

= Space opera in Scientology =

Church of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard included space opera narratives in his writings , wherein thetans (the name given to human souls) were reincarnated periodically over quadrillions of years , retaining memories of prior lives , to which Hubbard attributed complex narratives about life throughout the universe . The most controversial of these myths is the story of Xenu , to whom Hubbard attributed responsibility for many of the world 's problems .

Some space opera doctrines of Scientology are only provided by the church to experienced members , who church leaders maintain are the only ones able to correctly understand them . Several former members of the church have exposed these secret documents , leading to lengthy court battles with the church , which failed to keep the secret . Critics of the church have noted that some of the narratives are scientifically impossible , and have thus assailed the church as untrustworthy for teaching them . The space opera teachings have also been satirized in popular culture . Scholars of religion have described the space opera narratives as a creation myth designed to encourage reverence of Hubbard as a supreme messenger . Several academics have drawn attention to the similarity of the space opera myths to themes of the 1950s Cold War culture in which they were constructed .

= = Origins = =

L. Ron Hubbard created a form of therapy known as Dianetics , which he promoted as a scientific , not religious , teaching . Until the early 1950s , he had a negative view of organized religions , but thereafter discussed spiritual topics . In these teachings , he identified subconscious memories of past events , which he called " engrams " , as causes of human dissatisfaction . By 1950 , he had begun to ponder past lives , believing that they could be recalled ; he attempted to use these recollections to develop a comprehensive narrative of the universe . He founded the Church of Scientology in 1953 , advancing his beliefs as religious doctrines . The church was distinct from Dianetics @-@ based groups but incorporated some of their views . Hubbard saw Dianetics as focused on the physical body but viewed Scientology as a way to address spiritual matters .

In Hubbard 's efforts to shift from a psychotherapeutic to a spiritual program , he introduced the concept of thetans : a set of godlike , non @-@ corporeal entities capable of creating and shaping universes , later trapped in the MEST and confined , by reincarnation , to physical bodies . Hugh Urban of Ohio State University states that these teachings bear similarities to Gnosticism , although he doubts that Hubbard was well versed in Gnostic thought .

In the 1950s , as Hubbard 's followers recalled their past lives , he recorded many details of these recollections . With this as his source , he constructed an intricate history of the universe , identified as " space opera " . Although Hubbard believed that he had developed a comprehensive history , Urban cites the isolated and incomplete record of the statements , wherein Hubbard identified a thetan universe , separate from the material universe , created by its inhabitants . The material universe , in Hubbard 's view , began when other universes created by thetans collided , from which they entered the material universe in six invasion groups roughly 60 trillion years ago . Hubbard also described a series of events , called the " incidents " , that divorced the thetans from their self @-@ knowledge , but maintained that thetans could regain their former divinity , and referred to thetans that freed themselves from the material world as " operating thetans " .

= = Narratives and civilizations = =

Hubbard located his first ' incident ' four quadrillion years ago , in which a thetan encountered ' loud cracks and brightness ' and then observed a cherub and chariot before experiencing total darkness . In Scientology , this is known as " Incident 1 " . Another important event in Scientology 's chronology of the universe , occurred on a space city known as Arslycus , the inhabitants of whom brought about an incident when capturing thetans .

The most controversial portion of Scientology 's space opera is the myth of Xenu , known as "

Incident 2 " , in which Hubbard described a group of 76 planets , orbiting stars visible from Earth , organized in a Galactic Confederacy c . 75 million years ago , ruled by the dictator Xenu . The confederacy having become overpopulated , Xenu sent several billion of his citizens onto DC 8 planes to the planet Teegeeack (Earth) , ostensibly for tax audition . There , hydrogen bombs were detonated inside volcanoes , killing the exiles , whose thetans were brainwashed on Hawaii and the Canary Islands , introducing various myths , such as the myth of Jesus , to conceal the thetans ' origins . Eventually , officers of the Galactic Confederacy launched a rebellion against Xenu , which continued six years before capturing him and placing him in an electrified prison in the center of a mountain . Hubbard taught that the thetans brainwashed by Xenu 's forces remained on Earth , where the " body thetans " , attached to human psyches , contribute to human problems ; and that individuals could be freed from these brainwashed thetans and thus attain a type of salvation .

Hubbard also taught that , upon the deaths of humans , thetans continued to " implant stations " , including locations on planets near Earth , where their memories were erased and new memories emplaced . On grounds that some " implant stations " were better than others , Hubbard advised his followers to avoid the one on Venus . After passing an implant station , he taught , the thetan returned to Earth , where it was incarnated . Hubbard taught the Christian concept of heaven was based on a physical location on another planet , which he claimed to have visited . He compared its appearance to Busch Gardens in Pasadena , California , and noted it contained effigies of characters from the New Testament . Over time , he recalled , the location fell into disrepair . A town nearby contained an implant station , at which thetans were convinced to return there .

Another significant encounter in Hubbard 's narrative occurred when a large group of planets formed the Marcab Confederacy , described as in search of slaves , and called a " decadent " society . The author related that this civilization caused a significant implant upon their encounter with thetans .

Hubbard discussed the history of human civilizations on Earth , and the lives of ancient sea monsters and fish people , as well . He also said humans could recover memories of previous lives , such as the experiences of clams and Neanderthals . In his mythos , Atlantis was a completely electronic civilization , whose inhabitants possessed disintegration technology ; in contrast , Earth was invaded by multiple groups around 1200 BCE , including the " fifth invader force from Martian Command " against the " fourth invasion force from Space Command " in battle .

On premise that thetans are forced to believe various faulty ideas , the church teaches that their courses allow " theta beings " to be freed from these beliefs and regain their former abilities . Committed Scientologists pursue courses and procedures offered by the church in the hope of gaining freedom and enlightenment , allegedly permitting travel around the solar system . The author referred to the process of a thetan leaving its human body as " exteriorization " , which he said allowed for space travel . Urban notes that this is similar to Aleister Crowley 's teachings of astral projection , although he adds that Hubbard did not use that term .

= = Space opera and Scientologists = =

A glossary on the Scientology website defined the term " space opera " as a description of actual events :

" Space opera has space travel , spaceships , spacemen , intergalactic travel , wars , conflicts , other beings , civilizations and societies , and other planets and galaxies . It is not fiction and concerns actual incidents . "

The Scientology publication Have You Lived Before This Life contains some space opera , describing past lives ? including some on warlike planets ? which were recalled through auditing . In the 1960s , Hubbard introduced a series of questions , known as " security checks " , to verify members ' loyalty . Mikael Rothstein , associate professor of religious history at the University of Copenhagen , sees the Xenu myth as building off of , and the culmination of , these accounts . The Xenu myth was released to Scientologists in the late 1960s , after teachings about thetans and their relationship to the physical body had been disseminated ; its release provided the cause and origin of many of the group 's teachings . Rothstein describes " space opera " as " Hubbard 's introduction

of a new reality , and new foundation for everything " .

Although Hubbard spoke openly about space opera in the 1950s , Scientology eventually became an esoteric faith : some teachings are withheld until followers reach a certain point in their spiritual development , and the mythological foundation of the courses are unknown to many members . Over a decade of auditing and study ? and donations of tens of thousands of dollars ? are required for a member to reach the highest echelons of hidden knowledge . Followers below a certain level (OT III) of growth are denied access to the church 's cosmological teachings , and they are given different explanations for the church 's teachings . German scholar Gerald Willms notes that in addition to the esoteric foundations , Scientology cites practical justifications for its rituals , so they can be pursued without knowledge of advanced teachings . The Church of Scientology has attempted to prevent the public release of their esoteric teachings , but , through the internet , their confidential aspects have been widely released . The church considers public discussion of their space opera teachings offensive and has asked academics not to publish their details . Scientologists maintain that the true meaning of these texts is only accessible to those who have progressed through their courses , and that those who read them prematurely risk damage to their spiritual and physical conditions . Church leaders have sometimes outright refused to discuss the subject with journalists . Rothstein observes that the church also has a strong financial motivation to keep members from accessing higher level courses , as devotees are required to make large payments to obtain them . Free Zone Scientologists , however , are sometimes more open about space opera . Some Free Zone Scientologists believe that the Church of Scientology has been hijacked by undercover agents of the Marcabian Confederacy .

During auditing , Scientology members sometimes recall details of life in space . Rothstein states that this is part of a " mythological paradigm " that members initially partake of through Scientology 's scriptures . He notes , however , that some Scientologists do not believe that there are space opera myths in the group 's teachings , and that others have left the group after learning about the higher @-@ level doctrines . Reitman relates that some members accept the space opera teachings by seeing them as similar to seemingly implausible stories of popular religions or simply remain quiet about their doubts .

Rothstein states that space opera is a " part of the total fabric of Scientological thinking and narrative , but not of prime importance . " He argues that these teachings are a " second order belief " , in that they exist to support the group 's core teachings about thetans . Mike Rinder , a former spokesman of the Church of Scientology , stated that extraterrestrial auditing is merely " a small percent " of their canon .

= = Criticism and leaking = =

Scientology 's space opera teachings were publicized in accounts given by former church members , most notably during court cases . One such case was filed by a former Scientologist , Larry Wollersheim , against the church in 1980 . Five years later , Wollersheim offered confidential Scientology materials , including space opera teachings , to the court as evidence , a move that was vigorously protested by the church 's attorneys . They were unable to prevent disclosure , however , and the documents were published by the Los Angeles Times in November 1985 . This was the first time that some aspects of Scientology 's space opera teachings were offered as public evidence about the church . In the mid @-@ 1990s , Wollersheim published some of the materials on a website , prompting the church to sue his organization , FACTNet . The Church attested that the space opera narratives were trade secrets ; this claim was rejected by the court .

In 1990 , after being sued for libel by the Church of Scientology , Steven Fishman , a former member turned critic , offered a large amount of the group 's highly confidential teachings in court . The documents , contained in what is known as the Fishman Affidavit , included detailed accounts of the church 's space opera narratives . This material was subsequently posted on alt.religion.scientology and a website of Dutch journalist Karin Spink . The church filed suits against those who posted the documents , claiming copyright violations . Lengthy court battles ensued , but the church was unable to prevent the materials ' dissemination over the internet .

Former Scientologists and members of the anti @-@ cult movement often discuss Scientology 's space opera teachings . They generally take a rationalistic approach to the narratives and see them as absurd , or even as drug @-@ fueled delusions , using them as a source of humor . The doctrines have been satirized in popular culture , most notably in the South Park episode " Trapped in the Closet " . The anti @-@ Scientology website Operation Clambake prominently uses space opera doctrines in their criticisms of the church , casting the implausibility of the stories as a clear reason to reject the group . Anti @-@ cult critics of Scientology argue that the content of these teachings demonstrates that Scientology misleads its followers ; many aspects of the narratives , such as the age of the volcanoes that Xenu is said to have used , contradict scientific consensus . The space opera teachings are , in fact , incompatible with scientific consensus on the age of the universe : around 14 billion years . Rothstein notes that scholars of religion usually do not pursue this line of analysis because all myths contain unscientific content ; he notes that cultural conditioning determines whether religious narratives appear reasonable .

= = Analysis = =

Rothstein argues that in the construction of the space opera narratives , Hubbard drew from tropes common to his audience . The concept of a Galactic Confederation , Rothstein observes , was present in other UFO religions of the 1950s ;

In contrast to the overpopulation and atomic bombs were often discussed therein . Urban cites UFO encounters and alien invasions as popular themes during the Cold War ;

Rothstein draws parallels between Hubbard 's teachings and the beliefs of UFO religions , citing similarities between thetans trapped in human bodies and the walk @-@ in hypothesis of the Ashtar Command . Andreas Grünschloß notes Scientology 's space opera teachings place them in the tradition of the ancient astronaut hypothesis ; he states the group 's teachings about thetans bears similarities to " star seeds " found in UFO religions .

Grünschloß speculates the UFO @-@ contact narratives may have played a role in the group 's development of space opera , specifically citing the resemblance of Hubbard 's description of life in Xenu 's time to statements by George Adamski , a UFO contactee of the 1950s . Rothstein notes the group 's teachings about extraterrestrials varies greatly from most of the UFO movement , particularly in Hubbard 's descriptions of demonic characters .

Hubbard was a science fiction writer before starting Scientology , and some aspects of the church 's space opera bear similarities to his previous writings . Noting similarities between Hubbard 's fiction writing and creation of religious myths , Rothstein argues ; " perhaps no division between such categories should be made " . Kent posits some of his cosmology , such as the priests and psychiatrists loyal to Xenu , were modeled after events in Hubbard 's life , such as his distaste for Christianity and clashes with the psychiatric establishment . Hubbard theorized science fiction writers sometimes recalled portions of events from past lives and incorporated it into their works , and Urban writes Hubbard 's science fiction writings " contain more than a few seeds of Hubbard 's religious movement , the Church of Scientology " .

Rothstein argues Scientology 's space opera identify Xenu as the root of evil and Hubbard as the hero , for having uncovered the mysteries of the universe . Rothstein states the group 's teachings about " salvation " may be a means to encourage reverence of Hubbard . In addition , Rothstein notes the space opera teachings also provide fundamental justifications for some practical aspects of Scientology , including the rejection of psychiatry and the formation of the Sea Org . He sees space opera as similar to most types of mythology , involving superhuman beings in the far distant past . Willms states the mythology of Scientology differs from many other religions because it focuses on material beings ; but argues the Xenu myth is a religious narrative , although the Church of Scientology has never used this claim in their efforts to be recognized as a religion .