

[ **HARDCOVER:** US ]

# Read all about it! Man-bats on the moon

*In 1835 the 'Sun' wowed New Yorkers with an elaborate and extremely profitable hoax*

BY **MICHAEL KENNEY**  
NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE, BOSTON

Among the take-it-for-granted marvels of computer technology could be counted the "Breaking News Alerts" that can be delivered to one's computer — or even by a text message to the mobile phone.

But at not so distant a time — even well into the 1950s — the cry of "Wuxtry, Wuxtry" could be heard as newspaper Extras were hawked on downtown street corners.

The original in-your-ear news hawkers were the street urchins who peddled the *Sun* at a penny-a-paper on New York's streets in the mid-1830s.

And the story that they were hawking in the summer of 1835 is the subject of Matthew Goodman's highly entertaining *The Sun and the Moon* — the "Moon" being the *Sun's* running account of its own hoax, the discovery of life on the moon.

And not just some primordial life, but life worthy of a full-blown hoax, unicorns and other mythic beasts, and — "Wuxtry, Wuxtry" — man-bats who not only flew over the lunar landscape and bathed in its lakes, but engaged in behaviors that had to be censored for the sensibilities of the *Sun's* readers.

The *Sun* was the two-year-old creation of a journeyman printer-turned-journalistic pioneer, Benjamin Day, who conceived the idea of producing a "penny paper" to compete with the city's existing papers which sold for US\$0.06 a copy. "It Shines for All" was the motto over the nameplate.

The *Sun's* secret weapons were the street urchins who peddled the paper, rising before dawn from the alleyways where they huddled together, buying their bundles of papers, at US\$0.67 for a hundred papers, and hoping to make enough for a supper of a butter cake and coffee.

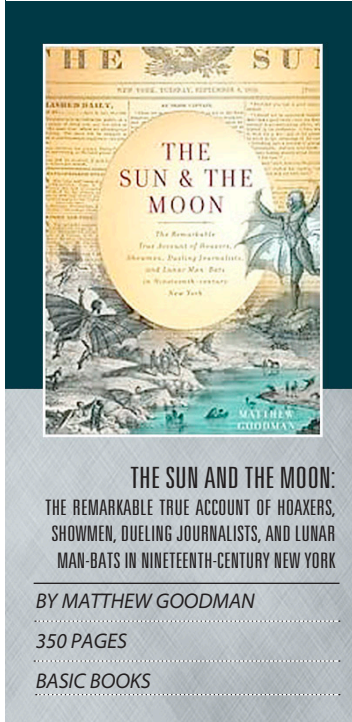
The hoax came as the proverbial "pennies from heaven," for a few weeks making them rich enough for oyster suppers and warm beds.

It was the brainstorm of a British immigrant, Richard Adams Locke, who had been hired by Day as a police reporter. Locke had an interest in astronomy and that apparently provided the seed for the moon hoax.

The weeklong series, writes Goodman, "a rich amalgam of technical detail and lyrical fancy," seemed, even to some who knew something of astronomy, "utterly believable."

The public loved it. On the Friday when the last installment

## Publication Notes



ran, Day announced on his front page that daily circulation was 19,360. None of his six-penny competitors sold more than a few thousand.

And what a summer it must have been for the city's newspaper readers.

PT Barnum was exhibiting his own hoax, an elderly black woman who he was presenting as the 161-year-old nursemaid of George Washington.

And then there was Edgar Allan Poe who was convinced that Locke had stolen the idea for the moon stories from his own short story about a balloon voyage to the moon, *Hans Phaall* — *A Tale*. That had appeared, obscurely, in the *Southern Literary Messenger* just two months before Locke's stories began running in the *Sun*.

But when the *Sun* went looking for another hoax, some nine years later, it turned to Poe who produced an account of a balloon crossing of the Atlantic, three days from England to the Carolina coast.

As for the *Sun*, it merged with the *World-Telegram* in 1950 — and that morphed into the short-lived *World Journal Tribune*. The name resurfaced in the *New York Sun* that died this fall after a half-dozen years. The *Sun* itself

is best remembered today for its Christmas editorial of 1897, "Yes, Virginia, There Is a Santa Claus," and among journalists, for the adage, "When a dog bites a man, that is not news ... But if a man bites a dog, that is news."

worked and why future US administrations should continue to abide by this guiding principle. By opposing unilateral moves by Taipei to break the status quo — such as the declaration of a Taiwan Republic — while providing assurances, as stipulated in the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), that the US would help Taiwan defend itself against an unprovoked Chinese military attack, Washington's strategy has been to create space and buy time so that leaders on both sides of the Strait can resolve the conflict peacefully.

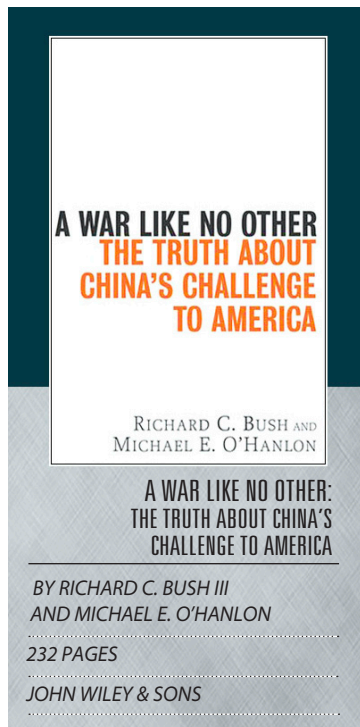
Published one year before the election of Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) to the presidency and the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) victory in the legislative elections, one can nevertheless imagine the author's sigh of relief at Ma's election and his peace initiative, which would seem to confirm the wisdom of Washington's longstanding policies on the Taiwan Strait. In this vein, the authors also make no effort to conceal their assessment of the administration of former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) as having been "provocative," "unreasonable" and taking unnecessary risks. Still, Bush and O'Hanlon helpfully point

out that Beijing, having no substantial experience of democracy, is bound to misinterpret political developments in Taiwan, which could precipitate conflict. As such, one conflict-preventing measure the authors propose is for Washington to ensure that Beijing is able to "distinguish actions that the island's politicians take for political gain and those that reflect policy intentions" as well as to impress upon the Chinese that Taiwanese are not necessarily opposed to all forms of unification.

Another important point the authors make is that the leadership in Taipei tends to assume rationality in Beijing regarding the Taiwan question, which could prompt the former to act "recklessly" — codeword for a move toward independence. Either as the result of misinterpreted signals or actual "provocation" by Taipei, China could feel compelled to abandon diplomacy and apply military pressure on Taiwan. Such action would involve a variety of scenarios, from a naval blockade to limited missile strikes to amphibious invasion, used separately, incrementally, or in combination.

Despite the authors' asser-

## Publication Notes



tion that war in the Taiwan Strait remains unlikely given what the participants stand to lose in terms of economic loss and casualties, there is a small chance that the

Capacchione hates having a police escort. "I lost all the freedom I had," she said glumly last week, sitting at her desk at *Il Mattino*, in a concrete office block in nondescript downtown Caserta.

"The funny thing is, I've had much more serious and clear and evident threats over the years.

But there wasn't the Saviano phenomenon," she said. "The rest of the world didn't know that the Camorra or the Casalesi existed," she said, adding, "I've been doing this job since before Saviano was born."

Under the Camorra, in recent decades the Campania region, which surrounds Naples, has become the hub of an international criminal web involving drug trafficking, illegal waste dumping, public works fraud and money laundering through semi-legitimate businesses like supermarkets and game parlors.

In her first book, *The Gold of the Camorra*, which appeared in November and is already on Italian best-seller lists, Capacchione

tracks the careers of four of the Casalesi's most brilliant criminal minds — Francesco Schiavone, Francesco Bidognetti, Michele Zagaria and Antonio Iovine. The first two are serving life sentences; the others are on Italy's most wanted list.

Using trial transcripts and her own reporting, she shows how the bosses profited from contracts to build a high-speed train to Naples, through construction and through cartels that distribute sugar and other basic commodities to Campania. Thanks to the Camorra, the region also has high rates of cocaine addiction and elevated cancer levels from toxic waste dumping.

"I didn't want to write a book, but Rizzoli practically forced me to," Capacchione said, referring to her Italian publisher. Instead, she sees herself as a beat reporter, uncomfortable with the "media circus" that erupted after she was threatened.

Capacchione, 48, was born and raised in Caserta and still lives there today. She has heavy, Levantine eyes, a smoker's voice and a small, sparkling cross around her neck. Reserved and at times sardonic, she sometimes smiles and occasionally laughs.

But to be in Capacchione's presence is to absorb an intensity — and fatalism — born from years spent covering a violent, seemingly intractable conflict.

Being in the front lines has its risks. Last month, Capacchione came home to find things had been moved around in her apartment — she lives alone — though

nothing of material value was missing. "They took a journalism prize I had won," she said. "That one meant a lot to me."

She does not know who did it. She does know that her police escort will only protect her so much. "If they wanted to kill me, they'd kill me with or without an escort here or abroad," she said.

Capacchione prides herself on her "scientific" approach — reading the signs, combing through court documents. In one trial, she noticed that prosecutors had not provided as much background information on one defendant as they had on the others. "I went and filled in the missing pieces."

It is a battle of wits and wills between the Camorristi and the authorities. "The most fun thing is when you find smart authorities fighting smart criminals," she said. "It becomes like a chess game."

In the land of the Camorra, there is a blurry line between legality and illegality. It is not uncommon to find organized crime figures with relatives in public office, law enforcement, the judicial system or other state operations like health care, Capacchione said. "If I buy a sentence, it means that someone sold it," she said.

While the Camorra may rely less on politicians today, she

said politicians still relied on the Camorra to deliver votes. And it is hard for citizens to distinguish between criminals and non-criminals.

"You never know," Capacchione said. "Or even worse, you do know."

A study last year found that organized crime was the largest segment of the Italian economy, accounting for 7 percent of Italy's gross domestic product, or US\$127 billion a year.

So what's the solution? "I don't know," Capacchione said. "It's a complex problem." Over the years "they've arrested hundreds and hundreds of people."

Indeed, since the mid-1990s, More than 500 people have been arrested and more than 4,000 investigated as part of operations like the continuing "Spartacus" trial, one of the most complex in Italian history. "My book is the story of investigations," she says.

And yet nothing changes. The clan members "regenerate themselves." As a reporter, "I'm on the third generation," she notes. "They live short lives."

That everyone knows there is a problem and yet no one — not the government, not the church, not the military — applies the political will to solve it can seem worse than the problem itself.



Italian crime reporter Rosaria Capacchione has been under 24-hour police protection since a death threat was issued against her in March.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

# Making enemies in high places

*Rosaria Capacchione's reporting on the Naples mob has landed her on best-seller lists — and hit lists*

BY **RACHEL DONADIO**  
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, CASERTA, ITALY

[ **HARDCOVER:** US ]

# The thin red line in the Taiwan Strait

*War involving Taiwan, China and the US is improbable, but even a small likelihood that it could happen should be enough to keep us awake at night*

BY **J. MICHAEL COLE**  
STAFF REPORTER

If the world is to see its first hot war between two nuclear superpowers in the 21st century, its principal cause will likely be a small democracy of 23 million people. Or so argue Richard Bush and Michael O'Hanlon in their timely *A War Like No Other*.

Bush, a former director at the American Institute in Taiwan and current director of the Center for Northeast Asian Studies at the Brookings Institution in Washington, and O'Hanlon, a senior military analyst at Brookings, use their considerable knowledge in the fields of diplomacy and defense to show how the long-standing political dispute between Taipei and Beijing over Taiwan's sovereignty could escalate to devastating effect and why world leaders should do everything in their power to avoid this contingency from becoming reality.

In commandingly clear prose and avoiding overly technical terminology, the authors explain why the decades-old US policy of mutual deterrence against Beijing's hard-line "one China" stance and Taipei's desire for sovereignty has

Chinese leadership could think that war against Taiwan — or even against the US — is winnable, which could make conflict likelier.

Regarding Taiwan's or the US' ability to counter a Chinese attack, Bush and O'Hanlon are optimists, concluding that with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) lacking three critical determinants for a successful amphibious assault — air superiority, initial troop/firepower superiority at point of attack, and reinforcement advantage at point of attack — added to hardened targets throughout Taiwan, an invasion would be prohibitively costly, if not impossible. Other analysts, including William S. Murray, an associate professor at the US Naval War College, are less optimistic and counter that the optimistic view, including the one O'Hanlon has held for years, fails to take into account the leaps made by the PLA in terms of modernization and accuracy.

Regardless of whether one sides with O'Hanlon or Murray on this issue — and admittedly Bush and O'Hanlon's position appears to be slightly overoptimistic — the likeliest scenario of a Chinese attack remains the blockade,

which Taiwan's growing economic dependence on China has turned into a tempting, and possibly quite effective, weapon. As the TRA refers to such a contingency as a "threat to peace and security of the Western Pacific and of grave concern to the United States," an economic embargo against Taiwan would likely prompt a response from the US military, which could be required to ensure safe passage for Taiwanese and international ships entering the Taiwan Strait.

Once the PLA and the US military are brought within proximity to each other, with a third party — Taiwan — beyond the control of both but capable of inflaming the situation, the likelihood of escalation becomes dangerously real, the authors argue. Errors could be committed that, unlike the peacetime mid-air collision between an EP-3 naval reconnaissance plane and a Chinese fighter in 2001, could easily spin out of control in a war scenario. With Beijing perhaps working under the assumption that Washington would be unprepared to suffer mass casualties to defend Taiwan (the so-called "imbalance of fervor"), the PLA could target a few

US Navy ships, or an aircraft carrier and hope that a few thousand US casualties would be enough to deter further US action. Bush and O'Hanlon, however, argue that rather than break Washington's will, such a "limited" option would spark retaliation and widen the war to China's shores — including preventive conventional military strikes against Chinese nuclear installations. In return, fearing that its nuclear arsenal would be obliterated before it could use it, China could feel impelled to turn to the nuclear option.

With such imponderables, Bush and O'Hanlon contend, if perhaps alarmingly, that war in the Taiwan Strait could "create the most serious nuclear risk since the Cuban Missile Crisis." It is, therefore, in everybody's advantage to prevent the cold war in the Strait from turning into a hot one, and to this end, leaders in Taipei, Beijing and Washington would benefit tremendously from heeding the warnings and prescriptions provided by the authors in this highly relevant book, and, for those in Taiwan, to overlook the authors' creeping bias against the Taiwanese independence movement.