# ELEMENTAL SPIRITS

## by SANDY MILLER

ACCORDING to the Abbé de Villars, the air is full of creatures of human form, who in appearance are fierce, but are actually tractable, science lovers, subtle, eager to serve learned ones but hostile to fools. Their wives and daughters are huge and beautiful like the Amazons. The waters were inhabited as well as the earth, and these creatures were called Nymphs or Undines by the Adepts of the past. Most of the children born to them are beautiful daughters, so lovely that the daughters of men cannot compare with them. According to the Abbé the earth is populated to within a short distance of its center with Gnomes, who are smaller in stature, and guard the mines, and precious stones. They are friendly toward mankind and are ordered about easily. The Gnomides who are their wives are tiny but very pretty and quaint in their attire. The Salamanders are the inhabitants of the fiery regions, and serve the philosophers but do not seek their company. The wives of the Salamanders are even more beautiful than any of the other Elementals, because their element is more pure, especially mentally pure. These creatures are to be pitied for their souls are mortal and they have no hopes of enjoying the Eternal Being whom they religiously adore. The only way they can achieve immortality is to form an alliance with a man of earth, which is very difficult.

* * *

# JEWELED COBRA

## by PETE BOGG

PEOPLE used to believe that every snake, as well as toads, had in its head a precious jewel. To doubt this belief was sinful. According to an old Sanskrit legend, there once lived a very beautiful maiden who longed for one of these jewels to the extent that she killed a cobra and removed the valuable stone from his head. It was the duty of the snake tribe to avenge the murder. So the King of the serpents called on his magic powers, and took the form of a handsome young man, and in this disguise, he proceeded to court the unsuspecting maiden. She fell in love with him and soon they were married with great ceremony. When the bridal couple retired to the bridal suite, she looked lovingly at her husband. He smiled at her, but when his mouth opened, she noticed to her great horror that his tongue was forked and that it trembled. He did not have the tongue of a man, but that of a snake.

Early the next morning, the bride's father and several friends stood outside the door to offer greetings to the happy couple. There was no answer to their knock nor was there a reply again at noon or in the evening. There was not even a sound from their chamber. During the next night the father broke down the door, and then he saw the terrible vengeance of the snake. On the bed lay the lifeless body of his beautiful daughter. The bridegroom was not in sight, but a black cobra came writhing out from under the bed and slithered from the house through a hole in the wall.

# FIRE BOMBS

## by J. R. MARKS

EVERY year forest fires destroy millions of dollars worth of trees. These fires spread over such large areas and become so fierce and hot that fire fighters cannot get near enough to them to do much good. Today three government agencies are working together to prevent large destructive fires. They are fighting fires from the air. When the forest rangers in their mountain lookout stations see smoke from a fire they call in their report to a nearby airfield where peace-time bombs are loaded into B-29s and P-47s. These special peacetime bombs are filled with chemicals and water that put out the fires. In just a few minutes after the airfield receives the fire report, there is a roar of motors above the flames. A P-47 zooms down over the fire at 350 miles an hour and drops a 165 pound water-filled bomb. Then a B-29 follows up with a 4,000 pound water and chemical filled bomb. This causes a huge blast of water and mud and rocks to explode upward and extinguish the flames in the nearby area. Then another plane flies low and drops men and axes and other fire fighting equipment. In just a short time the flying firemen are able to extinguish the last of the blaze.

Using this new method, fire-fighters can reach the fire before it spreads too far. They can enter areas that could not be reached with trucks and other large equipment. This experiment has been tried out in Missoula, Montana with such success that the experimenters hope the plan will be used throughout the country.

# The Tides of Time

## by A. Bertram Chandler

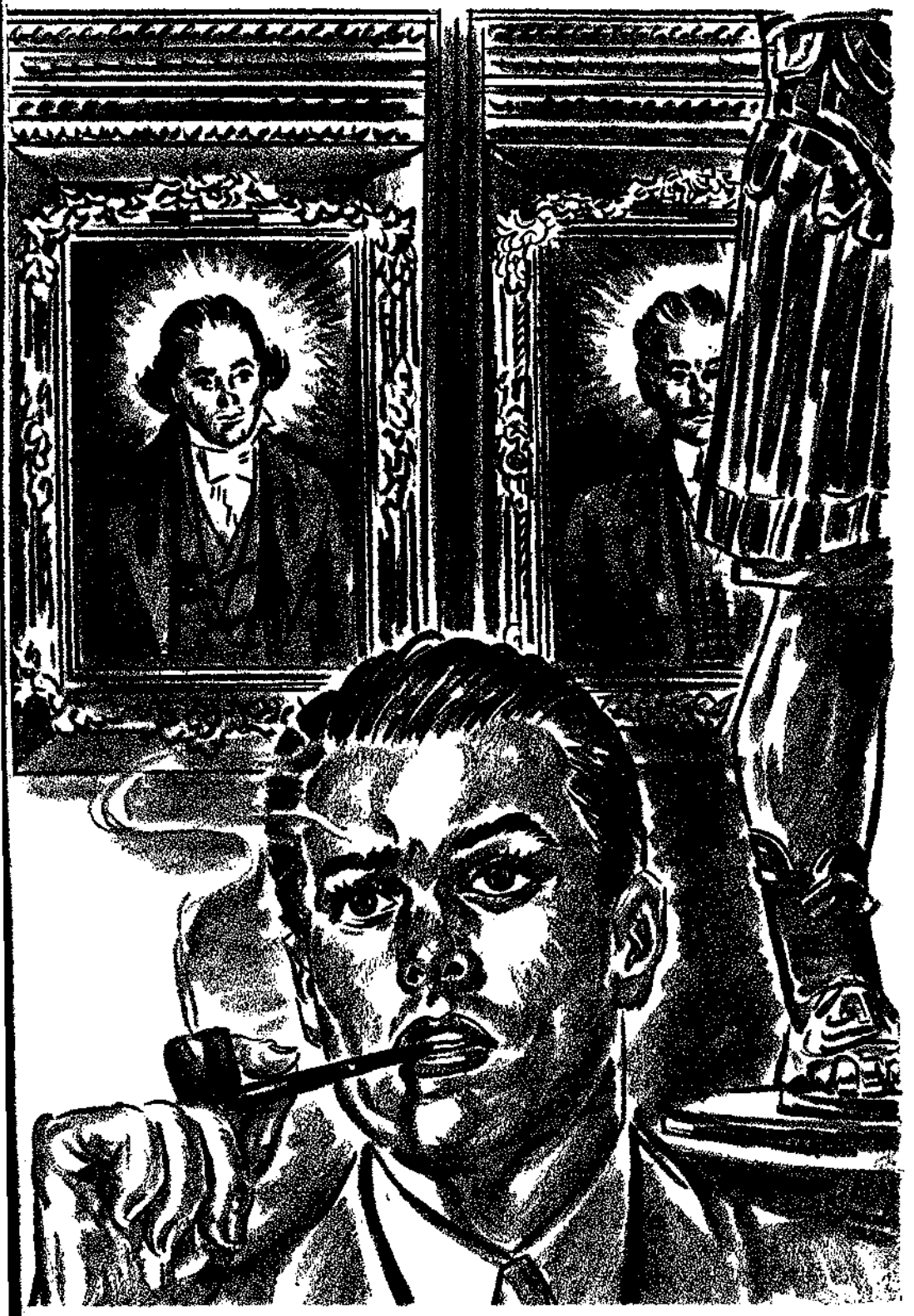
**They say that time is relative—**

**but what if *time* is *one* of your relatives!**

"AND so tomorrow you find out. . . ."

"Yes."

Aubrey St. John Sheraton looked across the table, across the remains of the simple yet expensive meal, at the girl. And she was worth looking at. Black hair, blue eyes, the kind of skin that is best described as golden—these were charms beside which the Sheraton Secret paled to insignificance. Perhaps the cheekbones were a shade too high,



Aubrey Sheraton felt a strange kinship in the room—and time seemed to have stopped . . .

perhaps there was far too much intelligence in the eyes to suit those who prefer their women merely ornamental —but Aubrey St. John Sheraton knew what he wanted.

"Yes," he said again. "And tomorrow, my dear, I shall be of age. Which means that I shan't have to wait any longer for my respected parent's consent. So. . . ."

"No, Aubrey. Not yet. Wait until I have my degree. You know very well that what first attracted you to me was the fact that we were interested in the same things. And you have said more than once that you wanted a fellow research worker as much as a wife. Wait, my dear. It won't be too long. Five months at the most."

Then the too serious young man allowed one of his rare moments of gallantry to flash to the surface.

"I'd wait five hundred years for you, my darling," he said.

* * *

Over a different table, in very different surroundings, Aubrey St. John Sheraton looked at his father. Manfred, the butler, brought in the decanter and glasses, left the two men to themselves. They took the first glass of wine in silence. In silence Sir Aubrey refilled his glass. His hand, his son could not help noticing, was not quite steady. Materialist that he was, the young man could not suppress a tremor of apprehension. For his materialism was that of the modern age—as redolent of mysticism as any religion of the past. He reached for the decanter.

His hand, in mid passage, was halted by that of the elder man.

*"No,"* said Sir Aubrey. Then, in a gentler voice, "No. You youngsters haven't the head that we had at your age—and *my* father wouldn't allow me more than one glass on the night of my twenty-first birthday."

"Is . . . is *it* so dreadful, then?"

"I shouldn't say dreadful. But strange, my boy, terribly strange. And yet . . . perhaps *you* will be able to understand something of it. You are the first of the family to become a scholar. And that is strange, too. For five hundred years, ever since the first Sir Aubrey shocked his contemporaries by competing with the merchants on their own ground, the main interest of the family has been finance. They said it was luck—the Sheratons always . . ." he groped for a telling word . . . "backed the right horse. They disavowed their faith and helped Henry sack the monasteries—but they were good Catholics again when Mary came to the throne. Elizabeth found them staunch Protestants with money to invest in the great maritime ventures. Under Charles I they supported Parliment—but were ready with a very welcome loan to his son when the Commonwealth disintegrated. But you know as well as I how we Sheratons have always ridden the tide of fortune. And it was never luck."

"The Secret?"

"Yes. But you've been into these things, Aubrey. I've looked at some of your books. I can't make head or tail of 'em—but they seem to say that Space and Time are all mixed up. Perhaps you'll understand it. . . . I don't pretend to. But come."

HE ROSE to his feet, picking up the object that had been before him on the polished mahogany throughout his talk. It was a key, a large key, in keeping with the antiquity of Sheraton Towers. He went to the corner of the room and picked up the lantern that Manfred had left there. In the bright glow of the electric light the feeble flame of the candle behind the translucent horn was barely visible. Sir Aub-

rey seemed acutely conscious of the incongruity of his appearance as he stood there—an ageing, slightly paunchy man in a well cut dinner jacket, the huge key in his right hand, the antique light swinging from the other.

"Isn't it absurd?" he demanded. "The Towers are wired for electric light—and even if we blow a fuze electric torches are handy enough. But this is the very lantern the first Sir Aubrey used when he paid his periodic visits—and *he* has insisted that we use nothing else. . . ."

"But who, or what, is *he?*"

"Be patient. You will soon find out. And I must leave you alone with *him*—that is one of his conditions—for a heart to heart talk." He chuckled. "He'll find it a pleasant change to have a scientist instead of the usual financier to pass the time of day with!"

They left the dining room, darkly dignified in gleaming oak panelling, walked slowly along the long gallery hung with portraits of long dead Sheratons. In spite of the different attire—ranging from Tudor to Twentieth Century—every Sheraton was surprisingly similar. It was more than a family likeness. The young man was reminded of a bitter phrase coined after the first world conflict—"Hard faced men who had done well out of the war." He looked at the ancestral portraits with a new understanding—here were hard faced men who had done well out of every war, out of the slave trade and sweated labor, out of unknown and unguessable human misery and degradation. He was thankful that he had broken with family tradition, that through him the wealth amassed over five turbulent, unhappy centuries would be used to push back the frontiers of Man's knowledge. With Cecilia to help him. . . . His hand strayed to his jacket pocket, to the small box whose sharp outline he could feel through the thin cloth. It was the child of both their minds—but Cecilia's deft, patient fingers had had the actual fashioning of it. And if it worked—and he was sure that it would work—it would be of far greater moment than any absurd family secret. . . . He had almost dismissed the whole business from his mind as superstition when his father stopped at the door. And at the sight of the massive, ironbound timber, at least as strong as the wall in which it was set, all the half forgotten terrors of his childhood rushed back in one frightening flood.

He realized that Sir Aubrey was speaking.

"Aubrey, Aubrey! Take the light!"

MUTELY, he obeyed. The older man inserted the key into its hole, twisted gently at first, then with a kind of frightened irritation. He was muttering under his breath. Something inside the lock complained creakily, then clicked with muffled hesitation. The father took the door handle in both hands and turned. Reluctantly, the door swung inwards on its rusty, long dry hinges. Swinging the lantern with a nonchalance that he was far from feeling the young man followed the other into the room.

It was dark inside. With the door carefully shut and bolted, without even the thinnest streak of radiance penetrating from the relatively well lit picture gallery, the blackness was almost tangible. And when, at last, the feeble flame of the lantern burned steadily it did little more than drive the reluctant shadows scant inches from its focuss of dim, yellow light.

There was a long silence, then the baronet spoke.

"It is I," he said at last, "the nineteenth Sir Aubrey. And I bring my son,

who will be the twentieth."

"It is well," came a voice from the darkness. "Proceed, Sir Aubrey. Acquaint the young man with our secrets."

Aubrey Sheraton stared into the blackness. But it was not the dim, misty, scarce visible *thing* that he saw there that sent cold tremors shivering over his skin like cat's-paws over placid water. Rather it was the feeling, the knowledge, that this voice was familiar. And yet, as he desperately reviewed the circle of his friends, of even his most remote acquaintance, there was none whose accents approximated even roughly to those of the being in the room.

". . . and when the first Sir Aubrey," his father was saying, "saw the apparition in his library, examining with apparent interest a map on the wall . . ." here he raised the lantern, allowed a glimpse of incredibly old parchment, of fabulous coastlines and monster haunted seas . . . "he, like Martin Luther on a like occasion, attacked the stranger with the first weapon to hand. It was a heavy pewter ink pot from the table. The missile struck the intruder's head. There was a flash of vivid blue light and, according to the old accounts, the stench of burning brimstone.

"Our ancester was a brave man but, frightened as much by his own temerity as anything, turned to flee. But the very immobility of the thing in his library halted him on the threshold. He went back to investigate. Greatly daring he tried to fell the intruder, at first with his hands then, later, with his sword. But it was like trying to strike a man clad in invisible, impregnable armour.

"At last he desisted. When he did so he became aware of a voice, a voice speaking an almost unintelligible variant of the English tongue. It told of a traveller who had come back in Time, from the Future. The chance, unlucky blow had damaged his apparatus, had condemned him to stasis until the centuries should slowly swing to his own age. He was doomed to long—how long we have never known—years of waiting. Sustenance of any kind he did not need, could not have taken. He could not die from any cause *before he was born*. Even so, that would have been preferable to an eternity with only his own thoughts for company.

"But he could ensure for himself company of a sort—although he is so far in advance of even you and I that the society of our progenitors must have been little better than that of the beasts of the field. And he could protect himself from the stares of the vulgar, from the certainty of attempts by the sincerely religious of those days to send him back to the Hell from which, in their eyes, he must have come. He could not have been harmed—but it is reasonable to suppose that when all else failed they would have had him bound and cast into the sea—or buried alive. And that, with the coming of his own age, would have meant sure and certain death.

"So he struck a bargain. In return for the sanctuary of Sheraton Towers, for the company afforded by periodic visits by his hosts, he would place at their disposal his not inconsiderable historical knowledge. From the very first to the present day he has kept to his side of the contract—that is how we came to get in on the ground floor of such things as aviation, radio and, lately, radio-active minerals.

"But now I must leave you with *him*. I shall never see *him* again, speak to *him* again. . . ." He broke off abruptly. Then, addressing the dim form in the darkness — "Whoever you are, I

wish I could shake hands with you. . . ."

There was a sound that could have been a ghostly chuckle.

"Perhaps you have, Sir Aubrey. Or perhaps you will. Time is . . . strange. We have lived before . . . or have we? We shall live again . . . or shall we? But life is short, Sir Aubrey. Enjoy your Sheraton millions while you may. Good-bye."

THERE was a brief, dazzling flood of light when the baronet opened the door. Caught unawares Aubrey was not looking at the being by the wall. When the door was shut again it was darker than before.

"Bolt the door, Aubrey St. John Sheraton."

There was quiet compulsion in the hauntingly familiar accent, the projection of a will moulded and tempered by centuries of ageless, timeless waiting. The young man stumbled through the shadows, did as he was bid. He fumbled badly, he could not concentrate on even so commonplace a task. His mind was a turmoil. One part of it dismissed the whole story as the wildest fantasy, another part accepted it without reservation. It all tallied so well with the line of research upon which he and Cecilia were at present working. Unconsciously, his hand strayed to the small, flat box in his pocket. Perhaps the negative vibrator would achieve for its creators results as startling as those claimed by the being in the room. But it couldn't. If it were successful it would be put into use by men of all future ages. There would be long queues at strategic temporal points of altruistic travellers awaiting their turn to change the course of history. The ludicrous image made him, in spite of himself, laugh softly.

"Yes, it would be funny, wouldn't it?" remarked the other. Then—"You have a torch, I think. I'm sick and tired of this damned farthing dip!"

Startled into a state bordering upon panic Aubrey St. John Sheraton fumbled in his pocket for the torch he had smuggled in with him. It was one of the fountain pen variety, and projected a narrow, but intense, beam.

"That's better. Find something white —your handkerchief will do. Put it on the table, and place your torch so that the beam is reflected from it."

The details of the old library flashed into startling relief. Were it not for the circumstances the young man would have exclaimed his delight at the revelation of the rare, bibliophile's treasures, the intriguing examples of the early art of the cartographer. But what caught and held his eye were the bricks and mortar dimly seen through the diamond paned window—the fact that this surface, unexposed to the weather, looked almost as new as it must have done when that ancestral Aubrey built the concealing wall with his own hands. The extraneous circumstances of the burying alive were, somehow, more strange and dreadful than the victim of the act.

At last he tore his eyes from the blocked window, turned to look at the stranger. In spite of the better light he could see little more than he had done with the aid of the lanthern. Just a slightly built man, his body concealed from head to foot by a drab, grey cover-all. The dull lenses regarded him steadily from the mask, and he was aware of the eyes behind them without seeing them. On the forehead was a complexity of antennae and spidery filaments, in the centre of which glowed what seemed to be almost the duplicate of the thing in his pocket. He knew then what had happened. It was highly improbable that there was any other approach to Time Travel than

that of negative vibrations. And he could see that the vibrator on the other's head had been damaged, was shining with a steady, though dim, radiance instead of the bright shimmering that must accompany its correct and proper functioning.

"Old Aubrey did that with his inkwell," said the Time Traveller. "He marooned me in Time, condemned me to 'creep in this petty pace from day to day, to the last syllable of recorded time. . . .'"

"Did you meet Shakespeare?" asked the young man eagerly.

"No. I tried to get the current Sir Aubrey to bring him round for a yarn —but the old basket didn't approve of play actors and such low types. And he threatened to hand me over to the Church if I insisted. . . . Of course, I held the whip hand really—a little misleading information and I could have ruined the Sheratons for ever. But it didn't suit me. And I want to get back to my own age—very badly. Although at times, in the last couple of hundred years or so, it's been damned boring. I did ask to be let out of my suit in good Victoria's golden reign—there was a time in which I could have used my scientific knowledge without being burned at the stake or anything unpleasant. But by this time the family knew it was on to something good—and your great grandfather wouldn't play. Oh, well, I suppose it's been worth waiting for. . . ."

"Your negative vibrator . . ." ventured Aubrey. "I think I can fix it. . . . I have studied these things—and it looks as though we have both attacked the problem from the same line of approach—Look!" He pulled the box out of his pocket, opened it, held the little translucent disc, its intricate complexity of coils and tubes dimly visible, before the other's eyes. "Look!"

"A little to your right, please. You forget that I can't move my head, that apart from such movements as I can make inside this suit I'm frozen. . . . Yes, it should work. . . ."

AUBREY raised his hands to the other's head—then hesitated. After all, he was a Sheraton. Scientist he might be—but he had not broken with family tradition to the extent of giving something for nothing. The little disc in his pocket represented hours of toil. The cost of its materials—which was not small—did not enter into his calculations. But he and Cecilia deserved some recompense for their exertions.

"That suit," he said. "I haven't been able to work out all the details yet. . . . You won't be in any great hurry *now,* surely? I'd like to take a trip in Time myself, and then I'd like to make a careful copy of the suit. . . ."

The other hesitated before replying. Then—"Time is of no real importance to one who has waited as long as I have. You'd better get the suit off me first. . . ."

The fastenings were strangely complex and it was like working under water. Had the negative vibrator been working properly it would have been impossible for one from a different Time to manipulate them at all—the suit and all about it—except to its wearer—would have been as rigid as armour plate. As it was Aubrey was sweating heavily when the grey fabric fell at last from the Traveller's body. It was the Traveller, his hands and arms now free, who removed the mask, or helmet. He let it fall to the floor. His hands went up to his face.

"What a relief," he said, his voice muffled but still with that haunting familiarity. "My nose has been itching for the last five hundred years. . . ."

Aubrey Sheraton paid no heed. He

had picked up the suit, the helmet, was examining them eagerly. They were just as he would have made them himself, followed faithfully the design that even now lay among his papers. Under his eager fingers the little disc of the negative vibrator came reluctantly from its fastenings. He was more careful with the undamaged one, worked slowly, made the delicate connections with infinite care. Then— "Help me on with this, will you?"

Mutely, the Traveller obeyed. He concentrated upon the back of the suit. Aubrey found himself wishing that he could get a look at his face. But that could wait until he returned. He realized that he hadn't set the controls for any time in the past, and they as he would, garbed as he now was, he could not bend his neck sufficiently to look at the dials on his breastplate. Before he could remove his helmet to do so the Traveller finished the fastenings at the back of the suit and came round into his narrow field of vision. He kept his face averted. His hand went to Aubrey's chest with a swift, decisive motion. Aubrey began to step back, his own hands went up to ward off the sudden attack. But he was too late. He felt rather than heard the click of the starting switch as it was depressed . . . and then all vanished in a swirling, formless grey mist.

* * *

The map on the wall held his attention. He had seen it before—but now its colors glowed in bright afternoon sunlight instead of the feeble glimmer of an electric torch; were fresh and bright from the artist's brush, not dimmed by age.

A sound, faint and far away as from another world, made him turn. By the table was a frightened looking, bearded gentleman, richly clad in a costume that he identified as Tudor. He began to raise his right hand in what he hoped would be interpreted as a peaceful gesture, felt as he did so that all this had happened before, that he was doing the wrong thing.

Before he could find the switch on his breastplate the other picked a heavy, pewter ink pot from his table, threw it with force and accuracy. As it connected with the negative vibrator Aubrey felt an agonizing shock flash through his body, followed at once by dead numbness. He found, after a few seconds, that he could still move his members—but only within the rigid confines of his suit.

He knew, then, why the Traveller had kept his face averted, why the voice had struck such familiar chords.

And he knew that he would have a long time to wait for his coming of age.

THE END

# BUGS FROM PERU

**by JUNE LURIE**

ALTHOUGH most of us feel that we already have way too many bugs in the United States, twenty-eight thousand Peruvian bugs recently arrived in New York City. The bugs were collected by Mr. John Pallister of the American Museum of Natural History. He went on a nine months', one man expedition into the jungles of Peru, armed with cyanide bottles, forceps, flashlight, and a butterfly net. He went into the huge dark limestone caves in search of rare bugs. He found many that scientists had never seen before. He brought back huge, fierce beetles that were nearly a foot long, and cave-dweller spiders, and giant moths that are brilliantly colored and with wing spreads of more than ten inches. He also found a Peruvian lantern fly which terrorizes the natives. The lantern fly is seven inches long and has a head shaped like an alligator's. It glows in the dark, and the natives say that it kills people with just one bite, but Mr. Pallister has disproved their belief.

* * *