

"FANTASY OF A SUPERIOR ORDER"  
Washington Post Book World  
HUGO and NEBULA AWARD-winner

# ROGER ZELAZNY

THE CHRONICLES OF AMBER  
BOOK TWO

## THE GUNS OF AVALON



# Table of Contents

- [Chapter 1](#)
- [Chapter 2](#)
- [Chapter 3](#)
- [Chapter 4](#)
- [Chapter 5](#)
- [Chapter 6](#)
- [Chapter 7](#)
- [Chapter 8](#)
- [Chapter 9](#)

# Chapter 1

I stood there on the beach and said, "Good-by, Butterfly," and the ship slowly turned, then headed out toward deep water. It would make it back into port at the lighthouse of Cabra, I knew, for that place lay near to Shadow.

Turning away, I regarded the black line of trees near at hand, knowing that a long walk lay ahead of me. I moved in that direction, making the necessary adjustments as I advanced. A pre-dawn chill lay upon the silent forest, and this was good.

I was perhaps fifty pounds underweight and still occasionally experienced double vision, but I was improving. I had escaped the dungeons of Amber and recuperated somewhat, with the assistance of mad Dworkin and drunken Jopin, in that order. Now I had to find me a place, a place resembling another place-one which no longer existed. I located the path. I took it.

After a time, I stopped at a hollow tree that had to be there. I reached inside and drew forth my silvered blade and strapped it to my waist. It mattered not that it had been somewhere in Amber. It was here now, for the wood that I walked was in Shadow.

treasured my eyes! Having them back again after nearly four years of blackness was a thing for which I lacked words. And to be walking free...

I went on, my tattered cloak flapping in the morning breeze. I must have looked over fifty years old, my face creased, my form sparse, lean. Who would have known me for what I was?

As I walked, walked in Shadow, moved toward a place, I did not reach that place. It must be that I had grown somewhat soft. Here is what happened

---

He wore no armor, though some of the others did. His gray eyes were open, though glassy. His knuckles were skinned and his breathing was slow. From beneath shaggy brows, he watched the crows eat out the eyes of the dead. He did not seem to see me.

I raised my cowl and lowered my head to hide my face. I moved nearer.

I knew him, or someone very like him, once. His blade twitched and the point rose as I advanced.

"I'm a friend," I said. "Would you like a drink of water?" He hesitated a moment, then nodded.

"Yes." I opened my canteen and passed it to him. He drank and coughed, drank some more.

"Sir, I thank you," he said as he passed it back. "I only regret it were not stronger. Damn this cut!"

"I've some of that, too. If you're sure you can handle it."

He held out his hand and I unstopped a small flask and gave it to him. He must have coughed for twenty seconds after a slug of that stuff Jopin drinks.

Then the left side of his mouth smiled and he winked lightly.

"Much better," he said. "Mind if I pour a drop of this onto my side? I hate to waste good whisky, but-"

"Use it all, if you have to. On second thought, though, your hand looks shaky. Maybe I'd better do the pouring."

He nodded, and I opened his leather jacket and with my dagger cut away at his shirt until I had exposed the wound. It was nasty-looking, deep, running from front to back a couple inches above the top of his hip. He had other, less serious gashes on his arms, chest, and shoulders.

The blood kept oozing from the big one, and I blotted it a bit and wiped it clean with my kerchief.

"Okay," I said, "clench your teeth and look away," and I poured.

His entire body jerked, one great spasm, and then he settled down to shivering. But he did not cry out. I had not thought he would. I folded the kerchief and pressed it in place on the wound. I tied it there, with a long strip I had torn from the bottom of my cloak. "Want another drink?" I asked him.

"Of water," he said. "Then I fear I must sleep." He drank, then his head leaned forward until his chin was resting upon his breast. He slept, and I made him a pillow and covered him over with dead men's cloaks.

Then I sat there at his side and watched the pretty black birds.

He had not recognized me. But then, who would? Had I revealed myself to him, he might possibly have known me. We had never really met, I guess, this wounded man and I. But in a peculiar sense, we were acquainted.

I was walking in Shadow, seeking a place, a very special place. It had been destroyed once, but I had the power to re-create it, for Amber casts an infinity of shadows. A child of Amber may walk among them, and such was my heritage. You may call them parallel worlds if you wish, alternate universes if you would, the products of a deranged mind if you care to. I call them shadows, as do all who possess the power to walk among them. We

select a possibility and we walk until we reach it. So, in a sense, we create it. Let's leave it at that for now.

I had sailed, had begun this walk toward Avalon.

Centuries before, I had lived there. It is a long, complicated, proud and painful story, and I may go into it later on, if I live to finish much more of this telling.

I was drawing nearer to my Avalon when I came upon the wounded knight and the six dead men. Had I chosen to walk on by, I could have reached a place where the six men lay dead and the knight stood unwounded- or a place where he lay dead and they stood laughing. Some would say it did not really matter, since all these things are possibilities, and therefore all of them exist somewhere in Shadow.

Any of my brothers and sisters-with the possible exceptions of Gerard and Benedict-would not even have given a second glance. I have become somewhat chickenhearted, however. I was not always that way, but perhaps the shadow Earth, where I spent so many years, mellowed me a bit, and maybe my hitch in the dungeons of Amber reminded me somewhat of the quality of human suffering. I do not know. I only know that I could not pass by the hurt I saw on the form of someone much like someone who had once been a friend. If I were to speak my name in this man's ear, I might hear myself reviled, I would certainly hear a tale of woe.

So, all right. I would pay this much of the price: I would get him back on his feet, then I would cut out. No harm done, and perhaps some small good within this Other.

I sat there, watching him, and after several hours, he awakened.

"Hello," I said, unstopping my canteen. "Have another drink?"

"Thank you." He extended a hand.

I watched him drink, and when he handed it back he said, "Excuse me for not introducing myself. I was not in good manner. . ."

"I know you," I said. "Call me Corey."

He looked as if he were about to say, "Corey of What?" but thought better of it and nodded.

"Very well. Sir Corey," he demoted me. "I wish to thank you."

"I am thanked by the fact that you are looking better," I told him. "Want something to eat?"

"Yes, please."

"I have some dried meat here and some bread that could be fresher," I

said. "Also a big hunk of cheese. Eat all you want." I passed it to him and he did.

"What of yourself, Sir Corey?" he inquired.

"I've already eaten, while you were asleep." I looked about me, significantly. He smiled.

". . . And you knocked off all six of them by yourself?" I said. He nodded.

"Good show. What am I going to do with you now?"

He tried to see my face, failed. "I do not understand," he said.

"Where are you headed?"

"I have friends," he said, "some five leagues to the north. I was going in that direction when this thing happened. And I doubt very much that any man, or the Devil himself, could bear me on his back for one league. And I could stand. Sir Corey, you'd a better idea as to my size."

I rose, drew my blade, and felled a sapling-about two inches in diameter-with one cut. Then I stripped it and hacked it to the proper length.

I did it again, and with the belts and cloaks of dead men I rigged a stretcher.

He watched until I was finished, then commented:

"You swing a deadly blade. Sir Corey -and a silver one, it would seem. . ."

"Are you up to some traveling?" I asked him. Five leagues is roughly fifteen miles.

"What of the dead?" he inquired.

"You want to maybe give them a decent Christian burial?" I said. "Screw them! Nature takes care of its own. Let's get out of here. They stink already."

"I'd like at least to see them covered over. They fought well."

I sighed.

"All right, if it will help yon to sleep nights. I haven't a spade, so I'll build them a cairn. It's going to be a common burial, though."

"Good enough," he said.

I laid the six bodies out, side by side. I heard him mumbling something, which I guessed to be a prayer for the dead.

I ringed them around with stones. There were plenty of stones in the vicinity, so I worked quickly, choosing the largest so that things would go faster.

That is where I made a mistake. One of them must have weighed around four hundred pounds, and I did not roll it. I hefted it and set it in place.

I heard a sharp intake of breath from his direction, and I realized that he had noted this. I cursed then:

"Damn near ruptured myself on that one!" I said, and I selected smaller stones after that.

When I had finished, I said, "All right. Are you ready to move?"

"Yes."

I raised him in my arms and set him on the stretcher. He clenched his teeth as I did so.

"Where do we go?" I asked.

He gestured.

"Head back to the trail. Follow it to the left until it forks. Then go right at that place. How do you propose to . . . ?"

I scooped the stretcher up in my arms, holding him as you would a baby, cradle and all. Then I turned and walked back to the trail, carrying him.

"Corey?" he said.

"Yes?"

"You are one of the strongest men I have ever met-and it seems I should know you."

I did not answer him immediately. Then I said, "I try to keep in good condition. Clean living and all."

". . . And your voice sounds rather familiar."

He was staring upward, still trying to see my face. I decided to get off the subject fast.

"Who are these friends of yours I am taking you to?"

"We are headed for the Keep of Ganelon."

"That ratfink!" I said, almost dropping him.

"While I do not understand the word you have used, I take it to be a term of opprobrium," he said, "from the tone of your voice. If such is the case, I must be his defender in-"

"Hold on," I said. "I've a feeling we're talking about two different guys with the same name. Sorry." Through the stretcher, I felt a certain tension go out of him.

"That is doubtless the case," he said.

So I carried him until we reached the trail, and there I turned to the left.

He dropped off to sleep again, and I made better time after that, taking the fork he had told me about and sprinting while he snored. I began wondering about the six fellows who had tried to do him in and almost succeeded. I

hoped that they did not have any friends beating about the bushes.

I slowed my pace back to a walk when his breathing changed.

"I was asleep," he said.

". . . And snoring," I added.

"How far have you borne me?"

"Around two leagues, I'd say."

"And you are not tired?"

"Some," I said, "but not enough to need rest just yet."

"Mon Dieu!" he said. "I am pleased never to have had you for an enemy. Are you certain you are not the Devil?"

"Yeah, sure," I said. "Don't you smell the brimstone? And my right hoof is killing me."

He actually sniffed a couple times before he chuckled, which hurt my feelings a bit.

Actually, we had traveled over four leagues, as I reckoned it. I was hoping he would sleep again and not be too concerned about distances. My arms were beginning to ache.

"Who were those six men you slew?" I asked him.

"Wardens of the Circle," he replied, "and they were no longer men, but men possessed. Now pray to God, Sir Corey, that their souls be at peace."

"Wardens of the Circle?" I asked. "What Circle?"

"The dark Circle-the place of iniquity and loathsome beasts . . ." He took a deep breath. "The source of the illness that lies upon the land."

"This land doesn't look especially ill to me," I said.

"We are far from that place, and the realm of Ganelon is still too strong for the invaders. But the Circle widens. I feel that the last battle will be fought here."

"You have aroused my curiosity as to this thing."

"Sir Corey, if you know not of it 'twere better you forgot it, skirted the Circle, and went your way. Though I should dearly love to fight by your side, this is not your fight-and who can tell the outcome?"

The trail began winding upward. Then, through a break in the trees, I saw a distant thing that made me pause and caused me to recall another, similar place.

"What . . . ?" asked my charge, turning. Then, "Why, you moved much more quickly than I had guessed. That is our destination, the Keep of Ganelon."

I thought then about a Ganelon. I did not want to, but I did. He had been a traitorous assassin and I had exiled him from Avalon centuries before. I had actually cast him through Shadow into another time and place, as my brother Eric had later done to me. I hoped it was not to this place that I had sent him. While not very likely, it was possible. Though he was a mortal man with his allotted span, and I had exiled him from that place perhaps six hundred years ago, it was possible that it was only a few years past in terms of this world. Time, too, is a function of Shadow, and even Dworkin did not know all of its ins and outs. Or perhaps he did. Maybe that is what drove him mad. The most difficult thing about Time, I have learned, is doing it. In any case, I felt that this could not be my old enemy and former trusted aide, for he would certainly not be resisting any wave of iniquity that was sweeping across the land. He would be right in there pitching for the loathsome beasts, I felt sure.

A thing that caused me difficulty was the man that I carried. His counterpart had been alive in Avalon at the time of the exiling, meaning that the time lag could be just about right.

I did not care to encounter the Ganelon I had known and be recognized by him. He knew nothing of Shadow. He would only know that I had worked some dark magic on him, as an alternative to killing him, and while he had survived that alternative it might have been the rougher of the two.

But the man in my arms needed a place of rest and shelter, so I trudged forward.

I wondered, though . . .

There did seem to be something about me that lent itself to recognition by this man. If there were some memories of a shadow of myself in this place that was like yet not like Avalon, what form did they take? How would they condition a reception of the actual me should I be discovered?

The sun was beginning to sink. A cool breeze began, hinting of a chilly night to come. My ward was snoring once more, so I decided to sprint most of the remaining distance. I did not like the feeling that this forest after dark might become a place crawling with unclean denizens of some damned Circle that I knew nothing about, but who seemed to be on the make when it came to this particular piece of real estate.

So I ran through lengthening shadows, dismissing rising notions of pursuit, ambush, surveillance, until I could do so no longer. They had achieved the strength of a premonition, and then I heard the noises at my back: a soft pat-pat-pat, as of footfalls.

I set the stretcher down, and I drew my blade as I turned.

There were two of them, cats.

Their markings were precisely those of Siamese cats, only these were the size of tigers. Their eyes were of a solid, sun-bright yellow, pupilless. They seated themselves on their haunches as I turned, and they stared at me and did not blink.

They were about thirty paces away. I stood sideways between them and the stretcher, my blade raised.

Then the one to the left opened its mouth. I did not know whether to expect a purr or a roar. Instead, it spoke. It said, "Man, most mortal." The voice was not human-sounding. It was too highpitched.

"Yet still it lives," said the second, sounding much like the first.

"Slay it here," said the first.

"What of the one who guards it with the blade I like not at all?"

"Mortal man?"

"Come find out," I said, softly.

"It is thin, and perhaps it is old."

"Yet it bore the other from the cairn to this place, rapidly and without rest. Let us flank it."

I sprang forward as they moved, and the one to my right leaped toward me.

My blade split its skull and continued on into the shoulder. As I turned, yanking it free, the other swept past me, heading toward the stretcher. I swung wildly.

My blade fell upon its back and passed completely through its body. It emitted a shriek that grated like chalk on a blackboard as it fell in two pieces and began to bum. The other was burning also.

But the one I had halved was not yet dead. Its head turned toward me and those blazing eyes met my own and held them.

"I die the final death," it said, "and so I know you, Opener. Why do you slay us?" And then the flames consumed its head.

I turned, cleaned my blade and sheathed it, picked up the stretcher, ignored all questions, and continued on.

A small knowledge had begun within me, as to what the thing was, what it had meant.

And I still sometimes see that burning cat head in dreams, and then I awaken, wet and shivering, and the night seems darker, and filled with shapes