

Animals in Action



Heroes can be anywhere among us—and not just on two legs or with a human brain. Check out these true stories of heroic critters!



THE HERO HAM

Jeffrey Smith

Illustrations by Jeffrey Smith

People often badmouth pigs, as in "Quit hogging the chips," or "That room is a pigsty." They laugh at the animals' round shape. And worse, they eat them!

This so bothered Victoria Herberta of Houston, Tex., that she adopted one. Priscilla (a pig) moved into "Pigdom," a purple house in which Priscilla shared Ms. Herberta's bed, wore nail polish and learned to swim the "piggy paddle."

Then, on July 29, 1984, Priscilla became a hero.

Ms. Herberta and her friends had

spent the day at nearby Lake Somerville. At 5 P.M. Carol Burk and Priscilla took a final dip. As Ms. Burk led the pig into deeper water, she told her son to stay on shore.

Eleven-year-old Anthony, a non-swimmer, waded out until he hit a drop-off. Then he screamed and disappeared. Carol dropped Priscilla's leash and struggled toward her son.

But the pig was closer and swam faster. When Anthony came up a second time, Priscilla was there. The boy grabbed the pig's harness. That sent both of them under. Seconds

passed. They surfaced again, then sank again.

"Everyone was screaming," Ms. Herberta said. Perhaps Priscilla heard, because the pig's snout appeared. It regained its stroke and, with Anthony hanging on, swam to shallow water.

A month later Houston celebrated Priscilla the Pig Day. Later that year, Priscilla became the first pet inducted into the Texas Pet Hall of Fame—giving Ms. Herberta one more reason for making her home "A Shrine to Swine."

Martin Richardson, an experienced diver, also got in over his head.

On July 23, 1996, Mr. Richardson, then 29, was with friends on a tourist ship off the coast of Egypt. When a group of dolphins jumped playfully nearby, the captain stopped the ship so people could watch them. Mr. Richardson and two friends jumped

in to swim with the animals.

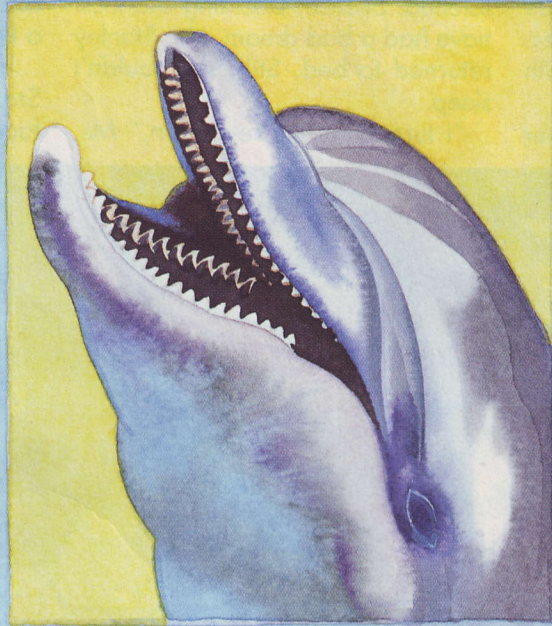
But when the others returned to the boat, Mr. Richardson lagged behind. Suddenly he screamed. His body shot into the air and the sea was stained red with blood. Like an enemy submarine, a shark had attacked from below. It bit Mr. Richardson's side and arm.

The crew launched a rubber dinghy

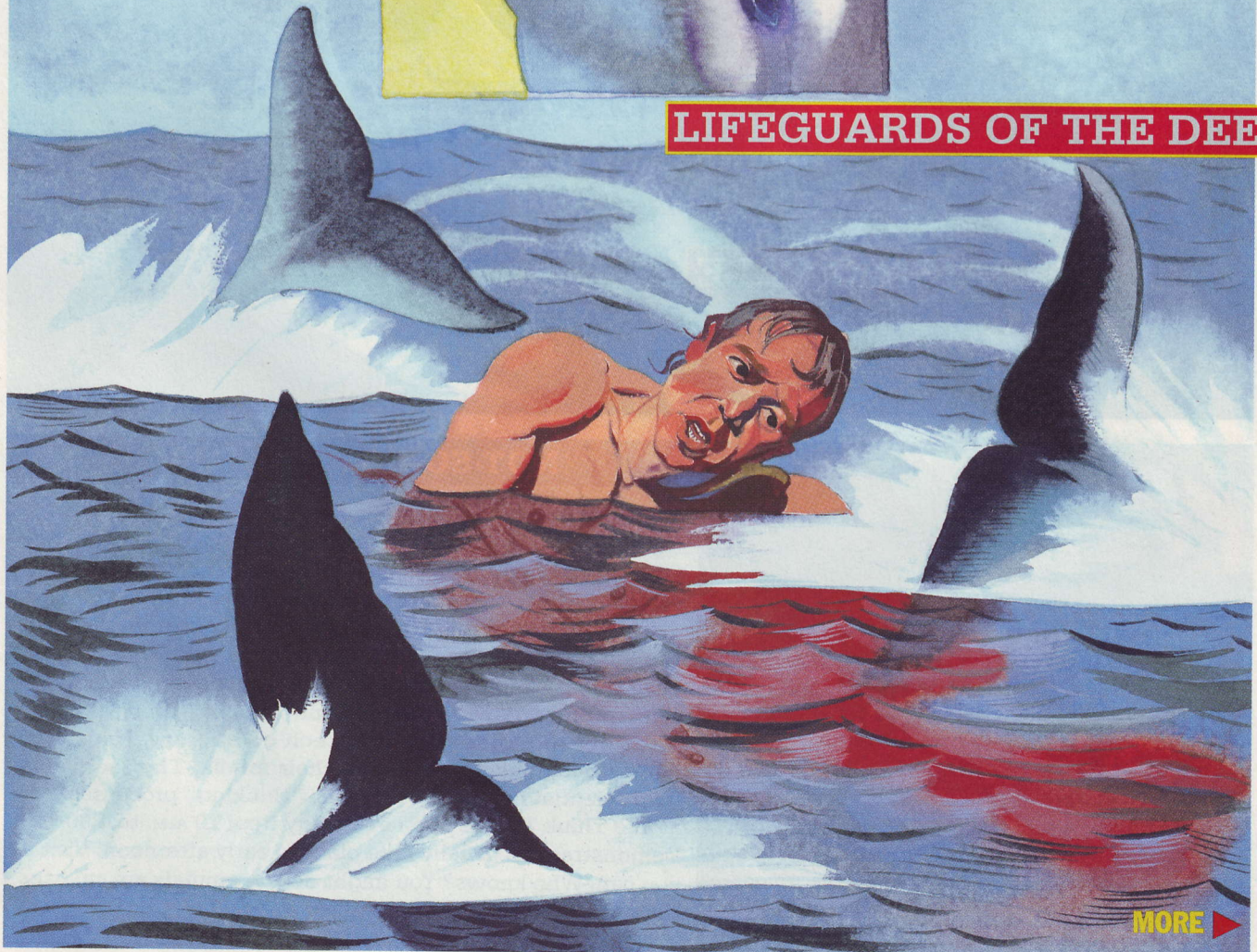
and raced toward the injured man. But the dolphins reached him first.

The three sea mammals whirled around Mr. Richardson, smacking the water with their tails and whipping it into a frothy shield. They protected him as they would a dolphin calf.

Mr. Richardson recovered, his life saved by friendly strangers that risked themselves to rescue him.



LIFEGUARDS OF THE DEEP



MORE ▶

Fuzzy little house rabbits aren't known for protecting people. Yet that's what Francesca, an eight-pound brown Agouti did one April night in 1987 in Bloomington, Ind.

College student Kate Stanley was sleeping soundly when Francesca thumped its hind feet. Exhausted from studying, Ms. Stanley ignored the noise.

Then the bunny climbed a bedside stool and bounded on top of her. The rabbit tugged at the covers with its teeth. Ms. Stanley woke up.

That's when she noticed another

noise—one coming from her bedroom window. Was someone breaking in? Ms. Stanley flipped on the lights and went to the kitchen. Francesca followed. Still groggy, Ms. Stanley reached for the back-door knob. But Francesca bit her ankle and Ms. Stanley stopped.

"That brought me to my senses," Ms. Stanley says. She stood still and listened. Silence. Deciding she must have had a bad dream, Ms. Stanley returned to bed. Still, she couldn't sleep.

"I turned on the television," Ms.

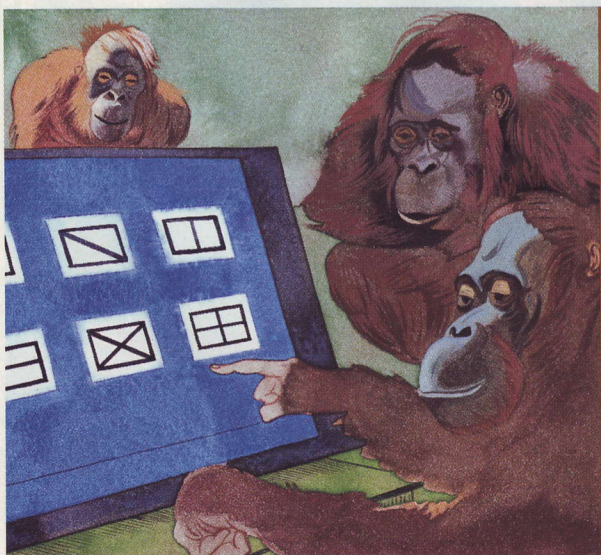
Stanley said. "Francesca stayed on the bed with me. She wouldn't leave."

The next day, Ms. Stanley told her story to a policeman. The officer found marks on Ms. Stanley's window where someone had removed the screen. He said Ms. Stanley was lucky. That same night an intruder had broken in across the street and attacked Ms. Stanley's neighbor with a knife.

If not for the bunny bite, Ms. Stanley might have come face to face with the intruder.



A HARE-RAISING TALE



NOT-SO-DUMB ANIMALS

Animals can't think to knowingly make heroic rescues, right? Well, that's what we humans have long believed. But a group of orangutans living at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., appear to be proving us wrong.

In 1995, the Think Tank, a research center at the zoo, opened up across the road from the Great Ape House. Overhead cables supported by steel towers connect the buildings. Curious orangutans swing over and "drop in" every day.

Inside, the apes find high-tech computers, tools and games designed to challenge their minds. The tools also help scientists study the animals' "thinking" processes.

The Think Tank is open every day from 10 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. Demonstrations usually take place in early afternoon. Visit if you can. Who knows? You might decide animals are smarter than you thought.

In some rescues, what looks like an enemy actually becomes a hero. That's what happened in August 1996 at Chicago's Brookfield Zoo.

A gorilla looks fierce. It has an ugly, smashed-in nose; huge, pointed teeth; and can weigh as much as a Japanese sumo wrestler. When angry, it stands tall, pounds its chest and roars.

No wonder people panicked when a 3-year-old boy tumbled into the gorilla enclosure. The boy's mother screamed. Visitors covered

their eyes. Zoo workers sprayed fire hoses to make the gorillas back away.

But then an amazing thing happened. Binti Jua, a gorilla carrying its baby on its back, tenderly lifted the unconscious boy. The big beast rocked the little human in its arms. Then the gorilla carried him to the exhibit door and laid him down where keepers could reach him.

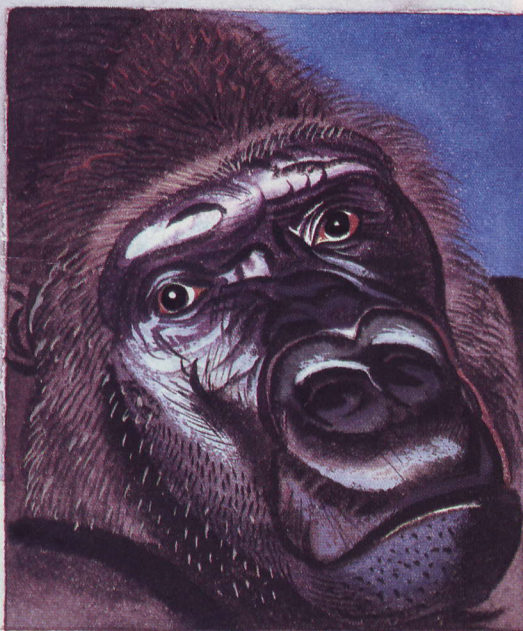
The gorilla's upbringing may have played a part in the heroism. Binti was hand-raised by humans

and even received mothering lessons from zoo keepers.

Other experts point out that gorillas are naturally gentle. They live in families and hug and kiss their young. These researchers think Binti knew what it was doing—they believe the animal acted out of compassion.

Whatever the reason, Binti Jua—and Priscilla, Francesca and the dolphins in Egypt—jumped into action when a human needed it most. ♦

—Aline A. Newman



ONE BEAUTIFUL BEAST

