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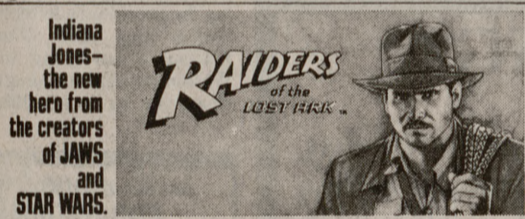
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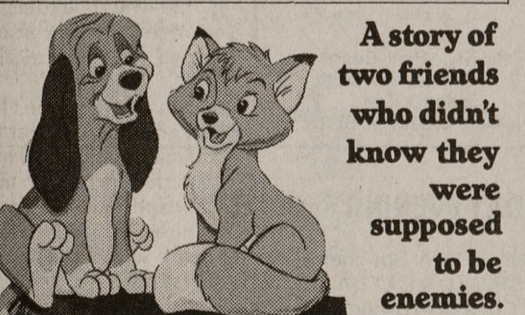
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Warped



By Scott McCullar

Had looked forward to 'land of freedom' Haitians imprisoned

NEW ORLEANS — Surviving on rice, beans, water and the "protection of God" for nearly a month in the Atlantic Ocean, 25 Haitian refugees rescued by a passing vessel looked forward to a new life in the "land of freedom."
Instead of freedom, however, the refugees Wednesday found themselves imprisoned in a downtown hotel awaiting word on their status from the State Department.
The refugees sailed for 27 treacherous days in an 18-foot boat registered under the Liberian government before they were rescued Thursday.
The last of their food and water had run out three days earlier and their boat was taking on water. When they spotted the massive Amoco Voyager on the horizon it represented their last chance for survival and freedom.
"Their hearts were open," said interpreter Paddy Poux as three young refugees curiously stared at television cameras at a Tuesday news conference. "They were full of joy. They had found political freedom."
But now, U.S. immigration officials and the State Department refuse to release the refugees until checking with the Liberian government.
Meanwhile, immigration officials ordered Amoco executives to hold the refugees under guard. Amoco spokesman Jim O'Leary complained the company should not be penalized for rescuing the Haitians.
"We, as a private company, should not be in the position of providing security for illegal immigrants," he said. "We're just waiting to see what happens. Our captain picked them up be-
cause it looked to him like the boat might flounder and they might be in danger.
Besides being their interpreter, Poux is responsible for resettling the Haitians and he also finds the government's actions ironic.
"It's very strange to me how a company like Amoco can be penalized by the State Department for being a good Samaritan," he said. "I'm trying to understand the rationale."
Poux said most of the refugees did not understand the controversy surrounding their arrival here and were mainly concerned with staying in "the land of freedom."
"They made a choice — for better or worse, they were going to try this dangerous voyage," he said. "They put their money together, got a boat and left under the protection of God."
"Now they're here they want to stay. If they went back to Haiti, they would be in a lot of trouble."
Three of the 25 refugees, dressed in baggy but clean clothes, fielded questions from reporters Tuesday as a guard from a private security firm looked on.
Through an interpreter, they told of their voyage during which they stopped at Cuba and later at a small island for water and supplies before being pulled by the Gulf stream toward the U.S. coast.
One smiling refugee, 23-year-old Louisa Edmond, explained the feeling when they finally spotted the ship that rescued them from treacherously high seas. "The food and water just went out," she said through Poux. "We would not be here this afternoon if it hadn't been for that boat."

Grain elevator gripes ignored

CALVESTON — Repeated complaints about dust problems prior to a 1977 grain elevator explosion that killed 18 people drew small reaction and few results, a federal grain inspector has testified.
James Phelps, a field office supervisor for the Federal Grain Inspection Service, testified Tuesday in the federal trial of two company officials that the Farmers Grain Export Co. tended to downplay his complaints.
A December 1977 grain blast at the site killed 18 people, injured 35 others and caused \$3 million in damages.
On trial are Robert Jones and Frank Caulder, who were indicted on 24 counts of willful violations of occupational safety standards.
"We noticed the elevator being dustier on more days (than with the previous owners)," Phelps said. "At that time, the reaction we got from the elevator management was that they were installing a new dust system. They were more or less trying to pacify us."
Phelps said he came to Galveston in March 1977 while the elevator was still owned by Cook Industries.
"The elevator at times had some dust problems, but they (Cook) would immediately clean up or solve the problem causing the dust. When we noticed the problem, they were already working on it," he said.
The elevator was sold to Farmers in June 1977 and gradually changed management. The transition ended in late September with Jones as manager and Caulder as superintendent.
"On a day-to-day basis the dust was greater in October than it was when Cook operated it," Phelps said. "The worst place was the scale floor (about midway up the 200-foot head house). The suspended dust was so thick you could not see across the floor. At points on the floor it was as deep as your mid-calf."
In October, Phelps said he complained but Caulder told him he had to be more patient. Phelps said he got basically the same reaction from Jones.
Phelps said he told Jones and Caulder on Nov. 1 that a safety inspector from Washington was coming and he asked them to clean up some of the dust.
But Phelps said, "Jones said he thought we were complaining too much, harrasing them. He said he would look into the complaints."
A letter from Jones to employees dated Nov. 2 ordered all Farmers employees to cooperate with the federal inspectors.
Government prosecutor Dan Small asked Phelps if grain dust was a contributing factor in the explosion and Phelps replied that it was.
Phelps said he had been concerned prior to Dec. 27 about dust levels in the facility.
On cross examination by Theo Pinson, attorney for Jones, Phelps said he knew of plans to work on the plant's dust system and acknowledged that Jones took some action to satisfy his complaints.

State given control of island area

AUSTIN — A meeting with Department of Interior officials has convinced Gov. Bill Clements that there is no basic disagreement between state and federal authorities over the proposed transfer of 19,000 acres of federal land on Matagorda Island to the state's control.
Ray Arnett, assistant secretary for fish, wildlife and parks for the Interior Department, and J.R. Spradley, a solicitor with the Interior Department, visited the island as guests of Dallas businessman T.L. Wynne, who owns more than 11,000 acres there.
"I find that our discussion Monday resulted in general agreement," Clements said. "I am convinced that no damage whatever will come to wildlife on Matagorda Island when our Texas Parks and Wildlife Department assumes management of the lands now held by the federal government."
Clements said he would not allow "a Coney Island atmosphere" on the island and that no vehicles would be allowed on the land.
The governor also emphasized that an area where endangered whooping cranes nest already is controlled by the state and would not be endangered by the transfer.

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