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Interview:
Robert Anton Wilson

HIGH TIMES

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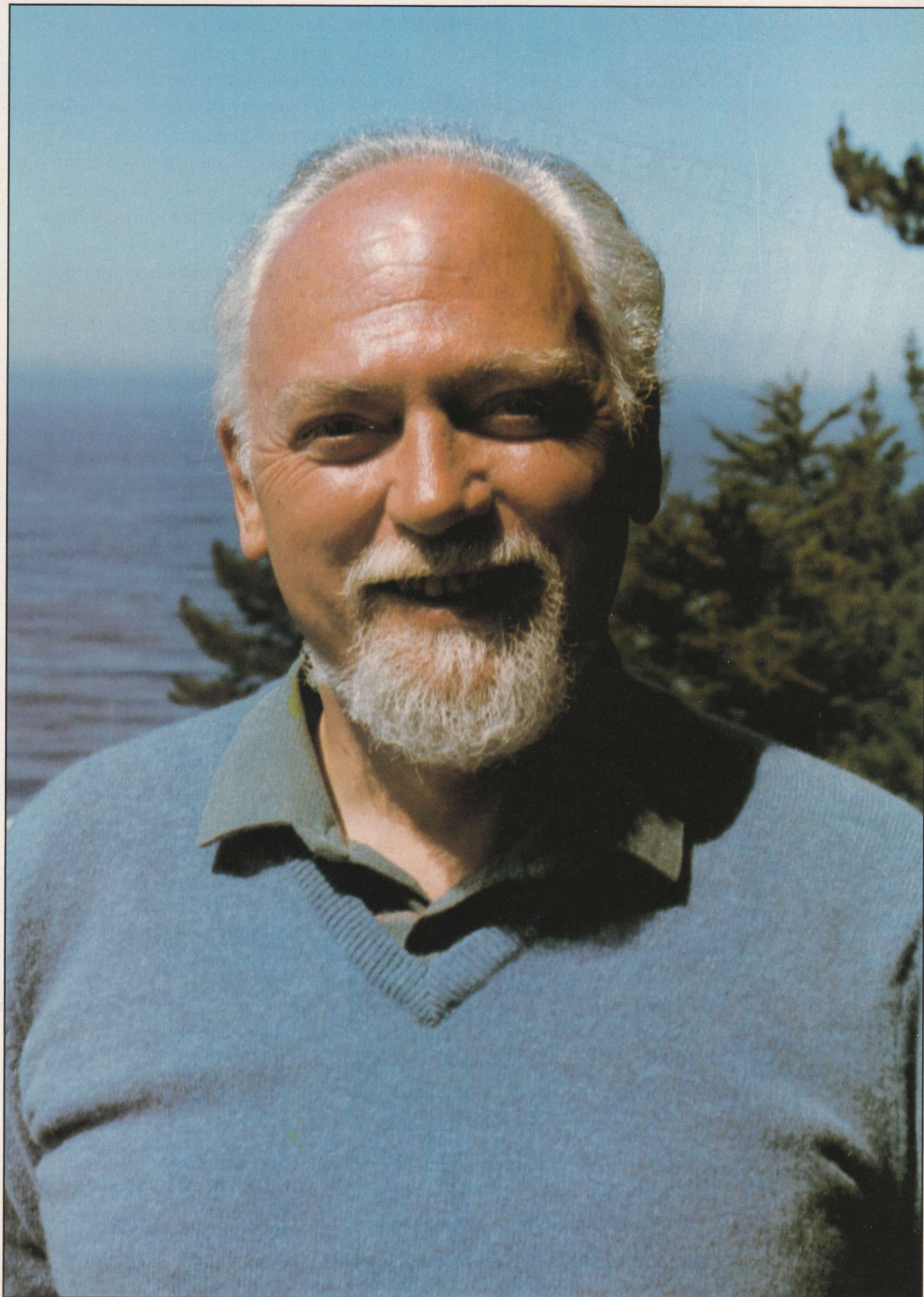
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The HIGH TIMES Interview

Robert Anton Wilson

Based on Robert Anton Wilson's incredible and varied career, it's hard to know what to expect when you meet him. This is a guy who spent five years in the '60s as an editor of *Playboy*, then went on to coauthor (with Robert Shea) the mind-boggling *Illuminatus!* (cut into a trilogy by its publisher), got his PhD in psychology, wrote the "new-age" classic *Cosmic Trigger*, collaborated on two books with Timothy Leary, wrote a whole bunch more on his own, released a punk-rock album, and toured as a stand-up comedian. Robert Anton Wilson has expanded as many minds with his books as all the Sandoz acid ever manufactured.

A small surprise, then, to finally see this white-bearded, Buddha-like man dressed in the same casual suit that your college physics professor wore—a slightly wacky Buddha, to be sure, cracking jokes and reciting Monty Python routines in a pleasantly gruff Brooklyn accent. Wilson's conversation is startlingly like his books, his words tying together an amazing diversity of facts, theories and punchlines in a way that gently prods at your sense of reality. Oh well, as Wilson's readers know well enough, it's always fun to watch as your preconceptions are blown to little, tiny bits.

by Philip H. Farber

HIGH TIMES: Who do you think is responsible for the "War on Drugs?"

Robert Anton Wilson: I suppose the Eli Lilly Company.

HT: How do you figure that?

RAW: The War on Drugs is chiefly a war on pot, according to Judge Sweet. Eighty-five percent of the drug budget is going into pursuing pot-smokers. They're trying to drive pot off the market because the CIA is making a

big profit out of the cocaine business, and Eli Lilly provides the materials that the Colombians need to make cocaine out of the coca. So they want to keep the cocaine business going. By the way, do you know who owns Eli Lilly?

HT: No, I don't.

RAW: The Quayle family owns a large part and George Bush owns a large part.

HT: How much do you think the US

government is involved in maintaining that supply of materials from Eli Lilly to Colombia?

RAW: Well, the government isn't doing anything to stop Eli Lilly from sending those materials down to Colombia and there's lots of cases where the CIA has been caught red-handed laundering drug money. They were running a bank in Florida a few years ago—the World Finance Corporation—which was mainly a

cocaine-money laundromat. And then there was a bank in Australia which the CIA was running, which was laundering heroin money [The Nugan Hand Bank; see Jan. '91 HT]. Most of their banks were tied in with the Swiss Alpine Bank in the Bahamas, which was run by Roberto Calvi, and Archbishop Marcinkus, so they could run the money through the Vatican Bank, where it leaves no record.

HT: I've noticed that a lot of the so-

called antidrug propaganda is phrased in a strange, negative fashion—sort of reverse suggestion. For instance, "Keep on smoking crack and you'll end up with nothing," could be taken as a suggestion to keep smoking crack. Do you think this is deliberate, or are they just stupid?

RAW: Never underestimate the stupidity of the establishment in this country. The stupidity of the establishment

approaches to infinity.

HT: The executive branch of the government, the CIA and the Vatican Bank are pretty monolithic institutions to be working against. Do you think there is much chance of cannabis being legalized in America?

RAW: Yes, because there are more and more people becoming aware of the valuable properties of hemp, thanks to Jack Herer and a lot of others—but especially Jack Herer. There are more and more people who know that we could be running our cars on hemp oil and not polluting the air the way that petroleum pollutes the air. A lot of people know that we can print books on hemp paper, and that will slow down the destruction of the forests. A lot of facts like that are becoming more widely known. It's an uphill battle against deception, greed and ignorance—but it's not hopeless.

HT: Are there some ways to do this that you think haven't been fully explored, but can be?

RAW: I think we should study the samizdat methods that were used in the Soviet Union to transmit information when the censorship was so strict there. We've got computer networks, that's one avenue for distributing information. Meanwhile, we do have alternative radio. We have Pacifica and National Public Radio, where a lot of information gets out that can't get into the major media. I think more and more people are aware of that while listening to those radio stations.

HT: We've been talking about hemp being legalized. What do you think is the possibility of any psychedelic being legalized or even just accepted by the public?

RAW: I'm beginning to think that there's a real chance that research will be legalized again. There are more and more people in the psychotherapeutic professions who are speaking out, and it has been relegalized for research purposes in several countries in Europe: in Switzerland, Germany and Holland, among others. There is definitely a movement toward, at least, legalizing research again. It does seem, with the passing of time, that more and more people can see how stupid it is to forbid scientific research in an area where the research that was done thirty years ago was so promising.

There was evidence, in the early sixties when research was legal, that

Return of the Cosmic Triggerman

Cosmic Trigger, Volume II (New Falcon Publications) is a largely-autobiographical compound of anecdotal insights, brilliantly-odd-ball observations and stunningly-right-on accusations, eccentrically fused into a book that summarizes Robert Anton Wilson's view of the world and the Cosmos. A great many readers know Wilson only for his *Illuminatus!* books and other works of fiction; some few others may also know him for his nonfiction works, which range with a Renaissance man's ease through philosophy, physics, occultism, cosmology and history. The *Cosmic Trigger* books might be considered the key to all his works.

You can yes, most definitely, appreciate this book without having read Volume I, which was first published back in '77 (and after being out of print for awhile, is now available again in a New Falcon edition). There are revelations here that made me sit up straight and blurt, "Holy shit! Those sons of bitches!" Revelations about the Vatican's criminal relationship with the Mafia, the CIA and South American drug dealers; about a secret variant of the Knights of Malta whose members are some of the world's most powerful and evil men; about the long-term consequences of the CIA's recruitment of NAZI MURDERERS after WWII; and about how all of the above ties together. This is not *Illuminatus!*-style satire, but very believable, chillingly-documented *real-life* data which neatly sums up some of the world's darkest conspiracies in but a few breathtakingly-lucid pages.

Here too, Wilson fans will get a very intimate portrait of Wilson's life—and some real insight into the inner workings of this artist and visionary. Although he consciously discards a conventional autobiographical structure, preferring a kind of holographically-cellular arrangement of sparkling set pieces, *CT2* ties together very neatly—and does indeed riff off the first volume. In both books Wilson talks frankly of the use of psychedelics and marijuana, and continues to act as a convincing advocate of their *intelligent* and *cautious* use. But much that Wilson trumpeted in the first *CT*, is not taken up here—perhaps because some of his more extravagant projections failed to come about. He was rather optimistic in his prediction for the development of immortality by the '90s, and the establishment of an O'Neill-type space colony. He felt we were on the verge of making contact with interplanetary intelligences, in accordance with the development of an innate system of intelligence circuits that would eventually link us with the higher beings of the Cosmos. He was heavily into Aleister Crowley and Timothy Leary. He still resonates with both those sages—but they are far less a presence in *CT2*. Nevertheless, the underlying concepts established in the first volume are still shining through. There is indeed a powerful intellectual continuity here—and sometimes it achieves an arc of connections which make one feel ghostly fingers hovering over one's own inner Cosmic Trigger....

—John Shirley

(Order *Cosmic Trigger II* for \$12.95 + \$1.48 postage from: New Falcon Publications, 7025 E. First Ave., Suite 5, Scottsdale, AZ 85251.)

LSD was useful in the treatment of alcoholism, schizophrenia—all sorts of psychological problems. Leary took a bunch of convicts, and when he was through with his therapy, the overwhelming majority of them never committed another crime for the rest of their lives. And for as far as the follow-up studies followed them, they were still law-abiding citizens—the most astonishing feat in the history of behavioral science! There was all the evidence that people learn languages faster with acid. And there was the research on religious experiences, like the Good Friday Experiment.

All of that was so promising that it's hard to believe that we can return to the days of the Holy Inquisition, and that promising areas of scientific research can be forbidden indefinitely. Especially, as I said, when it's beginning to open up in Europe.

HT: You mentioned the Good Friday Experiment—what was that?

RAW: That was an experiment in the early sixties where twenty theology students were in a chapel on Good Friday and ten of them got psilocybin and ten of them got placebos. The ten who got psilocybin all had mystical experiences of the highest quality.

HT: What kind of research is being done in Europe, that you know of?

RAW: Mostly, it's clinical. All that I've read about is just that therapists are allowed to use it in the treatment of their patients.

HT: Is there a way that you'd like to see psychedelics used by this society?

RAW: My personal opinion, based on what was done in the sixties, and what has been done underground—in a clandestine way since—is that it's probably the wonder drug of the twentieth century, much more than penicillin. Intelligently used, acid has nearly infinite potential.

HT: Do you think that a resurgence in psychedelic use now would produce the same kind of cultural ferment that it did in the sixties—bringing ideas up to the surface?

RAW: Undoubtedly. The main effect of psychedelics is to break down conditioned and imprinted circuits in the brain. You start using your brain in new ways, which means new impressions, new perceptions and new ideas.

HT: How can clandestine experimenters with psychedelics approach these experiences?

RAW: It should be approached seri-

ously, with a religious attitude or an attitude of philosophical inquiry.

HT: What do you mean by a religious attitude?

RAW: An expectation that your whole world is going to collapse and that you're going to be reborn. If you don't expect that, if you think you're just having fun, you're likely to have a terrible shock which can frighten you.

HT: That kind of experience might be frightening to a lot of people.

RAW: It is. It causes acute paranoia in

“The main effect of psychedelics is to break down conditioned and imprinted circuits in the brain.”

politicians who've never used it, and it's done some damage to people who have tried it. If they're not prepared properly.

HT: Do you think electronic highs—light and sound machines, or electromagnetic headsets—can fulfill some of the same uses?

RAW: Not yet, but I think we're getting closer to that all the time. I expect within two or three years we will have electronic equivalents. There are different machines that are approaching it from different angles. I don't know where the breakthrough will occur.

There are so many different types of brain-altering machines that someone is going to come up with one that acts just like LSD.

HT: You sometimes talk about the evolutionary value of stupidity in connection with the development of these machines....

RAW: Yeah, I've often wondered why there's so much stupidity in the world. It's got to be serving some function. Nothing survives a long-term evolution unless it has a function. And I finally decided that the function of stupidity is to force the intelligent to become more intelligent. The Inquisition vastly accelerated science, and I think that the New Inquisition that we're currently living through has inspired all sorts of creative work that wouldn't have happened if LSD had remained legal. People wouldn't have been searching into so many alternatives if they'd had LSD available for legal research.

HT: In your recent novel, *Nature's God*, you've got these great scenes with George Washington smoking some herb in his campaign tent. Is this purely fiction, or do you think that cannabis really was influential in the founding of the United States?

RAW: Oh, George was a pothead! That was documented by Dr. Michael Aldrich back in the sixties. I quote a lot of the documentation in two of my previous books, in one of the appendices to *Illuminatus!*, and in *Sex and Drugs* [Playboy Press, '73].

HT: Is there something inherent in cannabis that had people thinking about independence?

RAW: You know, the first hemp law we had in this country obliged farmers to grow it. Hemp was considered so valuable that they wanted everybody who owned a farm to grow some. Yeah, hemp played a major role in American history. The Constitution was written on hemp paper. The Declaration of Independence was written on hemp. All of our early ships were built largely out of hemp.

HT: What about the buzz itself? Did that altered state affect the thought and events that were going on at that time?

RAW: Yeah. Pancho Villa was another pothead. I think if you compare the military campaigns of Washington and Villa, you'll see that they were both influenced by marijuana. They were very nonlinear, that's why they kept going so long against such impossible odds. The British were thinking in a linear, Aristotelian way, and Washington was thinking in a nonlinear way. That's how he wore

them down over six years.

HT: Do you think there is a way to approach the headspace of George Washington for the purpose of gaining individual autonomy, which seems to be the present battle?

RAW: There's a Sufi word, that I don't remember, for the man who drinks wine in secret and doesn't get caught. Jesus said, "Be as harmless as doves and as subtle as serpents." In a mad world, one has to pretend to be at least partly mad in order to pass as normal.

Or, as J.R. "Bob" Dobbs says—Praise "Bob"—"Act like a dumb shit and they'll treat you like an equal."

HT: Do you think that the rise of strange new religions—like the Church of the SubGenius [who "worship" J.R. "Bob" Dobbs]—is having some effect on the culture?

RAW: When I first started talking about these deliberately surrealist religions ten years ago, most people had never heard of them. Now when I talk about them, people in the audience

have already heard of them, and they yell "Praise 'Bob'" and "Hail Eris" and things like that. I was at MIT recently and I saw in one of the men's rooms, written on the wall, "'Bob' is the only hope now." So, definitely, these reli-

my computer printing out pictures of Hugh Hefner?" I never realized "Bob" looked like Hugh Hefner until I read that.

HT: Is the Discordian Church, such as it ever was, still at large?

RAW: Oh, it's very active.

HT: What's the evidence of that?

RAW: The Chaos Computer Club in Germany—they infiltrated the whole American defense [computer] system.

HT: Are there Discordians active to

that extent in the USA?

RAW: One hears rumors.

[Robert Anton Wilson's latest books include a novel, *Nature's God (Roc/NAL)*; the third installment in the *Historical Illuminatus Chronicles*, and two nonfiction efforts, *Quantum Psychology (New Falcon)* and *Cosmic Trigger II (see review)*. A fourth novel in the *Historical Illuminatus series*, *The World Turned Upside Down*, is presently in the works.]●

"...I think that the New Inquisition that we're currently living through has inspired all sorts of creative work that wouldn't have happened if LSD had remained legal."

gions are impacting all over our culture. There was an Atari computer a while back that, when you first tried to use the printer, it printed out a hundred "Bob" heads before it would do anything else.

HT: Was that intentional or a virus?

RAW: That was somebody at Atari. Atari gave up trying to find out who did it and just sent a letter of explanation to people who complained. People were writing in and saying, "Why is

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