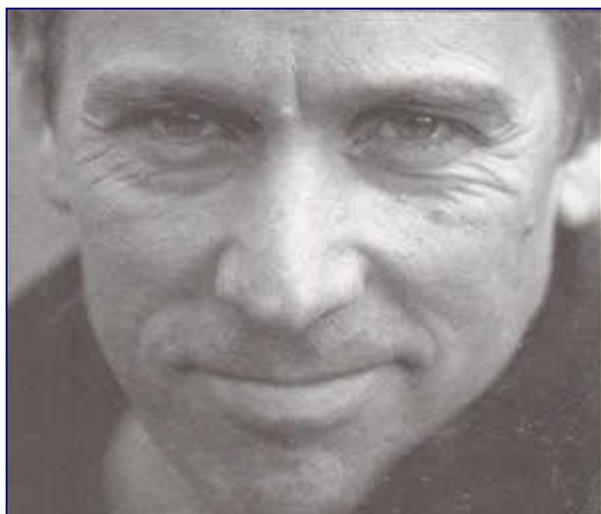


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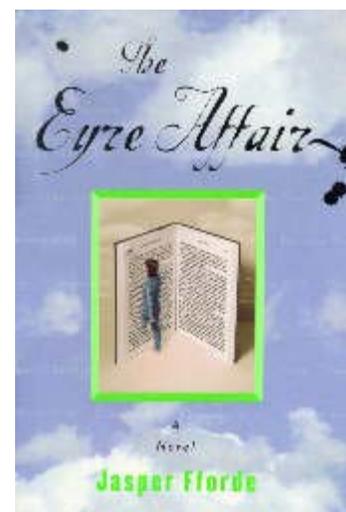
The Eyre Affair
A Novel

by

Jasper Fforde

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Book Review by Bobby Matherne
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This book came to my attention shortly after I finished "The Time Traveler's Wife" and because it also involved time travel, I bought a copy right away. A couple of my friends and I memorized first sentences from novels, such as "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times" ("A Tale of Two Cities") and "Call me Ishmael." ("Moby Dick") This novel belongs in the pantheon of novels with great first sentences with this memorable gem:

[page 1] My father had a face that could stop a clock.

Try forgetting that one. Her father was a time traveler and whenever he visited her, time would literally stop during his visit, which was usually at inopportune times, but also at very opportune times as you will see when you read the novel.

Comic strip cartoonists of the recent decades have begun to break the frame of their cartoons: they will have visitors from neighboring cartoons. This began one April 1st (April Fool's Day) around 2000 and has continued on and off. The recent incorporation of the "Baby Blues" children into the "Pearls Before Swine" strip is a notable example. Another way of breaking the frame is appearing in the "Blondie and Dagwood" strip where Dagwood is shown designing sandwiches, something he has done for over 75 years, but this time, he designing them for a Dagwood Sandwich Shop he is planning to open. The big deal is that there are real Dagwood Sandwich Shops opening. You may recall some Wimpie's Hamburger shops which sprouted up decades back named after the hamburger-eating character of the old Popeye comic strip. Several comic strips have literally broken the frame of their strip, e. g., in a "Beetle Bailey" strip where Beetle fell through the lower border of the panel.

What would it be like to break the frame of a novel? What if the content of the novel began to change the novel itself? One example is when the bookworms "had just digested a recent meal of prepositions and were happily farting out apostrophes and ampersands; the air was heavy with th'em&." This was the author's writing, the narrator speaking, not a character in the novel. Another way this novel breaks the frame of novels is by having action take place within it which changes the contents of other novels. The first experiment in doing this came when Mr. Quaverley, a minor character, disappears from Dickens' "Martin Chuzzlewit". Not only does the character disappear from all extant copies of the novel, but Mr. Quaverley is found dead in the trunk of an automotive and autopsied by the police who found him to have rickets, lice, among other anachronistic things about him.

This leads to the main affair in the second half of this novel which modifies the Charlotte Bronte novel, "Jane Eyre," giving the book its title. How many of you good readers of "Jane Eyre" were dissatisfied with its ending? Raise your hands. Among those with your hands raised, how many would like the ending to be changed? And changed, not just by some subsequent edition, but in every extant copy of "Jane Eyre" so that no one would ever have to read the sorry ending that Bronte crafted? If so, read this book, which describes how this was done.

There are several memorable characters in this book. Two of them are the heroine, Thursday Next, and the villain, Acheron Hades. His brother's name was Styx, but he is killed off after a brief cameo. Thursday is an intrepid Special Ops Agent at Level 27 who gets an instant promotion to Level 5 because she had Acheron as her college professor and wouldn't go to bed with him. Her ability to resist Acheron's charms were crucial to her ability to survive her assignment to dispatch him to his last name's place. Acheron steals things without appearing on the surveillance cameras and then charms the guards into giving him their weapons with which he immediately kills them. He is a master of disguises, concealment, and if you even say his name aloud while he within a mile of you, you're a goner.

Thursday has her wits, her intense will, and her ace-in-the-hole, her time-traveling father. She also has her Uncle Mycroft Next who invented a means of traveling into and out of books. Acheron steals his invention and sends Mycroft's wife, Polly, into the poem "Daffodils" by William Wordsworth. We hope that Polly will be rescued before she falls irreconcilably in love with Wordsworth on that hill overlooking "A host, of golden daffodils; Beside the lake, beneath the trees, Fluttering and dancing in the breeze."

Thursday Next's dad was a member of the Chrono-Guard who went bad. Thursday found this out when his buddies raided their home with a "Seizure & Eradication order open-dated at both ends." She said she was not a Chrono-Guard, but liked their retirement plan that promises "a one-way ticket to anywhere and anywhen." That would appeal to many people, no doubt. My preference is here and now, however, so it would hold no attraction to me. Note, that, as in "The Time Traveler's Wife," the unique word, "anywhen" makes an appearance.

This novel is humorous at many levels, some of them literate levels, such as the author of the quotes at the head of many of the chapters, Millon de Floss. If you can't stop giggling over that one, increase your drug dosage. Here's an example of a visceral sort of humor which Fforde is also good at. Thursday is musing over whether her boss(1) would ever step down so she could take her place:

[page 3] The only way I was going to make full inspector was if my immediate superior moved on or out. But it never happened; Inspector Turner's hope to marry a wealthy Mr. Right and leave the service stayed just that — a hope — as so often Mr. Right turned out to be either Mr. Liar, Mr. Drunk or Mr. Already Married.

When you have a time-traveling father and you swear that you will never have grandchildren for him, if he smiles and raises his eyebrow as Thursday's father did, and says, "I wouldn't say that *quite* yet." you know that likely you will. Makes one glad that time travelers are relegated to the pages of novels, but the exciting thing is that people, ideas, inventions, and other things are breaking out of this novel, just as the inventions of the submarine, the atomic bomb, etc., broke out of Jules Verne's novels.

One of the fun things for me was the Toad News Network. Every description of it can only bring to mind the only other network extant which contains the name of an animal, Fox News Network. Hand me that bottle of those pills, again. Once as the world rippled back to normal speed after her dad's visit in a pub, Thursday comments:

[page 6] I put down my paper to watch the TV when the Toad News Network logo came up.

Toad news was the biggest news network in Europe. Run by the Goliath Corporation, it was a twenty-

four-hour service with up-to-date reports that the national news service couldn't possibly hope to match. . .

"This," boomed the announcer above the swirling music, "is the Toad News Network. The Toad, bringing you News Global, News Updates, News NOW!"

The news was about the Crimean War, which in this version of world reality was still going on in the latter part of the twentieth century, entering "its one hundred and thirty-first year." The humor in this turn of events plays itself out through the book and effectively deconstructs most of the reasons given for going to war or continuing a war. Pass that bottle again, I have to go out to pay my taxes shortly and I don't want to have a smile on my face.

With all the talk of terrorists in the world, one can be glad that terrorism has infiltrated the art world. Perhaps we need a LiteraGuard to protect the contents of this book from spilling out or we might be hearing something like this on the Fox News Network:

[page 10] The Crimea had filled my mind with its unwelcome memories. It was lucky for me that my pager beeped and brought with a much-needed reality check. I tossed a few notes on the counter and sprinted out of the door as the Toad News anchorwoman somberly announced that a young surrealist had been killed — stabbed to death by a gang adhering to a radical school of French impressionists.

When the original manuscript of "Martin Chuzzlewit" is stolen, and Thursday is called to investigate, a Toad news reporter asks her, "Do you have any leads?" and she responds, "There are several avenues that we are pursuing. We are confident that we can return the manuscript to the museum and arrest the individuals concerned." After this public pronouncement, Thursday muses to herself:

[page 14] I wished I could share my own optimism.

Thursday says a revealing thing. She seems to indicate that her optimistic public pronouncement is at odds with the way she feels internally. This is called lying — one feels internally one way and reacts externally another way. People who are stone-faced at all times are the best at lying, and one might surmise that such people learned to profit from lying at an early age and became stone-faced in the process. But lying is always detectable, if not always visible. Pessimism may be detectable in a tone of voice or a change of breathing rate. If one matches with the person talking, such subtle changes will be detectable. I have lived for over 29 years with an expert at detecting lies. She learned from her father who was a successful businessman. Detecting liars is a survival skill in the world of business while lying continues to seem profitable in the milieu of immorality we have found ourselves, up until now.

While going over potential suspects for the Chuzzlewit manuscript theft, Paige Turner excludes a man named Milton who probably read something at the Parkhurst Library that gave him a serious stomach upset causing epilepsy.

[page 16] "Milton's no longer with us. Caught analepsy in the library at Parkhurst. Stone-cold dead in a fortnight."

Fortnight is a typical British word which we Americans hardly ever use. I know that I have not used it for the past two weeks. It is a useful word, much easier than saying "the past two weeks", but awkward because it causes folks who are lexicophobic to have to run to their unabridged. For "analepsy", they'll have to rush to their OED. But Fforde, with his Ffunny Scottish name, uses lots of words which may not appear in any dictionary because they are British idioms. Here's a few which I stumbled over in the course of reading this book. Any Brits who can help this Yank out with a *souçon* of meaning for any of these words, phrases, idiomatic expressions would be most appreciated. My British dictionary, the Cassell Concise, is a big help to sort out britishisms.

[several pages] "sod all"

This phrase appears in various places and contexts. Seems to be a euphemism for a popular four-letter word beginning with "f" and an abbreviation for "sodomy". But what is its idiomatic meaning? Or is it lushly polyvalent like the "f" word? Cassell's to the rescue: *sod* (2) is an intensive when used before adjectives and adverbs. Sod amazing, English: one language dividing two otherwise educated countries.

[page 32] "A Turner" — "When you've been in love, you know it, like seeing a Turner or going for a walk on the west coast of Ireland."

I assume the reference is to Joseph Mallord William Turner, a famous painter of awesome landscapes(3).

[page 46] "We stopped and listened but there was complete silence. Tamworth thought we had been rumbled."

My Cassell's gives the slang meaning of rumble as "to discover the truth about."

[page 79] "If I'd lost the blasted thing above the elbow I'd have looked a proper Charlie."

I thought of Charlie McCarthy, Edgar Bergen's ventriloquist dummy, but my Cassell's set me straight straight away. A "charlie" is slang for an utterly foolish person. I am beginning to feel a proper Charlie myself. But I felt better when I guessed the next reference is to King Charles. The second, I thought, but it was the first who is referred to in the [page 108] citation of a Charlie.

[page 86] "I trannied here from Oxford when the two depots merged."

This one I need help with, Brits! My Cassell's and OED give "tranny" as meaning "a transistor radio". Perhaps it's colloquial for "transferred".

[page 90] "I flipped up my hood and locked the car."

What Thursday described doing to her car, few Americans would understand. Why flip up the hood and *then* lock the car to go inside for the night? Seems the Brits use "hood" for the covering of a carriage or automobile convertible and use "bonnet" for what we Yanks call a hood, namely, the covering over the motor thingies.

[page 108] "To tell you the truth, Miss Next, I hate Milton. His early stuff is okay, I suppose, but he disappeared up his own arse after Charlie got his head lopped off."

Reference is to King Charles I, no doubt, who not only got his head lopped off, but citizens were allowed to dip their handkerchiefs in his blood. Why? I bloody don't know.

[page 224] ". . . the pilot booting full left rudder to allow Acheron a better view of his target."

Cassell's: *vt. boot*, slang for kick. We Americans, oblivious to such fine points of eloquence, might crudely say "the pilot kicked full left rudder". Seems related to our use of "heavy footing it" to describe someone jamming the accelerator of a car to the floor to speed up quickly.

[page 239] It was arse about face but the basic facts were correct.

My Cassell's wasn't necessary for this one. "Arse about face" is apparently the British form of our expression, "ass-backwards". Correct me if I'm right on this one.

[page 239] With no jurisdiction on the Welsh side of the border, our searches had centered around the marches — to no avail.

No American is likely to come up with the meaning of marches in the above sentence unless they had been subjected at a tender age to large dollops of British geography and history in Great Britain. Luckily my Cassell's bailed me out after a bit of inspection of all the meanings of "march". Here it is: "march *n.* 1. the frontier or boundary of land between two countries, especially the border country of England and Wales (the *Welsh Marches*). Lo and behold, it is exactly the right word to describe the area searched.

[page 293] "Then we need to steal a march. Any ideas?"

Right there in Cassell's was the expression which means "to gain an advantage over."

[page 301] . . . we approached Braxton, who leaning against a smokestack that squeaked as it turned.

For the life of me, I cannot imagine why any smokestack would be turning. To me, smokestacks are a hundred feet high or higher, made of bricks and not a candidate for rotation. Perhaps this is a special kind of small smokestack known commonly to Brits. I need help here.

Let us steal a march on the rest of the story. Fforde conjures up the image of a moral vacuum in this next passage, and I imagined a vacuum cleaner which sucks the morality out of any nearby. That surely describes Acheron Hades. He surrounds himself with henchmen with no morality left in them and kills anyone who doesn't join him thereby removing morality from the world, one person at a time. But he is unable to do this to Thursday Next who therefore has a chance to be the savior of a world in which the homogenized GSD(4) is the only official religion remaining in it. He lectured in English when Thursday was a student in Swindon where he left after impregnating one of her fellow students. She explains:

[page 25] "He never made me pregnant, but he had a good try."

"Did you sleep with him?"

"No; I didn't figure sleeping with lecturers was really where I wanted to be. The attention was flattering, I suppose, dinner and stuff. He was brilliant — but a moral vacuum. . . ."

"He asked you to go with him yet you turned him down."

"Your information is good, Mr. Tamworth."

One of the fun things in this book is that gene splicers have managed to re-create the extinct dodo birds. Thursday kept one as a pet which wandered around her apartment going, "plock, plock" and was always available for a hug. In this snippet she is registering her pet dodo to distinguish it from a wild dodo and talking to the registrar whose attention was on the next genetically engineered dodo which was a curious shade of pink.

[page 30] But the official wasn't listening; he had turned his attention to the next dodo, a pinkish creature with a long neck. The owner caught my eye and smiled sheepishly.

"Redundant strands filled in with flamingo," he explained. "I should have used dove."

Thursday's father told her that he had just returned from 3 weeks in the future where he found that her mother was going to paint the bedroom mauve. He implored Thursday to talk her out of it. When Thursday finally gets around to it, she simply tells her mom, "Don't paint the bedroom mauve." Her mom loves the idea and thanks Thursday for it! Just shows that one should always ask the following question, "What are you planning to do?" before advising someone *not* to do something and thereby planting an idea that may *never* have been in their head before.

The title for Chapter 5 is a hoot: "Search for the Guilty, Punish the Innocent." Sounds like what the feds did and are still doing to Scooter Libby who was not guilty, but is being punished anyway. Ain't coercion grand? This title seems to build on a Walt Kelly "Pogo" cartoon panel in which the storekeeper is admonished, "In this country, you is innocent until caught!" It makes sense that you couldn't be punished, even if innocent, unless you were caught first. Perhaps there are *no* innocent bystanders after all. Only seemingly unpunished ones. Gotta run, I hear the moral vacuum running.

Thursday gets shot in the arm and the chest by Acheron and her copy of "Jane Eyre" which she had tucked into her coat stopped the bullet from reaching her chest. She is saved from the shot through her arm by a mysterious stranger who is the hero from the same book.

[page 62] I finished packing and thanked the nursing staff, who gave me a brown paper parcel as I was about to leave.

"What's this?" I asked.

"It belonged to whoever saved your life that night." "What do you mean?"

"A passerby attended to you before the medics arrived; the wound in your arm was plugged and they wrapped you in their coat to keep you warm. Without their intervention you might well have bled to death."

Intrigued, I opened the package. Firstly, there was a handkerchief that despite several washings still bore the stains of my own blood. There was an embroidered monogram in the corner that read EFR. Secondly the parcel contained a jacket, a sort of casual evening coat that might have been very popular in the middle of the last century. I searched the pockets and found a bill from a milliner. It was made out to one Edward Fairfax Rochester, Esq., and was dated 1833. I sat down heavily on the bed and stared at the two articles of clothing and the bill. Ordinarily I would not have believed that Rochester could have torn himself from the pages of *Jane Eyre* and come to my aid that night; such a thing is, of course, quite impossible. I might have dismissed the whole thing as a ludicrously complicated prank had it not been for one thing: Edward Rochester and I had met once before. . .

Ah, yes. She had stumbled upon Jane sitting on a stile waiting for Edward. Thursday stepped back when Edward came on his horse preceded by his dog Pilot. The dog ignored Jane, but was startled by Thursday and stopped stark still looking at her.

[page 67] His tail wagged enthusiastically and he bounded over, sniffing me inquisitively, his hot breath covering me in a warm cloak and his whiskers tickling my cheek. I giggled and the dog wagged his tail even harder. He had sniffed along this hedge during every single reading of the book for over 130 years, but had never come across anything that smelled so, well . . . *real*. He licked me several times with great affection. I giggled again and pushed him away, so he ran off to find a stick.

From subsequent readings of the book I was later to realize that the dog Pilot had never had the opportunity to fetch a stick, his appearances in the book being all too few, so he was obviously keen to take the opportunity when it presented itself. He must have known, almost instinctively, that the little girl who had momentarily appeared at the bottom of page eighty-one was unfettered by the rigidity of the narrative. He knew [page 68] that he could stretch the boundaries of the story a small amount, sniffing along one side of the lane or the other since it wasn't specified; but if the text stated the had to bark or un around or jump up, then he was obliged to comply. It was a long and repetitive existence, which made the rare appearances of people like me that much more enjoyable.

I imagined as I read the above stories, how Rochester, who met when she was a child on that path near the stile, might have said to her, "I'll meet you Thursday Next by the bend in reality." This promise culminated in his appearance to save her light as she lay bleeding from gunshot wounds.

The author seems determined to reveal so much about "Jane Eyre" that most of his readers know very little, almost nothing about, even those who may have read it only once. As if to emphasize this possibility, he blatantly introduces a character whose name brings to mind a common idiomatic expression that says, in effect, if we don't him, we don't know him(5). The character, which appears on page 73, is Jack Schitt, the head of Goliath's internal security service.

In this next passage, Thursday shows uncommonly good sense when confronting the war-mongering Colonel Phelps who says to her about the Crimean war:

[page 80] "If we give the peninsula back, every single one of those lives will have been lost in vain."

"I think, sir, that those lives have already been lost and no decision we can make in any direction can change that."

In investment parlance what the Colonel suggests is like throwing good money after bad, but only in the case of war, it is human lives, not money, in the balance. Some sunken assets are worth trying to recoup one's investment from, especially if it means sinking more assets.

Everyone's heard the cliché "he had two chances, slim and none." Notice how Fforde inverts "none" to "fat" and achieves the same result: "fat and slim". (Page 81) Another familiar phrase is turned upon itself and wipes itself out in a fine example of the G. Spencer Brown's First Law of Form. Perhaps it was a coincidence. Thursday was accosted by a student demonstrating against the Colonel for whom Thursday had served as a Corporal in the Crimean War.

[page 82] "You're Next, aren't you?"

"Next for what?"

"Corporal Next, Light Armored Brigade."

I rubbed my brow.

"I'm not here with the colonel. It was a coincidence."

"I don't believe in coincidences."

"Neither do I. That's a coincidence, isn't it?"

Thursday's Uncle Mycroft lost his faithful assistant Owens to death by meringue. Well, I know it's hard to believe — let's say you just had to be there. Both Mycroft and Owen had egg on his face, but Mycroft survived. Thank God, he's got Polly to help him now — women usually know more about meringue than men.

[page 41] "A bit tragic, Thursday. We were developing a machine that used egg white, heat and sugar to synthesize methanol when a power surge cause an implosion. Owens was meringued. By the time we chipped him out the poor chap had expired. Polly helps me now."

A couple of Mycroft's fun inventions are the Spell-Checking Pencil and the Translating Carbon Paper. Place a sheet of German carbon under a page and type, "Have you seen my dodo?" and out comes "Haben Sie mein Dodo gesehen?" When he shows off the multiple carbons of Spanish, German, and Polish. The first two work perfectly but the third one translates it as "My aardvark has no nose." "How come?" Thursday asks her uncle. His answer is fully logical and understandable to anyone still alive who has actually used carbon paper:

[page 97] "You probably weren't pressing hard enough."

But Mycroft has bigger fish to fry, "Thesaurean Worms". Throw a bunch of them on the word "remarkable" on a piece of paper and they cluster and examine the word all over and begin saying in

chorus,

"Incredible! Astonishing! Stunning!", etc. (Page 101) These worms are the basis for his Prose Portal for transporting people into and out of written works.

Remember the surrealist stabbed to death by the impressionists? Thursday Next's world also contains the literature equivalent of a drugbuy going wrong, namely, a bookbuy going wrong. Another reason to celebrate the lack of literacy among the moral vacuum set. Her new boss, Victor Analogy informs about the man whose job she is now filling in her hometown of Swindon:

[page 111] Your post was held by Jim Crometty. He was shot dead in the old town during a bookbuy that went wrong.

Her brother Joffy tells Thursday (Page 200) that "the first casualty of war is truth," and it set me to wondering who originated that idea. I found it to be that "harmless drudge" Samuel Johnson who said it this way, "Among the calamities of war may be jointly numbered the diminution of the love of truth, by the falsehoods which interest dictates and credulity encourages." (from *The Idler*, 1758)

In his conversation with Thursday near the end of this novel, Edward Rochester asks her how she sustains herself. This conversation highlights how much stronger a [doylic memory](#) is than a cognitive memory. In Thursday's view, it is a hundred times stronger.

[page 332] "Where you come from you are born, you live and then you die. Am I correct?"

"More or less."

"A pretty poor way of living, I should imagine!" laughed Rochester. "And you rely upon that inward eye we call a memory to sustain yourself in times of depression, I suppose?"

"Most of the time," I replied, "although memory is but one hundredth the strength of currently felt emotions."

To translate the above passage into doyletics terms, one must understand that "memory" refers to "cognitive memory" and "currently felt emotions" refer to "doylic memory." When one is in the process of feeling emotions, one is retrieving doylic memories stored before five years old which arise always as feelings.

"Time is always out of joint in this novel", and one wonders if anyone "was born to set it right". The story ends with a bit of "sweet madness" which will set everything right in the end and this marvelous "Eyre Affair" will go on until the end of time so long as there books to read and people to read them.

----- *Footnotes* -----

Footnote 1. Her boss's full name is Paige Turner, which is what this book is. I read it in two days, almost non-stop.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

----- *Footnotes* -----

Footnote 2. Was surprised to find "Murphy's Law" is called "Sod's Law" in Britain. That makes Sod's the inverse of [Matherne's Law](#). It's always good to know all the names of something you're inverting.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 2.](#)

----- *Footnotes* -----

Footnote 3. To see a sample of a J. M. W. Turner landscape, see this [photo and write-up](#).

[Return to text directly before Footnote 3.](#)

----- *Footnotes* -----

Footnote 4. The GSD stands for the Global Standard Deity. Page 104 has this brief explanation: “Global Standard Deity,” answered Polly. “It’s a mixture of all the religions. I think it’s meant to stop religious wars.”

[Return to text directly before Footnote 4.](#)

----- *Footnotes* -----

Footnote 5. If you glancing down here to find out this curious sentence means, here it is: "If you don't know Jack Schitt, *you don't know Jack Schitt.*" Introducing a character with this name allows Fforde to intimate that most readers don't know *Jack Schitt* about Jane Eyre.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 5.](#)

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