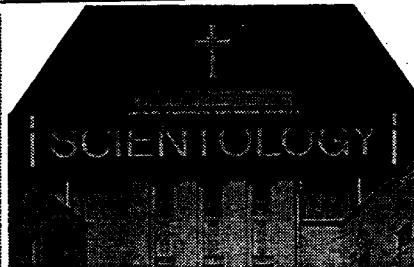


Arnie Lerma holds the plug to his computer, confiscated by the Church of Scientology after he posted copyrighted documents on the internet. "We take very forceful and elaborate steps to maintain the confidentiality," says one Scientology official.

BY ROBERT A. REZDEK—THE WASHINGTON POST



## Church in Cyberspace

Its Sacred Writ Is on the Net.  
Its Lawyers Are on the Case.

By Marc Fisher  
Washington Post Staff Writer

**I**t was 9:30 and Arnie Lerma was lounging in his living room in Arlington, drinking his Saturday morning coffee, hanging. Suddenly, a knock at the door—who could it be at this hour?—and boom, before he could force anything out of his mouth, they were pouring into his house: federal marshals, lawyers, computer technicians, cameramen.

They stayed for three hours last Saturday. They inventoried and confiscated everything Lerma cherished: his computer, every disk in the place, his client list, his phone numbers. And then they left.

"I'm one of those guys who keeps everything—my whole life—on the computer," Lerma says. "And now they have it all."

"They" are lawyers for the Church of Scientology, the controversial group that Lerma once considered his home, his rock, his future. Now they call him a criminal, accusing him of divulging trade secrets and violating copyrights.

Founded in 1954 by science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology has grown into a worldwide organization that has been recognized as a religion by the Internal Revenue Service but has been called a cult by the German government. The church claims membership of more than 8 million; its critics say the figure is dramatically lower.

Lerma spent nearly 10 years in Scientology. But that was almost two decades ago. Since then, he's lived in Virginia, designing sound and video systems for nightclubs and other clients.

It was only in the past year or so that Sciento-

See SCIENTOLOGY, C5, Col. 1

# Bumping Into the Church

SCIENTOLOGY, From C1

logy and Arnie Lerma have gotten reacquainted, and this time Lerma has a different view of the church: He considers it a dangerous cult, a corrupt organization dedicated to brainwashing its followers.

To convince others of this view, Lerma used his facility with computers to distribute some of Scientology's most sacred texts, documents he says were obtained from a public court file in Los Angeles. In recent months, Lerma and others have placed dozens of these documents on the Internet, in a discussion group called alt.religion.scientology, a busy place in cyberspace where Scientology critics and adherents gather to trade arguments, insults and threats.

"I thought it essential that the public know this, so people can make an informed decision when some kid on a street corner asks you, 'Would you care to take a free personality analysis?'" Lerma says.

For a long time, the church treated its Internet critics as bothersome pests, sometimes answering their critiques, sometimes ignoring them. But in the past week Scientology has revved up its awesome legal machinery, launching a fierce campaign to protect its most closely guarded scripture.

A federal judge ordered the raid on Lerma's house after the church filed a lawsuit accusing Lerma of copyright infringement and revealing trade secrets. Church officials also paid a surprise visit to the home of a Washington Post reporter that Saturday evening, seeking the return of documents Lerma had sent him. And in Los Angeles, the church has persuaded a judge to seal the court file containing the disputed Scientology documents.

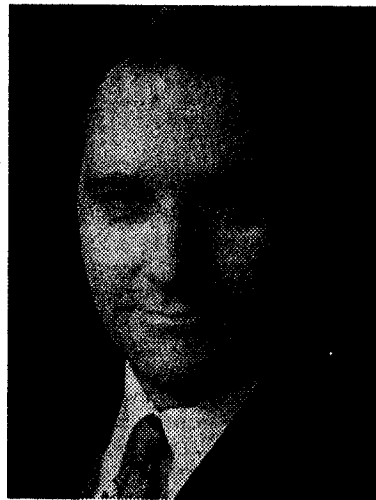
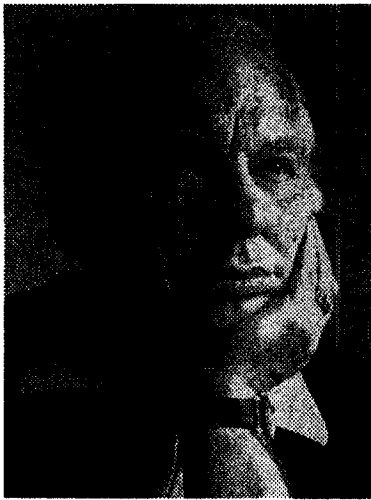
Arnie Lerma was lost without his computer. He resorted to jotting everything on legal pads. Finally this week, he got a new laptop. And then a sympathetic stranger mailed him a modem. But Lerma, 44, is deeply shaken. Tears drip down his cheeks at the slightest provocation. He descends into deep, barking sobs and cannot understand why.

He believes the church will try to harass him until he is silent. But he says that will not happen. On the Internet, Lerma signs his postings "Arnaldo Lerma, Clear 3502, Ex-Sea Organization Slave." It's a reference to his old Scientology code name and his status as a mostly unpaid church staffer. And then he writes: "I would prefer to die speaking my mind than to live fearing to speak."

Except that when he recites the line, Lerma cannot get it out without collapsing into spasms of sorrow.

## 'Ruin Him Utterly'

From the documents Lerma posted on the Internet, an oft-quoted Hubbard directive on litigation against unauthorized use of the church's texts:



PHOTOS COURTESY CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY  
Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, left, and church official Kurt Welland, who says: "This is not a free-speech issue. It's a copyright issue."

*The purpose of the suit is to harass and discourage rather than to win. The law can be used very easily to harass and enough harassment on somebody who is simply on the thin edge anyway, well knowing that he is not authorized, will generally be sufficient to cause his professional deace. If possible, of course, ruin him utterly.*

The church has long been quick to use the legal system against government investigators, ex-members turned critics, and news organizations that publish criticism of Scientology. At one point a few years ago, it had 71 active lawsuits against the IRS alone. In 1992 the church filed a \$416 million libel suit—still pending—against Time magazine, which had published a cover story titled "Scientology: The Cult of Greed." Earlier this year in California it filed suit against—and confiscated computer disks belonging to—another former member whom it accused of distributing copyrighted texts. And in the past year, the church has spent millions of dollars on an advertising blitz accusing the German government of a "hate campaign against Scientology."

A Scientology document filed in the Los Angeles case advises church members to discourage news reports on Scientology anywhere but in religion pages, and to "be very alert to sue for slander at the slightest chance so as to discourage the public presses from mentioning Scientology."

## Free Speech vs. Copyright

The Church of Scientology says the Lerma case is a simple matter of trade secrets and copyright violations. The church's unpublished, copyrighted texts—previously available only to church members who have paid thousands of dollars to rise through Scientology's hierarchy of training courses—have been placed on the Internet, open to all.

This, Scientology lawyers argue, threatens the church's intellectual property rights.

"Of course we want Scientology to go out as far and wide as possible," says Kurt Welland, a director of the Church of Scientology International. "There are 60 books written by the founder. There is one small section, the upper-level materials, which are trade secrets based on our religious understanding. A person has to have advanced in an orderly fashion, spiritually, in order to understand its content."

"We are determined to maintain their confidentiality. We take very forceful and elaborate steps to maintain the con-

fidentiality. This is not a free-speech issue. It's a copyright issue."

Scientology, which runs a celebrity outreach program and counts among its members John Travolta, Tom Cruise and Lisa Marie Presley-Jackson, offers to help people attain a near-god state through several levels of training sessions. At the upper levels, church doctrine reads like a science fiction plot.

The church believes that 75 million years ago, the leader of the Galactic Federation, Xenü, solved an overpopulation problem by freezing the excess people in a compound of alcohol and glycol and transporting them by spaceship to Teegeeack—which we know as Earth. There they were chained to a volcano and exploded by hydrogen bombs. The souls of those dead—"body thetans"—are the root of most human misery to this day.

Much of Scientology's upper-level training consists of re-creations of that galactic genocide. Welland says most church members pay up to \$20,000 to reach the final stages of the training. Critics estimate the total cost at closer to \$300,000.

It is the texts of those training sessions—known as "Operating Thetan" or "OT" courses—that the church now seeks to keep secret.

In the lawsuit against Lerma, court documents unsealed Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Alexandria contain 30 color photographs showing how Scientology protects its sacred scriptures. Members ready to learn the material obtain magnetized photo ID cards and sign agreements to keep the information confidential. To see the material, they scan their ID cards to walk through two sanitized white doors, and security guards unlock the scriptures from cabinets where they are wired in place. Then guards escort the members to a room where they are locked in and monitored on video cameras.

But despite the church's precautions, the OT documents have been in a public court file for two years, ever since they were submitted in Los Angeles by Steven Fishman, a former Scientologist who was quoted in the Time magazine article in 1991 and subsequently was sued by the church for libel. The suit was dropped last year, but for more than a year, federal court clerks say, eight people have served as a rotating guard, arriving each morning at the L.A. courthouse to check out five volumes of the Fishman case file and keep them all day.

"They get here when the door opens

at 8:30—they come every day, faithfully," says Tyrone Lawson, exhibit custodian for the U.S. District Court clerk's office. "They never miss a day. It's like they don't want anyone to read it."

On Monday, after a Washington Post staffer asked the clerk for the file, one of the men challenged the clerk's right to take it to copy it, according to Joe Nunez, another official in the clerk's office.

"He came at me [saying], 'Oh, do you have the right to take this away?'" Nunez says.

When the Post staffer approached two of the men Tuesday, they would not say for whom they work. "We're just helping out," one said. "It's not public," the other claimed when the staffer asked to look at the file.

Weiland confirms that the people in the clerk's office were Scientology employees. "We took elaborate steps to assure that no one made copies of our copyrighted material," he says. "We actually had people there." Weiland says the only copies ever made from the court file were those made for the Washington Post staffer.

After learning that the Post had received the documents, Scientology lawyers renewed their efforts to seal the file in the Fishman case. Federal Judge Harold Hupp had denied previous Scientology motions to seal the material, but the church won a temporary sealing of the file pending the judge's next decision.

But that may not change anything, says Los Angeles lawyer Graham Berry, who represented Fishman's co-defendant, psychologist Uwe Geertz, in the libel case. "Now that it's all on the Internet, the genie is out of the bottle, and no amount of pushing and shoving by the Church of Scientology will put it back in."

Copyright lawyers say Scientology does not lose its copyright on the sacred texts simply because they are filed in court. "The Church of Scientology is correct," says Ilene Gotts, a partner in the Washington office of Foley and Lardner who specializes in intellectual property law. "The mere fact that you file something in the public domain does not get rid of its copyright protection."

Gotts says any citizen has the right to go to a courthouse and read anything in the files. But making photocopies of copyrighted materials could get you in trouble, as warning signs in many libraries, for example, make clear. And putting those documents on the Internet can further muddy the waters, Gotts says.

"That's something courts grapple

# The Washington Post

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...R SATURDAY, AUGUST 19, 1995 C5

tions for leaders of the OT training sessions. They are written in the dense jargon of the church: "If you do OT IV and he's still in his head, all is not lost, you have other actions you can take. Clusters, Prep-Checks, failed to exteriorise directions."

Scientology's jargon is often similar to the self-actualization lingo used by self-help groups that emerged from California in the 1960s and '70s. Like est and Lifespring, it includes concentration exercises in which trainees sharpen their perceptive abilities by focusing deeply on objects or people around them. In one high-level OT session, trainees are asked to pick an object, "wrap an energy beam around it" and pull themselves toward the object. Another instructs the trainee to "be in the following places—the room, the sky, the moon, the sun."

Many excerpts from Scientology texts have been published in news accounts over the past 20 years. What appears to be new in the Fishman documents is a 1980 "Confidential Student Briefing" on OT-VIII. The church calls the four-page briefing a fake. Purportedly written by Hubbard, who died in 1986, it tells the story of the church founder's "mission here on Earth," and warns that "virtually all religions of any significance on this planet" are designed to "bring about the eventual enslavement of mankind." It also states that "The historic Jesus was not nearly the sainted figure [he] has been made out to be. In addition to being a lover of young boys and men, he was given to uncontrollable bursts of temper and hatred."

Ultimately, the briefing says Hubbard will return to Earth "not as a religious leader but a political one. That happens to be the requisite beingness for the task at hand. I will not be known to most of you, my activities misunderstood by many, yet along with your constant effort in the theta band I will effectively postpone and then halt a series of events designed to make happy slaves of us all."

The text concludes, "L. Ron Hubbard, Founder." But Scientology director Weiland says it is "a complete forgery."

## Genie Out of the Bottle

Forgery or the real thing, the documents are out there. The Internet newsgroups where the Scientology

texts have been posted are among the most popular in cyberspace, and a recent brouhaha over the erasure of Internet messages has drawn new readers.

"I'm a computer scientist, and I knew nothing about Scientology until all this started happening," says Dick Cleek, a professor of geography and computer science at the University of Wisconsin Center in West Bend who believes Scientologists are behind the erasures. "This is about the ability of people to speak out. It's as if every letter you sent saying 'Vote Republican' got removed from the mails. . . ."

"Every time they cancel one message, three more people post the documents," says Cleek, who is also a member of the Ad Hoc Committee Against Internet Censorship, a group of academics, computer users and Scientology critics who want law enforcement authorities to investigate the erased messages. "In the past, the church has harassed individuals who dared to criticize them. Now they've attacked the Internet, and they get people like me involved."

The church says it has never removed any messages from the Internet. "There are thousands of messages there about Scientology," says Weiland. "Those people were critical and obscene and we never did a thing about it."

Weiland says people who post messages about Scientology are "just a bunch of people of low moral standards. They don't have a life. It's really only a handful of people, maybe 15 to 20 guys who just post, post, post, and they just get high on each other's verbiage."

Despite the church's claim to copyright protection of its documents, Scientology will be hard-pressed to eliminate distribution of information already zipping around the world on the computer network, says Gotts. "The beauty and the beast of the Internet is that information gets out immediately," the lawyer says. The church could win every court battle, yet still find its sacred texts flying across phone lines from Bethesda to Beijing.

Which would suit Arnie Lerma just fine. His goal is to dissuade people from joining Scientology by revealing the church's philosophy to be empty and corrupt.

Lerma—who says he left the church

after leaders forced him out of a budding romance with a daughter of the church founder—is an angry and sad man. He says Scientology took advantage of him as a boy of 16, luring him into a life of virtual slavery, housing him in cold dormitories with insufficient food. "They prey on the naive with stars in their eyes. I just wanted to save the world."

Weiland says Lerma left because "Scientology has certain ethical standards. And Arnie Lerma was not able to live up to these standards and therefore decided to leave. There were problems with honesty."

"Ultimately," Weiland says, "his motivation is money." The director adds that Lerma never asked Scientology for money. "Not yet," he says.

Lerma contends he has violated no copyright, and intended only to distribute portions of the court file, "a public court record that I had a public duty to make available to the people because they were keeping it secret."

Arnie Lerma is a man given to causes. For years, he sought solutions through Scientology. More recently, he became intensely active in Ross Perot's abortive presidential campaign. Then he dived into efforts to unmask what he calls Perot's "terrible misdeeds." Now he has turned to Scientology once more.

Or, rather, against it. He says he does not seek revenge, only justice. He says that after he left the church, he went through a post-traumatic stress reaction, then through denial and, finally, a "reawakening."

Lerma lights up another Marlboro. He says he's smoking too much now. Every time the phone rings, he jumps up off the couch. Every time there's a knock at the door, he glances around the room.

Suddenly, he recalls the moment in 1977 when he called his mother in Georgetown and asked her to take him away from Scientology. "I said, 'Mom, I want to come home now and see if I can make life make some sense, because it surely doesn't right now.'"

And now, 18 years later, as Lerma says those words once more, he rolls over on his couch, drops his cigarette, and sobs until he laughs.

*Special correspondent Kathryn Wexler in Los Angeles and staff writer Lan Nguyen in Alexandria contributed to this report.*

with every day," she says. "A short passage for educational purposes is one thing, but if you're talking about 60, 80 pages, that defense is not going to work."

## Clusters and Prep-Checks

If the court clerk's daily visitors made it difficult for citizens to see the public file, some copies of the documents nonetheless got out. Lerma says several former Scientologists passed the copies among themselves and then gave them to him; he then used a scanner to put them onto the Internet. Lerma also put the copies in an envelope and sent them to Richard Leiby, a Washington Post reporter who has written frequently about Scientology.

On the evening after the raid on Lerma's house, church lawyer Helena Kobrin and Scientology executive Warren McShane arrived unannounced at Leiby's home and demanded all copies he might have of the disputed documents.

Weiland says Scientology representatives went to Leiby's home "because Arnie Lerma gave stolen materials to Richard Leiby to hide." Lerma says he sent the papers to the reporter in search of publicity. This week, at Lerma's request, The Post returned the papers.

Meanwhile, the Post staffer in Los Angeles got copies of the documents from the court file.

Most of the 103 pages of disputed texts from the Fishman file are instruc-