



MARK BARBER
**URBAN
LEGENDS**

AN INVESTIGATION INTO **THE TRUTH**
BEHIND THE MYTHS

URBAN LEGENDS UNCOVERED

Copyright © Mark Barber, 2007

All rights reserved.

The right of Mark Barber to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Condition of Sale

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent publisher.

Summersdale Publishers Ltd
46 West Street
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 1RP
UK

www.summersdale.com

Printed and bound in Great Britain

ISBN: 1-84024-554-9

ISBN 13: 978-1-84024-554-7

Disclaimer

This book contains a collection of urban legends (also known as urban myths or modern folklore) and although it sometimes contains the names of real individuals and companies, and other points of reference that may be also be factual, they have only been used to give an accurate representation of the oral and/or printed versions of the urban legend in question. The editor and publisher hereby note that the legends have at some point been expressed in the public domain, and such legends are reproduced herein for entertainment purposes only and are not intended to be taken literally.

Acknowledgements

This project has taken four years to complete, and would not have been possible without the help, support and patience of the following people:

Joanna, my parents, Jayne, Whizz, Nan, Jennifer Barclay (for making this possible), Prof. Jan Harold Brunvand, Pep, Patrick Arink (broodjeaap.nl), Sofia Knapp (Valmyndigheten), Maud Gehrman, NG Dave, David Adams and the rest of my friends and family – you know who you are!

This book is dedicated to...

Holly and Harry

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION..... 13

CLASSIC HORROR..... 19

BACK-SEAT HITCH-HIKER	HR4701
THE HOOK	HR4702
KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK	HR4703
THE VANISHING HITCH-HIKER	HR4704
BLOODY MARY	HR4705
THE ROOMMATE'S DEATH	HR4706
LIGHTS OUT	HR4707

COMIC RELIEF..... 42

FART IN THE DARK	CM1601
THE COLLEGE LETTER	CM1602
THE PARISIAN BELLBOY	CM1603
STAND-OFF AT SEA	CM1604
THE CAT FLAP	CM1605
THE BISCUIT BULLET	CM1606
THE BRICKLAYER	CM1607
THE NAKED SKIER	CM1608
TAKE THE TUBE	CM1609
THE UNZIPPED FLY	CM1610

CRIME..... 66

THE STING	CR1701
THE BODY IN THE BED	CR1702
GRANDMA	CR1703
THE TELEPHONE SCAM	CR1704
THE SLASHER UNDER THE CAR	CR1705
THE SUPERMARKET SCAM	CR1706

INFECTED NEEDLES	CRI707
THE KIDNEY HEIST	CRI708
RAZOR BLADES IN WATER SLIDES	CRI709
AIDS MARY	CRI710

ANIMALS AND PESTS.....92

THE HOUSE PLANT GUESTS	ANI601
THE SURREY PUMA	ANI602
COCKROACHES ON THE TONGUE	ANI603
THE LOG FLUME HORROR	ANI604
THE IMPORTED SNAKE	ANI605
THE DEAD CAT PACKAGE	ANI606
ALLIGATORS IN THE SEWERS	ANI607
KASPAR, THE WOODEN CAT	ANI608

HORROR – MORE TALES FROM THE VAULT.... 118

THE DEAD PROFESSOR	HO4601
THE MIDNIGHT SCREAM	HO4602
THE LICKED HAND	HO4603
BURIED ALIVE!	HO4605
FLESH FOR SALE	HO4606
THE HAIRY-ARMED HITCH-HIKER	HO4607
THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT	HO4608
THE HALLOWEEN HORROR PREDICTION	HO4609
TRICKS IN TREATS	HO4610

TRAINS, PLANES AND AUTOMOBILES..... 145

MOBILE PHONES AT PETROL STATIONS	TR8701
GHOSTLY HANDPRINTS	TR8702
THE CHICKEN GUN	TR8703
THE ROAD HOG	TR8704
BATTLE OF THE AGES	TR8705
MR GAY	TR8706

THE LOCKED-OUT PILOT	TR8707
THE DEATH CAR	TR8708
THE BEDBUG LETTER	TR8709
LIFE IS CHEAP	TR8710
THE JATO ROCKET CAR	TR8711
THE CLEVER MOTORIST	TR8712
THE WOODEN AIRFIELD	TR8714

FOOD AND DRINK.....180

KENTUCKY FRIED RAT	FD3301
AMERICAN SOUP	FD3302
BAR PEENUTS	FD3303
NEIMAN MARCUS COOKIES	FD3304
DON'T SWALLOW YOUR GUM	FD3305
COKECAINE	FD3306
SANTA COKE	FD3307
CARROT VISION	FD3308

AROUND THE WORLD.....204

THE GUCCI KANGAROO	AW1901
FLATJACK	AW1902
HONEYMOON HORROR	AW1903
FLYING COWS	AW1904
SOUNDS LIKE ENEMY WHALES	AW1905
VOTE DONALD DUCK!	AW1906
THE ITALIAN JOB	AW1907
THE BEAST OF BELGIUM	AW1908
CLEANING UP WITH TOOTHPASTE	AW1909
HOME IS WHERE THE AIRPORT IS	AW1910
TWO-FINGER SALUTE	AW1911

NETLORE.....234

GOOD TIMES VIRUS	NL6501
BUDWEISER FROGS SCREENSAVER	NL6502
RACIST WORD	NL6503
THE BROKEN CUP-HOLDER	NL6504
CRAIG SHERGOLD	NL6505
INTERNET CLEAN-UP DAY	NL6506
AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE	NL6507
FOREIGN SIGNS	NL6508

9/11.....263

BERT IS EVIL	WT9801
WINGDINGS CONSPIRACY	WT9802
THE NOSTRADAMUS PREDICTIONS	WT9803
THE STARBUCKS OUTRAGE	WT9804
THE \$20 PREDICTION	WT9805
IT'S A LOTTERY	WT9806
PENTAGON ATTACK	WT9807
THE BIRMINGHAM WARNING	WT9808
THE COKE WARNING	WT9809
JACKIE CHAN'S LUCKY ESCAPE	WT9810
THE DEVIL'S FACE IN THE SMOKE	WT9811

PARODIES.....297

BIN LADEN'S MEMO	PD7301
THE LIVERPOOL WARNING	PD7302
BODY PARTS	PD7303
THE UL OF ULs	PD7304

CONCLUSION.....309

BUZZWORDS AND JARGON.....313

USEFUL RESOURCES.....315

www.project2067.com



INTRODUCTION

When I was about 14, my friend David Adams related an incident that had happened to his father. He had bought a KFC bucket before entering the cinema to watch a film. As the lights dimmed, he took out a piece of chicken and bit into it. Immediately, something oozed down his chin. He ran into the Gents and looked in the mirror, seeing blood running from his mouth. When he inspected the 'chicken' he was eating, he realised it was a battered rat! I couldn't believe it when I read Alex Garland's *The Beach*, where the main character describes the existence of the beach as a 'Kentucky Fried Rat story', meaning it was an urban legend, and then proceeds to tell a story similar to the one told to me by my friend David. I was amazed, as I always believed this had really happened to my friend's father. When I searched the Internet, I found out that it was a story that was told all over the world. From that moment on I was fascinated by urban legends.

Urban legends (ULs) are tales of modern folklore that can be passed on through traditional methods such as word of mouth or by modern methods such as e-mail, faxes, and the Internet. It is not known how the term 'urban legend' was coined, but folklorists have been collecting and studying them for over fifty years. Variations of the same UL can be heard in many different countries, spontaneously spreading like a virus and often

Urban Legends Uncovered

adapting themselves to the environment they are told in, with details being localised by the storyteller. ULs often play on the fears, beliefs and anxieties of a particular period or moment in time, and over the years the legends adjust to reflect the themes of the new era and make them more believable. For example, The Vanishing Hitch-hiker (file HR4704 on the website that accompanies this book) is a classic and one of the oldest ULs. In the story, the mode of transport has changed over the years to adapt with the times; from horseback and horse and chariot in the early legends, to the horse and wagon, and eventually to a car in modern versions. If the modern story stuck to the horse and wagon as the mode of transport it simply would not be relevant enough to sustain interest in this day and age.

Because ULs are frequently a sign of the times, they often contain morals or lessons that are embedded within the tale. It may be possible to use the influence of ULs as a manipulation and propaganda tool for political motives, a clever marketing ploy or for more sinister gains. This is an area that I hope to tap into and in which to uncover some truths.

What intrigues me most is how and where the legends originate from, and how they are spread. These are the questions that will be at the heart of my investigation.

The answers to these questions are not as straightforward as you may think, since the teller normally believes the legend to be totally true. The teller will probably say that he/she has heard the story from someone they know (i.e. a friend or relative), and if you asked the friend/relative about the story, they would probably tell you it has actually happened to someone they know. The same pattern will repeat itself again and again, leading to a dead end at every turn and the investigator around the bend. When my friend David recently asked his father about the Kentucky Fried Rat story, his father told him that it had actually happened to an old work colleague of his that he is no longer in contact with. I am sure that if I managed to contact

this man, he would tell me that it had actually happened to a friend or relative of his, and so it would go on. It is this complicated network of connections that led the author Rodney Dale to coin the term 'a friend of a friend' (FOAF) in his book *The Tumour in the Whale*.

Tracing the origins of the legends can therefore be a frustrating business, even more so because the legends have a habit of mutating over the years, and so may have originally recounted a totally different set of events to which they do now. Not all ULs are an impressive work of fiction; some are true and others contain an element of truth. Sometimes the border between fiction and reality is blurred so much it is impossible to tell one from the other. As they (don't ask me who) say, the truth can be stranger than fiction.

This brings me nicely to the hotly-debated question 'How can a UL be true if it is just a legend?' There are convincing opinions on both sides of this argument but I believe that ULs are a unique class of legend which must not be confused with 'ordinary' (and overtly fictional) legends. Whether the tale is true or not has no relevance to its classification as a UL. The main difference between ordinary legends and ULs is the method and speed at which a UL circulates to a wide audience, being told and retold, often with small variations (such as being localised) as it is passed from one person to another like in the game Chinese Whispers.

In my investigation I have only identified a UL to be true if I believe that the origin can clearly be defined and there is enough evidence based on my research to support this. If the legend's origins cannot be clearly defined and there is not enough evidence to say if the UL is either true or false, I have given a verdict of 'Undecided'. Where possible I have clearly stated the origins of the legend. A false verdict is only given when there is enough evidence to suggest that the UL cannot possibly be true.

ULs can cover every subject imaginable and, like jokes, seem to arrive on the scene immediately after an important event has happened. Moreover, ULs are thriving with the use of modern

Urban Legends Uncovered

technology. The spread of the legends, which used to be reliant on the word of mouth method, has now accelerated thanks to faxes, e-mail and the Internet. This gives the legends an instant global audience. The flip side is that the new technology is very vulnerable to hoaxes. ULs in particular have fed on the fear of computer viruses, spreading worldwide panic over something that is nothing more than a joke.

If you thought this was going to be a nice bedtime story you could read while sipping your hot cocoa in bed, you are in for a shock. Wake up and smell the coffee. You are now part of this investigation. So, sharpen your mind and be prepared to think.

This is how it will work. The ULs are split up into different categories, which I have chosen from across a wide spectrum to give an insight into the fascinating and varied world of ULs. These are the ULs that have made me sit up and take notice and which I think best represent their particular category. Each UL investigation will contain at least one version of the story. The ULs have been gathered from a wide range of sources over the last four years including books, the Internet, newspaper cuttings, and straight out of my inbox from e-mails that I have received.

The journey starts with the Classic Horror category. You will recognise many of these ULs and they will probably feature in your DVD collection (unless your collection consists solely of Disney films), as they are the staple diet of any respectable slasher/horror Hollywood movie (and some not so respectable). Such films include the *Scream* series, the *Urban Legend* films and *Candyman*, to name just a few.

Other categories under the spotlight include Crime, Animals and Pests, Comic Relief, Food and Drink, and Around the World. I also look at the UL phenomenon of Netlore. This category has special relevance to this investigation as it demonstrates the fusion of ULs and the Internet, providing an unsettling look at how reputations can be destroyed or tainted, and how businesses and governments can be manipulated and brought to

Introduction

their knees with one click of a mouse button. Not only is this the age of information, it is also the age of misinformation.

Another vital but controversial category is 9/11. In these times of uncertainty and paranoia, ULs are used as a balancing force to try and make sense of an inconceivable situation. More disturbingly, they can be used as propaganda either to justify acts in the war against terror or as a smokescreen designed to cause confusion and blur the lines between fact and fiction.

www.project2067.com is the official website for this book and has been created to give you a more interactive experience, containing selected ULs from this book as well as a Special Features section where you will find additional ULs. Each UL in this book has been assigned a unique code, which can be used as a shortcut to access that particular UL on the website. There you will find further information on these ULs, such as different versions of the story, different endings, and different theories about the tale's origin. Not only will you be able to send in your own findings, arguments and opinions, you will also be able to view what other readers have sent in.

Do you know a different version, and where and when did you first hear it? More importantly, do you know any arguments on the origins and theories behind the ULs? Do you know if they are true or false, and if they are false, why were they started and how? With your help, I will uncover the shroud of mystery that surrounds the purpose and origins of these legends.

Now, I know what you are thinking. Why should you bother to help me? Well, if you had no knowledge of ULs beforehand, I am sure you will become as intrigued by the subject as I was when I first came across them, so jump on board for the journey and I will take you to some interesting and far out places en route. Let's go 'smoke' some urban legends.

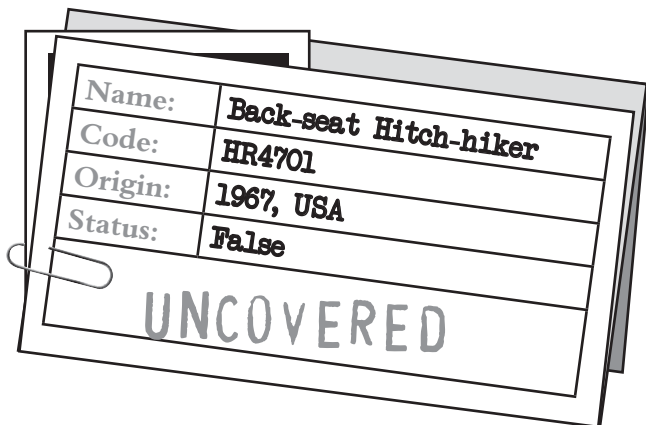


CATEGORY: CLASSIC HORROR

I consider this category the bread and butter of ULs. These tales offer horror in its simplest and purest form, delivered straight to the heart like an adrenalin rush. They form the backbone to most modern horror stories, and today's slasher/horror films are heavily dependent on and influenced by these gruesome tales. They survive the hands of time for one simple reason; they make good storytelling. A cub scout campfire would be meaningless without at least one of these ULs being told while heating marshmallows over the open flames. Then after the campfire, in the tent with your friends, huddled into your sleeping bag once the darkness of night has settled in, you lay awake, replaying the stories like an old B-movie in your mind. Dark shadows slipping over the tent, the hoot of an owl followed by scuffling noises from the nearby wood... Are those footsteps you can hear? Is that a hook you can make out from the shadows crawling across the canopy?

After reading the Bloody Mary story I dare you (no, no – I double-dare you) to say the name five times while looking in a mirror. You know the story isn't true, but bogeymen do exist, and are lurking somewhere in the back of your mind. ULs tap into this basic fear and exploit it, and that is what makes them so effective.

So without further delay, let's move on. Best not be late, for you have a date with the bogeyman...



The Legend: Version 1

As a girl is driving back home along a dark country lane after a night out with the girls in Bracknell, Berkshire (England), she comes across a dog lying in the middle of the road. Being an animal lover, she immediately stops and dashes over to the dog to see if it is dead or just injured. Whilst approaching the dog, the headlights of a car appear in the distance behind her. After a quick examination of the creature she realises it is dead and moves the body to the side of the road.

By now the other car is near, so she rushes back to her car and pulls away swiftly. As soon as she does this, the car behind accelerates so that it is right up behind her. The girl looks in her rear-view mirror to see the male driver making hand gestures of some kind at her. He then starts beeping his horn and continuously flashing his lights. By now the girl is petrified and accelerates even more to try and shake off the nutter. The pursuer keeps up, still flashing his lights and beeping his horn.

This pursuit carries on for another couple of miles before the girl finally reaches home, and speedily pulls up onto her drive. She immediately rushes into her house; double-locks the door