

A person is lying down, covered by a white sheet. Their right arm is bent, and their hand is clenched into a fist. The background is a soft-focus view of a beach and the ocean at sunset or sunrise, with warm light filtering through the scene.

Many False Prophets Shall Rise

**Autobiography of a Seventies
Religious Cult Disciple**

by Al Perrin



From 1970 to 1976, Al Perrin was a member of The Movement, a very secretive and destructive religious cult originating in Grand Rapids Michigan. It was begun under the leadership of "Sir," and eventually spread out over eight states touching thousands of lives, many tragically. This is the story of how it affected Perrin's life, and his eventual escape from its clutches is a gripping story of one man's will to survive.

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Al Perrin

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2nd Edition

Gus Company

The cars all pulled up side by side and everybody got out with their equipment, silently leaning them up against their cars. We stood there waiting as Frank shut the gate of the rolling cow-pasture, and then parked his old blue, beat-up Mustang next to the other cars. He got out silently and smiled as he strode up in front of us, a clipboard under his arm.

Frank was really decked out, all in military gear and equipment. I never saw him like that before. He wore khaki ODs and had a blue beret on his head. He wore a big webbed belt with a machete hung around his waist. His small black beard and beret made him look like Castro. He stood for a moment staring at his clipboard.

Frank looked up at me after a while and dug his heel into the soft earth beside him.

"Al, bring your stuff and come stand over here."

"Okay," I said and lugged my ancient Boy Scout equipment over to where he stood. He grinned broadly at me and sent a swift karate sidekick to my midsection that stopped only a few short inches from my stomach, and I flinched.

"How you doing, Al?"

"Fantastic, Frank."

"Good. Good to hear it. Glad to see you were able to find this place," he said, smiling. He glanced down at the clipboard again and his smile disappeared. He looked up at me.

"Tell me Al, are you a good follower?"

"Well – ah – yeah, I guess so."

"Good. Then you'll be a good leader," he said and he turned quickly calling off two other names from his clipboard and set Tim ten feet to my right and Jack ten feet beyond Tim. Then he called off the names of the rest of about thirty people I knew well from the Tuesday night group meetings. He had them line up behind Jack, Tim, and myself.

"These are your new squads," Frank announced. "And for those of you who don't know it – this is GUS Company. It stands for *God in Us*, and I'm your supervisor. These three in the front here, Tim, Jack, and Al are your new squad leaders. Tim here also doubles as my assistant. From now on you *will* address these three as well as myself, as 'Sir'. These are your leaders and your job this weekend is

to do what they say. You will not talk at all unless you raise your hand first and your Sir says you may. Then, if you have a question you will state it in this manner: 'Sir, may I go to the bathroom?' or 'Sir may I go to bed now?'. If your Sir says, 'No, you can't go to the bathroom,' then no you can't go. Does everybody get that?"

Everybody nodded but me. This is not at all what I expected and I didn't like any part of it. I expected this weekend camping with The Group was like church camp, but this was beginning to sound like the Russian Army. Frank continued after glancing briefly at my frowning face.

"Good, good. Now I suppose that some of you may be wondering what's going on here. Well that's okay. I can understand that. I've been in the same situation myself. This isn't the Tuesday night Group deal and I can understand if you're confused. What we're doing here is serious and it's important. We're not playing games here and we're not doing all of this just for the fun of it. I think you'll see by the end of the weekend that it isn't any mistake that you're here. And I think that if you follow all the rules and participate along *with* us that you'll see God here too. Because *He* was the one who set all this up this weekend. He set it up for you and *He's* the one who's really running this show – not me or Sir or the rest of us. I think you'll see that this weekend but it depends a lot on you and your response. I think you already know that. That's why you were selected out of the rest of the Tuesday-Nighters, because you've already shown a little response to Him – and now He wants to take you further. We'll see just how loyal a disciple you really are to Him. Like I said – we'll see."

Frank eyed all of us critically then and said in a voice softer than before but loud enough for all of us to hear.

"I think there's going to be some real changes taking place here this weekend. Just wait and see and watch yourselves grow spiritually. That's what we're here for. Just watch – you'll see."

He glanced down again at his clipboard checked off a few items on it and looked up at me.

"Okay Al, take your unit out to the north along the river and make camp for the night. We don't want it to get too dark too soon on us."

"Okay," I mumbled, and started to gather up my gear beside me.

"Yes *Sir*, Al! You forgot to say yes *Sir*."

"Yes Sir," I said slowly, and carefully.

Frank grinned at me, amused.

"Sort of grates on you don't it, Al?"

"Yes Sir."

"Good!" He said triumphantly. "That's what it's supposed to do. Just wait. We haven't even started yet. The weekend's just begun."

"Yes Sir."

Frank looked at me for a moment, and wrote something down on his ever-present clipboard.

"I'll see you and your unit later Al at 7:30 at the tree house for war games. Wait a minute I forgot. You don't know where it is do you?"

"No Sir. I've never been here before."

"Ah, okay – let's see – Caroline?"

"Yes Sir?" a girl in my unit answered.

"You've been here before so why don't you show Al where the tree house is when he asks."

"Yes Sir, Frank Sir," she answered precisely.

"Good. Then we'll see you and your unit at the tree house at 7:30 sharp. Right Al?"

"Yes Sir," I mumbled and turned to go with my camping equipment under my arms.

"And don't be late!" He called.

"Yes Sir! Frank Sir!" I answered with a supreme effort to keep my voice clear of all the rebelliousness and resentment I felt at the time. When Frank invited me for the weekend I didn't envision anything like this. As we walked single file parallel to the river the shadows of the woods lengthened in the waning daylight and I tried to make some sense out of it. I was a part of the open *Group* meetings on Tuesday night for almost two years. That's where I met Frank and the others.

They talked a lot about God there but I couldn't see where God fit into all of this military stuff. So, after the unit set up camp I found the tree house and told Tim, since Frank wasn't available momentarily, that I had to leave for a while. I had to get away. I needed some time to think about all this.

Fumbling through the woods in the dark moist mugginess near the river, I tried to listen for cars up on the road but the noise of the crickets and peeping frogs drowned everything else out. Suddenly,

the woods came to an end, and to my relief a few hundred yards off to the left were the dark shapes of the cars sitting beneath the starlight.

I found my VW by feel mostly and drove out of the misty moor-like pasture until the gate loomed up in front of me in my headlights. Suddenly, I saw the glow of a car's headlights bounding up and down through the meadow behind me. I knew it was Frank, so I waited for him. His lights disappeared and reappeared again, the engine roaring with speed. He seemed to be in a hurry to catch up to me. Finally, his car roared up and his brakes squeaked to a halt. He and Tim got out.

"What's the matter, Al?" Frank asked in a bewildered tone as he and Tim walked over to me, their hiking boots crunching loudly on the gravel by the road.

"Nothing's the matter, Frank," I said. "There's just something I got to do is all."

"Well, what you got going that's so all important?" he asked frowning. Tim stood silently beside him with his arms folded across his chest.

I told him some story. I don't even remember what it was now, but by the expression on his face, I could see he wasn't quite swallowing it. After I finished he stood for a short time, listening to the hushed chorus of frogs near the river.

"You want to know what *I* think?" He said in an angry voice, crossing his arms. "I think that you got all wiped out by this 'Sir' jazz and now you're going to go blab to Kirk, and the rest of the church people. They've never liked the idea that they haven't got us right under their thumbs, and I think that when I called you, they found out about it somehow and talked you into spying on us out here."

"No. That's not true at all, Frank," I protested. "Look – I just got to go for a while."

"All right," Frank sighed and threw up his hands in exasperation. "Go ahead. Do whatever it is you feel you *got* to do. I can't hold you if you really want to go. I will say this though that I think you're making a mistake. You really don't know what we're doing here and you owe it to yourself to stick around and find out if what we say is true. If God really *is* running this deal, then you'll *never* find out by leaving. You haven't anything to lose if you stay,

and you might just be throwing away the best thing that's ever happened to you if you take off."

I didn't answer. The engine to my car coughed spluttered, and died. The headlights dimmed. Frank turned around quickly in disgust and walked back to the car with Tim shadowing him like a ghost.

"We'll see you later, Al," Frank said as he got back to his car. "Give my regards to Kirk."

I stood and watched as their taillights disappeared behind the hills and then I drove around for a while trying to sort out my thoughts. Something nagged at me. I felt strange and confused inside like a little boy playing hooky from school. It felt like I was violating somebody's trust, or doing something wrong. But how could I reconcile God running something like the militaristic GUS Company? God was supposed to be about peace and love. As I drove along a road close to home, there was a great temptation to just skip it all, and go home.

I didn't though, and not even really knowing why, I drove back to the pasture. The only thing that made any sense to me at the time was that if God really was running GUS Company then I needed to stay there to find out. So I found myself wandering in the woods again along the Grand River trying to find the tree house. I walked along the riverbank for quite a while until there was a light up in the trees off to my right and I heard voices.

I came up under the tree house and paused for a long moment beneath it, feeling really stupid that I left in the first place. I almost left again out of embarrassment, but I heard Frank's voice and I called out to him. There was a long pause.

"Is that *you*, Al?" Frank called down his voice full of surprise.

"Yes Sir," I answered climbing up into the tree house with Frank. We talked for a long while until it was time to go to sleep. Frank had me sleep there that night and I was no longer leader of the unit. A girl by the name of Jacy was now my "Sir." Frank told me if I wanted to stay, that I needed to call *her* Sir and do whatever she told me for the rest of the weekend.

And so I stayed – not really even knowing why. Rebellious, confused and curious all at the same time, I still stayed. I wanted to know God. I wanted to know Him more than anything else in the whole world. And if this was the place to find Him, then I was going

to stay – no matter what the cost. We all awoke at dawn the next morning and meditated together as a group. Frank taught us all how, although I got the idea that most of GUS company already knew. This instruction was mostly for my benefit as well as a few others.

"You sit in a full lotus position," he said. "Or as close to one as you can get for right now with your legs crossed and *don't move* until the timer goes off."

"Yes Sir," everybody answered simultaneously.

"Okay. Now there'll be two timers, one for each half hour. During the first part of our morning spiritual experience, we'll all repeat a word together – let's see – what's a good word for today?" Frank looked at me for a moment.

"Open-ness!" he said. "That's a good word. We'll all chant 'open-ness' this morning for the first half hour. The last half of the meditation we'll hum whenever we get a thought in our heads. The idea is to clear your mind of any thoughts so that God can talk to you during your meditation. If there's too many thoughts cluttering up your mind, then God can't get in there with you. Humming helps you to clear your mind. So when the second timer goes off, just hum to yourself whenever you find a thought coming into your head. Is everybody ready?"

"Yes Sir," everybody answered.

"Good. So let's go," Frank took his two timers and sat directly behind me in my now humbled position as the very last in line.

I meditated before with the Tuesday Night Group, but never outside with a bunch of mosquitoes. So I didn't stay absolutely still for the entire hour like the others did. After we meditated, Frank told us to line up again in units. He smiled peacefully.

"I don't know about the rest of you, but I had a good meditation this morning. Hardly even felt those mosquitoes after the first five seconds. How was everybody else's?"

The rest of GUS company nodded yes.

"How was your meditation this morning, Al?" Frank asked.

"Fine Sir."

"You moved around a lot," he said.

"Yes Sir. I know. I'm sorry Sir."

"Oh, you don't have to apologize to *me*. You're the one that missed out."

"Yes Sir."

"Okay now," Frank coughed with his hands behind his back. "I'm sure that some of you have already had a growing experience this weekend in knowing God. But today we'll help you to know him even better. Now the Bible says that in the last days before the second coming of Christ, there'd be a period of great tribulation. It seems that when you work for Christ, the world doesn't like you too much. I guess it's because they like the darkness rather than the light. They get all guilty, and all of a sudden, *you're* the one who's evil, and of the devil. You'll get an opportunity to prove to Jesus just how much you love Him later when the world is beating on your body, by just loving the people as they do it to you.

What we're going to do today, however, is practice missing out on getting beaten up and killed during the last days. If you're an enlightened person of God, then you have a responsibility to help the poor lost people out there. You owe it to them not to let them catch you and kill your body before you can help them. So, we're going to run an obstacle course this morning."

GUS Company erupted in an enthusiastic squeal of delight. Frank grinned broadly holding up his hands in front of him and rubbing his beard.

"Okay, okay. We'll do this by units. Each unit will make a section of the obstacle course. Jacy?"

"Yes Sir?"

"Take your unit down by the river. We'll start down there."

"Yes Sir," she said motioning for us all to stand up. Then she took our unit down by the river to where the brambles and nettles grew profusely near the riverbank.

"Here's where we'll start," she said. "Just look at all these neat prickles. We'll have everybody belly crawl through them. That'll make everybody grow a mile."

I was astounded.

"Belly crawl through those?" I thought to myself. "These people are *crazy!*"

We spent most of the morning setting up our end of the obstacle course, dragging logs, tying ropes, and planning out our section. Frank supervised and coordinated things so that each section of the course fit together with the next one.

"This is the biggest obstacle course we've ever had," he grinned. He came over to me. "How you doing Al?"

"Fine, Sir."

"You still all wiped out about this 'Sir' jazz?"

"No Sir."

"Don't worry Al," Frank smiled. "By the end of the weekend you'll see a little bit better what we're trying to do. What we're doing is preparing. You want to be in on the second coming of Christ don't you?"

"Yes Sir. I do."

"You will," he grinned and patted me on the back. "You will."

I never ran through an obstacle course before, but this was the only time that weekend I had any fun. The women in GUS Company outnumbered us men by almost three to one. Many of them never ran an obstacle course either, but they all went through it without even one complaint. There were brambles and logs to crawl over, ropes to climb and cow pies to avoid. I didn't really want to go through it. But since everyone else did without complaining, it made me ashamed not to. I had one of the top times in GUS Company – even though I didn't miss all of the cow pies all that well.

Later, we had some time to ourselves in a pleasant summer afternoon on the bank of the Grand River. Other members of GUS company sat and talked quietly or meditated in the warm sunshine. Frank had each of us in turn come up to the tree house and talk. My turn came and I climbed up the tree to where Frank sat looking down at his clipboard. He looked up and motioned for me to sit.

"So – why'd you come back last night?"

"I don't know Sir."

"Where'd you go?"

"No place really. I just drove around for a while, thinking."

"About what?"

"I don't know. I just had to think for a while is all."

"You really threw me for a loop last night you know."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

Frank shook his head and looked out on the peaceful riverbank scene where the other disciples were.

"Yeah. You really did. We thought that you'd fit right in with this thing. That's why Sir wanted me to invite you out here but I don't know. I don't think that you appreciate what we're doing here for you."

"Who's Sir?"

Frank ignored my question and continued.

"I think you realize now that we're not out here just for the fun of it. Sometimes we kind of forget ourselves when we're out here, it's so peaceful, and calm. But if you look out there in the world, it's a different place. Everybody's out there killing each other and getting drunk, or high. Everyone's forgotten what we're supposed to be doing while we're here on Earth. We're supposed to be helping each other – and loving our neighbor – and serving God. It's crazy – really crazy."

"Yes Sir."

Frank sighed setting down his clipboard and he rubbed his beard pensively.

"I remember when this thing first got started. I didn't have anybody else around to help me hardly you know. All my friends made fun of me and it was a lot harder then. You guys don't know how easy we've made it for you. All you have to do is work with us and follow the rules – and you can know God! I mean really *know God*, just like the Apostles and the prophets did in the Bible. Listen. I'll tell you something. I'd like you to get hold on this thing Al and see the glory of God. We all would like you to get that.

We've had an eye on you for a long time. You've got a lot of potential for the kingdom but it's all up to you on how to use it. We're not going to make you do anything you don't want to, but you'll miss out on a growing experience if you don't participate. You'll only cheat yourself. Really the only way to find out if this truly is of God or not, is to get into it and do it all. Do you know why we do all of this crazy stuff for?"

"No Sir. I really don't."

"I didn't think that you were quite understanding it all. There seems to be a principle of God that works this way. When someone does something for Him, that they really don't want to do – I don't know – maybe it's too scary, or too dirty, or too something for them, but they do it anyway because they love God an interesting thing happens. They grow. They grow spiritually and God blesses them. That's why all of this was set up, to make people grow – to make them disciples who are willing to do *anything* for God. When you're willing to belly crawl through a bunch of nettles for Christ, then you're willing to do just about anything else too. And that's what

we're trying to accomplish out here. That's what God's trying to do. He asked specifically for you, you know."

"No Sir. I didn't know."

"Yes, He did. God is the one who is really running this whole thing. But the only way for you to find out for yourself is to participate, and watch yourself and the other disciples of Christ around here change and grow. Just remember; 'By their fruits you shall know them.'"

"Well," Frank sighed. "That's my heavy rap. When you go down, tell Darrell that I want to talk to her next."

"Yes Sir," I said getting up. I climbed down the tree and spent the rest of the afternoon strolling along the riverbank, just thinking about what Frank said. I was still all mixed up inside, but decided that if the only way to find out if it was true or not was to do it all – then I must do everything I was told no matter how crazy it was. I spent much of the time in prayer asking God to help me understand what He wanted.

"Help me please," I prayed. "I just want to do what is right in *your* sight."

And so the rest of the weekend passed pretty quickly. I did everything they told me to, from calling Jacy 'Sir' to meditating dawn until noon deep in a swarm of hungry mosquitoes. I still didn't know if GUS Company was anything more than just a bunch of craziness, and as the weekend drew to a close – I decided that I never would.

After the morning meditation, Frank told us to get ready to go home and I was convinced that everything was over. All I wanted to do was to *go home*, and forget about all of this as soon as possible. Frank stood up in front of GUS Company with his clipboard and read some rules for us to follow.

"These are for you to work on until our next activity," he said.

1. Always be on time.
2. Raise your hand before speaking to be recognized.
3. Always call your leaders, 'Sir', with respect.
4. Be in bed before midnight.
5. No going barefoot.
6. All meditative tools, to be done before unit activities start on Friday night.
7. No complaining.

8. Wear light pastel colors except red or black.
9. When meditating, use a blindfold and earplugs.
10. No laughing or idle talk.
11. Hand in two ideas on 3x5 recipe cards each week on how to build the kingdom.
12. Always smiling.
13. Get at least five hours of sleep a night, but not more than seven.
14. No talking about unit activities outside of the unit.
15. Talk, and think positive at all times."

I didn't write any of them down because I wasn't going to follow *any* of them – *ever*. But the rest of GUS Company busily wrote them down. Frank just looked at me and didn't say anything.

"In addition to this for next week," he announced. "If you break any of the rules – or you see anybody else in GUS Company breaking them – including me, just write out an observation on a 3x5 card and hand them in to me. If you break any of the rules, we'll have to think of some sort of reward for you. You know; 'As you sow – so shall you reap.' So," Frank sighed. "You are all dismissed."

A tremendous wave of relief swept over me. All I wanted to do was to *go home*. There wasn't a single thing about that weekend convincing enough for me to come back again next time at all. I was just standing beside my car ready to leave when Frank called me back.

"Al, help me to coil up this rope for a minute would you?"

I had my keys in the door to my car and thought; "No, I just want to get *out* of here." But suddenly somewhat to my surprise, I stuck my keys in my pocket and said; "Yes Sir."

The rope was the big one we used in the obstacle course. It was at least two inches in diameter and about thirty feet long so there were a lot of other disciples helping him too. Suddenly Tim slapped Frank on the back.

"Hey," he grinned. "Sir, can we have a tug of war?"

Everybody burst into an enthusiastic cheer of agreement, except for me. I just wanted to coil the rope up and go home. Frank's face brightened.

"Sure! Guys against the girls! The losers get a reward!"

All the women squealed in delight since they outnumbered us nearly three-to-one and went into a huddle. We stood together smugly, knowing that in spite of their superiority in numbers, we would of course win. We didn't. They dragged us over the line without any problem at all.

We got up sheepishly and dusted ourselves off while the women all crowed in triumph over us.

"Frank Sir?" Jacy said.

"Yes Jacy?" Frank grinned brushing the dust out of his beard.

"What was it you said about a reward for the losers?"

"But I didn't think that *we* were the ones that were going to lose!"

"Ah, but Sir," Jacy wagged her finger at him grinning broadly.

"As you sow, so shall you reap,' remember?"

Frank looked at us.

"I guess we deserve it don't we guys?"

We didn't have time to answer. The women cheered in triumph and instantly huddled again, whispering and giggling.

"Just look at them over there would you?" Frank said jerking his thumb at the huddled women. "Scary aren't they?"

"Yes Sir!" Tim said. "What are they going to think up?"

Our reward was to belly crawl all the way across the cow pasture to where an artesian well bubbled up from the ground without missing any of the cow manure along the way. The well was at least five hundred yards away so there were quite a few of them, and the women followed along with us to make sure we didn't "accidentally," miss any. All along the way I thought to myself: "I could be *home* by now."

We finally got to the artesian well which flowed into a large watering trough for the cattle – who eyed us suspiciously all weekend. When we reached it, the women held our heads underwater for ten seconds. This actually was the best part of the reward, since it was a hot and sweltering day, and the water was nice and cool.

We were just starting back to the cars when Frank stopped, his face lighting up again.

"Say, look at *this*!" he said.

"Oh no!" I thought. "What *now*?"

He was standing over a very large and very fresh pile of cow manure.

"Okay girls!" he announced. "Line up!"

"I thought that there wasn't any revenge in the kingdom, Frank Sir." Darrell said.

"Oh, there isn't, but we just had a very good growing experience so we'd like to help you to grow too. So, line up!"

All the women stood in line and with Tim administering it, they got a hand full of manure literally thrown right into their face. After their "growing experience," each one was led down to the well to wash it off, since it covered their whole face and they couldn't see where they were going.

I watched in total fascination as each one got it without as much as a complaint or objection. Some smiled peacefully. I was amazed.

"These people are *crazy*!" I thought to myself.

Then Frank announced. "Okay Men! Now it's our turn! Who's going to go first?"

I honestly don't know why I did it, other than to just hurry up and get it over with so I could go home, but I raised my hand.

"I'll go first, Sir," I said and everybody stared at me.

"*You* want to go first, Al?" Frank asked.

"Yes Sir."

"Well, okay then – step up to the firing line."

Caroline was now administering it, but since I was the very first one of the men, she missed me and hit my shoulder instead of my face. GUS Company moaned in disappointment – but I was elated. Frank looked at me sadly, and shook his head.

"Okay Al. Go on. Go wash it off."

I went to the well, washed it off and got back up to the other disciples just in time to see Frank get his. Caroline took two handfuls for him and bringing it back behind her head she threw it into Frank's face so hard that it staggered him. It took two women to help him go to the well gagging and choking all the way.

I was lying there in the shade with a couple of women disciples as they talked gleefully about what just happened.

"I never thought that I'd get hit in the face by a pile!" One of them laughed.

"Yeah, and enjoy it too!" the other one said.

"This is really great! I almost choked when I got hit in the face with that cow pie. Wow! What a growing experience! That Frank Sir thinks up the craziest things to do."

That bothered me a bit. I felt as if I missed something. They were all smiling and sitting together, sharing a comradery that I was missing out on. I wondered if perhaps there was something else that I was missing too.

I got up and went down to the well where Frank and the rest of the men were washing off. I asked Frank if I could do it again. He looked up at me in amazement.

"You want to do it *again*?"

"Yes Sir," I said. "Caroline missed me the first time."

"Well sure. If you really want to."

"Yes Sir. I thought about what you said about participating, and maybe missing out on something. I think that I want to find out what it's like to be hit in the face with a cow pie and like it."

GUS Company gathered around me as Caroline prepared to hit me again. She threw it just as she did for Frank – as hard as she could with two scoops – and I thought I was going to vomit on the spot. She hit me so hard that I couldn't help but inhale it through my nose and it gagged me.

When I finally got the last of the cow manure out of my eyes and could see again – all of GUS Company was gathered around me. They cheered and clapped enthusiastically. Frank put his arm around my shoulder and shook my hand.

"Now that was done like a real disciple," he said. "How do you feel?"

"Fantastic Frank," I said feeling incredibly exhilarated.

"Look Sir," somebody said pointing to the sky. "There's a rainbow in the clouds."

There, far above us was a faint ring of colors around the sun.

"Ice crystals in the upper atmosphere," Frank said. "God's promise," he looked around at us. "Maybe He's trying to tell us something here."

"Yeah," I thought to myself. "Maybe so. Maybe this is what I was here for. Maybe this is what I asked God about this weekend. Perhaps this was His promise to *me*."

From that moment on – I never doubted GUS Company, Frank, or The Movement again. From that moment on – I was theirs completely, body, mind, and soul.



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