

Interval of Stillness

Dale Bailey

The-sign-said:

ERASMUS BRAND, MERCHANT
DEALER IN THE WEIRD, EXOTIC, & MARVELOUS
WHAT IS YOUR HEART'S DESIRE?

And Upton Spencer, who was not without an interest in the weird, the exotic, and the marvelous; who very much wished to have filled his heart's desire, if only he could determine what it was -- Upton Spencer paused.

He scratched his chin.

He looked up and down the long length of the street, vacant in the stultifying glare of mid-afternoon. In the cloudless sky, the sun blazed; heat coiled in visible waves from the sidewalks and the parked cars. There was not a single human being as far as he could see, and no sound either, except somewhere far away the clamor of a car horn, blaring flatulent and intermittent in the stillness.

He looked back at the sign, which was certainly a curious sort of thing to encounter here, in a Midwestern city that in its banality seemed, to Upton, the epitome of the Midwest. In New York (he'd spent some time there), one expected such curiosities; for the New Yorker, they were the spice of life. And in San Francisco (he'd visited once), one sometimes encountered an oddity of this sort, tucked away in the nooks of the city, in the back alleys, beneath the hills. But here?

He scratched his chin again, placed his sample case on the sidewalk, and stepped closer. Hand-lettered in fading gilt paint, the sign was propped against the dirty glass. On either side of the words were curious designs -- runes, he suspected, but he could not decipher them. What a strange place to discover, he thought, here in the most banal of Midwestern cities (he had only just arrived, he could not remember its name).

He glanced at his watch and saw that it was a quarter before three in the afternoon. It was his theory that occasionally, at three or thereabouts, there was a stillness in the world, as if everything all at once paused for breath, the hands of clocks ceased momentarily to move, and all things -- men, women, and machines (for surely these were the components of the world) -- paused to gather strength and energy to finish the day. Further, Upton believed that in this interval of stillness, the rational and the irrational, the sane and the insane, for a fleeting instant coalesced. In such moments, one could taste the true elixir of life (like cinnamon, he imagined); could smell the swift muggy gust of monsoons sweeping through distant India; could hear the rare trumpet of an elephant echoing across the African veldt, oceans away.

He had read of such things.

And so it was that he took yet another step forward, where another man, having noticed this curious sign, would have turned, retrieved his sample case, and walked quickly away, having made an appointment to show some carpet samples at Moulder's Carpet Emporium at four o'clock, and being anxious that he would miss that appointment, for it was a new and potentially lucrative client.

Upton, unlike other men, stepped forward, and shading his eyes with both hands, peered into the plate glass window at the interior.

Nothing. He saw gloom and gloom, and a swift movement suggestive of mysteries within the gloom, but he saw nothing else, except his own reflection, curved and distorted, so that his nose looked large and

porous, and his hairline seemed suddenly to have retreated several inches. Upton stepped swiftly away and his features collapsed into their rightful dimensions. His nose was slightly oversized, perhaps, but certainly one could not see the pores. And his hairline had, in fact, retreated only an inch or two; he thought it made him look distinguished.

But still he could see nothing within the store, except the curious sign and the gloom, and on the window ledge, a collection of dead flies and like debris.

He went in (how the hinges creaked!), and the door shut behind him with a sound like a thunderclap.

Silence and light, and a coolness that was not the coolness of air-conditioning, processed and artificially frigid, but a wholesome mountain chill.

Yes, Upton thought, that was it exactly.

And a voice said, "Can I help you?"

Upton turned, and there was Erasmus Brand, not at all as Upton had expected him. He had expected a wizard of sorts, he supposed; a being of majesty, dressed in crimson robes resplendent with arcane symbols, possessing, perhaps, a flowing white beard or, at the very least, a staff.

But no. Here was Erasmus Brand, a tall man, with an impressive head of hair certainly, sweeping in a dark wave from his high forehead, touched gray at the temples, but neatly trimmed. Here was Erasmus Brand, resplendent, yes, but in a suit of impeccable taste, tailored just so. Here was Erasmus Brand, handsome and urbane, extending to Upton his manicured hand.

Upton took it, and was impressed by its cool dry grip, firm and yet not so firm that he felt he was in some adolescent contest of strength (the approach most carpet store managers took to hand shaking, he had discovered).

"I saw your sign," Upton said. He gestured vaguely behind him.

"Indeed?" said Brand. "Do you wish to purchase or to sell?"

"Well, I -- I don't know exactly."

"I see," said Brand, and he said it as if, in fact, he did see. As if nothing in the world was more common than a customer who did not know why he was there. "Then perhaps you'd care to look around?"

Upton nodded, and followed Brand to a nearby counter.

"This, perhaps?" said Brand, and he extended to Upton a mummified hand of some sort.

It was shriveled and desiccated and Upton thought that should he breathe upon it, it would crumble into a million dusty flakes. Still, it had some unique power. Though it was vaguely horrifying, for a moment Upton almost wished --

"Make no wish," Brand said, and swept the hand away.

He led Upton into the depths of the store, labyrinthine, Upton saw, and huge. Brand whisked him by all manner of things: a great shelf of books, smelling of leather and oil, where Upton paused to run his finger along a cracked and ancient spine ("Come away," Brand scolded him. "Some things are better left untouched."); a display of precious stones and jewelry, in the midst of which lay a single golden ring, precious in its simplicity; a glass bottle, in which floated a human finger, severed neatly above the

knuckle.

"Here," Brand said, stopping suddenly. "This, I think, might interest you."

He held up a wooden box of intricate design, lifted the hinged lid, and out flowed whale songs, the cry of gulls, and the crash of midnight breakers.

"No," said Upton. "That's very nice, I'm sure, but that's not it at all."

Brand closed the box.

"It's your sign," Upton said into the silence that followed.

Brand lifted his eyebrows, but he did not speak.

"Your sign," Upton said. "The one outside. The rare, the exotic -- my heart's desire. I think that's what I'm interested in."

"I see," Brand said. "Your heart's desire." He studied Upton for a moment, studied him out of eyes the color of October skies at twilight. His was the regard of an insect, measured and impersonal, and unutterably mysterious. "Such things aren't cheap, Mr. Spencer," he said. "I'm sure you understand."

Upton thought: But how did you know my name?

And then, because he was familiar with such shops, because he had known such men as Erasmus Brand (who might not be a man at all) -- in short, because he'd read stories that began in precisely this fashion when he was a boy -- another thought occurred to him, perhaps the most terrible thought he'd ever had. "The price," he said. "Is it . . . my soul?"

Brand laughed, a great roaring bellyful of a laugh that seemed to fill up the room with jollity. "Your soul!" he said. "Why, Mr. Spencer, there's so little of it left. Nothing in the world could be more useless."

Upton sighed in relief, and said, "Then what?"

"Why, your complacency. Merely that, my friend." Brand stepped toward Upton, draped his arm across Upton's shoulders (grown strong from lugging the sample case), and said, "Is that too much to ask?"

Upton stood there for a moment. He stroked his chin. He thought that he wasn't a very complacent man, after all, and it was really quite a bargain, this deal. For his heart's desire, whatever that could be. Then, he said strongly and with resolution, "No! No, that is not too much to ask!"

"Oh, wonderful!" said Erasmus Brand. He stepped away and clapped his hands in delight. There was a flash of light, a puff of smoke, and a vaguely sulphurous smell (sulphur? thought Upton).

Upton took a step back, and then, as quickly, two steps forward. For there, right there in Erasmus Brand's hand, rested a tiny ruby vial capped with a cork on a delicate silver chain. Whatever it might contain, Upton knew one thing for certain: that was his heart's desire. He wondered if it had been there all along.

"Now, then," said Brand. " -- NO!"

Upton halted in mid-stride, shocked to discover that he held one hand extended, fingers poised to grasp the little bottle and clasp it to his heart. How very uncharacteristic, he thought.

"First," said Brand. "A condition."

And Upton nodded, for, of course, he had known there would be conditions. That was the way such things were done.

Brand held up a long white finger. "When you take the vial -- and not until -- you surrender to me your complacency as payment for services rendered. Agreed?"

"Oh, yes. But how?"

"The exchange will take care of itself. You needn't worry."

Upton nodded. He needn't worry. And Brand's long white finger folded into his palm.

"Very well, then," Brand said, "we're quite finished." He placed the ruby vial into Upton's hand and glided away.

But just as Upton had reached the door, had indeed begun to open it so that hot against his face fell a wedge of jaundiced sunlight, Brand said:

"There is one other thing, Mr. Spencer."

"What's that?" Upton asked, but he did not turn. He thought of Orpheus, who attained his heart's desire -- and who lost it with a backward glance.

"Just this," said Brand. "You must drain the vial to the very dregs."

And then Upton stepped into the exterior glare, and the door shrieked closed behind him. People rushed along the busy sidewalk. Cars stood bumper to bumper, vomiting exhaust stench and a clamor of horns.

Upton glanced at his watch, saw that it was a quarter of three, and started up the street. Plenty of time to make his appointment at Moulder's Carpet Emporium, he thought, and slipping into his pocket the ruby vial (curious little item, he thought; now where did I pick that up?), he began to whistle jauntily, quite at ease with this most anonymous of Midwestern cities. Except . . .

And he paused.

Someone ran into him, flung him a curse, and went on.

Except . . .

. . . his sample case. Stunned, Upton stared down at his right hand, clenched as if around the much-worn handle of his leather case, but empty all the same. Perhaps his eyes were playing tricks on him, he thought -- hallucinations, perhaps, induced by the heat or the poisonous reek of the traffic. And so, experimentally, he rolled his shoulder beneath his blazer, worn slick by a thousand sales trips through Midwestern cities just like this one (whatever its name). There was no sensation of heaviness. Gone was the somehow comforting burden of the sample case he had carried for years.

Quelling an insurrection of panic, Upton forced himself to think. Vaguely, he remembered stopping before some shop-window, a book store perhaps, for he frequently found himself stopping in front of book stores to lament that he no longer had time to read. As a boy, he'd taken real pleasure in reading, gothic stuff, and fantasy, but these days there just wasn't the time, not in his hasty march from city to city.

But -- the book store (or whatever). He remembered stopping there to study the display, remembered placing the sample case on the sidewalk as he stepped closer to the window, and then . . . well, he must have turned away and strolled right up the street without it. It was probably still there, he told himself.

Not to worry.

Turning, he started back in the direction he'd come.

But, of course, the sample case was gone.

And stranger still, Upton thought, so was the book store (if indeed, a book store it had been). He paused to study his surroundings, but there was no doubt. He was in the right place. It appeared that he had stopped to stare into a vacant store-front, tenanted solely by cobwebs and fly-corpses, and a faded sun-bleached sign.

Upton gazed up and down the congested street. An irritable mass of people surged by him, and he briefly entertained the hope that his sample case had only just been snatched, that he would see the thief amidst the throng. But he hardly knew what he would do in such a case, for he wasn't a brave man, or assertive (else he'd long ago have been promoted to the desk job for which he longed).

He stared at the vacant store-front for a moment more; and then the neighboring establishments: an appliance store, closed for remodeling, and a bar.

There perhaps, he thought. Perhaps some good Samaritan had left the sample case there for him to find. And in his panic, he forced himself to forget that good Samaritans were rare as passenger pigeons, or rarer.

He went into the bar, a dank lair where shadowy men hunched silent over drinks. Ceiling fans churned air sour with the stench of beer and perspiration; there was only the sound of the television, flickering like a blue ghost in the smoky darkness.

"Getcha somethin?"

Upton twitched, startled, and stepped to the counter.

The barkeep was sallow and balding, big with the massive flabbiness of an aging prize-fighter. "Well?" he asked, crossing his arms.

"I -- that is, I thought . . . Well. I was hoping that perhaps someone had left a sample case for me," Upton said. "A leather case, oh . . ." He trailed off and held up his hands to indicate dimensions, but it was no use.

The barkeep shook his head. "Ain't nobody left nothing,"

"Oh." Upton placed his hands on the counter and stared down at them, disconsolate. He glanced at his watch. Three-forty. More than anything, he did not want to call his supervisor

"Look," said the barkeep, "can I getcha somethin or not?"

"It's like this. I was next door. I was just looking in the window. I thought it was a book store . . . or something. Anyway, I set down the sample case, and --"

"Look, pal, I ain't got the time for this, all right? You want a drink or what?"

"No thanks," Upton said (for he didn't drink), and the barkeep stalked away, muttering.

Upton glanced despairingly about, but no one moved to help him. He turned away. Outside, traffic belched poison into the afternoon. The next-door store-front gleamed vacantly in the glare.

It was nearly four o'clock. He had lost his sample case. He could not keep his appointment at Moulder's Carpet Emporium. There was nothing for him to do but return to his motel room, somewhere on the outskirts of this most anonymous of cities, there to call his supervisor.

With heavy feet Upton dragged himself through the clamorous sprawl. Leaving the motel at two-thirty, he had supposed it a pleasant day for a walk (after all, a salesman had to work to keep fit), but now the afternoon grew muggy and unbearable, the city nightmarish and claustrophobic. Buildings loomed like tumuli across the unswerving avenue; it seemed he walked through a city of the restless dead.

Fifteen minutes later, he reached his motel room. He sat on the edge of the bed and sipped tepid water from a plastic cup. The room, banal and anonymous as the city itself, was too cold and stank of disinfectant. Sitting there, Upton thought of all his time on the road, the countless motel rooms, the endless ribbon of highway narrowing before him to an indeterminate horizon. Last of all, he thought of the sample case, and his broken appointment at Moulder's Carpet Emporium. He had to call his supervisor. He had to call Frank Enderby.

He picked up the phone and punched the number hesitantly. The secretary put him through.

"Hello, Upton," the voice said. "What can I do for you?"

Upton was silent. He didn't know what to say.

"Hello? Upton? Upton, are you there?"

"I'm here, Frank," Upton said.

"Well, listen, Upton, I'm busy, you know. You can't just sit there. What can I do for you?"

"It's, well --" Upton paused again. An image came to him: Frank Enderby reclining in his plush office at corporate headquarters in New York (where Upton had merely visited), the vast city visible through the window behind him. Frank Enderby, who had started working for the company in the very same year as Upton, who had surpassed Upton in total sales for ten years running, who had long ago been Upton's friend, and who was now his supervisor. Frank Enderby, who in the interval while Upton paused, swore softly.

From five hundred miles away, the word hummed along the wires, surged through the receiver into Upton's ear, and began to work like vile poison. Upton imagined that single word, spoken by a man who had been his friend, rocketing through his system, parching the membranes of his lungs, clogging his veins like numbing contagion.

Frank Enderby said: "Goddammit, Upton. Aren't you supposed to be working the Moulder account right now?"

In the space of that single instant, Upton aged a thousand years. He had somehow metamorphosed, everything within him suddenly dry and fragile as the viscera of a mummy rooted after long centuries from beneath Egyptian sand. Out of the dusty pit of his belly, he dredged a single word, forced it up the arid and painful passage of his windpipe, into the cavern of his mouth. "Yes."

"Well, Upton, why in the hell aren't you?"

"It's . . . I, well, I lost my sample case."

"You what?"

"I lost my sample case." He took a long drink of the tepid water; with trembling fingers, he placed the empty cup on the nightstand.

"Well, for Chrissake, did you call them?"

Upton lay back on the bed and dropped his arm to his side. His fingers just brushed something in his pocket, something heavy (the ruby vial), and even as he spoke, he retrieved it. "No."

"Oh, for God's sake Upton, what were you thinking?"

And Upton, who held now in his hand the most curiously worked and beautiful of ruby vials, said quite simply and honestly, "I -- I just don't know."

Enderby raged.

Upton tried to listen. He sat upright on the bed, cradled the receiver against his shoulder, and sincerely tried. But there was the ruby vial (how beautiful!), and even as Enderby spoke, Upton began diligently to loosen the tiny cork. Whatever could it be? And where had he gotten it?

Then the cork was free, swinging in handsome parabolas on its tiny silver chain.

"It's like this, Upton --" Enderby was saying, but Upton hardly noticed, for out of the tiny ruby vial flooded a wonderful melange of scents: the smells of ripe peaches and midnight rain, of fresh-cut grass on a summer day, of a morning fog drifting endlessly from the sea.

"Have you any idea of the importance of the Moulder account?" Enderby asked.

And Upton, who at that very moment was gently tilting the ruby vial so that a single drop of the precious fluid within dangled sparkling and iridescent from its lip -- Upton said, "Of course, Frank." And just like that, the droplet fell to the end of his outstretched finger.

"Of course, Frank'?" said Enderby. "'Of course, Frank!' You lose your sample case, you screw up what may someday be the most important account we have, you don't even bother to call them and explain, and all you can say is 'Of course, Frank'?"

"I'm sorry," said Upton. "I'm really truly sorry." And he plunged the finger into his mouth. It tasted just like cinnamon.

"Goddammit, Upton, I am sick and tired of this crap! Do you know how many times I've covered for you? Do you know how many times I've fought for your ass, even when your totals have dropped for five straight years? Have you any concept of the fact that there is only so much I can do for you? You listen to me and you listen good! You better call up Moulder's and fucking humiliate yourself with apologies! You better find that damn sample case! And you better do it yesterday, or I'll fire your --"

Upton said: "Why don't you go to hell, Frank?"

At the other end of the line there was only silence.

Upton held the receiver away and stared at it as if it had suddenly nipped him on the chin.

"What did you say, Upton?" The words were almost deadly gentle, the ensuing silence so deep and flawless that Upton heard a cool electric hum, like the breath of five hundred miles of empty circuits hushed in silent expectation.

And then, quite to his astonishment, Upton said: "I said, why don't you go to hell, Frank." He formed the

words as clearly and precisely as if he was speaking to a child. As if he was possessed.

"You know, Upton," Frank said in the friendliest voice Upton had heard him use in a long time, "I think I've had about all I can take of your lousy sales record. I think it's about time we find someone for your territory who cares more about carpet stores than book stores. And most of all, I think your ass is finished."

To which Upton replied: "Those are the nicest words I've heard you say in years, Frank. I hope a heart attack drops you in your tracks."

He hung up the phone.

Holding the vial carefully, he lay back on the bed. Slowly, it all came back to him. The strange interval of stillness that fell across the world at three (or thereabouts), the hand-painted sign propped in the window of the vacant store-front: Erasmus Brand, Merchant.

What is your heart's desire?

He held the ruby vial up to the light and courage surged within him. Take that, Frank Enderby, he thought. You can go to hell. And for a fleeting instant he could taste that precious droplet of fluid, like cinnamon on the end of his tongue. Then it was gone.

Who was this Erasmus Brand? he suddenly wondered (for he had read of such things -- those stories never ended pleasantly). And other memories also returned to him: the stink of sulphur (or was it brimstone?) when Brand conjured the vial from thinnest air, and that somehow unpleasant warning ("Drain the vial to the very dregs.").

"Oh, no," Brand had said, "I don't want your soul. What could be more useless?"

But what if he was lying?

Upton sat up, corked the tiny vial, and placed it on the nightstand. His courage had drained away; he was afraid. How had he forgotten so much? Why had he spoken to Frank Enderby in that way -- to Frank Enderby, of all people, who was his friend (his supervisor)? What was he to do now, for certainly he was not suited to find other employment? The company, for good or ill, had been his life for years, and he felt suddenly adrift and rudderless.

He glanced at the phone and thought of picking it up, of dialing Frank Enderby's number, far away in New York City. I'm sorry, he would say, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. He tried to form his lips about those two simple words, to give them weight and substance through utterance, but he was suddenly tired, so tired.

All at once, the vast weight of the day's events collapsed upon him -- the heat, the walk, the stink of traffic in the dying air. Even as his lips shaped the words, as they hissed sibilant into the quiet room ("s-o-r-r-y . . ."), he slept, and sleeping dreamed.

Dark dreams. A coolness that was not the coolness of air-conditioning, but a frigid wind from between the stars (precisely). A dank lair where bestial men hunched snarling over their steaming kills. Erasmus Brand, handsome and urbane, stinking of brimstone as he opened a much-worn leather sample case (full of vials, Upton saw; a hundred ruby vials).

"Come back, come back! Upton, we need you!" cried a voice in his dreams, Frank Enderby's voice, and when he woke the voice seemed to hang for a moment in the silent room.

Early afternoon, the room emerald with muted sunlight behind the drapes. There was again the sound of an importunate voice -- not Frank Enderby's -- and a monotonous rhythmic fist against the door.

"Maid!" came the voice. "Maid! Anybody in there?"

Upton sat abruptly. "Yes!" he called. "An hour, please!"

Panicked, he looked at his watch. One-thirty. He sighed in relief. Plenty of time to shower and shave and have a quick meal before his appointment at Moulder's Carpet Emporium at four o'clock. Perhaps he could even walk there.

Yawning hugely, he stood, and standing, he saw the ruby vial upon the nightstand. There was a faint ephemeral stench of brimstone, and Upton Spencer (who had read of such things) felt his jaw snap involuntarily closed.

Not a dream.

He stared at the vial for a moment, crossed the room, and tore aside the heavy drapes. Shafts of moted sunlight fell into the room, and there on the nightstand was the ruby vial, real and substantial and astonishingly prosaic -- a simple glass vial, vaguely luminous in the falling brightness.

Upton returned to the bed and uncorked the bottle swiftly. Liquid sloshed within, and a vaguely medicinal smell came to him, like cough syrup or rubbing alcohol.

And suddenly he knew what he had to do.

Upton corked the ruby vial and placed it on the nightstand. He showered quickly, dressed, and slipping the vial into the frayed pocket of his best blazer, let himself out into the heat.

Upton walked through the restless din of the city. Beads of sweat crawled down the knotted highway of his spine, and the streets seemed to shimmer behind the rising waves of heat. At a quarter of three, just as Upton passed the dim window of the bar, it began. Began as the slightest hush, a distant rumor of quiet that, growing, swept across the heartland and fell over the city like cerements of silence. In that timeless moment, entombed in that interval of stillness, Upton paused before the vacant store-front.

The sign said:

ERASMUS BRAND, MERCHANT
DEALER IN THE WEIRD, EXOTIC, & MARVELOUS
WHAT IS YOUR HEART'S DESIRE?

Upton went inside. The icy chill of the dark reaches between the stars enfolded him. Goosebumps rose along his back.

Erasmus Brand said, "So you're back."

Wrapped in a vaguely sulphurous smell (like brimstone), Brand glided from behind the counter.

Upton shuddered. "Who are you?"

Brand laughed. Upton, familiar with such shops, such men (he'd read about them), had expected Brand to laugh, a rich menacing baritone of a laugh, like the gloating mirth of a dragon, but it was nothing of the sort. It was a chuckle really, like smoke, unamused and rueful.

"Choices," Brand said. "Everyone faces choices, Mr. Spencer. Courage, complacency, whatever,

everyone must choose. This was simply your moment -- the fulcrum of your life -- and I the agent of your dilemma. You have chosen."

Upton shifted on his feet uncertainly.

"You didn't drink it all," Brand said. "I warned you." He extended one long hand, his fingers unfolding from the palm like the petals of some slow-blooming flower.

With sudden reluctance, Upton dug the ruby vial from his pocket and placed it in Brand's palm. For a moment, just as he released it, there came to him a faint whiff of cinnamon, richly evocative, and a series of half-remembered images and sensations passed quickly through his mind: the long-familiar burden (somehow comforting) of the sample case he'd carried for years; the endless ribbon of the highway narrowing before him to an indeterminate horizon; last of all, Frank Enderby's stunned silence when Upton had said, "Why don't you go to hell, Frank?"

For a moment, as he stood there looking at the tiny ruby vial in Brand's palm, Upton wished to take it back. An inchoate longing for something, anything but this, swept through him, and he extended his arm, his fingers trembling --

But Erasmus Brand closed his fingers and the ruby vial was gone. "Too late, my friend," he said with a voice like October wind. "Too late."

And Upton turned away.

Outside, the sun fell jaundiced against his upturned face. Cars vomited pollution into the stagnant air. He stood in the midst of a jostling throng.

Upton Spencer looked at his watch, saw that it was a quarter of three, and scratched his chin. He glanced again at the sign in the window -- a most curious sign, he thought, especially unique in this, the most banal of midwestern cities -- and was stricken suddenly with the strangest feeling: that somehow, in a way that transcended his understanding, he had lost forever some singular opportunity. And then, despite the fact that he was not without an interest in the weird, the exotic, and the marvelous; despite the fact that he very much wished to have filled his heart's desire, if only he could determine what it was -- Upton Spencer picked up his sample case and turned away.

It was getting late, and he had an appointment at four.

Dale Bailey's story, "The Resurrection Man's Legacy," (July, 1994) made the 1996 final Nebula ballot for best novelette. In addition to his stories here, Dale has published in *Amazing*, *Pulphouse: A Fiction Magazine*, and *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*. He has just completed his first novel. Dale has a talent for taking the conventional ideas of the genre and making them new. This time, he examines an F&SF favorite: the magic shop.