The New York Sun Stuns Readers with Discovery of Lunar Life

In August 1835 the New York Sun astounded readers with the news that life had been discovered on the moon. In a six-part series titled "Great Astronomical Discoveries," the penny newspaper revealed that an astronomer in South Africa had found that the lush lunar surface was covered with trees looking like firs and palms and that animals resembling bison and zebras roamed over it. Then, in the last few installments, readers discovered that the moon also was home to "rational beings," creatures who looked and acted very much like humans — except they had batlike wings and could fly.

The moon stories, supposedly discovered by the Sun in a Scottish scientific journal, caused a sensation. Other newspapers rushed to copy them, and the Sun saw its own circulation soar.

The articles had barely concluded, however, before both the New York Herald and the Journal of Commerce denounced them as a hoax.

The latter paper, in particular, had reasons for its claim, because the writer of the stories, Richard Adams Locke, had confessed to a colleague at the Journal that he had made the whole thing up.

The Sun, however, never admitted that the articles were a hoax; still claiming in mid-September that their source was a credible scientific journal reporting the activities of a respected astronomer. At the same time, it delighted in the fact that the authenticity of the articles had become a news event in itself. The truthfulness of the articles was not even that important, according to the Sun, because even those who doubted the stories' veracity admired the skillful writing and appreciated the amusement they had brought.

As the moon hoax showed, entertainment was as much a part of the function of early penny newspapers as information.

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AWFUL CALAMITY.
The Wild Animals Broken Loose from Central Park.

TERrible SCENES OF MUTILATION.
A Shocking Sabbath Carnival of Death.

On Monday morning, November 9, 1874, the New York Herald reported to shocked readers that the animals housed in Central Park Zoo were prowling the city's streets mauling and devouring citizens. The vivid full-page article described a "bloody and fearful carnival."

The great escape began when a zoo keeper teased a rhinoceros. Enraged, the rhino burst out of its cage and "plunged blindly" into other cages, setting the most dangerous animals free.

The rampaging rhino trampled a zoo attendant, attacked a group of young girls, "gored a horse" on 19th Street, and continued to terrorize the public until falling into a sewer.

Other animals followed the shrieking and scurrying crowds into the streets. A leopard killed a child and mutilated several women. A lion horrified a church congregation, killing an elderly woman. A tiger pounced onto a ferryboat docked at 29th Street, causing the horses and carriages to plunge into the water, "dragging their human loads with them."

Three regiments of the National Guard, the police, and the mayor were unable to restrain the animals. General Chester A. Arthur prepared a crusade against the beasts. Governor John A. Dix shot a tiger on Madison Avenue. Whitelaw Reid, of the Times, and Charles Dana, of the Sun, were said to have already donated $50 each for the victims.

At least 200 men, women, and children were reported as dead or maimed, and the article listed more than twenty by name.

Twelve of the "wild, carnivorous beasts" were "still at large" the next morning. A proclamation from the mayor urged citizens to stay inside their homes.

Readers panicked. Rushing home from work, men armed themselves and stalked the streets, hoping to kill the animals. Parents pulled their children out of school.

Most were so excited that they did not read the article through to the end. Had they done so, they would have learned that it was nothing more than a prank. "Of course," readers would have found out, "the entire story given above is a pure fabrication. Not one word of it is true... It is a huge hoax... a wild romance..."

Thomas Connery, the Herald's editor, came up with the idea, and reporter Jophep I. C. Clarke crafted the gruesome account.

The public was upset at the stunt. Critics charged the Herald with being irresponsible and malicious.

A brief explanation in the Herald the next day rationalized that the intent was to highlight safety issues at the zoo. Yet the reason was not good enough to console angered members of the press.

The New York Tribune urged the arrest of the Herald reporters. The Times denounced the "heartless newspaper hoax." The Sun condemned it as "unfeeling, cruel, heartless" and labeled it "a mere piece of stupidity." The papers claimed that the hoax not only damaged the integrity of the Herald but also detracted from journalism as a whole.

Today, the "wild animal hoax" is known as one of the most outrageous and interesting - a newspaper ever perpetrated.

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Epic Adventure Ends with History’s Most Famous Greeting

The New York Herald’s publisher gave correspondent Henry Morton Stanley a two-word assignment in October 1869: “Find Livingstone.” The veteran reporter barely survived the search.

British missionary and medical doctor David Livingstone had disappeared four years earlier in East Africa’s equatorial jungles. Known for his good works and books about the largely unexplored African continent, Livingstone was a Victorian Era celebrity. But rumors now circulated among the enclaves of Europeans on the African coast that cannibals had killed him. Finding Livingstone, dead or alive, would help the Herald maintain the preeminence earned by its Civil War coverage, reasoned publisher James Gordon Bennett, Jr.

He ordered the Herald’s star reporter to work his way to Africa. Late in 1869, Stanley covered the Suez Canal opening and spent 1870 filing stories from the Middle East and North Africa. Starting from the island of Zanzibar early in 1871, he sailed to the southeast African coast and began his trek toward Livingstone’s last known camp more than 600 miles inland on Lake Tanganyika. During his 236-day journey, he contracted malaria and lost forty pounds. He also participated in a war between Arab traders and Africans that delayed his expedition for months.

But two years and twenty-four days after receiving his assignment, Stanley finally reached the object of his search and asked the question that would link him forever with one of the great scoops of journalism: “Doctor Livingstone, I presume?”

Stanley spent four months with the doctor before returning to Zanzibar. Livingstone died a year after they parted, and Stanley served as one of his pallbearers during a Westminster Abbey funeral. He returned to Africa to take up Livingstone’s exploration work.

He conducted other African expeditions, but his relationship with Bennett soured. The publisher often noted that Stanley might have found Livingstone, but Bennett paid for the trip.

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