

SPECTRUM



GAME ON

GoT star Owen Teale is coming to Melbourne. Don't worry, he's really very nice.

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NATAGE 6001



LINDY PERCIVAL



## EDITOR'S LETTER

Richard Jinman has interviewed a lot of very talented people in these pages but he was particularly taken with his subject for today's cover story, Owen Teale, he enthused via email following their chat, is "a fascinating guy ... and refreshingly he hasn't been over-interviewed".

Which might explain why the Welsh actor, who'll be in Melbourne next month to play Scrooge on stage in *A Christmas Carol*, is so unguarded. You'll know Teale's face from a slew of films and TV series, but as he freely admits, he was not destined for top billing. "My cut of my job wasn't quite right," he observes. "It's about what your face does on screen, I guess."

What his face does best on screen is to simmer and rage. As *Game of Thrones*' Ser Alliser Thorne, master-at-arms for the Night's Watch, Teale is every bit as intimidating as the Wall of Westeros over which he presides.

So where does the man who loves nothing better than hanging out with his co-stars (special mention goes to our own Toni Collette) find the darkness needed for such a role? The answer might surprise you.

It's not the only revelation awaiting readers this week. If you don't know much about the thrilling *GameStop* saga, then Stephanie Bumbury's interview with Australian director Craig Gillespie is the ideal starting point. His film, *Dumb Money*, tells the extraordinary tale of small-town US investors who took on Wall Street - and won.

And if you thought there was nothing new to say about our own post-punk pioneers, *The Birthday Party*, think again. Michael Dwyer previews a new documentary that prods the junkyard memories of Nick Cave and company, 40 years after the band called it quits.

Elsewhere, Melissa Singer unpicks the life-and-death fabric of some of our favourite garments, while in *Books*, Owen Richardson pays tribute to Gerald Murnane, "one of the strangest and boldest writers in Australian or world literature".

As one of Murnane's former students, I had fingers crossed this month as the odds narrowed in favour of him taking out this year's Nobel Prize in Literature. Alas, it wasn't to be, but I'm still not letting go of the manuscripts I submitted to his feared green pen back in the day. Fiction, it turned out, wasn't for me, but that's another story ...

## Interview

# LLOYD Cole

In the wake of pop fame comes a survivor's grit and a smile we cannot see.

BY MICHAEL DWYER

*Pyjamas say* a lot about a musician. Lloyd Cole's are purple with blue and white stripes; buttons up, collar a little ruffled. Here on my computer screen is a man either coolly oblivious to international media scrutiny or quietly relishing a certain mature-age punkness of presentation.

It's a long way from the Beat poet turtleneck of his mid '80s arrival with the *Commotions*' hits *Perfect Skin*, *Lost Weekend* and *Brand New Friend*. His brow retains its Brando-esque smoulder under grey hair. But as he blinks away the early Glasgow morning, it's a survivor's grit he's wearing. "The not-being-a-pop-star thing was a little hard in the mid 1990s, when I found myself walking around cities and heads were not turning when they had been previously," he says. "You know, you get used to things like that. It's not that I miss it. It's more that I'm not creating with a small niche audience in mind. I'm still writing with everybody in the world in mind ... I mean, I'm still devastated when I release a single and it's not massively successful. And in that way, I suppose I've succeeded in that I'm definitely not a cynic yet."

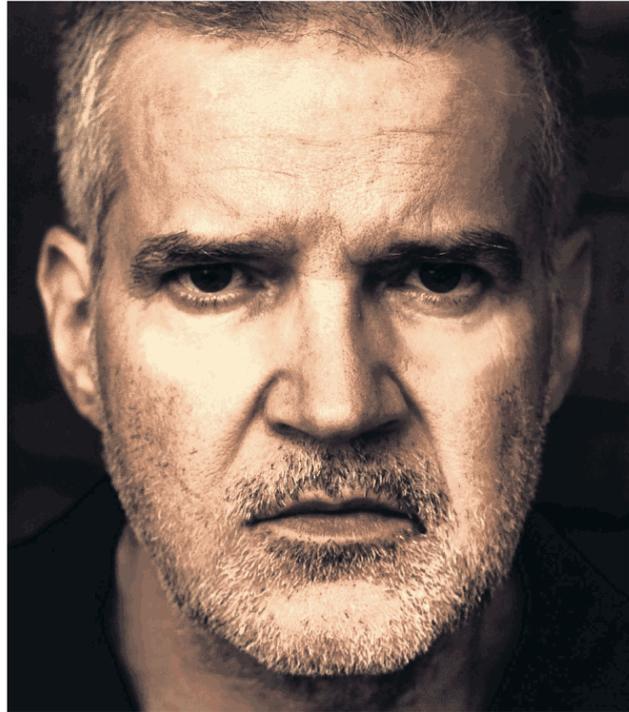
This chimes with something he told me on a previous visit to Australia. "To not become a cynic or a curmudgeon, that's the great challenge," he said in 2006. "Dealing with middle age and finding ways to make your life rich and beautiful becomes the challenge." He smiles at that now. "It's a bit like being an alcoholic and taking one day at a time. It's hard not to be a cynic. I am massively disappointed by humanity in general. I've done my utmost to try and live the best life I could live ... but you see an awful lot of people with seemingly no morality whatsoever and it's very disappointing."

*On Pain*, Cole's 16th album, arrives nearly 40 years since the *Commotions*' celebrated debut, *Rattlesnakes*: a lyrically rich anomaly, at the time, in a mostly synthesised scene. Shades of Dylan in a Madonna world, the Derbyshire troubadour's references to classic film and books led to the enduring adjective "literary".

"I'm literary if you put me next to Billy Idol," he says to that. "If you put me next to literature, I'm a pop singer."

Still, it takes a certain kind to dream up *Warm by the Fire*, one of his latest singles. On face value it's an apocalyptic panorama of rising consumerism, fascism and mob violence. But the chorus - "It's warm by the fire" - makes you wonder whether we're on the same page as the narrator.

"I just thought bonfires of burning cars, televisions, that it would be warm next to them. There was a certain perverse, dark humour to that," he says with a grin. "But that song didn't really start working for me until I came up with the third verse ... which



questions whether these scenarios are real or not. Verse one and two, are they just a screenplay? Are they just a video game? Do I have a VR headset on? Then it becomes interesting to me.

"I mean, why do people want to put VR headsets on and become assassins? How do people turn their moral compasses on and off? Like all of a sudden when it's possible to go looting, people go, 'Oh, I'll go do that now.' You could have done it last week, but you might have gone to jail ... I find it quite interesting how people are able to change their decision-making based on their environment."

*I'm literary if you put me next to Billy Idol ... next to literature, I'm a pop singer.*

Bleak as his premises can be, there's no mistaking the romantic streak in Cole's layered approach to song. The most tender on this new album is *The Idiot*, sung from the viewpoint of Iggy Pop on the occasion of his move to Berlin with David Bowie in 1976. The pair famously escaped ruinous drug addiction in Los Angeles to make four influential albums.

"I am borderline obsessed with that period ... possibly because I was 16 at the time, growing into a slightly more adult appreciation of music," Cole says. "I've had a lifelong love of *The Idiot*, *Lust for Life* and *Low*; 'Heroes' less so, but a sense of awe that four works like that could be created in such a short period of time and under such strange circumstances.

"The element that I'm talking to in the song is two guys who save each other from almost certain demise. I think if they'd stayed in LA ... something awful would have

happened. So there was something wonderful about it, something lovely. And I don't often come up with lovely ideas for songs, so when I do I tend to grasp them."

Cole seized on the same tactic, moving from New York to Massachusetts with his young family and gradually immersing himself in the electronic processes that colour his later albums.

"I never took citizenship. But I'm at home in Massachusetts," he says. "I don't really have an emotional home any more. Brexit ruined what I might have had before. Here in Scotland, they're vehemently anti-Brexit."

He's returned here, where he launched the *Commotions* after a brief stint studying philosophy and literature four decades ago, to prepare his *On Pain* world tour.

As for his home in the music industry, "I retreated from mainstream music in the late 1990s ... I started touring as my primary income because I liked the idea of being paid for what I was doing, as opposed to the model that I'd been on for the previous 15 years, which was taking an advance for something that I hadn't yet done and feeling obliged to then be creative to pay off that debt. I got to the point where I didn't want to write songs because I had to. And obviously I'd been very lucky in the early years in that I had sufficient ambition and motivation that was not related to the economic situation. I just wanted to make records. I wanted to be famous, I wanted to be a pop star, I wanted to be a songwriter that people enjoyed."

"I still do," he says. "I think there is something in the aesthetic that I bring to every record, which is not massively different now than ... when I was working with 12-string guitars, string sections and drums and bass with *Rattlesnakes* ... My basic aesthetic of what is beautiful and what isn't is probably still the same."

Australians seem to think so. Cole has been invited to play here every few years since his album with a brief new band called the *Negatives* in 2000.

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NATAGE 6002



ANSON CAMERON

# TAKE 7

**WORST HABIT?**  
I bite my fingernails.

**GREATEST FEAR?**  
Snakes.

**THE LINE THAT STAYED WITH YOU?**  
"I think you're swell, so long as I'm not your husband" (Fred MacMurray to Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity*)

**BIGGEST REGRET?**  
All my regrets are career-related; they are all boring. The rest of my life has been pretty much free of regret.

**FAVOURITE ROOM?**  
The Rothko Chapel in Houston.

**THE ARTWORK/ SONG YOU WISH WAS YOURS?**  
I don't covet, but (Paul McCartney's) *For No One* is about perfect.

**IF YOU COULD SOLVE ONE THING...**  
Humanity. We're not great, are we?

**Lloyd Cole plays the Melbourne Recital Centre on December 13. *On Pain* is out now.**

"I seem to get on well with Australian audiences," he says - although "one in Newcastle one year got a little bit too bloody Australian for me. They were wanting to have their dinner and their chat while I was singing and they didn't appreciate it when I walked offstage. They thought - what's the expression? - they thought I had tickets on myself."  
But he can only be grateful, he concludes, to a country that keeps asking him back. A bit curmudgeonly otherwise. "I think to not become a curmudgeon one has to have a sense of humour. As I've grown older I've appreciated humour more and more. I think it's the acme of human civilisation. The best, the cleverest people, the most brilliant humans, are comedians and scientists. People like me are kind of chasing their coattails."  
He looks, I can't help observing, very serious. "I have a terrible face that looks like I couldn't possibly have a sense of humour. I'd probably be quite a good stand-up in that respect. Because I can hide the fact that I'm smiling on the inside."

# PICK ME, PICK ME

*Your dreams, your dad, your sister's drawings ... sorry, but I couldn't possibly do them justice here.*

*It started early* last century when the novel broke away from its habit of focusing exclusively on gods, kings and heroes and became a more liberal art form, telling stories about everyday people. Then it was the movies, and TV dramas, and reality shows, and the rise of "the influencer". All of these helped to exaggerate the importance of common folk and drift the zeitgeist into a well-lubed solipsism whereby every dull-eyed vape-sucker believes himself Zeus.

The ego has always been primary in keeping us alive, sane, heedless of others, even brutal. But now people burnish it like a lamp that might vomit forth a genie. It's been given licence to run hog wild in an age in which everyone is told they're special.

These days people are convinced they're uniquely intriguing and should have a column written about them. People complain to me that they've never featured here. They come to me with compelling homegrown miracles. "My dad got sick. Hundred per cent terminal, doctors said. And we prayed and ... Ha!! Doctors!! He got better." They come to me with relatives who've deviated from a sensible path and who might therefore be interesting. "My sister draws insects with talk bubbles who comment on current affairs. They're so insightful. The beetles especially. The beetles nail Trump. You should write a column about my sister."

They come to me with dreams. "Last night I dreamt I was harpooning whales. How would you know about whaling in a dream ... the techniques, the scent of blubber, unless you'd done it in real life? That's a topic for a column right there - my dreams." They come to me boasting extraordinary powers for special friends. "My wife never forgets a birthday, but can never remember bin night. You should write about that."

Well, no, I shouldn't. Let me offer a warning to anyone with a hankering to star in this column. Bitter experience tells me everyone wants to be written about, and no one enjoys reading about themselves. It's like hearing your recorded voice for the first time - you know it's you, but it's some you you don't know. It's like seeing a portrait of yourself and thinking, I don't have a third chin, that libertine dirtbag has added seven kilos.

Recently a friend assailed me in a bar



Raini Corrother

after she'd drunk too much Japanese beer. "I'm scared to speak around you any more," she said. "You're a thief. You steal people's lives. You've milked me. Why didn't you ask before stripping me bare and putting me in your little storybook?"

She'd found herself in a novel I'd written. Lots of people do. The woman in the book

*Everyone wants to be written about, and no one enjoys reading about themselves.*

she'd recognised as herself was characterised by a penchant for lepidoptery and coastal infidelity, but my friend has no public record of either. So in recognising and nominating herself as that character I guess she unwittingly admitted to a couple of covert proclivities. Good luck to her. I wish my beach house was next to hers.

It took me half an hour of fervid denial to convince her she wasn't the character in my novel, that it was an amalgam of a couple of

women I'd known in WA. Then, of course, she was livid. What? Am I not a gripping enough character for you? Am I not an el primo provocateur? A femme fatale? A one-in-a-million muse? Not intriguing enough to be in one of your silly stories?

I feigned horror. "That's not it. No, no, no. It's that you're too complex a crouton for my insipid broth. Too sophisticated for my blunt pen. A unicorn I could never capture." That's the sort of gibberish you have to feed people who are too lumpen to be on your page.

Unfailingly, those insulted by your use of them in your writing, those torn up by what they see as your conscription and exposition of their innermost selves, horrified by what they see as a kind of intellectual kidnapping, an act you had absolutely no right to perpetrate - are twice as insulted when they find out the character isn't them.

So don't come to me whining that I've never written about you. Don't come offering me your vegan escapades and Virgin Mary-shaped rashes for a column in which you'll star. Instead, believe I could never do such an intricate, exquisite being as you justice. You're a unicorn I could never capture.

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NATAGE 003

## Cover story

RICHARD JINMAN



# Dark horse

He killed Jon Snow. Now GoT's Owen Teale is coming to ruin your Christmas.

*It all started* with a car full of booze and a bear costume. Owen Teale, recently suspended from his sixth-form college for organising a riotous Christmas party for fellow students, was in need of a job.

"They held an investigation into the party and I was the first to be called in," says the 62-year-old Welsh actor best known as gimlet-eyed master-at-arms Ser Alliser Thorne in *Game of Thrones*.

"They'd found the empty bottles and people were falling over drunk. I said, 'yeah, I did it. It was me. I borrowed my mother's car, loaded it up with booze and smuggled it in'."

Teale had no intention of joining his father at the limestone quarry that fed the steel works at Port Talbot. He wanted to escape South Wales, to find a bigger world. Which is when fate – or rather a kindly teacher called Mr Davies – intervened.

He suggested Teale might find work at Barry Island Pleasure Park, a fairground near Cardiff. "At the time, it was a rust bucket of a big wheel and one big dipper," Teale recalls. "But I went along and auditioned. I was hoping to be a magician's assistant or something like that, but they said 'you'd be great as the bear. Here's the costume.'"

The role of Barry the Bear was deceptively hard. "His remit was to wander around the park greeting visitors, but you could only do an hour at a time because you

sweated so much. I wore pyjamas under the costume to absorb the sweat, but it would fill the rubber hands. After a while, I'd get bored, sit on the big wheel and go round and round."

The sight of a disconsolate, sweaty bear riding the ferris wheel caught management's attention and Teale was sacked. At which point a couple of his co-workers – students from the Guildford School of Acting – suggested he audition at their alma mater. He was accepted, awarded a study grant and Barry the Bear got a ticket out of Wales.

"I was going nowhere really. If I hadn't met those two young women I don't know what would have happened," Teale says. "But there have been so many points in my career, moments of pure chance, when things went my way. And if you can survive the moments when things don't go your way, you can make it."

If you're not a diehard *Game of Thrones* fan, Teale's name may not be familiar. But his pale face, intense eyes and imposing physicality – he's 188cm in his socks – will be. The Welsh character actor is a Zelig-like figure whose stage and screen appearances invariably guarantee two things: the tale will be well told and bad stuff is going to happen.

He's in Leeds when we speak, visiting his younger daughter Gracie, 21, who's studying art and design at the city's university. Eliza, 25, his other daughter with actor wife

Sylvestra Le Touzel, is following in her parents' footsteps. His son, Ion, from his first marriage, recently made him a grandfather.

Earlier today, he was in Edinburgh shooting scenes for the second season of the supernatural TV thriller *The Rig*. His character, Lars Hutton, an irascible bully and the man most likely to be chucked off the oil rig, has somehow made it back for the next instalment of the Amazon Prime drama.

Hutton, Thorne and Chief Inspector Philip Osborne, another textbook bully who first appeared in the opening season of the BBC police procedural *Line of Duty*, are just three of the menacing characters he's played in recent times. Peter Knox, a villainous sorcerer in *A Discovery of Witches*, the fantasy TV series based on books by Deborah Harkness, is another.

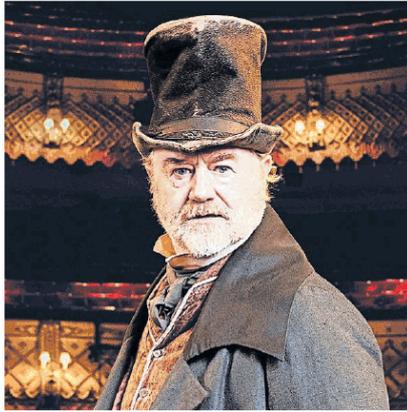
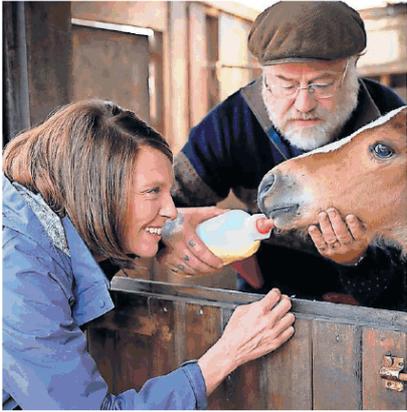
When he portrays Ebenezer Scrooge in a coming Melbourne production of Jack Thorne's award-winning adaptation of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, he'll summon the same forces to make the archetypal miser utterly convincing.

The truth is this: the avuncular man in the amber-coloured spectacles and leather jacket chatting to me on the line from Leeds is a master of darkness.

When Ser Alliser Thorne drove a dagger into the heart of *Game of Thrones*' Byronic hero Jon Snow in the final episode of Season

From main: Owen Teale started his career in a bear suit; with Toni Collette in *Dream Horse*; as Ebenezer Scrooge; as Ser Alliser Thorne in *Game of Thrones*. MAIN PHOTO: JAY BROOKS

NATAGE 0004



5, he left the show's 10 million viewers in a profound state of shock.

"It's true, I have started to play a lot of dark characters," he says, smiling. "And at first it was a great challenge because I'm quite a sociable fellow."

So, how does he find that darkness? "It's a sense of nothingness. In all honesty, I'm not very good at being completely on my own," he explains. "I come alive when I'm with other people. So staying in hotel rooms away from my family isn't great and it doesn't get any easier. There's something empty and a bit scary within me when I'm not with people. I think that's where that stuff comes from."

His ability to tap into the void served him well as he prepared to enact the murder of Snow, played by Kit Harrington. "There was Kit... who was so beautiful. And he's such a lovely man. By connecting to this feeling of emptiness, of having nothing inside of me, I was able to look at him and everything he had - his looks, his grace - and feel pure hatred. For all of Ser Alliser's explanations [for the murder], deep down he just has a hatred of Jon Snow's popularity and gifts."

Like Iago, I suggest. "Yes," he says. "Very like Iago."

When Snow's death was broadcast, Teale braced himself for the fallout. He imagined being confronted by irate *Game of Thrones* fans who would hate him for "killing the goodness". Instead, he was asked for endless selfies and impromptu recitations of Thorne catchphrases such as "For the Watch!" or "Bas-terd!"

Once, a drunk emerged from a restaurant and stumbled towards Teale brandishing a knife. The actor braced himself, but the man simply wanted "Ser Alliser" to hold the utensil to his throat for a photo. On a visit to Uluru with his family, the tour guide caught

sight of his face and exclaimed, "what are you doing here?" Says Teale, "He just kept staring at me and I realised it was an Alliser Thorne thing. I said, 'I'm not going to kill anyone, I'm just an actor'. But it clearly troubled him that this person who had committed this awful crime had suddenly appeared."

Teale has the grace to admit he enjoys this new level of celebrity. "People seem to realise that without the darkness of people like Ser Alliser, Jon Snow couldn't have shone as brightly as he did."

He was well into his 50s when he landed his highest profile role, but it would be wrong to think of Teale as a late starter. In 1989, not long out of drama school, he starred in the hit television adaptation of Catherine Cookson's romance *The Fifteen Streets*. The cast included Sean Bean, another young working-class actor, who went on to become a leading man in Hollywood before playing Ned Stark in *Game of Thrones*.

I ask Teale if he ever wishes he'd followed Bean's trajectory.

"Oh god, yeah," he replies. "Absolutely. You instinctively think [playing leading men] will lead to feelings of success. But it never came my way. My cut of my jib wasn't quite right. It's about what your face does on screen I guess."

There have been opportunities to step into the spotlight over the years. When *The Fifteen Streets* attracted a massive TV audience in Britain, Teale was offered a lead role in a movie playing a bare knuckle fighter. But the financing fell through and he signed up for a four-year stint with the Royal Shakespeare Company instead.

Years later, a producer offered him the lead in a big film being shot in Britain, but the money men demanded an American star and William Hurt got the gig. When Teale won a

Tony Award in 1997 for his performance in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, he was told he needed to spend time in Hollywood wooing producers. He decided to fly home to his family in London instead.

"My wife was about to give birth, so I said 'I'm off'. I'm sure part of it was I just didn't believe that I was going to waltz into leading man roles in Hollywood."

And there it is, that ambivalence. Despite plaudits, awards and steady offers of work, you sense Teale has never been certain of his gifts. It's probably why he's so good - complacency isn't in his nature.

He's far better at recognising brilliance in

*There's something empty and a bit scary within me when I'm not with people.*

others. For example, Toni Collette, who he worked with on *Dream Horse*, a 2020 movie about an unlikely champion racehorse. "Toni just raised my game. That's a huge talent, huge," he says, shaking his head in wonder. "I recently received an award from BAFTA for the film and part of me thinks they should give it to Toni."

He's happiest in a room full of actors working on a play, a film or a TV production. "What turns me on is the thought of collaborating with talented people. I'm very sociable with the rest of the company and fully intend to do that when I come to Melbourne."

Teale played Scrooge at London's Old Vic last year, so the role is familiar. But he doesn't regard it as an easy gig; he knows

there's plenty more humbug to be extracted from the old miser's soul.

"You've got a thousand people in the audience and 12 people on stage who have all turned up for a party and you're the party pooper," he says. "It's not the easiest thing in the world to maintain the character's gloom, because I find the mood infectious and the music is so brilliant."

"When I played him at The Old Vic, I never quite believed the epiphany," he says, referring to the moment the ghosts finally convince Scrooge of the error of his ways. "I want to see someone who is completely broken, someone who's last fibre is dedicated to the belief that love will only get you hurt and you'll lose more than you'll gain." He pauses. "It shouldn't be an instant conversion; he doesn't become the life and soul of the party straight away. He has a lot of learning to do and portraying that is a huge challenge. Frankly, I'm quite nervous. It's a new production, a new set of people. Nobody knows what's going to happen."

His apprehension seems at odds with the rave reviews his work invariably receives. But then you remember Barry the Bear and the world he left behind all those years ago. When he was accepted at drama school, his aunt Maisie told him, "If you leave it too late you'll never get a job at the steel works when you come back." To her, his dream was an indulgence, a hobby at best.

He's been "indulging" himself for some 40 years now, but one suspects Teale will never take success for granted. An hour before our interview, his agent called to tell him he'd been offered a part in a movie starting early next year. "I thought 'wow! I'm still not really used to it,'" he says.

*A Christmas Carol* is at the Comedy Theatre, November 12-December 31.

### FILM CLASSIFICATIONS

**G** General

**PG** Parental guidance recommended

**M** Recommended for mature audiences

**MA 15+** Not suitable for persons under 15. Under 18 must be accompanied by a parent or adult guardian

**R 18+** Restricted to 18 and over

**TBC** This film has advertising approval. Check the classification closer to the release date.

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