

# Siren Head: The Shapeshifter of Social Media

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Monsters that lurk in the dark and on the fringes of society have always haunted the stories that humans tell. They capture the fears of society, bending and sculpting into the representations of the anxieties that plague humans. As humanity faces new challenges, these fears begin to warp into new horrors. One such monster that has been developed by and for the contemporary space is Siren Head. Siren Head is a horror monster created in 2018 by an artist named Trevor Henderson. The creature is a 40-foot tall being with the body of a human, and a neck and head consisting of a metal pole with two loudspeaker systems and cords dangling from it. It is believed that the inspiration for Siren Head is Slender Man (Asimos 2021; Blank and McNeill 2018; Boyer 2013; Chess and Newsom 2014; Peck 2017) because both figures roam the woods and hunt down victims. Siren Head started as a Twitter post. As recounted on the “Siren Head” page of the Fandom.com Wiki, the post showed the monster “standing still at a graveyard” accompanied by a description of a woman seeing and hearing the creature screech a series of seemingly nonsensical numbers and words at her before running toward her.

Many readers will already be familiar with Slender Man, a folkloric figure that originated on Creepypasta. Though the physical presences of Siren Head and Slender Man seem to reflect each other, one intriguing parallel between the two legends is how they spread through reverse ostension, a “weaving together diverse strands of ‘experience’...into a more or less coherent body of narratives” (Tolbert 2018, 27). Both Slender Man and Siren Head were created through image postings and were later further developed by the public sharing their experiences through social media platforms. Siren Head quickly evolved from photos to videos, and eventually video games, with people creating and elaborating on the original image and sharing their videos online for others to see. This paper explores the figure of Siren Head in terms of its creation, development, and spread; the relationship between Siren Head and

other shapeshifters in folklore tradition; and the vital role of social media and sound in the ostension (or showing) process (Dégh and Várzsonyi 1983).

### **Siren Head Creation, Development, and Dissemination**

The horror creature, so the invented backstory goes, was said to have been first sighted in an Arizona desert in 1966, with another sighting in 1995. As the “Siren Head” page on the Fandom.com Trevor Henderson Wiki relates the story:

on July 16, 1995, Chad and his friends were hiking in the woods of Tanyard Creek, where they found Siren Head to be lurking. According to Chad, his friends got snatched by something gigantic striding through the trees that mimicked their voices. Chad was found alive with a few injuries, while the friends were gone, either taken or killed by Siren Head.

Although those were the first sightings reported about Siren Head, the backstory legend created about it holds that it has been around since ancient times, appearing in rock paintings throughout North America. This may indicate “that Siren Head is not a new species/creature on earth. There have been also sightings of creatures that resemble Siren Head but lack similar features.”

According to the legendary narrative woven around the creature on these and similar forums, Siren Head was able to survive over time by shapeshifting and adapting to current times. A previous photo of the creature was shown mimicking a streetlamp. As the Trevor Henderson Wiki notes, “it appears to have a streetlight for a head, while it is trying to blend in with the other streetlights by standing still.”

The sirens and height of the creature are two distinctive features that it possesses. If Siren Head basically resembles a normal loudspeaker pole, why is this creature so terrifying? It may be largely due to the sound that Siren Head makes, and, in particular, to the intensity of that sound, which can create a sense of fear for people. According to the Trevor Henderson Wiki:

[Siren Head] is mainly found in rural towns, wooden areas, and sometimes in dry forests. The victims of Siren Head are lost travelers, hikers, and even children. If the sounds of someone in distress are released, it can be a method of Siren Head trying to lure the victims into the woods.

However, over time the story has changed in terms of the sound the creature is said to produce, particularly in the most recent iterations of video games and video footage. According to an interview with Henderson in an episode of PBS' *Monstrum*, he had originally been inspired by the sounds produced in number stations, radio station broadcasts that consist of numbers, words, and even nursery rhymes used in wartime spy craft. As the lore surrounding this creature developed, the noises developed in new ways, influenced by those contributing to its spread throughout social media (Zarka 2022). The most common, and iconic, sound produced by the sirens resembles a blaring alarm.

One of the most recent sounds emitted by the creature is a unique and eerie alarm that is a realistic simulation of one we might hear in the real world today. People hearing these sounds, particularly as they seemed to be approaching from a distance, would understandably tend to feel a sense of fear. The sound that is produced through Siren Head's speaker head seems to be one that has been manually distorted from an original emergency siren. A preliminary search of different siren sounds from ambulances, cop car sirens, and tornado sirens failed to identify the specific sound used by Siren Head. However, additional research revealed a YouTube comment by a user named Legobricks asserting that the sound used is likely the tornado siren used by the city of Chicago. A video titled *Tornado Sirens in Downtown Chicago! (Original Video Recording)* uploaded on June 23, 2010 by the user BOOGIEMAN seems to be the original, and identical to the sound being played by Siren Head. Between the stormy weather and the large buildings, shown in the original video, an echoing sound is produced. The distortions these two add to the siren sound help create the uncanny, unsettlingly strange or mysterious sound that plays through the creature's siren head.

As mentioned earlier, the story's dissemination started as an image made by Trevor Henderson in 2018 which was posted on Twitter and Tumblr. Siren Head had enough popularity at that time that game developer Modus Interactive created a Siren Head-themed game, and later the next year another Siren Head game was created by a developer known as Thuleanpanteon. These new adaptations of the creepypasta served to boost the creature's popularity even further.

The following year on April 20, 2020, Alex Howard created a film of Siren Head on TikTok, further spreading its popularity. As explained on the Trevor Henderson Wiki on Fandom.com, Howard

“created a video of Siren Head moving around in a background, while at the same time, police and gun-fires can be heard. The video got popular very quickly, gaining over 20 million views in one week”. At this point, multiple people started to take the original footage and change out the sound so that more popular music was being played through the speakers. These developments caused Siren Head to spread through the algorithm in a different way than before, resulting in the content appearing on viewers’ For You Pages (FYPs) on TikTok—viewers who may not have seen the creature previously. Meanwhile, Trevor Henderson started to further expand on the lore of Siren Head, developing a backstory while touching on topics including the way the creature hunts, as well as the creatures’ abilities, behaviors, and the origins of its backstory legend.

The community around Siren Head is arguably starting to die out, with fewer people posting about their stories and sightings of Siren Head on Reddit forums. However, when it was most popular, the community was active in sharing their own photos of the creature and updating its current whereabouts in the world. Even fan fiction was made devoted to Siren Head, including a recent short story entitled “Gary the Hirskutan”, posted by a user named LinuxLiaison. He told the story of how the creature arrived on Earth, mentioning the existence of a whole population of Siren Heads called the Heads, otherwise known as Hirskutan. One of the Heads, named Gary, volunteered to come and protect planet Earth. While the rest of the story differed from the original lore, the author did note that the story was inspired by Siren Head. As the author explained in a 2021 post on LinuxLiaison:

This post was inspired by the character Siren Head which is a horror monster character created by Trevor Henderson. I’ve only seen horror-based Siren Head-inspired pieces and I wanted to try my hand at a more science-fiction-like story based on the character.

Though Siren Head was a recent creation, not even a decade old, the origins and spread of the creature and related story materials have grown to be rather extensive. Siren Head has developed in a manner similar to the spread of other tales in a modern setting, traveling from person to person while adapting to new iterations and new stories shared within the community. One of its main characteristics shows both its complexity as well as similarity to other, older stories: its ability to change shape and form.

## Siren Head as Shapeshifter

There are several examples of folklore that describe shapeshifting creatures (Barreiro and Cordo Russo 2019; Kachuba 2019), such as werewolves (Sconduto 2014; Stypczynski 2013), swan maidens (Golson 2023; Leavy 1995), *kitsunes* (Bathgate 2004), and so on. The idea of shapeshifting is something found within many cultures, reflected in myriad ways. Shapeshifting may consist of anything from partial to full transformations, and involve transformations from human to animal, vice-versa, or something else such as object-to-object. In discussing these types of stories, Emily Golson defines shapeshifting as “a physical change that affects inner changes in a shapeshifting being”, noting that “Very few shapeshifting tales ask if shapeshifters exist” (Golson 2023, 242). In terms of considering Siren Head as a shapeshifter, the lore surrounding the creature seems to present the question of shapeshifting as fact.

There are multiple examples of these shapeshifters, leading Siren Head to share some similarities with figures such as the Skinwalker and the Wendigo, both indigenous legends. Skinwalkers are a kind of evil witch from Navajo folklore, who can transform into, take over, or camouflage themselves in the guise of an animal (Alford 1992; Brady 1984). Wendigos are a belief creature from Anishinaabe folklore. Tales about them relate how a man turns into a monster due to his insatiable hunger (Krawec 2022). Wendigos are also legends that have struck interest within mainstream popular culture, leading to horror games such as *Until Dawn* (Supermassive Games 2015), in which a group of teenagers encounter Wendigos while on a trip to a friend’s cabin. While Wendigos do not change shape, they do have a similar characteristic of mimicry, reflected through media like *Until Dawn*. As mentioned on the *Until Dawn* fandom page there are Wendigos within the game that purposefully mimic voices to lure in prey. Jackson Elfin explains that: “The Wendigo will use a wide repertoire of tricks, from vanishing the meat off of still-living game to mimicking the face or voice of a hunter, to lure prey away from home, where it will eat or possess them, causing them to ‘go Wendigo’” (Elfin 2014, 10). It is important to note that the origins of these legends lie within indigenous cultures, and popular culture adaptations (as well as creepypasta iterations) are not necessarily accurate or unproblematic in their appropriations of these creatures.

The above-mentioned legends and the depictions shown of them within popular culture reflect the characteristics of mimicry and shapeshifting also represented in the Siren Head horror figure. These figures are said to be able to potentially shapeshift into multiple

animals, similar to how Siren Head is said to be able to transform into multiple guises—however, in its case, mainly ones that are non-sentient. In Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (1955-1958), transformation can take multiple forms, including animal-to-animal, animal-to-human, and object-to-object (Garry 2017). Siren Head would appear to be closest to the third kind of transformational entity, although in another sense it might be understood as undergoing a sort of animal (understood as “monster”) to object type of transformation. While there are parallels to elements in legend and myth, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact folklore on which this creature is based. Siren Head has the ability to transform into multiple inanimate objects and appears to resemble technology from the 1990s or 2000s, even while appearing in ancient times. The Trevor Henderson Wiki refers to a response Henderson gave on Twitter in which he seeks to explain this by saying: “What we’re seeing might be the most recent form, or maybe a slightly outdated form, of something that consistently changes. Maybe our eyes just show us the closest approximation to what’s actually there and this ‘fits’”. This implies that it does not just shapeshift but almost goes through an evolution to keep up with current times and remain blended in with the surrounding society.

This aspect of shifting to blend into the surroundings is very reminiscent of the story of the serpent woman. Even though the shapeshifter seemingly blended physically into her environment, Golson notes that “in spite of her beauty, people looked askance at her and felt, without being able to say why, that there was something wrong about her...” (Golson 2023, 244). This is also reflected within the Siren Head’s story. The creature seems to be adapting to the environment around it, but still, there is something uncanny or unnatural about its attempt to fade into the background. In addition to physically changing form, the sounds that Siren Head produces also seem to be adapting over time. One key characteristic of the creature is its ability to mimic the voices of its victims, though the sounds produced are typically depicted as being distorted. This combination of form and sound further contributes to its “unnatural” feeling.

Voice in any media serves as a powerful and purposeful tool, and Siren Head uses it both as bait and as a way to instill fear. One of the most well-known works of ancient literature discusses this manipulation of voices as something alluring and yet dangerous: the ancient Greek epic the *Odyssey*. The sirens, sea beings with the ability to lure their prey into the water with their voices, appear in

Homer's epic poem, where they attempted to lure and kill Odysseus on his journey.

In addition to sirens, there are other examples of mythology and folklore that have involved the idea of mimicry. The use of sound and voice in horror holds great potential to strike fear in audiences. Creatures from a variety of cultures use the idea of human speech to lure victims into their grips, and this sense of intelligence and trickery may be the real root of the fear behind the mythology. Thus, creatures like wendigos, sirens, and many more try to tempt their victims into their clutches (Austern and Naroditskaya 2006; DiMarco 2011; Wonderly 2009; Elfin 2014; Johnson 2022; Robson 2007).

Though Siren Head has many similarities to creatures from a variety of different legends both contemporary and old, it is important to note the way Siren Head has developed in its own unique way, and that it differs in certain ways from prior legends. With the combination of characteristics from shapeshifting to mimicry and its nostalgia-based appearance, Siren Head has developed into a truly modern tale. Unlike some of the legendary creatures mentioned earlier, Siren Head has also been developed to incorporate the use of not-quite-modern technology. This mixture of the machinic and organic is distinctive in certain ways and may serve to reflect fears within contemporary society related to technology itself. While the Wendigo is a tale of consumption and insatiable greed, the Siren Head legend arguably reflects a different set of fears in modern society (Krawec 2022).

Siren Head's story relates to the modern-day perception of authority and technology. The idea of a hidden creature that stalks and surveys its victim while they are unaware, inspires unease and even fear. Its ability to blend in with society and to copy voice and sound arguably conveys some kind of desire to evolve to meet the needs of modern society, as if it is learning more about the human condition and adapting to it as time goes on. Siren Head's ability to gain knowledge about those around it without being noticed is one that may reflect a fear of technology, particularly related to modern ideas about privacy--or lack thereof. This creature can mimic voices to lure its victims, in a way that demonstrates its ability to manipulate and understand. In addition to the use of mimicry, the employment of sounds to invoke purposeful feelings of distress, such as through issuing storm alarms and warnings, contributes to a heightened sense of fear of sudden disaster or peril. The use of alarms as a warning helps induce a sense of panic and fear of the

unknown. In addition, because the creature uses warped and distorted audio, it becomes harder to decipher what it might be warning against. Siren Head's link to technology in its very form is used to increase victims' and viewers' unease. Overall, the idea that something can be an amalgamation of the organic and mechanical is something that truly reflects the human fear of the unknown, and of the not-quite-human.

Siren Head, along with being unique in form, is also distinctive in the way its lore has spread and developed over time. The creation is notable for the role that social media platforms have played in showing, spreading, and transforming the sights and sounds of this creature.

### The Sounds and Sights of Horror: Ostension through TikTok

The sirens in this creepypasta helped to add another layer of fear, particularly for those with Phonophobia, which is the fear of sudden and unexpected loud noises (Henry et al. 2022). People hear the Siren Head first before seeing it, and with the noise being blared through loudspeakers, it is also hard to tell the direction the creature is coming from—thus creating a disorientating situation for its purported victims.

In addition to audio, so-called “found footage” and photos that people created helped make the belief in Siren Head spread through social media. Ever since the production of found-footage films like the *Blair Witch Project*, there has been an interest in horror as a potential reality (Aldana Reyes 2016; Littles 2023; Luba 2022). As McNeill and Tucker point out: “the ‘found-footage’ model of film making plays on the legend genre’s qualities of belief and possibility, making it an ideal visual genre to use with legend-like stories” (McNeill and Tucker 2018, 24). With filmmaking becoming easier for the average person to learn, legends are evolving to now display more video footage, blending the real and artificial in innovative ways. This can be seen through the multiple videos created on sightings of Siren Head, bringing in a newer layer of belief into the mythos surrounding the creature.

The popularity of short-form horror shown through platforms like TikTok has skyrocketed as the application has developed. This found-footage type horror is easily assimilated into the short videos that are the core aspect of TikTok (Ariyani 2022; Tortoloni 2022). When looking into horror on the app, one finds a wide range of results. The hashtag #horror has accumulated over 200 billion views as of October 2023 and continues to grow. Through TikTok, a large

variety of different folk horrors from creepypastas to cryptids have been even further developed within the community. Siren Head itself has continued to grow within the platform with over three billion views as of this writing.

People enjoyed having this new horror content to play around with, and started to remove the original sound, replacing it with popular music hits. As McNeill and Tucker argue: “Contemporary technology isn’t involved in legend tripping only at the evidence-gathering level, either – it can also provide a new avenue for the spread of legends and legend-trip rituals” (McNeill and Tucker 2018, 193). This was easy to do because of how Siren Head had been designed. With most other legends, people can only change or add to the original story, yet with Siren Head one could easily place any other sound over the video of the creature, making it seem as if the creature is playing that sound instead.

The development of Siren Head illustrates the idea of “re-mix culture,” or the ability to edit, add onto, and change content, before sharing it anew via the internet. Remix means engaging in “a culture in which all objects and items are (theoretically) untethered and up for grabs—for mashing, mixing, modifying, redistributing, and other acts” (Ridolfo and DeVoss 2017, 62). These additions and trends of remixing videos lead to the widespread sharing and extended reach of content and concepts. It is rare on platforms like TikTok that a creation is truly original, as it tends to lean into the idea of development on top of others’ ideas. In a somewhat similar way, oral tales involve processes of adding, editing, and altering as they are told from person to person; however, what is interesting about the way such a process works on a platform like TikTok is that the “seams” of this “stitching” are quite visible within the productions themselves.

One way of remixing a video has to do with the use of sounds. This made the legend of the creature spread more easily on TikTok since this particular social media application is based partially on sound. For instance, people use trending sounds and mute the music in order to boost their story onto other people’s For You Page (FYP) to attempt to cheat the algorithm and gain an opportunity to amass more views and a larger following on the platform. So, if a song or sound is trending, the theory goes, it is more likely to have that video pushed to other audience members, even if the content of the video does not match the viewer’s recommendations. This is perhaps how the footage of Siren Head became widely popular on TikTok even if the audience did not normally watch videos catered towards legends.

In addition to this ability to utilize sounds and trends that arguably increase visibility within TikTok, the idea of “rhetorical velocity”, discussed by Jim Ridolfo and Danielle Nichole DeVoss (2009, 2017), highlights creators’ ability to adapt and anticipate others’ remixing their works. This anticipation means that users may be able to try and create content for others to remix in the hope of expanding reach and further spreading their content. This is seen quite often within creative spheres on TikTok.

TikTok horror-focused creators like @heartstartspounding and @lighthousehorror dive into the mythos of Siren Head as a reality, relaying new sightings of the creature and giving debriefs on important information. While the idea behind the creature is assumed to be fiction, it is discussed as fact, and each of the sightings contributes to an overall idea of the creature and the dangers it poses to the world. There is fear laced in the descriptions of these videos, in order to cause the viewer to feel a sense of unease when presented with the idea of Siren Head. As @heartstartspounding stated on TikTok, “... There’s been an uptick in Sirenhead sightings. Things are about to get bad.” The use of such rhetoric continues to support the idea of Siren Head as authentic lore and thus encourages others to share their sightings. This, in turn, spurs further discussion within the community about the creature. This can be seen when other users on the app “stitch” the sighting to discuss and dissect the videos. Carlos Littles explains the importance of stitches when he writes: “Users can ‘stitch’ videos, which allows posts to be easily formatted for video commentary as it clips the original post so that a commenter can intercede with their own video at any point or superimpose one on top of the original” (Littles 2023, 152). The ability to expand on the lore of entities like Siren Head or other popular horror media, like the Backrooms creepypasta, is one of the reasons that TikTok has had such success with short-form horror.

Littles goes on to point out that “TikTok’s short form offers creators the ability to spam the feeds of their followers hundreds of times a day with short bursts of information... horror creators on TikTok also benefit from an erratic yet quasiregular algorithm” (Littles 2023, 152). TikTok’s platform is ideally suited for swiftly disseminating video content and information and is very dependent on circulating trends. Creators utilize these aspects of the platform in order to boost their content to interested audiences.

In addition to these discussions, TikTok utilizes an algorithm unlike other social media sites. TikTok is much more individualistic than other social sites, focusing less on the audience and more on

interaction based on individual interests. Aparajita Bhandari and Sarah Bimo use the term “algorithmic self” to discuss the way TikTok’s algorithm allows users to interact with both a trending algorithm and with themselves, defining it as “... the self as deriving primarily from a reflexive engagement with previous self-representations rather than with one’s social connections” (Bhandari and Bimo 2020, n.p.). Due to this, there is an increased amount of content creation, and the user directly views their own interests before them in the form of the For You Page (FYP). As a result, the spread of TikTok, especially in dedicated communities such as short-horror creators, has proven to have a very long reach.

As social media develops and spaces like TikTok advance, it is important to note the ethical concerns related to researching within a space that may complicate notions of privacy, despite being on a publicly shared platform. Contemporary legends such as Siren Head are being created, shared, and discussed on these public platforms. The research for this article directly references spaces that are supported by independent creators such as TikTok channels, fandom wiki pages, as well as other social platforms like Reddit. The ethical concerns behind public-facing information and digital sources have been a topic of ongoing discussion related to questions about access to information, as well as to evolving ideas about the relationship between copyright versus remixing (Campanelli 2011; Sugiura, Wiles, and Pope 2017).

On other platforms such as Reddit, people mostly posted photos of their sightings of Siren Head with a caption indicating where they saw the creature. In discussing the Slender Man creepypasta, Blank and McNeill argue that:

Regardless of scholarly understandings, the Slender Man Mythos is composed of a number of narratives that, while avowedly fictional, are framed within the narrative tradition as ‘true’ experiences – and the ‘truth’ of the tradition is established in various ways, including by likening it to ‘real’ legends’. (Blank and McNeill 2018, 29)

Similarly, with Siren Head, the users always told their stories as if the sightings were real, and the images posted along with it were fairly believable.

This poses an interesting question: Will the technology to create these photos become so well developed that people will soon only be able to rely on their independent knowledge and beliefs regarding the fact that such creatures do not exist? For example, would it be

outside the realm of possibility for someone to take high-quality photos of outer space and insert human-made creatures into the photos, thus creating new legends? Certainly, as McNeill and Tucker argue in regard to Slender Man, reverse ostension on the internet, as a “medium of communication”, is certainly “making further forms of ostension possible” (McNeill and Tucker 2018, 195).

## Conclusion

Siren Head started out as a Twitter posting that gained popularity through the community that built up around the creature, later resulting in two games being created about the character over the next two years. These video games boosted the knowledge of Siren Head, and soon videos appeared of the creature on the social media platform TikTok. Through this video and the use of manipulation of the algorithm, the creature was soon widely known on the internet.

It is intriguing to see how people used the sound feature on TikTok to boost this creature’s effect, relying on both remix culture and the idea of the algorithmic self to increase audience reception. But what is perhaps more interesting was the quality of the photos that were produced of Siren Head, and how these helped make the creature believable. A typical person’s common sense and beliefs may hinder full belief in such creatures found in such presentations. However, the more humans explore new realms, create work that emulates these creatures, and the more the technology used to create and manipulate photos evolves, people may come to increasingly question their beliefs and ask themselves whether what they are seeing is real, or simply a legend.

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