

The Heinlein-Hubbard Wager

The most common version of the story goes something like this:

Robert Heinlein and L. Ron Hubbard, two good friends and legendary contributors to the golden age of science fiction, are sitting at a bar/dinner table/convention table and discussing the nature of religion, mass hypnosis, and writers' wages when Hubbard exclaims, "The way to make a million dollars is to start a religion," or "Writing for a penny a word is ridiculous; if a man really wanted to make a million dollars, he would start a religion." --or one of several variations on the same theme.

The legend continues by claiming that Heinlein and Hubbard then entered into a wager to see who could start a religion the fastest and make the most money. Heinlein's entry was the tome, *Stranger in a Strange Land*. The myth was spread and gained popularity for many of the same reasons that all myths persist: it has the potential to be true, and it has a root in fact.

It's an easy story to believe: two men renowned for their outspoken opinions decided to create religions, one of them succeeds with Scientology, and the resultant theology sounds strikingly similar to most of his fiction.

Few people besides Scientologists take Scientology seriously or even consider it a religious faith. For many people, this only further reinforces the idea that Scientology is contrived and has certainly aided in the belief that its genesis was a wager.

Harlan Ellison, another famous science fiction author of the era, has been rumored to be the source of the now-mythical story. The only evidence in favor of the myth was second-hand accounts or different variations of the same story. An associate claimed that another famous

sci-fi writer, named Larry Niven, told her a variation of the myth while at a convention. Another claimed that Ellison had mentioned the same thing in an interview. Others believed the wager was made at a convention in the 50s, but had heard it from someone present, although not engaged in the conversation personally.

But Bill Patterson, Chairman of the Heinlein Society, finally shed light on the subject. His help was instrumental in revealing the simple truth of the matter, that a wager never took place. It never happened, end of story. However, the possibility does exist that a series of conversations between the two authors and commentary made by Heinlein may have been the catalyst for Hubbard's authorship of Dianetics. Heinlein and Hubbard were close friends, and Hubbard greatly respected Heinlein, his opinions, and his ideas.