

Aggielife

The Battalion

Urban Legends: From Aggieland to Movieland

• Professor says tales represent social fears.

BY TRAVIS IRBY
The Battalion



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JP BEATO/THE BATTALION

"The Roommate's Death," "The Purloined Kidney" and "The Angry Student" are among the most popular stories in America. Everybody and their friend knows at least one by heart. But these tales aren't listed on any bestseller list, and none are likely to be found in a library.

They are urban legends, modern society's continuation of the oral storytelling tradition. Urban legends are considered a national phenomenon, but A&M has some of its own legends.

Some of the tales unique to A&M include haunted buildings and architectural pranks. Dr. Thomas Green, an associate professor of anthropology, has written and edited several publications on folklore and urban legends.

He said many urban legends sum up contemporary fears and concerns. College students seem to be ripe with these oral anecdotes. Some of the most famous urban legends involve universities.

There is the legend sometimes referred to as "The Roommate's Death."

A college student returns from a night of partying, too tired to do anything but crash in her bed, so tired she does not even bother turning on the lights. The next morning, the girl wakes up to find her roommate slaughtered and "Aren't you glad you didn't turn on the lights" written on the wall in blood.

Another famous college-conceived tale is "The Purloined Kidney."

It starts with a guy clubbing around town. He meets a beautiful woman, and they share some drinks.

They go to his place, and the next morning he wakes up in a pool of his own blood. He sees a note with "Call 911 or Die" written on it. Apparently, the woman drugged him and stole one of his kidneys.

Green said such stories have a special place with students.

"Many people are away from home for the first time, with strangers they know nothing about," Green said. "The legends warn about real, potential dangers by exaggerating them."

Not all the tales have to do with death and violence; one tale might inspire a sense of empathy in some students.

In "The Angry Student," it is final time in a class of 400-plus students. The professor notices one student cheating. The professor decides to wait until the end of class to take action. When the student turns in his test, the professor asks the professor if he knows the student's name.

The professor replies no. The student takes his test and proceeds to shove it in the middle of the pile. He then takes the pile and throws it up in the air, scattering all the tests.

Green said this particular story is one of the most commonly told, by both students and professors alike.

"I have heard it told by both faculty and students," Green said. "The perception of right and wrong is different depending on who tells it."

A&M does have its own legends, but according to Green, they are technically not urban legends.

He said an urban legend is a story that circulates across the country and has no local history, although many people will localize the legends.

"I have had many people come up to me and swear one of these occurrences happened to a friend of a friend," Green said.

Such semantics do not keep Aggies from coming up with their very own campus legends.

The elevators in the Animal Industries building supposedly are haunted by a professor who lost his life in one. He was slaughtering animals late one night when he accidentally cut himself with a saw. No one was around to help, so he tried to use the elevator to get help. He bled to death in the elevator.

As a result of the gruesome death, at night elevators in the building go up and down without any passengers, at least any live ones.

There are many legends involving campus architecture.

The Reed-McDonald building is rumored to have been built by a sneaky University of Texas graduate. He wanted to play a joke on the Aggies by hitting them where it hurt most, their spirit. When he finished the building, he chose a maroon paint for the building. When it first dried it looked maroon, but as time went by the color changed, leaving a burnt orange building on the A&M campus.

Dr. John Hoyle, a professor of educational administration and the author of the *Good Bull* books, is an expert on Aggie legends and traditions. Each year he visits many groups talking about these legends.

He said legends and traditions are part of who Aggies are.

"These stories bind the Aggie community together," Hoyle said.

MOVIE REVIEW

Urban Legend

Starring Jason Leto and Alicia Witt
Directed by Jamie Blanks
Rated R
Playing at Hollywood 16

If audiences want to be on the edges of their seats, half scared half laughing and enjoying every minute, then *Urban Legend* is the movie for them.

The stories told around campfires and at slumber parties are brought to life in this fun flick, which ranks up there with the scariest movie of the '90s, *Scream*.

College students are systematically killed off by a mysterious killer using a vast knowledge of hometown legends.

Add a mix of inside jokes, and audiences get a movie that covers many facets of entertainment.

Urban Legend makes audiences jump, scream and laugh. It is a thrill ride that begs for a sequel.

Audiences will check their backseats before getting in their car after seeing this movie.

It is a definite must-see for lovers of scary movies everywhere. (Grade: A)

— Katie Mish

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Tuesday, Sept. 29, 1998
Kol Nidre Services at 8:00 p.m.

Weds., Sept. 30, 1998
Yom Kippur Services start at 10:00 a.m.
Yizcor about 5:30 p.m.
Break-the-Fast after sundown at the conclusion of the Neilah and Havdalah.

All holiday events are free of charge and occur at Hillel, located across from campus at 800 George Bush, CS

Please contact Hillel for more information at telephone # 696-7313 or e-mail us at: <Hillel@startel.net>

Names for Yizcor must be received in the office by Sept. 28, 1998

Coffee Talk

Come out and join Dr. Southerland and Laurie Nickel for a cup of coffee, cookies, and conversation!

September 28: 11:30am-1:30pm in the 12th Man
October 28: 11:30am-1:30pm in the Underground
November 17: 11:30am-1:30pm in the Commons

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WHO'S WHO AMONG STUDENTS IN AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES
1998 - 99
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Who's Who applications are now available for both undergraduate and graduate students in the following locations:

- Commandant's Office (Military Sciences Building)
- Student Programs Office (2nd floor MSC)
- Student Activities Office (125 John J. Koldus Building)
- Sterling C. Evans Library
- Office of Graduate Studies (125 Teague)
- Office of the Dean of each College
- Office of Graduate Studies (128 Teague)
- Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs (10th floor Rudder)

Completed applications must be received by the Student Activities Office no later than 5:00 pm on Friday, October 2, 1998. They may be hand-carried to the Student Activities Office, sent through Campus Mail, or sent through U.S. Mail. (See application for addresses.) Questions may be addressed to Sandy Briers in Student Activities at 845-1133.

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