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Cover: Vernon Kramer



ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY, One Park Avenue, New York 16, New York. William Ziff, President; W. Bradford Briggs, Executive Vice President; Michael Michaelson, Vice President and Circulation Director; Hershel B. Sarbin, Vice President and General Manager; M. T. Birmingham, Jr., Vice President and Business Manager; Charles Housman, Financial Vice President; Richard Kislik, Treasurer.



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the GOGGLES of

By FRITZ LEIBER

To those who wear the goggles of Dr. Dragonet there is another world—of mystery, joy and, yes, terror . . .

HAVE you ever thought what it would be like if we could see *minds*?" Dr. Hugo Dragonet asked.

"You've got something will do that?" I demanded.

Dr. Hugo Dragonet indicated the four pairs of black goggles scattered across the center of the gleaming gray table and sat back grinning at us like a genial old condor.

Marty, Alice and I eyed them suspiciously. The last time we had ventured to wear a gadget of the Doctor's—an innocuous-seeming sort of hearing aid—it had been to hear a nervous jungle murmur which the Doctor had asserted was the sounds of the subconscious mind. Just a jungle murmur, a little like the background music for a darkest

Africa movie, but after five minutes of it Alice had become hysterical, Marty had growled out a senseless accusation of murder against me, and I had had a terrifyingly vivid vision of the great



Dr. DRAGONET

Illustrator WEST

city around us choked with vines, a-crawl with huge snakes, a-rustle with giant spiders, and a-creep with great black panthers. Hypnotic suggestion, we had told ourselves afterwards, not very confidently. Although Southern California is a land of fakers, and Los Angeles a city of illusion, Marty, Alice and I find it difficult to write off Dr. Hugo Dragonet simply as a charlatan.

Now we looked at four pairs of black goggles. Each pair had a fine wire connecting one of the massive bows to a black-enamored power pack or control device about as big as a package of



kingsize cigarettes and reminiscent of the subconscious hearing aids.

"You say these gadgets will let you see thoughts?" Marty asked. The Doctor shook his head. "I didn't say thoughts I said *minds*." "I don't know that I like the idea," Alice said.

I didn't exactly like the four white canes hooked over the back of the Doctor's big chair. Taken together with the goggles they looked much too much like equipment for three blind men and one blind girl.

Nevertheless I reached out and gingerly drew the nearest pair of goggles to me along with its trailing flat black box. So did Alice and Marty. Dr. Dragonet's gadgets are always a shade more fascinating by the fact that they are frightening. He had the charlatan's gift of always arousing interest, sometimes by fabulous hints, sometimes as now by silence.

But he was grinning at me and the grin had a fatherly-sardonic twist to it, as if he had read my suspicious thoughts and was amused. Alice, Marty and I like to think of ourselves as reasonably mature—a fairly successful sculpture-actress, newspaperman and writer—but Hugo Dragonet has a way of treating us as if we are a trio of bright children, whom it pleases him occasionally to provide with wonderful toys.

None of us can decide whether he is really a charlatan or a brilliant physicist-physiologist who works completely freelance and has not chosen (at least as yet) to share his important discoveries with the world of academic and industrial science. So far as we know, the Doctor supports himself solely—though quite lavishly—by specialized and little-known inventions in the realms of film and TV effects and by his occasional services as technical advisor to the studios on psychiatric and anthropological movies. If he cashes in on his important inventions (or his charlatanism, if it's that), we haven't an inkling of it and his patrons (or his victims) move in lofty circles quite unknown to us. What we are agreed upon, all three of us, is that we look forward to and are wholly fascinated by our little meetings with him—even if we always do feel a bit uneasy as we approach them.

AS I uncertainly fingered my pair of goggles and carefully drew the companion box to me by the fine connecting wire, I wondered if this was one of the important inventions and if so how it would work. Four pairs of black goggles . . . four gleaming black kingsize boxes, each with two tiny switches on it, one gray and rough, the other white and smooth . . . four white

canes . . . I was still bothered by the implications.

Not that there was anything sinister about our surroundings, though they would have given a sensitive person a touch of vertigo. The cantilevered, black-flagged, magnesium-roofed terrace thrust out like the flying bridge of a futuristic ship from Dr. Dragonet's house, which lifted from an easterly crest of the Santa Monica Mountains, as if the house in turn were the figurehead of a ship of hills, with Hollywood below us to the south, the San Fernando Valley below us to the north, while before us to the southeast, sprouting white skyscrapers and slashed by freeways and only faintly hazed today by smog, stretched the central sections of sprawlingly spacious Los Angeles. Behind us were the mountains, the westerling sun, and the invisible Pacific.

The inevitable Hollywood note of the fabulous and fake was provided by a white-walled gilt-domed group of small buildings on the hillside just below. Even at this distance, looking across the intervening lawn and flower-beds, we could read the neat black-on-white sign: GREATER COSMIC FELLOWSHIP.

The mildly exotic atmosphere of the terrace itself was pointed up by a few earthenware oriental figures and a remarkably realistic ceramic of a kinkajou,

which looked as though the thick-tailed, dark yellow Asiatic carnivore had been frozen in mid-scamper along a dead branch.

Karl, the Doctor's squarely built chauffeur and precision machinist, sat on the northern verge of the terrace, where steps go down to the garage and the magnificent machine shop where he fabricates the Doctor's inventions, presumably including these goggles.

Karl was methodically turning the pages of *The Los Angeles Times*. Impet, the Doctor's slim black cat, snoozed in the sun on the southern edge. Otherwise we were completely alone.

The round gray-topped table was poker size. Alice sat to my left, Marty to my right, the Doctor across. The only things on the table were the four goggle-sets and a square of dull whitish sheet-metal about a foot wide.

Marty touched a goggle set. "See *Minds*, you said?" The Doctor just nodded.

I BEGAN to inspect closely the black instruments in my hands. I saw that I had been right in thinking of them as goggles rather than glasses, for although they had bows like glasses there was a wide spongy black flange going back from each lens that I could see would fit against the skin of cheek and orbit,

shutting out all light from the sides.

Then I looked at the lenses themselves, first from the front, then from the back—without putting them on—in growing perplexity. All I could think of for a moment was a demonstration the Doctor had once put on for us of a girl who told colors blindfolded and read books through heavy cardboard. Alice made my point first.

"You can't see through them," she said. "They seem to be made of a black metal." She hadn't put hers on either.

Hugo Dragonet smiled and nodded.

Marty carried his own pair over into the sunlight. Impet looked up resentfully. Marty turned the glasses front to back toward the sun and looked through one lens cautiously.

"No, they're not like eclipse glasses," the Doctor called after him. "You couldn't see even an atomic blast through them. They're opaque to X rays too, probably to *all* electric light—using the term to mean the whole electromagnetic spectrum."

Marty returned excitedly. "But if that's true, it's amazing, Doctor! This black metal would be the perfect material to shield atomic reactors! Might work for bomb shelters too!"

Hugo Dragonet yawned. Im-

pet cradled his head between his paws and went back to sleep.

Marty flushed and chewed his lip. Besides being an incurable enthusiast, Marty is quite an idealist and patriot, and what he calls the Doctor's cynical and frivolous impracticality gets under his skin.

"To return to matters of real interest," the Doctor said, "these goggles are transparent to rays of both the gravitoelectric and magnetogravitic spectra and, when properly excited, will translate bands of those spectra into visible colors."

"But Doctor," Marty burst out, irrepressibly, "those other two spectra are just an obscure possibility from field theory. There's absolutely no evidence for their existence."

"Are you sure of that?" Hugo Dragonet asked softly, weighing the fourth pair of goggles in his palm. "However I don't insist that you accept my explanations," he added with a smile. "Explanations are never the most interesting part of science."

"Doctor, how do the goggles help to see minds?" Alice put in hurriedly.

"Why, my dear," he said, "they translate into electric or visible light two narrow bands of gravitic and magnetic light—if, purely for convenience, I may use those terms," he added elabor-

rately with a sardonic little bow toward Marty. The Doctor likes to needle our young science reporter.

Marty blushed.

Keeping it simple like Alice, I asked, "How do minds show up in the gravitic and magnetic light?"

The Doctor did not answer my question. Instead he put on his pair of black goggles and tucked the attached black box into the top of his outside breast pocket with the two switches facing front.

It made him look like a blind man.

After a bit he reached his right hand across his chest and pushed the gray switch, then sat back stolidly. I got the impression he was counting under his breath.

Paper rustled faintly as Karl turned another page. Impet sat up and stared intently at the Doctor, seeming to study the change the goggles had made in his face. The sunlight struck bronze tints from the cat's black fur.

TIME stretched out. Karl swatted something with his newspaper—he has a thing about insects—and took up the next section.

Then the Doctor touched the white switch. Immediately he sat forward in his chair and looked

long and carefully at each of us in turn—first me, then Marty, then Alice.

His goggles were more opaque-seeming than ever—round flats of dull black metal—but I never in my life had such an intense sensation of someone looking through me or rather *into* me.

He frowned at me—at least the vertical furrows deepened above the bridge of his goggles—and he gave a faint grunt of what sounded like surprise.

When he looked at Marty his grunt seemed to say "Just as I thought," but when he turned to Alice there was a rising note to his "Umm," as though he had found something that tickled his imagination.

"What is it, Doctor?" Alice asked nervously, shrinking back in her seat. "You're acting like an X-ray machine."

Hugo Dragonet smiled. "Why don't you try the goggles?" he said. "Why don't you all try them? And see for yourself? Just put them on and then follow my directions. Only one thing: once you're wearing them, don't take them off until I tell you."

Suddenly I was no longer reluctant but fumblingly eager to get the goggles on. I judged from my last jumbled glimpse that Marty and Alice were the same. But as the thick black flanges settled down against my skull, I had a flurry of unexpected panic.

The rubbery material seemed not so much to touch my skin as to kiss it suckingly and for a moment I had the gruesome fear of suction applied to my eyeballs. I started to snatch the things off, then told myself not to be a nervous fool.

"Take it easy," I heard the Doctor say as if from a considerable distance. "Make sure they're comfortable. But remember, no peeking. And don't throw the little switches until I tell you."

I realized that in my rush I'd forgotten about the control box—if that was what it was—so I ghosted my fingertips down the wire from the left bow until they felt the box, which I slid halfway down into my breast pocket as I'd seen the Doctor do.

"Don't be in a hurry," he was saying. "Just as at the planetarium, if we wait a bit our eyes get more sensitive to the darkness."

But this was more than darkness, I realized with another spurt of inward panic, it was blackness complete and absolute. You know how when you close your eyes in no matter how dark a room, you always see churning specks of light and faint washes of color—even if you don't apply pressure, which can bring on blue flashes and all sorts of things? Well, now there wasn't anything of that sort at all, just velvety limitless dark-

ness—*black* black, if I may call it that. It didn't make sense to me, because I'd always thought that the churning specks weren't due to light at all but just a random automatic discharge of a few of the retinal cells, which would go on whether there was an atom of light or not. Unless, I suggested to myself, the goggles had some sort of general inhibiting effect? It really seemed quite incredible that I should still be sitting on a bright terrace with dazzling golden sunlight striking a few yards away and not getting one hint of it—not even a reddish glow transmitted through the flesh of my cheeks—just because of a pair of goggles, and for a moment I had the thought of Dr. Dragonet rearing up leanly and blotting out the sun like some Old Testament prophet or medieval sorcerer. Or suppose these goggles literally blinded their wearer? Suppose—

I WAS about to disobey instructions and take the things off when I heard the Doctor say, "Now you might each of you gently depress the gray switch, as you saw me do. It's the rough-surfaced one.

"Don't expect to see anything startling, or even much of anything at all," he added. "This part is merely preliminary and doesn't work too well for every-

one. But it creates a *framework*."

At first I thought I must be one of the ones for whom this part didn't work, whatever it was, then I became aware that the absolute blackness had been invaded by large shapes of dark gray faintly edged with silver. At first I thought they made only an arbitrary geometrical pattern, but then I realized that they added up to an extremely dark picture of the table in front of me and the terrace around us—with this important difference, that my companions had vanished, I could see only the three empty chairs. But it was all extremely faint—maybe it was just my imagination, it occurred to me; or maybe the Doctor was using suggestion on me—some sort of hypnotic deal, as we'd tried to tell ourselves about the subconscious hearing aids.

"But I can't see *us*," I heard Alice say excitedly. "I can't even see my own hand."

"It's like a very overdeveloped negative of the terrace with the people left out," I heard Marty add in puzzled tones.

"You are now seeing by *gravitic light*," came the cool but heavier voice of Hugo Dragonet. "Gravitic light is reflected by most inorganic materials—metals, minerals and so on—though not all—for instance, you can't see each other's goggles. But *all* organic materials—animals,

plants, the clothing made from plant fiber or animal wool or simply any carbon-based material—are transparent to *gravitic light* and so don't show up."

I looked around. Sure enough, Karl and Impet were both invisible, assuming they were still sitting where I'd seen them last. Much more startling to me, the ceramic kinkajou was also gone, although the earthenware figures remained, suggesting that the kinkajou wasn't ceramic at all but some sort of literally frozen animal flesh. I started to ask the Doctor about it, then remembered that it usually doesn't do to ask Hugo Dragonet about extraneous mysteries glimpsed while exploring a main one. There are some parts of his life, such as his years in Vietnam—old Indochina then—that he doesn't talk about.

One of the many odd things about my present vision of my surroundings was that the sun-drenched outside looked no brighter than the shaded terrace. And it was a frighteningly *empty* world.

"Of course you are not seeing by *gravitic light* directly," the Doctor's voice cut in, "but by the electric light your goggles translate it into. The goggles are adjusted to keep it very dim. It's just a *framework* or background for what you'll be seeing next—by *magnetic light*. Which re-

minds me, it's time for you to throw the white switch—the smooth one."

THIS time I hesitated on the brink. Alice gave an involuntary cry in which there was more wonder than fear. I depressed my switch.

Over each of the three chairs, exactly where my friends' heads would be, hung a ghostly globe of colored light.

Marty's and Alice's were identical shades of green. Hugo Dragonet's was blue shot with streaks of dark red—and much brighter, though none of the globes were very bright: they were like compact clouds of phosphorescent mist.

And they weren't perfect globes either. Marty's almost was, at least it had very sharp boundaries, but its shape was that of a large egg tipped forward—the shape of Marty's brain if the skull were removed. Its green glow was brightest to the front.

By contrast the Doctor's globe was misty-edged. The dark red streaks that banded the bright blue kept fading, changing, reappearing.

Alice's globe tapered down into a ghostly but recognizable replica of her face. It was as if a gossamer mask hung from the green globe.

And that was all. No, not

quite. On the table in front of Alice alone were very faint folded curves of light, like fingers.

Then the Doctor spoke. His voice seemed to me to be coming out of the globe of blue light. Natural enough, I suppose—just normal sound-localization—but the effect was monstrously eerie.

"You are now seeing by magnetic light," the blue globe (I mean the Doctor) said. "Magnetic light is generated solely by mental activity—specifically by consciousness or awareness. I sometimes call it mind light. In fact, you're seeing minds."

"You mean we're seeing each other thinking?" the mask-trailing green globe on my left (Alice, of course) asked wonderingly.

"In a way, yes."

"We're seeing each other's thoughts?" she pressed.

"Alas, no. Perhaps some day we will find a prism, a lens, some way of refocussing mind light, so that we can actually see the little inner world of form and color and feeling that is another person's consciousness. But not yet. Now all we are seeing is the diffuse outward glow of inward awareness—the envelope or aura of thought. It's possible that throughout history a few individuals have been sporadically sensitive to mind light without translating goggles—accounting for persistent mystical beliefs

about human auras and the halos of saints."

IT hit me all of a sudden what a terrific gimmick for spiritualism these goggles would be. Believers would pay limitless to see auras, to see their own minds glowing like spheres of pure incorruptible light. But right away I ran into the snag of the Doctor's apparent disinterest in con money or build-up. In any case my vague suspicions couldn't compete for long with the amazement I was feeling. The simple awe of the thing began to take hold of me.

"We're seeing brain waves," Alice said huskily.

"I don't believe so, my dear," the Doctor told her. "So-called brain waves are simply tiny rhythmic changes of electric potential in the flesh around the skull."

"But we are seeing nervous activity," Marty suddenly put in sharply.

"If that were true," the Doctor replied, "we'd see the spine, the whole nerve-tree, as sharply as the brain. No, we're seeing the glow of *consciousness*—that inward world of awareness that means life and identity, that little cosmos locked inside the skull that is all of reality to each of us. As I've said before, we're seeing *minds*."

None of us said anything for

a while then, as it sank in. The awe of the thing gripped me completely. Mind Light!

"I'm not all locked inside my skull," Alice nervously broke the silence at last. "I can see my hands." And as she said that, the ghostly fingers became a little more definitely outlined.

"That's because you're a sculptress," the Doctor answered. "You send your awareness into your fingers—molding, shaping. You literally see and think with your hands—like some blind man I'd watched by magnetic light. By contrast Marty and Arthur show a sharply delimited consciousness, as if it actually were skull-bounded—they're word-and-idea men, rationalists.

"Whereas you're an artist," he continued to Alice, "and an actress too, highly conscious of your appearance. That's why you project your consciousness into your face as well as your hands."

"I do?" Alice sounded both ashamed and excited. "Doctor, is there some way for me to see myself?"

The Doctor chuckled. A dark grey rectangle lifted from the table. I remembered the square of whitish metal that had been lying there.

"Here's a mirror for mind light," he said to Alice. Her ghostly fingers gripped it, the filmy mask of her face grew a

trace brighter as she stared at it, then it began to fluctuate as (I suppose) delight and embarrassment struggled together.

"What's the mirror made of?" Marty asked eagerly.

"Something quite unsuitable for reactor shielding or for wrapping gum," the Doctor told him sourly, then continued, "Projected awareness is rather common. Occasional unaided glimpses of it, due to magnetic sensitivity, may account for spiritualists' claims about ectoplasm."

Marty and I looked in turn at the reflections of our mind globes. Mine was sharply bounded like his but more toward the blue.

"Green and blue are the normal range," the Doctor explained. "Blue seems to link with introversion and contemplation, green with extroversion and action. The other colors come in when the *feelings* are involved. Yellow goes with joy, red with savage passions, orange with sensuousness, misery is gray. Violet I've almost never seen."

"Doctor," Alice asked, "why did you say 'Umm' that way when you first saw my mind? Because it was in my face?"

He chuckled. "No," he said, "more because it was exactly the same shade as Martin's—something I've seldom seen except in identical twins and long-married couples."

Alice said, "Hmm." Marty mumbled vaguely.

"Happily married couples," the Doctor added encouragingly. Then, "I'm a strange mixture, as you can see," he went on. "Blue, the philosopher's color, shot through with sudden animal impulses—the dark red. The old orang at the zoo has a mind that's *all* that second color."

"You've been out with these goggles?" I asked.

"Of course, Arthur. You wouldn't expect me to pass up a new way to pry into people, would you? I carry a white cane and pose as a blind man, mostly to justify the glasses. Karl always goes with me, pretending to guide me. Actually I do need his help from time to time—the dim gravitic background-light is not very useful in fast traffic. Besides, there are some people who don't have visible minds at all—blacked-out drunks, for one thing—and I don't want to go bumping into them."

"Will we be able to go out?" Alice asked.

"You counted the canes behind my chair, didn't you? First, though, we'll have a look at the mind-map. Come on."

THE banded blue globe rose and the doctor's chair pushed back. I got up cautiously, feeling at the table edge. It was very strange to feel it and to see it

by gravitic light, but not see my hands that were doing the feeling—ghosts must have such sensations, I thought. Just then a very faint globe of yellowish light about as big as a tennis ball flashed up onto the table (or bounced up, it seemed to me) and moved toward the Doctor. The word *Poltergeist* jumped into my mind at the same instant, and I felt the back of my neck crawl, but just then the Doctor said, "Come on, Impet, you too," and the pale little globe was lifted close to the bright blue one.

"Cats do have minds, you see," he said. "All the higher animals appear to have consciousness and awareness."

I had a strong impulse to take off my goggles and check for myself that the weird sight was only the Doctor carrying his cat, but I remembered his warning and refrained.

"What's this mind-map and where do you keep it?" Marty asked.

"I'll show you," the Doctor said and led us toward the southern edge of the terrace. Although it was well-defined in gravitic light I felt uneasy about the edge because it's unrailed and at that point the drop to the flower beds is considerable, but the Doctor stopped short of it, and I noticed that an olive globe had appeared beside us—Karl, I supposed.

Once more I suppressed the impulse to check.

"Look," said Dr. Dragonet.

The lights of Los Angeles seen from the hills behind Hollywood can be a most spectacular sight. Now it seemed to me as if I were seeing them on a very smoggy night, or—more precisely—seeing them as they would be if a giant rheostat dimmed all of them greatly though leaving hints of their neon coloring.

Gravitic light showed little of the city's structure and barely distinguished dark land from darker sky. It was almost a plane of solid black that backgrounded the faint glow of mind light that faded off toward the horizon in faint patches and rivulets.

We watched silently for some time. The Doctor said, "Notice how it keeps getting a little brighter? When you first switched on the magnetic light, you wouldn't have noticed any of this distant stuff at all. You'll go on getting more sensitive the longer you wear the goggles—up to three hours. But just one flash of ordinary light will cancel your sensitivity—that's why I warned you against peeking."

I asked, "What's the brighter glow due south? Downtown? And the one far off to the west?"

"You mean *that* and *that*?" the Doctor asked. A pale yellow blob moved to indicate the two directions—I realized he was us-

ing Impet for a pointer. "No, that's not downtown, that's the University of Southern California, while the one to the west is UCLA, though it may run into RAND. While that one off to the east over the hills—you missed that—is Cal Tech." He chuckled. "It amused me greatly to discover that more thinking actually does go on at universities."

He gestured again with Impet. "But many of those bright patches I can't interpret at all. I haven't explored them yet, or they keep shifting. And I can't explain that violet glow just below us. With one exception I've never seen violet anywhere else."

Alice said, "If your blue and red would mix, it might make violet."

Meanwhile I studied the glow he'd just pointed out and asked, "Doesn't that come from the Greater Cosmic Fellowship? But why should a bunch of crackpots have a rare color?"

Alice laughed nervously. "Maybe they're Martians. Great planet-hoppers, the Martians, especially in cartoons."

"What made you say Martians?" the Doctor demanded with a sharpness that startled me.

"I don't know—I guess I always call anything from off the Earth Martians," Alice explained fumblingly. "Doctor, I was only joking. I didn't really

think you'd take me seriously."

"I know you didn't," he told her. "But you know me, I take everything seriously—except practical matters."

"What's the one violet exception?" I wanted to know.

"I may show you later, Arthur."

Marty now spoke up at last, his voice sighing with wonder. "Doctor, I've just been thinking what a terrific advantage mind light would be for espionage, or military patrolling, or even simple police work. Doctor, in this instance wouldn't you be willing to let the government in on—"

Dr. Dragonet yawned audibly, then tossed Impet to the floor and said briskly, "How about that outing I promised all of you? Good! Just remember to keep your goggles on at all times—one peek ruins the sensitivity. Karl, get the car—but first bring us the canes!"

THE rest of that afternoon and night we saw Los Angeles as black canyons and caves through which minds streamed like globes of undissolving mist driven by random winds.

Karl not only chauffeured and shepherded us, but also quietly interpreted the passing scenes. Otherwise we would not always have been sure what we were watching, for a mind shows neither sex nor race nor (generally)

age and certainly carries no signs of class or station, poverty or wealth.

We saw freeways racing with wraithlike gravitic-sketched cars, in each of which poised one or a few of the phosphorescent spheres.

We saw a silver-gray cemetery where minds floated like ghosts among the tombstones—unutterably eerie even after Karl had described to us the funeral party he saw by ordinary light.

We saw dim minds, murky orange mostly, behind the bars at the Griffith Park Zoo. The old orang's was dark red, just as the Doctor had said. Even the snakes had shadowy minds, though Karl would not accompany us into the reptile house. Karl classes snakes with insects and arachnids.

We saw the golden minds of a jazz band. We saw projected orange mind twinkling in the feet of a dancer.

In a church we saw a scattering of dim indigo minds, like patches of light from deep blue stained glass.

In a skid row bar we saw smoky amber minds winking on and off like fireflies.

We saw red minds in a gang rumble.

We saw a mind vanish suddenly in a crimson burst when a driver was thrown and killed in a freeway accident. That made us ask the Doctor a question. He an-

swered softly, "Wearing the goggles, I have watched death in hospitals. The light only faded and then winked out."

We saw minds sun-hued with joy at the beach, glowing minds in a schoolroom, and (so Alice insisted) the silver-rosy minds of lovers.

Once we saw a violet mind in the rear of a car driven by an ordinary green mind, and remembering what the Doctor had said, we instantly asked Karl for a description. But our curiosity was thwarted in this instance—the car was a small panel truck. We asked the Doctor if this was the violet mind he'd promised to show us, but he denied it.

MANY times I was tempted to take off my goggles—more for the kick of verifying the incredible than because of fatigue or any lingering suspicions of trickery on the Doctor's part—but I hated to lose my ever-growing sensitivity to mind light. You see, by now I was becoming convinced that there was much more to be seen by mind light than I'd observed so far—faint things that hovered on the edge of vision. There was the suggestion that some minds had tenuous *tentacles* of mind light and that sometimes the tips of these tentacles plunged into other minds—I'll swear that once I saw one mind leading five or

six others, like dogs on leashes.

There were hints, too, that some brains held more minds than one—shadowy splits and mergers, dominations, possessions, vampirisms, clashes, battles. Once I seemed to see a mind flow around another, engulfing or perhaps dissolving it. I kept peering—I admit it—for minds without bodies.

Also I occasionally seemed to see a trace of color in the cold gravitic gray of some material objects—as if some minds were projecting themselves into things, or even the inanimate itself struggling toward awareness.

I asked the Doctor about these things, whether they were reality or imagination, but he would only say, "Keep watching."

Finally he told Karl to drive us back to his home. We sped out of the mind-dazzle of the city into the blackness of the hills.

The Doctor said, "I'm glad you've all followed my suggestion about keeping the goggles on without intermission. At least I hope you have. By now your eyes should be about sensitive enough for something rather special I want to show you. The desert or the mountains or the open sea would be better, but this local outback will have to do. Slide back the top of the car, Karl."

A moment later, "Look up," said Hugo Dragonet.

Desert nights have taught me the shape of the Milky Way. Smog blots it out in Los Angeles or any other city.

But tonight, very faintly but definitely, I saw the unmistakable shape of our galaxy a-glow over Los Angeles with muted rainbow light.

"Mind," Alice whispered, "all over the universe, beating on us in tiny waves."

As she said that, I could almost feel it on my skin—increasingly delicate flakes sifting down.

"How can something faint as mind light travel so far?" I wondered.

Dr. Dragonet said: "Who can say how dim minds are on other worlds? Or how bright? There may be minds like novas."

"What's that point of violet light near the horizon to the south?" Marty asked suddenly.

"You should know," the Doctor told him. "I thought you kept track of the planets."

Marty said: "Mars."

The Doctor commented, "So you see why I was struck by Alice associating violet with Martians." He laughed thinly. "An interesting coincidence."

AT that moment the car was climbing past the small, gravitic-etched domes of the Greater Cosmic Fellowship—making another coincidence, I told myself.

"I'm going to regret taking these goggles off," Alice said, "and seeing things by ordinary electric light." I realized I felt reluctant about it too and I found myself recalling the German psychologist who wore glasses that turned everything upside-down for so long that upside-down became normal and when he finally took the glasses off, everything seemed to be standing on its head.

As Karl was putting the car away, we started up the stairs to the terrace, the doctor just ahead of me, Marty and Alice lagging behind. In a few hours I'd got so used to gravitic light that the steep steps were no great challenge.

There was a sudden hissing ahead of us, then a single enraged or terrified squall. A small pale globe came streaking down past us from the terrace, not pausing at the Doctor's "Impet!"

I was beside him as we mounted the last steps. Marty and Alice were just behind.

I became aware of a wholly unfamiliar odor—acrid, nauseating.

A glowing sphere, the brightest mind I had seen yet, was on the other side of the terrace.

It hung only inches above the flagging.

Its color was violet.

Footsteps pounded on the steps behind us and I heard Karl

call, "I'm coming, Doctor!" The olive sphere of his mind appeared beside me.

With a dry rustling like light bony plates or metallic feathers scraping together, the violet mind across the terrace swiftly reared up to a height of eight or nine feet.

There was a clucking gasp of horror beside me, a swallowed scream. Simultaneously Karl's mind flared and winked out and I heard his body slump to the flagging.

"Keep your goggles on!" the Doctor cried.

The next voice I heard came from the violet mind towering across the room. It spoke English, but it was the mechanical English of a talking machine, or voder, that is operated by a keyboard and puts words together like snippets of magnetized wire. Yet in spite of its mechanical quality it conveyed an impression of power, intellectual and otherwise, that made me cringe.

VODER: Dr. Hugo Dragonet, I presume?

DR. D: What do you mean, sir, by this unheralded intrusion?

VODER: Really, Dr. Dragonet, I think you have little cause for surprise.

As the conversation between the Doctor and the violet mind went on, I was several times tempted to take off my goggles. Along with my terror I felt an

agonizing curiosity, a gnawing desire to know if I could bear to see what had made Karl faint—if that was all that had happened to him. Truthfully, I was grateful that the Doctor had ordered us all to keep them on. I was even more grateful for the courage and poise he showed as he answered the voder voice.

DR. D: It is true that I have been half expecting someone. At least I have considered the possibility. (*Then to us*) Keep the goggles on!

VODER: And you too, Doctor. It will be wiser if we do not see each other in the . . . I am not sure if "flesh" is the word I want, at least for myself.

DR. D: May I ask what attracted your attention to my dwelling?

VODER: Can't you guess, Doctor? We recently became aware that there were instruments in it sensitive to the magnetic light of consciousness. *Our* instruments detected *your* instruments.

DR. D: That seems reasonable enough.

VODER: Doctor Dragonet, are you aware of where I come from?

DR. D: I believe so. The Greater Cosmic Fellowship?

VODER: You are tactful, perhaps even elusive. I mean are you aware of where I come from—originally?

DR. D: If I must hazard a guess, the planet Mars.

VODER: That is correct.

DR. D: (to us) Keep the goggles on!

VODER: And now I must ask you, Dr. Dragonet, what you intend to do with your knowledge.

DR. D: Nothing. Nothing at all.

VODER: Excuse me, Dr. Dragonet, but I find that difficult to believe.

DR. D: Why, sir? What would you expect me to do?

VODER: Well, sir, I would expect you to inform your government, your police and military authorities, of the presence of Martians in the city of Los Angeles. Since most of your fellows have not been educated to an acceptance of intelligence in physical shapes different from their own, this information, once confirmed, would lead to raids, riots, panic, and a general demand for the immediate extermination of all the extraterrestrials. Attempts would be made to root out our innocent little observation post. Such attempts would encounter resistance, since we Martians are burdened with the same self-preservatory instincts as yourselves and have besides a certain dignity to maintain as peaceful extraterrestrial observers from a senior planet. The result would be a brisk skirmish—more likely, as Mars is rather stuffy about protecting her own, a full-scale interplanetary war.

DR. D: Exactly.

VODER: Excuse me, I do not quite understand.

DR. D: I think you do. What I mean is that you have described exactly what would be likely to happen if I should inform Terran authorities about your presence on earth. And so, as I have already told you, I propose to do nothing. Nothing at all.

VODER: Ah! I must confess I did not expect such a civilized decision from an earthling.

DR. D: Come, come! Earthmen aren't absolute idiots!

VODER: I am beginning to appreciate that, Doctor. I must say I am greatly relieved that this is your decision. It excuses me from taking certain steps, unpleasant to you and your companions, which I would otherwise have been obliged to carry out.

DR. D: Or attempt to.

VODER: Yes, sir, attempt to. Though I fancy that with our greater destructive powers—

DR. D: *We* are not altogether powerless you know.

VODER: That too, I suppose, is possible. Excuse me for bringing up such unpleasant matters.

DR. D: Certainly, certainly.

VODER: Dr. Dragonet, can you offer us assurance that your companions will be properly secretive?

DR. D: I vouch for them. You have my word.

VODER: That is sufficient.

DR. D: Thank you. And now, I

don't wish to seem inhospitable, but . . .

VODER: (The violet globe bowed with a repetition of the dry, rustling sound): Of course. I will depart immediately. I can understand that this interview must be something of a strain to junior minds. I trust, however, Dr. Dragonet, that there will be opportunities for you and I to discuss in private matters of interest to two philosophical denizens of the cosmos?

DR. D: Surely. Come back at any time I'm alone.

VODER: Thank you, Dr. Dragonet. Farewell, friends.

DIPPING close to the flagging again, the violet globe rapidly headed toward the edge of the terrace. Although I still found the accompanying rustling or heavy scuttling sound detestable, my earlier fears had been stilled enough by the strange urbane conversation I'd just heard so I thought I might risk a look.

I lifted my hands to my temples, but, "Keep the goggles on!" commanded Dr. Dragonet.

The violet globe went over the edge. Not long afterwards the Doctor said, "It's all right now, I imagine, to take them off."

Normal vision was something of an anticlimax. The terrace was very dark. And chilly. The first thing I did was turn on some lights.

The Doctor was kneeling by Karl, who came out of his faint quickly now and seemed almost embarrassed by it. Yet when asked what he had seen, he almost fainted again. Then he said firmly, "What I saw was some sort of black centipede four yards long with eyes big as saucers. It reared and swayed like a cobra. In its upper claws it had a black box with a keyboard on it."

At that point Marty, Alice and I all started to talk at once, but the Doctor, pleading weariness, refused to enter into a discussion of any sort. However, while scanning the flowerbeds below for evidence of the creature's trail between the terrace and the Fellowship, he did say, almost apologetically, to Marty, "I'm sure you can see why it's the better part of wisdom to keep the authorities out of cases like this."

Then gazing thoughtfully at

the white walls looming faintly through the dark, he said, shaking his head, "You certainly never know whom you have for neighbors in Hollywood. Good night, children—I'm beat."

Impet appeared at the top of the steps, crossed the terrace very gingerly, and sniffed the spot where the creature had gone over the edge. Then, backing away with a hiss that seemed her last word on the subject, she went into the house.

"Good night," the Doctor repeated to us, following her.

Driving down from the hills with Marty and Alice I had a try at convincing them that the whole business could have been a hoax—at least the Martian episode (perhaps the Doctor simply had an earth friend with a violet mind)—but I didn't begin to convince even myself.

THE END