

Urban Legends And The People Who Love Them

We've all likely heard one or two of them before. There's the story about the gang that offers girl the choice of being raped or having a facial scar in the form of a sick smile. In Japan, there is a mythical bus or train car where girls get raped and molested by the male passengers. In some areas of the US, there are stories of an psychotic killer that lurks in the backseats of cars and cuts the driver's head off with an ax. Some of us have heard stories about the Islamic woman who killed her husband's second wife with a scorpion hidden in the wedding dress. A few of us might even have heard of the highly secretive Global Conspiracy of the Bald. Or some of us might have heard one of thousands upon thousands of other stories, each with just enough truth to be believable. Regardless, the one thing that is certain is that, at some point in our lives, we've heard an urban legend. Urban legends can sometimes be pinned down to fear and anxiety in society, particularly in the light of certain technological or social developments. For example, the pervert bus myth was made prevalent in Japan when trains and buses started emerging, before they became prevalent means of public transportation. Fear and anxiety, as well as ignorance, regarding the polygamous marriages allowed by Islam prompted the scorpion in the wedding dress myth, which shows a lack of understanding of the underlying social mores behind the multiple wives. Of course, like any good urban legend, myths of this sort persist long after the initial fear and anxiety have faded into obscurity. Another common source of urban legends would be the products we use on a daily basis. One prevalent myth comes from the recent obsession with losing weight and staying thin. There are stories that, at one point in either the late 70s or early 80s, there was a mail-order weight loss pill that promised people who took them that they would never gain a pound. According to the stories, the weight loss pill worked because they contained parasitic worms that would inhabit the stomach. According to various records, there was never such a weight loss pill on the market. One more popular story involved a couple purchasing a car that was unbelievable in terms of fuel efficiency, having barely used a full tank after days of driving. The car was, according to the story, promptly stolen by oil companies after the couple commended the manufacturer on the engine design. Of course, performance anxiety and social anxiety have also produced a number of urban legends, particularly of the conspiracy theory form. For example, there are hundreds of people that believe they are unable to get ahead in their professional lives because of pressure applied by one secret society or another. In some ways, this is a subtle form of performance anxiety, with the people unable to accept their psychological inability to perform better and placing the blame on an unseen hand. A touch of social anxiety also pervades in a number of conspiracy theories when taken to excess, as people become afraid of social interaction for fear of coming into contact with agents of some socio-political super-cabal. Typically, the performance anxiety that inspires a person to hold these legends as reality come with other psychological disorders. Social anxiety can also take root in some older societies, particularly in Europe, when urban legends about secret organizations generally have more credence with the masses. The European continent is traditionally home to a variety of secret societies, which have goals ranging from world domination to controlling the global marketplace. In some respects, social anxiety sets in when people who are mentally and socially unstable in the first place hear the stories and begin to construct elaborate and implausible stories to back up the legends. The end result is that one ends up with a person that, essentially, believes that group is out to get them. The only real variation tends to be what the group is, though the Illuminati, the Camarilla, the Knights Templar, the Vatican, the New World Order, and Satanic cults are among the more typical.

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