

Special Report

Businessmen's Association of America, holds antidrug contests and awards \$5,000 grants to schools as a way to recruit students and curry favor with education officials. West Virginia Senator John D. Rockefeller IV unwittingly commended the CBAA in 1987 on the Senate floor. Last August author Alex Haley was the keynote speaker at its annual awards banquet in Los Angeles. Says Haley: "I didn't know much about that group going in. I'm a

Methodist." Ignorance about Scientology can be embarrassing: two months ago, Illinois Governor Jim Edgar, noting that Scientology's founder "has solved the aberrations of the human mind," proclaimed March 13 "L. Ron Hubbard Day." He rescinded the proclamation in late March, once he learned who Hubbard really was.

HEALTH CARE. HealthMed, a chain of clinics run by Scientologists, promotes a gruel-

ing and excessive system of saunas, exercise and vitamins designed by Hubbard to purify the body. Experts denounce the regime as quackery and potentially harmful, yet HealthMed solicits unions and public agencies for contracts. The chain is plugged heavily in a new book, *Diet for a Poisoned Planet*, by journalist David Steinman, who concludes that scores of common foods (among them: peanuts, bluefish, peaches and cottage cheese) are dangerous.

Mining Money in Vancouver

One source of funds for the Los Angeles-based church is the notorious, self-regulated stock exchange in Vancouver, British Columbia, often called the scam capital of the world. The exchange's 2,300 penny-stock listings account for \$4 billion in annual trading. Local journalists and insiders claim the vast majority range from total washouts to outright frauds.

Two Scientologists who operate there are Kenneth Gerbino and Michael Baybak, 20-year church veterans from Beverly Hills who are major donors to the cult. Gerbino, 45, is a money manager, marketmaker and publisher of a national financial newsletter. He has boasted in Scientology journals that he owes all his stock-picking success to L. Ron Hubbard. That's not saying much: Gerbino's newsletter picks since 1985 have cumulatively returned 24%, while the Dow Jones industrial average has more than doubled. Nevertheless Gerbino's short-term gains can be stupendous. A survey last October found Gerbino to be the only manager who made money in the third quarter of 1990, thanks to gold and other resource stocks. For the first quarter of 1991, Gerbino was dead last. Baybak, 49, who runs a public relations company staffed with Scientologists, apparently has no ethics problem with engineering a hostile takeover of a firm he is hired to promote.

Neither man agreed to be interviewed for this story, yet both threatened legal action through attorneys. "What these guys do is take over companies, hype the stock, sell their shares, and then there's nothing left," says John Campbell, a former securities lawyer who was a director of mining company Athena Gold until Baybak and Gerbino took it over.

The pattern has become familiar. The pair promoted a mining venture called Skylark Resources, whose stock traded at nearly \$4 a share in 1987. The outfit soon crashed, and the stock is around 2¢. NETI Technologies, a software company, was trumpeted in the press as "the next Xerox" and in 1984 rose to a market value of \$120 million with Baybak's help. The company, which later collapsed, was delisted two months ago by the Vancouver exchange.

Baybak appeared in 1989 at the helm of Wall Street Ventures, a start-up that announced it owned 35 tons of rare Middle Eastern postage stamps—worth \$100 million—and was buying the world's largest collection of southern Arabian

stamps (worth \$350 million). Steven C. Rockefeller Jr. of the oil family and former hockey star Denis Potvin joined the company in top posts, but both say they quit when they realized the stamps were virtually worthless. "The stamps were created by sand-dune nations to exploit collectors," says Michael Laurence, editor of *Linn's Stamp News*, America's largest stamp journal. After the stock topped \$6, it began a steady descent, with Baybak unloading his shares along the way. Today it trades at 18¢.

Athena Gold, the current object of Baybak's and Gerbino's attentions, was founded by entrepreneur William Jordan. He turned to an established Vancouver broker in 1987 to help finance the company, a 4,500-acre mining property near Reno. The broker promised to raise more than \$3 million and soon brought Baybak and Gerbino into the deal. Jordan never got most of the money, but the cult members ended up with a good deal of cheap stock and options. Next they elected directors who were friendly to them and set in motion a series of complex maneuvers to block Jordan from voting stock he controlled and to run him out of the company. "I've been an honest policeman all my life and I've seen the worst kinds of crimes, and this ranks high," says former Athena shareholder Thomas Clark, a 20-year veteran of Reno's police force who has teamed up with Jordan to try to get the gold mine back. "They stole this man's property."

With Baybak as chairman, the two Scientologists and their staffs are promoting Athena, not always accurately.

A letter to shareholders with the 1990 annual report claims Placer Dome, one of America's largest gold-mining firms, has committed at least \$25.5 million to develop the mine. That's news to Placer Dome. "There is no pre-commitment," says Placer executive Cole McFarland. "We're not going to spend that money unless survey results justify the expenditure."

Baybak's firm represented Western Resource Technologies, a Houston oil-and-gas company, but got the boot in October. Laughs Steven McGuire, president of Western Resource: "His is a p.r. firm in need of a p.r. firm." But McGuire cannot laugh too freely. Baybak and other Scientologists, including the estate of L. Ron Hubbard, still control huge blocks of his company's stock. —By Richard Behar



ATHENA GOLD'S WILLIAM JORDAN
Cult members got cheap stock, then ran him out of the company

Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop labeled the book "trash," and the Food and Drug Administration issued a paper in October that claims Steinman distorts his facts. "HealthMed is a gateway to Scientology, and Steinman's book is a sorting mechanism," says physician William Jarvis, who is head of the National Council Against Health Fraud. Steinman, who describes Hubbard favorably as a "researcher," denies any ties to the church and contends, "HealthMed has no affiliation that I know of with Scientology."

DRUG TREATMENT. Hubbard's purification treatments are the mainstay of Narconon, a Scientology-run chain of 33 alcohol and drug rehabilitation centers—some in prisons under the name "Criminon"—in 12 countries. Narconon, a classic vehicle for drawing addicts into the cult, now plans to open what it calls the world's largest treatment center, a 1,400-bed facility on an Indian reservation near Newkirk, Okla. (pop. 2,400). At a 1989 ceremony in Newkirk, the Association for Better Living and Education presented Narconon a check for \$200,000 and a study praising its work. The association turned out to be part of Scientology itself. Today the town is battling to keep out the cult, which has fought back through such tactics as sending private detectives to snoop on the mayor and the local newspaper publisher.

FINANCIAL SCAMS. Three Florida Scientologists, including Ronald Bernstein, a big contributor to the church's international "war chest," pleaded guilty in March to using their rare-coin dealership as a money laundry. Other notorious activities by Scientologists include making the shady Vancouver stock exchange even shadier (see box) and plotting to plant operatives in the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and Export-Import Bank of the U.S. The alleged purpose of this scheme: to gain inside information on which countries are going to be denied credit so that Scientology-linked traders can make illicit profits by taking "short" positions in those countries' currencies.

In the stock market the practice of "shorting" involves borrowing shares of publicly traded companies in the hope that the price will go down before the stocks must be bought on the market and returned to the lender. The Feshbach brothers of Palo Alto, Calif.—Kurt, Joseph and

Matthew—have become the leading short sellers in the U.S., with more than \$500 million under management. The Feshbachs command a staff of about 60 employees and claim to have earned better returns than the Dow Jones industrial average for most of the 1980s. And, they say, they owe it all to the teachings of Scientology, whose "war chest" has received more than \$1 million from the family.

The Feshbachs also embrace the church's tactics; the brothers are the terrors of the stock exchanges. In congressional hearings in 1989, the heads of several

ing whether the Feshbachs received confidential information from FDA employees. The brothers seem aligned with Scientology's war on psychiatry and medicine: many of their targets are health and biotechnology firms. "Legitimate short selling performs a public service by deflating hyped stocks," says Robert Flaherty, the editor of *Equities* magazine and a harsh critic of the brothers. "But the Feshbachs have damaged scores of good start-ups."

Occasionally a Scientologist's business antics land him in jail. Last August a former devotee named Steven Fishman began serving a five-year prison term in Florida.

His crime: stealing blank stock-confirmation slips from his employer, a major brokerage house, to use as proof that he owned stock entitling him to join dozens of successful class-action lawsuits. Fishman made roughly \$1 million this way from 1983 to 1988 and spent as much as 30% of the loot on Scientology books and tapes.

Scientology denies any tie to the Fishman scam, a claim strongly disputed by both Fishman and his longtime psychiatrist, Uwe Geertz, a prominent Florida hypnotist. Both men claim that when arrested, Fishman was ordered by the church to kill Geertz and then do an "EOC," or end of cycle, which is church jargon for suicide.

BOOK PUBLISHING. Scientology mischiefmaking has even moved to the book industry. Since 1985 at least a dozen Hubbard books, printed by a church company, have made best-seller lists. They range from a 5,000-page sci-fi decology (*Black Genesis, The Enemy Within, An Alien Affair*) to the 40-year-old *Dianetics*. In 1988 the trade publication *Publishers Weekly*

awarded the dead author a plaque commemorating the appearance of *Dianetics* on its best-seller list for 100 consecutive weeks.

Critics pan most of Hubbard's books as unreadable, while defectors claim that church insiders are sometimes the real authors. Even so, Scientology has sent out armies of its followers to buy the group's books at such major chains as B. Dalton's and Waldenbooks to sustain the illusion of a best-selling author. A former Dalton's manager says that some books arrived in his store with the chain's price stickers already on them, suggesting that copies are being recycled. Scientology claims that sales of Hubbard books now top 90 million worldwide. The scheme, set up to gain con-



THE ROWE FAMILY SPENT \$23,000 on Dianetics treatment. Like many dentists, Glover Rowe was drawn in by Sterling Management, which does not publicize its ties to Scientology.

companies claimed that Feshbach operatives have spread false information to government agencies and posed in various guises—such as a Securities and Exchange Commission official—in an effort to discredit their companies and drive the stocks down. Michael Russell, who ran a chain of business journals, testified that a Feshbach employee called his bankers and interfered with his loans. Sometimes the Feshbachs send private detectives to dig up dirt on firms, which is then shared with business reporters, brokers and fund managers.

The Feshbachs, who wear jackets bearing the slogan "stock busters," insist they run a clean shop. But as part of a current probe into possible insider stock trading, federal officials are reportedly investigat-



Church of Scientology International headquarters, Los Angeles

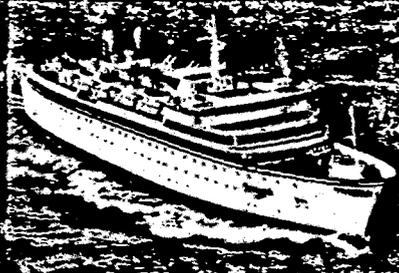
Can you revive your goals?

One of the heaviest TV advertising campaigns in the publishing industry pushes the 40-year-old Dianetics, the cult's basic sacred text.



Celebrity Center International in Hollywood is one of several church clubhouses that cater to stars

Small meter: \$4,375



The Freewinds: high-level enlightenment



Scientology's college in Sussex, England

verts and credibility, is coupled with a radio and TV advertising campaign virtually unparalleled in the book industry.

Scientology devotes vast resources to squelching its critics. Since 1986 Hubbard and his church have been the subject of four unfriendly books, all released by small yet courageous publishers. In each case, the writers have been badgered and heavily sued. One of Hubbard's policies was that all perceived enemies are "fair game" and subject to being "tricked, sued or lied to, or destroyed." Those who criticize the church—journalists, doctors, lawyers and even judges—often find themselves engulfed in litigation, stalked by private eyes, framed for fictional crimes, beaten up or threatened with death. Psychologist Margaret Singer, 69, an outspoken Scientology critic and professor at the University of California, Berkeley, now travels regularly under an assumed name to avoid harassment.

After the Los Angeles Times published a negative series on the church last summer, Scientologists spent an estimated \$1 million to plaster the reporters' names on hundreds of billboards and bus placards across the city. Above their names were quotations taken out of context to portray the church in a positive light.

The church's most fearsome advocates are its lawyers. Hubbard warned his followers in writing to "beware of attorneys who tell you not to sue . . . the purpose of the suit is to harass and discourage rather than to win." Result: Scientology has brought hundreds of suits against its perceived enemies and today pays an estimated \$20 million annually to more than 100 lawyers.

One legal goal of Scientology is to bankrupt the opposition or bury it under

paper. The church has 71 active lawsuits against the IRS alone. One of them, *Miscavige vs. IRS*, has required the U.S. to produce an index of 52,000 pages of documents. Boston attorney Michael Flynn, who helped Scientology victims from 1979 to 1987, personally endured 14 frivolous lawsuits, all of them dismissed. Another lawyer, Joseph Yanny, believes the church "has so subverted justice and the judicial system that it should be barred from seeking equity in any court." He should know: Yanny represented the cult until 1987, when, he says, he was asked to help church officials steal medical records to blackmail an opposing attorney (who was allegedly beaten up instead). Since Yanny quit representing the church, he has been the target of death threats, burglaries, lawsuits and other harassment.

Scientology's critics contend that the U.S. needs to crack down on the church in a major, organized way. "I want to know, Where is our government?" demands Toby Pievin, a Los Angeles attorney who handles victims. "It shouldn't be left to private litigators, because God knows most of us are afraid to get involved." But law-enforcement agents are also wary. "Every investigator is very cautious, walking on eggshells when it comes to the church," says a Florida police detective who has tracked the cult since 1988. "It will take a federal effort with lots of money and manpower."

So far the agency giving Scientology the most grief is the IRS, whose officials have implied that Hubbard's successors may be looting the church's coffers. Since 1988, when the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the

revocation of the cult's tax-exempt status, a massive IRS probe of church centers across the country has been under way. An IRS agent, Marcus Owens, has estimated that thousands of IRS employees have been involved. Another agent, in an internal IRS memorandum, spoke hopefully of the "ultimate disintegration" of the church. A small but helpful beacon shone last June when a federal appeals court ruled that two cassette tapes featuring conversations between church officials and their lawyers are evidence of a plan to commit "future frauds" against the IRS.

The IRS and FBI have been debriefing Scientology defectors for the past three years, in part to gain evidence for a major racketeering case that appears to have stalled last summer. Federal agents complain that the Justice Department is unwilling to spend the money needed to endure a drawn-out war with Scientology or to fend off the cult's notorious jihads against individual agents. "In my opinion the church has one of the most effective intelligence operations in the U.S., rivaling even that of the FBI," says Ted Gunderson, a former head of the FBI's Los Angeles office.

Foreign governments have been moving even more vigorously against the organization. In Canada the church and nine of its members will be tried in June on charges of stealing government documents (many of them retrieved in an enormous police raid of the church's Toronto headquarters). Scientology proposed to give \$1 million to the needy if the case was dropped, but Canada spurned the offer. Since 1986 authorities in France, Spain and Italy have raided more than 50 Scientology centers. Pending charges against

more than 100 of its overseas church members include fraud, extortion, capital flight, coercion, illegally practicing medicine and taking advantage of mentally incapacitated people. In Germany last month, leading politicians accused the cult of trying to infiltrate a major party as well as launching an immense recruitment drive in the east.

Sometimes even the church's biggest zealots can use a little protection. Screen star Travolta, 37, has long served as an unofficial Scientology spokesman, even though he told a magazine in 1983 that he was opposed to the church's management. High-level defectors claim that Travolta has long feared that if he defected, details of his sexual life would be made public. "He felt pretty intimidated about this getting out and told me so," recalls William Franks, the church's former chairman of the board. "There were no outright threats made, but it was implicit. If you leave, they immediately start digging up everything." Franks was driven out in 1981 after attempting to reform the church.

The church's former head of security, Richard Aznanan, recalls Scientology ringleader Miscavige repeatedly joking to staffers about Travolta's allegedly promiscuous homosexual behavior. At this point any threat to expose Travolta seems superfluous: last May a male porn star collected \$100,000 from a tabloid for an account of his alleged two-year liaison with the celebrity. Travolta refuses to comment, and in December his lawyer dismissed questions about the subject as "bizarre." Two weeks later, Travolta announced that he was getting married to actress Kelly Preston, a fellow Scientologist.

Shortly after Hubbard's death the church retained Trout & Ries, a respected, Connecticut-based firm of marketing consultants, to help boost its public image. "We were brutally honest," says Jack Trout. "We advised them to clean up their act, stop with the controversy and even to stop being a church. They didn't want to hear that." Instead, Scientology hired one of the country's largest P.R. outfits, Hill and Knowlton, whose executives refuse to discuss the lucrative relationship. "Hill and Knowlton must feel that these guys are not totally off the wall," says Trout. "Unless it's just for the money."

One of Scientology's main strategies is to keep advancing the tired argument that the church is being "persecuted" by anti-religionists. It is supported in that position by the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Council of Churches. But in the end, money is what Scientology is all about. As long as the organization's opponents and victims are successfully squelched, Scientology's managers and lawyers will keep pocketing millions of dollars by helping it achieve its ends. ■

The Scientologists and Me

Strange things seem to happen to people who write about Scientology. Journalist Paulette Cooper wrote a critical book on the cult in 1971. This led to a Scientology plot (called Operation Freak-Out) whose goal, according to church documents, was "to get P.C. incarcerated in a mental institution or jail." It almost worked: by impersonating Cooper, Scientologists got her indicted in 1973 for threatening to bomb the church. Cooper, who also endured 19 lawsuits by the church, was finally exonerated in 1977 after FBI raids on the church offices in Los Angeles and Washington uncovered documents from the bomb scheme. No Scientologists were ever tried in the matter.

For the TIME story, at least 10 attorneys and six private detectives were unleashed by Scientology and its followers in an effort to threaten, harass and discredit me. Last Oct. 12, not long after I began this assignment, I planned to lunch with Eugene Ingram, the church's leading private eye and a former cop. Ingram, who was tossed off the Los Angeles police force in 1981 for alleged ties to prostitutes and drug dealers, had told me that he might be able to arrange a meeting with church boss David Miscavige. Just hours before the lunch, the church's "national trial counsel," Earle Cooley, called to inform me that I would be eating alone.



Church attorney Cooley

Alone, perhaps, but not forgotten. By day's end, I later learned, a copy of my personal credit report—with detailed information about my bank accounts, home mortgage, credit-card payments, home address and Social Security number—had been illegally retrieved from a national credit bureau called Trans Union. The sham company that received it, "Educational Funding Services" of Los Angeles, gave as its address a mail drop a few blocks from Scientology's headquarters.

The owner of the mail drop is a private eye named Fred Wolfson, who admits that an Ingram associate retained him to retrieve credit reports on several individuals. Wolfson says he was told that Scientology's attor-

neys "had judgments against these people and were trying to collect on them." He says now, "These are vicious people. These are vipers." Ingram, through a lawyer, denies any involvement in the scam.

During the past five months, private investigators have been contacting acquaintances of mine, ranging from neighbors to a former colleague, to inquire about subjects such as my health (like my credit rating, it's excellent) and whether I've ever had trouble with the IRS (unlike Scientology, I haven't). One neighbor was greeted at dawn outside my Manhattan apartment building by two men who wanted to know whether I lived there. I finally called Cooley to demand that Scientology stop the nonsense. He promised to look into it.

After that, however, an attorney subpoenaed me, while another falsely suggested that I might own shares in a company I was reporting about that had been taken over by Scientologists (he also threatened to contact the Securities and Exchange Commission). A close friend in Los Angeles received a disturbing telephone call from a Scientology staff member seeking data about me—an indication that the cult may have illegally obtained my personal phone records. Two detectives contacted me, posing as a friend and a relative of a so-called cult victim, to elicit negative statements from me about Scientology. Some of my conversations with them were taped, transcribed and presented by the church in affidavits to TIME's lawyers as "proof" of my bias against Scientology.

Among the comments I made to one of the detectives, who represented himself as "Harry Baxter," a friend of the victim's family, was that "the church trains people to lie." Baxter and his colleagues are hardly in a position to dispute that observation. His real name is Barry Silvers, and he is a former investigator for the Justice Department's Organized Crime Strike Force.

—By Richard Baker