

legends

recognised products in the world has made it an easy target.

Coca-Cola could be seen as a symbolic product of the Western world, and therefore a very believable target for fundamentalist Islamic terrorists hell-bent on causing a spectacular catastrophe on the scale of 9/11.

Coke lore is discussed in greater detail in the Food and Drink category.

For more information, visit the Coca-Cola website (coca-cola.com, not coca-cola.co.uk).

It states: "These rumours are absolutely false and are causing needless worry."

The US-based website also debunks many other false rumours concerning Cokelore and is truly worth a visit.

NAME: Don't Swallow Your Gum
ORIGIN: Unknown
STATUS: False

The legend

HEALTH warning: do not swallow chewing gum!
The gum is indigestible, which means your body cannot digest it.

It will take a staggering seven years for



Picture: CORBIS

NAME: Alligators in the Sewer
ORIGIN: 1930s, New York
STATUS: Undecided

The legend Version 1

IN 1935, the *New York Times* newspaper ran a story about a group of boys who stumbled across an alligator in the New York sewers.

One of the boys had been shovelling snow into an open manhole down East 123rd St, Manhattan, when he noticed something moving directly beneath him.

After a closer inspection, the boy jumped back and called over to his friends that he could see an alligator in the sewer.

The news report states the boys managed to drag the alligator out into the open by throwing a lasso around its head, but the alligator was slain when it turned vicious.

The reptile was described as 2.3m to 2.4m long.

The investigation

The legend of the Alligators in the Sewer may have originated from the *New York Times* newspaper article mentioned in Version 1.

chewing gum to pass completely through your digestive system.

The investigation

The above message is a typical warning notice that usually arrives in the form of an email.

Parents have been telling their children not to swallow their chewing gum for this reason for years, and so the legend is nothing new.

Chewing gum *is* indigestible, and the word has caused much confusion.

The simple fact is that though swallowing your chewing gum is not a very healthy thing to do, the gum will pass straight through your system and into your stool undigested.

Though experts argue that swallowing large amounts of sugar-free gum could cause diarrhoea, this is because the sugar substitutes are not absorbed and pass into the small intestine and colon.

So to sum up, if you swallow chewing gum, it will not stay in your stomach for seven years.

But if you swallow an excessive amount of sugar-free gum, it will give you the splats.

Is that clear to everyone?

NAME: Aircraft Maintenance
ORIGIN: Unknown
STATUS: Undecided

The legend

AFTER every flight, pilots complete a gripe sheet on which they list mechanical problems encountered with the aircraft during the flight and which need to be repaired or corrected.

The forms are passed on to the aircraft mechanics, who read them and correct the problems the pilots have listed.

The mechanics then write on the lower half of the form what remedial action was taken, and the pilot reviews the

A further point regarding the credibility of the legend can be found in a book written by a former New York City Commissioner of Sewers.

In the book he claims that by the mid-1930s, there was a problem with alligators in the sewers.

The problem was treated as serious, and another commissioner headed the investigation. He claimed they did find alligators, but they averaged only about 0.6m.

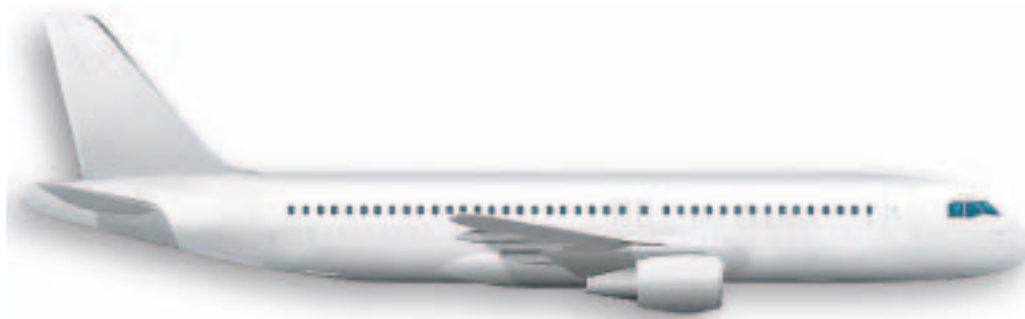
A campaign was immediately started to rid the Manhattan sewers of the reptiles, and in 1937 it was announced that all the alligators had been exterminated.

These accounts may be convincing, but cannot be taken as gospel.

There may be grains of truth in the stories, but they may have been heavily exaggerated as well.

Over the years the legend has grown in stature and popularity and plausible theories have been put forward on how the alligators got into the sewers in the first place and how they survived.

It is true that Florida is a popular holiday destination for Americans, especially those



gripe sheet before taking the aircraft on its next flight.

Here are some actual logged maintenance complaints and problems:

P = The problem logged by the pilot.

S = The solution and/or action taken by the mechanics.

P: Left inside main tyre almost needs replacement.

S: Almost replaced left inside main tyre.

P: Test flight OK, except autoland very rough.

S: Autoland not installed on this aircraft.

P: Something loose in cockpit.

S: Something tightened in cockpit.

P: Dead bugs on windshield.

S: Live bugs on back-order.

P: Autopilot in altitude-hold mode produces a 200 fpm descent.

S: Cannot reproduce problem on ground.

P: Evidence of leak on right main landing gear.

S: Evidence removed.

P: DME volume unbelievably loud.

S: DME volume set to more believable level.

P: Aircraft handles funny.

S: Aircraft warned to straighten up, fly right and be serious.

The investigation

This is an email that I received in October 2002.

This "list" arrangement is an instantly recognisable format in ULs that are spread by email, and is used to document such things as computer helpline conversations, doctors' notes about patients, quotes from parents for students, quotes from accident report forms and signs and menus that have been translated into poor English by foreigners.

Most of the material that is circulated via emails today could have been found sitting on top of a fax machine's in-tray 10 years ago.

Similarly, it could have been found pinned to a company's bulletin board or printed in a newsletter 30 to 40 years before that.

In other words, this is a typical "office water-cooler conversation" that reproduces and recycles the same information but with variations.

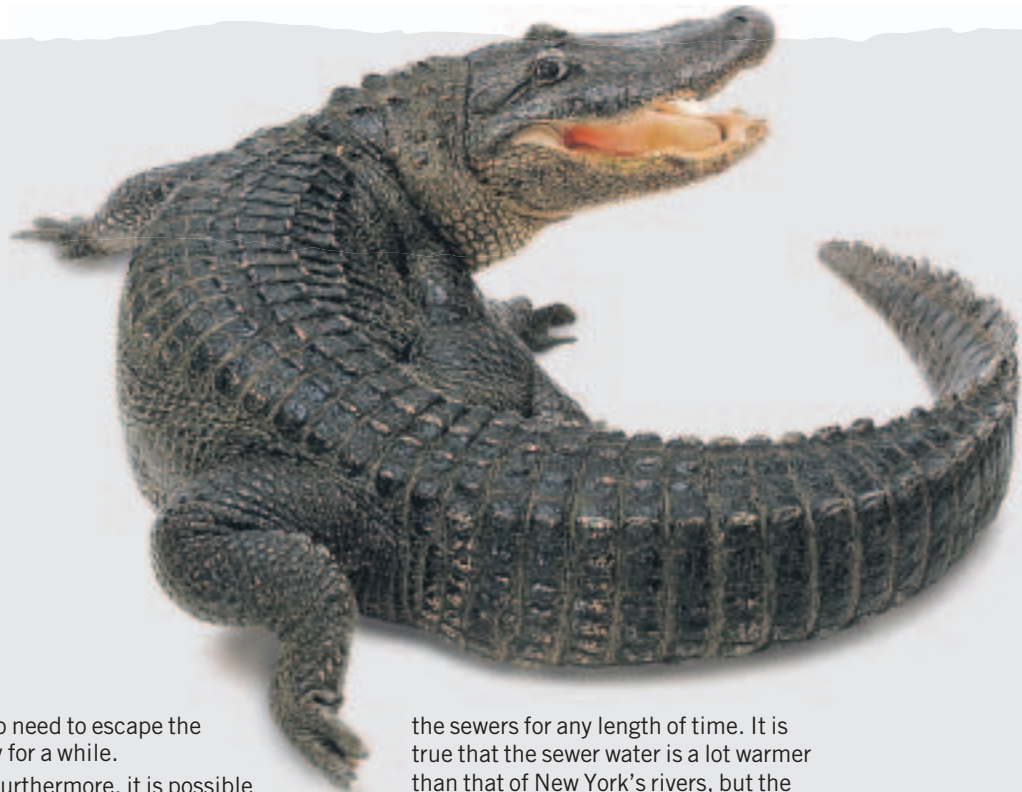
This is why I consider the "lists" as ULs.

The examples are edited versions of the legends in Mark Barber's book, *Urban Legends Uncovered*.

offer

Urban Legends Uncovered by Mark Barber.

See Page 26 for a special reader offer



who need to escape the city for a while.

Furthermore, it is possible that baby alligators were brought back to New York City as pets. But experts say it would have been impossible for the alligators to survive in

the sewers for any length of time. It is true that the sewer water is a lot warmer than that of New York's rivers, but the toxic gases, hydrogen sulphide and the industrial chemical wastes that pervade the sewers would make the alligators' chances of survival only minimal.

Pictures: CORBIS