

Category	Magazine Article
Title	L. Ron Hubbard's Science Fiction Relic of the Golden Age
Source	"The Economist"
Author	
Date	April 7th, 1984

Contents:

The author of *Battlefield Earth* (Quadrant Books, L8.95) intrigues more than the book. Mr L. Ron Hubbard invented the cult called Scientology, upon which was founded a hugely successful church, which at the last count claimed 200,000 adherents in Britain and millions elsewhere. He, however, is no longer associated with the Church of Scientology and has long been in Howard Hughes-like seclusion.

Before turning his hand to religion, he wrote 101 science-fiction novels. By his own admission, he was one of the great writers of the golden age of space romance and was recruited to the trade by John W. Campbell Jr, the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*. Campbell is generally acknowledged as the founding father and chief inspiration of this golden age, which Mr Hubbard dates roughly from his own introduction to the genre (1938) to about the time he quit it, in 1950. (Kingsley Amis, the pioneer of science-fiction criticism, dates it from 1949 to 1962, which puts Mr Hubbard beyond the pale.) He returns now with this massive tome and invites comparison with the best.

He lists the writers of his golden age on the dedication page - 84 in all, not including himself, but mentioning, among others, Poul Anderson, Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell and John Wyndham. Does he belong in this company? Two of his dedicatees, A. E. van Vogt and Robert Heinlein, think he does. Regrettably, though, "*Battlefield Earth*" is an unsubtle saga, atrociously written, windy and out of control.

The hero, Jonnie Goodboy Tyler, begins his adventures as an illiterate hunter in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Spy drones patrol the skies, but none of his tribe knows their significance. It is the year 3000 and the earth has for a millennium been held by an alien race, the Psychlos, who are interested only in its mineral wealth. The gas they breathe explodes on contact with even traces of uranium and, for this reason, they keep clear of the mountains, where the last remaining 35,000 humans skulk in fear.

The Psychlos are large, furry psychopaths, who control, by means of technologies stolen from other races, all 16 known universes. The key to their supremacy lies in their knowledge of teleportation, their conditioned ferocity and their command of a coded mathematics, founded awkwardly on the base 11, which gives even Jonnie a severe headache when he comes to grips with it.

Jonnie is captured by Terl, the chief Psychlo villain, who wishes to train humans to mine where Psychlos cannot go, but becomes so rapidly the master of their technology that he is able to wipe them out by page 596, leaving him with only a further 223 pages to deal with the several other interstellar predatory races who now take an interest in this bemused planet. Jonnie is assisted in his conquests by Chinese, by the remnants of the Red Army, by Tibetan lamas and most notably by Scottish highlanders, whom L. Ron Hubbard has drawn apparently from a viewing of some old movie version of "Rob Roy".

Some human villains also appear in the form of the Brigantes. These are inhabitants of the Congo, millennial descendants of mercenaries sent to topple the Zaire government, given to cannibalism and vile sexual practices and still awaiting rescue by the United Nations. This is one of the author's jokes, others being derived from his views on politics and economics. Science fiction, says he, ought to include such sciences as sociology and economics. There is even a ponderous joke about Keynes, of whom Mr Hubbard does not approve.

What is missing is the most elementary shred of characterisation. The good guys are all selfless and courageous and the bad guys uniformly sadistic. The plot clanks along like a giant, lumbering engine and Mr Hubbard is most at home (tiresomely so) - in laboured description of mechanical processes. Perhaps this secretive man was an engineer before he was an author. He writes like one.

Of his own history he lets slip a little in his introduction, which is of value. In it he makes large claims for the writers of that golden age of his. During and after the war, he knew "the boys who built the bomb, who were beginning to get the feel of rockets". The golden age, he writes, "gathered enough public interest and readership to help push man into space".

"Battlefield Earth", on the other hand, is unlikely to persuade the United States government to invest more heavily in space travel. The Psychlos, it seems, first came here in response to that probe Nasa sent out, giving other creatures directions how to get here should they wish to pay earthlings a visit. That is Mr Hubbard's best joke. It comes, unfortunately, on page three.

Category	Magazine Article
Title	Scientayatology
Source	"The Economist", Vol. 340, Issue 7979, p. 40
Author	
Date	August 17th, 1996

Description:

The article looks at strained relations between Germany and the United States, because of Germany's actions toward Iran and the Church of Scientology.

Scientayatology

Dateline: Berlin

WHAT do the mullahs who rule Iran and a well-heeled American cult have in common? Well, for one thing, between them they have managed to bedevil Germany's relations with the United States, usually as solid as the old British-American special relationship used to be. And it may take more than the close of the American presidential election campaign to bring the two countries together again.

Post-war Germany's political identity has grown largely out of a tight relationship with America. Helmut Kohl, whom Bill Clinton in his sentimental way has called America's "best friend in the world", is as passionate about hugging America as he is about European integration. Warding off French efforts to unlock Europe from America, in political and defence matters, keeps the chancellor on his toes.

So Germans take it badly when things go wrong. The United States' new law to punish firms investing in Iran looks to them like a shot aimed directly at Germany, though other Europeans are just as much in the firing line. By comparison, a transatlantic row over the Church of Scientology, a worldwide but Florida-based cult adept at recruiting Hollywood idols and boardroom chiefs, might seem to be a summer entertainment. It is more than that, though, for it has landed Germany just where it dreads to be: looking narrow and intolerant in American eyes.

That German democracy should appear suspect in a row over this money-minded cult is rather bad luck. Political aversion to Scientology's incursions exploded last week when the youth wing of Mr Kohl's ruling Christian Democratic Union tried to blockade cinemas showing Hollywood's "Mission: Impossible" starring Tom Cruise, the sect's most sparkling catch. A party boss close to Mr Kohl thereupon proposed banning the sect, which the United States recognises as a church but which the German political class, encouraged by a German court decision, prefers to see as a subversive business operation.

When the state of Bavaria, Germany's good soldier of Christianity, announced that it was in effect excluding Scientologists from public-service jobs, the Americans balked. The State Department gave warning, informally but cuttingly, against religious intolerance. The cult leapt at the chance to liken Bavarian policy to Hitler's persecution of Jews, a sure way to embarrass not just Bavarians but the German government, and to fan American doubts about Germany. In fact, Germany's federal authorities have long hesitated to blacklist the American sect, even though some over-zealous democrats see Scientology as a threat to Germany's liberal constitution.

In the matter of business with Iran, Germans had better reason to think the United States was singling them out, mainly because the State Department - formally this time, albeit apparently by mistake - suggested that German firms might escape sanctions if Bonn dropped its friendly-seeming dialogue with Tehran. Blackmail, cried German politicians.

Like its European partners, Germany sees the American attempt to impose sanctions unilaterally on the world as a distortion of the international economic order. And Germany has a special position. It maintains closer contacts with Iran than do most European countries. It has two reasons. For one, it believes that so large an oil power cannot be ignored when seeking political solutions in the Middle East. Second, Iran owes it some DM13 billion (\$8.8 billion) in business credits provided over the years. So, though new German business investment in Iran - the target of the American law - has dwindled almost to nothing, the German government keeps well in touch with Iran's, rather than isolating it, as the United States would like.

Aghast at American tactics, Otto Lambsdorff, a Free Democrat elder statesman in the Kohl coalition, concludes that maybe France has been right all along about Europe needing to stake out more distance from America. Count Lambsdorff likes to provoke. Some Germans think all will be well once the American presidential election is over. But others see fresh clouds gathering over NATO's expansion to eastern Europe, predicting that the Americans will seek excuses not to go ahead as fast as the security-minded Germans want. There should be more than back-slapping on the agenda when Mr Kohl meets America's election winner.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Best of friends, most of the time.

Category	Magazine Article
Title	A German eye on Scientology
Source	"Economist", Vol. 342, Issue 8002, p. 50
Author	
Date	February 1st, 1997

Description:

The article deals with allegations that the German government is guilty of harassing members of the Scientology movement.

A German eye on Scientology

Dateline: Berlin

Germany is both embarrassed and sure that it ought not to be. The charges are quite unfounded, groans the foreign minister, Klaus Kinkel. Chancellor Helmut Kohl, more self-assured, consigns the wilder accusations to the dustbin. But any official reproach coming from America stings. So it was with this week's barb from the State Department-for the third year running but sharper than ever-that Germany is guilty of harassing a religious sect, the American-based Scientology movement with its 30,000 German members.

Scientology faces legal constraints in other countries too, including France, Italy and Greece. But Germany cannot bring itself to be relaxed about the movement. Moreover, the sect does its best to provoke the Germans by harping on their country's treatment of Jews over half a century ago. An over-the-top open letter recently written by American entertainment celebrities contained the gross charge: "In the 1930s it was the Jews. Now it is the Scientologists."

The American government has disowned such stuff but remains puzzled. And, indeed, the German approach to democracy needs defining. Germany is, say the practitioners in Bonn, "a militant democracy". This means that its first job is to defend itself: failure to defend Germany's first democracy, the Weimar Republic, brought Hitler.

The front line of defence is a network of constitutional protection agencies, well-manned outfits operating at both federal and state level that track, and sometimes infiltrate, movements suspected of working against Germany's thoroughly liberal constitution. These watchdogs are open about their sleuthing. When they intend to keep an eye on extremists of right or left, they say so. People or organisations currently being watched include the anti-immigrant Republican Party and unabashed communists from what used to be East Germany.

But not so welcome in Bavaria

The federal government has carefully avoided hounding Scientologists, despite its contention, based on a court verdict, that the sect is a dubious business outfit that traps its adherents. It confines itself to refusing the sect the tax-exempt status of a church. But individual Lander (states) are less circumspect. God-fearing Bavaria has taken to screening applicants for state jobs, in effect barring Scientologists. And its southern neighbour, Baden-Wurttemberg, keeps the sect under formal observation. Confrontational, indeed. But a cooler attitude, many German democrats would argue, might amount to the sin of constitutional neglect.

Category	Magazine Article
Title	Religion, Good and Bad
Source	"The Economist", Vol. 346, Issue 8063, p. 14
Author	
Date	April 11th, 1998

Description:

The article discusses the controversy over the political position of the government in Germany against Scientology.

Religion, Good and Bad

So Germany's treatment of Scientologists today is not, after all, quite like its treatment of the Jews in the 1930s. That was the claim made in a full-page advertisement in the International Herald Tribune last year, in which such celebrities as Goldie Hawn, Dustin Hoffman and Oliver Stone attacked Germany for its "shameful pattern of organised persecution" of the Church of Scientology. Now an investigation carried out on behalf of the UN Commission on Human Rights pours appropriate scorn on this "meaningless and puerile" comparison, rebutting not just the accusations of Hollywood's vigilantes but also the slightly less idiotic ones made by America's State Department. The United States, it must be remembered, having for 25 years regarded Scientology as a commercial enterprise, suddenly decided in 1993 that it was no such thing but eligible instead for the tax exemptions given to churches. These days it chastises Germany for being beastly to the godly Scientologists.

And yet, however much one may sympathise with the Germans for being sceptical about Scientology, it is hard to argue that it does not meet the dictionary definition of a religion-any system of belief in a higher unseen controlling power. Of course, Scientology tries to turn its followers' minds and part them from their money; of course, it will try to change their lives forever. But so do lots of religions. Scientology's founder, L. Ron Hubbard, taught that humans are clusters of spirits that were trapped in ice and banished to earth 75m years ago by Xenu, the ruler of the 76-planet Galactic Confederation. Some religions teach stranger things.

Some Christians, for instance, teach that God created the world in a week. This weekend others will be eating bread and drinking wine in the belief that these are Christ's body and blood.

All right, you may say, Scientology may be a religion, but if so what about all the cults that meet the same dictionary definition? Are the Branch Davidian, of Waco-massacre fame, and suicide-promoting Heaven's Gate, and metro-gassing Aum Shinrikyo, also to qualify as religions? Well, yes. They may direct their message at the weak and susceptible, but so do other religions. They may hold views that are offensive, but so do other religions (many are founded on a heresy). They may even promote violence, but

violence is often the handmaiden of strong religious belief. If you doubt it, go to Bosnia, or Northern Ireland, or the Middle East or countless other places where, even today, men fight their neighbours apparently irrationally. That is ethnic strife, you will be told, but in truth it is religious: Bosnians, whether Muslim or Orthodox, are ethnically identical; so are Ulster's Catholics and Protestants; Arabs and Jews alike are Semites. It is religion, not race, that fires them up.

Awkward as it may be to admit, almost any old group of believers is logically eligible for religious status, even if their movement reeks of hatred, fraud or tax-evasion. If the practitioners call it religion, who is to gainsay them-just as who is to gainsay the creator who calls his creation art? Art is in the eye of the producer; religion is in the eye of the believer. Whether it is good religion or bad, however, is a judgment for others: the Americans evidently think Scientology good, the Germans have their doubts. Both are entitled to their views.

In the end, God's judgment awaits. Meanwhile, godliness and goodliness are separated by more than a letter.