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The Truth Never Stands In Way Of A Good Story



Synopsis

"My sister's boyfriend knows a family who...", "One of my wife's colleagues has a friend who knows someone who...", "This is a true story that was forwarded to me by...", "This is not a joke!". In this lively and engaging book, the nation's foremost expert on urban legends explores the spontaneous germination of these bizarre, yet plausible, narratives that play on the absurdities and prey on the fears of modern life. Through voluminous correspondence from readers of his books and syndicated newspaper column, Jan Harold Brunvand has become something of a clearinghouse for evolving versions of urban legends. Here, he looks in detail at a dozen rampant and long-lived examples of this vigorous category of contemporary folklore, tracing their histories, variations, sources, and meanings. Brunvand tracks the various permutations-by fax, by e-mail, by newspaper, by word of mouth - of such legends as "The Red Velvet Cake", "The Brain Drain", and "The Baby Roast". He points out their common elements - notably, their insistence on the truth of the story and their attribution to a "friend of a friend". His son Erik Brunvand, an associate professor of computer science at the University of Utah, contributes his own view of computer hacker legends traded across the Internet. Captivating and thought-provoking, "The Truth Never Stands in the Way of a Good Story" pins down the qualities that give urban legends their air of authenticity and make them hard to believe, yet impossible to dismiss. For those interested in popular culture and current events, as well as those wary of being taken in by false information, Brunvand's book reinforces his most basic piece of advice: "Don't believe everything you hear".

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

More text-booky than previous endeavors, Brunvand brings us yet another urban legend anthology. Perhaps "anthology" isn't the best word. "The Truth Never Stands..." is more of a work of research, delving into the origins and travel patterns of the legends rather than legends (and variations of the legends) themselves. I do recommend this book, but only to die-hard UL enthusiasts and folklore aficionados. If you don't really care about where the urban legend came from, then this book will be a bore. As for the casual UL reader, I recommend any of Brunvand's other books.

I frequently receive urgent warnings from friends and colleagues via e-mail. They always provide me with crucial information, e.g. do not use your cell phone near a gas pump (the pump will explode); do not open certain e-mail messages (your drive will be wiped); and of course - do not flash your headlights in San Jose (you will be murdered to facilitate a gang initiation). Thanks to the works of Brunvand, I amaze and mystify my friends by my ability to recognize these electronic urban legends. This book carries on the urban legend tradition of the author's other works: "The Mexican Pet", "Curses! Broiled Again", for example. I recommend this new book without reservation. You too can become an urban legend spotter.

I agree with the Olympia reader, below. If you want a collection of stories, you're better off with his 1999 book, "Too Good to Be True." But if you are more deeply interested in this subject, this is the book for you. The only down side is that he has tackled most of these legends already in previous books. The upside is that he goes more into depth, in some cases tracking them all the way back to a person named in the story and finding out how that person is connected to it.

This is the first Brunvand book that I've read. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it. I'm usually very skeptical and don't believe Urban Legend stories that I hear but I must admit this book debunked a few tales I assumed to be true. This book does tend to have an academic tone to it at times and I didn't mind this. Some readers may not want this much detail however. If you are at all interested in Urban Legend, folklore, or even those ubiquitous internet rumors then you'll enjoy this book.

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