



Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid: The Book of Scary Urban Legends

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Urban legends are those strange, but seemingly credible tales that always happen to a friend of a friend. For the first time, Professor Jan Harold Brunvand, "who has achieved almost legendary status" (*Choice*), has collected the creepiest, most terrifying urban legends, many that have spooked you since your childhood and others that you believe really did occur—even if it was one town over to some poor hapless coed who left a party early only to be followed by a man who just got loose from a mental hospital. From the classic hook-man story told around many a campfire to "Saved by a Cell Phone," these spine-tingling urban legends will give you goose bumps, even when you know they can't be true. Still, you'll continue to check the backseat of your car at gas stations and look under your bed at night before praying for sleep.

Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid: The Book of Scary Urban Legends Details

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Susan Haines says

I have read all of Brunvand's other books so was excited to see one I hadn't read before. Unfortunately, this one just seems to be stories taken from the others and put into a differently-organized collection. (Sort of like buying the greatest hits album of a group whose other albums you already have.)

Charley Meredew says

Ahhhh I can't express how much I loved this book ! I think it is a definite must have for horror fans which I myself definitely am sooo it was right up my street and I shall definitely be re-reading this book in the near future :D ...

I love hearing all the different versions of creepy stories that I over the years have told to try and scare people and also finding out the origins of them . I was amazed at just how many years ago Urban Legends started and how different the same stories have become ! Anyway don't listen any longer go pick this up however if you scare easy I wouldn't recommend it some of the stories are pretty creepy *insert creepy laugh here*

Natalie Pietro says

Being a fan of short stories and horror I knew this book had to be a winner. The stories were good and some scary but most I have heard before. Seeing that most of them were Urban Legends you knew they had to be untrue. I heard them before around the campfire and this just put a damper on this book.

Its a quick fun read for the young teen at a slumber party or camping around a fire but for adults it might seem a little weak and nonscary.

I did however like that each chapter was a collection of stories about one subject. Like bugs, animals, hitchhickers, and much much more. Some stuff is to grose to even read like the bugs and rats and icky stuff like that. So all of the book was not all that bad. Some were great and so short you could remember them and scary your friends one late night in the dark.

So dont pass this book up. Its a fun quick read that every generation will love.

Scott says

As a huge fan of both urban legends and Prof Jan Brunvand, I was looking forward to reading this collection. Organized deftly (as all of his works are), Brunvand collects most of the 'horror' urban legends, some dating back to the 1800s, some currently circulating through inboxes. Each chapter is basically an 'organizing principle' of sorts, providing an umbrella to group the stories together. He introduces each chapter with some analysis, but then jumps right into giving as many variants of the stories as he can. Also intriguing is that he chooses to retell them exactly as he heard them, rather than retelling them in his own words.

This is a great collection of stories, but I miss his analysis that is found in his other works. While each 'genre' of horror stories offers some analysis, the analysis of individual legends is left to a paragraph or less, most just identifying the source of each variant.

Nevertheless, its a great read, and a fast one (I read the entire thing in less than five hours)

Max Rudd says

And enjoyable read and plenty of material in here to pull apart for future horror ideas.

Zoe Vertefeuille says

I thought that this book was really good, I did enjoy the way the author wrote the stories because he wrote them in a style that I was not familiar with. The author made the stories not childish and he really brought out the horror in each story to really make them engaging. The author also told the story from many different points of view to see where relatively the same story may have been told differently or the stories ending may have been changed slightly. It was an interesting book that I would highly recommend to anyone in need of a good scare.

innae says

I was surprised to find that ULs have been around since the 1800's -- some of them that we hear now have roots back 200 years (or more!!) -- This is True!!

I had heard many many of these stories before, I was interested in the foreign tales though -- fascinating that they are so very similar to the ones I have heard (the rat dog for instance, which I have always heard the couple found a "dog" in Mexico -- a German tale has the couple find the "dog" in Thailand.)

A fun read, though not really very scary...I guess unless you believe the Urban Legends are more real than legend.

Jennifer Hughes says

If you enjoy urban legends or scary stories, this book is definitely worth your time. Why do we tell and re-tell these stories to each other? The psychology of it is a fascinating thing to ponder.

Brunvand has been collecting ULs for a long time, and he is careful to act simply as a scribe or historian so as to not insert himself into the retelling. Because of that, the presentation is a little odd for a book of campfire stories because it consists of transcriptions of actual people's versions, so the spooky details and suspense are fairly eliminated. But the material is great if you can use it as a base and then weave a story around it. Actually, that's even better, since that's exactly what folklore and urban legends do.

I enjoyed reading different versions of stories we told as kids (the stranded teenage couple, the guy with a hook scratching on the window after killing the boy) as well as some of the e-mails of recent years (the guy who slashes people's ankles while lying under their car). Don't think less of me if I admit that I was a little reassured that a few of the stories "you hear from a friend" are just urban legends!

Wren [t(he)y] says

This review can also be found at :

<http://fortheloveofbooksreviews.blogs...>

This book is a compilation of urban legends both new and old. It contains multiple versions of many urban legends and compares older stories with their modern incarnations.

From the classic scary story 'Bloody Mary' to chain emails warning of the newest dangers, this book is sure to have something for everyone.

I found myself revisiting many of the scary stories I had shared with my friends as a child as I read this book, and I appreciated that the author included the sources of the stories and that he compared and contrasted different retellings.

Amongst these older and more familiar urban legends were newer ones, stories that I hadn't heard before. I was disturbed by many of them; rats disguised as dogs, venomous snakes hiding inside bed sheets and children's clothing. I enjoy being unnerved and as a result this book was perfect for me.

Deliciously disturbing and perfectly eerie, this compilation of urban legends is not for the faint of heart or the easily upset. I'd like to mention that it contains stories which include emotional deaths and child neglect. As these are themes which some may be sensitive to I feel it is an important courtesy to give potential readers a heads up

I recommend this book to those who love creepy stories and urban legends, and to those interested in learning about different versions of popular and sinister stories. If you love horror-esque tales, this is definitely for you.

Remo says

Como bien saben nuestros lectores, las leyendas urbanas nos parecen muy interesantes en CPI. Desde aquel maravilloso episodio de autoengaño colectivo que sufrimos en España con lo de la niña y la mermelada y el perro y Ricky Martin, mucha más gente tuvo la oportunidad de acercarse a lo que significa una leyenda urbana. ¿Quién no ha oído hablar de la historia de la autoestopista que al llegar a un curva dice “cuidado con esta curva porque aquí me maté yo” y va y desaparece? Hay miles de historias que todos hemos oído contar y que muchas veces nos las cuenta alguien que de verdad se cree que ha pasado (me remito a Ricky Martin. A mí hubo gente que me contó la historia jurándome que la había visto con sus propios ojos, cosa que,

obviamente, era imposible, pues no ocurrió). Hablando de esta leyenda de la mermelada (otros dicen que Nocilla), debe saberse que varios años antes la leyenda ya corrió por los USA, en un programa similar al Sorpresa, Sorpresa, sustituyendo el condimento por mantequilla de cacahuete. No hay nada nuevo bajo el sol.

Bueno, pues este libro habla de este tipo de historias, pero centrándose en las más terroríficas y *gore*. Muchas ya las he oído o leído.

Lo bueno de estos libros no son las leyendas urbanas en sí, sino el análisis y la comparativa que hace el recopilador sobre ellas. Que si la historia de la canguro que no vigila bien a los niños ya existía en 1920, que si esta otra deriva claramente de una leyenda medieval que sustituye un coche de caballos por un deportivo biplaza... Los libros de leyendas urbanas suelen sacarle a uno bastantes creencias de la cabeza y demuestran lo poco originales que son los correos en cadena que dicen que Microsoft donará 7 céntimos a un niño sordomudomancociego de Osetia del Norte por cada vez que reenvíes el mensaje.

En este libro se echa de menos el análisis del *folclorista* o recopilador de las leyendas. Hace muy breves comentarios al principio de cada capítulo, diciendo cómo las leyendas llegaron hasta él, y poco más. Nos deja con ganas de saber más cosas. Además, a veces nos clava completas varias versiones de página y pico de la misma leyenda, en vez de poner una versión y sintetizar las diferencias de las demás. Me gustaron mucho más los libros de leyendas urbanas de Antonio Ortí y Josep Sempere, "Leyendas urbanas en España", o uno de este mismo autor, más detallado, "El fabuloso libro de las leyendas urbanas". Como lectura es entretenido, pero poco más. Los hay mejores, lo garantizo.

Mi nota: *Discretito*.

Michael says

In 1981, professional folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand compiled *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, a 20th century look at the tales and oral traditions passed along by tellers convinced they actually happened to somebody, just never someone that anyone can actually identify by name. There's even an acronym for these types of tales now: FOAF, or Friend of a Friend, because the incident never happened to the person telling the story, and it didn't happen to anyone they actually knew, they were told about it by a friend because it happened to a friend of one of their friends.

In other words, FOAF is just another term for 'bullshit'.

What's amazing about these tales is not only their iron-clad resistance to being debunked, but also their ability to roam across the country from one township to the next, crossing fields, mountains, valleys, even oceans and continents. These FOAF-tales, like some demented orally-transmitted incarnation of Jason

Voorhees, stalk campfire tales and gatherings of friends, office buildings and shopping malls, backyard barbecues and e-mail messages. Chances are you've been infected by one or two yourself, and you probably didn't even realize it. I mean, everybody knows somebody who told them about the hook-handed killer stalking lover's lane. They made a movie about it in 2000, after all.

The iconic story of the babysitter who keeps receiving creepy phone calls asking her if she's checked on the children lately has to be true, right? They made a movie out of it in 1979. And a sequel in 1993. And a reboot in 2006!

How about those thieves who go around harvesting kidneys and other body parts for the black market?

The story of "Bloody Mary" has been adapted to the screen so many times, both for film and TV, that you'd be harder-pressed to find someone in North America who *didn't* know what happens if you stared into your bathroom mirror with the lights out and say her name three (or was that five, or ten, or fifty?) times. And let's not even get into the film *Urban Legend*, which uses everything from "The Killer in the Back Seat" and "The Roommate's Death" to "The Boyfriend's Death" and what happens if you eat Pop Rocks and chug a Coke to startle the audience and slaughter its college kid cast. These are stories so ubiquitous and well-known that chances are good you could repeat them, or at least compose your own extemporaneous versions, the minute anyone asked.

The kicker is, they're all *stories*. While some of them may have a kernel of truth, the fictional tale spun by people desperate to shock, delight, or scare audiences usually bears little resemblance to the facts when subject to a firm dissection. That's what Brunvand does here with *Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid*.

Without Brunvand's scholarship, this is just a loose collection of spooky stories to recite at the next sleepover. But rather than stripping these stories of their power, Brunvand's goal is to enhance the fun for everyone by showing how these stories evolve and change over time, passing from person to person, culture to culture, decade to decade, even century to century. If you like a healthy dose of humor and scholarship to go with your tales of mayhem and destruction, *Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid* is an inexpensive and fun way to explore the world of urban legends from the safety of your own bedroom.

Of course, even your own bedroom isn't truly free of danger. After all, you remember what happened to that girl when the black widow spider wound up in her pillowcase, don't you?

Four stifled yelps of amusement and fear out of five.

Best Scene:

Well, it's a book of folklore so you can't exactly pull a 'best scene' out of it, but of all the tales presented in it, here's one I find the most hilariously awful even now, some twenty-five years after I first encountered it:

An older couple took a long-anticipated trip to Costa Rica, and when they arrived they found to their dismay their luggage had been stolen. The thieves had spared nothing except the couple's toilet articles and their camera case. It was assumed that the thieves didn't want the couple's personal toilet items, and authorities speculated that in their haste and loaded down with other luggage the miscreants simply were unable to manage the camera equipment.

Well, the couple were determined not to let the incident ruin their vacation. They bought some new clothes and in fact had quite an enjoyable two weeks. They took a lot of pictures.

Upon returning home they promptly had their film developed so they could share the experience with their friends. Having shot color slides, they quickly loaded them into a Carousel projector and began showing them to their kids. Halfway through the presentation they ran across a slide they didn't take. It must, in fact, have been taken by the thieves who stole their luggage.

It was a close-up picture of the couple's toothbrushes sticking out of two large hairy butts.

Now try to enjoy your next international vacation. Remember, it's only a story. ;)

Kylie says

I've always been fascinated by Urban Legends, particularly the more gruesome and supernatural ones, and this book was a really enjoyable collection of some of the most well known and a few I'd never heard of. Brunvand often collects a few variations together so you can see the evolution these things take via word of mouth and time. This is not a resource that takes time to debunk them or discuss them in any greater academic way and so is a good book for all ages who happen to be interested in ULs for whatever reason.

Heather says

I started this book years ago - when I'd first bought it. However, things came up and it ended up getting set aside, so I didn't finish it until this past weekend, when I was looking for something to read and... there it was, on my bookshelf, with a bookmark tucked into the pages.

In any case, it's a pretty easy and entertaining read. All the urban legends you've heard - and some that you may never have heard - are scattered through the pages. There are also explanations about... just where do people get these ideas? In addition to being entertaining, because of the stories themselves, it's also pretty interesting. All in all, I'm glad that I picked it up. Not only is it a good reference for things like... yeah, there are no spiders that lurk under toilet seats, just waiting to pounce on the unwary - but it gives me ideas for my own writing - both plot ideas and cultural ideas (for world building, because... even a madeup culture should have urban legends, right?)

Rebecca McNutt says

All these little stories were kind of funny, but nothing we all haven't heard before. Everyone has heard at least one of these stories, by word-of-mouth or in books like Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark. I honestly didn't find anything new or worthwhile in this book, it was the typical stories like the "hook on the car door" story and the "escaped mental patient" story, stories better heard from somebody standing at an open campfire at night, than out of a collected short novel.

Joseph F. says

Fun book that catalogs many of the more popular urban legends of the grisly kind.

The author gives them to us as they were recorded. He particularly does not edit those transmitted via email.

The stories vary in intensity: from okay to a few that really gave me the creeps.

The tales are mainly short and to the point, although there are some versions that have a literary flourish.

Sometimes the legends droned on a bit, without any one really jumping out at me, until finally I found one I really liked. This perhaps is a book that you would pick up periodically for a tasty morsel of a story rather than read from cover to cover. Other than that I really don't have much to complain about.

So sit back and read how a rat was mistaken for a dog, or how someone had such a stiff beehive hairdo that it attracted spiders to build a nest, or how a woman escaped the clutches of an axe murderer hiding in the back seat of her car!
