

# SCIENCE FICTION

# REVIEW

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COVER BY BRAD FOSTER



# Robert Shea

## PROLOGUE

The son of a doctor, Robert Shea was born in New York City on St. Valentine's day, 1935. He attended Manhattan College, where he worked on the college newspaper, yearbook and literary magazine and helped found a fraternity that dispensed with blackballing and pledging. Drafted in 1954, he spent most of his two years in the Army doing public relations writing. After earning a master's degree in English literature at Rutgers University and writing the first draft of an autobiographical novel (as yet unpublished) about his college years, Shea returned to New York, where he tried free-lance fiction writing for a time. His first professional short story was published in FANTASTIC UNIVERSE by Hans Steffan Santesson, who invited Shea to join the Hydra Club. At a Hydra meeting Shea met Larry T. Shaw, editor of INFINITY, who hired Shea to work on CUSTUM RODDER and CAR SPEED & STYLE. (Shea was not to pass a driver's test for another seven years.) In 1963 he joined the editorial staff of TRUE MAGAZINE and in 1964 he was appointed editor of GULLIER. In 1967 he was asked by PLAYBOY to become one of the editors of "The Playboy Forum" letter column. As a "Forum" editor he represented PLAYBOY in many lectures, panel discussions and debates. By 1977 he was solely responsible for editing "The Playboy Forum." He lost his job at PLAYBOY in an economy drive in September, 1977.

Throughout his career as a magazine editor, Shea continued to write. His work included occasional science fiction short stories and a couple of novels (he tends to be vague about how many there were) that never saw the light of day, as well as other pieces that did. He had better success with non-fiction, his articles and essays appearing in magazines as diverse as TODAY'S HEALTH and the LOS ANGELES FREE PRESS. In 1968 he was one of a group who put together LAW AND DISORDER, a one-shot magazine sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union in the aftermath of the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Articles became less frequent. An important article was his "Women at War," a critique of the women's anti-pornography movement published in the February, 1980 PLAYBOY. Lately he has taken to doing travel pieces on hotels and restaurants in the Midwest for TRAVEL & LEISURE. His most recent published article was "Nobly Eats from It For You," in the WRITER, November, 1984.

During his years at PLAYBOY Shea met Robert Anton Wilson, also an editor on

"The Playboy Forum." Together they wrote ILLUMINATUS!, published by Dell in 1975. The three volumes of ILLUMINATUS! have been described as "the anarchist/acid rock answer to THE LORD OF THE RINGS" by David Harris, one of the editors who worked on it.

ILLUMINATUS! is still in print, unusual for a paperback original; it has been produced on the stage in England, the Netherlands, Germany and the U.S. and a small, antic cult has grown up around it. It was republished in a one-volume trade paperback edition in 1984 and has since appeared on a couple of science fiction and libertarian best-seller lists.

Shea continues his career as an editor by getting out his own amateur magazine, NO GOVERNOR. He claims it has a circulation of a little over a hundred.

Shea's next novel, SHIKE (pronounced she-ky), set in medieval Japan, was published by Jove Publications in June, 1981. It has come out in eight foreign editions and is now in its seventh printing.

His newest novel, ALL THINGS ARE LIGHTS, a novel about a troubadour and the women he loves in the time of the Crusades, will be published by Ballantine Books in the summer of 1986. He teaches part-time for the Department of Communications at Loyola University, Chicago.

Shea lives with his wife, Yvonne, and his son, Michael, in a small yellow house surrounded by evergreen shrubs in a suburb of Chicago on the shore of Lake Michigan. It is a surprisingly conventional setting for a man who writes science fiction and calls himself an anarchist. The choice is possibly explained by a quotation from Flaubert Shea has tacked to the bulletin board of his office: "Live like a bourgeois and think like a god." He says, "We bought this house because we needed room and it was cheap and pretty, and now the price of houses has gone up so much that it's even cheaper to live here. In fact, we probably couldn't afford to move."

Shea works in a room in the back of the house which has a pleasant view of green fields. Cramped with books, the room is papered with a black and white design of heraldic lions. The walls are decorated with framed posters advertising performances of the stage version of ILLUMINATUS!. There is also a small picture of Shea and Robert Anton Wilson side by side, each with his head enclosed in a pyramid surmounted by an eye, the symbol of the sinister Bavarian Illuminati.

There is a bulletin board on which, Shea says, he changes the items once a month. This month it includes a calendar of his own devising (the weeks begin on Monday), a schedule of the editing course he is currently teaching at Loyola, the

above-mentioned line from Flaubert and several odd-looking photographs without captions clipped from newspapers. On some shelves the books share space with what Shea calls "my collections of tacky souvenirs," cheap, gaudy objects purchased in gift shops in various parts of the world. There is a gilt replica of the Eiffel Tower, a China pig from Louisville, Kentucky, a Space Needle pencil sharpener from Seattle, a dinner bell from the Sherlock Holmes Hotel in London, a pin cushion from St. Louis, Missouri, and a replica of New York City in a bottle. The centerpiece of Shea's workroom is an Apple IIe computer which he calls "Mr. Chips."

Shea is about six feet tall, slightly overweight, and has a full head of wavy, greying hair and a brown mustache that droops over the corners of his mouth. He wears gold-framed bifocals. His manner is calm and pleasant. He speaks with a slight New York accent in a nasal voice that tends toward loudness, he says from years of trying to talk above subway noises.

SRF: After the publication in 1975 of ILLUMINATUS

SRF: After the publication in 1975 of ILLUMINATUS!, which you wrote with Robert Anton Wilson, your opus enjoyed a remarkable career on the stage. How did that come about?

SHEA: A mad English showman by the name of Ken Campbell discovered the ILLUMINATUS! books and decided to try to produce a theatrical version. Campbell's Science Fiction Theatre of Liverpool produced ILLUMINATUS! opened on November 23, 1976 in a coffee shop called the Liverpool School of Language Music Dream and Pan on Mathieu Street, almost next door to the site of the Cavern Club, where the Beatles got their start. After that it played the National Theatre in London, and later in Amsterdam and Frankfurt. Then the Empty Space in Seattle got wind of the British production and arranged

PHILOSOPHER-KING! WHAT A CROCK! PLATO'S ACADEMY CORNERED THE MARKET IN PHILOSOPHY AND GAVE THE CONCEPT A BIG 'PR FLUSH!

BUT THE STRANGERS WERE TO SMART TO BUY IT!



to do their own, halfway around the world, which ran from September to December of 1978. Cambell and his co-playwright, Chris Langham, an illuminated comedian who used to write for the Muppet Show, originally set up ILLUMINATUS! as a cycle of five plays, one to be performed each weekday night, followed by a Saturday marathon performance of all five plays lasting from noon to midnight, with pub breaks at suitable intervals. For the National Theatre, the cycle was to last to eight and a half hours. The Empty Space turned it into a cycle of three plays, and their marathon performances lasted about ten hours.

**SFR:** What did you think of the stage productions?

**SEA:** What greater delight can a writer experience than to see real people taking the trouble to bring his work to life? When what began as a vague shape in the mind takes on solid form in a theater before an audience, it's a thrill that cannot be duplicated. It was one of the most sublime experiences in my life, second only to being with Yvonne when she gave birth to our baby. Novelists are often displeased with adaptations of their works to other media. But Wilson and I were delighted with both the British and Seattle productions. They were ingenious in handling problems of staging and special effects, and they were faithful to both the text and the meaning of the books. The actors were passionately dedicated and gave brilliant performances.

**SFR:** How were the plays received by the public? Did people have trouble sitting there for eight to twelve hours?

**SEA:** Audiences at the marathon performances seemed even more enthusiastic than those who saw only one play at a time. ILLUMINATUS! achieves its effects through sheer size and all-inclusiveness. In Liverpool, London and Seattle the house was always full for every marathon performance.

**SFR:** What did the critics have to say?

**SEA:** There were dozens of reviews of the various stage versions, nearly all of them favorable. The few negative reviews were invariably aimed at the material rather than the actors. I'm glad we got at least a few hostile reviews.

**SFR:** Why?

**SEA:** ILLUMINATUS! was intended to outrage, disgust, disturb and bewilder many sorts of people. When two anarchists write a long novel full of satire aimed at everything from conspiracy theories to government and organized religion, somebody better be offended, or the authors are not communicating very well. The novel is replete with favorable references to drugs and rebellion, it presents a series of pornographic scenes of progressively increasing complexity and perversity and it is peppered with obscene and blasphemous imagery and language. If nobody is turned off, it means nobody is paying attention.

**SFR:** In addition to its science fiction and anarchist aspects, ILLUMINATUS! displays a strong preoccupation with the occult and the paranormal. Has your interest in this area grown, or are you more skeptical these days?

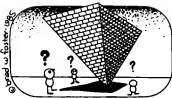
**SEA:** I've always been pretty skeptical about the occult and the paranormal, but in an open-minded way, if you take my word. I think magic, witchcraft and paganism have value as tentative pathways to what the mystics call illumination. I am willing to believe that occult or paranormal phenomena really exist, if ever I'm presented with conclusive evidence. I think that it is a betrayal of science that some so-called scientists are trying to use institutions and awards to discourage research in these areas. But I don't think anything has been proven yet. And don't ask me to take things on faith. I was a believing Catholic until I was thirty, and it was difficult enough to get away from that. No more so for me, thank you. Meanwhile, however, in ILLUMINATUS! and elsewhere I'm willing to use such concepts as story material without worrying about whether they're real or not.

**SFR:** What about the Ancient Illuminated Seers of Bavaria? Don't you believe in them?

**SEA:** At the time the book was written, I thought the legend of the Bavarian Illuminati was a silly, paranoid myth. We were simply using the Illuminati legend and the related plethora of conspiracy theories for material about sixties and political assassinations as a launching pad for an extended flight of black humor and political satire. In the years during which we wrote ILLUMINATUS! the country was awash in paranoia, and we were hoping to exercise some of it by poking fun at it. It had not been that long since Senator Joe McCarthy had the whole country in the grip of Communist conspiracy mania. It was not that long since a harmless couple named Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were sent to the electric chair as atomic spies. The evidence against them was pure shit, if you look at it today, but it was convincing at the time because of the prevalent hysteria. At the time we were writing the John Birch Society had magnified that conspiracy mania by connecting the Communist conspiracy to the Illuminati conspiracy, which Robert Welch had now discovered, and they were blasting the conspiracy for sex education, fluoridation, rock music, the peace movement and the popularity of marijuana. And they were being believed. It was in that climate that Wilson and I took up our pens to tilt at the windmills of political madness.

**SFR:** Have you changed your mind at all about the existence of the Illuminati since the book was published?

**SEA:** You, yourself, having written and researched the ILLUMINOIDS, which I consider to be a very sane and scholarly study of the Illuminati myth, are in a better position to say whether they actually exist than I am. I still think the Birch Society picture of the Illuminati--which is now also being put about by a Birch-like group led by an extreme authoritarian named Lyndon Larouche--is sheer nonsense. Of course, there are secret deals among world leaders and dastardly criminal acts are committed covertly by government agents. Still, I do not believe in a single, worldwide, age-old conspiracy that explains All of the Bad Things That Are Happening.



There is also the tradition of philosophical research whose initiates are sometimes known as Illuminati, a tradition that includes the heretic-martyr Giordano Bruno, the magician Aleister Crowley and Robert Anton Wilson, my co-author. But members of this tradition have not tried to take over governments or the world economy, only to turn on more light in their own--and others'--heads.

**SFR:** So you wrote ILLUMINATUS! purely as political satire?

**SEA:** Our intentions kept changing all the time. At first we saw it simply as an international espionage thriller, with the Illuminati as arch-villains, giving us, as I said, an opportunity to satirize current paranoia. As the book developed, it rolled along like a blob-monster, absorbing everything in its path. We came to consider it what the literary critic Northrop Frye calls an anatomy, a long work of prose fiction that incorporates everything that interests the author--ideas, opinions, curious facts, campy stories. WOMAN DICED is a good example of an anatomy. We wanted to outrage authoritarians of left, right and center, so we made the book subversive, blasphemous and pornographic. We threw in generous helpings of anarchist propaganda and our notions about the theory and practice of mysticism. Eventually, we came to realize that ILLUMINATUS! might be a more-than-literary experience, might actually have psychotherapeutic or mystically enlightening value, make readers feel as if they were participating in some magical or religious rite. Only, the aim of this rite would be to liberate people rather than confine their current programming. I think the stage versions of ILLUMINATUS! really did have this magical quality. The marathon performances reminded me a bit of the long Catholic services for Holy Week that recapitulate the trial, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Of course, ILLUMINATUS! is a good deal more entertaining than any religious ceremony I've ever sat through. Maybe this is what religion was like before somebody decided it had to be boring to be good for your soul.

**SFR:** You wrote ILLUMINATUS! while an editor at PLAYBOY. Did you find working there an enjoyable or a stultifying experience?

**SEA:** It was a very lively, creative place to work, especially during my earlier years there. My work on "The Playboy Fun" gave me lots of material for ILLUMINATUS! Later on, though, the corporation started to run short of money, so the staff got smaller, and I had to take on most of the work that had formerly been done by a group of people. It took all my time just to do the "Fornas" week, and there was nothing left over to develop new ideas or new directions on the job because something of a treadmill. Then there was an economy drive. On a

single day in September, 1977 about 150 employees were axed including several editors, and I was one of them.

**SR:** Was that traumatic for you?

**SEA:** No matter how much they tried to tell me I was a swell person and I was first-rate, I couldn't help but feel I had been weighed in the balance and found expendable. Also, Yvonne and I had some family tragedies at the same time that made things worse. Less than two months after I was fired my mother, who died in 1979, became an invalid, and Yvonne's 22-year-old brother was killed in a motorcycle accident. So the end of 1977 was a bad time for us, not just because of my being kicked out by PLAYBOY.

**SR:** How did you get through it?

**SEA:** I was buoyed up by Yvonne's unshakable confidence that I'd find worthwhile work to do. Years of studying Zen helped a lot, too. It's a bounce-back philosophy. When fears of not being able to support my family plunged me into anxiety or depression, I reminded myself that my family needed someone who could stay calm and cheerful more than they needed someone who had a job. That helped me out of a lot of funks. Besides, PLAYBOY didn't exactly cast me adrift without a life raft. There were 15 weeks severance pay, my profit-sharing and several free-lance editing and writing assignments.

**SR:** How did you manage to strike out on your own as a free-lance writer?

**SEA:** I'd always intended to leave PLAYBOY--on my time-table, of course--and try to write for a living. I didn't feel ready to do that when I was unexpectedly fired, but when I was job-hunting a substantial amount of free-lance writing work came my way. At the same time, I gave some short outlines for novels to my agent, Al Zuckerman. One of them turned into SHIKE, the medieval-Japanese novel which was published by Jove in 1981. That's a publishing company, not a good one. Since Al being the sole support contract for me that would pay enough to support us, there was no question about going back to the old office-job-and-paycheck routine.

**SR:** What is life like on your particular limb?

**SEA:** When I had a regular job I used to observe the free-lance writers I knew and say it must take nerves of steel to live like that, but I had no bone-deep understanding of how frightening it really is until I started to do it myself. It's very difficult to be the sole support of my family. Work is much more of a pleasure than it was when I was a magazine editor. It's hard at times and lonely at times, but what could be more fun than spending all day in a quiet room watching and recording the doings of the creatures of my imagination?

**SR:** Have you always had a creative bent?

**SEA:** As a kid I constantly drew and made models of dinosaurs, space ships, robots and horrible monsters. I made my own toy soldiers out of paper. They were usually supposed to be Martians. I built fleets of paper rocket ships. I staged great battles on the living room rug. At the same time, I was making my own newspapers. Before I knew how to write I would fold pieces of paper and decorate them with regular rows of squiggles, which I would then "read" to any interested adult, making the news stories up as I went along. I made up a long epic about my teddy bear, which I told in daily installments to my mother. As I grew older I developed the ambition to write and draw my own science fiction comic strip. This grew out of my fascination with BUCK ROGERS, which I began reading in 1938. I felt about BUCK ROGERS the way my son now feels about STAR WARS. I drew my own comic strips and passed them out to friends.

**SR:** How did you get started as a writer?

**SEA:** Just as reading BUCK ROGERS made me want to do my own comic strip, reading sf made me want to write the stuff. I started reading science fiction--a CAPTAIN FUTURE story called "Magic Moon"--when I was eleven. Since the magazines didn't come out fast enough for me, I started patronizing a back-number magazine store in my neighborhood, and pretty soon I had built up a big collection of sf magazines. About the time I got the urge to write sf stories myself, I discovered that this store had stacks of back issues of WRITER'S DIGEST, THE WRITER AND AUTHOR AND JOURNALIST. These magazines fed my ambition, and they also taught me that there are principles in the construction of fiction, techniques for telling a story, methods of going about writing. I started reading how-to-write books. Those by Jack Woodford were among my favorites. By the time I was in high school I was turning out short stories pretty regularly. As a senior in high school I wrote a long pseudo-history of the future, which I called the MARCH OF THE MARTIANS. It lends heavily on a book called THE MARCH OF THE BARBARIANS by Harold Lamb, a history of the Mongols. I had a couple of short stories published in the MANHATTAN QUARTERLY, the college literary magazine. I had finished college and done two years in the army and was in graduate school when I had my first professional publication, a short story called "Brave Feast," which appeared in the January, 1958 issue of FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, edited by Hans Stefan Santeson.

Ah... I HAVE TO INFORM YOUR MAJESTY THAT AS OF THE FIRST OF THE MONTH, I'VE BEEN TAKEN OVER BY A LARGE MULTINATIONAL CONGLOMERATE



**H.L. Gold** published a story of mine called "Madness" in the July, 1959 issue of IF. I wrote fiction and articles frequently during my years as a magazine editor, but it wasn't until 1975 that Bob Wilson and I came out with ILLUMINATUSI, which was the first time I had my name on a book.

**SR:** Can you remember the first novel you ever read?

**SEA:** Not for sure, but the most important was THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS. One of the great books of all time. Yvonne and I took turns reading it aloud to each other a few years ago, and I recently read it aloud to Michael, and I still think it is a beautiful and delightful book. SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON was another favorite. I read MOBY DICK and HUCKLEBERRY FINN when I was seven or eight years old, but I didn't understand them very well until much later.

**SR:** What books did you like most when you were a teen-ager?

**SEA:** I read more magazine science fiction than anything else. When I was in my teens there were no publishers regularly bringing out sf books. I was enchanted by Leigh Brackett's SHADOW OVER MARS and by Asimov's FOUNDATION series. Among novels I loved Robert Penn Warren's ALL THE KING'S MEN and Ayn Rand's THE FOUNTAINHEAD. I also liked big gaudy historicals like GONE WITH THE WIND and ANTHONY ADVERSE and the many novels of Frank Yerby and Thomas B. Costain.

**SR:** You must do a lot of reading as part of your work. Do you read for pleasure as well?

**SEA:** A writer who doesn't read for the sake of reading is doomed to lose all sense of what writing is all about. I do most of my leisure reading either for pleasure or for self education. Recently, for pleasure, I have read LINCOLN by Gore Vidal, HERETICS OF DUNE by Frank Herbert, THE WARRIOR by Malcolm Bosse, THE GATE OF WORLDS by Robert Silverberg, THE TOMB by F. Paul Wilson, and PET SEMINARY by Stephen King. For enlightenment, in the last few months I've read THE TIME FALLING BODIES TAKE TO LIGHT by William Irwin Thompson, THE C ZONE by Robert and Marilyn Krieger, INTIMATE CONNECTIONS by David D. Burns, THE HOLOGRAPHIC PARADIGM edited by Ken Wilber, THE GREAT BEING POPE by Fritz Hopf and PROMETHEUS RISING by my good buddy Robert Anton Wilson.

**SR:** What contemporary authors do you get the most out of reading?

**SEA:** The list is continually undergoing revision as my taste changes and my opinions on reading change, but John Fowles, Romain Gary, Norman Mailer, Yukio Mishima, Vladimir Nabokov, George Orwell, Thomas Pynchon, J.R.R. Tolkien and Robert Penn Warren seem to have taken up permanent residence in my literary pantheon.

**SR:** As a former magazine editor, you probably read a lot of magazines.

**SEA:** Dozens, though I don't have enough time to read as many magazines--or books for that matter--as I'd like to. My favorite is THE NEW YORKER, which I think is the best magazine being published in the U.S. today. I also love NATURAL HISTORY, especially the column on evolu-

tion by Stephen Jay Gould. THE NEW YORK TIMES SUNDAY MAGAZINE and SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN are other favorites.

**SFR:** Could you describe your working habits?

**SEA:** I'm always experimenting with new ways of going about writing. The habits of the moment are not the habits I had last year and may not be those I'll be using next year. Right now, though, I try to follow a routine that varies little from one day to the next. Monday through Friday I get up at six a.m. I start writing between eight and nine. I eat a light lunch and go for a long walk. Then I continue working until six. Those may seem like long hours, but there are interruptions, because I have to be available to our twelve-year-old Michael, though he doesn't need me as much now as he did when I started free-lancing. From six to eight is free time, then I read till around ten, and so to bed. That's my ideal schedule, you understand. The reality is punctuated by all sorts of vicissitudes.

**SFR:** Isn't it boring to follow a daily routine?

**SEA:** I like it. Many teachers of mystics recommend a daily schedule. By not having to worry about where you're going to do next, you keep your mind on a higher plane. That's why monks the world over follow a regular routine. It encourages the growth of the inner life and of creativity.

**SFR:** How much planning do you do before starting to write a novel?

**SEA:** To get an advance from a publisher you have to submit an outline of your proposed novel. So I write an outline of forty pages or so. But I don't necessarily follow that outline when I write, and I plan the finer details of a chapter or scene only when I'm ready to write that particular section. Also, I welcome changes of direction that depart from the original outline. I go along with John Fowles' rule, "Follow the accident, fear the fixed plan." I try to look at my original idea as nothing more than a springboard, with the real creative process happening as I work along.

**SFR:** Do you work through a piece of writing from beginning to end, then, or do you hop around, writing sections as they occur to you?

**SEA:** I've tried hopping around, but the results are confused and don't seem to fit together too well. For me, the most natural way to write is the way I read most novels, straight through from start to finish. But I often do get ideas for parts of the book other than the one I'm working on. I make notes of those ideas and use them when I'm ready.

**SFR:** When you're writing fiction, do whole scenes appear in your mind, or do you have to make yourself figure out what happens next?

**SEA:** I start by rereading what I wrote yesterday and looking at my notes or outline for the scene I'm writing. This gets my mind back into the story. The scene starts to unfold in my mind as if I were reading it in a book or watching it on a movie screen. Sometimes I'm a passive observer, and I simply write what

I see and hear. The words and sentences come to me without much effort on my part. Sometimes, though, I have to take a more active role in shaping the scene, asking myself what the characters would probably do or say, what would the details of the setting probably be. Although I like my stories to develop spontaneously, I'm not above manipulating characters and events to push the story in the direction I think it should go.

**SFR:** Do you find that writing dialogue is easier than straight narrative?

**SEA:** So much so that it's a problem. Once my characters start talking to one another it's hard for me to get them to shut up, so we can get on with the story. You know those monologues in Ayn Rand's novels that go on for pages and pages? Well, I could easily write dialogues that would go on just as long. Usually, I let my people talk as much as they want to in the first draft, then cut back on the conversation when I'm revising.

**SFR:** How much revision do you do?

**SEA:** I try to keep it to a minimum. I try to avoid what I call "overfuss," which means tinkering with a piece for seven years or so before submitting it, something I have been known to do from time to time. I think two drafts is best. My first draft writing usually needs that much revision. I did SHIKE in three drafts for the most part, typing several pages of first draft material, then rewriting that, then typing a final draft moving on to the next clump of pages. I don't like to write a whole draft of a novel, then go back to the beginning and start over. But the novel I just finished, ALL THINGS ARE LIGHTS, was tougher to do than SHIKE. It took me six complete drafts over four years before I finally got it done. This is still not the way I prefer to work.

Of course, I could go on revising my writing endlessly. There are always improvements that can be made. But I think the best way for me to develop as a writer is to get a lot of practice by producing a large quantity of work, rather than by perfectionistically polishing a few pieces.

Now that I do my writing with an Apple II/e computer and a word processing program called Apple Writer II, revising

REMEMBER TO  
SNORT YOUR FOOD  
28 TIMES, DEAR



is a lot easier. I just call up the old draft on the screen, type in my changes, punch a couple of keys and turn out a new draft on my Apple letter quality printer at the rate of about a page a minute. As you can see, I'm an Apple loyalist. I got the computer in 1983, and all those later drafts of ALL THINGS ARE LIGHTS were done on it.

**SFR:** What do you think is the strongest point in your writing?

**SEA:** Story structure. Keeping the story moving in a definite direction without wandering away from it and without losing track of the various plot threads. I'm also good at imagining and describing pageantry and spectacle, big scenes, events on an impressive scale.

**SFR:** Do you think a work of fiction can satisfy the demands of an intellectual, educated elite and the larger, general public simultaneously?

**SEA:** First of all, the vast majority of people in this country don't read books at all, so as soon as you write a book you are already appealing to an intellectual elite. Within that book-reading audience, I think, it is possible to achieve both popular and literary success. If you'll go back and look at my list of favorite contemporary authors, you'll notice that many of the all-respected artists and they have all written best sellers. My ideal is to write about people and events that have popular appeal, yet tell my stories with a richness that will satisfy discriminating readers.

**SFR:** Do you have an imaginary reader in mind when you write?

**SEA:** Much of the time I'm not thinking of any reader at all, just doing my best to put the right words on paper in the right order. At other times, all sorts of readers invade my mind. I imagine my agent or my editor, or some friend or acquaintance reading a passage I've just written. These readers over my shoulder tend to make negative comments. I would like to have an ideal reader to whom I could address my work, but I haven't been able to develop such a character systematically in my mind. In lieu of an ideal reader, I try to use myself as the touchstone. I try to write the sort of thing I myself would like to read. I

try to write as my favorite writers do. I figure, if my writing pleases me, there must be some other people out there whom it will also please.

**SFR:** Do you think it's true that a writer is never the best judge of his or her own work?

**SEA:** On the contrary, the writer is the only judge whose opinion is important. In order to work at all, I must be able to judge my own work and to assume that I am a good judge of it. I have to know when something I've written needs more work, and when it's okay and I can leave it as it is. If I couldn't make such decisions, I'd be writing in a vacuum. It is true that writers often can't predict how their work will be received by others. Others may praise work of mine that I am unhappy with, or dislike something I think is fine. But other people's opinions are not really the important thing for a writer. I can't learn from what others think of their work.

**SFR:** Isn't it important for writers to follow editors' directions?

**SEA:** If you encounter an editor who doesn't like your work, it's best just to go looking for another editor. The publishing business abounds with stories of writers who had a manuscript rejected by twenty-two publishers, only to have it accepted by the twenty-third and become a best-seller. A high-ranking editor at PLAYBOY once said categorically at a staff meeting, "Isaac Asimov can't write." Now, Isaac has a strong ego and a huge following, and he could care less what any one editor thinks of his writing. But I wonder how many potential Asimovs may have been cut off at the beginning of their careers because they took some asinine editor's word for it that they couldn't write. In fact, when I was making my adieux at PLAYBOY another high-ranking editor advised me to look for another editorial job rather than try free-lancing because in his opinion I wasn't that good a writer. I thank God I did not listen to him. The editor whose word you take as gospel today may be a public relations account executive---or a free-lance writer---tomorrow. The only teacher you can rely on over a lifetime is yourself.

**SFR:** Are you very critical of your own writing?

**SEA:** I try to be neither too severe nor too lenient. You can't fool yourself, and when you are a writer, you're working for yourself. You know when you're goofing off and not getting the work done, spending too much time sharpening pencils. You know when you're doing below-standard work. So there isn't really much danger of a person who is derisive about writing being too lenient with himself or himself. The greater danger is paralyzing oneself with per-

fectionism. Aside from listening to too many other opinions, the factor that more than anything stifles would-be writers is an overactive critical faculty. The people who tell you that writing is agony for them are usually criticizing their work even as they try to turn it out. I try to avoid that. When developing story ideas or doing first draft work, I try to ignore the voice of my critical faculty. Get something on paper first. The critical faculty is more useful to me later, when I'm revising and polishing, but I need momentum when I'm trying to come up with ideas or get a first draft on paper.

**SFR:** Could you describe ALL THING ARE LIGHTS for us?

**SEA:** The title comes from a medieval philosopher, Scotus Erigena, who said, "All that are, are lights." The main characters have an outlook that is as mystical as that statement, only their mysticism is not of the orthodox variety. The main character is a troubador who achieves illumination in an adventuresome affair with a countess through the rites of courtly love, which I portray as a Westernized version of tantric yoga. The troubador is also in love with a woman minister of the heretical Cathar sect. Nowadays they tell women they can't be priests. In those days they burned them at the stake for trying. These people get caught up in the disastrous Seventh Crusade led by King Louis IX, known today as Saint Louis. The crusaders are eventually defeated by the Egyptian Mamelukes. The survivors, including the King, are held as hostages by the Moslems and to save their lives by paying an enormous ransom.

**SFR:** Sounds strangely familiar. What are you working on now?

**SEA:** It's in the formative stages and I don't want to say too much about it, but it seems to be a sequel to ALL THING ARE LIGHTS. It will be a continuation of my despectic view of the Crusades and of the Middle Ages generally.

**SFR:** Let's talk about SHIKE for a moment. How did that novel fare in the marketplace?

**SEA:** Quite well, though it wasn't a best seller. That is to say, it didn't make the NEW YORK TIMES or PUBLISHER'S WEEKLY best seller lists. But it did make the best seller lists of several book store chains, such as B. Dalton's, Waldenbooks and Kroch's and Breton's. It was listed as a best seller by the Toronto STAR. And reprint rights have been sold in eight foreign countries. I has gotten good reviews and gone back for a couple of printings. All in all, a respectable performance. And the people who like it, love it. That's the most important thing.

**SFR:** Did you learn anything in researching Oriental history for SHIKE that might be of interest to us in the twentieth-century Occident?

**SEA:** Many things. For instance, right-wing libertarians often talk about private armies and private police forces as a necessity for a free society. I learn-

ed that the samurai, whom we look upon as the epitome of militarism, were just like private warriors. They were not armed government troops. They were armed retainers protecting the private property of local landlords. The word samurai means "one who serves." But only a few hundred years after the class first appeared, they became the government. Government is based on the power to coerce, and that power exists, there will be government.

**SFR:** Your outlook is both anarchist and pacifist. Did you have trouble writing with sympathy about authoritarian militarists like the samurai?

**SEA:** Any writer of fiction who sympathizes only with characters whose ideas agree with his or her own is going to run out of material fast. I've always admired Japanese culture, and in particular the samurai. The samurai ideal is to develop oneself as a whole human being, to be an artist, poet and philosopher as well as a fighting man. The samurai often studied under Zen masters, and some who lived long enough retired and became monks themselves. I find this cultivation of aesthetic sensitivity side by side with martial ferocity to be most attractive. You have to go back to the knight-troubadors of Provence, the Vikings or the pagan Celtic warriors to find anything similar in Western culture, yet as recently as World War II Japanese officers were still writing poems in beautiful brush-and-ink calligraphy before they charged into battle slaying their beautiful, obsolescent sword.

As far as my being a pacifist goes, paradoxically the martial virtues are not antithetical to pacifism. Gandhi remarked that many of his most steadfast nonviolent campaigners were men with military training and a desire to be warlike. Both the Buddha and the Buddha were born into the Kshatriya, the Indian warrior caste. In the ANGITARA NIKAYA, a Buddhist scripture, we find, "Warriors, warriors we call ourselves. We fight for splendid virtue, for high endeavor, for sublime wisdom, therefore we call ourselves warriors." Bob White wrote a nice little essay in NEW LIBERTARIAN several issues ago on the need for an effective pacifist to have the heart of a warrior.

**SFR:** Isn't historical fiction a rather drastic switch from science fiction?

**SEA:** Well, SHIKE started out as a proposal for a science fiction novel which borrowed its plot from certain historical events---the Wars of the Roses in England and the Mongol invasion of Europe in the thirteenth century. An editor expressed interest in the story, but said if I could set it in medieval Japan, since he was in the market for historical romances, but science fiction. This is not, by the way, the editor or the publishing house that ended up buying the book. Anyway, I did a little quick research and discovered that there was a Japanese civil war like the War of the Roses. The parallels were startling, even to the opposing sides using red and white as their official colors. I knew, of course, that the Japanese had suffered a Mongol invasion. Since the novel was in an embryonic state at that time, it was possible to do a little genetic engineering and program the organism to develop into a historical novel rather than a science fiction novel. This new novel



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is connected to my other work in other ways as well. My hero belongs in an order of warrior monks whose resemblance to the Illuminati is not coincidental and whose teachings suggest many of the ideas about mysticism, philosophy and politics expressed in ILLUMINATUS! There are similar threads connecting ALL THINGS ARE LIGHTS with ILLUMINATUS!

Generally speaking, there are many similarities between science fiction and historical fiction. A lot of science fiction is historical fiction set in the future. In both genres, the writers must create in their imaginations a society and a way of life that they cannot know firsthand. Many science fiction stories describe future societies obviously modeled after societies that existed in the past. Asimov, for example, drew on the history of the Roman Empire for the Foundation series.

SFR: What other writing have you done recently?

SEA: The last piece published was an article in THE WRITER for November, 1984 called "Nobody Else Can Do It for You." In it I said at greater length what I've just told you, that a writer has to be his or her own teacher and critic.

SFR: Would you like to write more SF?

SEA: Oh, sure, but I could never be exclusively or even primarily a science fiction writer. There are too many other kinds of writing I want to do.

SFR: Do you have any advice for aspiring authors?

SEA: Write the sort of thing you yourself prefer to read. Use your own taste as a guide to what to write and how to write it, and you are more likely to find a market for your work and to be happy doing it. Don't write what you consider trash just because it seems like a way to make a lot of money. Don't, on the other hand, try to write belles lettres because such writing confers prestige, if reading such literature puts you to sleep. Take as your models, not the writers who make the most money or those who rank highest with literary journals, but the writers from whose work you personally derive the most satisfaction.

There's another word of advice I consider equally, maybe more, important: Don't listen to people who give advice to aspiring authors. As it says in the painting aboard the Lief Erickson, "Think for yourself, SCHMUCK." Doing on advice produces confusion, stultification, discouragement. I mentioned reading how-to-write magazines and books when I started writing. After a while, though, I reached a point where too much reading about how to write messed me up. I was forever changing my methods to follow the latest how-to article or professional tip that impressed me. I even followed advice from writers whose actual novels and short stories I had never read. I kept fantasizing that I would discover the Secret and feeling depressed because my writing didn't seem to get any better. When you are trying to learn to write, you usually go through a period of having your work rejected by editors, and during this painful time you're tempted to listen to any plausible character who comes along and this advice hunting made my approach to writing much more erratic and inconsistent and hamper-

"AND NEVER DARKEN MY MAIL BOX AGAIN -"



ed by discouragement than it would have been if I'd just figured out my own way of doing things and kept on writing and writing and writing. The kingdom of writing is within you.

SFR: Then you agree with the people who say it's impossible to teach anyone how to write?

SEA: Even that notion is misleading, if it is taken to mean that writing is a mysterious ability that can't be studied rationally or developed methodically. People who believe so, if they're not happy with their first efforts at writing, may conclude that they don't have genius or talent or whatever it takes, and may give up. What I'm saying is that you have to learn writing by yourself. You can be quite rational and conscious about it, or you may just practice and allow your skill to develop--whatever suits you. You can learn a few things from other writers, but you have to be very selective. You have to invest your own ideas about writing, your own methods and techniques, your own goals. The kingdom is within.

SFR: Have you yourself followed this advice?

SEA: Not all the time, and that's how I've learned that the advice is good. Whenever I've tried to do some sort of writing I despise or dislike I've been miserable and the result has been poor. Whenever I've uncritically adopted somebody else's writing theories or practices, my development as a writer has been held back.

SFR: Looking over your writing career, you seem to have had more work published in the last ten years than you did before that. Why do you think you are accomplishing more lately?

SEA: I've been gaining experience and I've learned my way around the publishing business. The fact that ILLUMINATUS! was a collaboration helped me get that book done, too. I had Bob Wilson's encouragement and example to spur me on. Before ILLUMINATUS! I produced several novels which I never finished.

Perhaps most important is that I

started psychotherapy in 1963, when my first marriage was falling apart, and I went into full-scale psychoanalysis between 1967 and 1973. Before all this professional help I had a lot of problems with sticking to projects that I started, with meeting writing commitments, with figuring out what I really wanted to do. Psychoanalysis taught me how to be productive.

SFR: What else besides writing are you working at?

SEA: I'm teaching, among other things. I give courses in magazine editing and magazine-article writing at Loyola University in downtown Chicago. It's great fun pulling all my experience together and trying to make sense of it. In my writing course I stress self-criticism and self-development as opposed to seeking answers from writing gurus.

Then, I irregularly publish an anarchist magazine called NO GOVERNOR. I let this lapse between 1977 and 1984, but then I doing a magazine for Arthur Hlavaty's Golden APA, and that got my editing-and-publishing motor started again. Lately my apazine has turned into a revived NO GOVERNOR. The magazine is now less purely anarchist and has strong mystical and fanzine components.

I write for other anarchist and far-out publications when time permits. I give talks when asked and occasionally attend meetings of anarchist and related groups. I'm a member of the Social-Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, an umbrella organization for a number of anarchist individuals and groups. Several years ago I engaged in some anti-draft activity. For the past few years I've been much involved in the Freeze movement, working at the community level here in Glencoe. I write publicity and propaganda for them and do occasional computerized mass mailings. At the moment the Freeze isn't getting much publicity, but I still think it's the only practical alternative to the extinction of humanity in a nuclear war.

I'm deeply interested in the study and practice of mysticism, particularly Zen. I meditate. I try to regulate my life in ways recommended by mystical teachers. I have built up a large library devoted to mysticism. I sit now and then with the group at the Zen Center of Chicago.

SFR: What do you do for fun?

SEA: Everything I do is fun.

SFR: Does your fiction have a political purpose?

SEA: Naturally my writing reflects my ideas about politics, religion and what-not. But I do not write to advocate my ideas. Not the way Ayn Rand--whose ideas and work I admire in many ways--did in THE FOUNTAINHEAD and ATLAS SHRUGGED. My primary purpose in writing is to be a storyteller, not a preacher. The ideas in my stories are just more material out of which the story is built. A story, to be any good, must honestly embody the writer's values and beliefs. But the better writer you are, I think, the more those ideological elements will be absorbed into the creative process and become invisible. For over four hundred years people have been arguing about the meaning of various characters and events

in Shakespeare's plays. If Shakespeare was trying to get some ideological message across, he failed abysmally. And he is too good a writer for that, so I have to conclude that he did not intend his plays to be vehicles for messages. We admire Shakespeare because he created events that enthrall us, people that live for us, language that dazzles us. Many other fine writers who do have messages, we admire in spite of what they are saying. Milton's Puritanism, for instance.

SPR: Do you feel a need to take a public stand on political questions, or do you think you should just stay in your study and work?

SEA: I try to participate when I can find time for it. But I think I may be doing my most important work for humanity when I stay home and write. So I have no qualms about letting my involvement in public issues take a much smaller share of my time than writing does. In any case, whatever I do in public it is not political but anti-political, since politics is the art and science of government, and I advocate the abolition of government.

SPR: Insofar as you do believe in political--or anti-political--activism, what do you think is the most libertarian thing a person can do? What approach would be most likely to hasten the advent of a totally free society?

SEA: Government will never be abolished as long as most people think there is no alternative they can live with. So the first step is education: Explaining anarchism to people. Showing them that it is not inimical to basic human needs and values, as it has often been portrayed. Offering evidence that it is not impossible utopian thinking either, but a way of reorganizing society that can work in the real world. Helping them to see that, far from being a practical necessity, the institution of government is leading the human race to the brink of extinction. We can do this educating by whatever means are available: Talking to people on the job or in the local tavern. Making speeches. Writing pamphlets and songs. Drawing cartoons. Producing anarchist paintings, novels and symphonies.

SPR: Wait a minute. You previously praised writing that doesn't have any message.

SEA: True, but Blake said that all poets are of the Devil's party, whether they know it or not. I would say that all novelists are anarchists, consciously or unconsciously. All art that affirms life encourages anarchism.

SPR: Do you consider yourself a left-wing anarchist or a right-wing anarchist?

SEA: The argument between left-wing and right-wing anarchism makes about as much sense as the argument between socialism and capitalism makes in a world which is tending more and more toward a single hybrid economic system. The more important question is not what kind of economic system we ought to have, but whether our economic system will develop freely, by voluntary participation and voluntary observance of the rules of the economic game, or whether it is going to be enforced and imposed by a government. I was appalled the first time I heard an anarchist-syndicalist declare that in an anarchist society nobody would be allowed to practice capitalism. I'm equally appalled by people who call themselves anarchists and envision armies of Pinkerton types protecting their real estate and industrial holdings. I imagine a free society as one in which many different communities will undertake many different kinds of economic experiments, with the blessing of humanity as a whole.

SPR: Many anarchists think violent means are necessary in the struggle against government. Why do you insist on pacifism?

SEA: Because as I see it violence is what makes any organization a government. A government is any person or organization which uses force to coerce people into obedience. When anarchists use terrorism, revolutionary violence or military means, they are no longer advancing the cause of anarchism. They have become another government, regardless of what they may call themselves.

SPR: You mentioned that you were a believing Catholic until you were thirty. Has anything taken the place of religion in your life?

SEA: Mainly my own philosophical speculations. I am thinking for myself, as I have learned I must do, trying to decide on a meaning for my life, to work out a satisfactory explanation for the world around me and my place in it, to select values that will help me chart my course. I want a philosophy that will do for me what religion does for a person, but with me in control of it.

SPR: How is your philosophy turning out?

SEA: It's a mixture of mysticism, anarchist individualism and scientific materialism, elements that are somewhat difficult to blend. One of my key convictions is that we have to cease to be guided by the ideas of good and evil. The origin of human misery, as the BOOK OF GENESIS tells us, lies in our adoption of ideas of good and evil. Oddly enough, no preachers seem to have drawn the logical conclusion that we ought to stop thinking in terms of good and evil. However, that is what both mysticism and

the philosophy behind psychoanalysis seem to suggest. I also think, and this somewhat contradicts the above, that people have a natural moral sense that transcends their own culture. So that a sensitive Aztec might feel there is something wrong with human sacrifice, for example. I make it possible for the contradictory elements in my thinking to coexist by keeping my philosophy aphoristic rather than systematic. I have noted on occasion that I've contradicted myself several times in this interview already. Don't worry, I'm not going to quote Walt Whitman or Ralph Waldo Emerson.

SPR: How did you get interested in mysticism?

SEA: I mentioned how I sedulously read writers' magazines. One very influential article I read, published in THE WRITER in 1958, was "Zen and the Art of Writing" by Ray Bradbury. Bradbury's advice was "Banalization. Don't think," which is not a bad calculation of the Zen approach to the arts. As I said, I was constantly fussing over my methods and techniques of writing in those days, and it was getting in my way. Later, I read Herrigel's ZEN IN THE ART OF ARCHERY and many books by Alan Watts and T. S. Strydom, and they all helped my creative development. Practicing an art in the Zen way gradually turns you into a mystic.

SPR: And, I take it, mysticism to this day continues to satisfy some need in you?

SEA: By 1968 I had gone through a radical change in my own point of view, and mysticism, especially Zen thought, was the only outlook that made sense to me. I met Alan Watts several times and became one of his many admirers. I read a lot about mysticism from Bob Wilson. The countercultural revolution of the sixties, in which I participated, was inspired in part by the impact of Oriental mystical ideas on a number of Western minds. By the beginning of the seventies I was meditating regularly and had adopted a number of mystical practices. I started to treat my work, everything in my life, as a Way. I started to treat everything that happens to me as a lesson or problem presented to me by life, the true sensei. To me, mysticism has nothing, necessarily, to do with theology or morality. It's simply a means of making direct mental contact with the ultimate, indescribable reality, thereby achieving a state of peace and euphoria. This is an utterly inadequate description of what mysticism is.

SPR: So you are both a mystic and an atheist?

SEA: Yes. One of the important threads in my thought derives from the existentialism of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir who teach that the universe is not ruled by a god and is meaningless and amoral in human terms, that there is no hereafter and that life on this planet is a chance event which has no significance. This is, so far as I know, what science appears to have learned about the human condition. Nevertheless, the existentialists assert that it is possible for human life to have value, meaning and dignity, if we realize that we can create these things for ourselves. The universe doesn't have meaning--we put meaning into it.







**SFR:** I'm curious about your outlook on lifestyle as it affects long life and vitality. Do you engage in activities like jogging or running? Yoga or Tai Chi? Is nutrition important in your daily life? Are such concerns likely to help us extend our life spans and enjoy life more?

**SEA:** I used to lead a determinedly unhealthy lifestyle. I was a heavy smoker, drinker and eater. I preferred high cholesterol foods like beef and cheese. I got no exercise. I liked to stay up half the night and often worked or played through two days straight without sleeping at all. Sounds like fun, doesn't it? Gradually I got the message that it's a fun way to shorten your life. So I've been whittling away at these self-destructive habits. Studying and emulating the practices of mystics has helped. I try to follow the Buddha's rule of walking a middle path between harmful asceticism and self-indulgence. I have to say, though, that I am repelled by fads. A couple of the things you mention have become fads to the point where I wouldn't do them even if they would double my life span. When I see a jogger coming down the street in his hundred-dollar Adidas warm-up suit, I want to reach for my revolver.

**SFR:** I note that you and I share the unique distinction of having become fathers for the first time at forty. Isn't it great? Do you think it's better than becoming a father in your twenties?

**SEA:** Fatherhood is rather like its necessary precondition, sex, in that the older you get the more grateful you are that something so nice can still happen to you. And, as with sex, parenthood is an area of life in which our cultural evolution has outstripped our biological evolution. Though it is physically possible for us to become parents in our teens, the cultural tendency seems to be to put off actualizing this potential until later and later in life. The fact that we tend to live longer and to be in better physical shape in middle age makes this postponement of parenthood practical. Women are also putting off motherhood until later in life. In their twenties, and even in their thirties, people are still finding themselves. In the old days, if you hadn't found yourself by the age of sixteen, you were dead. But now people have more time and need more time, because life is more complex and there are more options. So it's often not until their thirties or forties

that people have a sense of who they are and where they are going, have mellowed out somewhat and have the mature values that enable them to enjoy parenthood. Parenthood is like any other task--- you've got to enjoy it to do well at it.

**SFR:** Many vital and creative people extol the virtues of will power in making life more than just one damned thing after another. Is will an important part of your approach to life?

**SEA:** For a long time I dismissed will power as an obsolete Victorian notion. I thought Freudian psychology had established that people have no control over the way they act, that it's all determined by the structure of their subconscious. Then I learned that Freud never held any such view. He, and modern psychoanalysts, hold that people can direct their behavior rationally and should try to. Freud even admired those great exponents of will power and character the English Puritans, so much so that he named one of his sons Oliver, after Oliver Cromwell. All the important varieties of psychotherapy, even the non-Freudian ones like behavior therapy, agree that for the therapy to be successful the patient must have a strong will to change. This is a precondition of therapy. Psychotherapy doesn't replace will power, it depends on will power to be effective. In my own case, I thought my bad habits, smoking and the like, were neurotic symptoms that would go away automatically when I completed my analysis. Not so. I still have the same struggle to direct my behavior rationally that I did before. The only difference--and it is a crucial difference--is that I'm a more together person and can struggle more intelligently with my self-defeating tendencies. There is no substitute for will. We must take responsibility for our lives. We can't just go on blaming the silly things we do on our parents or the economic system or the devil. Unfortunately, this doesn't seem to have gotten through to the public at large, which is still looking for miracle cures. All that being said, please understand that I don't consider myself a very strong-willed person. I try to use the power of habit. I'm very conscious of my habits, and I try to strengthen the helpful ones and gradually chip away at the self-defeating ones. I also think that will depends a lot on attitude, and that one's attitudes can be improved--and one's will strengthened--by constantly reminding oneself of the attitudes one wants to have. For instance, if you like to smoke, you have to keep reminding yourself that tobacco is a poison and smoking is slow suicide. This is what is meant by reprogramming yourself. In this connection I also like Gandhi's advice, that you should never give something up just for the sake of giving it up, but only make a sacrifice when you can see it as a way of gaining something else that you value more. Good health, say, or mystical illumination. That is what will is, in a sense--a zeroing in on what you value most. Through a process extending over many years I've become a somewhat more disciplined person. I behave more intelligently than I once did. But I still have a long way to go.

**SFR:** Thank you, Robert Shea.



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