



Threshold

Roger Zelazny , David G. Grubbs (Editor) , Christopher S. Kovacs (Editor) , Ann Crimmins (Editor)

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The first in a six-volume series, Volume 1: Threshold contains all of Zelazny's short works from his early years through the mid 1960s--a period of experimentation and growth that flowered into gems such as "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," "The Graveyard Heart," "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth," and "He Who Shapes." The stories in this series are enriched by editors' notes and Zelazny's own words, taken from his many essays, describing why he wrote the stories and what he thought about them in retrospect.

Threshold Details

Date : Published February 14th 2009 by NESFA Press

ISBN : 9781886778719

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Format : Hardcover 576 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fantasy, Short Stories, Fiction

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From Reader Review Threshold for online ebook

Riju Ganguly says

Rather than going into analytical discussions into the "where & how" of me getting switched off while reading these stories, I would like to state that I am deeply regretting the whimsical decision taken about purchasing the first couple of volumes of collected shorter works of this very-very highly regarded author without sampling some of it first. In American colloquialism, it is the absence of this "rain check" that forced me to try to read some highly literate, and yet exquisitely boring (and in case of the fantasies, much-much worse than the masters like Leiber and even Moorcock) stuff, because after paying good money I had no option other than trying to read them.

If you prefer your science-fiction or fantasy to be action-oriented and plot-driven, rather than being ratiocinations about religion & philosophy in high language of the exalted, DO NOT GO FOR THESE BOOKS. If you wish to establish yourself as a "cool dude" who reads "real heavy stuff", the pleasure is all yours!

Matthew Miller says

It's good Zelazny. Character driven and fast paced, the stories are people implementing ideas. People will like the intensity and well fleshed characters. People may not like the quickness. Because everything is short fiction, much is left undeveloped. The commentary does a good job of clarifying detail.

Nicholas Whyte says

<http://nwhyte.livejournal.com/1296094.html>[return][return]This weighty volume of almost 600 pages covers the early work of the late, great Roger Zelazny (1937-1995). It is the first of a planned series of six volumes covering his entire literary career, published by the New England Science Fiction Association and edited by David G. Grubbs, Christopher S. Kovacs and Ann Crimmins. Together with volume two, it was launched at Boskone in February which was where I bought it.[return][return]I suspect that the book's main audience will be Zelazny fans like myself, hoping for 1) hitherto unpublished literary gems unearthed by the editors' diligence, 2) some insights into those aspects of Zelazny's life and background which made it possible for him to produce his work, and 3) a convenient volume including our favourite pieces. NESFA have delivered on all three. A lot of the uncollected pieces here are rather minor, but there were a couple which jumped out at me as memorable ('Final Dining', 'Circe Has Her Problems'). There is a decent amount of explanatory biographical material by co-editor Kovacs, Carl Yoke and a preface by Robert Silverberg. And this first volume includes 'A Rose for Ecclesiastes', 'The Doors Of His Face, The Lamps Of His Mouth' and 'He Who Shapes', Zelazny's best early stories, which is a powerful mixture.[return][return]Satisfying those three requirements would just about justify the hefty \$29 price of this hardback. But there are several other positive points about it. First, a lot of Zelazny's early poetry is collected here, interspersed through the stories, certainly at a pace where I could appreciate it. Second, and probably deserving to be mentioned before this, there is a brilliant Michael Whelan cover which will apparently span the jackets of all six volumes. Third, each story and poem has, if available, a short epilogue from Zelazny himself explaining his own feelings about it, and also a glossary of literary references (most of which are accurate, though I

wouldn't be surprised if the Miller whose writing has emetic effects is Henry rather than Arthur).
[return][return]So, apart from its obvious appeal to existing fans, I think volume one at least is well-designed as a gateway book to encourage new sf readers to read more Zelazny and just to read more widely. 'A Rose for Ecclesiastes' is a really powerful story to begin with - consciously old-fashioned but doing something new as well. 'He Who Shapes', drawing as it does on Zelazny's own experience of car accidents and bereavement, is a good ending point for this first selection. The commentary keeps us going through the less memorable stories in the middle. I am looking forward to reading volume two, and to buying the rest as they come out.

Stephen says

4.0 to 4.5 stars. I have not read all the stories in this outstanding collection so this review/rating is for the stories listed below (I will update periodically as I read more stories).

"A Rose For Ecclesiastes" (5.5 stars) - Among Zelazny's best work and certainly one of his best short stories. Brilliant, emotional and unforgettable.

"And the Darkness is Harsh" (4.0 to 4.5 stars). - Great short story about war.

"Mr. Fuller's Revolt" (4.5 to 5.0 stars) - All I can say about this one is...so that's where they got the idea for that Twilight Zone episode.

"Youth Eternal" (4.5 stars) - Smart, short story about how some things never change.

Bill says

(More like 4.5 stars but bumping up.) The first of NESFA's six volumes collecting Roger Zelazny's short fiction, covering the first few years of his career. While Zelazny is one of my favorite authors, I've always found him a bit hit-or-miss; he's written some bad stuff, but also stuff that blows you away.

This collection reflects that. There are some subpar stories, but there are also three of his best, acknowledged classics in the genre - 'The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth,' 'A Rose for Ecclesiastes,' and 'He Who Shapes.' I'd read those before, but still find them compelling. His best traits are on display (humor, wordplay, allusions to myth and literature), as are his worst.

Many of the stories here appear for the first time after their initial publication. Mixed in throughout are some his poems, and the end matter includes part of a biography, as well as some miscellaneous fragments that have never been published before. Many of the pieces include commentary from Zelazny, culled from interviews and other sources, which I enjoyed. I appreciated the explanatory notes, but I wish they had appeared as footnotes, rather than endnotes.

A must for any Zelazny fan.

Matt says

I have no idea how to do an objective review of *Threshold*. This book, which is the first of six, made me giddy as I read it. Yes. Fucking giddy. I can't overstate the thrill I had in reading these obscure stories, scraps of stories and bad poems that Zelazny wrote in his early career. I loved his pulp science fiction Mars and Venus imaginings. I loved the idea that he and his best friend from middle school wrote competing stories of Parisian subterranean monsters named Yok and Zlaz. I even loved his stupid poem about a shedding cat. But what I love most is Zelazny's love of story. His relentless submissions and rejections. The fact that he kept writing because clearly he couldn't stop writing. A tome of forgotten and wonderful stories that exist because he wanted to create, constantly improve and simply couldn't walk away from what he loved.

I have no idea what else I can possibly say once I read the other five volumes...

Metaphorosis says

reviews.metaphorosis.com

4 stars

Roger Zelazny deserves every bit of his status as a legendary SFF author. At his best (which he often was - see *Lord of Light*), his prose verged on poetry without ever losing its readability. His short fiction (gathered in several partial collections over the years) was as good, if not better. So, running across a complete collection of his short works is as exciting to an SF fan as finding that a (more) affordable version of the [Jack] Vance *Integral Edition* is being published. Zelazny and Vance were not only among the top SF writers, but were two of the absolute best for those who love good writing for its own sake.

Which is why the editorial policy behind this collection (published by NESFA) is so puzzling. Curious decisions include: - stories are not in chronological order, nor in series groups, nor in topical order. Yes, there's a general chronological sequence here, but stories are often presented out of order, for no evident reason. - Zelazny aspired to be a poet, and there's a lot of his poetry here. Ironically, for a writer whose prose was so beautifully poetic, his actual poetry is pretty poor. The poems are scattered throughout the volumes of the collection - often topically linked with the following story. It's a little hard to argue with the editors on this - several hundred pages of poetry in one place would have seriously weakened one of the volumes in the set. And if the poetry had just been left out entirely, you'd wonder about it, and how good it must have been. - Several excerpts from novels. Frankly, I just resent this. I **have** the novels - they're mostly available for purchase. I bought this set for the short stories. - One little quibble. One the inside back jacket, Michael Whelan gets as much space as Zelazny himself. Yes, he's a famous (if overrated) artist, but hey, he just did the one cover, not the six volumes of content.

Strange sequencing, etc. aside, the collection is well done. There is excellent information on publication dates and how the stories fit the various series. There are many previously unpublished (or underpublished) pieces. There are carefully collated comments from Zelazny about each story, and there are (over-) copious interpretive notes about the allusions in each story. Also, there's a nicely written biographical piece included in each volume. While they're all respectful of Zelazny's talent, they're not sycophantic in tone. There are also introductions by guest notables for each volume - some good, some that lead you to question why the

editors selected people who clearly did not know Zelazny well.

Finally - the stories themselves. If you're a Zelazny fan, this collection is well worth your time. Otherwise, it's not your best introduction. Some of the underpublished (e.g. in a fanzine) stuff just isn't that good. And the strange sequencing ends up undercutting the effect of the really great stories that are also here. I'm a long time, committed Zelazny enthusiast, and I'm confident that this is **not** the collection I'd give my spouse in order to share my burning enthusiasm for Zelazny's work. If you're already a fan, though, this will satisfy your completist desires, and give you access to a lot of new work, uneven though it may be.

Michael says

Early works by Roger Zelazny. Contains 4 of my favorites by him; "A Rose for Ecclesiastes", "The Doors of His Face, The Lamps of His Mouth", "The Graveyard Heart", and "He Who Shapes."
There is also a plethora of poetry and about 25 more short stories that give a glimpse into his writing process.

Jim says

No surprise to anyone that knows how much I love Zelazny's writing, but this is a fantastic look into his work. Many of the stories are unpublished or not readily available any more. As a whole, the work promises to include every short that he ever wrote. These are many of his early ones. A few are partials, but most are complete & as Zelazny preferred them.

There is discussion about Zelazny's versus editorial preferences. There are excellent notes about allusions & metaphors in the stories as well as personal notes from Zelazny & other authors.

If you're a Zelazny fan, I think this is a must read.

Julie says

I'm glad he realized he'd never make it as a poet, because his poetry was awful. Clunky, jagged, and so vague as to be meaningless. It took me weeks to get through this selection of stories and poetry. There were a few stories that I wanted to like because the premise seemed fun, but the unnecessary references and symbolism kept me from enjoying (and sometimes comprehending) them. The last story in the book was 84 pgs in length and the Notes to help you understand terms and references you had just read was 5 pgs long. There is also a comment at the end of this one in which Theodore Sturgeon put all of my opinions on the matter much more eloquently. It was frustrating to mostly understand a story (finally!) and then have the ending make absolutely no sense.

I like some of his characters, such as the mutant seeing-eye dog. I don't care for his tone, but I understand that it was geared for his audience. Some of his experiments with writing were interesting as an exercise, but not interesting as a story itself. He has wonderful character development, but many of his characters are just the same person over again in different clothes, and himself I suspect.

I think that the ant queen story was interesting because it seems that Orson Scott Card lifted her almost perfectly from Zelazny.
I did not read the non-fiction articles at the very end.

Nick says

This book is not perfect. It has a lot of early stuff of Zelazny that shows the student quality that one would expect of any early work. BUT --- it contains the three wonderful (10 STAR!) early stories that "shaped" Zelazny's style: "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," "The Doors of his Face, the Lamps of His Mouth," and the short novel "He Who Shapes." They are great! -- and it is great to read them within the context of other stuff he was writing at the time.

Also, there are two introductions and a great deal of editor's notes on Zelazny's own opinions of his early writings. Very interesting!

Magill says

A series of early short stories and poetry supported by end notes, background and comments, as well as several pieces written about Zelazny by people who seemed to have known him well.

As a fan of his Amber series (particularly the first), I was curious about his other works, even though I am more fantasy than scifi in preference. The presentation of his early work in a series of volumes was too tempting to pass by.

After reading this first volume, I am still more fantasy than scifi, but I did find it interesting and hope to access the other 5 books in the series. I suspect that this will be more appealing to people who are fans of his work and, possibly, slightly obsessive compulsives who, having started with volume one, will be compelled to continue.

To be honest, these short stories are really more of an amuse bouche as you don't get the chance to really become immersed in a story, and some of the characters are less than appealing on such a brief acquaintance. And I still don't get some of the ideas the notes indicate were in the story, but they are literate with ideas and references, and that is nothing to complain about.

Volume 4 has been the most enjoyable so far.

Alazzar says

I recently picked up all 6 volumes of Roger Zelazny's collected stories, and based on the first book, I couldn't be happier with my purchase.

Zelazny's early work was amazing (not to say that his later work wasn't . . .), and it's really interesting to see things from the very beginning, including stuff he had published in his high school newspaper. A lot of the stories are extremely short (think 2-4 pages), which can actually be a ton of fun, because you get so much

variety that way.

I'd read some of the stuff in this book already (most of it from *The Doors of His Face, The Lamps of His Mouth*), so I skipped a lot of the re-reads this time through, being that I've got a ton of Zelazny I want to get through. However, some things were so good they were worth a second read (I'm looking at YOU, "A Rose For Ecclesiastes"). I even read "He Who Shapes" even though I'd read the novel-version of it (*The Dream Master*) only a few months ago. (And lemme tell ya, either the novella is way better than the novel or that story is just a lot better the second time through. Either way, I loved it.)

One of the beautiful things about this book (and this entire series) is the notes following each story. It's basically like having a specialized Wikipedia at your fingertips, ready to explain every single reference Zelazny made in any given story (and let's face it, you didn't understand all of the references, because that guy's all over the board with his mythology and Jacobean drama and whatnot). Also, many stories have notes from Zelazny, discussing how the story was conceived, what his goals were, etc. Fantastic!

There's also some great biographical information in here, which is awesome for someone who worships Zelazny as much as I do.

All that being said, here's a list of the stories in the book (I'm not including the poems, 'cause I'm not a poetry guy). I've bolded the ones I thought were particularly swell.

A Rose for Ecclesiastes

And the Darkness is Harsh

Mr. Fuller's Revolt

Youth Eternal

The Outward Sign

Passion Play

The Graveyard Heart

Horseman!

The Teachers Rode a Wheel of Fire

Moonless in Byzantium

On the Road to Splenoba

Final Dining

The Borgia Hand

Nine Starships Waiting

Circe Has Her Problems

The Malatesta Collection

The Stainless Steel Leech

The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth

A Thing of Terrible Beauty

Monologue for Two

Threshold of the Prophet

A Museum Piece

Mine is the Kingdom

King Solomon's Ring

The Misfit

The Great Slow Kings

Collector's Fever

The Night Has 999 Eyes

He Who Shapes

Huh. Looking back on that, I guess it would have been easier to bold the ones I liked *less*. Or maybe I should have just been a lot more strict in the judging and only picked the MEGA hits, like “Rose,” “Doors,” etc.

Anyway, this book really was an excellent deebler. It always pays to be a Zelazny reader.

Paul says

So much great writing, so early in his career. Loved all of it. Well, I'm not much of a poetry guy. I do think being able to write poetry is laudable, so I admire Zelazny's desire and ability to write it. I just don't enjoy reading it as much as I do prose (I consider this a shortcoming in myself and not in the medium itself). If I had all the time in the world, I'd love to spend time cultivating an appreciation for poetry, but I digress.

Rather than take paragraph after paragraph saying how much I like Zelazny (which anyone who knows me really well already knows), I'll just say that I thoroughly enjoyed myself, and was impressed all over again.

Besides the obvious ones, I also really liked: Mr. Fuller's Revolt, A Thing of Terrible Beauty, The Stainless Steel Leech - I could go on. Studies in Saviory was also great fun for the insights into the author himself. I liked Carl Yoke's piece and part 1 of the biography for the same reason.

Beyond the writing, I'll say the book itself is very nice. Great cover, nice quality, well constructed I think. I'm so glad NESFA but it together, I'm excited to read the rest. I especially enjoyed the notes, and "Zelazny speaks" that appear after the stories. In many cases I got new insights into some of the references made in the stories, which gave me new appreciation even for the stories I'd read before.

Kimbeattie says

Zelazny is my #1 favorite author bar none. A collection of his stories is an unexpected dream come true. While I have read most/many of his novels, my reading of his shorter works has been hit or miss and I'm really looking forward to digging into this material, most of which will be new to me.
