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NEWSMAKERS

A SPOTLIGHT ON THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Scientology founder's fate: Dead or alive?

L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology founder, is dead. Or mentally incompetent. Or alive and well.

The status of the wealthy 71-year-old author depends on whether you're talking to his estranged son or his wife. In Los Angeles, the two are mounting a courtroom tug-of-war over Hubbard's estate.

Ronald E. DeWolf claims his father is either dead or mentally incompetent, and wants control of the estate. Hubbard's wife, Mary Sue Hubbard, filed suit Friday to block DeWolf's probate court action.

If anyone knows where Hubbard is, they aren't saying. "To us, it's not anything unusual at all that he's off writing, because that's what he's been doing for years," Kathy Heard, spokesman for the Church of Scientology said Monday. "This man has had an enormous

amount of publicity, and he likes his private life."

Hubbard's country home in Sussex, England, currently is being used by the church. He cut his official ties with the church in 1968, stepping down from his position on its board of directors to devote himself to his writing.

He started writing at 19 and has written more than 100 novels, 138 short stories and more than 400 works about Scientology. Based on Eastern philosophies, the religion teaches how to live a harmonious life by erasing painful, subconscious memories or "engrams."

Hubbard always has made waves — in his founding of Scientology, in his role as one of the key writers who started the Golden Age of Science Fiction, and in his barnstorming stunts as a young man.



HUBBARD: If anyone knows where he is, they're not saying.

The 1934 edition of *Who's Who in Aviation* describes him as a "pilot who just dared the ground to come up and hit him."

The only child of a Navy lieutenant commander, Hubbard was born in Tilden, Neb., and spent his youth living all over the world. He founded Scientology with the 1950 publication of a best seller called *Dianetics*. The book is being heavily promoted anew in television commercials.

The commercials don't mention the Church of Scientology or the controversy that has surrounded it. There has been criticism of the church for exacting high fees for counseling, and 11 Scientologists were convicted in 1979 in a scheme to steal government documents.

Mrs. Hubbard, one of those convicted, will be sentenced Dec. 9 in Washington, D.C.

A hearing on Hubbard's estate is scheduled for Dec. 30 in Los Angeles. Mrs. Hubbard's lawyer, Barrett Litt, said Monday, however, that they hope to force an earlier hearing — and derail DeWolf's petition before the issue of Hubbard's whereabouts becomes relevant.

"I don't know anything about where Mr. Hubbard is," Litt said. "(Mrs. Hubbard) does know that he is alive and doing fine because she receives letters from him." He said she gets financial support from her husband, although she has not seen him since 1979.

The controversy over Hubbard's whereabouts comes five weeks after the release of his new novel, *Battlefield Earth*.

Another Hubbard manuscript received recently by St. Martin's Press is expected to run 12 volumes. It's *Mission Earth*, a sequel to *Battlefield Earth*, and a spokesman for St. Martin's says the apparently consistent writing style suggests Hubbard wrote it.