

Prebunking Health Misinformation Tropes Can Stop Their Spread | WIRED

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The scene comes into focus: A car is driving down a winding mountain road at night. Suddenly, the headlights flicker, then fade to black. The car stops dead. Moonlight is all that's left for our heroine, owls hoot, and vaguely ominous music plays in the background.

You know that things are about to go south because, as TVTropes.com notes, "only three things happen when you go on a road trip in a horror movie," and they all involve horrors. As our heroine gets out of the car, you may be tempted to yell "Don't Go in the Woods!" because nothing good ever comes from going into the woods at night. But she does, of course. There, she finds an Abandoned Log Cabin. You can write the rest of the story yourself.

Over time, such tropes become extremely predictable. Their predictability is employed to many ends. Just as storytellers in movies, songs, and TV use tropes to make stories more understandable and relatable and, ultimately, to entertain us, disinformation purveyors use these same tropes to make their arguments more understandable or relatable and, ultimately, to manipulate us. Knowing this, we might be able to keep more of us out of the woods.

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