

# The Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest



## The Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest

Where “WWW” means “Wretched Writers Welcome”

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## 2008 Contest Winners

### Winner



- Theirs was a New York love, a checkered taxi ride burning rubber, and like the city their passion was open 24/7, steam rising from their bodies like slick streets exhaling warm, moist, white breath through manhole covers stamped “Forged by DeLaney Bros., Piscataway, N.J.” — Garrison Spik, Washington, D.C.

The winner of the 2008 Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest is Garrison Spik (pronounced “speak”), a 41-year-old communications director and writer from Washington, D.C. Hailing from Moon Township, Pennsylvania, he has worked in Tokyo, Bucharest, and Nitro, West Virginia, and cites DEVO, Nathaniel Hawthorne, B horror films, and historiography as major life influences. Garrison Spik is the 26th grand prize winner of the contest that began at San Jose State University in 1982.

### Runner-Up:

- “Hmm ...” thought Abigail as she gazed languidly from the veranda past the bright white patio to the cerulean sea beyond, where dolphins played and seagulls sang, where splashing surf sounded like the tintinnabulation of a thousand tiny bells, where great gray whales bellowed and the sunlight sparkled off the myriad of sequins on the flyfish’s bow ties, “time to get my meds checked.” — Andrew Bowers

### Winner: Adventure



- Leopold looked up at the arrow piercing the skin of the dirigible with a sort of wondrous dismay – the wheezy shriek was just the sort of sound he always imagined a baby moose being beaten with a pair of accordions might make. — Shannon Wedge, New Hampshire

### Runner-Up:

- “Die, commie pigs!” grunted Sergeant “Rocky” Steele through his cigar stub as he machine-gunned the North Korean farm animals. — Dave Ranson, Calgary, Alberta

### Winner: Children’s Literature



- Joanne watched her fellow passengers – a wizened man reading about alchemy; an oversized bearded man-child; a haunted, bespectacled young man with a scar; and a gaggle of private school children who chatted ceaselessly about Latin and flying around the hockey pitch and the two-faced teacher who they thought was a witch – there was a story here, she decided. — Tim Ellis, Haslemere, U.K.

### Runner-Up:

- Dorothy had reasons to be nervous: a young girl alone in a strange land, traveling with three weird, insecure males badly in need of psychiatric help; she tucked her feet under her skirt to keep the night’s chill (and lewd stares) away and made sure one more time that the gun was secured in her yet-to-develop bosom. — Domingo Pestano, Alto Prado, Caracas, Venezuela

### Dishonorable Mention:

- I’m convinced that the Doc is dealing drugs to most of the mining crew because they either can’t stay awake, constantly sneeze, grin like maniacs, or won’t look you straight in the eye (not to mention behaving like a moron) and they wonder why a dwarf gets grumpy! — Neil Prowd, Charnwood, ACT, Australia

### Winner: Detective



- Mike Hummer had been a private detective so long he could remember Preparation A, his hair reminded everyone of a rat who’d bitten into an electrical cord, but he could still run faster than greased owl snot when he was on a bad guy’s trail, and they said his friskings were a lot like getting a vasectomy at Sears. — Robert B. Robeson, Lincoln, Nebraska

## Runner-Up

- The hardened detective glanced at his rookie partner and mused that who ever had coined the term “white as a sheet” had never envisioned a bed accessorized with a set of Hazelnut, 500-count Egyptian cotton linens from Ralph Lauren complimented by matching shams and a duvet cover nor the dismembered body of its current occupant. — Russ Winter, Janesville, MN

## Winner: Fantasy Fiction



- “Toads of glory, slugs of joy,” sang Groin the dwarf as he trotted jovially down the path before a great dragon ate him because the author knew that this story was a train wreck after he typed the first few words. — [Alex Hall](#), Greeley, CO

## Winner: Historical Fiction



- As she watched the small form swing backwards and forth from the crystal chandelier – hands on hips, sniffing the air and squeaking inaudibly – it suddenly became clear to Madame de Pompomme that she had done the wrong thing asking Jacques to find and bring back her long-lost sister: for, whilst her coterie would doubtless be enchanted for a short while, the novelty of Janine having been raised by bats since the age of two in caves of the North-west Congo would soon wear off in seventeenth-century France. — Simon Terry, Broadfield, Crawley, West Sussex, U.K.

## Runner-Up:

- Our tale takes place one century before the reign of Alboin, the Lombard king who would one day conquer most of Italy and who would end up being murdered by his own wife (quite rightfully, I’d say, since Alboin made a drinking cup out of her daddy’s skull and forced her to drink from it), when our little Sonnebert was seven years old. — Edo Steinberg, Beer-Sheva, Israel

## Winner: Purple Prose



- The mongrel dog began to lick her cheek voraciously with his sopping wet tongue, so wide and flat and soft, a miniature pink fleshy cape soaked through and oozing with liquid salivary gratitude; after all, she had rescued him from the clutches of Bernard, the curmudgeonly one-eyed

dogcatcher, whose own tongue – she remembered vividly the tongues of all her lovers – was coarse and lethargic, like a slug in a sandpaper trenchcoat. — Christopher Wey, Pittsburgh, PA

### Runner-Up:

- The complementary crepuscularities of earth and sky shrank away from one another as the roseate effulgence of a new dawn burst forth, not unlike a reclining pneumatic beauty's black silk stocking splitting apart at the seam to reveal the glowing radiance of an angrily sun-burned leg. — Graham Thomas, St Albans, Hertfordshire, U.K.

### Dishonorable Mention:

- The pancake batter looked almost perfect, like the morning sun shining on the cream-colored bare shoulder of a gorgeous young blonde driving 30 miles over the speed limit down a rural Nebraska highway with the rental car's sunroof open, except it had a few lumps. — Jim Thomas, Gilbert, AZ

### Winner: Romance



- Bill swore the affair had ended, but Louise knew he was lying, after discovering Tupperware containers under the seat of his car, which were not the off-brand containers that she bought to save money, but authentic, burpable, lidded Tupperware; and she knew he would see that woman again, because unlike the flimsy, fake containers that should always be recycled responsibly, real Tupperware must be returned to its rightful owner. — Jeanne Villa, Novato, CA

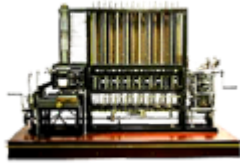
### Runner-Up:

- Like a mechanic who forgets to wipe his hands on a shop rag and then goes home, hugs his wife, and gets a grease stain on her favorite sweater – love touches you, and marks you forever. — Beth Fand Incollingo, Haddon Heights, N.J.

### Dishonorable Mentions:

- He was a dark and stormy knight, and this excited Gwendolyn, but admittedly not as much as last night when he was Antonio Banderas in drag, or the night before that when he was a French Legionnaire who blindfolded her and fed her pommes frites from his kepi. — Leslie Muir, Atlanta, GA
- Carmen's romance with Broderick had thus far been like a train ride, not the kind that slowly leaves the station, builds momentum, and then races across the countryside at breathtaking speed, but rather the one that spends all day moving freight cars around at the local steel mill. — Bruce Portzer, Seattle, WA

### Winner: Science Fiction



- Timothy Hanson, Commander of the 43rd Space Regiment in the 52nd Battalion on board the USAOPAC (United Space Alliance Of Planets Attack Carrier) and second in command to Admiral L. R. Morris of the USAOP Space Command, awoke early for breakfast. — Joe Schulman, Cartersville, GA

### Runner-Up:

- Lightning flashed from the blue-black sky of this alien world and shattered the engines of the spaceship, destroying Reninger's last chance of escaping and reminding him of the time his sister returned from New York with the tips of her hair dyed blue, except for the part about the lightning and the spaceship. — Mark Murata, Kirkland, WA

### Dishonorable Mention:

- The dual-headed Zhiltoids from Beta Quadrant in the Crab Nebula, who lived entirely on a diet of steaming hot asphalt, thought they had died and gone to heaven upon landing in the Midtown Mall of Fresno, California on the planet Earth during the month they called "July". — Gregory Homer, Sacramento CA

### Winner: Spy Fiction



- Special agent Mark Park's strong chin and firm mouth showed that he was a man to be reckoned with, while his twinkling blue eyes revealed surprising depths of kindness and humor, the scar on his cheek a past filled with violence and danger, and his left ear a fondness for M and Ms, but only the red ones. — John R. Cooper, Portland, Oregon

### Runner-Up:

- The KGB agent known only as the Spider, milk solids oozing from his mouth and nose, surveyed the spreading wound in his abdomen caused by the crushing blow of the low but deadly hassock and begged of his attacker to explain why she gone to the trouble of feeding him tainted milk products before effecting his assassination with such an inferior object as this ottoman, only to hear in his dying moments an escaping Miss Muffet of the MI-5 whisper, "it is my whey." — David Potter, Nagoya, Japan

### Winner: Vile Puns



- Vowing revenge on his English teacher for making him memorize Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality," Warren decided to pour sugar in her gas tank, but he inadvertently grabbed a sugar substitute so it was actually Splenda in the gas. — Becky Mushko, Penhook, VA

## Runner-Up

- The Jones family held their annual family reunion on Easter going through over six dozen spiral-cut, hickory-smoked hams and several bottles of a fine Australian shiraz, before Farmer Jones, the head of the family, took the leavings back to Manor Farm to slop Napoleon and his other champion hogs but the seventy-six ham bones fed the pig's tirade. — Michael L. VanBlaricum, Santa Barbara, CA

## Dishonorable Mentions:

- Jan Svenson, having changed his fortune in the annual "Scandinavian King of the Beach" in Santa Cruz with a bottle of black hair coloring and thus standing out in a sea of fair-haired rivals to win the coveted title, realized the ironic truth of the old adage "That in the kingdom of the blonde, the one dyed man is king." — Matthew Chambers, Parsons, WV
- Dimwitted and flushed, Sgt. John Head was frustrated by his constipated attempts to arrest the so-called "Bathroom Burglar" until, while wiping his brow, he realized that each victim had been robbed in a men's room, thereby focusing his attention on the janitor, whose cleaning habits clearly established a commodus operandi. — Jay Dardenne, Baton Rouge, LA
- Nell Gwynn, a descendant of the famous English actress and friend of King Charles II, decided she would help French aristocrats, who were being decimated by the guillotine during the French Revolution, cross to safety in England by hiding them under her voluminous skirts and putting off French customs inspectors by confronting them with a face and arms covered with angry red pimples, earning for her the sobriquet of Scarlet Pimple Nell. — Alec Kitroeff, Psychico, Greece

## Grand Panjandrum's Special Award



- Upon discovering that Myles Black, the famous phrenologist from Yorkshire was going to take up yodeling to lonely goats in Bali, James White decided to balance four planks of wood on a beer keg and call it an abstract work of art in the style of a famous fourteenth-century architect, just going to prove that people will read any old garbage if they think there will be a good pun at the end of it. — Stefan Croker, Bury, Greater Manchester, UK

## Winner: Western



- Nobody knew just who the steely-eyed stranger was, where he came from, where he was headed, or what his intentions were while he was in Dodge City; but he wasn't an hombre you'd want to stick your tongue out at or flip off, and any man who tried to tickle him would be asking for a long stay in a pine box, if you know what I mean. — David McKenzie, Federal Way, WA

## Runner-Up

- Bryson the Plainsman seldom spoke a discouraging word but he did when he filed for divorce after discovering his dear and an interloper played. — Maree Lubran, Saratoga, CA

## Miscellaneous Dishonorable Mentions

- Behind his pearly white smile lay a Bible black heart, not like the Psalms with its, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord," but like Revelations where God just smites people. — Elaine Deans, San Jose, CA
- She had the kind of body that made a man want to have sex with her. — Barry J. Drucker, Bentonville, AR
- As Kevin thumbed through the thick pages of the ancient manuscript lately found deep in the bowels of the Enzo family library in Castellino, with its depictions and detailed woodcuts of the morbid crimes committed during the Spanish Inquisition, he couldn't help but marvel at the serene faces of the Florentine martyrs (Italians are so much tougher than they look!) and thought that his own expression would differ slightly if he were being sawn in half using the crack of his butt as a straight-line. — Camille Barigar and Jeff Blick, Twin Falls, ID
- There are certain people in the world who emanate an aura of well being – they radiate sunshine, light up a room, bring out the best in others, and fill your half empty glass to overflowing – yes it was these very people thought Karl, as he sharpened his mirror-finished guthook knife, who were top of his list. — Jason Garbett, London, U.K.
- Creeping slowly over the hill, the sun seemed to catch the small village nestled in the valley by surprise, which is a bit unusual really, as you'd think that something with a diameter of 865,000 miles and a surface temperature of 5780 degrees Kelvin, and which is more normally seen from 93,000,000 miles away, wouldn't be able to creep anywhere, let alone catch anything by surprise. — Malcolm Booth, Brinsworth, Rotherham, U.K.
- "Let's see what this baby can do, Virgil," said Wyatt, as he floored the Charger, brushing a Dart out of the way, sideswiping an oncoming Lancer, rear-ending a Diplomat, and demolishing a row of Rams before catapulting head-on into the sheriff's Viper – realizing that we'd indeed missed the turn-off to Abilene and ended up instead, in Dodge City. — Paul Curtis, Randburg, South Africa
- Though her beloved Roger had departed hours ago, Lila remained in their rumpled bed, daydreaming about his strong arms, soulful eyes, and how, when he first fell asleep, his snoring sounded not unlike two grizzly bears fighting over a picnic basket full of sandwiches, but as he drifted off into deeper slumber, his snoring became softer, perhaps as if the bears decided just to rock-paper-scissors for it instead. — Lili R. Lillie, Alamo, CA
- I hadn't fallen in love with Monique because of her intellectual level – she referred to the 6th grade as her "senior" year – or her habit of eating popcorn off the floor of theaters during movies – okay, so maybe love

is a bad archer with a low IQ – but you couldn't carve a finer or shapelier figure out of a hedge. — Robert B. Robeson, Lincoln, Nebraska

- Emerging from the dark and dusty wine cellar of Lord Parker after a year of fattening up on wine, truffles, and caviar, head butler Hastings, sans his servility and his tan, was well larded and ready to slip into the Lord's slippers after pickling Parker in a punt of port. — Jay Solmonson, Orinda, CA
- The day started out as uneventfully as any other, and continued thus to midday and from there it was nothing at all to ease into an evening of numbing, undiluted monotony that survived unmarred by even the least act of momentary peculiarity – in fact, let's skip that day altogether and start with the day after. — Jon Starr, Rumford, ME
- As usual, Mr. Riddle came home from work, and, as usual, took the toy poodle, Fluffy, out for her walk, and, as usual, Fluffy “did her business” at the usual places, first at the bush, second, on the sidewalk, and third, in the grass, so that there, on the pavement, was evidence of Fluffy's evening sojourn: Mr. Riddle's little poodle's middle puddle. — Dr. Ford Sutherland, Venice, Florida
- Watching Felicia walk into the bar was like watching two fat Rottweilers in yellow spandex and spike heels that had treed a scrawny bleach blond cat at the top of a skinny flagpole that for some reason had decided to sprout casaba melons. — Melissa Alliston, Coraopolis, PA
- Her name was Mauve, like the color of paint, which was apt: not only was she “pretty as a painting,” she was also “smart as paint,” and certainly as thin (assuming sufficient solvents had been added); she was, however, Arnold discovered when she stepped from the shower, a lot more fun to watch dry. — Steven W Alloway, Granada Hills, CA
- When he concentrated, his thick black eyebrows furrowed, looking not unlike a pair of Hypercompe scribonia caterpillars on a collision course over the bridge of his nose, but unlike them, his eyebrows would never evolve into giant leopard moths, and would find better places to hover after nightfall than around her 40-watt backporch light. — Jane Auerbach, Los Angeles CA
- Earthy ochre and russet hues in the lifeless leaves which rustle under his feet, and spiral down from the majestic trees above, signal that October has now arrived, but of course he knew this already because he has a calendar above his breakfast bar in the kitchen. — Roz Black, Rhynie, Aberdeenshire, Scotland
- As she skipped past the giant mushroom Alice was not surprised – because, after all, she had always suspected it was opium and not simply hookah, as many Lewis Carroll defenders had claimed, and tar heroin had since become a much cheaper and more available alternative – to see the track marks up and down the Caterpillar's abdomen. — Chris Carlos, City of Industry, CA
- Ted feared that the line between his jobs as plastic surgeon and butcher was blurring when he found himself injecting Botox into a rump roast he was preparing for his wife and mother-in-law, who was a decent person except for the hideous wart on her nose that begged to be removed – a simple task for his boning knife. — Wayne Carmichael, Tyler, TX
- The homicide detective was an aging woman with a crusty and somewhat ill-tempered personality, an individual who reminded me of the kind of woman my mother, a Sunday-school teacher, would have been if she had been a crusty and somewhat ill-tempered homicide detective. — Bill Crumpler, McKinney, TX
- Lonely as I might like to feel – the helplessness of loneliness, and its simulation, is so responsibility-relieving it fills me with relief of the sort we feel after using the urinal after a long funeral of an elderly relative we had never met – I write this, dear reader, because a writer talks to a word processor because he does not trust a real person. — Surit Das, BR, New Delhi, India



- Her lips were full and wanting in the kind of way that your tongue anticipates the happy burn of Hunan beef followed by the cooling swill of cheap beer, but never a malt liquor, as that would bruise the delicate tang of monosodium glutamate, the kind that only Sue Hong uses, that probably exacerbates her water retention, causing her lips to be unnaturally full and plump and always thirsty. — Larry Davick, San Francisco, California
- I heard her husky breathing as she came up the stairs, breathing exactly the way a sled dog breathes after competing in the Iditarod as she sauntered into the room, her hips swiveling from side to side like a Sherman M-4 tank with a 75mm gun forcing its way through the hedgerows of Normandy after D-Day in 1944. — Bruce Hannem, Citrus Heights CA
- It was a dark and stormy night, except when the lightning flashed, because then it wasn't dark; it sort of turned the windows into a giant disco ball for a moment, but eventually the thunder and lightning stopped and it settled down to a steady light rain, so then it really was dark, but it would probably be a stretch to call it stormy. — Laura Loomis, Pittsburg, CA
- Tom and Kelly's relationship had hit a dead end, like that road in your neighborhood when you were little that everyone used to throw their old chairs away at, and then the kids would use them to build forts. — Diana Maloney, Northampton, MA
- Fittingly for a butcher, Carl resembled a fresh turkey – pale, knobby, and large through the middle with spindly appendages – and as he was wont to do on slow days, he had nearly finished reassembling the hams, loins, and chops into something approaching a pig when she walked in – long, flat, and lean, like a flank steak, radiating a heat that would cause him to flush, then darken, and, eventually, to crisp up deliciously. — David K. Mullen, Batesville, IN
- Vito watched as Robert squirmed in his life vest while the Great White brushed against his chum-soaked and shackled body, but it wasn't until the terrible fish circled back, finally ending Robert's evening, that Vito, with the vision of the legless torso undulating up and down in the Farallon current had his epiphany, and uncovered one of life's truly great mysteries: when you shorten Robert you really do get bob. — Paul Olson, San Jose, CA
- Carey, unnerved by an affair that had suffered through weeks of volatility, walked unsteadily, her dress etching complex runes in the fine patina of dust along the antiquated floor, to a rose-scented box of love letters in a vain attempt to find solace, like a security fund struggling to find liquidity in the US sub-prime mortgage market. — Ray Pasimio, Chicago, Illinois
- As a cold winter sun was just rising above the lonely French village of Vices-le-Buffeur, the forlorn figure of a man dressed in rich Arabian silks could be seen crouching in the center of the market square, crying softly and cradling in his arms the limp and lifeless body of what appeared to be a large hamster. — Arndt Pawelczik, Hennef, Germany
- The band had stopped almost two hours ago, the musicians had packed up their horns and strings and were halfway to Biloxi, but the lone couple on the dance floor moved to their own silent music as they clung to each other like barnacles on the rusty hull of an old oil tanker with a belly full of sweet crude hoping to drop their hook at the Big Easy before the dancing stopped. — James Macdonald, Vancouver B.C.
- Like almost every other post-Hegelian neo-hipster angst monkey at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Rene flatly rejected the labels society placed upon him. — Bob Salisbury, Spokane Valley, WA
- It was common knowledge around town that Bill drank like a fish, the kind of fish that consumes large quantities of cheap scotch on a daily basis. — Brent Sheppard, Morganton, NC
- The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day – though the Little Leaguers themselves, who all attended Mudville's famed Albert Einstein School for Science and Technology, were certainly very,

very smart. — Stephen A. Silver, San Francisco, CA

- The penguin stood on the iceberg, cutting a striking black-on-white profile, much like the silhouette produced by a person standing behind a screen in front of a bright light while holding up a Twinkie to represent the penguin and placing it atop a Yorkshire terrier to represent the iceberg. — Sarah Totton, Owen Sound, Ontario
- Although the family resemblance was almost palpable, there was no glint of recognition in the eyes of the separated-at-birth-but-nearly-identical quintuplets – Pixie, Trixie, Moxie, Gertie, and Howard – as they reached for the same size-10 champagne-colored lace Teddy in Filene’s basement that fateful Thursday morning. — Julia Tryk, Shaker Heights, OH
- Sandy applied a fresh coat of lipstick, snapped her gum and pulled the specially-made thigh-high waders on for one last time before the New Year rang in; Anchorage didn’t hold much for a girl from the Bronx, but Catherine the Great, in a snowdrift, had become her specialty. — Jane Louise Thalken, Shenandoah, IA
- The tiny boat got tossed around on the ocean like a pinball in a pinball game played by a player who was really good at hitting all of those bumper things to get a really high score. — Maile Valentine, Lakeland, FL
- Rudy’s feline senses tingled as he watched Minerva pour a glass of milk, thrusting his tongue outward involuntarily, urging him to inexplicably lick his hand and smooth his cowlick, but he could not let Minerva know about the vampire kitten that had sucked his neck – attacking him with a feral ferocity that belied its adorable whiskered face – and how the meowing and purring that had become an integral part of their lovemaking was really just an injection of half-dead Calico. — Tara Lazar, Basking Ridge, NJ
- Town mayor Alvaredo Sanchez, in defense of Carmelita’s indubitable honor, cracked the very expensive ocean-mist smoky-blue bottle of worm-in-bottom tequila over the badly balding head of his political opponent senior Montaya Gonzales, who runs the Toyota factory in town. — Randy R. Wise, Paradise, TX
- Gripping his terrified victim by her sensual slender neck with his foul piercing talons like a lawnspeaker, Igor the Terrible bellowed, “How do you want to die? over the coals? with a plastic bag over your head? with your blond hair seeped in red blood? in agony? today? tomorrow? – hurry up, please, my fingers are getting sore.” — Edward Vincent Tennant, Edgemoad, Cape Town, South Africa
- Surveying his shattered and splintered ship, Baskin pronounced it wrecked, glanced at his first mate, Robbins, and began a careful assessment of his new surroundings: sand as white as whipped cream, lush greenery layered like a cake against the fruit-filled treeline, a vanilla sky blended into an evening as dark as chocolate with a pie-shaped moon, prompting him to wonder aloud, “what’s so unappetizing about being stranded on a deserted island?” — Jay Dardenne, Baton Rouge, LA

## Fans, Stalkers, and Others

Mariann Simms, winner of the 2003 contest, [writes about the BLFC in her blog](#). (April 2006)

Celine Shinbutsu: [Fantasy Category winner’s blog from Japan](#).

[Suite.101.com interviews 2008 Winner Garrison Spik](#) (August 16, 2008)

[Suite.101.com interviews the Grand Panjandrum](#) (August 16, 2008)

[Guillaume Destot interviews the Grand Panjandrum](#) (2002)

[“The Great Bulwer-Lytton Debate”](#) (Manchester Guardian)

[Sticks and Stones](#) (a “new” contest, last updated August 2010)

[Bulwer-Lytton's Ancestral Estate](#)

Bulwer-Lytton’s Bicentennial Birthday Celebration at Knebworth House. [With pictures](#). (May 20-23, 2003)

[Literary Locales](#): Over 1,350 picture links to places that figure in the lives and writings of famous authors

[The Eye of Argon](#) (a Sci-Fi conference classic)

[Dead White Guys](#)

[Dead Dogs](#)

[Shakespearean insult?](#)

[Bad Sex in Fiction Award](#)

[It Was a Dark and Stormy Night — the game for people who love to read](#)

[Dickens or Bulwer?](#)

“Dark and Stormy Night Cocktail” from the [Swig Bar](#) in San Francisco: Pour ginger beer into a highball glass and top with Zaya rum.

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