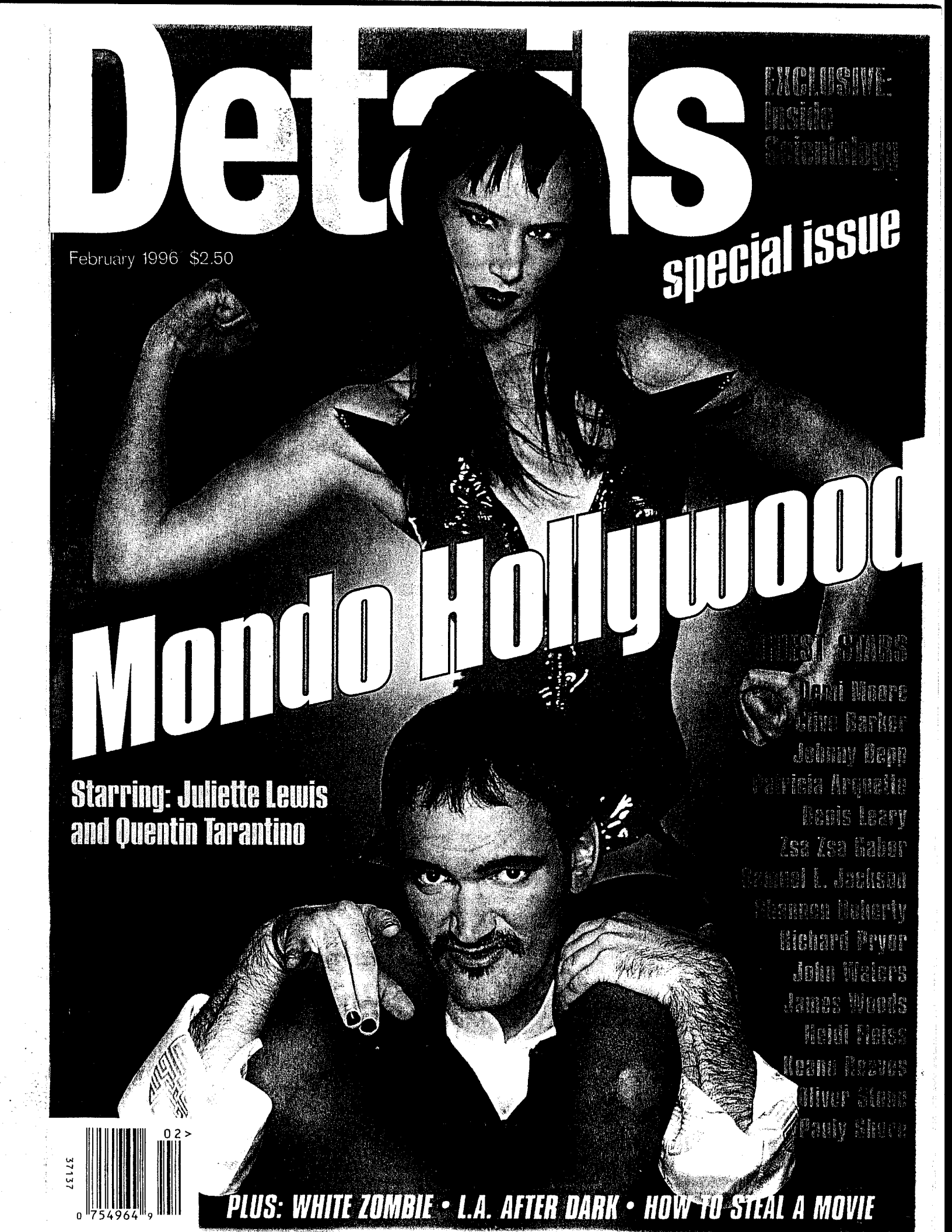
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Starring: Juliette Lewis and Quentin Tarantino
HOTTEST STARS
Demi Moore
Clive Barker
Johnny Depp
Patricia Arquette
Denis Leary
Zsa Zsa Gabor
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Shannen Doherty
Richard Pryor
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RICHARD BURBRIDGE; STYLING: ALYSSA LEAL

Scientology is the religion everyone loves to hate. So how come so many movie stars are devout followers? moves into the church's Celebrity Centre for an exclusive look at the starway to heaven.

THE cult OF PERSONALITIES

RICHARD BURBRIDGE; STYLING: ALYSSA LEA

AT FRANKLIN AND BRONSON A LOGJAM OF LIMOusines crawls toward the mock-French Normandy Chateau. At the grand doorway, celebrities, lawyers, producers, and the children of the well-heeled of the entertainment industry step onto the crimson-carpeted tarmac, chattering through the pink-and-gold lounge to the lawns and fairy-lit trees beyond, kissing cheeks and grabbing each other's hands.

Nancy Cartwright, known to all as the voice of Bart Simpson, is explosive in white, greeting friends in her perpetually adolescent voice. Anne Archer, with her son, Tom Davis, smiles for the cameras. Jazzman Chick Corea, his mother

and his wife nearby, slips out of his dinner jacket. Travolta's tie is silver; wife Kelly Preston shines by his side. Isaac Hayes is here too; later, he'll play a version of "The Long and Winding Road" and remind listeners of the title's deeper significance for all of us tonight.

As we enter the building, a charming woman hands us copies of a book of poetry by the man who made this all possible. It's called *Ron: The Poet/Lyricist.*

"Celebrities are aloof quarry," Hubbard wrote. "If you bring one of them home you will get a . . . reward."

This is a church social of sorts, though not like any I've ever been to: It's the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Church of Scientology Celebrity Centre International. "It marks the day when L. Ron Hubbard entrusted the Celebrity Centre with the role of caring for the artists and opinion leaders of our society," the center's president announces proudly from the stage.

I wander around the party as a wallflower on a round of spiritual tourism, clutching a glass of Chardonnay and my book of poems and eavesdropping. "Every time I bitch about the money Scientology costs," a loud young woman is blaring at one table, "and every time it's worth it! You just can't say that only people with money can afford to do it."

A Scientology video crew collar a few of the celebrities for comments: "The Celebrity Centre saved my life," says a smiling Kelly Preston.

"Scientology addresses you as a spirit, not as a body or an animal," announces John Travolta. "So that's the start point. From there on, there are limitless concepts. There's no doubt about the impact that Scientology and the Celebrity Centre have had on the artistic community. It's helped artists clean up their act, be more focused, and get real career help."

FULL OF CHAMPAGNE AND BONHOMIE, THIS slick, confident gathering doesn't look as if it has ever considered itself an oppressed religious minority, and yet a sense of us-and-them simmers under it all. The people here believe in a scheme of things most of us would find strange—but what may be weird to us is to them as normal and efficacious as the money in their wallets.

A cult, new religious movement, sect—call it what you will—is an act of collective spiritual rebellion: It asks the questions we all ask, like Why are we here? Why are some rich and others poor? But every cult comes up with a whole different set of explanations. And every cult must fight a battle over the territory of our normality. They cling tenaciously to their own realities in the face of a hostile world. For some, like Jim Jones's People's Temple or the Branch Davidians, the fight proved catastrophic. Others eventually gain acceptance: America has learned to live with sects like the Amish and the Mormons.

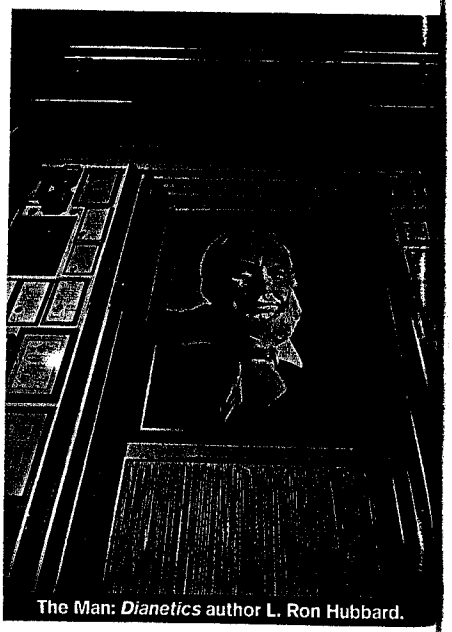
What is extraordinary about Scientology is that it has battled for survival with an unparalleled shrewdness. Its late founder, L. Ron Hubbard, knew that belief was fragile. From its earliest days, he tried to arm his church with the power of celebrity, the power of what he called the "opinion leaders." In 1955 he launched what he called Project Celebrity, urging Scientologists to convert celebrities, even naming those he wanted on board. He listed sixty-three, a jumble of names that included Ernest Hemingway, Danny Kaye, Orson Welles, Liberace, Charles Laughton, John Ford, and Bing Crosby. Pablo Picasso nestled next to Al Capp and Walt Disney.

"These celebrities are well-guarded, well-barricaded, overworked, aloof quarry," he wrote in the Scientology magazine *Ability.* "If you bring one of them home you will get a small plaque as your reward."

Unsurprisingly, none of the above joined. But a trickle of others slowly became interested. Actors who acknowledge their involvement include Travolta, Preston, Tom Cruise, Nicole Kidman, Anne Archer, Juliette Lewis, Kirstie Alley, Priscilla Presley, and Lisa Marie Presley-Jackson.

To outsiders, it's a puzzle: These are successful, intelligent, and powerful people, yet they believe in a scheme most of us would find outlandish. In 1993, *Premiere* ran an article, "Catch a Rising Star," which clearly suggested that their fame was being cynically exploited by Hubbard's followers. An earlier story in *Time* savaged Scientology as "the cult of greed," depicting an organization more concerned with extracting fees from its followers than with their spiritual welfare. The church's celebrity members read these intended exposés, hurt and resolutely convinced that the outside world doesn't understand the magnitude of their undertaking. With varying degrees of visibility, they fight a battle on Ron's behalf, speaking out for the church, promoting its activities, nudging Scientology toward the epicenter of Hollywood life where they feel it belongs, hoping that the religion they've found will become the L.A. orthodoxy.

IN A SMALL WAY, I TOO AM AN INSTRUMENT in Scientology's battle of charm. A couple of years ago, I joined a few cults secretly to write a book about why a fault line exists between the worldviews of the outsider and the cult insider. I discovered that mind control and brainwashing—the popular demons used to explain away the fact that people can come to believe in things the rest of us find absurd—were bunk. The truth was stranger: People believe because they *want* to—most of the time, anyway—and with a force that is astonishing to a wishy-washy agnostic like myself.



The Man: *Dianetics* author L. Ron Hubbard.

DAN WINTERS

When I recently asked Scientology officials whether I could see what it felt like inside their church, they hemmed and hawed before deciding to give me access. Like all faiths, they believe that if only we

William Shaw is the author of Spying in Guru Land: Inside Britain's Cults, *published in England by Fourth Estate.*

are given the chance to see the unvarnished truth, we too will believe. "No one has ever been allowed this much access before," the publicist said, flattering me. This isn't strictly true; journalists and sociologists have been given access before, in the hope that the publicity would prove beneficial. It's a risky strategy; it's easy to ridicule the arcane twists of any faith, especially one as feared as Scientology. Its opponents have been browbeaten by lawsuits and letter-writing campaigns, and allege they have been victims of dirty tricks. In 1982, Hubbard's wife and ten other leading Scientologists were sentenced to five-year terms in federal prison for breaking into government offices and stealing thousands of documents about Scientology. Church officials claim these were the actions of a misguided few who have long been expelled from the church.

You can buy an E-Meter for yourself. The Hubbard Professional Mark Super VII costs $3,080.

A FEW WEEKS LATER, TOM DAVIS, assistant to the Celebrity Centre International president, is standing with me on the building's sixth-floor deck. He points out familiar landmarks, then identifies some of the buildings Scientology owns in the area. He points to the line of palm trees along Hollywood Boulevard which marked the edge of the huge grounds sixty years ago, before the city gobbled them up. "It was quite a piece of property," Tom muses, proudly proprietorial.

This is just the building to woo Hollywood with, rich with movie-star legend. It was completed in 1929, a gift for the widow of one of the movie industry's greatest forgotten pioneers, Thomas Ince, who helped develop the Western, and who built one of the first studios in Culver City. Rumor has it that Ince was shot and killed by Hearst aboard the publishing magnate's yacht. Hearst supposedly mistook him for Charlie Chaplin, who he believed was sleeping with his mistress. Just as when it was first built, this building screams with the showy wealth of the arriviste. Its architecture blares: Scientology is here for perpetuity.

Tom and I take the elevator down to the ground floor. Near the lobby sits a big, empty office with a large, somber desk in the middle. There are fresh red roses. A big white feather quill lies on the desk, a hokey attempt at old-world erudition. And there, on a big engraved gold sign, the notice announces the absent man: "L. Ron Hubbard. Founder." In every major Scientology office in the world, his desk waits empty.

"It's not like we think he's going to come back and suddenly sit down in his chair," lectures Tom, in a hearty voice, lest I get the wrong idea. "But it serves a very specific purpose. It acknowledges that this is a Hubbard organization. It's not like he is deified... or worshiped. It's a tribute to someone we consider a great man."

CELEBRITY SCIENTOLOGISTS (top row, from left): Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, Juliette Lewis, Isaac Hayes; (middle row): Priscilla Presley, Nancy Cartwright (voice of Bart Simpson), Anne Archer; (bottom row): Chick Corea, Lisa Marie Presley-Jackson, Kirstie Alley.

In the '30s and '40s, Hubbard, the *original* pulp-fiction star, was a successful mass-producer of Westerns and sci-fi thrillers for magazines like *Astounding Science Fiction*. In 1950, his sci-fi imagination seemed to merge with reality when he published *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, the first flowering of the postwar self-help industry. In the book, he announced that we could all be free of aberrations and psychoses if we confronted the traumatic incidents that created mental blocks, or "engrams," in our minds. The liberation it proposed was simple. We were in charge of our environment, not victims of it. If we undertook the counseling he proposed, we could become "clear." Hubbard's extraordinary venture burgeoned. Within four years, this psychotherapy cult had transformed itself into the Church of Scientology, ordaining ministers and holding services. The cult had raised itself to the status of religion; this gave it a beneficial legal and financial standing. But it also signified that, as with any religion, a magic lay at its heart: By performing Hubbard's "tech"—his religious "technology" of rituals—a believer could transform the world.

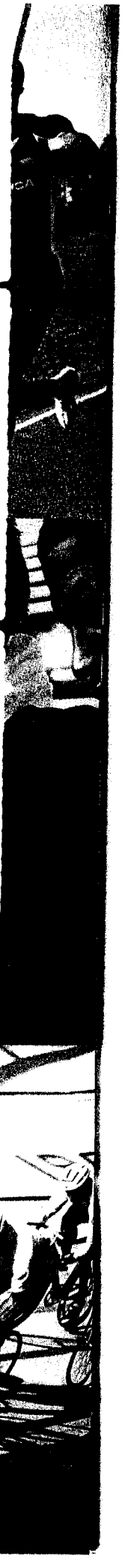
Scientology holds that we are pure souls, spiritual beings called "thetans," burdened by engrams. As the therapy grew into a religion, the troublesome engram was gradually transformed into something more mystical; engrams weren't just the product of this life, but of past lives stretching back thousands of years.

Only a hugely complex progression of parallel courses known as training and auditing could truly free you. (Auditing became in essence a form of exorcism, casting out the demons that hold us back.) Hubbard called his upward rising ladder of courses "The Bridge," a road to freedom. The dedicated will finally reach the Operating Thetan Levels—OT Levels—by taking the highest courses, whose contents remain a secret. The more vociferous and bitter ex-members estimate that with the price of the required books, tapes, videos, and equipment, it could easily cost more than $100,000 to rise to the highest level currently available, OTVIII.

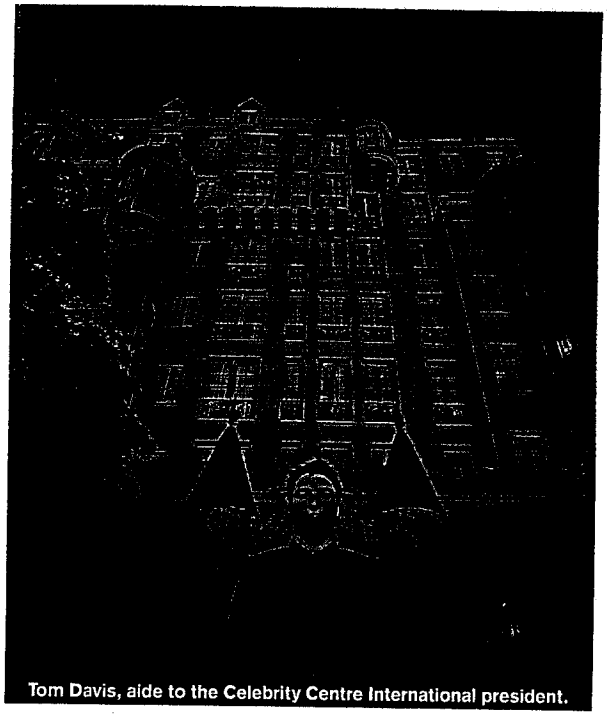
Hubbard's secular world is equally elaborate in its hierarchy. During World War II Hubbard served as a lieutenant in the navy and had a passion for naval bureaucracy. For a while, Scientology was run from a flotilla of yachts called the Sea Organization. The now landbound managing body of the church is still called the Sea Org; members wear naval uniforms and have naval ranks. Among the faithful, social status and one's position on the Bridge have become closely interrelated. Once one is clear, one can progress to the still rarer atmospheres of the upper-level OT courses

(Continued on page 45)

TOP ROW (FROM LEFT): PAUL SMITH/RETNA; LISA ROSE/GLOBE PHOTOS; RETNA. MIDDLE: GAMMA LIAISON; FITZROY BARRETT/RETNA; M. FERGUSON/GLOBE PHOTOS. BOTTOM: ED PERLSTEIN/GLOBE PHOTOS; SIPA PRESS; GLOBE PHOTOS.



DAN WINTERS



Tom Davis, aide to the Celebrity Centre International president.

that members carry out on board the cult's 6,500-ton cruise ship Freewinds that dawdles round the Caribbean.

TOM DAVIS IS A GOLDEN BOY OF Scientology. At seventeen, he was involved with a girl, but it wasn't working out; it was just making him unhappy. He went to his mother for advice. Anne Archer had grown up a Christian Scientist—another American cult which made it to the mainstream—but discovered Scientology when Tom was around five, so she suggested he try to find the answer at the Celebrity Centre. He took a course called Personal Values and Integrity, learning simple Scientological bumper-sticker axioms, like "Never regret yesterday"; "Life is in you today and you make your tomorrow"; "Never withdraw allegiance once granted." Somehow this clarified things. He began to devote himself to the church. After finishing college he signed on to the Sea Org. It's a commitment. I have seen the contracts for it lying on the recruiter's desk in the lobby. The words that make the nonbeliever start and goggle read: "Therefore I contract myself to the Sea Organization for the next billion years (As per Flag Order 232)." Tom has gone clear now, though he has yet to do his OT levels; as a volunteer staffer, he'll get them for free.

Tom shows me around the Academy itself, the spiritual boiler room of the Celebrity Centre, where Scientologists receive their training and learn how to audit. On one wall of the long corridor outside the auditing rooms, a picture shows a confident auditor sitting before a small device with dials, knobs, and digital readouts: "This is an E-Meter," announces the sign. "It is used to verify the Pre-Clear's gains and register when each auditing action has ended."

The E-Meter is a peculiar sacred object, built half from science, half from faith. Basically, it's a simple galvanometer, the same device that is used in a lie detector. Scientologists believe that the "falls" and "floats" of the needle detect lurking engrams and "withholds"—the dark self-deceptions that Scientology says we all have. You can buy an E-Meter for yourself. The Hubbard Professional Mark Super VII E-Meter costs $3,080, though skeptics might say that the devices it contains could never justify the price. E-Meters come in a range of colors that includes French vanilla, periwinkle blue, halliburton brown, and misty fern. If you want to pay more, there are special anniversary editions, too.

In the same picture, at the other side of the table, sits another smiling man, clutching the two cylinders that plug into the back of the E-meter: "This is you. A Pre-Clear. A spiritual being who is now on the road to becoming clear. This is a session.... Scientology auditing and study are the road to ability and freedom."

We peer inside various rooms. In the offices, stacks of bulging, diligently kept manila envelopes record people's "wins"—the gains they make through auditing. In other rooms, our voices lowered to a library whisper, we look at people hunched over big, lavishly bound tomes or practicing auditing with each other. "You know," whispers Tom—anxious lest I get the wrong idea, along with those others who have accused this sacramental device of being an accompaniment to pseudoscientific mumbo jumbo—"it doesn't do anything, the E-Meter. It's just a tool."

Kelly Preston has worked hard and recently completed Level 12. "It rocked my world," she grins.

I CHECK INTO THE MANOR HOTEL, PART of the Celebrity Centre complex. Anyone can stay here, though normally only Scientologists do. Mine is a $250-a-night duplex suite, the most opulently draped and chandeliered room I have ever stayed in. The room comes with a valet. She's called Beatrix, a Sea Org staffer from Hungary, dressed in a black-and-white maid's uniform, and she wants to unpack my bags. I shoo her away politely. My bags are full of old underpants I want no one but myself to see.

In the evening, the publicist calls me. They have decided to bend the rules and allow me to try an auditing session tomorrow. (The creed of Scientology has it that these things are not to be played with: Only those who have embarked on the road should try them.) Five minutes after I've put the phone down, just as I'm about to open a bottle of beer, it rings again. "I forgot to tell you. Don't drink or take drugs before the session. You have to have a clear mind, okay?" I replace the beer in my fridge.

At dusk, Beatrix shimmers in and turns down my bed and leaves a chocolate and a good-night card, just like the ones in other hotels, where the management wishes you sweet dreams and tells you the weather forecast. This one says: "'On the day when we fully trust each other, there will be peace on earth.' —L. Ron Hubbard. Have a pleasant night."

THE NEXT DAY I AM AUDITED BY A SCIENtology minister, the Reverend Anthony Wyant. He is a pleasant, benevolent, middle-aged Englishman who now runs his own private auditing practice in Glendale. He recalls meeting Hubbard in 1968, when he was aboard the first Sea Org flagship, *Apollo,* in the Mediterranean. Volunteers were worked extremely hard, and life was grueling. Taking a forbidden shortcut through Hubbard's quarters, Tony was mortified to find the great man in the corridor. He remembers the words Hubbard spoke to him: "Hello there, young feller." To Tony, this slender communication remains proof that Ron was a real man, kind and compassionate, like, he says, a big Father Christmas.

Tony tells me to sit opposite him at the desk. I take the two metal tubes, and he asks me to talk about an incident that I have in my mind. He is smiling, hopeful, and friendly. What I tell him, he assures

me, will remain strictly between the two of us. He hopes I will have wins today, not just for the sake of publicizing the church, but because he believes that his skill can be used for my own betterment. He wants to give me this miracle he learned from Ron. Attempting to meet his sincerity in kind, I talk about something that has truly affected me: the death of my father. Tony says little, simply asking me to talk through the experience several times. Each time I finish, he says simply: "Thank you. Now, go back to the beginning and start again." If I falter, he prompts me. "Tell me what happened next." Only that.

E-Meter: A device used to detect engrams.

As I talk, he watches the E-Meter needle and scribbles in pencil on a pad.

I talk as sincerely and plainly as I can. At the end of three long hours, he stops: "Do you think we have done enough?" I'm sure if I told him I wanted more, he would pick up his pencil and start again.

Dennis sighs. "The celebrity never gets to talk to someone who was locked up in a basement like I was."

The rules of auditing compel the auditor to remain passive. He must offer no comment, and no evaluation. Afterward, he doesn't ask me how I feel about what I said, or whether it has changed me. If it has done its work, I will know. He simply presents me with a copy of L. Ron Hubbard's book *The Way to Happiness,* the equivalent of Scientology's Ten Commandments, signed "To William, from Tony." When he hands it to me, he completes a little ceremony that Hubbard decreed should take place when passing this book to another: "Why I Gave You This Book," he reads aloud from the preface. "Your survival is important to me." His voice is slightly embarrassed in an English way, but I am touched. We shake hands solemnly.

And that is all. I have been audited. I am curiously deflated. I had expected something grandly mysterious. Time and time again in the cults I have joined, the things that appear miraculous to them are the ordinary machinery of life to me. In the modern world, miracles no longer involve flaming chariots or the dead walking. To me, all Hubbard had stumbled on was what therapists these days call nondirective counseling. (Church officials would take strong exception to this comparison; they consider auditing to be vastly different from any form of psychiatry.)

But auditing works—especially if you believe it does. And, for the convert, this is a substantiation of the very truth of Ron's message. In the days I spend at the Celebrity Centre, I meet dozens of people—musicians, producers, radio-show hosts, photographers, a champion motorcycle racer, even a car salesman—who tell me how well it has worked for them. Celebrity Centre isn't just for the Hollywood A-list, it's for all those who work in what Hubbard called "communications." They all offer me a sentence, like a mantra I hear again and again, on the workability of Ron's great discovery: "Every day I ask myself, Am I going to be in Scientology tomorrow? Well, only if it works. And it's worked for ten years."

BACK IN MY HOTEL ROOM THAT EVENING, Beatrix knocks. She notices I have been watching a video called *An Introduction to Dianetics.* She asks, eagerly, "Did you enjoy the video?"

"It was...very interesting."

"It's interesting when you read the book, too," says Beatrix, noticing one on my table. "But you really only understand it when you do the auditing."

"I did some today," I tell her.

"Oh," she smiles, pleased as punch for me because I have found the right road. One of the exhilarations of joining a cult is laid out here. In one moment of acceptance, if I decided to believe, and to start my long progress up the ladder, I could start life again right here. I could turn my back on my past and have a new job, a new home, and a new set of friends by simply making the leap of faith.

Tonight the card she leaves on my bed reads: " 'All the happiness you ever find lies in you.' —L. Ron Hubbard. Sleep well."

IF YOU WALK DOWN HOLLYWOOD BOULEvard around lunch break, those people in blue uniforms you see dawdling in front of shop windows are not security guards, they're bureaucrats in the Scientology empire. L.A. is Scientology's world headquarters: A staff of around 2,500 work here.

East down Hollywood Boulevard, past the Dianetics Testing Centre (the one with the huge sign that announces that *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* has just sold its 17,007,051st copy), is the L. Ron Hubbard Life Exhibition. At the front desk, Shannon greets me, wearing a careful beige suit. The exhibition is a Disneyland ride through Ron's life, featuring films, animated exhibits, and giant mechanical monsters based on his sci-fi books. Inside this high-tech hagiography, there is little Hubbard did not achieve. As a youth he travels to China, sups with pirates. He leads scientific expeditions to the Caribbean. He is a pioneer of radar. In the war, a hero: Crippled in a death-defying act of bravery, he effects a miracle discovery that forms the basis of Dianetics, the greatest invention of the twentieth century. He is a great photographer, a great musician, a great aviator, a great writer, a ninety-four-word-per-minute typist, and more. Several biographies, countless newspaper articles, and even court records suggest that many of the stories about his pre-Scientology accomplishments are lies or exaggerations. It doesn't matter. It is believed.

Shannon, my guide, is like a nun in a deserted Vatican.

"How many people come round here?" I ask.

"Oh, I get about two hundred a week," she says proudly. Imagine a Disney ride that takes only two hundred people a week. Believers say time and time again that it is an insult to offer Scientology less money than the courses are worth. The money rises upward, building this bizarre half-used homage to the curiously enigmatic round-faced man with the dimpled chin and the thinning, swept-back hair.

DAN WINTERS

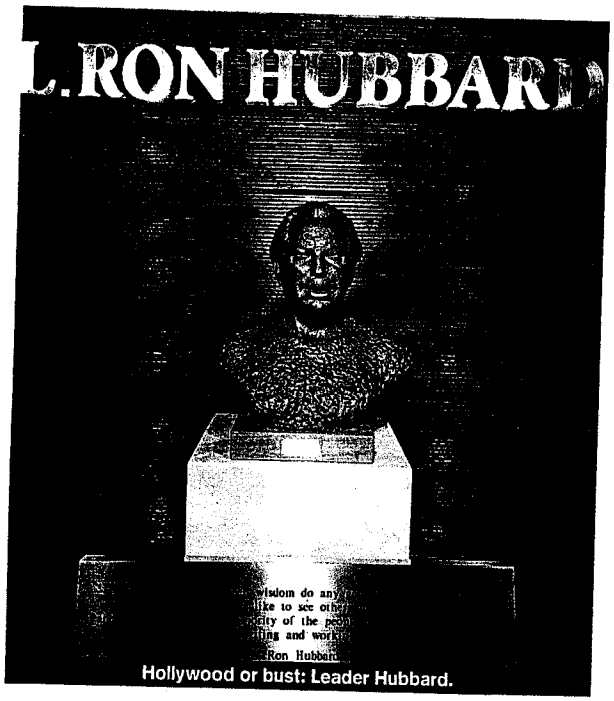
Outside in the hallway, there are the testimonials—sincere, heartfelt—engraved on plaques: "EVERYONE IN THIS WORLD MUST FIND OUT ABOUT L. RON HUBBARD AND HIS WORKS." —TOM CRUISE.

And my own favorite, for its ironic center: "THANKS TO L. RON HUBBARD'S TECHNOLOGY, 'UNDER ACHIEVER' ISN'T EVEN IN MY VOCABULARY." —NANCY CARTWRIGHT, VOICE OF BART SIMPSON.

The exhibition even celebrates one of Hubbard's personal failures: L. Ron wanted to make it in the movies. His greatest success was in 1937, when he spent four months in Hollywood writing serials for Columbia Pictures. But Hollywood never welcomed him. Instead he had to be content making his own training films about Scientology, clutching a megaphone in a studio chair that bore the legend L. RON HUBBARD—DIRECTOR.

But his Project Celebrity has had more of an impact on Hollywood than his 1937 visit. It's logical that Scientology should thrive here: It is, after all, the city that dreams up new realities. It's not surprising that it should be a city filled with new religions.

And in return, Scientology offers celebrities a faith that suits them, a religion which teaches that ambition is praiseworthy and that the popular arts are to be cherished, a place where would-be stars can learn a technology that they believe will give them an edge in the race upward. The process of auditing is a gentle one. It never judges the fragile ego—battered by the Hollywood cut and spill—it simply processes it. It is never critical, or evaluative, it simply nods its head and says: "Thank you."



Hollywood or bust: Leader Hubbard.

LOOKING BACKWARD, KELLY PRESTON SEES blood in the snow, and the gash in the forehead. It's her fault. Thirteen, and she has never been on a ski lift before. She fluffed it, letting the T-bar swing backward, where it cracked into the head of the skier behind.

This unwitting complicity in small violence lived in the Hollywood actress for years, along with dozens of other subtle incidents, losses, and violations. The careless things people said at unguarded moments from the instant she squeezed out of her mother's womb. The death of her father when she was only three. The time when she was six and she saw the overturned bus in Iraq, all the bodies of the children crushed beneath it. Nonetheless, she believes hers was a wonderful, healthy childhood.

Not until she encountered the teachings of L. Ron Hubbard did she realize the darker significance of these things: how they put stops on her, impeding her from being truly free, putting hurdles in her way—as did all the cocaine she took when she was a young actress wannabe. Scientology taught her about these engrams, locks, key-ins, and chains. All of it seems like common sense to her now.

Now she's gone clear. She's an Operating Thetan: She has completed OT levels right up to OTIV. A successful actress, Preston is married to one of the biggest names in Hollywood, with a beautiful son and a great life. She's talking to me in the Manor Hotel's Premiere Suite. She is vivacious and beautiful, dressed in black patent leather thigh-length boots and a black minidress. She alternates between Marlboro Lights and another brand, politely offering me them first.

She encountered Scientology when she and her first husband were taking classes from renowned acting coach Milton Katselas. He used some of the principles behind Hubbard's technology in his classes. What impressed Kelly most was the way he had applied the philosophy of auditing: He encouraged no criticism or comment on people's performances. "The thing was that there wasn't any evaluation or invalidation by the actors. The person could walk away able to be better. Being introverted is crippling for the artist," she says, smiling.

She knew it had the answers for her. She has worked hard at Scientology. Recently she completed Level 12. "It rocked my world," she grins. She can't tell me exactly what she did, because some of it is confidential and "a lot of it you have to experience to know what I'm on about. They're Doingness, Beingness, and Havingness," she says, attempting to elucidate. "The Beingness of somebody... who you are... your lifetimes. It's as pure a being as you could ever become."

When she finished her course in Beingness, her life was completely different. So different she could hardly remember how to walk. She remembers grabbing hold of the wall when she left the room, putting one foot in front of the other, thinking, Okay, put one foot in front of the other. That's how you walk in this body.

She says: "It blew my mind."

After the course in Havingness, she felt she could have anything she wanted: She married John Travolta. They had a baby. She got film parts that she had always wanted. "My Havingness went *bsssssssss!*" She makes a motion like a plane taking off.

She gave birth to their son, Jett, in total silence. Hubbard believed that any sounds or words uttered during the trauma of birth could be recorded as engrams. "That," she says with matter-of-fact pride, "is one of the most remarkable things... I feel I gave my son a gift."

Last night she spoke with Quentin Tarantino about a cameo role in *From Dusk Till Dawn*. She's just completed another role in a new film, *The Devil Inside*. Kelly plays a militant lesbian lawyer. When finding her character, she talked to lawyers and lesbians, but she also used Hubbard's own hyperspecific system for charting human emotion, the Tone Scale, which ranges from -40.00 (Total Failure) up to 40.00 (Serenity of Beingness). She judged her character to be around 1.1 on the Tone Scale: Covert Hostility.

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DAN WINTERS

The Cult of Personalities

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"I think there's a false datum in Hollywood: The more pain you've experienced, the more screwed up you are, the better actor you are. And it's not true. You don't have to be stuck in incidents to be able to create."

She pauses. "I mean, look at my husband, who I think is a brilliant actor and who has done a lot of Scientology. He is extremely happy. I think he smoked pot once... maybe two pots in his life. He played a heroin addict, and heroin addicts were going, 'Well man, that's what it's like. It was heavy.'"

Kelly is happy: She bubbles with contentment and confidence. "My life," she tells me, "is so full and so rich without my career that I don't define myself by my career. I know I will be successful," she says, like it's a matter of ordinary fact. "It's only a matter of time."

THE CELEBRITY CENTRE HOTEL HAS NO BAR. After each day's orgy of positivity, I wander across the street and take a drink in bars on Franklin. One evening I sit near two lovers, whose gaze drifts toward the Centre.

SHE: "What a great building. Isn't it pretty?"

HE: "You want to know what it is? It's full of Scientologists."

She gasps. "Wow."

HE: "You go in. They say, 'Hey, put this thing on your head.' *Bzzzzzt*! Next it's two years later. 'What happened?'"

She laughs loudly. They walk away, arm in arm. Outside of the Celebrity Centre, the certainties of Scientology fall apart. The outside world is a hostile place.

In the past, America shaped its national identity around cults and sects. From the Pilgrim Fathers onward, religious dissidents and nonconformists were its pioneers. In the increasingly confused and paranoid modern climate, America's relative tolerance of cults is wearing thin. These days we tend to imagine all cults to be practitioners of obscure, dark rites of mind control.

One of Scientology's most visible and vocal opponents for the last twenty years has been the Cult Awareness Network (CAN), a group that campaigns vigorously against what it calls "destructive cults" that practice "mind control." It has fulminated against the Hare Krishnas, the Moonies, the Children of God, the Branch Davidians, and countless other nascent American religions. For years, they've raged against Scientology. The anger is mutual, for the church considers CAN to be an antireligious hate group. The tangled history of the two groups is filled with claims on both sides of deceit and intimidation, as well as an unending stream of lawsuits.

I call Priscilla Coates, the L.A. organizer, and ask if I can come and visit. "How do I know you're who you say you are?" she demands. "I'd like to see your driver's license and a copy of the magazine with your name in it." I fax her what she needs.

Five minutes later she's back on the phone, giving me her address, and relenting: "I've been had this way before. I've been named in twenty-two lawsuits by Scientology. It has an effect on you." Not so long ago, Priscilla says, a choir came round to sing Scientology songs outside her house. (A church official says they have no knowledge of the incident.)

Her Glendale houseguest in recent months, Dennis L. Erlich, is a celebrity in these circles. He is a large, bumptious, fire-breathing would-be rock 'n' roll songwriter, and used to be big in Scientology; in his fourteen years in the church, Dennis says he rose to the office of Chief Cramming Officer of the Flag Land Base, then Scientology's HQ in Clearwater, Florida. When people were discovered to have errors in their knowledge of practice of the "tech," they were sent to him for what he calls "correction." Dennis Erlich didn't just dole out "correction," he claims he was also on the receiving end of what he describes as a discipline-obsessed organization. In those days, volunteer staff whose performance "stats" dropped too low were sent to the Rehabilitation Project Force to perform humbling menial tasks. Once, when discipline loomed, Erlich joked that he was such a favorite that Hubbard would have him back on normal duties in a few hours. As a punishment, Dennis says, he was locked up in a basement. He was there for ten days, cleaning the place up, eating meals on his own. (The church vehemently denies ever holding someone against his will and characterizes Dennis as an incessant liar who has made numerous wild accusations against the church over the years.)

The incident he describes was not the final straw for Dennis. Back then, his enthusiasm was undented; it took four more years for disillusionment to take hold. When he left, around 1982, he turned his guns on his former religion. Recently he discovered that the Internet could be a weapon in his campaign. But Net discussion of the cult was too mild for Dennis. He jumped in and started alleging that Scientology practiced slavery, kidnapping, bait-and-switch fraud, undue influence, and incarceration. More important, he began discussing the secret OT drills to which he had been privy.

In February last year, the church obtained a court order to raid his house and seize documents and computer disks that they believed contained their material, both sacredly secret and—more conveniently for the Church in this particular skirmish—secularly copyrighted. The reverberations of this attack on what idealistic Net-izens view as their liberal utopia—where anyone should be able to say anything they damn well please—are still with us. The ensuing legal fracas has cost Dennis dearly; that's why Priscilla is putting him up these days.

He is scathing about the Celebrity Centre and its clientele. "I have a very low opinion of them," he says, leaning back on a chair at Priscilla's dining table. "It's like they have this whole army of psychic healers that they can call upon. 'Oh, I've been down for the last two weeks. I hate my agent. I didn't get a good movie deal.' They write their check for $50,000, and this whole machine goes into action."

Dennis sighs. "They're the sheep with the bell around them. And if you can get them to come the way you want, then the rest of the sheep will follow. The celebrity never gets to talk to somebody who was locked up in a basement like I was. And many people are... tortured in one way or another. It's like Disneyland. You go through the ride but you never see the illusion of the nuts and bolts, what's behind the scenes."

Dennis is the classic apostate: The believer turned destroyer. Everything that he once believed was pure, he now believes is corrupt. Curiously, he believes it's not he who changed, but the cult. He says it became too totalitarian, too militaristic, too oppressive. In his day, when he was there to ensure ideological right-thinking, it was a force for good.

The war of cult versus anticult is a bitter one, one of claim and counterclaim. Each side believes it is fighting on the side of good against evil. Dennis is bullish. He's locked in a court battle to get his computer disks back. He'll carry on fighting. He says he has nothing left to lose anyway.

THERE IS ALWAYS PLENTY OF GOOD READING on the tables in the Celebrity Centre lobby. One table has a pile of copies of *High Winds*, the magazine of the Sea Org. I skim through it and come across an article called "Handling Supression on the Fourth Dynamic." The fourth dynamic is Hubbard-speak for "on a world scale." It talks of "eradicating external SPs." These, I have learned, are Suppressive Persons, those who work against the church: to be "declared" an SP is the

church's equivalent of excommunication. Defectors who try to profit from their knowledge of Hubbard's tech are known as "squirrels." In a tone of unforgiving militancy, the article charts how they've moved to "shut down" one former member who wrote an exposé.

"Unemployed and abandoned by his family, this squirrel had schemed to make money by hawking his lies in a book. But the Office of Special Affairs had a court declare his book libelous. He has now been forced into bankruptcy, joining the fate of two others who met the same fate in the last year after they were confronted by Sea Org members...."

And thus the good shall triumph. Hallelujah.

I look up. The publicist has come to meet me for coffee.

I point out the article I've just read. She looks nervous for a second. "Oh.... Those aren't really for public consumption."

"But it said 'Please take one,'" I say.

"Well, most people wouldn't understand it. You've been around us so long, you've probably got a better idea." She smiles hopefully at me.

MY VISIT TO THIS MIRACULOUS CREATION OF Scientology is drawing to a close. On Sunday afternoon, after the jazz band that played during brunch is gone and the ice sculpture of the swan that adorned the buffet has melted, the Celebrity Centre pavilion becomes the venue for a Sunday Service: It's a small affair. Only Scientologists attend, but in theory, anyone can go along to watch.

A clerical collar tops the minister's purple shirt; beneath it, a big eight-point crucifix. He stands before a blue-robed choir who sing positive songs to old tunes like "Greensleeves." When the vamped piano dies away, the minister recites the creed of Scientology. "We of the church believe," he is saying, in Hubbard's plea for self-determination, "that all men have inalienable rights to conceive, choose, assist, and support their own organizations, churches, and governments..."

Scientology is going to carry on brawling with our own reality for years to come, but inside this pavilion, in the humdrum ceremony of this service, it looks like it has won at least enough to survive, to be included in the strange warp of American sects. I am immune to Ron's message. Like most of us, I can only see the flaws in it. But these people see it another way.

The minister is reading from one of Hubbard's books. "Salvation," he is saying, "does not come in blares of trumpets. It comes softly.... And you don't have to go to heaven and you don't have to go to hell. If you don't want to." And the audience, which believes that Hubbard has shown them the way to be in control of their lives, laughs aloud as one.

They rise and clap and whoop, as the choir stands back and reverentially looks at the picture of the man in the sailor cap behind them.

"GO! GO! GO!" MONDAY MORNING I AM AWOKEN by the sound of the staff doing their start-of-the-week exercises in the parking lot. They run back and forth in some obscure relay I can't fathom, shouting encouragement to each other.

Before I return the room key I find a note on my table.

Dear Mr. Shaw

I just wanted to let you know that it was great to have you around. I hope that you'll have some time to audit others—and have great wins on it. I wish you good luck and I will be very glad to service you again whenever you come back.

She is happy and content. Scientology has given her life a purpose it lacked before. So much so that she wants me to share in it too. She signs, "Sincerely, Beatrix—your valet," in round blue letters. •

They Died Laughing

(Continued from page 102)

roundup, and it's too late for many publications to review the show. The show receives almost no network promotion: Fans e-mail David Wain asking if in fact it's going to air, and Kerri and Mike Black start phoning radio stations on their own: "You're alternative and we're alternative. How would you like to interview us?" The Friday series the State is preempting, *American Gothic,* has been pulling a so-so thirteen share. Steve Starr explains by phone what the new *ifs* are: If the State can get a stronger rating, the odds are the group will press to go directly to series. If they can hold the rating, they'll happily accept a second special. No one is talking anymore about what will happen if the ratings are bad.

We watch the finished show at the apartment of Mike Showalter's girlfriend. Kerri Kenney and I bump into each other in the elevator, and when we arrive, everyone else is already clustered around the TV. It's a thrill when the deep CBS voice announces that their regular programming has been preempted. But the show feels strange on CBS—as if we've all played a trick on the network by sneaking on this homemade thing. The special doesn't feel like the State *or* like CBS. "Manzelles" is the only sketch that works; even the Barbara Manzelle works.

When they see themselves on TV, the group members grow very quiet. When I see *myself* on TV, I become very quiet too. In the middle of the broadcast, there's an update for the 11:00 news. I whisper to Joe Lo Truglio, in a fake-anchorman tone, "The State is holding a thirteen share." Lo Truglio laughs and picks up the joke, adding, "This just in: The State is holding a thirteen share." The members chuckle, and I realize I've finally gotten one of my jokes absorbed into the group brain. When the special is over, there's silence. The State is anxious but proud. Kerri asks, "Why do I feel like we're the only eleven people watching this in the world?"

The rating comes in Saturday morning: A six share. By Tuesday, Pike has called Starr with the network's decision. "I'm not going to candy-coat this for you, Steven. The State is out of business with CBS."

TWO DAYS LATER, THE CAST MAKE THEIR FIRST pilgrimage to unemployment. Garant jokes on the phone, "It's looking like the army next year for me: Private Garant." There are still some options: a movie deal with Hollywood Pictures, a record album with Warner Bros., a six-week college tour. But without a weekly show to call their own, no one is sure what's going to happen to the group. Lennon thinks they'll come through this. "At least, I hope we do," he says. "I've been with the group for seven years, and I don't have that many other friends."

I drop by the office on moving day. I've left some tapes I need in the writer's room. The office feels like a dorm on the last day after classes. None of the State members are around. Bendis—who's been watching David Wain grow up professionally for a decade and a half—seems crushed. He loads boxes with old scripts and ideas: "Hopefully," he says, "we'll get to use these again." Starr is making a final round of phone calls. I walk into the writer's room; I find an old pack of Camels in one of the desks. Just being around the place makes me want to smoke, so I smoke them. The corpse has been removed; the rest of the State members' stuff is gone; the only thing still around is the name of the ideal CBS viewer. For the moment at least, Charlie Six-Pack has the edge on them, and the State is without a country.

David Lipsky is now permanently retired from sketch writing and has lost ten pounds. His novel, *The Art Fair,* will be published this spring by Doubleday.