SLENDER MAN

MODERN MYTH

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HIS FACE WAS VERY
LONG AND PALE
...HE WAS VERY TALL.
HE WAS WEARING A BLACK
THREE-PIECE SUIT
AND I KNEW RIGHT AWAY THAT HE WAS NOT A
HUMAN BEING.
- Stephen King,
"The Man in the Black Suit"

Creating a Monster

"We didn't want to go, we didn't want to kill them, but it's persistent silence and outstretched arms horrified and comforted us at the same time…" – 1983, photographer unknown, presumed dead.

One of two recovered photographs from the Stirling City Library blaze. Notable for being taken the day which fourteen children vanished and for what is referred to as "The Slender Man". Deformities cited as film defects by officials. Fire at library occurred one week later. Actual photograph confiscated as evidence. – 1986, photographer: Mary Thomas, missing since June 13th, 1986.

Back in 2009 a 'create paranormal pictures' thread opened on the Something Awful internet forums. The idea was simple, to take photographs and edit in a ghost or something else strange and perhaps fool people into believing the images were real by leaking them onto other websites. Three days after the thread was created a user by the name Victor Surge posted two black and white photographs of children along with a short description. The images had been doctored to include the figure called "Slender Man" by the creator, a tall being with a blank white face wearing a black suit, seen standing in the distance.

A few days later the user added a third image along with a fake account of events, and soon after other contributors were using the Slender Man in their own manipulated photographs. Slender Man quickly spread from Something Awful to various other websites, becoming a well known mythical creature like vampires or Bloody Mary, despite his origin being very recent and not at all up for debate.

His popularity grew quickly, spreading through fake stories and images, being reinterpreted and expanded the further the story travelled from it's original two images. His appearance became more defined, the powers the creature possesses were created and refined. Here in 2009 was a story spreading across the internet in a way that would seem more fitting of a fairytale spreading from village to village, and parents to children hundreds of years ago.

What is the Slender Man?

The Slender Man as a creature can't completely be defined. Almost every interpretation will be slightly altered to fit the idea the author has, but there are some common threads that seem to be universally agreed upon.

He is a tall thin humanoid, though he seems to be able change his height at will. This is done either by being able to extend his limbs, or by extra spider-like legs that can grow from his back at will. Because of this he's often seen in a forest setting, his thin black limbs blending in well with branches.

He's not known for actually attacking people and being violent, rather he seems to simply follow people and at some point they just disappear. It's clear he has an effect on them passed the expected paranoia of being followed, however. He causes what has been dubbed 'Slender Sickness' in his victims. The sickness gets steadily worse and includes coughing fits, vomiting, exhaustion, and amnesia. In some cases this can escalate to coughing

up blood, trouble breathing, extended periods of memory loss, and signs of radiation exposure.

It is a large theory that Slender Man is of another dimension, which is what allows him to appear inside people's home and vanish without a trace, which is also what makes him radioactive and causes sickness after extended periods of exposure.

Originally he was known for stalking children and causing them to disappear, but this quickly evolved so that the people shaping this elaborate story could be move personally involved with the tale. So the story became that Slender Man stalks people from when they were a child into their adult life. It only seems to be when they become aware of his presence that the stalking becomes more aggressive and they disappear.

Changing History

Der Ritter.

These woodcuts are held up as an indication that Slender Man, a character created only a few years ago, has actually existed for hundreds of years. The first, Der Ritter (The Knight) shows one of his many long limbs being used to impale a knight in battle. The second shows Slender Man stealing a child away from it's family.

The images are credited to a German artist named Hans Freckenberg, who is said to have disappeared in 1543. The woodcut were later discovered in Halstberg Castle in 1883.
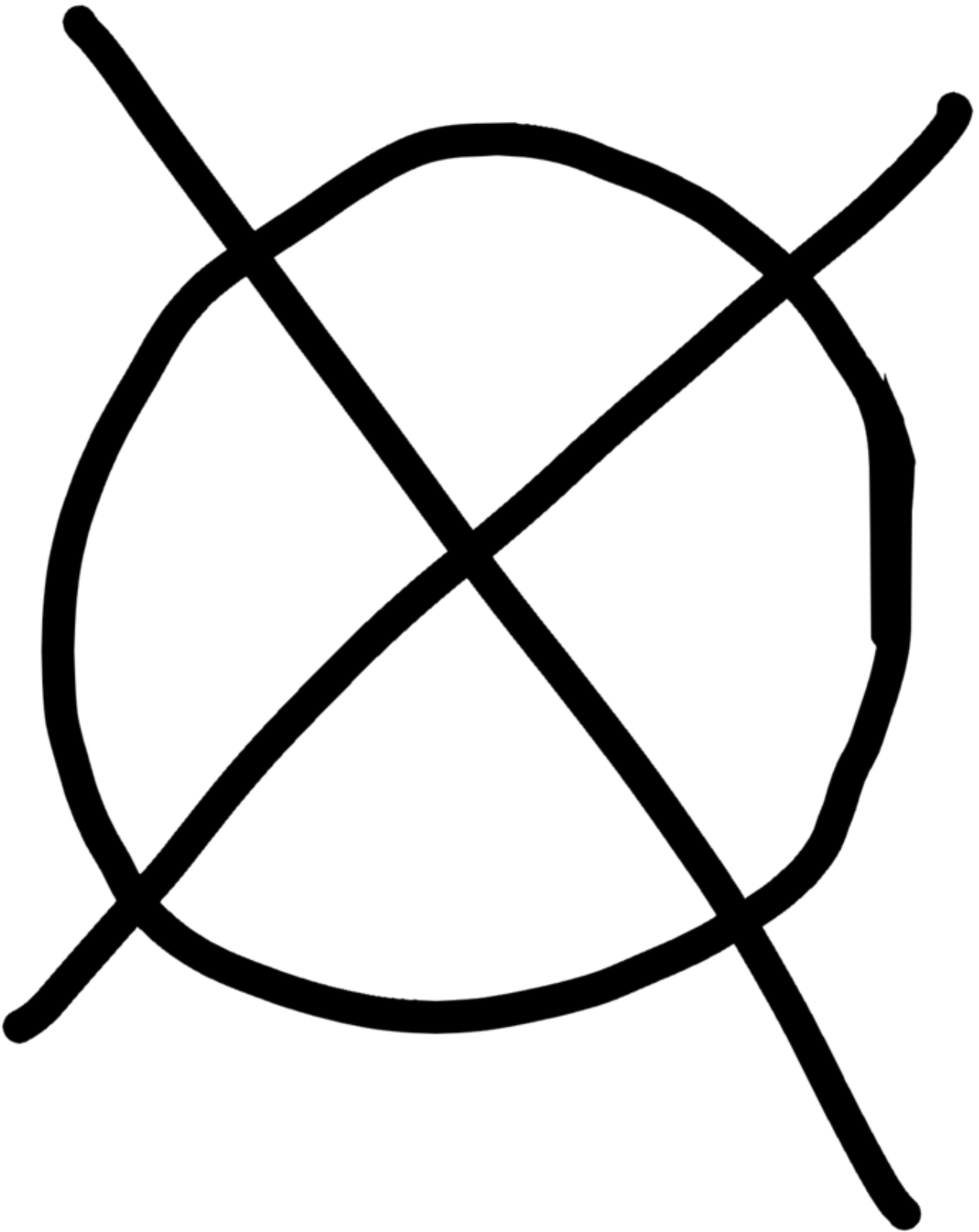
The images are yet another manipulation however, ones created to try add more credence to the myth. There are many images like this, people backtracking through history almost as if to make others doubt that Slender Man didn't exist until 2006, when Photoshop brought him to life.

The original unedited images are actually by the artist Hans Holbein (The Elder), the name change ensuring that even if the artist is searched for the original woodcuts will not be found.

There have been many images like these created, edited versions of everything from Renaissance paintings to Ancient Egpytian hieroglyphics. Some of the ideas are rather creative, with one claiming that when x-rayed the painting Three Ages of Woman and Death by Hans Baldung revealed it was altered early in it's existance to remove extra limbs attached to the skeletal figure in the painting.

This practice has also led to the creation of false legends of many cultures that sound like the Slender Man, given various different names and slightly different interpretations over many years.

Alternate Reality Game

A good example of just how quickly interest in Slender Man caught on would be MarbleHornets. Only ten days after Slender Man was created on Something Awful the YouTube account MarbleHornets began posting videos.

The Introduction video sets the stage. Jay, the uploader, retrieved taped of his friend Alex's student film, Marble Hornets, which Alex abandoned in 2006. Alex gave up on the film because of 'unworkable conditions' and said he was going to burn the tapes, but Alex convinced him to hand them over.

The tapes sat in the back of Jay's closet for a while, and Alex disappears out of his life soon after. Finally Jay rediscovered the tapes and decided to go through them. The tapes are unnumbered and so the correct order isn't known, but Jay plans to upload anything interesting he finds on the tapes onto the YouTube channel.

The tapes show Alex's many encounters with Slender Man. Jay himself soon starts to be stalked by the Slender Man, known in the Marble Hornets Project as The Operator.

The series still runs to this day, with followers of the story sometimes having

to wait months between entries and follow the tale as it spills over onto other websites such as Twitter.

Many other Slender Man series have since popped up YouTube. Most notably, EverymanHYBRID.

Started in March 2010, it at first appears to be a group of friends making fitness videos with obviously inserted Slender Man appearances in the background. The friends soon find themselves stalked by the real Slender Man however, having draw his unwanted attention.

MarbleHornets also quickly inspired the first written series based around Slender Man.

Just Another Fool is a blog run by a man called Logan. In February 2009 one of Logan's friends, Matt, leaves for Iraq and as a parting gift Logan gives him a black moleskin notebook.

Matt is ambushed in early July. He survives, but is diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and dies later after spending the remainder of his time in a mental hospital. Logan is given back the notebook and finds some startling things inside.

Just Another Fool, like MarbleHornets did for webseries, led to countless other blogs of people claiming to be stalked by the Slender Man.

The theme through almost all Slender Man media is that it's real. Slender Man is real. The web series, no matter what media they used, are almost never approached in third person. Rather than being a story about a group of fictional characters the people use themselves. Slender Man became the basis for an Alternate Reality Game, with hundreds of plays writing about and filming how they've come face to face with the creature.

What's Next?

So, what's next? Well, Slender Man doesn't seem to be showing any signs of stopping his take over. More blogs and YouTube series continue to be created, and the myth has become popular enough that it's began to attract parodies.

The independent low quality video game Slender, which is only one (extremely hard) level long, became a sensation and a more established professional second game is currently in the works thanks to how large the audience became.

Multiple low-budget horror films based around the creature are soon to be released for sale online and more still are in the works.

Could Slender Man possibly make the jump from internet to the big screen? It's possible, I even expect it. To the wider audience he would simply be another creature created by Hollywood, his previous life on the internet wouldn't need to be know to understand him as a horror movie villain, but would be a very good story for publicity.

Slender Man, coming soon to a theater near you. Maybe.