

Standard online reader survey



Q: Do you favor the border wall President Trump wants to build?

YES 44 percent
NO 56 percent

GUEST EDITORIAL

Fake videos pose threat to the truth

If you thought fake news was bad, better hold on to your hat. It's only going to get worse.

The New York Times reports that technology has advanced to the point that, with some off-the-web software and a little effort, people can now create fake videos. They are not yet sophisticated enough to fool the careful observer, but that will change.

Once, it took a huge Hollywood studio to create a clip of Forrest Gump shaking hands with John F. Kennedy. Soon anyone will be able to do it in the privacy of their basement.

This means that in the near future it will be possible to create, say, a video clip that seems to show a political candidate confessing to murder, or kicking a puppy, or doing something even worse, like rooting for the Dallas Cowboys.

Most people probably will use the technology the way they use face-swapping apps now: to post funny things on social media. But others could cause a great deal of mayhem.

Imagine a candidate for the state legislature having to prove, say,

Richmond Times-Dispatch

that he never threw up in a strip club when a video purports to show him doing just that.

We have become used to trusting video evidence as a means of truth, as a depiction of something that really happened. Instead of taking someone's word, just take a look at the video and see what "really" happened.

With advanced technology, the potential for havoc is huge. Still, there is an upside: Fake videos, like fake news generally, could renew interest in epistemology: the study of knowledge — of how we know what we know and whether we are justified in knowing it.

This isn't to say dollar stores will start selling T-shirts of Edmund Husserl and Willard V.O. Quine. But optimistically, a few philosophy professors might want to get ready for their close-up.

We are preparing to enter what could be a dangerous age for information.

Stormy and Donald Trump

President Trump denies having an affair with an adult film actress named Stormy Daniels. Yet his lawyer and close confidant Michael Cohen paid Stormy \$130,000 — using fake names and shell corporations — to buy her silence on the eve of the 2016 election.

There are only a few logical possibilities here. One: Trump is a liar who did dally with the porn princess. Two: Cohen is a fool who paid hush money to bury a false story. Three: The lawyer is a movie buff who contributed to a GoFundMe campaign to help an aspiring artist.

The smart money is on option No. 1. The fact is Stormy (real name Stephanie Clifford) and The Donald are made for each other: two professional performers who star in their own reality TV shows. In fact, Stormy claims The Donald promised her a slot on "The Apprentice" during their relationship — a promise he failed to keep.

The real difference is The Donald has made it to the Big Time. Stormy is still trying to break through, and this is her moment. So why should we care, apart from the obvious fact that Stormy is a fascinating public figure? For one thing, there's politics.

In 2016, 1 out of 4 voters identified themselves as "white born-again or evangelical Christians," and 80 percent of that group backed Trump. He was right on their main issues, especially abortion, and they ignored his three marriages, numerous affairs and a video on which he boasted about sexually assaulting women.

There are signs Trump's support among evangelicals could be slipping. A Pew survey in December reported his favorable rating had dropped to 61

percent in this group, down from 78 percent the previous February, and some conservative Christians are gaging on their own hypocrisy.

"The Trump evangelicals," writes *Washington Post* columnist Michael Gerson, a former speechwriter for President George W. Bush, "have made a national joke of moral standards that were once, presumably, deeply held. At least when a Democrat violated them."

Even the Rev. Jeffress had to admit, "Let me be clear. Evangelicals still believe no one should be having sex with a porn star."

Stormy and her aggressive lawyer, Michael Avenatti, have challenged the legitimacy of her agreement to remain silent, and she's upped the ante, offering to return the \$130,000 and giving an interview to "60 Minutes" that promises more salacious details of her liaison with the president.

The White House is contemplating legal action to block CBS from airing the interview, but the law is pretty clear. No court would enjoin the network unless national security was in imminent danger.

There's another potential legal trap as well: If Cohen did pay Stormy \$130,000 out of his own pocket, he could have violated campaign finance laws that limit individual contributions to \$2,700. If Trump reimbursed Cohen, and didn't report the payment as a campaign expense, he could also be in trouble.

It looks like "Stormy and The Donald" will be renewed for another season. Stay tuned.

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STEVE & COKIE ROBERTS

COLUMNISTS

Finding faith in 'A Wrinkle'

When her children were young, author Madeleine L'Engle used to take them on nighttime visits to the top of Mohawk Mountain, not far from the family's 200-year-old Connecticut farmhouse. The goal was to glimpse the mystery of God.

"If you need one image of God, then go outside on a clear night and look straight up at the stars. That's about as good as I can do," L'Engle told me in 1989, during a two-hour interview.

The wonders of science and heavenly light are at the heart of her classic novel "A Wrinkle In Time." However, she said she knew she needed to include some specifics to clarify her central message — without clubbing young readers over the head.

"It's a work of fiction, not theology. I didn't write it expecting to get challenged on every last detail," she said.

However, she was willing to state one fact for the record, offering a variation on a quote she repeated through the years. Yes, she loved stargazing, she said, but ultimately, "I can understand God only as he is revealed in the Incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth."

L'Engle died in 2007 at the age of 88, after publishing 60 works of fiction, nonfiction, drama, poetry and prayers. Her work is back in the news because of debates about Disney's \$103-million version of "A Wrinkle In Time," which removed the book's religious images and biblical quotes.

It would be hard, explained L'Engle, to grasp this book's cosmic war between life and death, good and evil, darkness and light without two crucial passages.

A key character is Mrs. Who, who speaks only in famous quotations. She

is part of a trio of mysterious characters — guardian angels, according to L'Engle — who help the children in the novel. To explain the power of "light," Mrs. Who quotes the Gospel of John: "The light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not."

Also, in a climactic word of encouragement to heroine Meg Murray, Mrs. Who quotes St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

None of the novel's Bible quotations made it into the Disney film, but there were new quotes from popular music and the musical "Hamilton."

L'Engle always knew her work was hard to categorize, since her whole career was defined by a paradox. She was an Episcopalian from New York City, yet many of her strongest admirers were evangelical Christians. Then again, so were her fiercest critics.

The goal, said L'Engle, was to create fiction that was unmistakably Christian.

"I have been brought up to believe that the Gospel is to be spread, it is to be shared — not kept for those who already have it," she said. "Well, 'Christian novels' reach Christians. They don't reach out. ... I am not a 'Christian writer.' I am a writer who is a Christian."

L'Engle laughed, before continuing. "Now, if I am truly a Christian, then that will show in my work," she added. "If I am not truly a Christian, then that, too, is going to show in my work — whether I want it to or not."

Terry Mattingly is the editor of GetReligion.org. He lives in Oak Ridge.

ON RELIGION

TERRY MATTINGLY



JUST A THOUGHT

LISA HOBBS



My first letter to the Easter Bunny

The *Southern Standard* received a letter to the Easter Bunny. It's adorable.

While we are the distribution center for letters to Santa Claus every year, this is my first Easter Bunny correspondence.

It says, "Dear Easter Bunny. All I want for Easter is gnr lies. I relly want it please."

The letter was from Devin Scott and it was sent through the United States Postal Service — no stamp and no envelope — and hand delivered to us.

I'm assuming our awesome postal employees took a hop of faith that we might have ties to the famous furry little critter because of our longstanding relationship with Santa. In legend, the Easter Bunny carries colored eggs in his basket, candy, and sometimes also toys to the homes of children, and as such shows similarities to Santa Claus, who brings gifts to children on Dec. 25.

Next to Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny is probably the most exciting holiday icon our children know. It was for me. To children, the Easter Bunny means plastic eggs and candy. It's also a symbol of the beginning of spring and the entire Easter season and of course a reason to be very excited.

Easter falls on the same day as April Fools this year. That's so wrong.

I would probably reply to Devin with "Hippity hop! Guess who? It's me, the Easter Bunny! I'm so egg-cited that Easter is here, aren't you? It's such a magical time of year. A little Easter chick told me that you've been egg-stremely good since Christmas so I'll leave you a little Easter treat. Now I must hippity hop on my way. I've got lots more to do before Easter and I want to make sure everyone gets their special Easter treat. The Easter Bunny."

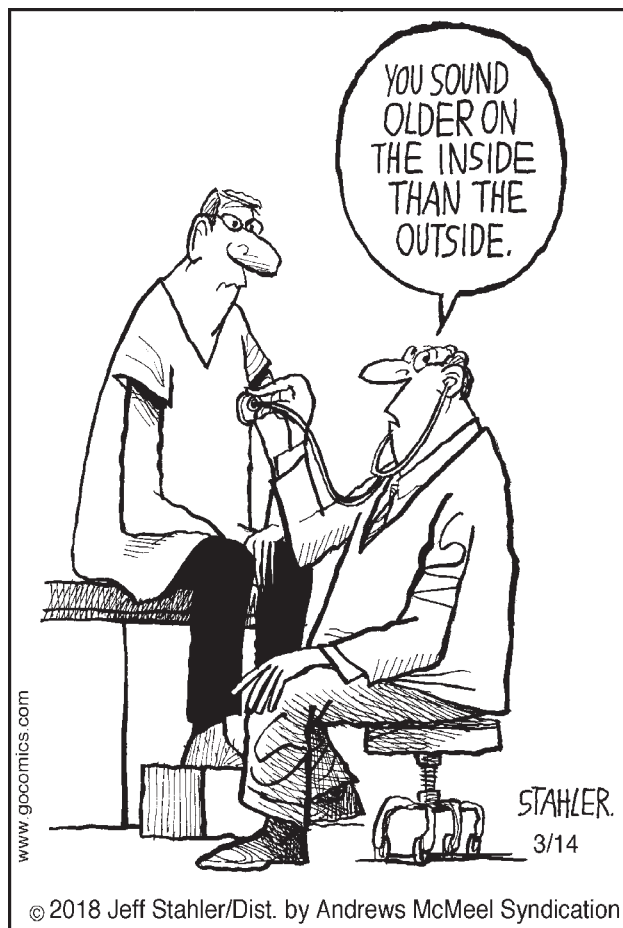
Sadly, that reply is not to be. The correspondence did not include an address or enough information for me to figure out who Devin Scott actually is. My investigative powers have limits — albeit very few.

Case in point: My friend told me she had been looking for a song for years. If memory serves correctly, she had been searching approximately 30 or more years. All her attempts to figure out who sung it and find the video ended unsuccessfully. I asked her to tell me the lyrics. Within a few minutes, I placed my cellphone to her ear and stated "Is that it?" It was. She was amazed that she looked for that song for years and I found it within a few minutes with an online search.

It appears Devin wants the Easter Bunny to bring him the Guns N' Roses album "Lies." It is the second album by the band and was released in 1988.

After checking out the CD, I'm going to go out on a limb here and assume Devin is asking the Easter Bunny because his parents won't let him have it. My answer would be "absolutely no" if my children had asked for it. Even the Easter Bunny has limitations.

Good luck, Devin.
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