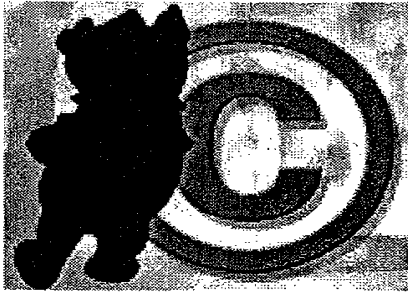


Today In World News



Pooh Judge Talking Trash

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A pivotal sanctions hearing in the Winnie the Pooh case ended this week with the judge challenging attorneys to prove or refute claims that plaintiff Stephen Slesinger Inc. stole and altered documents in its royalty dispute with the Walt Disney Co.

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Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Charles McCoy Jr. repeatedly interrupted closing arguments to demand that the attorneys cut to the chase as to whether the Slesingers systematically raided Disney's trash and broke into its offices to take more than 6,000 pages in confidential case documents.

"The question is: Did it happen, has the integrity of the court process been harmed, and if it has, how can it be remedied?" McCoy said early in the daylong session.

Disney says the alleged misconduct has caused irreparable harm, justifying a dismissal of the case that could otherwise result in hundreds of millions of dollars in damages if a jury found they improperly withheld Pooh-related royalties. The Slesingers deny any wrongdoing.

Both sides will have an opportunity to file further briefs in support of their positions, indicating that a final decision from McCoy will take at least a month.

"This is about the honor and integrity of the court," Disney attorney Daniel Petrocelli said in court. "You can't steal evidence, you can't alter evidence, and you can't lie to cover it up. In this case, (the Slesingers) have done all three."

Countered plaintiffs attorney Patrick Cathcart: "There's still no evidence of breaking and entering anywhere - of any real illegal activity."

While the plaintiffs admit that their investigator repeatedly took documents from Disney's trash, they insist that it was only from the publicly accessible bins behind one building in Burbank.

Disney disputes that claim because none of the lawyers, consumer products executives and others involved in the case worked at that rented building, known as Buena Vista Plaza.

To McCoy, the issue was simple: "What real evidence is there that any documents were in fact taken from any other location?"

Petrocelli said Terry Sands, the investigator responsible for the "lone Dumpster theory," was not credible because one of the people who helped him testified that they searched at least two Disney facilities and could not identify Buena Vista Plaza as being one of them.