lay off until we find something better."

After hanging up, Hayward concluded that Haeckel actually could be in two places at the same time, yet not be

all at two places at once, only half and half. And then the true explanation hit him. That was it! At certain periods Haeckel was transferring himself back and forth with bewildering rapidity. That was why his projected image was transparent. He was in and out, first there and then not there, like the blade of a whirling electric fan, which creates an illusion like a brass disk, even to the glint of the headlight, yet which can be seen through.

Immediately Hayward asked himself why the Haeckel in the laboratory had not also appeared transparent? The answer was simple. Haeckel looked solid for the reason that he dressed in pale clothes and sat under bright lights against a dead background. One could not see through him any more than he could through the gauze backdrops of theatres, when the backstage is dark and the footlights on.

This discovery galvanized Hayward into activity. During his stay in Pottstown he had made friends with several of the instructors. Now he hunted up one, a reliable man named Merriam, who shared Hayward's distrust and dislike of Dr. Haeckel. Hayward found Merriam willing to assist.

It took them several days and it cost Hayward a ten dollar tip to the janitor, but by the time the next seance came due they were ready for their test. During the next seance Haeckel did not send his astral self to Mossdale, explaining he had exhausted the possibilities of that hamlet, but to another place, in Arizona, where the ghost of an old prospector was said to roam. The change of the field of

operation did not bother Hayward greatly, for on this night he was only interested in the laboratory end.

"Oh, boy, now I've got something," breathed Hayward, sighting through the instrument he had constructed in the adjoining room. Peeping through the stroboscope, while Haeckel was still "testing," Merriam and he had ample time to study Haeckel's appearance. Once they had their instrument synchronized, the Prussian looked solid and normal. But another adjustment of the stroboscope showed only an empty stool. The Dr. Haeckel the witnesses thought they were looking at was only there half the time, flickering on and off like the pictures on a movie screen, but giving an illusion of solidity.

Later that night, Hayward made a grim decision. He had no qualms about being an executioner, but he shrank from murder. Yet Haeckel had to go. His machine was too dangerous to the existence of the nation. In this situation Hayward could not go to the authorities, for it was impossible to prove where Haeckel went in the periods when he was not talking. That might be aboard one of our flagships at sea, listening in on vital orders, or in the council chambers of the Axis chiefs, reporting what he had heard. He was an enemy with power to do unlimited damage, and must be eliminated before any other valuable Information was stolen. Yet he could not be attacked directly.

Hayward visited Mossdale. Trigg's face lighted up as he heard the plan. If Hayward would pay traveling expenses, he would be glad to go to Arizona and take on the phantom prospector for the final round.

When did he start?

"Now," said Hayward, and shook Trigg's hand.

Thus Hayward was ready for that last and fatal seance. It started off in the routine way, with Haeckel chanting out the scene as he saw it in the sunbaked gully known as Pozo Diablo, except that it was then midnight and a full moon was directly overhead. His control, the old prospector, it developed, had been savagely tortured and killed by Indians, and his ghost haunted the spot to this day.

"I am walking down the arroyo," came Haeckel's monotonous voice. "I am wary, for accursed redskins may be lurking behind boulders. I turn into the Escondida—I—I—ugh!"

Haeckel screamed shrilly and clutched at his heart with both hands. Then he fell off the stool backwards, tearing all connections loose as he dropped. He writhed for a moment and lay still. The spectators rushed to him.

Hayward was among the first to arrive. He ripped open Haeckel's shirt. There was nothing to see. But the doctor was alongside and he tore the cotton garment entirely off. All that was visible was a small piece of wood protruding from the back with a few drops of blood oozing out beside it. There were no other marks, yet Dr. Haeckel was dead.

An amazing autopsy followed. Just below the sternum the doctor found and picked out a pencil thin piece of wood about a half inch long. How it got there was a mystery. There

was nothing beneath. But inside the right ventricle of the heart was found another such piece, and the posterior wall of the heart was punctured. A third bit of cylindrical wood was wedged between two ribs near the spine, piercing the skin of the back. The doctor threw up his hands.

"I'll never report this," he announced, "I have a reputation to consider. I'm calling it heart failure due to the presence of foreign matter in the ventricle."

Hayward and Merriam walked away.

"What happened?" asked Merriam. "I don't get it."

Hayward considered carefully how to phrase his answer.

"I do not know exactly how it was that Haeckel projected himself through the machine or how he managed to make his double perform various acts. We only know he did it. It amused him to play the ghost, and that's always a dangerous thing to do. Once before some victim shot at him, for we saw the bullet hole."

"Yes," admitted Merriam. "But it didn't go through, and there was no bullet."

"Don't forget how the image here and the image there oscillated back and forth through the machine," Hayward reminded him. "To shoot either one of them was like shooting at the props of a plane in flight. A bullet might shatter a blade by chance, but it is more likely to miss. You would have better luck by throwing a slow moving object like a rock, or better still, poke a crowbar through. Then it

would be there long enough to register. That is the only sure way of striking something that flickers on and off."

"I understand," said Merriam. "But what about those little broken sticks?"

"Parts of an arrow," explained Hayward. "The rest of the fragments must be lying in the Arizona arroyo. The other segments went through when Haeckel wasn't there."

"I see," said Merriam, comprehending at last. "Who could have shot him, do you suppose?"

"An Indian, I guess," said Hayward. "Probably a good Indian!"

[The end of *Death by Proxy* by Malcolm Jameson]