

Urban Legends

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- About the Book

URBAN LEGENDS:

Strange Stories Behind Modern Myths

by A.S. Mott

Published by Ghost House Books,

an imprint of Lone Pine Publishing

In this new collection, A.S. Mott explores the true stories behind many classic urban legends, showing how strange coincidences and popular misconceptions about fast food, celebrities and science can become accepted wisdom in our increasingly paranoid society.

URBAN LEGENDS is the latest missive from Ghost House Books, an imprint of Lone Pine Publishing devoted to the strange, the unusual, the bizarre, and the downright scary. For each of the 48 tall tales, storyteller and film buff A.S. Mott attempts to track the legend to its source and determine whether or not it is based on fact. Along the way, he comments on the variations of each legend, how the legend has migrated into popular culture, and what lessons each legend may contain.

URBAN LEGENDS are today's modern myths. Each legend says something about us because they exploit our fears, express our prejudices, and are used not only to entertain but to teach lessons, advance political agendas, or even boost business. For example, many of the legends in this book demonstrate a fear of foreigners and have been used to discredit foreign-made products such as food and cars.

Some of the fascinating and frightening legends included in this book:

- A fastidious woman complains when her chicken burger comes up with mayo, only to discover that the mystery substance isn't mayonnaise...

- Eager for a photo op, witless parents encourage their child to approach an innocent-looking bear with a jar of honey...

- A bride, obsessed with looking good for her wedding, cooks her insides by dieting and tanning to extremes...

- Japanese fishermen are shocked beyond words when a dairy cow plummets from the sky and crashes through their boat, sinking her...

- A cheapskate bargain-hunter gets her comeuppance by way of a lethal snake in the sleeve of a discounted blouse...

- After a baffled California man is sent an incorrect vanity license plate, police write him nearly 2500 traffic tickets...

- And much more!

URBAN LEGENDS will keep you and your friends spellbound for hours. Like all Ghost House Books, the stories make for entertaining parties or gatherings around the campfire. The book will help you learn the patterns of true or false legends, so you can easily spot a fake or test your friends' knowledge of modern folklore.

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- Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

How well do you know your urban legends? Thanks to the Internet, legends that used to take years to develop now grow faster than Jack's beanstalk. You've heard the one about the adulterous businessman who woke up in his hotel room minus one kidney, but how strong is your BS detector for other urban legends?

The following quiz is based on the new book, URBAN LEGENDS: Strange Stories Behind Modern Myths, by film buff and storyteller, A.S. Mott. It's the latest missive of misery from Ghost House Books, an imprint of Lone Pine Publishing. Can you tell which legend is fact

and which is fake?

The answers follow the quiz -- but no peeking! Good Luck!

The Urban Legends Quiz
by A.S. Mott

- Mama Cass Elliott died from choking on a ham sandwich.

- In 1987, two men living in California found a human finger in a can of menudo (a food made from beef tripe).

- When a brewing tank ruptured in Boston, a slow flood of molasses caused the deaths of more than 20 people.

- A 12-foot alligator was found living in the sewers of Manhattan.

- A nervous golfer chewing on a wooden tee died from ingesting the toxic chemicals used by the golf club to maintain the course.

- A fired employee trying to commit suicide by jumping out of a window landed on and killed the boss who had just fired him.

- Opera singer Maria Callas intentionally swallowed a tape worm in an attempt to control her weight.

- Thomas Edison, an opponent of capital punishment, aided the development of the electric chair in a misguided effort to discredit rival George Westinghouse.

- A girl babysitting on Thanksgiving killed the child she was caring for by accidentally putting the baby in the oven instead of the turkey.

- A high school student was killed on prom night by a black widow spider

hiding in her elaborate hairdo.

Answers to The Quiz

- Mama Cass Elliott died from choking on a ham sandwich.

- FALSE. There was a partially-eaten sandwich on Mama Cass's nightstand when she died, but she died of heart failure, not choking. Urban legends often target celebrities. This is one of many celebrity legends covered in the book.

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In 1987, two men living in California found a human finger in a can of menudo (a food made from beef tripe).

FALSE. This widely-reported legend, like many others covered in the book, was based on a true incident. The men found what they thought was a finger, but further analysis proved it was a piece of connective tissue commonly found in tripe. This is one of the many food-related urban legends covered in the book.

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When a brewing tank ruptured in Boston, a slow flood of molasses caused the deaths of more than 20 people.

TRUE. On January 15, 1919, over 2 million gallons of molasses spilled from a ruptured tank, unleashing a 30-foot-tall tidal wave of black goo into Boston's north end, killing 21 people and injuring another 150.

-
A 12-foot alligator was found living in the sewers of Manhattan.

FALSE. No alligators large enough to seriously harm a human have ever been found in the sewers of New York. It is too cold for alligators to survive the winter down there. This is one of several urban legends discussed in the book where nature retaliates against the human race.

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A nervous golfer chewing on a wooden tee died from ingesting the toxic chemicals used by the golf club to maintain the course.

TRUE. In 1982, U.S. Navy Lieutenant George M. Prior died from an allergic reaction to the fungicide Daconil after chewing on a golf tee at the Army-Navy Country Club in Arlington, Virginia. This is one of many bizarre but true urban legends tracked down for this book.

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A fired employee trying to commit suicide by jumping out of a window landed on and killed the boss who had just fired him.

FALSE. Many urban legends are morality tales, where people who have been cruel or abusive get their just rewards. Our belief in karma keeps these myths alive. Just because they aren't true doesn't mean we can't enjoy the many examples of justice served up in this book.

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Opera singer Maria Callas intentionally swallowed a tape worm in an attempt to control her weight.

FALSE. This example of celebrity mythmaking has some basis in truth. Maria Callas did, at one time, have a tapeworm removed -- but she never swallowed it intentionally. Many urban myths reveal our prejudices against other races, genders, or lifestyle choices -- in this case, large prima donnas.

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Thomas Edison, an opponent of capital punishment, aided the development of the electric chair in a misguided effort to discredit rival George Westinghouse.

TRUE. Edison thought a demonstration of the potential for alternating current to kill people on contact would result in the State of New York adopting his less-efficient direct current method for powering homes and businesses. Instead, it inspired the State of New York to build the country's first electric chair.

-
A girl babysitting on Thanksgiving killed the child she was caring for by accidentally putting the baby in the oven instead of the turkey.

FALSE. Many holidays come with legends firmly attached, such as Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny. And babysitters are a favorite target of both urban legends and horror movies. While rarely true, caretaker calamities are a favorite at summer camps everywhere.

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A high school student was killed on prom night by a black widow spider hiding in her elaborate hairdo.

FALSE. This legend dates back to the 1950s when big hair architecture was all the rage, and parents found something sinister in high hair. Like many urban legends, it was given new life on the silver screen, when director John Waters included a

variation featuring cockroaches in his movie, Hairspray.

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About the Author

As a child, A.S. MOTT didn't like to play outside. Born with the nocturnal instincts of a vampire, Mott preferred the dark confines of his parents' basement. There he fed not on the blood of others but on a steady diet of scary movies and the most frightening books he could find. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that this enemy of sunlight would choose to write about the supernatural. Mott cites among his current influences such writers as Martin Amis, Stephen King and Joss Whedon (creator of the TV cult classic Buffy the Vampire Slayer). Mott still can be found spending most of his time in the dark, either watching another cheesy horror movie or working on his latest book.

If you like URBAN LEGENDS, be sure to see these other books by master storyteller A.S. Mott:

Ghost Stories of America Volume II (ISBN 1-894877-31-4, Paperback, 248 pages, USA\$10.95, CAN\$14.95) This eagerly anticipated sequel brings together fascinating stories from over 200 years of haunted history in America. Covering every region and every era, ghost chronicler A.S. Mott explores the nation's most infamous spirits, paranormal phenomena and haunted places, making this collection essential reading for skeptics and believers alike.

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