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Hubbard hot-author status called illusion

By Mike McIntyre
Staff Writer

In 1981, St. Martin's Press was offered a sure thing.

L. Ron Hubbard, the pulp writer turned religious leader, had written his first science-fiction novel in more than 30 years. If St. Martin's published it, Hubbard aides promised the firm, subsidiary organizations of Hubbard's Church of Scientology would buy at least 15,000 copies.

"Battlefield Earth," priced at \$24.95, was released the next year in hardcover, rare for a science-fiction title. Despite mixed reviews, the book quickly sold 120,000 copies — enough to place it on *The New York Times* best-seller list.

"Five, six, seven people at a time would come in, with cash in hand, buying the book," said Dave Dutton, of Dutton's Books, a group of four stores in the Los Angeles area. "They'd blindly ask for the book. They would buy two or three copies at a time with \$50 bills. I had the

suspicion that there was something not quite right about it."

Dutton only suspected what others claim to know for fact. The book's sudden success, say dozens of former Scientologists and bookdealers, was the result of a church plan to create the illusion of L. Ron Hubbard as a hot author. The church, they say, sustains the myth — 15 *New York Times* best sellers and counting — through dubious marketing tactics and the manipulation of an obedient flock of consumers.

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The church's orchestration of best sellers, say former Scientologists, is merely a public relations means to a larger end. The goal is to establish an identity for Hubbard other than as the founder of a controversial religious movement. His broadened appeal can then be used to recruit new members into the Church of Scientology.

The church uses two businesses to peddle its books. Author Services Inc., a Hollywood literary agency, sells the rights to publish Hubbard's works to Bridge Publications Inc., a Los Angeles company.

A Church of Scientology spokeswoman, Leisa Goodman, said that the church, Author Services and Bridge are separate and independent. But former Scientology officials say that Bridge and Author Services are staffed almost exclusively by Scientologists and operate within the church hierarchy.

"Author Services used to always think of schemes to make more money," said Vicki Aznaran, the former inspector general of the Religious Technology Center, an organization that former church members say runs the entire Scientology empire. "Bridge gets the money from a totally controlled cult population."

"They send people into bookstores. You get a phone call: 'Your job is to go down to the B. Dalton. Take as many people as you need to buy up all the books so they'll have to reorder.'"

Numerous calls to Author Services were not returned. Church and Bridge officials denied that sales of Hubbard's books have been artificially inflated.

But others dispute that claim, saying the church perfected its technique through the 1980s. After the success with St. Martin's, a reputable New York publisher, Bridge took over. Its 1983 paperback release of "Battlefield Earth" was a best seller. Around the same time, Bridge's re-issue of "Dianetics," the scripture of Scientology that Hubbard wrote in 1950, returned to best seller lists.

Hubbard's death in January 1986 did not break the streak. From 1985 to 1987, Bridge published Hubbard's 10-volume science-fiction series, "Mission Earth." All 10 books were hardcover best sellers. Subsequent paperback releases of the early volumes also were best sellers. And, if form follows, the volumes yet to be released in paperback also will be best sellers.

At the close of the '80s, Bridge claimed Hubbard's books had generated \$90 million in revenues for the publishing industry. But unlike the cases of Tom Clancy or Danielle Steele, L. Ron Hubbard's meteoric rise as a best-selling author may have little to do with readers.

Hubbard:

L. RON HUBBARD

Hot-author status a myth



File photo

"We were told to go out and buy a bunch of copies of 'Battlefield Earth' so it would become a best seller," said Dr. Frank Gerbode, the former head of the Scientology mission in Palo Alto. "The argument we were given was, if he became famous again as a science-fiction writer, it would improve his status."

Aznaran, who defected from the church in 1987, said Scientologists comply because the church teaches them that the future of their religion and their souls is linked to the success of Hubbard's novels.

"Scientologists are told they're supposed to buy lots of those books," Aznaran said. "They're told they're helping save the world with Scientology. If they can create a good image for Hubbard, they will be assured spiritual salvation."

Manufacturing a best seller

There was a time when Hubbard's fiction required no artificial boosts to succeed. In the 1930s, he was a popular and enormously prolific pulp adventure writer, publishing millions of words.

In 1938, Hubbard switched genres. With writers such as Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov and A.E. Van Vogt, he ushered in the Golden Age of science fiction. His heroes tended to be supermen who drew on highly developed mental powers to save the world. By the late 1940s, nearly 100 of his novels had been published, including "Final Blackout," an early classic of the field.

But his voluminous output did not translate into wealth.

"Writing science fiction for about a penny a word is no way to make a living," Hubbard said to a 1947 gathering of the Eastern Science Fiction Association. "If you really want to make a million, the quickest way is to start your own religion."

The remark proved prophetic. Hubbard founded the Church of Scientology in 1955 and started amassing his fortune. By the time of his death in 1986, reported *Forbes* magazine, his organization was worth \$400 million.

L. Ron Hubbard speaks at a Dianetics meeting in 1951. "Dianetics," the scripture of

Scientology that Hubbard wrote in 1950, made best-seller lists.

Nearing the end of his life, the cult leader apparently grew nostalgic for his first vocation. "I'm very proud of also being known as a science-fiction writer," Hubbard wrote in his introduction to "Battlefield Earth." The book, he said, "celebrates my golden wedding with the muse. Fifty years a professional — 1930-1980."

Harvey Haber, a former Scientologist who served as Hubbard's literary aide, was dispatched to New York to sell the manuscript. Hubbard demanded that the book be represented by a major literary agency and placed with one of the 10 largest publishers. The church and Bridge Publications were to play no role.

"He wanted to prove to everyone and all that he still had it," Haber said. "That he was the best in the world."

But 58 New York literary agencies thought otherwise, Haber said. "Not one of them would touch it." In Haber's opinion, "The book was a piece of s---."

Church officials didn't dare tell Hubbard his book was unmarketable, said Haber. "You would've been handed your head." Thus, he said, was hatched the plan to offer guaranteed sales in return for publication.

Even that was not enough for some publishers. David Hartwell, who in 1981 was director of science fiction at Simon & Schuster, declined to publish "Battlefield Earth" despite guaranteed sales of 35,000 copies. "I didn't think it was a terribly good book," Hartwell said.

Hubbard's aides then knocked on St. Martin's door, and the publisher welcomed them in.

The book was published in August 1982. The church, Haber said, transferred funds from its international reserves to buy 25,000 copies of "Battlefield Earth" from St. Martin's. Bridge Publications and its European affiliate, New Era Publications, were then ordered to replace the money. About the same time, Author Services was created, allegedly to manage Hubbard's finances and those of the church.

St. Martin's senior editor Michael Denny confirmed that a deal was struck. He recalled, however, that Author Services guaranteed to buy 15,000 to 20,000 copies. But when "Battlefield Earth" was published, he said, Author Services bought more copies than originally promised.

"The Author Services people were very rambunctious," Denny said. "They wanted to make it a *New York Times* best seller. They were obsessed by that."

When "Battlefield Earth" reached the shelves, the Cult Awareness Network, a national non-profit clearinghouse for information on cults, started hearing from book dealers in the New York area.

"Bookstores were calling us and asking what was happening," said Priscilla Coates, then director of the network. "People were calling them up and ordering multiple copies. The largest (order) was over 100."

Some Scientologists noticed that these tactics had a familiar ring to them. Hana Whitfield, a personal aide to Hubbard from 1967 to 1977, said the Scientology leader routinely issued "project orders" in the 1970s to buy "Dianetics."

Church members were given lump sums of up to \$50,000, Whitfield said, and sent to book stores.

"Some of them had a quota. For example: 'Buy 50 copies from *this* B. Dalton on *this* street every two weeks.' Or: 'Buy 50 copies from *that* Waldenbooks on *that* street every other week."

"As they were bought, they would be disposed of, or given to libraries, or stored in warehouses, or sent back to the printer and recycled."

A Riverside librarian recalled that throughout the '70s, the county's 30 branches frequently received donated copies of "Dianetics." "I remember they used to come in boxes ... about five books per box," said Billie Dancy, head of the Riverside Central Library. "They'd arrive in the mail."

The church's techniques were a bit more refined when Hubbard resumed his literary career in the early 1980s.

Vicki Aznaran said each of Scientology's 419 subsidiary organizations and missions has orders to fund a separate checking account called "The Book Account." Bridge Publications, she said, is a signatory on all of the accounts.

"Bridge holds the checkbooks," Aznaran said. "Bridge just writes checks to itself.

"All Scientology organizations are required to buy so many books. They are just shipped the books. They have warehouses full of books. Bridge just has books printed. They have this captive purchasing group that has no choice in buying them. It would be like Stephen King billing B. Dalton for books it didn't want."

There are numerous stories of Scientologists being coerced to buy Hubbard's books. Gerbode, the former head of the Palo Alto mission, said he was required to stock 100 copies of every Hubbard title. "We ended up with a huge storeroom of books we couldn't get rid of," he said.

Bent Corydon, the former head of the Riverside mission, said in his unauthorized biography of Hubbard that he was once ordered to sell to his flock 1,000 copies of "Battlefield Earth" or lose his mission.

In "L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman?" (co-authored with L. Ron Hubbard Jr.), Corydon also recalled a 1982 meeting where mission holders were given a directive by Wendall Reynolds, introduced as the International Finance Dictator. Reynolds, Corydon wrote, said that from then on each mission would be required to pay 5 percent of its income to a TV advertising campaign for "Dianetics."

Selling the 'doorstop'

At 819 pages, "Battlefield Earth" was thought at the time to be the longest science-fiction novel ever published. But it was only a preview of what was to follow.

Readers contemplating the 10-volume "Mission Earth," a sprawling saga of an alien invasion, were faced with more than 5,000 pages and 1,354,000 words.

The science-fiction community refers to the series as "a doorstop," said Bruce Pelz, a UCLA librarian and science-fiction historian.

The *New York Times* gave up after the first volume, dismissing it as "a paralyzingly slow-moving adventure enlivened by interludes of kinky sex, sendups of effeminate homosexuals and a disregard of conventional grammar so global as to suggest a satire on the possibility of communication through language."

But like "Dianetics" and "Battlefield Earth" before it, copies of "Mission Earth" almost flew off the shelves.

Once again, former church officials say, a captive audience of Scientologists was marshaled to move the books through the checkout stands and onto the best-seller lists. But by now, the church had also fine-tuned a complex marketing apparatus. The tactics employed ranged from innovative and aggressive advertising to almost giveaway discounts offered to stores reporting to best-seller lists.

The most visible marketing method has been old-fashioned promotion, where Bridge Publications stands alone in the book industry.

Bridge advertises nationally on television, a rarity in publishing. There are national print ads, radio spots, L. Ron Hubbard billboards. In the current Spring Announcements issue of *Publishers Weekly*, the bible of the book industry, Bridge is the only publisher with a full-color three-page display. It is also one of the few publishers to pursue the military market, advertising in *Stars and Stripes*.

Bridge is perhaps the only publisher involved in sports marketing, sponsoring Indy 500 and Le Mans race cars. Broadcasts of California Angels and San Francisco Giants baseball games are sponsored in part by Bridge. And Bridge is a major sponsor of this summer's Goodwill Games in Seattle.

Celebrity Scientologists, including actress Karen Black and musician Chick Corea, stump for Bridge on radio and TV talk shows. There are parades and mall appearances by science-fiction characters from Hubbard's books. A "Mission Earth" album by rocker Edgar Winter. Posters, banners, fliers, bumper stickers, buttons. At book conventions, lavish parties complete with champagne and chocolate-dipped fruit.

When retailers place orders by phone with Ingram Book Co., the nation's largest wholesaler, they frequently hear clerks recite paid ads for Hubbard's books.

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Hubbard: Hot-author status said myth created by church

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Hubbard's books are prominently displayed at B. Dalton and Waldenbooks outlets — often in the prime floor space near the door — in flashy cardboard cases provided by the publisher. Bridge is a frequent advertiser in the chains' catalogs and newsletters. Bridge also generously funds "co-op" ads, bookstore ads subsidized by a publisher.

All of this costs a great deal of money. Bridge senior vice president Mark McKinstry declined to reveal the publisher's operating budget. But former employees said funds available to market Hubbard's books are virtually without limit.

"You can't think of Bridge as a normal business or publisher. They are like the world's largest vanity press," said Mary Mason, who worked in promotions for Bridge during release of the "Mission Earth" series.

"They pour more money into promoting those books than most major publishers would spend on an *entire line* of books. The whole thing is set up to lose money. If Bridge ever wound up making money, I don't

think they'd know what to do."

Bob Erdmann, a publishing consultant for Bridge from 1982 to 1988, said his former client is without comparison in the industry.

"You weren't limited by resources like other publishing houses are," he said.

There are also those who contend there are no limits on the discounts Bridge offers certain customers.

McKinstry said the publisher sells its books to retail stores at a discount of 50 percent to 52 percent — a rate he called "standard." But two book dealers once among those surveyed for *The New York Times* best-seller lists said Bridge has been willing to go far higher.

Larry Todd, formerly the manager of Hunter's Books in Beverly Hills, said Bridge offered him discounts as high as 80 percent, a rate he had never been offered by any publisher during his 35 years in the book business.

"They (Bridge) were willing to stock the books at next to nothing if we would display them with the best sellers," said Todd, who declined.

Todd said the offer came in 1986. See Hubbard on Page A-10

Hubbard: Followers said coerced into buying books

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during release of the "Mission Earth" series, from Bridge sales representative Howard Ramer. Todd quoted Ramer as saying: "We want to make sure that (the new volume of 'Mission Earth') is on the best-seller list. We're sure it will be and we want your participation in helping it get there."

Reached for comment, Ramer said: "I really don't remember that at all. I can't say that it isn't true, but I can't recall that. I wouldn't be surprised that that might of happened."

Dave Dutton, of Dutton's Books, said Bridge has offered him up to 70 percent discounts — "twice what we would normally get."

Dutton said he quit stocking Hubbard's books several years ago after some unpleasant sales pitches by Bridge representatives, including a request for a window display.

"We said no, and they would not take no for an answer," Dutton said. "They were almost intimidating."

Michael Kagay, editor of news surveys at *The New York Times*, said the paper has "encountered no evidence" that Bridge has manipulated the best-seller lists. He said that its large survey sample — 3,000 stores — would minimize the effect of "unusual patterns." But he also said: "A change in sales patterns of the major chains has a larger effect on the figures."

Spokeswomen for B. Dalton and Waldenbooks, the nation's two largest book chains, declined to reveal sales figures for Hubbard's books. Sharon Jonas, of B. Dalton, which has about 1,000 stores, and Dara Tyson, of Waldenbooks, which has about 800 stores, also declined to reveal the discounts the chains receive from Bridge. Both said that the chains have no data on who is buying Hubbard's books from their stores.

"Who buys his books?" said Tyson. "We don't know."

A former employee of both chains offered a more detailed answer.

"What we used to see was the L. Ron Hubbard people coming into the chains, buying books out so we'd have to reorder them. Then they'd return them," said Eleanor Lang, a former manager of a B. Dalton store in the New York City area and an ex-employee of Waldenbooks.

"Throughout the '80s, B. Dalton had a liberal return policy," said Lang, now the publicist for the science-fiction publisher Tor Books. "Once a chain store sells through a book, it's on their computer as having been sold. Once on the computer, the computer automatically reorders it."

That might help explain why hardcover copies of the "Mission Earth" series are a common sight these days on remainder shelves.

"This month Bridge Publications quietly offered remainder houses

237,848 'Mission Earth' hardcovers," publisher Lyle Stuart wrote last July in his newsletter *Hot News*, under the heading "That Scientology Scam." "This must be something of a record in the remainder industry."

Through their spokeswomen, B. Dalton and Waldenbooks also denied that they sell floor space to Bridge or any publisher.

Two industry sources disputed that claim. Alice Allen, spokeswoman for the American Booksellers Association, said retailers maintain that the chains engage in the unpopular, but not illegal, practice of selling prime display space.

Betty Wright, executive director of the National Association of Independent Publishers, said prime display space is not only sold, but that Bridge is a major purchaser of it.

"They're buying floor space, there's no question about that. You can't walk into a bookstore without seeing their big cardboard displays," said Wright. "One of the most valuable things you can do besides advertising is buy floor space. There are 50,000 books published every year. And let's face it, they can't all be in bookstores."

'The Bridge to Total Freedom'

Bridge's senior vice president Mark McKinstry denied that the publisher buys Hubbard's books to inflate sales.

A spokeswoman for the Church of

Scientology also denied that Hubbard's followers are required to purchase his books.

"You can't make anyone buy anything," said Leisa Goodman, from the L. Ron Hubbard Office of Public Relations in Los Angeles. "People spend their money because they want to."

Goodman also denied any official link between the church and Bridge Publications.

"We have a relationship like any client and publisher," Goodman said. "It's just probably closer."

Much closer, say former Scientologists.

Vicki Aznaran, the former inspector general of the Religious Technology Center, said the center controls a Scientology network of 419 subsidiary groups, including Bridge Publications. Her claim was echoed by several other former church officials.

In addition, the Religious Technology Center is listed prominently in an internal church document, "The Command Chart of Scientology."

The Religious Technology Center appears at the top of the chart. One level below, within a body called the Watchdog Committee, is the office of the executive director of the Church of Scientology International. And one level below that is Bridge Publications.

Appearing on the same level of the chart as Bridge is the church's public

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Hubbard: Readership called myth

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relations office.

In a 1989 issue of "Hotline," a Church of Scientology newsletter for its publicists, a new public relations strategy was announced:

"For the first time in the history of Dianetics and Scientology the PR (public relations) positioning for L. Ron Hubbard (LRH) has been established:

"One of The Most Acclaimed and Widely Read Authors of All Time.

"This is a major breakthrough that will have far-reaching effects for the future of PR and the expansion of Scientology. . . .

"There have of course been a number of successful PR campaigns for LRH and his works. The Dianetics Campaign, campaigns for 'Battlefield Earth' and 'Mission Earth,' even local campaigns. . . .

"But what we have lacked is the full power of a coordinated push from ALL sectors of Scientology promoting LRH in a concerted manner and with a single image.

"For it is LRH's image on which all the rest of our expansion depends. To the degree that LRH is made the stable terminal in society, people will reach for his books and services and we can get them on the Bridge to Total Freedom."

Search for information followed long, winding trail

The *San Diego Union* first asked for an interview with Bridge Publications in December 1989. The request was referred to the L. Ron Hubbard Office of Public Relations, a Church of Scientology organization in Los Angeles.

Several times throughout January, *Union* reporter Mike McIntyre contacted the L. Ron Hubbard Office of Public Relations to request an interview with Bridge personnel. Each time, L. Ron Hubbard spokeswoman Sharyn Runyon said that a decision had not been made.

Runyon later asked McIntyre to send a written request, which was faxed on Jan. 29. McIntyre made several more requests by phone in early February, but Runyon said she still did not have an answer.

Two months after the first request, Runyon told McIntyre that he would not be allowed to interview Bridge officials.

"We're not interested in a controversial story," Runyon said.

Asked who had made the decision, Runyon said Fred Harris, of Author Services Inc., a Hollywood literary agency that owns Hubbard's copyrights.

Church officials maintain that

the Church of Scientology, Bridge Publications and Author Services are separate entities. Yet a request for an interview with Bridge was bounced to the church's public relations office then declined by Author Services.

McIntyre left several phone messages for Harris at Author Services, but none were returned.

Meanwhile, the *Union* decided to proceed with the story.

About a week later, a second church spokeswoman, Leisa Goodman, called McIntyre and requested that questions for the story be submitted to her in writing. Questions were faxed to her on Feb. 15.

On Feb. 19, Goodman asked if McIntyre would meet with her and Bridge senior vice president Mark McKinstry the following day in Los Angeles. Goodman would not allow the interview to take place at Bridge's office. Instead, McIntyre was requested to meet Goodman and McKinstry on a downtown Los Angeles street corner. At McIntyre's suggestion, the interview was subsequently scheduled for a restaurant.

Goodman used the occasion to remind McIntyre that the church had



File photo

L. Ron Hubbard

Founded church in 1955

sued the *Union* for a story the paper had run on Scientology in 1977. The church later dropped the lawsuit without a settlement.

On Feb. 22, several *Union* officials received letters from attorneys for Bridge Publications. The letters suggested that publication of

this story might result in legal action.

More than 80 named sources agreed to be interviewed for this story. Most of the former Scientologists quoted have been both plaintiffs and defendants in lawsuits involving the church. The church has often paid former members to settle lawsuits out of court. But it is believed that the church has never successfully sued a former member in a jury trial.

Many sources were initially reluctant to be interviewed for this story, leery that McIntyre was not who he claimed he was. Several hung up and called back through the *Union* switchboard. They claimed they had previously been harassed by Scientologists misrepresenting themselves.

Others interviewed alluded to the church's so-called "Fair Game" policy. Allegedly written by Hubbard in 1967, the policy, former church members say, states that enemies of Scientology "may be deprived of property or injured by any means by any Scientologist, without discipline of the Scientologist. May be tricked, sued, lied to or destroyed."

Critics, government call Scientology business masquerading as religion

By Mike McIntyre
Staff Writer

The Church of Scientology's genesis was the 1950 best seller by L. Ron Hubbard, "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health."

Church officials claim there are 7 million Scientologists worldwide, but former members allege there may be fewer than 100,000.

The church promotes Scientology as a religion — one not based on the worship of a god but on the belief in "scientific" principles applied to the mind.

Hubbard argued in "Dianetics" that inner turmoil springs from subconscious mental images, or "engrams," caused by past traumatic events. The engrams, he argued, can be eliminated by recalling and confronting the events — a process similar to conventional methods of psychotherapy.

Hubbard invented a device he called an E-meter to help eliminate engrams. Attached to the E-meter — actually a simplified lie detector — the subject reveals traumatic and intimate events to a church counselor, or "auditor." The process, says church doctrine, will free, or "clear," the faithful of misery.

After the church was founded in 1955, Scientology franchises, or "missions," were formed worldwide to minister to an expanding flock. Some one-on-one auditing sessions reportedly cost more than \$1,000 an hour. And, since Scientologists believe in reincarnation, previous lives must also be audited. Members reportedly have paid hundreds of thousands of dollars before a church auditor has declared them "clear."

Former Scientologists have told bizarre tales of intimidation, blackmail and detention. The church has paid disaffected members millions to settle dozens of lawsuits alleging fraud and abuse.

The American Medical Association is among the church's many detractors, several of whom have labeled Scientology a cult. Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Paul G. Breckenridge Jr., during a 1984 trial that blocked the church from reclaiming a former member's church documents, pronounced the Scientology organization "schizophrenic and paranoid," and described Hubbard as "a pathological liar."

Critics allege that Scientology is a business masquerading as a religion, and the government has often agreed. The church was stripped of its tax-exempt status in 1967. During court testimony in the early 1980s, former officials claimed that the church's weekly income was \$2 million and that \$100 million in profits had been transferred to foreign bank accounts.

In 1979, 11 Scientologists, including Hubbard's wife, were convicted of infiltrating, burglarizing and wire-tapping more than 100 government agencies, including the IRS, FBI and CIA. Prosecutors said the operation was an effort to obtain confidential files compiled on the church.

Throughout most of the 1970s, Hubbard lived in hiding or cruised international waters in his 342-foot ship, the Apollo, safe from government scrutiny. In 1980, he withdrew to a ranch near San Luis Obispo, from which he controlled his empire through three trusted "messengers." Hubbard was never again seen in public. He died in 1986.