

## INTRODUCTION

### Robert Silverberg

He came out of nowhere. That was probably not how it seemed to him, but it certainly was how it seemed to me: a brilliant new writer with a strange surname, suddenly filling all the science-fiction magazines of the early 1960s with dazzling, unforgettable stories that were altogether unlike anything that anyone (not even Bradbury, not even Sturgeon, not even Fritz Leiber) had published in those magazines before.

The first encounter that science-fiction readers had with the work of Roger Zelazny came with the August, 1962 issue of *Fantastic*, an undistinguished and long-forgotten penny-a-word magazine. It was a story just eight hundred words long, called “Horseman!”, and this is how the 25-year-old author opened it:

“When he was thunder in the hills the villagers lay dreaming harvest behind shutters. When he was an avalanche of steel the cattle began to low, mournfully, deeply, and children cried out in their sleep.

“He was an earthquake of hooves, his armor a dark tabletop of silver coins stolen from the stars, when the villagers awakened with fragments of strange dreams in their heads. They rushed to the windows and flung their shutters wide.

“And he entered the narrow streets, and no man saw the eyes behind his vizor.”

It sings, flamboyantly. The metaphors tumble one over another—"when he was thunder in the hills," and "when he was an avalanche of steel," and "he was an earthquake of hooves," and "his armor a dark tabletop of silver coins stolen from the stars." The syntax is idiosyncratic, when he wants it to be: "the villagers lay dreaming harvest." Everything is vivid, everything is alive, and we are plunged immediately into a strange, dramatic, fantastic situation. In the first few lines of his first published story Zelazny had announced his presence among us and had told us what kind of writer he was going to be.

That same month came a second story, "Passion Play," like the other a mere two pages long, in the August, 1962 issue of *Fantastic's* equally mediocre companion, *Amazing Stories*. It opens in an entirely different but equally Zelaznian manner:

"At the end of the season of sorrows comes the time of rejoicing. Spring, like the hands of a well-oiled clock, noiselessly indicates the time. The average days of dimness and moisture decrease steadily in number, and those of brilliance and cool begin to enter the calendar again. And it is good that the wet times are behind us, for they rust and corrode our machinery; they require the most intense standards of hygiene."

Here we get Zelazny the poet in prose: notice the scansion and cadence of that first sentence, "At the end of the season of sorrows comes the time of rejoicing." Zelazny the wry comedian is here, too, telling us that "the most intense standards of hygiene" must be observed by robots hoping to fend off rust and corrosion.

The general effect of "Passion Plan" is a quieter, less fantastic one than that of "Horseman!". He gives us simile instead of metaphor; he gives us science-fictional imagery,

machinery vulnerable to rust, instead of the medieval villagers and armored stranger of the other story. There is power in that paragraph; there is soaring individuality of vision. Both stories, in hindsight, are recognizably Zelazny, yet they vary widely, within the compass of their few pages, in what they achieve.

One would have had to be looking very closely at those two little stories when they first appeared to realize that they signaled the arrival in our midst of a master of prose technique and a paragon of the storytelling art. Gradually, though, over the year that followed, he let us know that that was the case, and then, in case anyone still had not noticed, he published what would become his first classic story, "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," in the November, 1963 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. It was nominated for the Hugo Award; it was chosen, a few years later, as one of the twenty-six great stories included in the first volume of the definitive Science Fiction Writers of America anthology, *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame*. It has been reprinted countless times ever since.

After that, there was no overlooking him. A flood of brilliant novellas and novels—"He Who Shapes," "The Doors of His Face, The Lamps of His Mouth," ". . . And Call me Conrad," and many, many others—brought him great acclaim and a shelf full of Hugo and Nebula Awards. He was still not yet thirty. Zelazny seemed to be everywhere at once, and his performance was never anything other than brilliant. By the time his 1967 novel, *Lord of Light*, won the Nebula Award and narrowly missed the Hugo, he was reckoned among the masters of the field. Over the decades ahead he went on to produce the many novels of the popular "Amber" series, a number of other novels as well, and a host of shorter works that would ultimately bring him three

Nebulas and six Hugo trophies, before his premature death, at the age of 58, in 1995.

Most of the great short stories of Zelazny's early period, the ones on which his reputation was founded, can be found today in the collection entitled *The Doors of His Face, The Lamps of His Mouth*, which ibooks published in June, 2001. During the 1970s and 1980s he concentrated chiefly on novels, not only the ten "Amber" books but also such books as *Today We Choose Faces*, *Damnation Alley*, *Roadmarks*, and *Bridge of Ashes*. Nevertheless, he continued to produce the occasional short story and novelette, and again and again, nearly to the end of his career, won Hugo and Nebula awards for the best of his output. Here, brought together for the first time, is another generous sampling of his shorter work, the finest stories of his last two decades, including many of his award-winners and also the previously uncollected 1992 story, "Come Back to the Killing Ground, Alice, My Love," which was one of the last great short tales by this superbly gifted, beloved, and much lamented master of science fiction and fantasy.

—Robert Silverberg, July, 2001

## COMES NOW THE POWER

It was into the second year now, and it was maddening. Everything which had worked before failed this time.

Each day he tried to break it, and it resisted his every effort.

He snarled at his students, drove recklessly, blooded his knuckles against many walls. Nights, he lay awake cursing.

But there was no one to whom he could turn for help. His problem would have been non-existent to a psychiatrist, who doubtless would have attempted to treat him for something else.

So he went away that summer, spent a month at a resort: nothing. He experimented with several hallucinogenic drugs; again, nothing. He tried free-associating into a tape recorder, but all he got when he played it back was a headache.

To whom does the holder of a blocked power turn, within a society of normal people?

. . . To another of his own kind, if he can locate one.

Milt Rand had known four other persons like himself: his cousin Gary, now deceased; Walker Jackson, a Negro preacher who had retired to somewhere down South; Tatyta Stefanovich, a dancer, currently somewhere behind the Iron Curtain; and Curtis Legge, who, unfortunately, was suffering a schizoid reaction, paranoid type, in a state institution for the criminally insane. Others he had brushed against in the night, but had never met and could not locate now.

There had been blockages before, but Milt had always worked his way through them inside of a month. This time