

Tom's aliens target City's 'planetary rulers'

David Miscavige's hateful rant against psychiatrists at the 2006 event for the International Association of Scientologists. Evening Standard writer David Cohen comments on hypnotic aspects of the event.

Source: Martin Poulter's UK Media Archive

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by DAVID COHEN

[...]

To learn more about this mysterious organisation, I decide to join the devotees flocking on Friday evening to the 22nd anniversary of the International Association of Scientologists in the West Sussex countryside.

Here at Saint Hill, a Jacobean castle set on verdant lawns and formerly home to the group's founder, L. Ron Hubbard, who died in 1986, staff members dress in sailor suits and apparently work in total silence. I catch their free coach laid on from their old London base, on Tottenham Court Road, and 90 minutes later find myself being corralled into a giant white marquee the size of a football stadium.

Tom Cruise is there, or so I'm repeatedly told, among the sea of approximately 6,000 faces of all ages and nationalities. I expect the evening to have something a spiritual dimension - after all, Scientology calls itself a religion - but what happens next is truly eye-opening.

Up front, David Miscavige is dramatically - and somewhat bizarrely - attacking psychiatrists, his words backed by clips from a Scientology-produced DVD are broadcast on four giant high- definition TV screens and sensationally called: Psychiatry - an industry of death."

"A woman is safer in a park at midnight than on a psychiatrist's couch," booms Miscavige, backed by savage graphics of psychiatrists - or "psychs" as he calls them - being machine-gunned out of existence. Tom Cruise once publicly criticised a postnatally-depressed Brooke Shields for taking antidepressants, for which he later apologised, but I am now witnessing the raw dogma that lies behind his outburst. As Miscavige begins to crescendo "our next step is eradicating psychiatry from this planet, we will triumph!" the audience rise as one, wildly clapping and cheering.

I look around, half expecting people to be rolling their eyes at this ridiculous, over-the-top message, but instead they're staring at the screens with a rapturous gaze, almost as if they are hypnotised. A few minutes later, Miscavige crescendos again, and, on cue, the audience rise to hail the chief.

Occasionally, they shout: "To LRH", toasting the American science-fiction author who 54 years ago published a self-help philosophy called "dianetics" and kick-started a religion.

I feel as if I have been parachuted into a tent inhabited by 6,000 aliens. God help anyone in the audience who happens to be a psychiatrist! For three hours, a succession of speakers - all with the same automaton-like delivery - assail the audience with the "unprecedented worldwide achievements" of Scientology's anti-drugs and anti-recidivist outreach programmes, Narconon and Criminon, portraying themselves as a vigilante force spreading peace to mankind.

I suddenly grasp why Germany has taken such a hard line against Scientologists, virtually hounding them out of the country. Such gatherings must feel too close to home, uncomfortably reminding them of Nazis rallies at Nuremberg. Later, over refreshments in another giant marquee, I try to understand the appeal of Scientology to its adherents.

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