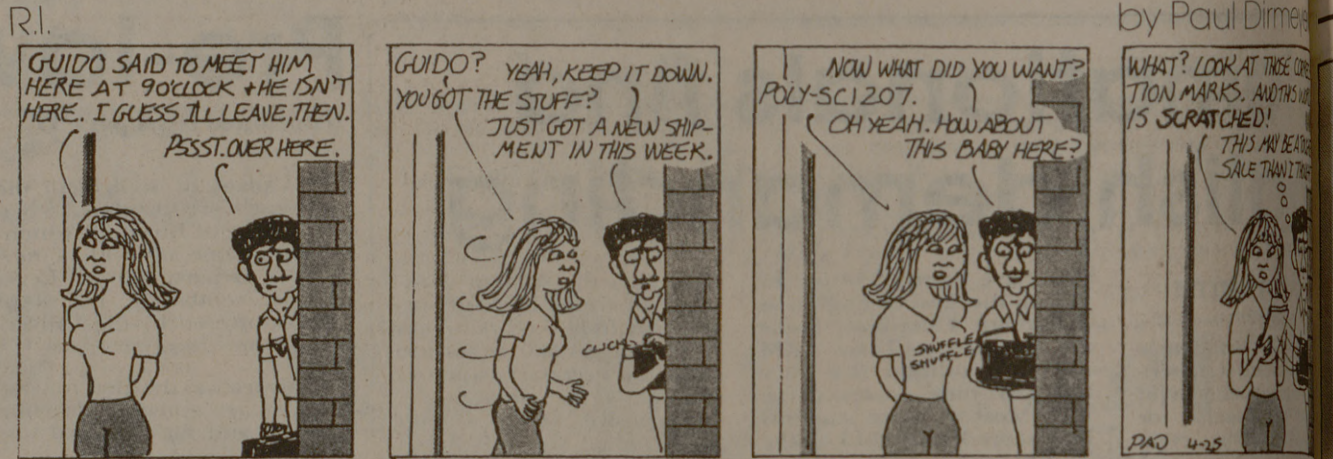


Starving giant pandas maraud through houses

United Press International
PEKING — Starving giant pandas, faced with the withering of their bamboo feeding grounds, have broken into peasant homes in central China in search of food, the official Xinhua News Agency said Tuesday.
 Xinhua said local authorities in Sichuan Province had appropriated funds to reimburse peasants whose homes were damaged by the marauding pandas recently.
 Wang Quanan, a peasant liv-

ing deep in the mountains of Sichuan's Baoxing County, said a giant panda broke into his kitchen one night, scattered all the utensils and would not leave until it had eaten its fill, Xinhua said.
 Wang now leaves a regular supply of food outside his home before he leaves for work each day, the agency said.
 Chinese and foreign wildlife experts trying to save the endangered giant pandas say a famine caused by cyclical withering of bamboo plants, the

pandas staple food, is worsening.
 Xinhua said nearly all of the bamboo has withered in Sichuan's Fengtongzhai Nature Reserve, home of 200 pandas, or about one-fifth of China's total.
 The cyclical withering of the bamboo occurs every 40 years. The bamboo began to flower and wither last year and has affected up to 90 percent of the plants in some areas, wildlife officials said.
 Xinhua said five giant pandas have died at Fengtongzhai since last September. At least nine of the animals have died in other preserves.



El Paso turtle rewriting fable

United Press International
EL PASO — Aesop's Fable made the slow-moving turtle famous.
 Al, the El Paso Zoo's 245-

pound tortoise, would like to rewrite the story.
 He is pure greased lightning. The African Aldabra tortoise will be cruising for another eight weeks on a jury-rigged scooter so his forepaw can heal, said Robert Fulton, El Paso Zoo director.
 During a zoo board meeting last week, Fulton reported Al suffered an injury, possible when a child seeking a ride sat on him.
 The board accepted Fulton's report and responded with little or no emotion when told about Al's unusual mode of transporting himself.
 Then Al whizzed by a glass door.
 "Hey, what's that?" one of the board members yelled with surprise. The board immediately recessed to marvel at the gliding tortoise.
 He could have beaten any

hare — at least by a turtle neck — in a race.
 Al, a native of the African Aldabra Islands, went on a safari halfway around the park in about 40 minutes, his fastest time ever, said zoo keeper Diana Riley.
 Ever since Al got his new set of wheels, he's coming out of his shell after 30 years of introverted life, zoo keepers commented.
 "He likes it. He gets in my kitchen closet and he can rest on his scooter," said zoo keeper Armida Gallegos.
 Al is able to go up small ramps, making it difficult to bring the heavy tortoise down to earth.
 Gallegos said it took a while to develop the ultimate scooter for Al.

At first, Robert Nav... employee in charge of... gave Al an auto creeper... that didn't work well...
 "It was too low and he... away and the creeper... Ms. Gallegos said.
 Eventually, Nav... some wheels onto a... face, placed them under... fastened the scooter with... ber straps over Al's...
 Fulton said no one... what happened to Al... but he will be coasting... control — for the... weeks.
 "We thought it was... tism. Maybe an intent... and he was re-injur... just started limping... Miss Riley said.
 But for now, Fulton... zoo's fastest tortoise... ing along on his scoot...

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'Creep' caller sends couple on frantic search for relative

United Press International
SAN ANTONIO — An elaborate telephone hoax by a "very believable creep" sent a couple to California in a frantic search for relatives they believed were seriously ill or dead, officials said Tuesday.
 Police said a woman called the wife of the San Antonio couple over the Easter weekend, telling her that her brother was dead and her sister-in-law critically ill.
 The prank call prompted the unidentified couple to fly to San Diego, where the brother and sister-in-law were found in good health.
 In one of three separate calls to the couple, the prankster pretended to be the San Antonio woman's sister-in-law. The

caller also pretended to be a friend of the sister-in-law's hospital official.
 "With her hysteria about this lady really got into role," the victim said. "The victim said she knew a lot of medical ogy."
 Police said the caller probably the same woman has made a rash of prank calling people their relatives sick or badly injured in mobile accidents.
 Southwestern Bell phone Co. spokesman... Bell could do about... and suggested they be... to police.

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Boys suspended for stripper-gram

United Press International
ST. PAUL, Minn. — Members of a Catholic high school hockey team dispatched a stripper with a birthday greeting for a teammate. School officials were not amused.
 Twenty-one of the team's 22 players — including the birthday boy — were suspended for ordering the "Stripper-gram" during the state high school hockey tournament last month. The only player not disciplined was at a doctor's office while the scantily clad woman sang a song to the guest of honor.
 Officials of the East St. Paul school learned about the weeks later. The suspension were announced Monday.
 The player who arranged the provocative greeting was suspended for two weeks and the player for five days and the law or tradition...
 "This is conduct unacceptable," a Hill-Murray student director Brother Francis said. "This sort of conduct is unacceptable."
 The players will have to make up the work they miss during their suspensions, but won't lose any academic or athletic eligibility.

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