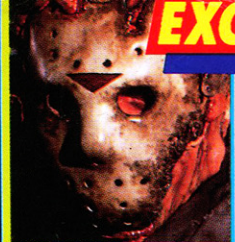


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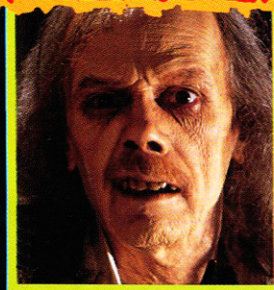
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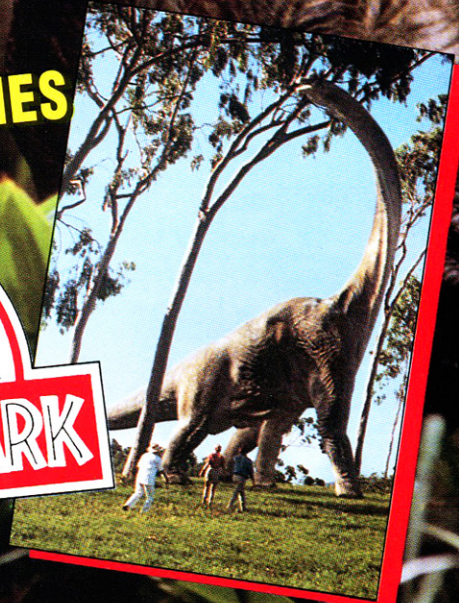
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*Before the first
computerized
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created for
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Michael Crichton
brought them to life
in the novel and
script.*

By MARC SHAPIRO

STAL

Michael Crichton once wrote of digital imaging in his film *Looker*; now it has helped bring his best-selling novel to cinematic life.



PEEKING THROUGH THE PAGES

When Michael Crichton first met with Steven Spielberg to discuss the director's impending film adaptation of his epic dinosaur novel *Jurassic Park*, the result was not the expected creative discussion. Rather, it became an opportunity for Crichton to hear the director air his trepidation about the project.

"He was sitting there bemoaning what his life was going to be like making this movie," says Crichton in his trademark slow and deliberate manner. "He kept saying that he had been in these trenches before, and that doing the dinosaurs was going to be a real headache. I told him that I thought a lot of it could be done with computer graphics. He said, 'No, I've checked with ILM and they told me it can't be done.' "

Crichton pauses, letting the scenario sink in during a conversation a week before the premiere of that impossible movie, *Jurassic Park*. Then he delivers the punchline.

"Well, it turned out that we were both right. When we were having this conversation, in May 1989, he couldn't use computer graphics because the technology just wasn't there. But by the time he got around to making this movie, it was."

Crichton, whose thriller *Rising Sun* also traveled the novel-to-movie route this summer, claims to be very pleased with Spielberg's efforts on behalf of his book. Unlike *Rising Sun*, he feels *Jurassic* allowed him to become very much a part of the creative process. "There was no fear on my

part of relinquishing *Jurassic Park* to Steven," he states. "From the beginning, we were both very much in sync in terms of what we wanted this film to be. Sometimes projects just come together. In the case of *Jurassic Park*, it was the right story for the right director, along with the fact that the technology emerged just in time to make it possible. All the pieces just came together."

But before the movie was even considered, Crichton had already faced the challenge of writing *Jurassic Park* the novel. "I don't know why I came up with the concept for the book," he says, "but one day, the light went on and there was this idea for genetically engineered dinosaurs." That was in 1983 and, he relates, writing *Jurassic* was no walk in the park.

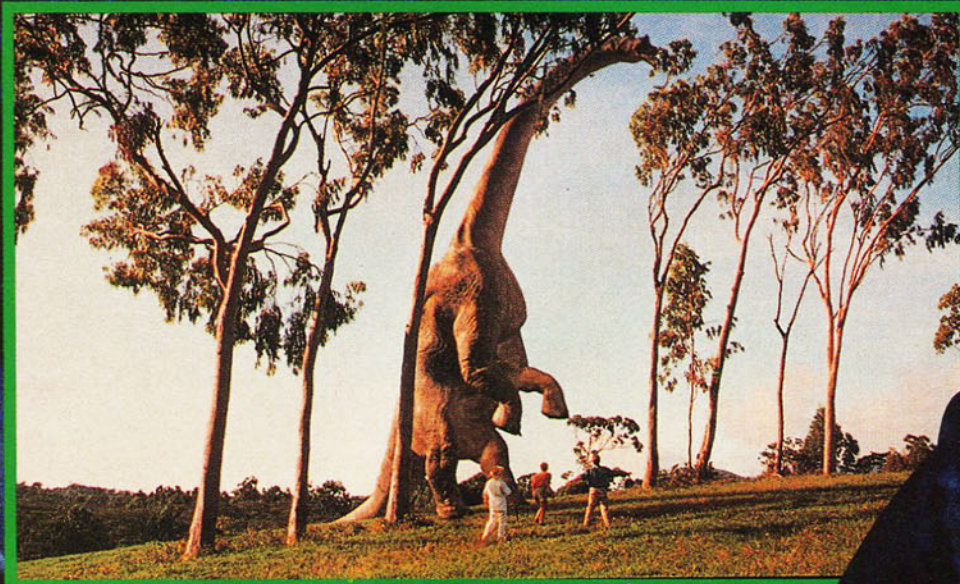
FX Photo: Copyright 1993 ILM



Photo: Jonathan Exley

"I tried writing the book that year, and the notion of genetic engineering was OK, but the story I wrote just didn't work," he offers. "I couldn't think of a way to make it play, and I didn't really pursue it very hard because, at the time, there was this tremendous dinosaur mania going on and I felt the book would be perceived as exploitative of that trend. So I just let it go."

The author, who dismisses his '83 version as "something that didn't work for different reasons, and who cares?" recalls returning to the idea when the prehistoric trend refused to become extinct. "Dinosaur mania never went away; it got worse than ever," he laughs. "At that time, I was finding that my interest in science was shifting away, and yet I still had this dinosaur idea staring me



You'd think the Brachiosaurus wouldn't have to stand on its hind legs to reach the treetops.

in the face. I realized the mania was never going to stop, and if I was ever going to do this book, I should do it now. I liked the idea of a dinosaur story, and I felt I was starting to move away from the very attitude that could make this work."

Crichton, whose directorial credits include his own adaptation of Robin Cook's *Coma*, along with the SF thrillers *Westworld* and *Runaway*, claims that while writing *Jurassic Park* the book, he could not help but think down the road toward the possibility of *Jurassic Park* the movie. "When I was writing the novel, I was conscious of movies because that's where people's ideas about dinosaurs come from," he notes. "So as I was working on it, I was thinking, 'For whoever reads this, movies will be their source of thinking, rather than the science and the ideas I'm drawing on.' On the other hand, there was that hope on my part. I knew the book would make a wonderful movie, and I couldn't help thinking, 'Wouldn't it be nice if...'"

"But I really had no expectations of that happening," he continues. "At the time I was writing *Jurassic Park*, I hadn't sold a book to the movies in 12 years. Hollywood was right in the middle of downsizing stories and budgets,

and I was in the process of writing something that would probably be a \$100-million movie. These were clear signals to me that a film version might never get made."

Consequently, nobody was more surprised than Crichton when news of *Jurassic Park*'s impending publication sent the movie industry into a feeding frenzy. But rather than just throw his creation out to the highest bidder and hope for the best, the author had loftier goals in mind.

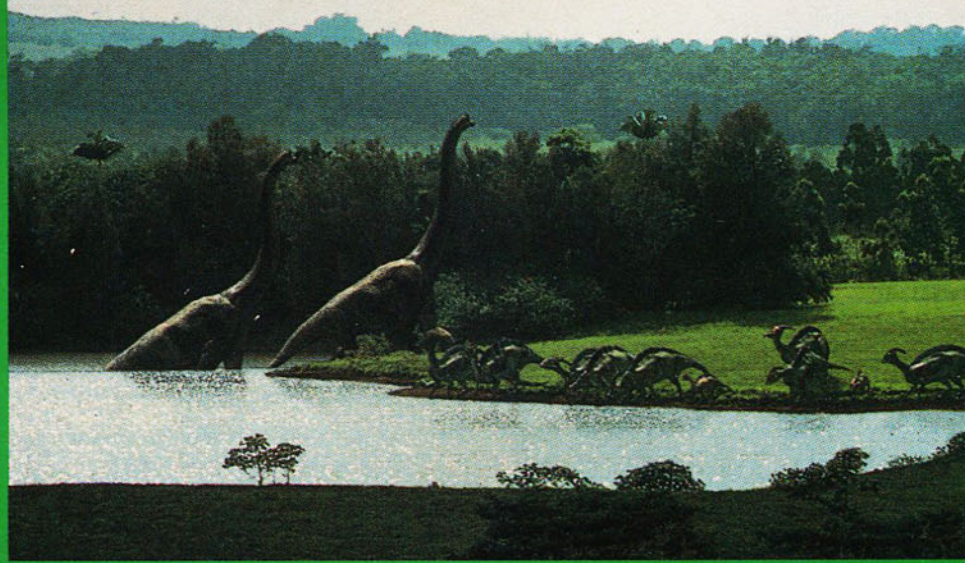
"I was looking for the best filmmaker, as opposed to simply the studio that could put the most money into it," he says. "There was a higher offer than Universal/Amblin, a much higher offer. But there were far more important considerations for me. I wanted the movie to be in the hands of a filmmaker who had the technical expertise to deal with the huge amount of special effects, the kids and an overall project that, in '89, was being predicted as an \$80-100-million movie."

"To my way of thinking, there were a limited number of directors who could handle that," Crichton continues. "A number of directors who had experience doing science fiction and fantasy films were in the running, but we discovered that a lot of people on a very short list didn't want to do it. They had other commitments, or they didn't respond. I was even told that some directors looked at what it would take on their part to make this movie, and just didn't feel up to it."

Once Spielberg was selected, Crichton wrote a first draft of the *Jurassic Park* script. A second script, by *Hook* co-writer Malia Scotch Marmo, was commissioned and ultimately rejected before David Koepp was brought in to do the final drafts and the shooting script. Crichton remembers, somewhat painfully, that with each draft and storyboard meeting, something would have to go.

"Steven and I would perform a mock funeral every time something had to be cut," he sighs. "We made those decisions for a number of reasons. Some of them were made because of money, others were made because of time considerations and still others were made because of the complexity of the effects that would have been involved."

It's ironic to note that when Crichton first wrote his novel, computer FX shots like this weren't possible.



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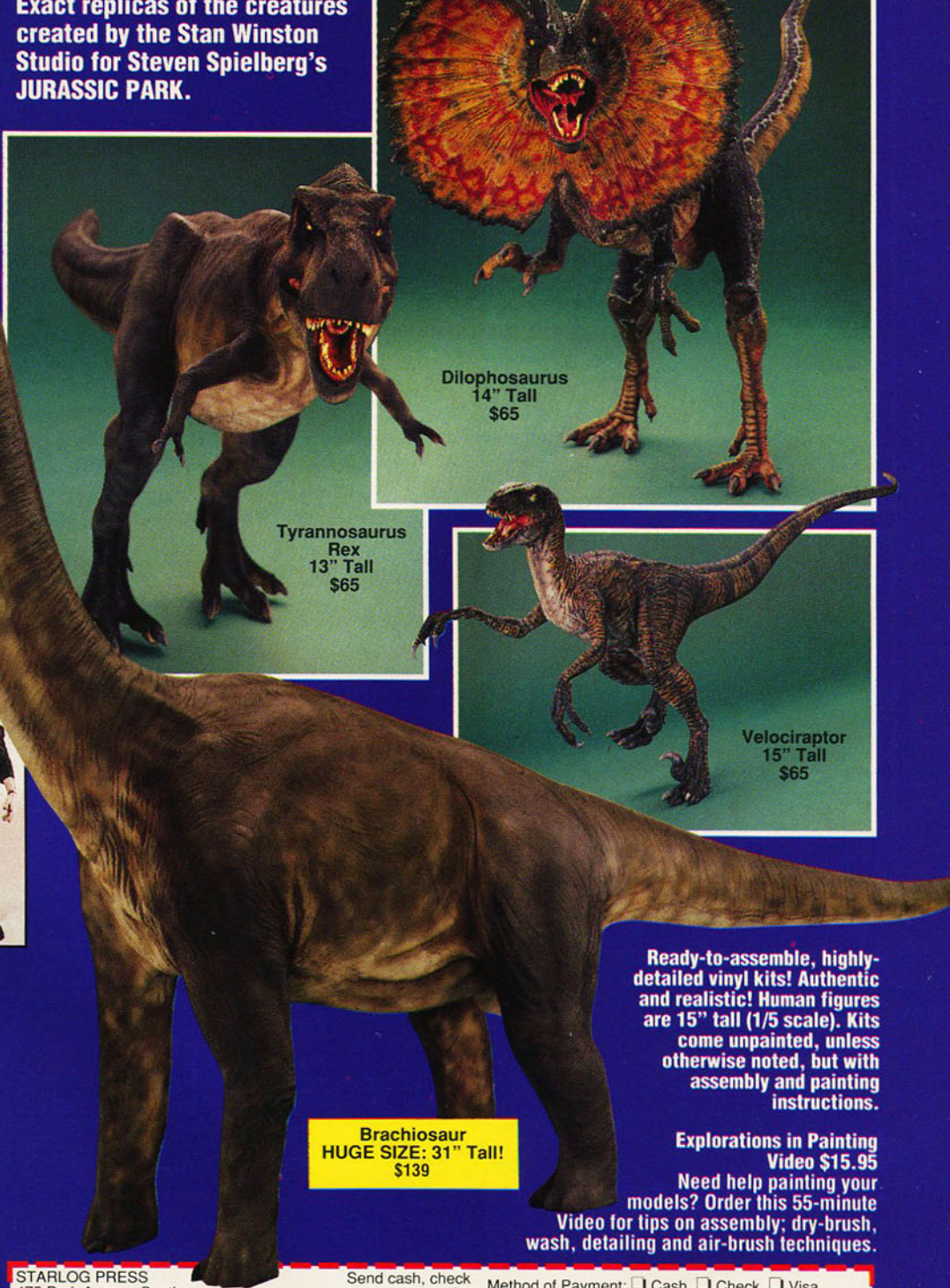
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"There were two scenes in particular that Steven and I were both sorry to see go," he continues. "One was the scene where the Tyrannosaurus rex attacks the boat in the water. That scene was actually in the script for quite a few drafts before it was cut. The other is the scene under the waterfall, with the T. rex's head coming through it. That scene was in the script all the way through the first year of preproduction before it was cut.

"But it worked the other way as well," he adds. "One of the scenes that came out early was the dinosaur stampede. At first it was like, 'Stampede? How many dinosaurs? No, no, no!' But then we realized that we could do it with computer graphics, so back in it went."

Since the author only visited the set occasionally during the film's lensing, he has few anecdotes



FX Photo: Copyright 1993 ILW

The movie's Velociraptors are scary enough that their fatal footwork didn't need to be graphically displayed.

regarding *Jurassic Park's* actual production, but claims that he and Spielberg agreed at just about every turn. "I don't think it's a surprise to anybody who knows me that I would

get along better with a Steven Spielberg than with a Phil Kaufman [who directed *Rising Sun*]. Steven works like I do. He's organized, plans things out, is logical and

Dinosaur Bytes

Of all the elements that went into the creation of *Jurassic Park*, none have received as much attention as the FX that brought the dinosaurs to unparalleled cinematic life. While the remarkably realistic full-sized props created by Stan Winston (to be covered in depth next issue) comprise the bulk of the onscreen dino footage, it is the six and a half minutes of computer-generated imagery that result in the movie's most startling moments, and point the way for the future of visual FX. With one razor-taloned blow, the CGI saurians have rendered stop-motion—the traditional method of bringing movie dinosaurs to life—sadly obsolete.

"From a computer graphics point of view, we just had to figure out if we could even do it—it had never been done before," says Industrial Light & Magic's Dennis Muren, who was responsible for overseeing *Jurassic's* computer work. The seven-time Oscar-winner knew that while the prehistoric beasts would be created through electronic means, they still had to play as flesh-and-blood animals. "They had to appear real, and not look like computer graphics, or plastic or rubber models," he says of his creations. "We also had to get performances out of them.

"Attitude was critical on this show; you had to understand the minds of these things," he continues. "The T. rex's head is an eating machine, and the body is merely there to support it, whereas the raptors are alert and curious. They can become frightened and poke around, and seem to be thinking."

Managing this complex task required 50 technicians working on \$15 million worth of computer equipment; 20 new software programs were created just to make the movie possible. Yet before the first animator sat down at his keyboard, the production had to determine the division of FX labor. "The CGI shots were more suited for the longer scenes of ambulatory dinosaurs," Muren points out. "This was part of the design process we went through very carefully—going over the sequences, breaking down and choreographing them and determining whether a live-action or CGI shot would be used."

The optical team worked from models provided by Winston (though some of the dinos were "built" from scratch) to insert their computerized creatures into film footage shot without the dinosaurs present. A skeletal image of a given dino was created and scaled on the computer screen, then inserted into the filmed scene. Using digital mapping, the animal's muscles and skin were added over the computerized "skeleton," with lighting and color adjusted as well. Using this process, the technicians were able to add an unlimited number of dinosaurs to a shot (as in the stampeding Gallimimus scene) or choreograph a precise, startling action (a Velociraptor lunging vertically at the camera).

"One of the advantages of CGI is that shots can go on for a while," says Muren. "Some of the Brachiosaurus shots last for 25 seconds or more. It gave us an opportunity to understand the characters. We could handle shots like those in a wildlife documentary, and that helps sustain the believability of these



Photo: Sean Casey

Dennis Muren (lower left) and friend relax with computer FX honchos (clockwise from upper left) Mark A.Z. Dippé, Eric Armstrong and Steve Williams.

animals. The bottom line was, 'Is it going to look real and perform the way a real dinosaur might behave?'"

Of course, there are no real dinosaurs around to compare Muren and company's creations to, but the overwhelmingly positive response from critics and audiences indicates that they've done their job well. While Muren points out that "there are sequences that are a blend of both CGI and full-sized models," the optical dinos are impossible to distinguish from the full-scale creatures. The cumulative result is the complete suspension of disbelief, while one is watching the movie, that dinosaurs live again.

"The ultimate experience of what we've done is that the audience is unaware of the technology and just gets into the spirit of what we've created," says Muren. "The dinosaurs' performances are as real as anything that's been done in motion picture history."

—Michael Gingold
with Marc Shaprio



FX Photo: Copyright 1993 ILM

Gallimimuses stand in for the novel's hadrosaurs in *Jurassic's* stampede.


above board. He works in a way that a lot of people would define as not being artistic. But it worked for me."

One major goal that Crichton agreed with from preproduction on was the idea that *Jurassic Park* should be rooted at a PG-13 level. "How intense the film should be was always a major consideration for everybody involved," he reveals. "What you've got to remember is that, as a dinosaur movie, *Jurassic Park* comes from a tradition of all the dinosaur movies we've ever seen. And

before *Jurassic Park*, nobody ever talked about a dinosaur film being too intense or too scary. This one is unprecedented, and I think there is a legitimate concern for young children, because the images are so real and the pace so intense.

"If kids have seen *Terminator 2*, they can probably handle this film, but I think parents should be aware of its approach," he continues. "I don't want to be the person responsible for a kid having two weeks of nightmares."

Now that the film has opened to spectacular grosses (over \$50 million in its first weekend), the inevitable question of a *Jurassic Park II*—in either novel or movie form—can't help but come up. "It's not like the thought never crossed my mind," Crichton admits. "After all, the book's ending left things open for a sequel. I've never written a follow-up to any of my books before, and the idea of doing one for *Jurassic* is kind of interesting. I have thought about it and come up with some ideas, but there's nothing I want to talk about at this point."

One final question arises about the seeming contradiction of attempting a faithful adaptation of Crichton's gruesome novel while keeping it mass-audience-friendly. "The ultimate test of how true to the book the movie is involves the Spitter kill scene," he offers. "Do you show the evisceration that I described in the book? My answer is that you don't. To show explicit violence with exposed organs automatically takes the audience out of the movie and into the realm of wondering how it was done. The explicitness worked in my book, but if they had filmed the scene that way, it never would have played. Nobody wanted to see intestines spilling out all over the place—especially me." 

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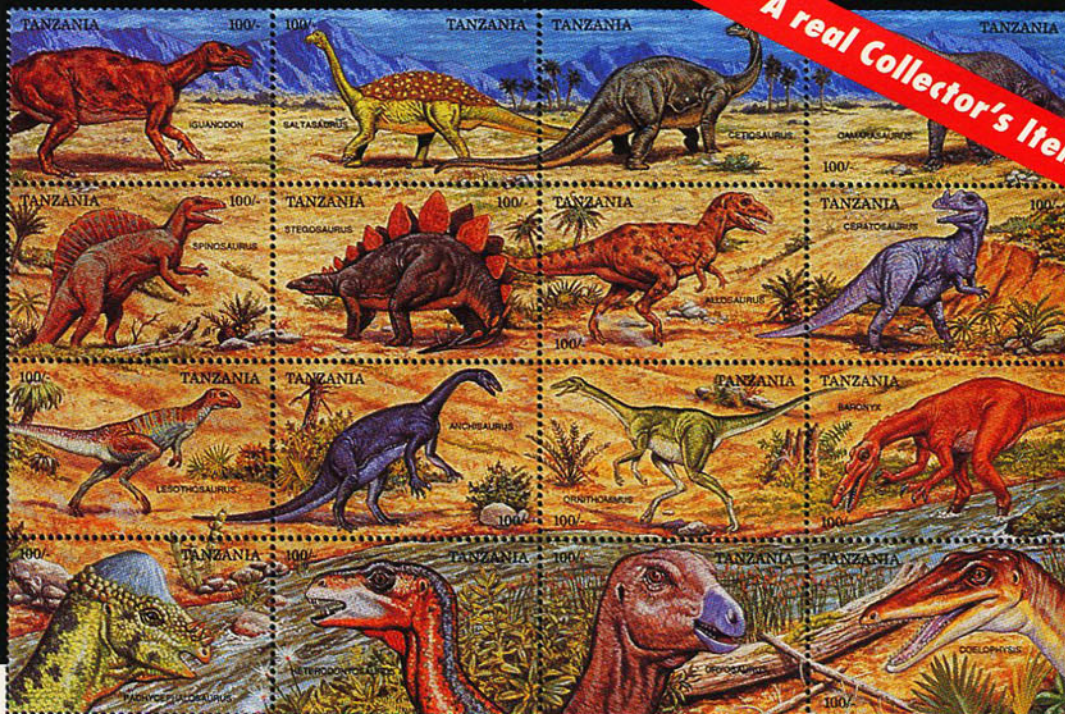
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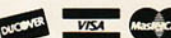
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