

# The Terror Tale: Urban Legends and the Slasher Film

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Mark Kermode begins his documentary film about the slasher genre, *Scream and Scream Again: A History of the Slasher Film* (Andrew Abbott and Russell Leven, 2000), with a comparison between the slasher film and the urban legend known as "The Hook," in which a psychotic killer, with a hook for a hand, menaces a young couple, parked on Lovers' Lane. According to Kermode, "The Hook" works as a morality archetype for the entire slasher phenomenon: the young couple are threatened specifically because they have strayed from the moral path (by engaging in sexual activity), but are ultimately saved from certain death because their adolescent sexuality did not get the better of them (see Appendix One). Within this documentary film, and following Kermode's introduction, is a montage retelling of this legend by a variety of horror movie filmmakers including Wes Craven, William Lustig, Sean Cunningham, John McNaughton, and Tobe Hooper; each filmmaker relates a sentence or two of the story. Kermode concludes this sequence by noting that "The Hook" had a direct influence on slasher films like *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), when fused with previous films about psychotic killers like *Black Christmas* (Bob Clark, 1974).

But it is a single comment by Hooper, the director of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), which got me thinking directly about the connection between the slasher film and urban legends: Hooper notes that the enduring power of both these films and these legends is their "close call with death." In many urban legends, as well as films, about psycho killers, the protagonists survive; they met death (consciously or unawares as in the case of "The Hook") and lived to tell about it. That experience of surviving the maniac's rampage is, in Vera Dika's morphology of the slasher film, what she notes as the concluding structural facet, "the heroine is not free" (Dika, 1990: 60). Surviving a slasher movie, just like surviving an urban legend, scars the narrative's protagonists at the point of diegetic closure.

This study examines the narrative structure of the slasher film, with particular attention to its relation to contemporary orally circulated stories (urban legends). Although urban legends have directly inspired some slasher films, like *When a Stranger Calls* (Fred Walton, 1979) and *Urban Legend* (Jamie Blanks, 1998), most utilise a narrative structure analogous to this kind of modern folklore. In addition, this study seeks to problematise both the legends' and films' overtly content-derived taxonomies through a morphological consideration, including the issue of the film/story's affect.

Film scholars do not, apparently, read in Folkloristics (the academic study of folklore), for in none of the central works on the modern horror film (i.e. Clover, Creed, or especially Dika) is there any reference to the literature on urban legends. And yet, by the same token, folklorists often have not read widely within film studies; and when they make reference to film versions of legend texts, they do so filmographically -- that is, they note such references, but do not analyse them to any degree. This current study seeks to present a beginning point in redressing both of these shortcomings.

Defining the slasher genre is difficult: a number of film scholars have approached the subject, each with their own agendas, and what is included within such studies, or more importantly what is excluded from consideration, says more about the scholars' own schemata than anything inherent in the films themselves (Bordwell, 1989: 169-204). Vera Dika, at the beginning of her own book length study of the phenomenon, refers to these films as being "a large but undifferentiated body of films that emerged onto the American market in the late seventies and early eighties" (Dika, 1990: 9). Carol Clover, in her book *Men, Women and Chainsaws* sees the slasher film as merely one example of the phenomenon of the modern horror film (Clover, 1992: *passim*). If we base our taxonomic criterion solely on content, then any film with or about a psychotic murderer would be considered a slasher film, a point voiced by Robin Wood (Wood, 1984: *passim*). Vera Dika takes issue with Wood on this account, noting that he

... assembles his body of works on the assumption that these are "low-budget horror films based on psychotic killers." Much like the grouping together of films under the heading of violence, the conclusion that the presence of a single character can serve to isolate a distinctive formula is ultimately incorrect (Dika, 1990: 11).

On another hand, John McCarty would classify the films under discussion here as "splatter movies:"

Splatter movies, offshoots of the horror film genre, aim not to scare their audience, necessarily, nor to drive them to the edges of their seats in suspense, but to *mortify* them with scenes of explicit gore. In splatter movies, mutilation is indeed the message -- many times the only one (McCarty, 1984:1, emphasis in original).

Dika disagrees with McCarty, and sees instead "this horror formula [as] best identified by a predominantly *off-screen* killer who is known primarily by his/her distinctive point-of-view shots" (Dika, 1990: 14, my emphasis). Based on this distinction, Dika classifies these films as "stalker films," with the emphasis on the watching of the victims before they are killed. I, personally prefer the term *slasher* films, not because of any psychoanalytical or schematic *a priori* assumption about the films' gender discourse (as in "slash-her" films), but because as an adolescent filmgoer in the early 1980s, this is what we called the films under consideration here. Nevertheless, there are varieties of different kinds of slasher films, which I shall firstly outline.

One kind I refer to as "Scooby-Doo Movies:" named after the children's animated television series which deals with a gang of teenagers solving what appear to the adult, outside world as supernatural mysteries, but are ultimately revealed to be non-supernatural in nature, and are usually the result of some adult who uses the supernatural legend to distract other people from discovering his/her own illegal operation (see Appendix Two). In the "Scooby-Doo" slasher films, however, the killer is revealed to be human and using some kind of killer-legend to distract from their own motives. These slasher films are, in reality, gory murder mysteries (see Appendix Three), where the "game" for the audience is to attempt a hypothesis as to whom the killer may be out of a set group of people. This *difference* in narrative structure has been noted before, for example, by Gregory Waller in his introduction to his edited volume, *American Nightmares*, where he directs his readers to

consider the case of *Prom Night* (1980) and *Terror Train* (1980), which were unambiguously advertised as horror movies in the manner of *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*. Though they do feature psychopathic killers, both of these stalker films are structured very much like classical whodunits, complete with a plethora of mysterious clues and a cast of likely suspects (Waller, 1987: 10).

Vera Dika, although noting these differences in narrative structure, differs in her assessment of their generic similarity, noting: "the apparent shift in the stalker film formula, one that asks the question Who is the killer? instead of just Where is the killer? is ultimately a 'trick' imposed by the film's authorial system: a superficial change that does not alter the film's underlying structure" (Dika, 1990: 90). This is not a "superficial change," for what is *specifically* noteworthy and different about these films is that the killer is not always killing, and s/he must interact with the other characters in some kind of "normal" way at other times during the film. These are by far the most common form of the slasher film and many of the "classics" of the genre are of this type: *Prom Night* (Paul Lynch, 1980), and *Terror Train* (Roger Spottiswood, 1981) are perhaps two of the best known films, and I consider *Terror Train* below. However, almost all of the more recent revival of the slasher film, *Scream 1, 2* and *3* (Wes Craven, 1996, 1997, and 2000), *Urban Legend* and *Cherry Falls* (Geoffrey Wright, 2000), are also "Scooby-Doo" slasher films, however space does not permit me to consider *this* narrative structure except in passing.

By far the *least* common form of the genre can be considered "Psycho Character Studies," films which try to explore the psyche of a psychotic killer. Films in this category include *Fade to Black* (Vernon Zimmerman, 1980), *Maniac* (William Lustig, 1981), *Silent Night Deadly Night* (Charles E. Sellier Jr., 1984), and *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, 1986). In these films, the killer and his illness and motivation are explored both psychologically and sociologically in an attempt to understand the cultural phenomena of serial killers. This is not to say that these films do not utilise urban legend motifs, however their consideration also falls outside of the purview of this current work, and needs to be treated separately.

The slasher films that I *do* want to consider here are those films in which the killer is known from the outset to both the filmic victims and to the audience, films where the killer, when met, is always the killer. Although these films are less common than the "Scooby-Doo" slasher films, within the popular consciousness of genre aficionados, they are perhaps the most famous: *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980), *The Burning* (Tony Maylam, 1981), and others. Because both the dramatis personae as well as the audience know the killer's identity, these films are not driven by the same mystery-elements that the "Scooby-Doo" films are. Likewise, because we are given little insight into these killers' motivation or psyches, it is unlikely we can engage with the films on an emotional, *identification* level (at least with the killer), like one should in the "Psycho Character Study" films. Instead, this category of slasher film reveals the sub-genre's connection to oral urban legends, and by considering both these films' and the legends' structures, some new light is shed upon what drives the enjoyment from these films.

It is worth noting, even somewhat parenthetically, one notable exclusion from this category of the slasher film, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984). While much of the scholarly and popular material tends to include *Elm Street* and its monster, Freddy Krueger, in the slasher pantheon, I have difficulty including it in this sub-genre, due to its primarily supernatural killer -- Freddy is a revenant, and a malicious one at that. Often *Elm Street* gets

included because it is an early 1980s horror film, and those critics who include it as a slasher film tend to assume all horror movies made in the early parts of the decade share deeper taxonomic meaning (see Appendix Four). The killers of all three kinds of slasher movies -- "Scooby-Doo"-type, "psycho character studies" or even those killers who appear in urban legends and its inspired films -- are all primarily corporeal. Oftentimes a supernatural hypothesis is offered within the diegesis -- for example, that Michael Myers in *Halloween* is "the Bogeyman" -- but these explanations are always false. In different terms, this distinction between the supernatural horror worlds of Freddy Krueger and the "natural" horror worlds of Michael Myers and the other killers I am considering here, underlines Todorov's distinction between the fantastic -- defined as "a world which is indeed our world, the one we know... [but wherein] occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world" (Todorov, 2000: 14) and his concept of the uncanny -- wherein the narrative event "does not transcend the laws of nature as we know them" (Todorov, 2000: 16). The world of *Elm Street* is our world, true enough, but our laws of nature do not allow Kruegerian murder, whereas, although thankfully not a common occurrence, serial and psychotic killers do stalk our world. The urban legends under consideration here, and the films which are inspired by them, work within this later framework -- of Todorov's uncanny.

## Urban Legends

Before discussing how the slasher genre uses urban legends, some further definition is required; I say *some* definition, because *urban legend*, in fact the term *legend* itself, is difficult to define. Folkloristics, for decades, has been struggling with a definitive understanding of the term. Since most legends referred to as *urban* rarely occur within an urban diegetic space (i.e. Lovers' Lane, remote highways), nor are they frequently told within urban performative contexts (i.e. around campfires), the term *urban* is understood as referring to Western modernity (cf. Tangherlini, 1990). But the one similar factor of both urban and more seemingly traditional legends is that they have to do with belief. This is not to say, as Georges notes, that all legends are believed, either by their tellers or audience (cf. Georges, 1971), but that they negotiate the conceptual space of the possible, of what *could be true* (Oring, 1986: 125).

The term *urban legend* gained popular understanding through the work of folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand in the early 1980s, beginning with the publication of his book *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* (1981), and was coincidental with many of the films under consideration here. In Brunvand's many subsequent volumes of urban legends (Brunvand, 1984, 1986, 1989, and 1995), he classifies a large corpus of seemingly unrelated materials into his own taxonomy. This taxonomy becomes problematic when one considers those legends which Brunvand calls "Teenage Horrors" (Brunvand, 1981: 47-73), these include, not only classics like the above mentioned "The Hook" (Brunvand, 1981: 48-52), but also "The Killer in the Backseat" (Brunvand, 1981: 52-53), "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" (Brunvand, 1981: 53-57) and "The Roommates' Death" (Brunvand, 1981: 57-62) but also stories like "The Pet (Baby) in the Oven" (Brunvand, 1981: 62-65) and "The Hippy Babysitter" (Brunvand, 1981: 65-69). The two latter stories, although their affect is to "gross-out" the listener and fill them with a sense of "horror," are very different kinds of stories to the other stories Brunvand cites in the same chapter. In later anthologies, Brunvand moves "The Killer in the Backseat" to his chapter on "Automobile" legends (Brunvand, 1986: 58-60), and includes under the same category, "The Hairy-Armed Hitchhiker" (Brunvand, 1984: 25-55), a story which also feature a psychotic murderer. Across these volumes of legends, the category of "Horrors" becomes increasingly dominated by "gross-out" stories. Whether under

Brunvand's "Automobile" or "Horrors" classification, "The Hook," "The Boyfriend's Death," "The Roommate's Death," "The Killer in the Backseat," "The Hairy-Armed Hitchhiker" or the more recently circulated "Humans Can Lick Too" and "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn on the Lights" all feature maniacal killers as one of their chief characters. Neither "The Hippy Baby-Sitter" nor "The Colo-Rectal Mouse" (Brunvand, 1984: 78-80) (both classified by Brunvand as "Horrors") feature malicious individuals intending on harming/killing innocent victims, and are instead based upon an intended disgust at the story's imagery. It is the legends which feature psycho killers that I am particularly interested in here, as the slasher films which emerged in the late 1970s/early 1980s seem to draw upon and reference. I refer to these legends as "Terror Tales:" tales intended to create feelings of suspense and terror in the listener, rather than revulsion or disgust; distinguishing them from other kinds of horror legends, ones whose aim is predominantly to gross the listener out.

Noël Carroll, in the *Philosophy of Horror*, outlines what he calls "art-horror" -- the emotions of disgust and revulsion which horror, as a literary/filmic genre, produce, and the emotional distancing effects required because such horrors are Todorovianly fantastic -- that is, they cannot possibly be explained by our natural laws. Art-horror, to paraphrase Donna Haraway, signifies (Parks, 1996: 121): not only by creating cognitive categories which cannot be (Todorov's category of the fantastic), but furthermore, by defining what then *must be* -- a cognitive ontological game, as it were. For Carroll,

... the pleasure derived from... horror fiction and the source of our interest in it resides, first and foremost, in the processes of discovery, proof, and confirmation that horror fictions often employ. The disclosure of the existence of the horrific being and of its properties is the central source of pleasure in the genre; once that process of revelation is consummated, we remain inquisitive about whether such a creature can be successfully confronted, and that narrative question sees us through to the end of the story. (Carroll, 1990: 184).

Such an approach is, as Cynthia Freeland notes, cognitive: we play a mental game of discovery and then, recognising that our cognitive categories of reality have been in some way challenged, attempt to understand this horror (Freeland, 1995: 127-133). What Brunvand categorises as "horrors," whether homicidal maniacs or gross-out stories, are equally predicated upon the narrative structure of discovery -- of the hook dangling on the door handle, of the boyfriend hung above the car, of the turkey in the crib and the baby in the oven, or of the mouse/gerbil up someone's rectum. But like Carroll and his "art-horror," Brunvand's horror stories are largely determined by plot.

Folklorist Linda Dégh, on the other hand, "viewed legend not merely as a historical account [of what is true], but rather, primarily as a genre growing out of contemporary hopes and fears" (quoted in Lindhal, 1996: xii). Working out of the Folklore Institute at Indiana University in the late 1960s, Dégh and her students developed what has been referred to as "The Indiana Approach" to urban legend research, which can be characterised as "to see legend not only as a reflection of social fears but as a series of scripts for varied responses to contemporary problems" (Lindhal, 1996: xiii). Urban legends, then, are scripts for debate, about what a society/culture (here understood in its most micro-form) believes to be true, or at least possible.

In a similar fashion, Cynthia Freeland criticises Carroll (and by extension in this connection that I am making here, Brunvand) by demanding a more ideological reading of horror films. Freeland notes:

Ideological critique interprets film texts by identifying how they represent existing power relations so as to naturalise them. Such readings can register contradictions between surface and deeper messages, so can offer more complexity than the moral psychological condemnation of realist horror as perverse. I mean that good ideological reading can enable the critic to question and resist what she sees as problematic moral messages of films (Freeland, 1995: 134-135; also see Freeland, 1996).

Most folklorists also reject leaving legend analysis at the level of plot analysis. However, Folkloristics and Film Studies are not the same disciplines: whereas Freeland is quite right to explore and interpret ideological meanings which can result in "against-the-grain" readings of film, and some folklorists, like Dundes (as noted in Appendix One) have tried this approach to legend texts too, Dégh's "social-script" theory of legend is significantly different.

Linda Dégh ... argues that (i) belief-related stories are 'traditional' in that they reflect age-old concerns as adapted by transmitting communities; (ii) the newness of the 'new' way the stories have become both fragmented in the telling and adapted to modern environments; (iii) the heart of a legend is belief, not text, and therefore esthetic considerations should not be a criterion by which it is judged (Bennett and Smith, 1996: xxxi).

For much of the analyses below, I have approached these slasher films along Déghian lines -- that is as social scripts, while also touching upon their ideological significance. This in no means either invalidates or exhausts further investigation: my project here is largely to demonstrate that by asking an alternative question of these films, alternative frameworks for investigation emerge. But it should also be noted that there is a degree of ambivalence to these analyses: as discourses about the possible, Freeland's "realist horror," Todorov's "uncanny," and Oring's "legends as tales of the possible" are treated for the sake of argument as largely analogous.

Alan Dundes, in attempting to find a morphological structure to Native American myths and folktales, and realising the inappropriateness of applying Propp to them, developed his own structural schema to deal with these narratives (Dundes, 1963: 121-130). Daniel Barnes, took Dundes' schema and applied it to contemporary urban legends. According to Barnes, there is a four-movement structure to urban legends: Interdiction, Violation, Consequence, and Attempted Escape (I-V-C-AE) (Barnes, 1996: 4). The interdiction phase informs the characters not to do something, although in most urban legends, this phase is often implicit (Barnes, 1996: 9). The interdiction is then violated, and the consequences are outlined. These stories then conclude with the protagonists' escape, sometimes successful, sometimes not, from the consequences of violating the interdiction. Let us consider the story of "The Hook," which as Kermode noted above, contains the essence of the slasher film. The story contains no direct interdiction, but such a narrative phase is implied: the couple parked out on Lovers' Lane and making-out should not be there. It is implied that they had been warned not to go out into the woods by themselves, nor should they be getting so intimate. The news report on the radio, informing them of the escaped lunatic with a hook for a hand is a further interdiction to get out of there. They ignore (violate) the implicit warnings from society (do

not get sexual at your age, do not go out to Lovers' Lane), and the more explicit warning from the news report (the escaped killer). The consequence of which is that the Hook-man attacks them; however in this case, their attempted escape is successful, perhaps because the girl's virtue is still intact (they did not get too intimate while parked). The interdiction phase, whether stated explicitly or not, is one of the foci for discussing these narratives as representations of teenage social fears and the one I shall be focussing on in discussing the slasher films.

It is worth noting, at least parenthetically, that in all these Terror Tales I am considering here, there is at least one survivor of the horror (in the case of "The Hook," *no one* actually gets killed). In "The Boyfriend's Death," "The Roommate's Death," and "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn on the Lights" one of the two protagonists dies, while the other survives (in some variations, when the survivor discovers the horror, their hair turns white and they end up catatonic in an asylum). Simon Bronner, in his study of campus folklore, notes the following:

The lingering question for the listener, then, might be whether responsibility for the tragedy belongs with the victim who took the risk of going out late at night or with the person in the room who did not answer the door because of her fear of the murderer. The issue of responsibility commonly underlies the climax of both the boyfriend's and roommate's death stories, and in each type, extreme fear and courage could each be shown to create problems in this age of adolescent independence (Bronner, 1995: 171).

As Bronner noted, these legends are often used to discuss the social issues in which young people find themselves, either at college or at summer camp, as both are liminal contexts between childhood and adulthood, where young people are forced to accept adult responsibilities while still maintaining their childhood. The campus dorm room and the summer campfire are also the two main contexts in which these stories are told. It is because of these liminal contexts -- of teller and place -- which give further credence to utilising a social-script theory to these films.

## **Urban Legends and the Slasher Film**

Well beyond Jamie Blanks' 1998 slasher-revival film, *Urban Legend*, or its sequel *Urban Legends: Final Cut* (John Ottman, 2000), the slasher film has been drawing upon this contemporary form of oral folklore from the very beginning. I would now like to consider the Dundes-Barnes morphology applied to some of these films. Prior to doing that, however, it is worth noting how folklorists have approached the slasher film and its relation to legend texts and performances. Simon Bronner, for one, notes in passing that

One also has to wonder about the influence of popular 'slasher' movies, typically appealing to adolescents, and the incorporation of traditional legendary motifs into their plots. *Halloween* (1978) and its many sequels are perennial teen favorites; they regularly feature a knife-wielding attacker escaped from a loony bin, who with Hallowe'en mask in place, slashes a young woman. Many slasher films, such as *Black Christmas* (1974) and *Final Exam* (1981), use college settings as backdrops (Bronner, 1995: 175).

Although Bronner picks up on the narrational context for these films (college dorms/summer campfires), for him the films are noteworthy only incidentally as some use legendary motifs.

In much the same vein Larry Danielson notes how films, specifically *Halloween*, use urban legend motifs. Danielson calls Carpenter's film, "a frightening color mosaic of urban legend themes and motifs" (Danielson, 1996: 60). And notes that

The theme of illicit sexual activity avenged is clear in *Halloween*, and it is present, I think, in related oral horror stories, in particular in the many lovers' lane legends... Other urban legends to which the film relates do not clearly express the theme. Most versions of the roommate's death, the entrapped babysitter, and the assailant in the backseat do not depict promiscuity. They do, however, portray vulnerable females prey to knife-wielding maniacs. Whether we subscribe to an orthodox Freudian explanation of this pattern or not, these scenes are too common in urban legendry to dismiss. Its meanings in different, though related legend types for individuals, male and female, are probably more complicated than we at first realize. That these motifs are so vigorously shared by film fiction and contemporary verbal art suggests their psychological potency (Danielson, 1996: 64-65).

But we can go further than Danielson on this subject, and by examining the morphological structure of the slasher film, the role of the (often implicit) interdiction asks often different questions of the film text, than traditional film theory has done.

Considering the case of *Halloween*, a film which seems to be at the centre of most discussions about the slasher film, by doing an analysis of the morphological structure of the film, a different set of diegetic prohibitions emerge. If we look at *Halloween* in the way we would an urban legend, by applying the I-V-C-AE structural pattern: namely asking, *what* is violated for the consequences to occur (i.e. Michael's attack on Annie, Lynda, Bob and Laurie)? What is the interdiction which urban legends tell us must be violated? If, as most film critics and theorists direct us toward, the violation is against sexual taboos -- a kind of Puritan-like morality -- then why attack either Annie (who although "tarty" is never seen to be engaging in sexual activity) or Laurie? We assume that the reason Michael killed Judith, his sister, is because of sexual prohibitions, and these assumptions are not seriously challenged by the scholarship: "Slashers typically feature psychotic males... who set about systematically killing an isolated group of teenagers. Often the killer is motivated by a past sexual trauma activated by the sexual promiscuity of the victims he stalks, a convention that has led critics to see slasher movies as staunchly conservative in their sexual ideology" (Blandford et. al, 2001: 216) (See Appendix Five). Creed, citing Royal Brown, notes "the slasher film 'grows out of the severest, most strongly anti-female aspects of a very American brand of the Judeo-Christian mythology' in which woman, because of her sexual appetites, is held responsible for man's fall from innocence. Woman is victimized because she is blamed for the human condition" (Creed, 1993: 125).

But let me offer a minor alteration to that assumption and interpretation of the film: does *Halloween* make narrative or cultural sense if sex is *not* the primary motivation for Michael's rampage? Turning back to the urban legend narrative that seems to be the inspiration for the film, "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" (See Appendix Six), what is the interdiction violated by the young babysitter? As Danielson above noted, the meaning of legends is heavily dependent upon who is telling them, and so, when adults, who have children, tell this story it could perhaps be interpreted as a warning against leaving your children with a stranger, much like the implied interdictions in stories like "The Hippy Babysitter." But such an interpretation would have little meaning within the adolescent girls' community who



disseminate the legend, and therefore, it is unlikely that the story would circulate for very long. Perhaps, as we consider the implicit interdictions in this story, we need to at least hypothesise what the babysitter's own fears are. It is not the literal belief that some psycho-killer will torment him/her from a telephone extension in the same house after brutally murdering the children, but perhaps reflects fears regarding responsibility. Sole responsibility for a child/children, in one so young themselves must weigh heavy on their minds. What if something really horrible happened while babysitting? Would you, these legends seem to ask, know what to do in an emergency? Probably, if the babysitter was responsible at all, s/he would know how to contact the parents in an emergency, as well as the various phone numbers for the local police, fire department, ambulance, and/or poison control centre. But who does one call when there is an escaped lunatic in the house?

The fears about *adolescent responsibility* are what lie at the centre of *Halloween's* interdiction. Carpenter juxtaposes both Annie's and Laurie's babysitting skills: Annie is shown to largely ignore Lindsey, who is left alone watching horror movies on television while Annie chats on the phone to her friends; Laurie interacts much more with Tommy, reading him stories, making popcorn, carving Jack-o-Lanterns together, and talking to one another. To underline this even further, Annie abandons Lindsey to Laurie's care, while she goes off to pick up her boyfriend, and Laurie sits down to watch television *with* both children. It is here that Michael attacks Annie, and while still in and around the Wallaces' house, Lynda and Bob arrive, who likewise behave irresponsibly in someone else's home, by going up to the Master Bedroom and having sex. Laurie herself acts irresponsibly when, more concerned with her friends than her charges, leaves them asleep to go across the road to the Wallace house where she first meets Michael. By going across the road and leaving the children unattended, Laurie brings Michael back. Suddenly, if I am in the correct ballpark here, Michael's original attack on his sister, Judith, was not so much about her having sex, as much as it was about her not being responsible for babysitting her younger brother. Sex is merely an extension of neglect as a result of poor babysitting. I am aware that such a reading, of reducing the complex discourses surrounding American attitudes towards sex and violence against women which have developed surrounding *Halloween* and other slasher films, might be seen as a tad superficial or simplistic; that I have reduced *Halloween* to a discourse about "being responsible when you are babysitting." This does not rule out a more psychoanalytic or gendered reading of *Halloween*: babysitting is, of course, a largely gender-specific activity, as well, the responsibility for a child (even a temporary responsibility) has something of a maternal nurturing aspect to it, thereby making the killer's punishment/murder of babysitters (whether legendary or filmic) open to Oedipal and Puritanical interpretations. But, when we consider who tells these legends, to whom, and in the case of these film variants, to whom are the films primarily addressed, the gendered and psychoanalytic interpretations are less useful than the social-script approach.

Let me turn to another example of the slasher film to see how the I-V-C-AE structure holds up: *Friday the 13th*. Here the interdiction is more difficult to identify, as the prohibition against having sex is not textually verifiable. Much scholarly work on these films seems to indicate differently, that in films like this and *Halloween*, everyone is assumed to be having rampant sex. For example, Tania Modleski notes, "In *Friday the 13th* (1980), a group of young people are brought together to staff a summer camp and are randomly murdered whenever they go off to make love" (Modleski, 1986: 161). Barbara Creed takes this position even further, noting: "In the contemporary slasher film the life-and-death struggle is usually between an unknown killer and a group of young people who seem to spend most their time looking for a place to have sex away from the searching eyes of adults" (Creed, 1993: 125).

However, closer textual analysis indicates that the only people we see having sex (or even fooling around) are the couple of unnamed counsellors in the pre-credit sequence who are quickly killed, and Jack and Marcie. Everyone else is, if not chaste, than neither are they rampantly sexual either. Drugs and alcohol, as noted in Kevin Williamson's screenplay for *Scream*, are merely extensions of the "no-sex rule" as all these are forms of pleasurable sin. However, Alice, Clover's "Final Girl" (see Appendix Seven), according to this assumed "no sin" set of rules, should be ripe for the proverbial chop: she takes a draw or two of a communal joint as it is passed around, participates in the game of "Strip Monopoly" (although as Fate would have it, remains almost fully clothed), and drinks alcohol. If Williamson is accurate in his self-reflexive screenplay, and he is not, Alice "sins" neither more nor less than Mrs. Voorhees' other victims. So what interdiction is violated to spark off Mrs. Voorhees' rampage? One interdiction in *Friday the 13th* is actually expressed (unlike in *Halloween*): do not re-open Camp Crystal Lake, the site where a young camper, Jason, died, because the counsellors were not paying proper attention to him (much like in *Halloween*). Mrs. Voorhees, it is implied, went on a murderous rampage killing off the counsellors who neglected her son the following year, depicted in the pre-credit sequence. By opening up the camp again, over 20 years later, Mrs Voorhees returns to ensure that the camp remains shut. At this level the film has a quality of a *local* legend, used to explain local phenomena; in this case, why is there an abandoned summer camp on the lake? But why punish the young counsellors? Sure, go after Steve Christie, the man who is opening the camp again. Go after Christie's financiers. But why go after these largely innocent kids who are just doing what kids do on summer vacation -- drink, smoke and fool around? We are once again in the realm of *Halloween's* implied interdiction: the yoke of responsibility cannot be easily removed. For the adolescents working at summer camps, just like the adolescents who went to see *Friday the 13th* upon its release, the fears surrounding the responsibility they have been given, particularly for the lives of younger children, and this time in a residential setting (unlike a few hours babysitting), must weigh heavily on their consciousness. This interdiction about responsibility, when violated, has the same murderous consequences.

Not all slasher film interdictions tell young people to be responsible when babysitting, either for the night or over a summer. In *The Burning*, unlike *Friday the 13th*, the counsellors are responsible and professional. The most immediately noteworthy legend-connector with *The Burning* is that, unlike these other films wherein one needs to examine the films morphologically in order to ascertain their relationship to urban legends, "the Cropsey Maniac" had an orally circulated life in and around post-war New York summer camps (see Haring and Breslerman, 1977). This local legend (for it appears to be unknown outside of New York State) tells of a respected member of the community, often a judge or local merchant, who loses a child in a tragic accident, and as a result of this loss, goes mad and begins a murder spree in the vicinity (much like Mrs. Voorhees in *Friday the 13th*). Particular attention needs to be drawn to the conclusion of the story: for Cropsey, finally cornered by the authorities, refuses to give himself up, and his shack, or barn or hut, is burned to the ground, but of course his body is never found, leaving the story open. This open-ended kind of legend narration, often de rigueur in slasher movies due to the assumed potential to become a franchise, has a different function in legend-telling: here the intention is to connect the audience, hearing about something that happened in the past, with their immediate present. Rather than the "burning" of Cropsey ending the story, in *The Burning*, it opens the film, and, as a pre-credit sequence, introduces us to the film's monster. In *The Burning*, during the first night of the campers' canoe excursion, the counsellor, Todd, tells the legend of the burning of Cropsey and of Camp Blackfoot's "haunted past" with the punch line that Cropsey is still hunting in these woods. Todd had arranged with another counsellor to leap

out at the campers on that cue line, frightening them in a typical campfire tale scenario (see Appendix Eight). It turns out, in a later flashback, that Todd was one of those responsible for severely burning Cropsey, and so the telling of the legend of Camp Blackfoot takes on a different resonance, but one which recreates the norms of the legend telling context (around a campfire). At the end of the film, Todd survives by killing Cropsey properly, aided by recluse camper Alfred. The film ends with another counsellor, implied to be the grown-up Alfred, now telling this tale to campers around a campfire, thereby returning the narrative, albeit fictively, back into the oral tradition.

Haring and Breslerman's interpretation of this legend, particularly with regards to the story's function as "social-script" is equally applicable to these slasher films. The authors note that the oral legends

... function... to promote a feeling of solidarity among the hearers: the setting and main actor of the story appear outside the camp or school groups, and the action of mayhem and insanity is of a type solidly condemned by the society to which the hearers belong. [Another] function is to integrate new campers into the camp society by imposing on them the local [belief] traditions. ... Finally, of course, the story explicitly tries [quoting William Bascom] 'to insure conformity to the accepted cultural norms' in this case the prohibition against leaving the camp grounds (Haring and Breslerman, 1977: 21, emphasis in the original).

Not only does *The Burning* recreate the Cropsey-storytelling context, these slasher films also, to some extent, fulfil the functions of the legends. Obviously there are fundamental differences between an orally transmitted urban legend and a horror movie, even a horror movie *based on* an urban legend; the two media are certainly not synonymous. However, within the "social-script" theory advocated here, both slasher films and urban legends demonstrate the ideological functions of maintaining categories of normalcy, and transmission of belief traditions, not unlike what Freeland argues for above with her ideological criticism, just using different terms. But, it is the final function of Haring and Breslerman's characterisation of the "Cropsey Maniac" stories, of ensuring campers do not wander off into the woods on their own, that I want to turn to. In all these Terror Tale urban legends, and the films being considered here, it is when one wanders off -- from the campsite, from the university campus, from home or school -- that one is at risk from psychotic killers. Freeland notes, part of the conservative ideology of these films, just like with urban legends, "is to perpetuate a climate of fear and random violence where anyone is a potential victim" (Freeland, 1995:138; this connection between slasher movies and urban legends was explicitly noted by Danielson, 1996: 64). This potentiality of violence, for the on-screen characters in slasher movies and for the "friends-of-a-friend" of urban legends, and for us listeners/viewers, underlines that these narratives are predicated upon what is *possible*, and assuming we do not wish to end up as grist for these killers' mills, need to heed their narrative interdictions.

Another major context for the telling of urban legends is the college dormitory, and so it is not surprising that the dorm room is frequently the setting for a number of legends themselves: "The Roommate's Death," "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn on the Lights," and "The Cadaver Arm" to name just a few. The sorority/fraternity house is also the setting for a number of slasher films. These, not surprisingly, have a different set of interdictions to them. The Canadian film, *Black Christmas*, although largely ignored as the first of the modern

slasher films, demonstrates many of the similarities to urban legends, although it is not based on any one in particular. Interestingly, folklorists Paul Smith and Sandy Hobbs identify *Black Christmas* as being based on the urban legend known by them as the "Sorority House Murders" (Smith and Hobbs, 1990: 146), but unfortunately this legend seems to be known only by them, and I have come across no articles or reports of this story circulating orally as an independent legend. That being said, Danielson does note the following:

The most recent illustration of urban legend phenomenon paralleled in film and intensified by historical event occurred in 1978. On January 15 of that year, two women were murdered and three others beaten in a Florida State University sorority house by an assailant who had secretly entered the building in the early morning. Scheduled for national television viewing the following weekend was the movie *Stranger in the House*, a 1974 film unsuccessfully released in theatres under the titles *Black Christmas* and *Silent Night, Evil Night*. The thriller dealt with a story familiar to many folklorists. During the Christmas season, sorority house residents are frightened by obscene phone calls and then by a systematic attack on individual women in the residence. The National Broadcasting Company tactfully substituted another movie because of the previous weekend's Florida murders (Danielson, 1996: 58).

Certainly there are a number of Terror Tale-urban legends which occur within a sorority house, noted above, but it is only Danielson who picks up on the explicit reference to the legend of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" with the motif of the obscene phone caller calling from within the same house.

In *Black Christmas* there is no background story and no real motive for the killer's actions, other than that he is insane. Of the girls living in the house, Barb, Claire, Jess, Phyl, and their house-mother, Mrs. Mac, only drunk Mrs. Mac and the drunk and foul-mouthed Barb could be considered in the same category as Lynda and Annie, or Jack and Marcie -- the others are more or less innocent. In fact, the "Final Girl," Jess, is not only sexually active, but also pregnant and considering an abortion. Therefore the basic rules of the slasher film do not apply here (and as a film made in 1974, well before their apparent codification after *Halloween*, why should it?). But what interdiction was violated to send the killer down the stairs to murder the residents? At one level, Barb clearly antagonises the killer on the phone, *giving* obscene verbal abuse as much as she receives it. Phyl warns her *not* to antagonise him immediately before the first murder, of Claire. Looking at *Black Christmas* as a form of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" legend, one can hypothesise that the implied interdiction is not to antagonise an obscene phone caller, even by talking to him/her. We all remember what our parents told us about obscene phone callers; to hang up immediately, or as the police officer on the phone in *When a Stranger Calls*, a film explicitly based on this legend, suggests, to blow a whistle loudly into the phone deafening the caller. What we are warned *not to do* is to engage the caller in any kind of conversation -- that is what he (usually he) wants. Ironically, in *Black Christmas* and *When a Stranger Calls*, as well as the legends themselves, the babysitter/sorority girls *have* to keep the caller on the phone so the police can trace the call back to the house the girl(s) are in. When this interdiction is broken, by engaging directly with the obscene caller, the results are tragic.

However, diegetically, in both films and the legend, the killer is already in the house when the calls are made, and if that is the implied interdiction, then how not talking to the caller will prevent the murders is not considered. I have already discussed the responsibility issue

with regards to one interpretation of this legend and its application in film, and so I offer up an alternative one which deals specifically with the Terror Tales set in sorority houses: sororities, like fraternities, are predicated upon the notional concept of "brothers" and "sisters," of being among family. In *Black Christmas*, as in the sorority house-based Terror Tales, it is when that familial bond breaks down that the killer can strike. For example, in both "The Roommate's Death" and "Aren't You Glad You Didn't Turn on the Lights," the murders happen during vacation time, when the campus, and in particular the sorority houses/dormitories are less populated. *Black Christmas* takes place as the sorority sisters are in the process of going home for the holidays. At an obvious level, these legends and films underline the fears one has of being left alone in an unfamiliar place (the university). However, sorority and fraternity bonds are further odd insofar as they utilise the language of the family (brother and sisters), but everyone goes elsewhere outside of term time. They are a temporary family, but not under the same conventional rules that govern a blood family. The ideology of the Greek system (as the sorority/fraternity system is known --cf. Bronner, 1995: 126-143) is such that one should be so involved in Greek life, that these people *become* your family. When one does not behave to ones' fraternity/sorority brothers and sisters as a family, bad things happen -- like letting them go to parties by themselves, or conversely to stay in the dorm room studying, only to end up butchered by the psychotic killer every university has. So, the interdiction in *Black Christmas* may well have to do with a violation of the ideology of the sorority, of the Greek System. Claire is murdered after being taunted by Barb when she goes up to her room by herself -- had anyone followed Claire to see if she was alright, they might have saved her life. Likewise, Barb is allowed to become dangerously drunk, and when she has an asthma attack in the middle of the night, although Phyl does comfort her initially, she is left alone for the killer to stab. Jess does not confide in any of her sorority sisters about her pregnancy, leaving her to face the abortion by herself. When the social order of the sorority breaks down, psychotic murderers are able to strike. Bronner notes something similar in the use of the oral legends: "there's also a question about the responsibility that women must take for one another in the potentially intimidating setting of college, and the values they must hold there" (Bronner, 1995:171). And, when those values are violated, the horror begins (see Appendix Nine).

All the films I am discussing so far, *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th*, *The Burning*, and *Black Christmas* have implicit and not-so-implicit connections with orally circulated urban legends, which I argue, marks them as distinct from the "Scooby-Doo"-like murder mysteries which are predominant in the genre. But what happens when one attempts to apply the I-V-C-AE structure to the "Scooby-Doo" slasher films? Take for example *Terror Train*, where although the identity of the killer is more-or-less known, because of the context of a costume party where everyone is masked, the killer could be anyone. The "past event" sequence is directly tied to urban legends in its representation of medical school pranks, most notably the legend of "The Cadaver Arm," and linked to the variety of legends about "Fatal Initiations" (Bronner, 1995: 162-166). In the "past event" sequence of the film, a fraternity initiation is shown to go disastrously wrong. As an initiation, all pledges must lose their virginity on the night of the big Sigma Phi Homecoming party. One poor pledge, Kenny Hampson, is taken upstairs to the frat house with the promise of sex with one brother's girlfriend, Alana. Alana calls Kenny over to the bed, but unbeknownst to him, "Alana" is actually a purloined corpse from the anatomy lab. When Kenny discovers this, he goes mad. Going mad as a result of "The Cadaver Arm" or in this case, just "The Cadaver," is a standard concluding motif of these legends. As Bronner notes in conclusion to one telling of "The Cadaver Arm" story, "So they go in, and they find him and he's sitting in the closet, chewing on the hand and his hair's all white" (Bronner, 1995: 159). Not quite what happens in *Terror Train*, but Kenny does go

mad and is institutionalised as a result of this prank. The film hypothesises what would happen if that practical joke's poor dupe, not only went mad, but also decided to take his revenge out on the other fraternity brothers by murdering them. Included within *Terror Train*'s diegesis is even a reference to the verisimilitude of the oral tradition by noting that since that night, the University has outlawed Sigma Phi parties, which is why they are having *this* party on a privately hired train (see Appendix Ten). But beyond this, the murders are localised only towards those directly responsible for the Kenny prank. There is no interdiction here, as the authorities themselves have put a stop to fraternity parties, nor is there any kind of warning *not* to have the party that could be violated. The boys of Sigma Phi have already been reprimanded, and so Kenny's revenge is overly individualised, thereby violating the narrative's legend-like openness and discursive aspects.

## Conclusion

The slasher film, like the oral urban legends which these films so closely resemble, may be seen to share one final similarity, that of *affect*. Barnes notes, although specifically referring to urban legends when he did so, that "the immediate function ... is obviously to *scare* the listener" (Barnes, 1966: 311, my emphasis). The author continues, "but once again, there is strong evidence of didactic purpose, both implied by the teller (who has been, in many instances, a 'hall counsellor' or a 'big sister') and inferred by the listener" (Barnes, 1966: 311). This didacticism within Terror Tale telling, although rarely explicit, contains strong implied moral purposes beyond, although not exclusive to, sexual behaviour. These may seem banal, but for folklorists specifically, and cultural scholars more generally, these narratives can be seen as moral templates to be used as behavioural surveys of contemporary adolescent mores, that is, as social scripts.

Applying morphological and social-script approaches to these films reveals a different set of questions. Sometimes these questions, particularly regarding the automatic assumption of gendered discourse, offer new interpretive strategies to these films. This is not to discount the gender debates in these films, or in film scholarship, but such interpretations should not be *de facto*. Although sex is often punished in these films, as is drinking and drugs, a consideration of the slasher genre, in terms of urban legend scholarship, also reveals questions about adolescent responsibility; as Bronner calls the campus-told legends, "a social map of teenage transition between childhood and adulthood" (Bronner, 1995: 169). Although referring specifically to college campus lore, the same could be said of adolescent babysitter, and summer camp lore, for they too negotiate this liminal development period between child- and adult-hoods. But, if nothing more, I hope this study, by its folkloristically-informed approaches, has demonstrated that even our taxonomic schematics need revising on these films, whether by content (Wood, 1984), film form (Schoell, 1985), genre (Creed, 1993; Clover, 1992), special make-up effects (McCarty, 1984), or narrative structure (Dika, 1990).

The popularity of these films, based on the number of variants, derivatives, sequels, copies and downright rip-offs that were produced, at the very least *points* to some kind of connection with the North American adolescent culture of the late 1970s/early 1980s. Dika notes "what is demonstrated here, then, is not only that an individual film made a sizeable impact on the viewing audience but that a particular story formula was so successful that the demand for it by its selective audience (i.e. a predominantly young one) encouraged the producers and distributors to continue the cycle of films" (Dika, 1990: 15). But even more to the point,

... the stalker film did not spontaneously spring into being because of a social impulse, but was originally engineered to embody a personal appraisal of an ongoing conflict. The fact that it continued through a sustained response from its audience, however, indicates that there was some congruence or appreciation of that attitude by the audience (Dika, 1990: 134).

The psychoanalytic readings of Creed, Clover and Dika, which posit specific violence-against-women and the-punishment-of-sexuality interpretations, even though these are recognised and accepted interpretations of the film cycle, are not the only schema through which to view these films individually. By using an urban legend morphology to examine these films, specifically in terms of the films' interdictions, when they have them, asks different questions of the texts. Just as there is little ethnographic evidence to prove that psychoanalytic interpretations are conscious among these films' audiences, neither is there much to support the social-script hypothesis either. What now needs to happen is for proper audience studies to be done on actual audiences' interpretations. Of course some ethnographic work has begun in this area: specifically the studies by Brigid Cherry (2002) and Martin Barker and Kate Brooks (1998), and to a lesser extent Annette Hill (1997). But in the end I wonder whether or not any chance at ascertaining audience cognition of these films' interdictions as social-scripts has not been irreparably destroyed by *Scream's* self-reflexivity: by explicitly telling its audience what "the rules for a horror movie are." Even if incorrect, are these interdictions not now proscribed?

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix One:**

Folklorists have also attempted psychoanalytical interpretations of these urban legends, most notably Alan Dundes' psychoanalytic reading of "The Hook". Regardless of the veracity of such readings, Dundes does note that "either folklorists must begin to try to interpret legend materials as traditional products of human fantasy, or they must forfeit any claim to be anything other than antiquarian butterfly collectors and classifiers" (Dundes 1971: 22).

### **Appendix Two:**

In folkloristic terms, this phenomenon is called "ostension" -- the acting out of a legend narrative (for a consideration of ostension in film see Koven, 1999). It is further worth noting, as Mark Seltzer does, "'there is some evidence that actual serial killers may pattern themselves on fictional accounts.' There is evidence too that these fictional accounts are often based on official accounts, which in turn often draw on fictional accounts" (Seltzer, 2000: 105). Further research is needed on the role of urban legends in this process of "acting out" fictional stories, or ostension, and this phenomenon's connection with horror cinema.

### **Appendix Three:**

There is some connection between the slasher film and Italian giallo books and movies, most notably that Mario Bava's *Reazione a catena* (1971, and known to English-speaking audiences as both *Bay of Blood* and *Twitch of the Death Nerve*) was the inspiration for *Friday the 13th*. But furthermore, the giallo films of both Bava and Dario Argento have much in common with the "Scooby-Doo"-like murder mysteries.

#### **Appendix Four:**

*Elm Street* creator, Wes Craven, has pointed out that Krueger was intentionally a *reaction to* the slasher films of the late 1970s and early 1980s, "a backlash against the *Friday the 13th* [series]" (Schoell and Spencer, 1992: 180). The same authors also note: "...Freddy is no dull and typical practitioner of 'stalk and slash'. He would be appalled by those mute, dumb, and unimaginative fellows who merely plod around in masks or cloaks, thumping people on the head like petulant psychotic ninnies. Freddy has class. He... dreams up truly fiendish, original, chillingly clever and macabre ways of offing his victims. ... Other crazies pop out of closets or crawl out from under bed -- Freddy rips out of your very dreams, tearing out of your body or rising out of the bathwater..." (Schoell and Spencer, 1992: 1, emphasis in original).

#### **Appendix Five:**

An alternative perspective on this assumption regarding the conservative nature of the slasher films, as well as their reproduction in multiple forms, can be seen by applying Walter Ong's "psychodynamics of orality" to these films' storytelling structures. In *Orality and Literacy*, Ong identifies the "psychodynamics" of orality: those cognitive processes which characterise the primarily oral cultures. The terms that we, in our highly literate society, use to describe the world around us -- our very "literate" worldview -- are often inappropriate to describe the worldview of primary orality cultures. Ong notes that orality in mass-mediated, technological societies, like our own, does exist in a secondary capacity (Ong, 1982: 11). But that by conceiving of oral "texts," as well as other linguistic metaphors to describe primary oral cultures, demonstrates our literacy prejudice (Ong, 1982: 13). Ong notes that primary orality often lacks analytical discourse, that is, lacks the discourse of introspection or self-reflexivity (Ong, 1982: 30), a facet not applicable to the recent revival of the slasher films, but, as "Scooby-Doo" murder mysteries, is more *literary* in their narrative logic. Furthermore, one associates the word *conservative* ideologically, that is, as in *political* conservatism, and in no uncertain terms are any of these movies progressive in ideological terms, but this too is one of Ong's psychodynamics: to challenge the social order, to call it into question, or any of the precepts which make up that order, risks forgetting the generations of work which built it (Ong, 1982: 41-42). Individually, an audience member may choose to accept, challenge, or otherwise problematise the films, but as a general address to a primarily audio-visual audience, vernacular cinema cannot encourage "intellectual experimentation" (Ong, 1982: 41). Unfortunately, space does not permit me to fully explore this application; that will have to wait for another article.

#### **Appendix Six:**

Vera Dika notes "Yablans offered... Carpenter... to direct a feature film based on the idea of 'the baby-sitter murders'" (Dika, 1990: 30). Danielson takes this observation a step further by noting: "*Halloween* is something else. It is a composite of themes and motifs familiar to any folklorist who has paid attention to these oral horror stories. ... As in many legends of this kind, attention in the movie to the specific location and time of occurrence precedes the action, which involves a vulnerable adolescent endangered by a violent madman, either in a baby-sitting situation or an amorous tryst, or in both" (Danielson, 1996: 63).

#### **Appendix Seven:**



Clover defines the role of the Final Girl thus: "The one character of stature who does live to tell the tale is in fact the Final Girl. She is introduced at the beginning and is the only character to be developed in any psychological detail. We understand immediately from the attention paid it that hers is the main story line. She is intelligent, watchful, level-headed; the first character to sense something amiss and the only one to deduce from the accumulating evidence the pattern and extent of the threat; the only one, in other words, whose perspective approaches our own privileged understanding of the situation," (Clover, 1992: 44).

### **Appendix Eight:**

Bronner notes this as a standard performance style of campfire storytelling: "In its formulaic structure, this fatal initiation story is reminiscent of playful horror tales often told at summer camps... In these tales, a ghost comes closer and closer to the final victim until the teller startles the listener by grabbing him or her or feigning death" (Bronner, 1995: 163). This style of legend performance is also recreated in the film *Meatballs* (Ivan Reitman, 1978), where Bill Murray tells the story of "The Hook."

### **Appendix Nine:**

Barnes, in an earlier piece, offers a slightly different interpretation of these campus urban legends. He notes "the function of [these legends] is not only to frighten the listener for the moment, but to discourage him from staying in the dormitory or fraternity house over the holidays" (Barnes, 1966: 307).

### **Appendix Ten:**

Bronner notes, "Told in college, the horror variety of initiation stories is frequently offered to explain why a campus does not have fraternities or sororities" (Bronner, 1995: 165).

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Urban Legend is a 1998 slasher film directed by Jamie Blanks, written by Silvio Horta, and starring Jared Leto, Alicia Witt, Rebecca Gayheart, and Tara Reid, and is the first installment in the Urban Legend franchise. Its plot focuses on a series of murders on the campus of a private New England university, all of which appear to be modeled after popular urban legends. In addition to its younger cast, the film features supporting performances from Robert Englund, Loretta Devine, John Neville, and Brad Pitt. Urban legends are made to scare, making them the perfect inspiration for creepy and unsettling horror movies. The obscure anthology Campfire Tales actually features three urban legends and one well-known children's ghost story. Other than the movie's interpretations of "The Hook" and "The Boyfriend's Death," there's a chilling adaptation of "People Can Lick, Too." RELATED: 10 Great Anthology Movies to Watch If You Liked Creepshow. The 1981 slasher The Burning loosely adapted Cropsey as the film's killer. The movie is considered a Friday the 13th knockoff, but Tom Savini's exemplary practical gore effects make it stand out among the crowd of copycats. 1 Urban Legend (1998) - The Killer in the Backseat. About the film. TERROR TALES is bringing together legendary horror actors from some of the genre's most iconic films including: Friday the 13th, Maniac Cop 1 & 2, George Romero's The Crazies, Wes Craven's The People Under the Stairs, Sleepaway Camp, Ghostbusters and more. SYNOPSIS. When Michael wakes up he is horrified to find that he is riding shotgun with a psychopath (Christopher Showerman- Ladybug) who reveals to him that his wife and daughter are held captive in the attached cargo trailer. With a burning desire for the truth behind his abduction and the safety of his family, will Michael have the will to survive the madness? Your sanity will be tried and tested in Terror Tales. DIRECTOR: Jimmy Lee Combs. WRITER: Jimmy Lee Combs.