



Jack of Shadows

Roger Zelazny

Chicago Review Press (May 1, 2016)

Softcover \$15.99 (216pp)

978-1-61373-524-4

The republication of *Jack of Shadows*, by the late Roger Zelazny, is set on a planet half bathed in perpetual light and half shrouded in eternal dark. The sunlit hemisphere is modern, characterized by technology, business, and relative tranquility; the dark hemisphere is a feudal world ruled by warlord magicians and energized by sorcery. From the twilight realm between comes Jack, an infamous thief who, like others of his kind, can die and regenerate many times before his final life is expended. Also like others of his kind, Jack believes that he has no soul. After falling into a trap devised by his enemy, the Lord of Bats, Jack is wrongly executed. Fully regenerated, he vows revenge and embarks on a multiyear odyssey that will take him from the dark lands into the world of light and back again, armed with knowledge that will ensure victory even as it destabilizes the planet. Along the way, Jack is forced to confront the soul he denies having, and must decide whether or not to reverse his Faustian bargain.

Originally published in 1971, the novel is richly imagined, and descriptions of the dark lands are especially lush and alluring. By contrast, Jack's tenure posing as a university professor in the land of light seems underexpressed, but this may be deliberate, for Zelazny was a master of the genre. It is when the story returns to the dark lands that the book presents Jack's rich moral dilemma. The story is fast-paced and compelling at every turn, proof that good science fiction—despite the technological advances of intervening years—is timeless.

SUSAN WAGGONER (Fall 2016)

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