

A mythical story asking YOU to consider: What if a divinely inspired homeless man won the lottery and built a modern utopia offering everyone free housing, food, healthcare and lifetime employment doing whatever they were destined to do?

Considering SomeplacElse

By Barry Lindstrom

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B.L. Lindstrom's

Considering



SomeplaceElse

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First Edition

Thursday, May 1st 1.00pm - Norm L

Want some meaningful work?

ConsiderSE.com

I bit into my Quarterpounder, no cheese and stared at the business card. What kind of scam was this? Surely one of those stuff-envelopes-at-home-multi-level-marketing-internet-spamming-real-estate-with-no-money-down schemes designed to line the pockets of those at the top of the pyramid that want to con you out of the few dollars left in your credit limit. I finished my value meal, wrapped the card in with the rest of the trash, took one last sip of Diet Coke and pitched it all. When I got to the library all the newspapers were in the hands of fellow workers without jobs. So, I stood in line waiting for an internet terminal. ‘Terminal’, now there’s a descriptor for my career.

The guy behind me was one of those extroverted-everybody-is-his-best-friend types that can handle no more than 4 seconds of silence before they have to say something.

Three-Two-One

“So, you lookin for work too?”

“Yeah.”

“I can’t believe how many of us are out. Yeah know? I moved back in with my mom. She’s got money from my dad, but I can’t keep livin off her. Yeah, know what I mean?”

Three-Two-

“So, what do you do? I was in the printing business but now, Gees. It’s all computers. So, I sold all my equipment and now I’ve got to find something else. Did you say you were in printing too?”

“No, I’m...”

“Oh, well, it’s been hell the last couple of years. You’ve got to invest in the latest and greatest computer gadgets, or you won’t sell

anything and even if you do you can't make any money because somebody can make it cheaper and faster than you. Yeah know? Hey there's one."

Printer man was pointing to a terminal that had opened up. I wished him luck and moved quickly toward the solitude of my internet job search. I noticed the trace of a smile on the previous user as she brushed passed me. Not a something-amused-me smile, but rather the kind of smile that we are entitled too when good fortune has been granted to us. Where had she been on her internet journey? Had she won a game? Received email from a long lost friend? No. Somehow, I sensed fate had dealt her something more. With voyeuristic curiosity I approached the P C and went immediately to the browser history in search of the source of that smile.
www.ConsiderSE.com

Printer man interrupted my coincidental or possibly serendipitous discovery.

"That's a scam man. The guy that runs that site is a billionaire"

"Wow. Must be a pretty good scam"

"Yeah, well, don't get sucked in. He doesn't need your money too. Hey, my keyboard is all sticky. Mind if I sneak in here? I just have to check on this one job"

As he pushed me out of the way, I just relinquished control and went to phone in my unemployment verification. After 18 weeks, I was really in no hurry to pursue the fruitless job quest, yet again. 8 weeks from now I would no longer receive 1/4 of my former paycheck from the state. My wife's job at Fedex was still secure. At least as secure as it could be in this economy-that-onlyworks-for-the-amusement-of-the-top-one-percent. Between the two of us we were bringing in about half of what we used to even though our expenses were closer to 85% of our former earnings. We had played credit card roulette until they cut off all new cards. Then we started selling stuff for 10 or 20 cents on the dollar to make up the

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difference. If I could just find a job paying even half of what I made, we could get back on track.

I dialed in to the unemployment voice-bot, swearing under penalty of imprisonment and fine that I was indeed able to work, looking for work and had not seen a paycheck in over 18 weeks. I hung up the phone and went over to look at the newspapers until printer man disappeared.

After about 2 hours, printer man looked at his watch, asked three people if that was the right time, then announced to most of the library that he had a dentist appointment and left. I got back in, what was now, a short line and soon found myself looking at job boards, full of the same jobs that had been there the last four times I looked. My email contained a lot of we'll-keep-you-on-file-for-six-months application confirmations. There was also a bunch of spam about writing better resumes, as if that was the problem with the 23% of us collecting unemployment.

What the hell. I typed in *considerse.com*. It took a while to load then

'You have arrived *SomeplacElse*' danced across the screen in front of what appeared to be a flying saucer parked on top of an underground laboratory in the middle of the desert. Only four links were offered up:

Now Hiring

Life's Tasks

Utopian Problem Set

1st Timothy verse 4:14

I tried Now Hiring...Nothing happened...Life's Tasks...Still nothing...1st Timothy...The screen went blank...The library was closing.

As I walked down the front stairs, I forced *SomeplacElse* into new age religious status, dismissing it as some no wage job working for Jesus while waiting for the mother ship. I wondered why I

couldn't find a real job. I wondered what character flaw or flaws in my make up prevented me from working or perhaps caused me to lose my job in the first place.

'Lost my job'.

Funny how we assume the problem is with us and not the mismanagement of resources by business and government that puts us out of work. No, in America, or at least in the United States, we are taught that if we ain't workin it's our fault. It's not the low wages, the crappy hours, the demeaning and/or unsafe environment, it's all on us. There's something wrong with us. Start your own business. Work your way up and out...In the United States there are no barriers to entry. You can be anything you want to be. So, if you're unemployed it must be by choice. I looked to heaven as I continued to rail sarcastically at God for not opening the door that I was knocking on. But before my gaze could reach the sky the 10 foot tall image of Adam Wainwright appeared before me.

Adam Wainwright the-high-school-drop-out-self-made-billionaire-soon-to-be-governor bill board turned my stomach. I knew about this guy. He was an idiot. His parents gave him some thought-to-be-worthless property so he could set up a junk yard and work on cars. Rumor had it he was actually running a chop shop, but they couldn't prove it. Somebody decided they needed to build a shopping mall and a freeway on and through his property.

I think he got 10 million for that. He then bought the most expensive house in town, started throwing parties and giving money to politicians and crooked businessmen. A few years later, he sold his 5 million dollar house for 10 million to one of his chop shop buddies. The crony had taken a 100K from Wainwright and turned it into an incredibly successful auto parts chain. I heard Wainwright's take was over 200 million in company stock. Somebody told him to sell it all and buy oil futures. He did and the

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next thing you know, he's a billionaire venture capitalist without ever having worked an honest day in his life.

His pick-yourself-up-by-your-boot-straps-just-like-I-did rhetoric is striking a chord with the voters. I guess the reasoning is, if this idiot can do it, there must be something wrong with me if I can't.

Of course, his third wife is a real babe and that never hurts in politics.

Justin Gross, his opponent, wants to attract more employers to the state. His plan is to provide tax incentives so favorable to big corporations that they would come here in droves. This would, of course, shift the burden of taxation for all government services to the individual. Voters have never liked the T word. So, naturally, Wainwright is a shoo-in.

Of course, his election will not help me find a job and his cost-cutting-no-T-word approach will effectively eliminate any possibility of unemployment extensions. Maybe if we moved to another state, I could find work someplace else.

The words froze in my mind. Maybe I could work SomeplacElse. That's what the business card said but what kind of work?

What would it pay? Did it pay anything?

It would have to wait until tomorrow. Public access computing was all I had and keeping Libraries open on weekdays until 5:00pm was all the local government could afford. Once Adam gets in, they'll probably close them up, melt down the computers for gold content and burn all the books. The Internet Cafes had all but closed up. Customers buying a small drink and then sitting there for six or eight hours had been bad for business. If I could afford an iCon device and the services that went with it, I could video conference with anyone, surf the web and watch movies right over there in the ever expanding homeless park. No. All I could afford was an old cell

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phone, because ‘talking only’ support was free, at least until next year. Then they are going to force us Neanderthals to upgrade or lose all wireless communication capability.

I went home. At least I still had one to go to. Bev walked in just as I finished browning the ground beef for tacos.

“The traffic was terrible. There must have been an accident at 61st. I could see flashing lights. So, I just cut over on 53rd along with everybody else.”

She had stopped asking ‘Any luck today?’ shortly after the second unemployment check came.

Funny how we talk about job searches being related to luck and chance rather than skill. We lose our jobs and find our jobs as though we actually believe we have some control over it. Yet we wish each other good luck in our job hunts as though the unseen force of Good Fortune is really what gets us working again.

Bev was worried about bills and making ends meet but I was more worried about how I was making Bev worry. As children our parents would sometimes speak of layoffs. But rarely, if at all, were we exposed to the stress of unemployment. The thought of working someplace other than the auto plant or steel mill or whatever industry employed the people of a region was inconceivable, back then.

The information revolution had swept in and made us all believe that the individual could change jobs anytime they felt like it or needed to. Work for any company, anywhere, for a non-committal period of time then walk away from the rat race a millionaire by age 30.

But something went terribly wrong with that vision. Companies started failing. Excessive government and corporate borrowing destroyed our financial infrastructure. Stocks, bonds and options became worthless. Consumers stopped buying when they couldn’t borrow anymore, and jobs started disappearing. The Japanese Cradle-to-Grave employment experiment had failed as had our own

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Military-Industrial-Congressional-Complex-as-patriarch-of-all-things-good-and-secure. China escalated the resource bidding war as they industrialized their aging rural economy. The U.S. self-employment euphemism that turned the century led most of its advocates to borrow and mortgage to keep their retail-franchise-house-flipping-day-trader dreams afloat until the next big boom. The 25 year all-government-bad phase of our society prevented any intervention into the sacred marketplace and the next boom was the sound of a crash bigger than the one that started what they called the Great Depression. If that was the ‘Great’ Depression, what are we going to call this one, the ‘Really Great’ Depression? Na, the way they are spinning this they’ll probably called it the ‘Days of Excessive Negative Growth’.

I used to blame the damn Republican in the white house. Nixon, Ford, Reagan, Bush, and Boy George all ushered in hard times. But after the 2000 presidential selection, the events of 9/11, Emperor Dick’s Invasion of Iraq, hurricane Katrina and the farcical elections of 2004 and 2008, I realized that government, be it national, regional, or local is only really interested in self-preservation. It’s got nothing to do with solving society’s problems or even helping to solve society’s problems. Now, I am just disgusted with all of them.

As Bev and I ate our tacos, I related the tale of SomeplacElse. Bev, like printer man, immediately dismissed it as a scam. I countered with,

“But how can somebody get rich by offering people jobs?”

“They’re not real jobs...How much does it pay? ...What kind of work do they want you to do?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, go ahead and check it out, but as soon as they ask for your credit card number, logout!”

“I don’t think they will, but the only thing I’m giving them is my resume.”

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“It’s a scam. I hate for them to get your hopes up like this.”

“My hopes haven’t been up for 4 or 5 months. So don’t worry about that.”

“It’s a shame we had to sell the computers and cancel the internet service, or you could check it out right now.”

“Well, it’ll keep ‘til tomorrow.”

We cleaned up the kitchen, climbed into bed, watched Seinfeld and Monk reruns then Bev fell asleep while I watched the end of “People Will Talk” with Cary Grant. I fell deep asleep, then awoke. It must be time to get down to that library and apply to SomeplacElse. It was still dark...What time is it?

The clock on my nightstand glowed 4:41 as I gazed from my pillow, wide awake.

Can’t get up yet. Bev’s got to sleep...She’s still working and needs her rest.

Movement from me invariably woke her up so I tried to go back to sleep. Visualize something...anything...stop thinking about what coulda been or shoulda been at the last 3 jobs...No. Don’t think about bills...I need something completely distracting...a naked woman...Hey that works...now there are two...now three...ConsiderSE.com...no, no naked women...I should never have sold my computers...then I could get up and look at naked women on the internet...no you could find out about this SomeplacElse...How can he make money hiring people?...Damn those Etech guys for laying me off...stupid politicians and their do nothing reactionary government wrapped in the American Flag...Fat Cat bastards all of them...They don’t have to worry about collecting unemployment...Is the rent due tomorrow?...There’s a naked woman...There’s another...what time is it?

The clock glowed 4:43.

Bev left for work around 7:00. I was too tired to get up with her and as soon as she left, I finally fell asleep. The sun came streaming

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into the bedroom through a crack in the blinds. It hit me right in the face. What happened? Oh. I fell asleep. What time is it now?

The clock glowed 10:45. For a second or two, I panicked...I was late...I needed to...I needed to be...Oh yes, the library...Consider SE.com. It's not like I was late for a meeting or an interview or an appointment. As far as my work life was concerned, 10:45 was almost the crack of dawn.

Nevertheless, I showered and dressed in some anticipatory urgency. I may not find a job today, but I was going to get to the bottom of SomeplacElse.

It was a gorgeous spring day, 85 degrees with lots of sun. A really nice breeze blew across my face carrying the scent of orange blossoms as I walked the 2 miles to the library. Campaign signs littered the street with the special election only a few days away. No meaningful debates, just hundreds of little 2 by 4 signs with candidate's names in large letters and the occasional 3-5 word slogan. Apparently, the only thing we are capable of, as a society, is name recognition and recalling the occasional sound bite. But I wasn't going to think about this anymore, I was heading someplace else.

I practically leapt up the stairs and entered the library with a big grin on my face. Not even an extra-long line for terminal use could discourage me today. An hour later I was typing that magic URL. I wanted a job, so I clicked on 'Now Hiring'. I expected to see a list of job openings, but the website immediately presented the SomeplacElse employment application. What was I applying for? Maybe they were looking for certain things in the application so they could present a list of jobs you were qualified for. I figured I'd go ahead and fill in the first page:

Name: Norm Larson

Address: 561 Hobson Road

City, State, Zip: Chandler, AZ 85224

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Phone: 480-555-5208

Email normlarson@freemail.org

This page had no questions about past experience. No place to submit a resume and nowhere did they ask for references. Assuming this would all be on page 2, I read the lone question on this first page:

‘What were you going to do before you were told you couldn’t?’

What kind of question was this? Were they serious? Was this some kind of trick or maybe a test? I entered:

“I don’t know how to answer this.”

Then I pressed the submit button, fully expecting page 2 and the rest of the application to appear. Instead, the site came back with:

‘Thank you for applying for meaningful work, which pays real wages, provides full health and education benefits at no cost to you, AND, once hired, we will never lay you off.’

Whoa, what did I just do? What did I apply for? I wanted meaningful lifetime work that paid real wages and provided benefits, but even I wasn’t willing to just take any old job that they saw fit to put me in. I must have missed something. I read on:

‘Please select an interview date from the schedule below.

Our interview process lasts all day. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are provided.

If you have transportation, please come to our offices at:

400 E. Main

Chandler, AZ

If you prefer, please indicate “transportation needed” next to your appointment time.

We will contact you and arrange for a car to pick you up in time for your interview and return you when you are finished.

If you need to reschedule, please send email to interviews@someplacelse.org or call us at 480-555-7777.’

My apprehension subsided. Scam or not, it was three free meals and a free ride. What did I have to lose? I signed up for tomorrow

and asked to be picked up. Funny how being out of work for an extended period of time can make you bold. Besides, I could always change my mind and not go. I decided to look at the rest of the web site to see what I had gotten myself into:

The 1st Timothy 4:14 link simply stated:

‘Do not neglect the gift you have which was given you by prophetic utterance when the elders laid their hands upon you.’ There was nothing very sinister in that.

‘Utopian Problem Set’ turned out to be a kind of chat room where people discussed the 5 fundamental problems of a Utopian Society:

Social Control, Dissent, Material Inducements, Economics, and Maintenance.

My principal knowledge of utopia came from an old Bob Hope Road picture. I didn’t feel qualified to contribute. But hey, if these guys figured out how to build a utopian world, I would certainly not object to working in it.

Life’s Tasks on the other hand struck a very non-egghead chord with me:

‘1. Essential Tasks of a modern life: Earn, Eat, Sleep, Eliminate Waste’

A bit earthy, but true.

‘2. Quality of Life Tasks: Enjoy, Organize and Maintain, Relax’

No argument here.

‘3. Tasks that give a Life Value: Commune, Counsel, Solve, Learn, Teach, Dream, Create.’

This was followed by a brief summary:

‘Since most of us are dealing with the Essential tasks while trying to grab some Quality, is it any wonder why we feel our lives cannot have value unless we steal it from 1 and 2.’

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What kind of a job were these folks going to have for me? What kind of work did they do? Curiosity had now taken over any reluctance I had. I needed to find out all the what, where and how of SomeplacElse.

I started surfing the net for more information, checking out all aspects of the operation.

Suddenly, a rather large woman tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to the line that had formed. Then she pointed to the sign next to the terminal which read:

‘Please be courteous to other patrons and limit your time on the terminals to 30 minutes or less’

I read a book on time once. It basically said, ‘people operate at the speed of their time keeping devices.’ We started with seasons. Then we went to phases of the moon. Next, we used daily calendars. Then we built clocks with an hour hand, then a minute hand, then a second hand. Each change increased the pace of our lives. These changes took place slowly, over multiple generations. My generation started using computers to further subdivide time into ever decreasing fractions of a second. Without realizing it, we exponentially increased the pace of our lives in less than half a lifetime. Furthermore, because these boxes now ‘think’ at brain speeds or faster, we tend to lose track of clock and even calendar time when we use them. I had just spent a relative eternity on this computer and everyone in the library knew it, except for me. I apologized with a whispered “Sorry” as I slunk, red-faced, out the door.

Once outside, I realized it was almost time for Bev to come home. I would barely have time to make dinner. I ran to my front door and grabbed the ringing phone as walked in.

“Hello?”

“Mr. Larson?”

“Yes.”

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“This is Bud Jones from SomeplacElse. I’ll be your driver tomorrow. Can I pick you up at 8:00am?”

“Well, yes. I guess so. To tell you the truth, I just walked in the door.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Did you need me to call back in an hour or so?”

“No, no! 8 will be fine. I just need to press my suit and I’ll be ready to go. Is there anything else I need to bring?”

“You will need a valid picture ID. Some of our candidates bring their resume, but it’s really not necessary.”

“How can you conduct interviews without a resume?”

“Well, as you will find out tomorrow, we are more interested in who you want to be than who you were.”

“What?”

“Believe me Mr. Larson, by the time you leave here tomorrow, you will know all about us. And, more importantly, may find out who you are and what you want to do.”

“That sounds like some kind of ominous career counseling or indoctrination.”

“Not at all, there are no tests of your mental or physical aptitude and no sales presentations of any kind. You’re going to talk to a lot of people, tour our facilities and eat some really good food. If at any time you wish to leave, I will take you home, no questions asked.”

“Now it sounds too good to be true.”

“We get that a lot. I’ll see you at eight o’clock tomorrow morning then?”

“Okay, but I’m still skeptical.”

“Skepticism is a sign of a cautious mind that has been betrayed. We have many cautious minds working here but we are no longer concerned with betrayal. Until tomorrow, Mr. Larson.”

“Okay. Thanks. Good Bye.”

This was shaping up to be an interview like no other. Maybe that’s what it takes to get meaningful work. I pressed my suit and

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worked on dinner. Barbecue ribs on the grill, we'll just see if SomeplacElse can provide food as 'really good' as my ribs.

Bev came home just as I came in from the grill. The smell of barbecue wafted through the house.

"Ribs!?"

"You betcha."

"What's the occasion?"

"Oh, I just had them in the freezer, and I've got an interview tomorrow."

"...Really? Where? ...With who?"

"I'm going to SomeplaceElse."

"How much is it going to cost us?"

"Not a penny. In fact, they're sending a car for me tomorrow AND I get free breakfast, lunch and dinner."

"Oh my God, they're going to kidnap you. Lock you up somewhere and brainwash you."

"Now, why would you think that?"

"That's how all these religious cults operate. They lock you in a room and don't let you out until you sign over everything to their leader."

"Really? And you know that this is one of those type operations?"

"Well, it has to be."

"Why? Because no company in their right mind would hire me, let alone give me a ride and a couple of meals during the interview?"

"It's got nothing to do with you. This is just a scam to get at what little you have left."

"I don't think so. I think this is a legitimate job opportunity that will allow me to regain everything that I once had including my dignity."

"How much did they charge you to apply?"

"ZIP!"

“I bet they told you to bring a credit card or check book.”

“Nope.”

“What if they hit you on the head and send you off to South America?”

“Then you’ll be the first one to file a claim against them with the Better Business Bureau, the police or the FBI.”

“So, you checked them out?”

“Yes, I researched their financial statements on the internet and their record is impeccable. Of course, I spent so much time checking them out I may never be allowed in the library again.” “Maybe they just bought off all those people or filed fake numbers to make them look good.”

“Or maybe this company was founded by someone who lost his job 4 times during his career, was on unemployment and food stamps at various times for over 2 years, had to declare bankruptcy during his last jobless stint and has become a billionaire by putting people to work doing what they really want to do.”

“Is that what they told you?”

“No, this is what I was able to extract from my research.”

“I don’t know. If it sounds too good to be true, it usually is.”

“That’s what they said about my ribs and look how they turned out.”

Bev laughed and I think relaxed a little.

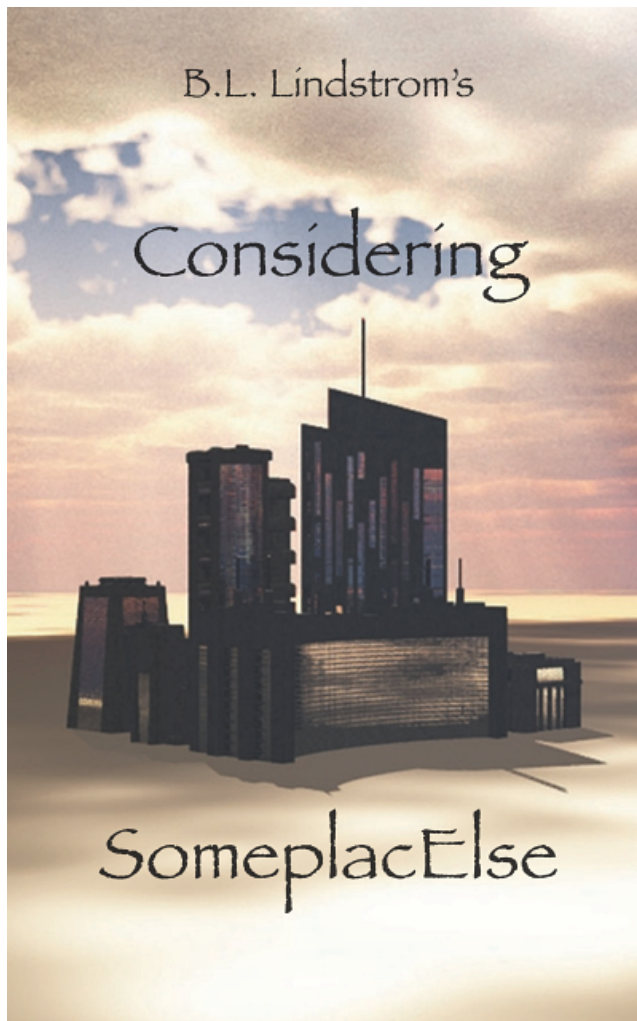
“Just be careful.”

“Just eat!”

She did and so did I. Everything tasted better than I remembered. We cleaned up the kitchen, climbed into bed, watched *Seinfeld* and *Monk* reruns then Bev and I fell asleep. I slept all night, rising with Bev’s 6:00 alarm, refreshed and excited. Bev wanted to go to work late in case the brute squad showed up to kidnap me. But, once she realized the watchful eye of our neighbor, Mr. Cranston, was fully trained on all neighborhood comings and goings, she left for work. I

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tried to watch some TV. Instead, I found myself reading and rereading my resume while answering pretend interview questions. The doorbell rang. I took a deep breath, opened the door and found Bud Jones smiling broadly on the other side.



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