SPOOKY SURVEILLANCE

Try and escape the watching eyes of a mask.

THE SETUP
A stationary mask can appear to follow your every movement. No matter what direction you move, the face of the mask seems to turn with you. You will need:
- a molded mask (we used a Halloween hockey mask)
- tape
- a sunlit window

This illusion depends on using a mask that is molded so that the inside surface is the exact opposite of the outside. (The inside surfaces of some masks are smooth. These won’t work.) The mask must also be translucent. (Some light must be able to pass through it.)

It doesn’t matter if the mask is painted on the outside.
To experience this illusion, tape the mask onto a sunlit window so that the outside of the mask is against the window and the hollow inside faces the room. The sun must be shining directly into the window because the mask has to be lit from behind.

Stand ten or more feet away from the mask. Position yourself so that you are facing the window and the mask is on your left side. Stand still and focus on the mask. It will no longer appear hollow, it will look as if you are viewing the outside of the mask.

If you have trouble seeing the illusion, try closing one eye.
Watch the mask as you walk past it, moving parallel to the window. The effect is startling.

You can’t get away from the mask’s spooky surveillance.
INSIDER INFORMATION

The mask seems to be tracking you for two reasons, neither of which is supernatural. First, the backlighting removes some of your ability to judge depth. Your brain doesn’t have enough information to tell whether you are viewing the hollow inside of the mask or the convex outer side. Since you’re more familiar with a bulging face, your brain goes with the more “normal” perception. Not only can you be tricked by backlighting as to the shape of the mask, but you can be fooled by motion as well. If you tape a mask to a window with the normal side facing the room, the eyes and face appear to turn away from you as you walk past. When you walk past a mask with the hollow side facing the room, everything is reversed including the direction the face appears to turn. The Haunted Mansion in Disney World makes good use of this chilling illusion. Instead of masks, hollow statues with lights inside them stare at you as you ride by.