

brendanryan9@gmail.com

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Hello Book Pals,

And I bet you've been doubting whether there might even be another bookletter. I know it's been 4+ months since the last one. Why so? Well to start, I've been a bit of a slug ...and reading endlessly. Then a rather massive birthday. Then a tourist visit to Argentina, happily during the World Cup Final and Semi-Final. And then a bout of Covid, albeit minor. Whatever... here I am, filled with vigor and lots of books to pass on to you. And oh, by the way, Happy New Year, Happy 2023. AND...Happy Year of the Rabbit .

Now here is where I would normally launch into a discussion of authors new to the bookletter. I was heading down that path and then I suddenly realized that was stupid. The best books I've read of the last several months have been by some of our favorite authors. Yes, there have been a few good new ones, but I will come to them later. Let me pay proper respect to our best and favorite writers, each of whom has provided just an outstanding new book(s). A little revolution is good for the soul. And off we go:

1. Michael Connelly

–Desert Star

And who better to start with than the person whom I think is the single best writer today. Regardless of genre! And that is Michael Connelly. And one thing which keeps his series featuring Harry Bosch, long-time and now former LAPD Homicide detective so vibrant, is as the years go by, so too does Harry's life. Harry does get older, Harry does move into new situations, Harry does connect with new partners, etc. etc. Harry's daughter gets older. Everything stays fresh and current.

Here we have Harry essentially retired from active policing, but once again partnering with LAPD Detective Rene Ballard. Harry has never stopped "working" a case that haunts him, namely the murder of a whole family by a psychopath who still walks free. And when Detective Ballard assumes leadership of the LAPD Cold Case Squad, she enlists Harry as an "advisor" to help her clear cases on her docket while at the same time working on his "white whale." Really don't need to go into a lot of detail here. If you are not aware of Harry Bosch and this series

and you've been reading this booklet for several years, I'm not sure what to do about you. This just a brilliant continuation of arguably the best police procedural series there is.

And now, a brief digression. You've heard me talk about The Mysterious Bookshop, a wonderful bookstore dedicated to mysteries and thrillers which is located on Warren Street down in Lower Manhattan. A great little place. And truly, a little place. Yet they regularly attract the world's foremost mystery writers to come and chat with an assembled crowd of usually between 25 to 50 goofballs (oops...mystery fans). Including yours truly. Michael Connolly himself showed up a month ago to talk about *Desert Star* then of course, to sign books. Now personally I find that astoundingly cool. It's like having Mickey Mantle (or if you prefer Lionel Messi) to come and chat with you for about an hour. No obligation, no nothing. Of course, I do buy the book. Just great fun. And then two weeks later, another all time favorite, Mick Herron, author of *Slow Horses*, showed up and did the same thing. So basically, every couple of weeks some author shows up from somewhere and does their thing. Pretty cool, yes?. Now I know many of you don't live in NYC. Okay, fine. But you still might want to get on the mailing list of The Mysterious Bookshop. In addition to being regularly informed about all new mysteries you also learn about when the authors are showing up. No cost, no nothing. Here's the website – <https://www.mysteriousbookshop.com> Email, ask them to be put on the mailing list and voila' – you will be. And of course, you can buy books on line.

2. Ian Rankin

--A Heart Full of Headstones

Another all time all-star. "*A Heart*" is #25 in this series featuring long-time Edinburgh, Scotland Detective John Rebus. John is now aged, like Bosch and is essentially retired from the PD but still involved in criminal justice activities. In this book, our man Rebus is on trial for a crime that can put him behind bars for the rest of his life. Did he take the law into his own hands? Many of the long-time continuing characters appear in this book such as Detective Siobhan Clarke, Malcolm Fox from Internal Affairs, Ger Cafferty long-time bad-boy/long-time collaborator with Rebus, etc. etc. And of course, one of the main characters, the city of Edinburgh itself. As one critic states, "Rankin consistently finds clever ways of involving his retired detective in new investigations and Tartan noir grows in popularity, Rankin leads the charge." So so true.

3. Anthony Horowitz

-- The Twist of a Knife

As you know from earlier bookletters, Horowitz is in my judgement one of the most amazing people who write for a living. Author of my favorite television series ever *Foyles War* (yes, he wrote every word), author of three authorized James Bond sequels, author of several additional

series including the Alex Ryder series which counts 24 books appealing to teenage boys and then of course this series. Where Horowitz follows this very unusual conceit of having himself be a leading character in the books. He has partnered with ex-detective and all-time curmudgeon Daniel Hawthorne and they wind up solving crimes together. With an eye to Anthony writing books about their joint exploits.

Anthony is about to break off this partnership when what happens but he himself is arrested by an old enemy of his, Detective Inspector Karen Runshaw. She's out for revenge for having regularly been shown up by A H and would love to put Anthony away. He must fall back on working with his quasi-buddy, Hawthorne to extricate himself from this pickle. This is the fourth Detective Hawthorne novel. The first was *The Word is Murder*; the second is *The Sentence is Death* and the third, *A Line to Kill*. I would go back and start with *The Word is Murder*. It just helps. And by the way, hardly a sacrifice as it's just great.

4. T.J. English

--Dangerous Rhythms

Mr. English's only other bookletter appearance was for his wonderful book *The Westies*. About that ruthless Irish gang on the West Side of NYC. This is not about them. This fascinating book ...non-fiction... traces the connectivity between the Mob and the largely African American jazz movement over the last 50 years in this country. Probably to the surprise of many of you who think I am a one-dimensional mystery geek (humph). I actually have some other things I love, and jazz is one of them. I got lucky back in that late 60's when in school in Philadelphia I stumbled upon jazz bars where for the huge sum of perhaps \$10 one could get three beers and then sit within about 10 feet of Jazz greats ranging from Miles Davis to Oscar Peterson to Ramsey Lewis to Nina Simone, etc. etc. Originally lured by the beers, I wound up falling in love with the music and the musicians and never gave that up.

But little did I know how much the Mob was weighing in, owning those bars and in fact controlling the lives of so many of the great African American Jazz musicians. English is a brilliant writer who is also, very much an historian, and an investigative reporter and a Jazz music buff. This book is absolutely brilliant if any of those appeal. Let me just read from the flyleaf, "For the first half of the century mobsters and musicians enjoyed a mutually beneficial partnership by offering artists like Louis Armstrong, Earl "Fatha" Hines, Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Lena Horne and Ella Fitzgerald a permanent stage. The Mob, including major players like Al Capone, Meyer Lansky, Lucky Luciano and Mickey Cohn etc. provided opportunities that would have otherwise not existed. The resulting major diversity of the clubs

and speakeasies paved the way for some of America's greatest stars to find their voice." That sounds pretty good, but believe me, over time this all became not a symbiotic relationship.

Bottom line, if you enjoy Jazz and want to wander through 50 years of fascinating history, visiting bars you probably went into, moments in Vegas that you wish you had been involved in, a whole good chunk on Frank Sinatra and the Mob, Vegas and the Kennedy's, then Jules Podell and the Copacabana, Louie Armstrong, Louie Prima etc.etc.. you will just love this book. And as a bonus you'll come up with little bits and pieces of information that have no use but to entertain oneself. For example, back in Prohibition times if someone asked you in a jazz club "Are you hip?" It had a very specific meaning – "are you carrying a hip flask of booze?" Went on to mean much more than that. Or that Duke Ellington, when often questioned by the police about various evil doers, he would always cite the popular street dictum, later popularized by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney saying, "Whatever you say, say nothing." That was kind of the watchword for all the entertainers.

And now a little personal nugget. A name that appears very often throughout the book is "Joe Glaser." I vaguely remember that name from my days of selling hot dogs as a kid in Yankee stadium as being permanently displayed on one of the box-seats. We never knew who he was. No reason to. Except that every once in a blue moon, Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong would be sitting in that box. Well reading this book made it clear that Joe Glaser was one of the truly bad boys of the whole era. He was largely responsible for getting Louis Armstrong to his position of popularity but certainly did him no favors financially. Much more on that in the book but it just was fascinating to see this name which had somehow lodged in my brain for many many years come to life.

I'm probably not doing this book true justice. It just is a massively entertaining, informative compendium about a hugely interesting period in our country's history.(and for many readers of this booklet, our own personal history) It's about a group of people, these jazz musicians who were just brilliant at what they did and who finally pushed their way through to positions of independence where they could personally benefit from the unique music they created. The subtitle of the book is called "Jazz and the Underworld" and boy is it fascinating. And superbly well-written...and reads easy !!!

5. Martin Walker

To Kill a Troubadour

Great news! Bruno Courreges, Chief of Police for the small French town of St. Denis is 100% back on his game. This is the 15th (?) in this series and the vast majority of the books have been simply outstanding. Personally, I think the series sagged a little bit in the middle but maybe

that's just me. But this one is just fantastic. All the normal wonderful suspense of a Bruno book. Fascinating characters, a vivid depiction of a little French town in the Dordogne, all Bruno's pals (and ladies) turn up, the usual complement of great meals hand prepared by Bruno, interesting wines being savored, and a fascinating bit of criminality.. And quite realistic. The plot here is that a folk music group "Les Troubadours" long supported by Bruno, suddenly go viral with their new number titled "Song for Catalonia". The Spanish government quickly and emphatically finds this song rather annoying. You think? And then assorted people decide to take matters into their own hands...aka "let's kill a Troubadour". All at that same time that this wonderful group is about to play their annual "concert" in St. Denis. What could possibly go wrong? As always, a "Bruno" book supplies a wonderful little vacation into a small part of France where one can luxuriate in the countryside, the food, the wine and of course, Bruno. A must-read series. Pick this one up and start here. No downside.

6. John Sandford

--Righteous Prey

You want to talk about an author keeping a series going. Look no further than our boy Sandford. This, I believe is the 30th volume of the "Prey" series and that doesn't even count the 12 standalone Virgil Flowers novels. Clearly in such a long and prolific spate of writing there will be some ups and definitely some downs. This ain't a down. This is a big BIG up. If you're looking for a really fun, entertaining, easy to read interesting plot with tons of funny and often rude repartee between Virgil and Lucas Davenport this has your name on it. The storyline is interesting... a group of super-wealthy people title themselves "The Five" (on Fox ? heh,heh) and start knocking off the worst of society – rapists, murderers, and thieves – and then they use their unlimited resources to offset the damage done by those they've killed, donating Bitcoins to charities and victims via the Dark Web. Crazy plot. But actually, a lot of fun to contemplate. And both Lucas and Virgil get involved up to their ears. And definitely no need to read the 40+ books that lead up to this one. This could be easily a standalone. But definitely a light, fun read. Well, "light" if you consider exotic forms of murder light, but hey, whatever.

7. Bill O'Reilly & Martin Dugard

--Killing the Legends

Okay, calm down, calm down... you may or may not share Bill's political views but this series which now numbers 12 books in all is absolutely brilliant. Definitely not fiction, with titles ranging from *Killing Lincoln*, to *Killing Patton*, to *Killing England*, to *Killing Crazy Horse*, to *Killing the SS*, to *Killing the Rising Sun* etc. etc. ...all are remarkably historically accurate and authentic yet are entertaining to read and almost inevitably shed new light on a topic that we all think we are quite familiar with, but maybe not so much. And this book is no exception. Particularly

for those of us who are a certain vintage, and I don't mean really old vintage like myself but certainly if you've lived during the years when John Lennon, Elvis Presley and Muhammed Ali held forth you will find this a fascinating book. It deals with each of these three massively iconic human beings separately and then ties them together. It is fascinating how three vastly different celebrities had so many common strains which unfortunately led to their downfalls. The subtitle of the book is "The lethal danger of celebrity" and boy does it materialize in each of these three cases. Simply a fascinating reminder of history that we all lived through, seen particularly through the life experiences of these hugely iconic people. Obviously no pre-reading required. .

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| 8. | <i>Max Allan Collins</i> | <i>-The Million Dollar Wound</i> |
| 9. | | <i>-Carnal Hours</i> |
| 10. | | <i>- Flying Blind</i> |
| 11. | | <i>- Do No Harm</i> |

Hope you remember my ecstatic discussion of Max Allan Collins in the last booklet where I introduced his trilogy starting with the 2002 movie "Road to Perdition" followed by two brilliant books, one titled *Road to Purgatory* and the other *Road to Paradise*. Absolutely excellent..must read. But Collins is just astoundingly prolific. And has several other series, one of which I'm about to talk about. This one offers 20 volumes and all feature Nathan Heller, a Private Eye whom we first meet during World War II and then continue with for many years into the future. This series is categorized as "True Fiction" which is an unusual literary genre. Collins inserts his character, Nathan Heller – fictional guy-- into real-life situations with real people whom we more or less know and carries out the story mixing in fact and fiction. Each of these four books is remarkably historically grounded ;is remarkably well-written; AND is remarkably intriguing as Collins "solves" mysteries that may have baffled people for years. Here is a bit of a summary of each of the books mentioned above.

The Million Dollar Wound starts with Nathan, a struggling private eye in Chicago in the early 1940's. His best pal is Barney Ross (yeah, that Barney Ross – the boxer) who voluntarily enlists in the US Marines. Heller, compelled by his friendship joins up also and soon enough the two of them are over in Guadalcanal in the height of the fighting in that battle of World War II. After extensive time and heroics in Guadalcanal, they both end up back in Chicago, Heller continuing his career as a private eye. The story unfolds with violent interactions with Frank Nitti, the Mob boss, then extends to Hollywood where the Mob is trying to infiltrate the film industry and Heller encounters people like columnist Westbrook Pegler, actor Robert Montgomery, Fan Dancer, Sally Rand, G-Man Elliott Ness etc. It becomes a great detective read.

Carnal Hours takes place in the Bahamas. Nate Heller is asked to come to the Bahamas by Sir Harry Oakes to investigate one of his enemies. You may not know of Sir Harry. I did not. But it is a true story that this multi-millionaire Englishman who had made tons of money in mining gold is murdered in the Bahamas. His killer was never found. However, Nate has some ideas and in the book, we find some interesting explanations to how it all happened.

Flying Blind is all focused around Amelia Earhart. Again, Heller gets inserted into these situations seamlessly and credibly. He befriends with Amelia Earhart, in fact more than befriends her and then when she is announced missing, he returns out to the islands of the Pacific to see what went on. Plots and suspicions abound and again a credible, plausible explanation as to what happened to Amelia is provided.

Do No Harm centers around the famous Sam Shepard case. The more senior of us may remember this case from the 1950's when the Cleveland Osteopath was accused of murdering his wife. Sensational trial. Verdict overturned, what really happened? Well, once again Nate Heller is summoned in, this time by his old pal, Elliot Ness who was at the time heading criminal justice in Cleveland to see what the score is.

I'm not sure I'm doing these justice. I find them absolutely fascinating. The level of accuracy and detail is startling really and yet all are totally engaging fiction. As I said, there are about 20 of them each revolving around a pretty famous incident or person. If there's a topic that particularly interests you, just google the series and pick up that volume. Couldn't rate these books more highly. This whole notion of "True Fiction" is new to me and I just love it.

12. Nelson DeMille

The Maze

Okay I gotta be truthful here. I was really really anticipating this book. DeMille is one of the best authors of our time and the topic he is writing about here are the famous "Gilgo Beach Murders"... very well known to New Yorkers. Ten bodies found on the beaches along the South Shore of Long Island. All murdered, all generally speaking sex workers and none solved. And no shortage of speculation of police corruption, etc. And DeMille took the topic on and inserted his continuing character John Corey, former NYPD Detective into the mix. Given the location, given the topic, given Corey, all of that, I definitely recommend fans of DeMille and Corey to pick it up and read it. Having said that, I did not find this anywhere near as satisfying as an earlier book of DeMille's titled *Night Fall* which had to do with the downing of TWA flight #800.

13. Richard Osman

The Bullet that Missed

This is book #3 in this excellent series by Osman all featuring the “Thursday Murder Club.” As you may recall the club consists of four residents of a retirement community in England called Cooper’s Chase. And it all started when in an effort to relieve their boredom and skip out on “Over 80s Zumba Night” they agree to meet and attempt to sort out unsolved crimes. You never really know the entire background of the four but they are certainly some interesting characters including clearly an ex-MI6 person, ex-cops, ner-do-wells and just fascinating people. In picking up book 3 one critic said “It feels like a reunion with old friends. Clever, witty, and touching this thriller has it all.” And it does. These are not mind-bending books, they are also not out on the blood-soaked tundra of Norway but there’s real crime, some real naughty behavior and a really good mystery to boot. To readers of this booklet who may be nearing the time to consider “retirement villages” (oy vey) this may give you some insight into how you might actually have fun in one.

14. Ian Hamilton

The Disciple of Las Vegas

15. _____

The Queen of Shanghai

First, confession and correction. In the last booklet I introduced Sir Ian Hamilton as the author of a trio of books all featuring Uncle Chow Tung, all taking place in Hong Kong and all featuring Uncle who was very involved in the Triads. Great series. However, our Ian ain’t Sir Ian. He’s rather just IAN, a Canadian author who has written those books and the books I’m about to introduce you to which are a connected series. The real “Sir Ian” apparently was a famous British General who did major things at Gallipoli and wrote many books about same. Oh well. The books referenced here feature Ava Lee, one of the more interesting characters I’ve come across. And there are 13 books all featuring her. Ava Lee is a young Chinese Canadian forensic accountant who specializes in recovering debts and stolen money for wealthy clients. Oh, and did I mention she is a deadly martial arts practitioner. I do confess that I have long long been a big fan of Hong Kong and all of Asia and have been fortunate to visit a lot of its countries and cities...but not necessary to enjoy this series. You have an immensely interesting female lead character who navigates successfully through triad dominated worlds and often ends up in places like Las Vegas, like Macao, like Manilla, even Costa Rica. And would certainly not be characterized as a “do-gooder.” Au contraire. One of my favorite descriptions of Ava comes from, of all places, the London Free Press which says “Readers will discern in Ava undertones of Elizabeth Salander Irresistible.” Excellent call. And do tell me you know who Elizabeth is. Say yes. The first book in the series is *The Disciple of Las Vegas* and I would start there. But I will devour all 12 of these. They are really absolutely addictive. And easy to read.

16. Jonathan Harries

The Correspondent of Petrograd

Yup, my prolific pal Jonathan is back with another chapter in the family saga focusing on the successful assassins in the family “business”. This time we turn to “Great Uncle Leon” who in the spring of 1912 is back in London starting out as a society columnist. He is quickly sucked back into assisting the British Secret Service and winds up being dispatched to Vienna, to Hamburg and ultimately to Petrograd where it is revealed for the first time, Uncle Leon is very directly involved in the mysterious death of Rasputin. If this sounds a bit over the top, why of course it is. But it is a great bit of revisionist history involving all kinds of shady characters in wonderfully intriguing places. Make no mistake...these are intended to be fun, and they actually are. And, despite your best efforts, you might pick up a little bit of new historical knowledge. Most recommended. And if you haven’t yet gotten to it you might want to start with volume 1 which is titled *The Tailor of Riga*.

17. Christopher Fowler

Cold Dark House

18. _____

10 Second Staircase

19. _____

Oranges and Lemons

Okay I do admit I’m on a one-person crusade to get this brilliant series of some 20 volumes the recognition and readership it deserves. I won’t dwell here. All of these books feature the Peculiar Crimes Unit led by slightly gaga Inspector Arthur Bryant and his equally curious Detective partner, John May. In each book, the powers that be at the London Met are determined to close them down. They and their oddball collection of detectives keep beating back the odds and solving crimes that fall into the realm of “peculiar.” Each book stands alone although obviously continuing characters abound. Not for everyone but I promise you if you just pick up one and give it a try, you will be addicted.

Alright, that’s it for authors we talked about in the past. I actually have several more but I just want to get on to some new authors and honestly, the ones above are the best of the best. But now onto some new folk.

20. Charles McCarry

The Tears of Autumn

It really is remarkable that I am only now getting around to this man. He is one of the gods of espionage writing. Right up there with LeCarre, Fleming, et al. And like many of the best, he was a practitioner serving for a decade under deep cover as a CIA operations officer in Europe, Africa, and Asia. He is also a brilliant novelist. His continuing character, Secret Agent Paul

Christopher figures prominently in most of his books and is right at the center of this one. And if you are at all intrigued with conspiracy theories here is a special book for you. It was written back in 1974 and its central premise is that Christopher believes he knows who arranged the assassination of JFK. And why. As the fly-leaf says, "his theory is so destructive to the legend of the dead President, so dangerous to the survival of US foreign policy he is ordered to desist." Does he? Well of course not. He resigns from the CIA and investigates from Paris to Rome to Zurich to the Congo and then to Saigon. Especially Saigon!! A fascinating spy novel with a very plausible alternative to Lee Harvey Oswald. I will not reveal who here, but it really did make a lot of sense when one reads through the book. Just a great read by a true master. Strongly recommended to me by my pal, Ted K.

21. Ralph Graves

Champagne Kisses, Cyanide Dreams

Written by another long-ago pal of mine who was an Editor of Time & Life and who retired from the magazine industry in 1983, this is a little gem. Stumbled upon it in a used bookstore for \$2. And it is a tale of Martha's Vineyard. So those of you who vacay there, jump all over this. It's just a wonderful little mystery novel centered around who murdered the very rich, very privileged, very renowned author, Mildred Silk who was famous most of all for her "acid-tongue and general mean-spiritedness." Self-appointed doyenne of the summer season at the Vineyard her parties were legend. To be invited was to be victimized by her but to NOT be invited was even worse. Someone took her out, who? As the flyleaf says, this book is "frequently sarcastic, often hilarious and an unflaggingly thrilling tour of the celebrity mansions, gardens and morgues of the Vineyard." Each bookletter has a little "gem" that probably most have not heard of, this is it for this letter. Terrific read

22. Bonnie Garmus

Lessons in Chemistry

What?? How the hell did this get in here? Well, I was pushed from a couple of points. It was rated THE best book of 2022 by Barnes & Nobles. For real! And it was a favorite book of a certain Ladies Book Club whose members I know well. . I've gotta try some stuff out of my comfort zone and this was it. I will admit I found it fun to read. By no means weighty but definitely fun. And the cover says "laugh-out-loud funny, shrewdly observant, and studded with a dazzling cast of supporting characters, *Lessons in Chemistry* is as original and vibrant as its protagonist." Okay, I surrender. Worth the read just to see what America thinks is great. And not just books liked by a grumpy old guy focusing on mysteries and thrillers.

23. Javier Cercas

Even the Darkest Night

This is an excellent book. Originally written in Spanish, the lead character is Melchor Marren a young cop from the big city of Barcelona. As a teenager he went to prison, convicted of working for a Columbian drug cartel and then he read a book while imprisoned titled *Les Misérables* and it changed his life. His mother was murdered, he decided to become a policeman. And the action and story take place in Terra Alta a remote region of rural Catalonia where he investigates a serious double murder. And then it becomes clear that nothing is as it seems. Not my best description by any stretch. I forget how I even stumbled on this. But it is really an outstanding read from a part of the world that actually does interest me. Namely Catalonia. But that's not necessary to enjoy it.

24. A.F. Carter

The Yards

25. _____

The Hostage

Both of these stories take place in Baxter, a Rustbelt town that has most definitely seen better days. The lead character in both is Delia Meriola, Head of detectives in a tiny police force, a single mom, pretty poor, a lesbian, and all the while, a determined really good cop who recognizes the hand she's been dealt in this decaying town and plays it brilliantly. Each book is a standalone mystery that really keeps one guessing till the end. I stumbled on these down at The Mysterious Bookshop and bought them despite knowing that A.F. Carter is a pseudonym for somebody. Two surprising, highly credible, entertaining detective stories set in a time and place in Middle America that is very real. Two very undiscovered jewels of the mystery genre. Read *The Yards* first .

Well, that's it for books. Just one television recommendation: (I know,I know, back to being a slug)

1. Slow Horses – Season 2

If you remember the last booklet, I strongly recommended Season 1. Season 2 is even better. All written by our pal, Mick Herron who wrote the eight books in this series. Cannot recommend it more highly. Tremendous casting, production, the whole nine yards. And there is a Season 3 coming. For those who don't recall, the story line is based around a group of basically washed-out MI-5 spies who have been "sentenced" to waste out their remaining years in the service at Slough House under the dissolute leadership of Jackson Lamb. They're not meant to do anything but the inevitably wind up getting in the middle of some of the biggest issues and cases in the UK and inevitably wind up both pissing off and showing up the doyennes of Regent Park HQ. Gary Oldman brilliantly plays the wonderfully "incorrect" Mr. Lamb. Better job on TV next time.

Brendan

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