



The North Texas

Skeptic

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<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

Zina's challenge

By John Blanton

By now the secret is out. Several members of The North Texas Skeptics have underwritten a \$12,000 award to any person who can demonstrate proof of the paranormal under controlled conditions. These conditions are spelled out in the NTS Challenge protocol posted on our Web site.¹

We have been offering the prize for well over ten years and have yet to pay out a penny. One possible reason for this could be that not too many challengers have stepped forward to have a go at the prize. Another possible reason could be that challengers are claiming to be able to do the impossible, which kind of stacks the deck against them.

Every now and then somebody comes along to break our dry spell, and things get interesting again. So, it came to pass that in July we received an e-mail from Igor Boyarchenko. Here are the interesting parts:

Dear John,

...

I was thrilled, too, reading your page North Texas Skeptics Paranormal Challenge. It is awesome! The sense is I have a female aquainter that lives next door. She is a clairvoyant and is visited by people for asking advices and future. Even police use her help for seeking missing stuff. I myself have checked twice her predictions and can say "She tells truth." Does this noble lady match your name of "claimant" with psychic or paranormal activity? Actually, a clairvoyance is the next point of my interests and I could share how it really works. It is an esoteric knowledge ,too.

What do you think, John, about all this?

...

Fraternally,
Igor Boyarchenko

EVENTS CALENDAR

August Program

Saturday 13 August at 2 p.m.
Center for Nonprofit
Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Quack Medicine

Danny Barnett is the NTS resident speaker on alternative (fraud) medicine. He will give us an update on what's been going on recently.

NTS Social Dinner and Board Meeting

Saturday 27 August at 7 p.m.
Good Eats Grill
6950 Greenville Ave
Dallas, TX
(214) 691-3287

Updated Upcoming NTS Events for 2005

Future Meeting Dates
September 10 2005
October 8 2005
November 12 2005
December 10 2005

Phone the **Hotline**
214-335-9248 for information.

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 501 (c) (3) scientific and educational organization. All
 members receive the NTS newsletter and may attend
 NTS functions at which admission is charged at no or
 reduced cost. In addition, members will receive mailings
 on topics of current interest or social events.

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Of course, we were highly interested in the nature of this mysterious
 lady clairvoyant. Igor Boyarchenko provided additional details in a
 statement from Zina Chuklina:

My name is Zina Chuklina. I am clairvoyant from small resort
 Russian town. I would like to demonstrate one of my psychic or
 paranormal ability. The point is I can tell information that is hid-
 den from usual sight. I can see quite clearly events and details of
 people's personal lives. I can predict future and to tell about
 present and past. It is not concerned global or historical events,
 only mundane human problems and troubles.

A percentage of accuracy of predictions is 100% (personally),
 about 85% by a photo, and by telephone (via voice) is near 75%.
 A percentage of telling about present and past is the same.

To test my ability is very simply. You just come here, or to send a
 photo, or to call. Also I answer any questions that need and im-
 possible to get by usual ways. No equipment, no special places,
 no special statements of consciousness.

Unfortunately, I am unable to tell exact time of fulfilling of pre-
 dicted events but can describe a season of happening of its.

You can record a process of demonstration of my ability on au-
 dio or video recorder if need.

Conditions of my living here are very poor, and I am not able to
 pay your arrival, accommodations or other expenses.

If you need more precise details about my abilities feel free to
 ask. If it is okay, so I am ready to enter into protocol and start ne-
 gotiations.

Zina Chuklina

Since that time I have agreed with Igor Boyarchenko to see what
 Zina Chuklina can do. I have provided him with a photo of some person,
 whose identity will have to remain unknown for the time being. I want
 to know what Zina Chuklina can tell us about this person.

Now, I am as gullible as the next person, but I am willing to play this
 game with Igor and Zina for what it's worth. Since we are dealing with
 somebody supposedly from Russia by e-mail alone, there exist a number
 of possibilities. For example, how do we know we are really dealing
 with Igor Boyarchenko? And who is Igor Boyarchenko, anyhow? An
 Internet search didn't find any trace of him. Furthermore, is Igor
 Boyarchenko really from Russia? We could be dealing with Clyde
 Rupert out in Farmers Branch, Texas, for all we know. Besides that,
 does Zina Chuklina really exist?

How do we know? After all, we're not psychic.

Details to follow.

References

1 <http://www.ntskeptics.org/challenge.htm>

Web news

by John Blanton

The World Wide Web is a wonderful source of information and news. Some of it is true, and some of it is not.

Creationism Love Fest

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2005-07-20.htm#falwell>

<http://www.CreationMegaConference.com>

<http://www.wavy.com/Global/story.asp?S=3613368>

<http://www.reason.com/rb/rb071905.shtml>

Liberty University is a fundamentalist Baptist institution founded by Jerry Falwell in Lynchburg, VA, in 1971. What better place to hold the 2005 Creation Mega Conference?

The Associated Press reports that more than 1200 people enrolled in weeklong celebration of creationism cosponsored by creationist Ken Ham's Answers in Genesis. Ham says that "...evolution versus creationism controversies are going on in about 20 states in one form or another — in relation to school boards or textbooks and such." What Ham does not mention is that most of this recent push toward creationism ignores his own form of "young Earth" creationism. Many Christian universities do not require a course in creationism, according to AiG, but Liberty does.

Ronald Bailey, writing for Reason Online, gave a higher estimate for the number of attendees.

Most of the 2,000 people at the 2005 Creation Mega-Conference, being held here at Liberty University this week, appear to be middle and upper middle class; the conferees are overwhelmingly white and many have brought along their whole families. When organizers poll the audience for "Christian leaders," about 200 people stood up; a poll of attendees with "graduate degrees" brings another 300 or so to their feet. Participants hail from as far away as Alaska and California, and cars in the parking lot are tagged from New York, Michigan, Iowa, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Alabama and Texas. The attendees are clearly engaged, enthusiastic, and sincere.

Speakers included Romanian geologist Dr. Emil Silvestru, who likes to debunk the idea the Earth is millions (billions?) of years old. Here is his chronology for the Earth, according to Bailey:

Creation—six 24-hour days

Lost World—1700 years—no big mountains, no plate tectonics

Flood—370 days—creation of high mountains, deep oceans, sedimentary rocks, plate tectonics form continents

Ice Age—1000 years

Post Ice Age—3000 years and counting.

Silvestru explains the fossils as a consequence of the mythical flood of Noah. All those ancient animals got covered up by sediment from the flood, and today's scientists are fooled into believing that evolution accounts for the order of the fossils in the sediment layers.

John Whitcomb is co-author of "The Genesis Flood," which was first published in 1961 and helped get the whole "creation science" fad going. Whitcomb told attendees that Noah carried 1000 kinds of dinosaurs on his ark, as well as copies of all the currently living animals. I would tell you what Whitcomb's explanation is for the disappearance of the dinosaurs, but I can't recall just now what it is.

Whitcomb doesn't buy into the ideas of creationist Dr. Hugh Ross, because physicist Ross supports the "Big Bang" theory of modern cosmology, and he also postulates all these animals were created, albeit supernaturally, over a period of millions of years.

Also

Whitcomb reproaches the leaders of the intelligent design movement for believing that evolutionism can be defeated without any reference to the Bible or the Creator of the World. He agrees with them that tax supported schools need to be purged of the errors of evolutionism, but he then rhetorically asks a very pointed question:

"Are people believing in Christ their Lord and Savior as a result of hearing the message of intelligent design scholars?"

Ham says "you can believe in millions of years so long as God was involved." He reconciles this with Christian fundamentalism, but you are going to have to read the explanation for yourself. I can't figure it out.

Ham rejects the "Big Bang," as well, because of its obvious conflict with Genesis.

As a historical note, the Big Bang was devised by Jesuit scientist Georges Lemaitre in 1927. Two years later astronomer Edwin Hubble confirmed that most galaxies are flying away from one another. Lemaitre thought the Big Bang cinched the argument for a universe created at a specific time by God. Whether or not the Big Bang

holds up under scrutiny is a scientific question. The nature of science is skepticism—if solid new data calls into question the theory, then the theory will have to be revised.

Another speaker was Philip Bell.

Philip Bell, former British cancer researcher and now fulltime creationist, in his talk “Ape Men, ‘Missing Links’ and the Bible,” explains, “If Adam is your ancestor then you were created specially and have a purpose in life. If evolution is true, we are descended from ape-like animals with no morality, no aesthetic sensibility and no soul.” If evolution were true, Bell tells the conferees, then “you would have no purpose for your existence.”

Reverend Falwell made an appearance, as well. He repeated the creationist mantra “If we believe that we evolved from a blob of protoplasm, we have zero values then... If we evolved, then there was no Fall in the Garden and there is no sin and no need for redemption and Christ’s death was unnecessary and meaningless.” There seems to be nothing in there promoting a special regard for the truth, so we wonder if some sins are less than others.

Falwell reminded listeners that there is hope, however. Against all the usual forces of evil (Universities, Hollywood, etc.) Jesus came through for the righteous and returned George Bush to the White House. The rest of us incorrectly thought the president’s re-election was due to a large turn out of his supporters at the polls.

About the writer:

Ronald Bailey is Reason’s science correspondent. His book *Liberation Biology: The Scientific and Moral Case for the Biotech Revolution* is now available from Prometheus Books.

Scientists Challenge Evolutionary Theory

Susan Wang

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<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2005-07-20.htm#challenge>

<http://www.christianpost.com/article/society/1680/section/scientists.challenge.evolutionary.theory/1.htm>

<http://www.discovery.org/>

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/2004/2004february/february2004.htm#unlocking>

http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/articles/3541_project_steve_2_16_2003.asp

Whoa, there. Time to disband the North Texas Skeptics.

Hold on. False alarm. We have breaking news of who these “scientists” are. It turns out they are scientists in the same sense that Jayson Blair is a journalist (or for that manner, that I am).

Scientists who challenge evolutionary theory will hold an “uncommon dissent forum”

This was posted on-line on The Christian Post on 19 July.

These scientists plan to meet 4-6 August in Greenville, South Caroline, in what is described as an “open forum to both inform and discuss the theory [of evolution].”

Titled “Uncommon Dissent Forum, Scientists Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing,” the conference features a panel of nine scientists who will air their criticisms of evolution.

The creationist Discovery Institute Center for Science and Culture provides a rundown of the speaker’s list:

Molecular biologist Dr. Jonathan Wells will discuss many of the “textbook” examples used to support neo-Darwinism, which he contends are either misleading or simply false. Philosopher of biology Dr. Paul Nelson will examine the evidence for Universal Common Descent, one of Darwin’s two major claims. Biochemist Dr. Michael Behe will take attendees into the molecular realm and explain how the “irreducible complexity” of many cellular systems poses an obstacle for the power of natural selection to create such systems, Darwin’s other major claim. And finally, Dr. John Angus Campbell, a noted rhetorician of science, will explain how Darwinian evolution should be taught in contemporary, pluralistic American society.

Joining the Discovery fellows as speakers at the conference will be oceanographer and chemist Dr. Ed Peltzer, biologists Dr. Ralph Seelke and Dr. David J. Keller, and biophysicist Dr. Jed Macosko. Science author Dr. Tom Woodward will emcee the conference.

The Christian Post mentioned that the DI CSC has compiled a list “of over 350 scientists” who have signed onto their “Scientific Dissent from Darwinism.” I did a quick check on DI’s Web site and noticed the list is now “[m]ore than 400.” The list doesn’t seem to include any of the luminaries of biological science, and I didn’t notice any Nobel winners, although there have been Nobel laureates in the past who oppose evolutionary theory.

Taking a sample of one from DI's list, I checked out "Marko Horb," who is listed as a Ph.D. in cell and developmental biology at the State University of New York. An Internet check turned up numerous references to Dr. Horb, of SUNY at Stony Brook. Looking further, I was unable to locate Dr. Horb through SUNY Stony Brook's Web site.

In the past we have noticed that a creationist's link to a famous university has lingered long past its shelf life. In critiquing the DI-sponsored video "Unlocking the Mystery of Life," Andrea Bottaro, Assistant Professor of Medicine at the University of Rochester Medical Center noted the peculiar circumstances of Jed Macosko. In the video Macosko is listed as one of these scientists who oppose Darwinism and, presumably, someone who supports Intelligent Design. However, as we reported in our February issue of this scandal sheet last year, Macosko's credentials were considerably laundered. See the link above to the newsletter item:

Macosko is described in UML as "Molecular Biologist, UC Berkeley," but his association with Berkeley seems to be limited to his UC Berkeley degree and his work there as a postdoctoral trainee. He has never been listed on the UC Berkeley faculty and is not currently at the University. Some ID Web sites show him teaching chemistry at the religious La Sierra University in California, though at the time Dr. Bottaro wrote to WNYE Macosko was not listed on that university's faculty.

We don't claim this is the case with Dr. Horb or any of the other 400 dissenters listed by DI. Except for Dr. Jed Macosko. On DI's list of "[m]ore than 400" Dr. Macosko is still listed as "Ph.D. Chemistry University of California (Berkeley)." DI is probably still working to bring the list up to date.

DI's list provides skeptics a marvelous opportunity to practice their investigative skills. Go to DI's Web site, navigate down to the section on the Center for Science and Culture. Get the list of 400 and have a go at it. If the file has moved or is no longer available, send me an e-mail, and I will forward a copy to you.

In the mean time, the Berkeley, California, based National Center for Science Education has compiled a similar list. Similar in the sense that NCSE's list is of scientists who support evolutionary theory. Dissimilar in the sense that their list is larger, and NCSE has tried to keep it small enough to fit on most people's computer hard drive. They kept the list small by restricted the list to scientists named Steve. Supporters of Evolution named Steve, Stephen, Steven, even Stephanie are listed, but all the Toms, Dicks, and Harrys are excluded. Maybe later when computer drives get larger. In the mean time, you can get the condensed list from NCSE's Web site. See the link above.



What's new

By Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.aps.org/WN/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

Political science: is the congressman doing climate studies?

Who among us has not engaged in disputes over research findings? Disagreements between researchers are a normal part of the scientific process. The success and credibility of science is anchored in the willingness of scientists to make their data and methods available to other scientists for independent testing. Openness is a sacred obligation. However, three scientists, who have had their share of such disputes, recently received letters from Representative Joe Barton (R-TX), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, demanding complete records, going back 10 years, of their paleoclimate work, including computer codes and a list of all studies on which they were authors and the source of funding—by next Monday. Their climate studies, which support global warming, figured prominently in the 2001 report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. It seems unlikely that Rep Barton plans to repeat their studies; his record of support for environmental legislation is 0%. Barton is, however, among the top recipients of campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry, and the aggressive tone of his letters sounds to most scientists like an effort to intimidate.

Catholics too! archbishop finds a little Intelligent Design.

In yesterday's New York Times, Cardinal Schoenborn, editor of the official Catechism, rejected John Paul II's supposed acceptance of neo-Darwinism when he said evolution was "more than just a hypothesis." Schoenborn goes on to quote Pope Benedict XVI, "We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution." Well, that's it, if we believe in science we're on our own. On the other hand, the Church's position is evolving.

Evolution: Schoenborn's folly linked to Discovery Institute.

As scientists battled efforts by Christian fundamentalists to counter the teaching of evolution, we took comfort in the more enlightened position of the Catholic Church. But as WN reported last week, a powerful cardinal wrote in the July 7 New

York Times that evolution may be incompatible with the Catholic faith. His argument sounded like the the Discovery Institute's intelligent design nonsense. It was. The *NYT* revealed two days later that Schoenborn's essay had been written at the urging of Mark Ryland, vice president of the Discovery Institute, and submitted to the Times by the Discovery Institute's public relations firm.

Appeal to the Pope: war looms between science and religion.

Schoenborn's op-ed was meant to refute a May 17 *NYT* op-ed by Larry Krauss, then chair of physics at Case Western Reserve, which said the Catholic Church "has no problem with the notion of evolution." Krauss is not Catholic, but yesterday he was joined in a letter to Pope Benedict XVI by two well-known Catholic biologists: Francisco Ayala at UC Irvine and Ken Miller at Brown. They urge the Pope not to reestablish the divide that once existed between the scientific method and religious belief.

God's hand: Catholics don't have to believe in Adam and Eve.

On Tuesday, at the National Press Club in Washington, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick told reporters that Catholics can believe in evolution — as long as it's understood to have been guided by "the hand of God" rather than chance. The Church cannot accept the belief that "this is all an accident," he said.

Harry Potter: as if Charles Darwin wasn't enough of a problem.

As *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, hits book stores, we learn that Pope Benedict XVI is not a fan. "Those are subtle seductions that deeply distort Christianity in the soul," he wrote two years ago. Catechism number 2117: "All practices of magic or sorcery, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one's service and have a supernatural power over others — even if this were for the sake of restoring their health — are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion." You want to take magic out of kids books? Why not ban Cinderella? Scientists look at it differently: Magic and sorcery don't work.

Prayer: and while we're talking about things that don't work.

The shuttle is still on the ground (WN 15 Jul 05), the Kansas City Royals are 28 games behind, cold fusion is a memory, missile defense isn't even being tested, and intercessory prayer has no effect according to researchers at Duke reporting in *Lancet*. Didn't we already know that (WN 3 Dec 04)? Prayer is just one

of the things the Samueli Institute supports that don't work. The Institute is headed by Wayne Jonas, a genuine authority on the subject of things that don't work. Former head of the NIH Office of Alternative Medicine, Jonas authored *Healing with Homeopathy* (WN 2 Aug 96).

World peace: the inflation rate exceeds that of real estate.

Avant-garde film director David Lynch ("Mulholland Dr.") wants to raise \$7B to create world peace through a massive Transcendental Meditation program. A corps of 8,000, trained in TM, would create a coherent unified field over Earth. I don't mean to be a cynic, but in the 1993 Demonstration Project to reduce violence John Hagelin had 5,000 meditating over an 8 week period for only \$1M. He offered to end the war in Kosovo with 7,000 Yogic flyers (flyers are better trained). After 9/11, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi himself, in a full-page ad in the *NY Times*, turned to "the world's wealthiest." He proposed to create world peace with a corps of 40,000 flyers for \$1B. "There must be a few peace-loving billionaires who can raise the money in one day," he said. We see from Iraq that not one cheapskate billionaire came through.

Missile defense: that's even better than I thought it was.

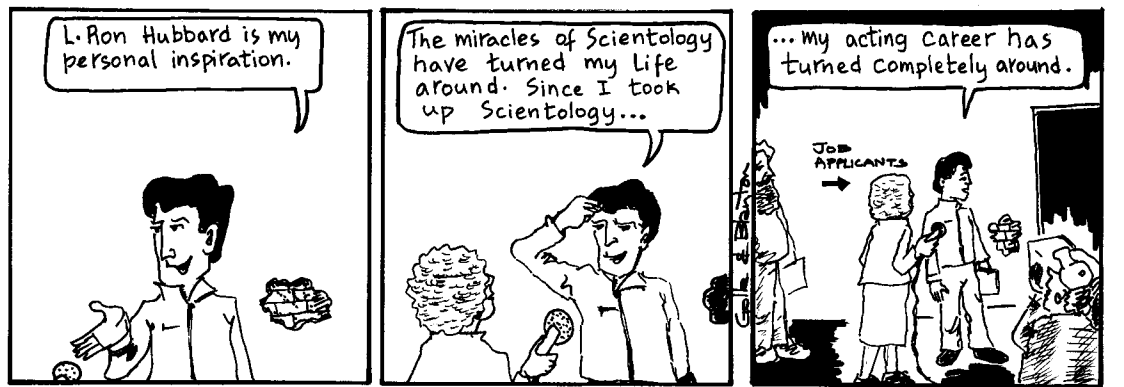
Air Force Lt. Gen. Henry A. Obering III, director of the Missile Defense Agency, quoted in today's *Washington Post*: "We have a better than zero chance of successfully intercepting, I believe, an inbound warhead. That confidence will improve over time."

Echinacea: the theme this week is "things that don't work."

There is no reason why herbal remedies couldn't work. The bark and leaves of the angiosperms are packed with biologically active chemicals. Surely, among the thousands of herbals on the market, one must work. With a budget of over \$100M, and under pressure to show it's not biased against alternative medicine, the new National Center of Complementary and Alternative Medicine at NIH set out to find it. Well, ephedra worked, but side effects were fatal (WN 2 Jan 04). Why not ask herbalists what would be a sure thing? Answer: "Echinacea." Millions of Americans use the purple cone flower to prevent or treat colds. Native Americans used it, and we all know that primitive societies had wondrous cures that today's narrow-minded scientists can't explain. But in initial tests, it didn't seem to work (WN 28 May 04). This week, the *New England Journal of Medicine* published a convincing NCCAM funded test: Echinacea does not prevent or cure colds.

Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton. © 2005.
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Prayer: follow-up study finds no benefit for heart patients.

Prayers for the sick are probably the most widely practiced healing tradition in the world. An earlier study with the same lead author, Mitchell Krucoff, MD, at Duke University Medical Center, continues to be widely cited as scientific evidence for the power of prayer. In a much larger follow-up study, however, 748 patients who had common cardiac procedures were not helped by intercessory prayers of groups throughout the world, drawn from Christian, Muslim, Jewish or Buddhist denominations. You will not be surprised that the authors conclude that so-called “noetic” therapies, defined as therapies that don’t involve the use of tangible drugs or devices, deserve further scientific scrutiny. Science assumes that all events result from natural causes (WN 3 Dec 04).

Evolution: so is it true that Charles Darwin was a Democrat?

Dover, PA, school board candidates could run in both Republican and Democratic primaries. On Tuesday, seven incumbents who support a policy requiring high school biology students to be told about “intelligent design,” won the Republican primary. Meanwhile, seven challengers, all of whom oppose mentioning “intelligent design” in science class, won in the Democratic primary. The school board election will be held in November.

Acupuncture: or maybe you could just eat a jalapeno pepper.

JAMA, May 4, reports a randomized, controlled trial comparing the effectiveness of acupuncture with sham acupuncture in treating migraine. There were 302 patients in the study. Acupuncture is widely touted for treating migraine, but in 12 sessions over 8 weeks, sham acupuncture, in which the needles are

inserted in the “wrong” points, was just as effective as inserting them in the “correct” points. This should greatly simplify the training of acupuncture specialists. Just stick the damn needles anywhere.

Table top fusion: total media confusion over UCLA fusion device.

Last week, WN pointed out that media stories about a UCLA neutron generator were, uh, uninformed (WN 29 Apr 05). High-energy deuterium ions strike a deuterium-loaded target. Now and then you get d-d fusion, as Rutherford did in 1934. The new wrinkle is a pyroelectric crystal to generate the accelerating voltage. on April 30 totally mangled the story, referring to it as cold fusion in an editorial (it’s VERY hot fusion). The story speaks of “energy from crystals” (groan), and winds up with Dr. McCoy on Star Trek.

Energy: maybe this is the way the system is supposed to work.

Last night President Bush began his press conference talking about high gasoline prices. “First,” he said, “we must become better conservers of energy.” Terrific! The price at the pump is doing the job. The President even called for a nuclear energy policy. And earlier in the week, he called for incentives to encourage the switch from SUVs to hybrids. The Cheney solution was always to drill more wells. Bush also said in the press conference that we must develop “new energy sources, such as hydrogen, ethanol or biodiesel.” Three years ago we were told that the way to reduce dependence on foreign oil is with Freedom Car (WN 18 Jan 02). Alas, hydrogen is a fuel, but it’s not an energy source. Freedom Car won’t happen in your lifetime. But the biodiesel idea is interesting. Biodiesel fuel can be made from animal fat. Linking it to a liposuction facility would alleviate two serious national problems at the same time.

Bob Park can be reached via email at opa@aps.org

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