



# Eye of Cat

*Roger Zelazny*

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## Eye of Cat Roger Zelazny

A retired hunter of alien zoo specimens, William Blackhorse Singer, the last Navajo on a future Earth, has come to what he sees as the end of his life. The World Government calls upon him for aid in protecting an alien diplomat from a powerful and hostile member of his own species. Knowing both the importance of the task and his inability to handle it on his own, Singer goes to confront his greatest conquest with a strange bargain. A shape-shifting alien, the last of his species, sits in a special cage at an institute dedicated to the study of extraterrestrial beings. Most frequently he projects the aspect of a one-eyed catlike creature, but he can appear as almost anything.

One of Singer's secrets, and his greatest guilt, is his suspicion that the creature is intelligent. He confronts him and offers his own life for Cat's cooperation in saving the alien. Cat accepts, and later, their mission fulfilled, demands a refinement on the original bargain. Rather than a simple death he wants a return bout—a chase with Singer as the hunted rather than the hunter.

The gods, powers and monsters of Navajo legend provide the backdrop for the working out of Singer's fate—for the chase is as much for his soul as for his body. As he uses matter transmitters to flit from Paris to London to the Middle East to the American Southwest, he must search back into his own early life as well as the root beliefs of his vanished people and come to terms with a world that has adopted him, made use of his skills, and left him feeling that he has no place to call his own.

## Eye of Cat Details

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# From Reader Review Eye of Cat for online ebook

## Perry Whitford says

A bounty hunter of Native American descent is hired to hunt and kill a deadly alien that poses a threat to all life on Earth. In order to succeed he needs help, so enlists the support of a previous quarry, the shape-shifting, telepathic "Cat", who agrees to help on the proviso he be given another chance to renew old hostilities with his nemesis once the current hunt is over.

Zelazny is a top-notch sci-fi writer who likes to examine various belief systems and their cosmogony in his fiction. Through the hunter, Billy Singer, he turns his attentions upon the rich culture and traditions of the Navajo Indians. Zelazny finds a clear affinity with this culture, resulting in a meditative novel of greater empathy than others I have read by him.

It's a pretty slight story, but there is a satisfying density to the themes that belie the brevity of the work. Singer is a conflicted character and the hunt becomes a journey to the very roots of his ancestry and conscience.

Worth a read.

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## Jim says

I don't normally care for stories with pure Native American Indians in the space age of the future who use their in-born skills to track aliens & such. Kind of hoakey & goes against my philosophy that we'll merge into one race (the sooner, the better), but that's the plot here & it's done as well as any I've ever read. Zelazny put his unique touch on it, which is all that saves it from 2 stars.

Chris Kovacs, one of the editors of the "Collected Works of Roger Zelazny" reread this book after spending years researching Zelazny. That gave him a better insight into the book & he wrote about it here.

<http://www.nyrsf.com/2015/06/christop...>

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## Cathy Sprankle says

Roger Zelazny was one of my favorite authors in high school, and I reread this book to see how it held up. Zelazny was a master of combining fast-moving plots with beautifully poetic language, and I enjoyed most of the book for that reason. But the conclusion of the story was frustratingly vague; I felt like I'd missed something along the way. It won't keep me from reading/rereading more of his books in the future, though.

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## James Proctor says

Zelazny really goes all out with this one. It pays off. A compelling read start to end, doing what the author does best, overlapping folk mythology, magic and science fiction so fluidly and uniquely, he almost belongs

in his own genre. Reminiscent of *Lord of Light*, a novel that pulled a similar stylistic feat by combining Hindu folk tales with interstellar intrigue, *Eye of Cat* is a more cohesive book and the plotline far easier to follow than the former, making for this a reader a very enjoyable experience.

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### **Evan Winchester says**

Read this if you want a book in the hunter-becomes-the-hunted genre. Alien shapeshifters, the last Navajo on a future earth. Be ready for an \*extremely\* psychedelic experience. As an added bonus this book is only 180 pages.

Zelazny is great because you really don't know what you are going to get. Try not to read the front flap.

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### **Alazzar says**

“Eye” before “E,” except after “Cat.”

(That sounded a lot wittier before I typed it out. And even then, it was still pretty bad.)

Roger Zelazny is my favorite author, and I'm pretty sure he listed *Eye of Cat* as one of his five favorite books he wrote. Thus, you'd think I'd really like it.

Unfortunately, I didn't share Roger's enthusiasm on the subject.

The book was . . . okay. I had pretty high expectations going in, especially since it'd been over a month since I'd read anything by Zelazny (blasphemy!) and was really excited to return to the words of my hero.

The premise of the book is interesting enough, and is as awesomely unique as you'd expect from a Zelazny story: Billy Blackhorse Singer, the last Navajo left on Earth in the 22nd century, is an expert animal tracker who pretty much single-handedly populated Earth's galactic zoo by chasing down strange creatures on alien worlds. He gets hired to help deal with a potentially disastrous interplanetary political problem that he's uniquely suited to handle, and the next thing you know he's running from a terrifying beast on some crazy spiritual journey.

Emphasis on “crazy.”

*Eye of Cat* is just weird, as far as form goes. Every now and then we get random poems, sentence fragments, and garbled paragraphs with no punctuation or capitalization that would make a modern-day word processor combust from spell-check overload. And yet, it sorta works. In a way, the unusual form makes it like *Creatures of Light and Darkness*; in fact, I seem to recall reading that Zelazny said he couldn't have written *Cat* without having done *Creatures* first.

That being said, the book is a little slow to start and can kind of drag in parts, but overall, it was pretty good. I'd say 3.5 stars, and I'll decide by the time I'm done writing this whether that means it should be rounded up or down (although I have a feeling that the Z-factor alone will bump it up to 4).

There's a lot of good Navajo mythology and cultural stuff in here, which is pretty interesting if you're into that sort of thing. Perhaps my favorite part of the book, however, was the visuals—I really felt like I could see the lightning split the sky, feel the snowflakes falling into the canyon. There were a few stretches where it felt like not a lot happened, but they were saved by great imagery that really dropped me into the middle of every scene.

Of course, part of this could be that the climate seemed generally stormy (be it rain, snow or lightning), and that's pretty much my favorite type of weather. So I definitely felt like I was in a little piece of paradise made just for me, a lot of the time.

All in all, I think this is a book that will be even better the second time I read it (whenever that may be). The weird format will flow better now that I've been through the story once.

Not my favorite by Zelazny, but still great.

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## **Megan says**

Two impressions I repeatedly had throughout *Eye of Cat*: first, that it reminded me of John Dos Passos' *The Big Money*. And the more I think about it, the more I think this was deliberate. OK, I just looked up the U.S.A Trilogy in the Wikipedia and conclude that Zelazny must be deliberately mimicking it — there are four prose styles Dos Passos uses: narrative chapters that progress the story, “camera eye” interludes that are stream-of-conscious, newsreels that give clips of headlines or radio snippets, and biographies of famous people. Zelazny has all four of those in this book, though the biographies are of the book's own characters.

Second — and this leads from that — Roger Zelazny is the most versatile writer I've ever read. This may be because I don't necessarily read lots of books by one author, or because he is actually surprisingly versatile. He is the only author I know of who set out so deliberately to develop variety throughout his career. He began writing short stories and set out to lengthen his prose as he grew more skilled, and wrote on a variety of themes and in a wide range of styles just to see if he could.

Honestly, I love Roger Zelazny so much because this is the author I would've been if I'd ever become one. I can see where we think in the same lines, in the same patterns. He plots the way I would plot, and I love him for writing in an era where attention-deficit masses would not condemn, judge, and pass him by for spending huge swaths of time on intricate descriptions.

Okay, enough about Roge. On to the book. All of that being said, I didn't particularly like this book. *Eye of Cat* is written in a style that defies fast reading, and I just get distracted while reading slow, so I was bored for a lot of it. It is set in an indeterminate but certainly distant-ish future, taking for granted that the reader has familiarity with the decade and technology of whenever and wherever it is. And it is about a hunt.

It is about William Blackhorse Singer, the last real Navajo, the last Indian connected with the past and the old ways, and Cat, a highly intelligent predatory and telepathic metamorph who is also the last of his kind. Billy Singer made a name for himself once hunting and catching exotic and dangerous creatures from all over the galaxy, and Cat — not known to be intelligent at the time — was one of his acquisitions for the exomorph zoo in San Diego. Over the course of 50 years, Cat has done nothing but plan how he will destroy the man who caught him. And then Billy comes to him for help.

An assassination plot is no more than the mere mechanism to get to the focus of the book, where Singer frees Cat for his help and agrees in exchange to be killed by him. The story blends Navajo myth and cosmology with mystical realism and fantasy, the past with the present, Cat with coyote. As Singer tries to lose the predator on his trail — a predator who insists Singer actually wishes to be caught — he also tries to find himself and face his past and his demons. There, in the shadows and treachery of Canyon de Chelly, Singer faces off with Cat and against his chindi (his deathwish) in a lyrical hunt that evokes much ancient American imagery and folklore.

As far as craft is concerned, it is an excellent book. And I did come up with a new rule that whenever I read Zelazny, when I finish the last page, I have to go back and re-read the first chapter because he is so cyclical. I did it with this one half by accident because I didn't really think I'd caught enough, and the references that suddenly made sense with the rest of the book just made it dazzling.

This review via The Hundredaire Socialite.

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### **Susan says**

In his memorial to Roger Zelazny, George R. R. Martin says: "He was a poet, first, last, always. His words sang." This is especially true of *Eye of Cat*, which at times read like a novel by e. e. Cummings. This book is about the language and the shamanistic journey; the story itself is simple and straightforward. I might have wished for a longer book with more than sentence-long references to William Blackhorse Singer's career as a hunter of exotic alien species - but that would have been a novelist's approach, not a poet's. But reading Zelazny again has inspired me to purchase a new copy of the Amber series, which I read too many years ago to remember anything but the story premise and the surprising lyricism of the language.

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### **Mont'ster says**

Okay, I will admit that I'm stretching (just a little) in giving this book 4 stars. My honest opinion would be closer to 3.5 stars but we work with what we have, yes?

I haven't read enough of Zelazny's work to be able to compare this to his other books but I found it to be an interesting diversion and an entertaining piece of "brain candy".

**SPOILER WARNING** Zelazny deals with some interesting and complex issues (death, the meaning of life, purpose in life) but the comic moments keep the book "light" enough so that the heavy topics covered don't become a downer.

The hero is a hunter by trade and the book is set in the not too distant future. He travels the galaxy and uses his innate tracking skills to gather animals for an intergalactic zoo. The main character struggles with his purpose in life and whether or not he has "abandoned" or "betrayed" his Navajo heritage. He experiences a moral delimma when he realizes that an animal he captured many years earlier is, in fact, a sentient being. This (and another conflict) are set up early on and the remainder of the book is the deal the two make and the lengths the hero goes to to repay his end of the bargain (or die trying).

I don't want to completely give the book away because if you like light SF, it's a decent read.

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## Richard Harp II says

The themes and contrasts I found in this book are profound. Hunter and hunted, beast and man, old and new, myth and technology (or science, which in this book encompasses psychics), are all separate but the same, just displayed in different images. Zelazny uses different language and forms for each. Flowing prose for myth, sometimes broken and disjointed language and short, almost Twitter-like phrases for technological messages and news stories. All of these dichotomies intermingle together near the climax. I feel that this book was written for me to read today. Zelazny and Billy Singer definitely sang to me today.

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## Elar says

Most significant part of this book is Zelazny's style of writing and native american culture mix with scifi.

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## Neale says

Roger Zelazny began the 1980s inauspiciously. He had completed the first 'Amber' sequence in the late 1970s, and its success seemed to have convinced him that there was an easier path for a professional writer than the fine writing and extravagant conceits of his best early work. He threw out a couple of hastily written fantasies whose awful paperback covers quite adequately described their contents. And then, out of nowhere, came 'Eye of Cat'.

I find it hard to believe that the same man who had just put his name to the dreary clichéd prose of 'The Changing Land' should, within a year, put the same name to this remarkable prose-poem. 'Eye of Cat' is Zelazny at his most interesting: a poetic, mythic, stream-of-consciousness inner journey on Navajo themes. One remembers it not so much for the story as for the 'trip'. The style is perhaps a bit show-offish at times, as if he is trying to demonstrate that he's still 'got' it, but that is a small price to pay for having Zelazny back. The book is compelling, strange and utterly original.

'Eye of Cat' was Zelazny's last work of substance. Prose-poems do not pay the rent. He saw out the 1980s by returning to Amber with a new sequence, even less interesting than the first, and his final decade was filled with collaborations, fix-ups and humorous novels. But he had at least shown that he still 'had' it...

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## Colin says

I picked up this book used at Zia Records because I have greatly enjoyed Zelazny's work in the past, and because I heard an interesting review of it as an "Appendix N" book (from Gary Gygax's famous list of authors and books that inspired the creation of Dungeons and Dragons) on the "Sanctum Secorum" podcast. I have to say, I really enjoyed the beginning of it - Zelazny captures so much of what the Southwest is like, especially up around canyon country. The concept was very interesting - Navajo tracker in the future in a game of cat-and-mouse with a telepathic alien shapeshifter. But I found the last 25% or so of the book very unsatisfying, mostly because of the odd stream-of-consciousness telepathy. Still a very fun book, though.

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## Hack says

my god this was horrible. i couldn't get into the Native American legends, nor could i really be pulled in by the crisis that Singer was having. i was really interested in the parts with Cat in them (i was more interested in Singer's fears and final realization of Cat as a sentient being) than i was in the rest of the book. unfortunately, the bits with Cat in them are a minority in the book. i liked his motives, but it was lost in bullshit about Singer's dumb spirit journey where he battles himself. the book held nearly no coherency and overall, i'm impressed with myself that i finished it.

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