



Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults: Legends We Live

Bill Ellis

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Written for both the cultural studies expert and the reader fascinated with reactions to extraordinary phenomena, *Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults* pursues motivations for why people tell these "true stories, heard from a friend of a friend." Ellis shows legends creating a sense of community in a multi-ethnic institutional camp. He traces some contemporary scares to such old tales as the vanishing hitchhiker and murderous gang initiations. In analyzing some newly emerging legend types, such as alien abductions and computer virus warnings, Ellis discovers connections between earlier types of religious experience and supposed witchcraft. Finally, the book reveals how legends can inspire people to actions, ranging from playful visits to haunted spots to horrifying threats of violence. Legends rely on active discussion to spread and mutate. This book considers them to be a social process, not a kind of narrative with a fixed form. People worldwide may tell a legend or one person to whom the event allegedly occurred may "own" the story. Individuals may relate an event as something strongly believed, or as something laughable. Legends may be very new, or have roots in old folklore. But when high schools, law enforcement agencies, city governments, and individuals take action, the story becomes one of the legends we live.

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