```
n could believe in. Everybody knew someone who'd been eaten by a fukú, just like everybody knew somebody who worked up in the Palacio. It was in the air, you could say, though, like all the most important things on the Island, not something folks really talked about. But in those elder days, fukú had it good; it even had a hypeman of sorts, a high priest, you could say.
ato who bleached his skin, wore platform shoes, and had a fondness for Napolean-era haberdashery Trujillo (also known as El Jefe, the Failed Cattle Thief, and Fuckface) came to control nearly every aspect of the DR's politinidation, massacre, rape, cooption, and terror; treated
he country like it was a plantation and he was the master. At first glance your prototypical Latin American caudillo, but his power was terminal in ways that few historians or writ- ers have ever truly captured or, I would argue, imagined. He was our Sauron, our Arawn, our Darkseid, our Once and Future Dictator, a personaje so outlandish, so perverse, so dreadful that not ever
en a sci-fi writer could have made his ass up. Famous for changing ALL THE NAMES of ALL THE LANDMARKS in the Dominican Republic to honor himself (Pico Duarte became Pico Trujillo); for making ill monopolies out of every slice of the national patri- mony (which quick
 made him one of the wealthiest men on the planet); for building one of the largest militaries in the hemisphere (dude had bomber wings, for fuck's sake); for fucking every hot girl in sight, even the wives of his subordi- nates, thousands upon thousands upon thousands of women; for expecting, no, insisting on absolute veneration from his pueblo (tellingly, the national subordi-
 egan was or its master, its agent or its principal, but it was clear he and it had an understanding, that them two was tight. It was believed, even in educated circles, that anyone who plotted against Trujillo would incur a fuku most powerful, down to the seventh genera- tion and beyond. If you even thought a bad thing about Trujillo, fuá, a hurricane would sweep your family of
ut to sea, fuá, a boulder would fall out of a clear sky and squash you, fuá, the shrimp you ate today was the cramp that killed you tomorrow. Which explains why everyone who tried to assassinate him always got done, why those dudes who finally did buck him down all died so horrifically. And what about fucking Kennedy? He was the one who green- lighted the assassin
on of Trujillo in 1961, who ordered the CIA to deliver arms to the Ísland. Bad move, cap'n. For what Kennedy's intelligence experts failed to tell him was what every single Dominican, from the richest jabao in Mao to the poorest guey in El Buey, from the oldest anciano sanmarcoriano to the lit- tlest carajito in San Francisco knew: that whoever killed Trujillo, '
hat he did to his enemies) and for his almost supernatural abilities (dude was the original Witchking of Angmar). Outstanding accomplishments include: the 1937 genocide against the Haitian and Haitian-Dominican community: one of the longest, most damaging U.S.- backed dictatorships in the Western Hemisphere (and if we Latin types are skillful at anything it's tolerating it's tole
g U.S.-backed dictators, so you know this was a hard- earned victory, the chilenos and the argentinos are still complaining); the creation of the first modern kleptocracy (Trujillo was Mobutu was Mobutu was Mobutu was Mobutu was Mobutu); the systematic bribing of American senators; and, last but not least, the forging of the Dominican peoples into a modern state (did what his Marine trainers
 during the Occupation, were unable to do). their family would suffer a fukú so dreadful it would make the one that attached itself to the Admiral jojote in comparison. You want a final conclusive answer to the Warren Commission's question, Who killed JFK? Let me, your humble Watcher, reveal once and for all the God's Honest Truth: It wasn't the mob or LBJ or the ghost
of Marilyn Fucking Monroe. It wasn't alien's or the KGB or a lone gunmen. It wasn't the Hunt Brothers of Texas or Lee Harvey or the Trilateral Commission. It was Trujillo; it was the fuku. Where in coñazo do you think the so-called Curse of the Kennedys comes from? 2 How about Vietnam? Why do you think the greatest power in the world lost its first war to a Third World of
untry like Vietnam? I mean, Negro, please. It might interest you that just as the U.S. was ramping up its involvement in Vietnam, LBJ launched an illegal invasion of the Dominican Republic (May 24, 1965). (Santo Domingo was Iraq before Iraq was Iraq.) A smashing military success for the U.S., and many of the same units and intelligence teams that took part in the "democratic plants" in the "democratic plants" in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the "democratic plants" in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the "democratic plants" in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the units and intelligence teams that took part in the units and units a
tization" of Santo Domingo were immediately shipped off to Saigon. What do you think these soldiers, techni- cians, and spooks carried with them, in their rucks, in their shirt pockets, on the hair inside their nostrils, caked up around their shoes? Just a little gift from my people to America, a small repayment for an unjust war. That's right, folks. Fuku. 2H
re's one for you conspiracy-minded fools: on the night that John Kennedy, Jr., and Carolyn Bessette and her sister. Lauren went down in their Piper Saratoga (fukú) John-John his favorite dish: chicharrón de pollo. But fukú always eats first and it eats lone.
hich is why it's important to remember fukú doesn't always strike like lightning. Sometimes it works patiently, drowning a nigger by degrees, like with the Admiral or the U.S. in paddies outside of Saigon. Sometimes it's fast. It's doom-ish in that way, makes it harder to put a finger on, to brace yourself against. But be assured: like Darkseid's Omeg
Effect, no matter how many turns and digressions this shit might take, it always—and I mean always—and I mean always—gets its man. When I was growing up in the DR, if a kid was misbehaving or crying, folks would say, Callate la boca or the Admiral will come and eat you. I didn't know jack about the Admiral when I was three four five years old, but you better believe he had some of us litt
e fucks scared shitless. I would run to find my tía Yrma anytime anybody even mentioned the Admiral's name. Had me hiding in her goddamn skirt quick fast in a hurry. I mean, coño, mán, you don't knów childhood fear until you've known childhood fear until you've known childhood fear in the Third World. I'm sure all that Admiral nonsense has changed now that niggers got MTV Latino and MyAss.com, bu
 back in my day it was some really spooky vaina. Whether I believe in what many have described as the Great American Doom is not really the point. You live as long as I did in the heart of fuku country, you hear these kinds of tales all the time. Everybody in Santo Domingo has a fuku story knocking around in their family. I have a twelve-daughter uncle in the Cibao who bel
  —it's perfect. Because no matter what you believe, fukú believes in you. A couple weeks ago, while I was finishing this book, Í posted the thread fukú on the DR1 forum, just keep coming in. And not just from Domos. The Puertorocks v
ant to talk about fufus, and the Haitians have some shit just like it. There are a zillion of these fukú stories. Even my mother, who almost never talks about Santo Domingo, has started sharing hers with me. As I'm sure you've guessed by now, I have a tukú story too. I wish I could say it was the best of the lot—fukú number one—but I can't. Mine ain't the scariest, the cleare
would keep you and your family safe. Not surprisingly, it was a word. A simple word (followed usually by a vigorous crossing of index fingers). Zafa. It used to be more popular in the old days, bigger, so to speak, in Macondo than in McOndo. I guess as Alistair Reid has pointed out, given the state of our Island, of our World, nig-gers are just saving their breath; otherwise
ur entire day's would be one long zafa. There are people, though, like my tío Miguel in the Bronx who still zafa everything. He's old-school like that. If the Yanks commit an error in the late innings it's zafa; if somebody brings shells in from the beach it's zafa; if you serve a man parcha it's zafa. Twenty-four-hour zafa in the hope that the bad luck will not have had time to coho
  Even now as I write these words I wonder if this book ain't a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell. ONE GhettoNerd at the E
                                                                                                                                                                                   nd of the World 1974-1987 the golden age Oscar was not one of those Dominican cats everybody's always going on about—he wasn't no home-run hitter or a fly bachatero, not a playboy with a million hots on his jock. And except for one per
 nigger to learn the perrito and the one who danced it any chance he got. Because in those days he was (still) a "normal" Do
                                                                                                                                                                                     e inevitably pushed Oscar onto some little girl and then everyone would howl as boy and girl approximated the hip-motism of the adults. You should have seen him, his mother sighed in her Last Days. He was our little Porfirio Rubirosa.3 All
                                                                                                                                                                                      females, had "girlfriends" galore. (He was a stout kid, heading straight to fat, but his mother kept him nice in haircuts and clothes, and before the proportions of his head changed he'd had these lovely flashing eyes and these cute-ass cheel
 the Cobra Woman herself, María Montez). A tall, debonair prettyboy whose "enormous phallus created havoc in Europe a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     y, the Trujillato's "happy side" (for he was indeed one of Trujillo's best-known minions). A part-time former model and dash
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             fe's good graces throughout the regime's long run. Unlike his ex-brother-in-law Ramfis (to whom he was frequently con
nected), Rubirosa seemed incapable of carrying out many murders; in 1935 he traveled to New York to deliver El Jefe's d
                                                                                                                                                                                   eath sentence against the exile leader Angel Morales but fled before the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              ation could ta
y in our narrative.) walked like she had a bell for an ass—all purportedly fell for him. Ese muchacho está bueno! (Did it hu
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    at all!) In the DR during summer visits to his family
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    s is not a cabare
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        Oscar, one th
                                                                                                                                                                                                        -haired and prissy and so pretty she could have play
                                      other was una maldita borracha (to quote Oscar's mom), Olga sm
                                                                                                                                                                                                           of ass, which is why the kids took to c alling
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      Mrs. Peabody. Mrs. Peabody or not, Oscar liked how
                                                                                                                                                                                                             ys around too, and it was just a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                of pure genius that convinced him to kick it to them both at once
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  he pretended that it wa s his number- one hero, Shazam, who wante
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         ed to standing close to each other at the bus stop, some undercover hand holding, and twi
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        ce kissing on the lips ver y seriously.
                                             agreed he dropped all pretense. It wasn't Shazam—it w
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      y after school Maritza cornered Oscar behind the swing set and laid down the law, It's either her or me! Osc ar held Maritza's h
                                                                                                                                                                                           any of it. Sh
                                                                                                                                               he would chop at
                                                   Oscar to his feet by his ear. Mami, stop it, his si
ered the galletazo. It wasn't
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     lacked all aggressive and martial tendencie
                                                      t that he didn't have no kind of father to sho
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            —he
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     s. (Unlike his sister, w
                                                                                                                    e a zero combat rating; even Olga an
So he thought it over. Didn't take him lo
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               as not; Olga
                                                                                                               coff ed. Jamás!) His logic as close
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  math of insects as a nigger co uld get. He broke up with Olga the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               to the ves
                                                                              side, and ho
                                                             taring blank ly out near
                                                                                                                      ew York bus stop, co
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            after he'd fed Olga to the dogs he arriv
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                                                                                                          car had be
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                                                                                                                                                                                                                       nick
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    PCP
                                                                                                                                                                                                                       d to Os
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     —his life started going down the tubes. Over the next c
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      scrambling his face into nothing you c
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 d said boo about before, suddenly becam
                                                                                                                                                                                                                           se a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              alled him gordo asqueroso! He forgot the perrito, forgot th
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   ad called Oscar a cake eater, and he'd alm
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             ost said, Look who's talking, puerca, but he was afraid that she would rea
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        ved t
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             ndicapped kids and with Joe Locorotundo, who was famous for masturba
ting in public. And the lovely Maritza Chacon? The hyp
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             sis, Maritza blew up into the flyest guapa in Paterson, one of the Queens
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           get their infirmiti
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              aritza might not have been good at much—not sports, not school, not v
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           o seemed to delight in getting slapped around by her boyfriends. Since
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            ier than Oscar or Olga? That was
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    doubtful. Fr
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        at Oscar could see. Maritza w
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        op
? H
      ened to her all the time. If a boy hit me. Lola said c
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            tza: French-kiss
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    the front sto
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        of her house, getting in or o
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                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         her almost every day
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          nd the boys. He s
                                                                                                                                                                                                                RONIC INF ER
                                                                                                                                                                                                               a source of endle
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             ar, high school was the equivalen
                                                                                                                                                                                                             he should have eme
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        erson, but that
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               s not really what h appened—and if ther e were any lessons to be gleaned from the ordeal of those years he never quite figured out what the
ey were. He walked into school every day like the fat lonely
                                                                                                                                                                                                             all he could think about
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           f his manumis
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         be set free from its unending horror. Hey, Oscar, are there faggots on Mars?—Hey, Kazoo, catch t
                                                                                                                                                                                                        d and who were its in habitants. So
                                                                                                                         where it was
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            omore year Osc
                                                                                                                         rigüayo.4 Had no
sage during the First American Occupation of the DR, which ran from 1916 to
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      't worry, when you have kids they won't know the U.S. occupied Iraq either.) During the First Occupation it was reported that members of
                                                                                                                         924. (You di
                                                                                                                                                                                                now we were occu- pied twice in
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  h century? Dor
the American Occupying Forces would often attend Dominican parties pulled
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       uncoordinated, threw a ball like a girl. Had no knack for music or business or dance, no hustle, no rap, no G. And most damning of all:
                                                                                                                                                                                        life depended on it. Couldn't play sports for
no looks. He wore his semi- kink hair in a Puerto Rican afro, rocked enormous
                                                                                                                                                               lasses—his "anti-pussy devices," Al and Miggs, his only friends, called them—sported
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     an unappealing
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         trace of mustache on his upper lip and possessed a pair of close-set eyes that made him look somewhat retarded. The Eyes of Mingus
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           to that particular chapter of the All-African World Party.) You have the same eyes as your abuelo, his Nena Inca had to
of his visits to the DR, which should have been some comfort—who doesn't I
                                                                                                                                                                  ng an ancestor?—except this particularly ancestor had ended his days in prison. Oscar h
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  a d always been a you
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           ng nerd—the kind of kid who read Tom Swift, who loved comic books and watched Ultraman—but by high school his commitment to
                                                                                                                                                                   dge of dances and watch. Which of course must have seemed like the craziest thing in the world. Who goes to a pa
on't dance, who ain't got game, who lets people clown him—he's the parigüayo. (Some Puerto Rican scholars claim
that it was the Dominicans who would stand and watch the Marines party, but anybody who's ever been to the DR can see how unlike
the Genres had but instead of joining in the fun the Outlanders would simply
                                                                                                                              stand at the e
and watches while other people scoop up the girls but also someone who is
                                                                                                                            t. The kid who d
ly that claim is.) If you looked in the Dictionary of Dominican Things, the entry for pari güayo would includ
                                                                                                                                                                        e a wood carving of Oscar. It is a name that would haunt him for the rest of his life and that would lead him to another Watcher, the one who lamps on the Blue Side of the Moon. become absolute. Back when the rest of us were learning to play wallball
and pitch quarters and drive our older brothers' cars and sneak dead soldiers from under our parents' eves. he
                                                                                                                                                                                 was gorging himself on a steady stream of Lovecraft, Wells, Burroughs, Howard, Alexander, Herbert, Asimov, Bova, and Heinlein, and even the Old Ones who were already beginning to fade—E. E. "Doc" Smith, Stapledon, and the guy who wrote
all the Doc Sav- age books—moving hungrily from book to book, author to author, age to age. (It was his good f
                                                                                                                                                                                     ortune that the libraries of Paterson were so underfunded that they still kept a lot of the previous gen- eration's nerdery in circulation.) You couldn't have torn him away from any movie or TV show or cartoon where there were monsters or spa
ceships or mutants or doomsday devices or destinies or magic or evil villains. In these pursuits alone Oscar showe
                                                                                                                                                                                        d the ge- nius his grandmother insisted was part of the family patrimony. Could write in Elvish, could differentiate between a Slan, a Dorsai, and a Lensman in acute detail, knew more about the Marvel Universe than
                                                                                                                                                                                           ut despite owning an Atari and an Intellivision he didn't have the reflexes for it.) Perhaps if like me he'd been able to hide his otakuness maybe shit would have been easier for him, but he couldn't. Dude wore his nerdiness like a Jedi wore
Stan Lee, and was a role- playing game fanatic. (If only he'd been good at videogames it would have been a slam dunk b
his light saber or a Lensman her lens. Couldn't have passed for Normal if he'd wanted to 5 5Where this outsized love of genr
                                                                                                                                                                                        jumped off from no one quite seems to know. It might have been a consequence of being Antillean (who more sci-fi than us?) or of living in the DR for the first couple of years of his life and then abruptly wrench- ingly relocating to New Jers
ey—a single green card shifting not only worlds (from Oscar was a social introvert who trembled with fear during gym class and who watched nerd British shows like Doctor Who and Blake 7, could tell you the difference between a Veritech fighter and a Zentraedi walker, and he used a lot of huge-sound- ing nerd words like indefatigable and ubiquitous when talking to T hird to First) but centuries (from almost no TV or electricity to plenty of both). After a transition like that I'm guessing only the most extreme scenarios could have satisfied. Maybe it was that in the DR he had watched too much Spider-Man, been taken to too many Run Run Shaw kung Fu movies, listened to too many of his abuela's spooky stories about el Cuco and la Cigua
pa? Maybe it was his first librar- ian in the U.S., who hooked him on reading, the electricity he felt when he touched that first Danny Dunn book? Maybe it was just the zeitgeist (were not the early seventies the dawn of the Nerd Age?) or the fact that for most of his childhood he had absolutely no friends? Or was it something ancestral? Who can say? Wha
t is clear is that being a reader fanboy (for lack of a better term) helped him get through the rough days of his youth, but it also made him stick out in the mean streets of Paterson even more than he already did. Victimized by the other boys— punches and pushes and broken glasses and brand-new books from Scholastic, at a cost of fifty cents each, torn in half before his very eyes. You like books? Now you got two! Har-har! No one, alas, more oppressive than the oppressed. Even his own mother found his preoccupations nutty. Go outside and play! she commanded at least once a day. Pórtate como un muchacho normal. (Only his sister, a reader too, supporting him. Bringing him books from her own school, which had a better least once a day.
ibrary.) You really want to know what being an X-Man feels like? Just be a smart book-ish boy of color in a contemporary U.S. ghetto. Mamma mia! Like having bat wings or a pair of tentacles growing out of your chest. Pa' 'fuera! his mother roared. And out he would go, like a boy condemned, to spend a few hours being tormented by the other boys—Hey, Oscar, are there
ag- gots on Mars?—Hey, Kazoo, catchet this—Please, I want to stay, he would beg his mother routed, hiding himself in the upstairs closet, where we''d read by the wind to stay, he would beg his mother routed, hiding himself in the upstairs closet, where we''d read by the wind to stay he would beg his mother routed, hiding himself in the upstairs closet, where we''d read by the wind beg his mother routed, hiding himself in the upstairs closet, where we''d read by the wind beg his mother routed, hiding himself in the upstairs closet, where we''d read by the wind by the wind beg his mother routed, hiding himself in the upstairs closet, where we''d read by the wind by the wind beg his mother routed himself in the upstairs closet, where we''d read by the world beg his mother routed, hiding himself in the upstairs closet, where we''d read by the world by the world by the world beg his mother routed by the world by the world by the world by the world beg his mother routed, hiding himself in the upstairs closet, where we''d read by the world beg his mother routed, hiding himself in the upstairs closet, where we''d read by the world by the w
assed without comment, but this is a Dominican kid we're talking about it. Plenty of tamiliares offered him advice. His tid Rudolfo (only fecentity relea seed without comment, but the discusse they was supposed to ne pulling in their house of new thouse in his tack of game and because they were bominican everybody talked about it. Plenty of familiares offered him advice. His tid Rudolfo (only fecentity relea seed from his last and final bit in the Justice and now living in their house on Main Street) was especially gener- ous in his tutelage. Listen, palomo: you have to grades. And in more introspective moments: Just be glad you doun't get my luck, hijo. What luck? his two wire them one of those to worry about your grades. And in more introspective moments: Just be glad you don't get my luck, hijo. What luck? his two without a speck of vergienza. When she was in fourth grade she'd been attacked by an older acquaintance, and this was common knowledge throughout the family (and by ex-tension a sizable section of Paterson, Union City, and Teaneck) and surviving that urikán of pain, judgment, and bochinche had made her tougher than adamantine. Recently she'd cut her hair short—flipping out her mother yet again—partially I think because when she'd been little her family had let it grow down past her ass, a source of pride, something I'm sure her attacker noticed and admired. Oscar, Lola warned repeatedly, you're going to die a virgin unless you start changing. Don't you think I know that? Another five years of this and I'll bet you somebody tries to name a church after me. Cut the hair, lose the glasses, exercise. And get rid of those porn measures. They're disgusting, they bother Mami, and they'll never get you a date. Sound counsel that in the end he did not adopt. He tried a couple of times to exercise, leg lifts, sit-ups, walks around the block in the early morning, that sort of thing, but he would notice how everybody else had a girl but him and would despair, plunging right back into earling. Penthouses, desin
igning dungeons, and self-pity. I seem to be allergic to diligence, and Lola said, Ha. What you're allergic to is trying life of seventies feminist sci-fi novels he sometimes read—an all-male-exclusion zone. Paterson, however, was girls the way NYC was girls, Paterson was girls the way Santo Domingo was girls. "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao" by Junot Diaz, Copyright © 2007. Paterson had mad girls, and if that wasn't guapas enough for you, well, mother-fucker, then roll south and there'd be Newark, Elizabeth, Jersey City, the Oranges, Union City, West New York, Weehawken, Perth Amboy—an urban swathe known to niggers everyw here as Negrapolis One. So in effect he saw girls—Hispanophone Caribbean girls—everywhere. He wasn't safe even in his own house, his sister's girlfriends were always hanging out, permanent guests. When they were all on the volleyball team together and tall and fit as colts and when they went for runs it was what the track team might have looked like in terrorist heaven. Bergen County's very own cigüapas: la primera was Gladys, who complained endlessly about her chest being too big, that maybe she'd find normal boyfriends
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