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The Great Moon Hoax: The Birth of Fake News? | Interesting Engineering

By John Loeffler
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> In 1835, The Great Moon Hoax convinced people around the world that the Moon wasn't a barren wasteland but actually a rich landscape full of ruby caverns and towering amethyst crystals, populated by intelligent humanoid bat-people, two-legged badgers, and unicorns.
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> While this seems ridiculous in hindsight, at the time, everyone from Ivy League students to middle-class professionals were roped in by the six-part series in *The New York Sun* newspaper. Claiming to be a supplement to a serious scientific journal in Scotland, the series played on the era's excitement over a steady stream of revolutionary scientific discoveries, and an increasingly literate audience hungry to be "in the know."
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> *The Sun* never quite fessed up to inventing the whole thing, and those involved would claim that it was just satirizing the spectacular claims of popular scientists and was never meant to by taken literally. But there's no question that the story was taken as fact by its audience and that it was a financial windfall for *The Sun,* which claimed that the story helped boost its circulation to become the best-selling newspaper in the world.
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