

# The Stars Shine Down Short Guide

## The Stars Shine Down by Sidney Sheldon

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



# Contents

<a href="#">The Stars Shine Down Short Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Social Concerns.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Techniques.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Key Questions.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Literary Precedents.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Related Titles.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Copyright Information.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>



# Characters

In *The Stars Shine Down*, Sheldon resumes his usual practice of making a beautiful, intelligent woman his chief protagonist. As the novel opens, Lara Cameron is on her way to a birthday party in her honor where her guests will include dignitaries from both the political world and the business world. Her building projects have been highly successful, and she has tried to make her past as glamorous as the social position she currently occupies. Actually, she was poverty stricken, the daughter of an abusive alcoholic father. She has recently bought a castle in Scotland and buried him there. Unloved as a child, she has created a myth that her father was from a great family and was devoted to her.

She is determined that her name, already on many buildings throughout the country, will soon be on the world's tallest Skyscraper. She is known as the "Iron Maiden," someone who gets what she wants, regardless of how she has to do it. But the Iron Maiden is also so beautiful and sexually appealing that no man can resist her. "No one really knows her" is a frequent appraisal of her character.

In Chicago after her successful career in Glace Bay, Lara forms an alliance with a young banker named Howard Keller. He became her chief assistant in the business enterprise she created in Chicago. Keller, although a genius in finance, has become a businessman only because circumstances forced him to abandon his dream of becoming a major league baseball star.

His talent was there as all the coaches assured him, but his father deserted the family and his mother suffered a stroke that made it necessary for him to support the family by working in a bank. He, like most males who meet her, falls in love with Lara, but to her he is merely her trusted employee. His expertise enables her to realize her dreams, and she never realizes how much he loves her.

Lara, having conquered the world of real estate developers in Chicago, decides that she must challenge New York. Labor troubles force her to consult a noted attorney, Paul Martin, who at first refuses to help her. He is soon having a torrid affair with Lara, who is unaware of his underworld connections. Sheldon is fond of introducing Mafia figures into his novels and Martin differs little from the ones he put in his earlier novels, except for his genuine love for the heroine.

A concert pianist is Lara Cameron's unlikely choice for the love of her life.

Philip Adler is considered by many critics to be the premier concert pianist of his era. The world of music provides some heightened glamour in the last part of the novel. Adler, against his will, falls in love with Lara Cameron.

Sheldon is concerned with setting up a love affair between two very different people, using their differences to heighten the romance of the novel.

## Social Concerns

In *The Doomsday Conspiracy* (1990), Sheldon showed concern about what unscrupulous businessmen were doing to the environment. No such concern is mentioned in *The Stars Shine Down*, although real estate developers are potentially as destructive as the villains of the earlier novel. Lara Cameron would be quite capable of erecting one of her office buildings or apartment houses in a pristine forest or on the site of a national monument. Sheldon presents how real estate developers operate, for he has studied the business with his customary thoroughness. Lara leads a glamorous life, but Sheldon does not try to make her lovable or even particularly likable. Rather, she survives by being more ruthless than any of her competitors.



# Techniques

The plot of *The Stars Shine Down* is circular in that the novel concludes where it begins, in the Cameron Plaza in New York City, where a birthday party for Lara with two-hundred distinguished guests is scheduled to take place. The great ballroom is deserted when she arrives and she, believing her career is over, relives her past from her beginnings in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia.

Each important character in her life is given a series of flashbacks which explain how his or her character was formed. Gibellina, Sicily, 1879, is the farthest point in the past in the novel; it is where Paul Martin's Mafia origins are described. Lara's career takes her successively from her native Grace Bay, to Chicago, and finally to New York.

Such shifts in locale are common in Sheldon's fiction.

Mystery, violence, and sex are always part of the package in a Sheldon novel. A would-be blackmailer, Bill Whitman knows that Lara lied to the chairwoman of a community board in order to get permission to build in that neighborhood. He is killed when the bucket of a crane slips its chain and falls on him. Later her husband Philip Adler is mugged and the tendons of his right hand severed by the assailant.

The police trace the orders for both attacks to Lara's company. Adler believes his wife hired the thug because his concerts took him away too often.

Paul Martin, her former lover and a known Mafia member is under suspicion, too. The association with Martin puts Lara under investigation because of a Nevada casino he helped her to build. Predictably, it is Lara's most trusted assistant, Paul Keller, who hired the thug responsible for both incidents. Lara is cleared of illegal dealings when Martin refuses to testify against her.

Sheldon continues his practice of ending most of his chapters with an exciting event in the lives of his protagonists. The concluding chapter of Book Three ends with the slashing of Philip Adler's right hand. As readers of romances would expect, the lovers Lara and Philip are reconciled in the novel's conclusion, and both of their careers continue, he as a teacher at Juilliard and she as a real estate developer.

# Themes

The methods of real estate developers are explained as Lara learns the ropes of her demanding profession. She learns the importance of OPM — "Other people's money" as the developer borrows money for his projects.

The government permits deductions on interest and depreciation while the developer's assets keep growing. Location is of primary importance too. A building in a strategic location can make a developer richer. Lara proves an apt pupil, and she becomes a developer with a flair for successful deals.

Lara is from Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, a predominately Scots city, so Sheldon gives his readers an introduction to Scottish history and customs. Lara's is a rags-to-riches story, a common theme in Sheldon's best sellers, and a significant part of the American Dream. After a miserable childhood, Lara becomes a powerful force in the world of land developers. Paul Martin's family also rose to prominence, but in a different kind of business venture. They are kingpins in the Mafia. Sheldon traces the family back to its origins in Sicily where they were poor tenant farmers on the estate of the local Don, who brutally mutilated and killed Martin's grandfather.



# Key Questions

Sheldon's preference for women as his protagonists might be a subject for debate. As Lisa See points out in an interview published in Publishers Weekly (November 25, 1988): "What other popular novelist in the last two decades has so empowered his women characters? (Since I Dream of Jeannie, every Sheldon tale presents a woman in distress who rescues herself.)" However, these beautiful, successful women may not seem much more than the hapless victims of nineteenth-century melodramas to other readers. Is Sheldon actually furthering the feminist cause? In *The Stars Shine Down*, Lara Cameron is rescued from her predicament by the police and by the generosity of her former lover, Paul Martin.

How does she differ from Sheldon's other heroines?

In his column "The Professional Response" in the January 1995 edition of *The Writer*, Sheldon says: "My characters come to life in my novel as I dictate the story." The characters are defined by the situations he invents.

How effective is this method? Are the resulting characters believable?

1. Sheldon opposes censorship in any form. His novels have come under attack on several occasions, by the Reverend Jerry Falwell, for example, in the late 1970s when Falwell headed the Moral Majority. The Christian Coalition has come to the forefront since as the guardians of morality in this country.

What might they find objectionable in *The Stars Shine Down*?

2. Which would readers of this novel understand better after they have finished reading, the world of real estate developers or the lives of great performers of classical music?

3. Lara Cameron seems to alternate between the role of martinet who fires people on the slightest pretext, and the romantic lady still looking for her Young Lochinvar to "come out of the West." In which role is she more believable?

4. Sheldon provides some historical background for a decade as his heroine continues her triumphant career. How useful is this information?

5. To what extent does Sheldon use techniques he learned as a writer of screenplays and television scripts?

6. Despite his success as a writer and producer of several successful situation comedies, Sheldon rarely, if ever, puts anything comic in his novels. Why is this? Would the novel be improved by such material?

7. Lara Cameron insists that she really works for people, not for money or prestige. "I dream," she says several times when explaining her motivations.



How sincere are these ideals which she professes?

8. Since most of Sheldon's novels involve violent crimes and mystery, the police play prominent roles. Is his handling of police procedures comparable to that of writers such as Ed McBain or Joseph Wambaugh, both of whom are noted in this skill? How does Lieutenant Mancini in *The Stars Shine Down* compare to other fictional detectives?

9. Readers are often fascinated by our society's capacity for evil. Does Sheldon have a sound understanding of human depravity?

10. How does *The Stars Shine Down* compare to earlier novels by Sheldon?

Has he changed his basic formula?



## Literary Precedents

A number of books have music and musicians as their subjects, and some are structured like musical compositions. Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1947), for example, is the life of Adrian Leverkühn, a fictional German composer of the twentieth century. His compositions are described in great detail. The novel also deals in length with philosophy and politics, especially those of the Nazi era. Marcel Proust's *Swan's Way* (1913), also deals extensively with music. It begins with an "Overture" rather than an introduction. One of its characters is Monsieur Vinteuil, a church organist and composer, and Proust uses the theme from his "Little Sonata" in one of the climactic scenes. The problem with these novels might be their sheer complexity, which makes them more difficult to read than *The Stars Shine Down*. Readers may, however, want to see, for the sake of comparison, how other writers have used music in their works.

## Related Titles

Most of Sheldon's books have characters similar to Lara Cameron, although she is much less vulnerable than earlier heroines. Sheldon's heroines seem to find Mafia leaders irresistible. His Jennifer Parker, in *Rage of Angels* (1980), first opposes but later has an affair with Michael Moretti, a New York racketeer. In *The Sands of Time* (1988), Lucia Carmine, whose family in Sicily has strong Mafia ties, hides in a convent in Spain after avenging the murder.



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994