
East Tennessee **Writer**

Newsletter of the Knoxville Writers' Guild
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Landis Will Read from Novel Aug. 1



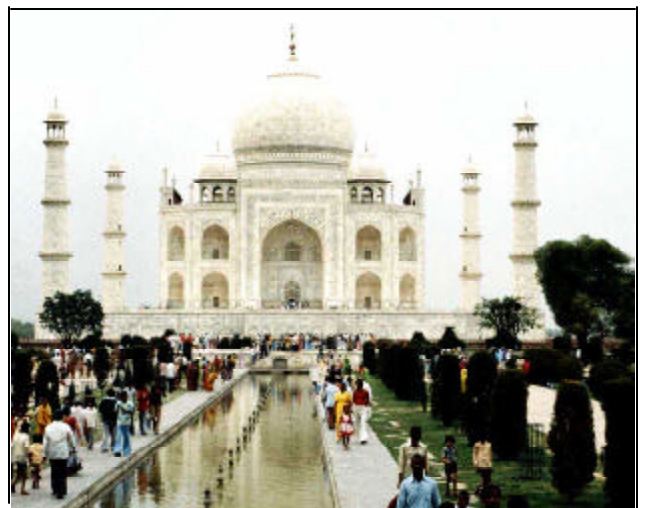
Catherine Landis, local author of *Sometimes There's Pie*, released in April by St. Martin's Press, will read from her work at the August 1 meeting of the Knoxville Writers' Guild and answer questions about her personal journey in writing. Cathy was the first winner of the annual Leslie Garrett short story competition sponsored by the Guild. Judges of the contest that year saw real promise in her work. She went on to write more short stories and then, three years ago, to begin work on a novel that emerged as *Sometimes There's Pie*. The book is already in its THIRD printing, and Cathy is now working on a second novel to fulfill her two-book contract with St. Martin's.

Her reviews have been consistently excellent. *Publishers Weekly* says, "Landis does a fine job of rendering these memorable characters, two iconoclasts on a quest to live big until they die." *BookList* says, "Landis' debut novel reads like a tougher version of *Fannie Flag*; fans of southern literature will surely appreciate this wry and clear-eyed tribute to the power of friendship." *Library Journal* says, "This is a new writer worth watching."

The program begins at 7 p.m. at the Laurel Theater on the University campus. The public is invited and refreshments will be served. A one-dollar donation is requested to support projects of the Guild.

INSIDE: Letters from India: Amy Smith Shares Details of an Unorthodox Summer Experience in an Era of Political Upheaval

On pages 3 and 4 inside, Amy Smith shares with us her letters home from India. This summer marked her second visit to that country, this time under conditions marred by political tension. See India through Amy's vivid descriptions of a country steeped in beauty and turmoil. Amy is currently a full-time student at Northern Arizona University, majoring in Business Accounting and minoring in Criminal Justice. She also works at Lowell Observatory as a public program assistant and is a member of the Army National Guard. At 17 she joined the U.S. Army, working as a preventive medicine specialist and as the Commanding General's staff assistant. She graduated from her Advanced Individual Training with top distinguished honors. After graduation she plans to earn a master's degree in international relations.



The Writing News



Upcoming Programs

September 5

Ted Olson, speaker for September, is currently serving as interim director of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University. A book Olson edited, James Still's *From the Mountain/ from the Valley: New and Collected Poems* (University Press of Kentucky, 2001), recently received the Appalachian Book of the Year Award for 2002 from the Appalachian Writers Association.

During his presentation Olson will read selections from two of his books—*So Far: Poems* (Creeker Press, 1994) and *Blue Ridge Folklife* (University Press of Mississippi, 1998)—as well as writings published in various periodicals/journals. All of these selections will reflect Olson's efforts to understand two sometimes parallel, sometimes linked themes: the inter-relationships between people and nature and between the contemporary individual and cultural history.

October 10

A. G. Hamon, Peter Taylor Prize Winner for 2001, will read. (Please note that this program will be the SECOND Thursday of the month rather than the first.

November 7

Irene Zabytko, UT visiting novelist, whose book, *The Sky Unwashed*, is about the Chernobyl accident, taught 60 miles from the site six years after the accident and uses her students' stories plus her own experiences, gleaned from traveling thru deserted, contaminated villages.

December 5

Poet Danny Marion and son Stephen, a novelist, will read from their work. We will also have the traditional pot-luck Christmas buffet.

All meetings will be held at the Laurel Theater at 7 p.m.

Cheuse to Be Final Judge for 2002 Peter Taylor Novel Competition



Alan Cheuse (Ph.D., Rutgers University, 1974) is the author of three novels, two collections of short fiction, and the nonfictional *Fall Out of Heaven*. As a book commentator, Cheuse is a regular contributor to National Public Radio's "All Things Considered," With Caroline Marshall, he has edited two volumes of short stories. His own short fiction has

appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Boston Globe Sunday Magazine*, *Another Chicago Magazine* and elsewhere. His articles, magazine journalism, and reviews have also appeared widely. A new collection of his short fiction was published in September of 1998.

KWG's 4th Anthology to be Released in Oct.

One of the highlights of the new anthology to be released by the Guild in October will be a prose/poem by Nikki Giovanni called "the train to Knoxville," about her father going off to college. The work has never before been published, and after its debut appearance in *Literary Lunch*, Giovanni will include it in her book, *Quilting the Black-Eyed Pea*, due out in December by HarperCollins.

Also included will be an excerpt from Allen Wier's new novel, *Tejano*, a section called "Hunger in the Swamp."

Among the 81 "entrees" included in the book are short stories by Jack Mauro, Jack Rentfro, Don Williams, Joseph Michael DeGross, Catherine Crawley, David Joyner and others.

Knoxville-born poet Nikki Giovanni in an earlier photograph



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

BY JULIE AUER



I write creative nonfiction and alternative fiction for the most part, but I've had some small success with what might be called serious literary fiction. So small and so long ago, in fact, that it no longer bears mentioning. (Don't call me a hack. I prefer the term "sell out.") Writing is hard work, but I like to have fun with it, too. It's my nature. When asked recently how I reconcile my literary taste for the works of such writing luminaries as Willa Cather, Flannery O'Connor, Evelyn Waugh, and Truman Capote with the base fact that I write crime fiction in

my spare time, I had this to say: I read *crème fraîche*, but I write cream cheese.

The writer has a responsibility to the English language and to the art of writing, to be sure. I also think the writer has a responsibility not to drive her reader to suicidal fits of boredom. Michael Chabon, author of *Wonder Boys*, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, and some of the best short fiction ever, is a champion of writing. Not just because his use of the language is stunning -- his genius for metaphor brings me nearly to tears of envy -- but because he can tell a story that makes you not care what time it is, or that you're hungry. His prose is at once elegant and witty and cool. Totally devoid of sentimental cheap shots, it makes the reader charge right along with the story.

Probably just for fun and to show off, Chabon wrote a short story called "In the Black Mill," an homage to the horror fiction of H.P. Lovecraft and others who made the pulp fiction of the 1930's and 40's almost respectable. The fact that Chabon obviously reads or has read the stuff, coupled with his contribution to it, is proof enough for me that the oft-scooped "genre" style of writing is, in fact, a respectable and meritorious art form. Ruth Rendell, for example, is a British writer who rivals Agatha Christie in her impact on mystery and crime fiction. She makes Patricia Cornwell look like, well, Patricia Cornwell. Stephen King is roundly booed as a hack by the sentinels of proper fiction writing. They're wrong. King's horror fiction, while certainly not Pulitzer material, is nonetheless steeped in the tradition of Poe and his legacy.

My point is, there is a demand for genre fiction, and there is a lot of good genre fiction out there. Those who would deny that need to get a life. There's room for everybody, from the vanguard of literary fiction to the rearguard of pulp writers. There's room for them in the world of writing, and there's room for them in the Knoxville Writers' Guild. If you write mystery, horror, romance, science fiction, or other genre styles, contact me **about starting a genre writing group. It's high time.** degaard@earthlink.com

We need your vote on a proposed \$5 dues hike. Members will vote at the August 1 meeting. Please also remember to vote in city and county elections Aug. 1.

Forgetfulness

A poem by Billy Collins

The name of the author is the first to go
followed obediently by the title, the plot,
the heartbreaking conclusion, the entire novel
which suddenly becomes one you have never read,
never even heard of

as if, one by one, the memories you used to harbor
decided to retire to the southern hemisphere of the brain,
to a little fishing village where there are no phones.

Long ago you kissed the names of the nine Muses
good-bye

and watched the quadratic equation pack its bag,
and even now as you memorize the order of the planets,
something else is slipping away, a state flower perhaps,
the address of an uncle, the capital of Paraguay.

Whatever it is you are struggling to remember
it is not poised on the tip of your tongue,
not even lurking in some obscure corner of your spleen.

It has floated away down a dark mythological river

whose name begins with an L as far as you can recall
well on your own way to oblivion where you will join those
who have even forgotten how to swim and how to ride a bicycle.

No wonder you rise in the middle of the night
to look up the date of a famous battle in a book on war.

No wonder the moon in the window seems to have drifted
out of a love poem that you used to know by heart.



Billy Collins,
Poet Laureate
of the United
States

Letters from India

by Amy Smith

May 30: I arrived safely in India this morning (New Delhi) and immediately booked myself a hotel near the Central Railway Station, Hotel Bajrang. There is this unique type of air conditioner in my room. It sprays water on reeds on the inside of a box and there is a fan that blows



cold air out off of those reeds. Well, I turned it on and it blew out a whole lot more than air all over my clean white sheets! We have been having frequent power outages, and boy is it hot! After wandering around for a while, I sat down on a veranda with a friendly guy (Latif) who began talking to me about Kashmir, the violence, what's really going on, China, Bin Laden, and all sorts of other stuff of interest. He is a son of the owner of a large travel agency here, and suggested a few things to me before my group from North Carolina State University meets up over here (2 weeks+?). The rest of my group

held off on coming for a bit due to the rising tensions; but I had already gotten rid of my home, temporarily left my job, was packed, and have been to India before, so I decided to continue on. To put a long story short, I have rented a personal driver (chhh, there goes the power.. Whew, it came back.. chhh.. no.. ok!) and will be making a trip to the state of Rajasthan (Jaipur-Amjer-Kota-Bhopal-Agra), and many other cities. One major thing I will be doing is making a camel trek into the desert. I will be in touch along the way, but it will be much better than staying in this city where breathing the air in a day is equivalent to smoking 20 cigarettes, 40 in traffic! The man I am traveling with is Latif's friend, and knows India much better than me! Latif seems like a nice guy—has 6 wives and 13 children in Kashmir. Wow! After my week out, I will decide on another fun trip. I am meeting with all the family (Latif's) tonight at 7p.m. and head off at 7a.m. tomorrow morning. I am doing great and everyone seems nice enough in my part of town. Tomorrow will be a stressful day of road madness! It's not driving here, its plain madness out there! Three cars have already grazed me, but they do everyone, being that the streets are so narrow.

June 2: Right now am in Jaipur (Rajasthan). Internet has been scarce, and very expensive at the few places it is. Yesterday with the power outages all over the city, I constantly was getting cut off and gave up after the 7th time of losing it all. You know the power would go out at the oddest times, you would be in the middle of a conversation and wham! Pitch darkness! All you can do is sit there in the dark, feeling kinda weird and wait for the power to come back. Last night I stayed in Agra (Uttar Pradesh). There I saw the Taj Mahal, and too many forts to remember all of the names. I stayed in a really nice place, Raja is friends with everyone and has been getting me really good deals at safe places (200 Rs vs 600 Rs and 1 dollar = 48 Rupees). All last night I spent talking to one of Latif's older brothers about Kashmir, the current situations, and drinking Kashmir tea, which is said to add 5 years to your life. The people of India do not want war, it is only the politicians. You would never know from how the media sounds that things are quite calm in the average town. It is only the borders that are bad. Even Kashmir is said to be more peaceful than ever. Do not trust everything you hear, there is a lot of hype and the media lies a lot here. If one person dies they say 10, and the tourists you hear about in the news being murdered— Well it was the Indian Army that did it, not the so-called freedom fighters. The tourists were Danish (kinda hippies) that I speak about and the Army asked them stop because they thought they were someone else of course. They did not understand and kept going and the Army shot them. Who for sure knows what will happen in the end; but the general feeling here is that the people do not want war, they do not want another Hiroshima.

After dinner last night, I drove our van that I have rented (a bit scary). Earlier, Raja, my driver, said, if you can ride that motor bike, I will buy you a beer and if not, you buy for me. It was a friend of my driver's motor bike, and I figured well, why not! I won the bet, but Raja drank the beer (Sirens outside). Today rode the bike to the only Internet place I could find. the only Internet place I could find. This morning I awoke early to someone tapping and pushing on my door. I said hello? No one answered and then they began it again. I was kinda worried and slowly opened the door; no one was there. I opened it a bit more and there stood three monkeys who wanted in!

June 9: Today I wandered around the city palace. I came across two men playing a flute and drums, high in the palace tower. I had followed the beautiful music. One of them motioned for me to sit down and handed me a metal instrument (like a drum symbol) and two sticks. I picked up a similar beat as best I could. The other stopped to rest a second from his flute and grabbed a large red turban and proceeded to wrap it around my head. Several locals walked by doing double takes. The streets are full of people trying to sell things. There are few tourists now and they (the vendors) flock to me when I step out of the car. It is very annoying but I have learned to say "chalo, chalo—be stem, " and they soon go. Snake charmers set up on the ground, wherever I walk. The heat is unbearable, especially in Indian dress. Later I came across a beautiful wedding. There was music, and dancing in the streets. Men carried large lights with a generator carted by a horse at the back of the gathering. The band struck up some festive music and I was soon invited to the wedding. I spent the evening watching interesting ceremonial traditions take place, where the groom was anointed with powders and interesting markings. At 12 p.m. I headed back to my hotel to sleep.

June 16: Today is Sunday. The past days I have spent on a bus making a 28-hour journey up into the Himalayas. The air is clean here and pine trees surround me. I am staying in a houseboat on a lake, which is surrounded by the foothills of the Himalayas. Internet is scarce, so I may not be heard from again for a week.

June 24: Almost now, there is a full moon. On Friday the 21st, the Prime Minister of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, visited the convention center just beside my houseboat for a special event. The day before, the President of the Nationalist Conference Group was shot in the head in old town and grenades were thrown at some VIPs' cars. All that is targeted is the Indian Government Officials. Military and Police security forces were everywhere, with multiple checkpoints along the roads. I saw an autorickshaw driver mistakenly pass through one without stopping and then get clubbed and kicked by a military officer. All I could hear was "sorry, sorry" while we then passed through with ease. Guess I look too innocent to be any threat. Armored jeeps with armored windows with small peepholes, along with tanks, lined the streets. The military here carry an assortment of weapons, and each adds his own special twist to his uniform, so none are quite the same. Currently I sit outside the houseboat, . It is evening now. Upbeat Hindi music is coming from a Shikara boat passing by, and my feet dangle in the warm water. Slowly now, it is beginning to rain. Yesterday the entire family and I made a long journey by car to a mosque called Baba Shakur Din, where a holy man is buried. The mosque sits on a hilltop overlooking the largest lake in Asia. Inside is a stone casket where the holy man lies. People journey here from all over India to say a prayer and make a wish that will hopefully come true. When you make your wish, you tie a small piece of fabric from one of your outfits or a bangle to the casket. I saw many very sick people there too who would just lay down on the floor in tears begging, I guess it is true that all that is left for them to do is to pray. I too made a wish and tied a small piece of brown fabric from my outfit to the casket. When it is granted, I am supposed to journey back and remove another one. I can tell though that there are many ungranted wishes, for the temple overflows with them. We then traveled down to the lake, which overlooks the Mughal empire's ruins. There I met a village math teacher and gave a student of his a quarter and told him that now he can prove to all of his friends that he met an American girl in the park. The day before, I went for a picnic in the Himalayas with Ruby, Latif, and Jabar. There (cont. next page)

(continued) we walked through small riverside villages and chatted with horsemen and locals. Tomorrow will be a day of market bargaining and street-wandering, and on the 28th, I head back to Delhi.

June 26: Currently I sit by candlelight composing this letter.

Internet has been scarce so it is best to go prepared. The past ten days I have been in the mountains, and may continue to stay here for the rest of my trip. The past week I have been trekking in the Himalayan Mountains with Latif, Jabara, 2 horsemen, 4 ponies and a chicken. All day long we would face sudden rain or hail storms, literally racing with the weather to be sure we could make it to our next campsite before the storms came again. If it was sunny out, all was safe but rain caused the glaciers to become treacherous and we risked having the ponies fall through and break a leg. Several times, I myself went through the snow up to my waist and would have to claw my way back out to a firm spot. It was really quite hilarious, but a lot of hard work on your legs trudging about. Our goal was a small mountain glacier lake 4000+ meters, surrounded by wild flowers and unknown beauty. Our journey began by a small village, up through pine forests past gypsy homes and shepherders, over a snow-covered mountain and into a grassy valley of nothing but wildflowers and bones. Every night we would set up camp, cook a huge meal and sing songs around the fire. The only American song we could come up with was "I'm a Barbie Girl" and "No woman no cry." I almost died laughing at the time we had trying to mimic the tones of the songs. Shepherders would stop to chat with us, gypsy children would follow me around endlessly in amazement of my skin color (to my horror even to try to watch me bathe and change!). We met one boy named Saddam Hussein. The journey brought us all very close and I was disappointed when it came to an end. Only the chicken did not make it back. When I look back now on the mountains we have crossed, if you had shown me pictures, I would have wondered if it was possible.

Currently I am staying on a houseboat at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains. The houseboats here are unlike any others in the world, all hand-carved, mainly out of walnut, and with such intricate detail. The area is beautiful; yesterday Latif and I took a shikara (type of boat here) around the lake past floating vegetable gardens, what were once very expensive brick homes, lily gardens, parks in the middle of the lake and a Hindu cremation site. Everything you can find in the streets, you can also find on the lake. Men come up offering fresh roasted corn, there are jewelry retailers, tailors, snack boats and yes even beggars all on shikaras or other small boats who will paddle up to your pier steps. During my time here a Dutch radio station has also interviewed me and other friends of mine in India said they saw me on Zee TV news. In a day or so I may head to a small Tibetan style village in the mountains, which has been virtually untouched by present-day life.

This was my second trip to India and I was enrolled at JNU in New Delhi, for Hindi and Urdu language studies. When the nuclear crisis broke out, I stayed on so that I could understand better what it is like, since I will one day be working in the international relations field. Most of my time was spent in Kashmir, where the heart of these problems lay. There I learned more than any book could have ever taught me on what the real situation is and how the people feel. The experience is irreplaceable and I plan to continue to study various countries and then travel to them so as to experience it first hand. I first started doing things like this when I was active duty military and have not stopped since. Too many people today walk around blind to the outside world, we all know someone like that. More people should open their eyes to what is going on around us. With the myriad of information being thrown at us today, all too often the truth becomes blurred. In our changing world it is imperative that we not only know what is going on, but also the reasons for it. It is essential that we as a nation understand the world's various customs and cultures, for much of that helps explain the reasons behind the events we are seeing take place today.

July 2: At 0430 a.m. I awoke to the chirping sound of my alarm.

Quickly I got ready and then knocked on the kitchen door to awaken Jabar (that is where he sleeps). This morning we were heading to the vegetable market. We pushed off from the rickety pier. The morning lake was smooth as glass. In the east we could see the sun rising from behind the mountains. After about 15 min. of paddling, we rounded a bend to where a mob of 60 or so Shikara boats fought for space on the water. Each farmer was auctioning off his vegetables to the local vendors. The reason it is all done by boat is because the vegetables are grown on floating gardens on the lake. I was quickly chased by a local flower vendor who carried a wide assortment of different colors and sizes of flowers. After snapping a few pictures and chatting with the locals we headed back, only stopping for the morning's milk and bread.

July 3: Every morning I have looked up to the mountain to see a small stone tower peeking through the trees, and above it blowing in the breeze a red flag. Today, curiosity got the better of me. Early in the morning Jabar and I set off to climb the mountain. Passing quietly through the military checkpoint we glided up the mountain past pomegranate and apricot trees, berry bushes and flowers. Occasionally we would come across a group of a few young boys carrying bags of apricots back down the mountain. Finally after 2 hours of climbing we reached the top of the mountain, which smelled sweetly of pine. We both underwent a vigorous military pat-down and then climbed the 268 steps to the foot of the temple. The temple was over 500 years old and was dedicated to a BG of the Indian Army who passed away in 1923. Surrounding the entrance were photographs of other Indian Army soldiers, who had died in the line of duty, most of the Border Security Force. We walked slowly up the very last few very high stone steps into the temple. There in the front sat a smooth cone-shaped stone. A clay pot hung above it with a small hole in the bottom in which a rose was stuffed. Water dripped down from the rose petals onto the stone, making it glisten beautifully. Around the stone, incense billowed up and coins, powders, rice and flowers lay. A young boy stood there trying to eat the rice as his mother swatted him and resumed prayers. As each of the Hindus stepped in, the holy man by the stone took blessed water and spooned it into their cupped hands. The people then drank some and threw the rest over their heads. He then placed a yellow powder bindi mark on each of their foreheads. They each left an offering, touched the stone and then themselves and backed out, never once taking their eyes off the stone. The whole way back down the mountain we spent our time climbing apricot trees to shake down the ripe fruit, eating the best ones as we went. Once we were offered a ride back down with a few military men, but we thanked them and politely refused, since it is well known that many people have disappeared around these parts after getting into one of their vehicles. It was evening by the time we reached the bottom of the mountain.

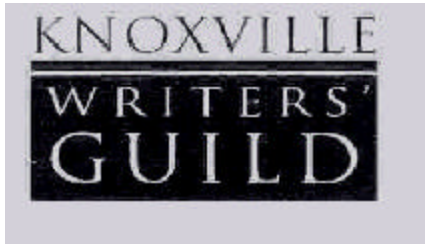
Well, I am back in Delhi now and this evening head to Varanasi. It is very hot here, 48 degrees C. and up! Last night I was awake most of the night sweating for without electricity and the fan, sleeping is impossible! Varanasi should not be too different than Delhi as far as the heat goes, but it will be interesting to see.

Postscript, July 22: I actually barely made it back to the states. I caught Shigella (bacteria from contaminated food and water) on the last day or two when I was in India. The water filtration devices in New Delhi stopped working properly and the tap water we were drinking was basically sewage water. So the boiling that we always do didn't work. Either that or it got me in the shower or on the washed dishes. Who knows? I was so sick though, that as soon as I got to Flagstaff, I had to be taken to the emergency room. That's where they found out what I had and started me on antibiotics. It's pretty much gone now, but it's been tough keeping up with the military while still being in a recovery stage.

Knoxville Writers' Guild:

Organized in December 1992 in Knoxville, TN, to facilitate a broad, inclusive and egalitarian community among area writers; to provide a forum for information, support and sharing among writers; to help members improve and market their writing skills, and to promote writing and creativity in the wider community through education, publication, and sponsorship of writing-related public events. Meetings are held the first Thursday of each month at the Laurel Theater. **Officers:** President: Julie Auer; Vice President: Don Williams; Secretary: Kim Trevathan; Treasurer: Laura Still; Hospitality: Kay Newton; Publicity: Marybeth Boyanton; President Emeritus: Jack Reese; VP Emeritus: Michael Gillespie; **Newsletter Editor:** Jeanne McDonald; **Webmistress:** Jo Ann Pantanizopoulos. **Board Members:** Julia Auer, Marybeth Boyanton, Robert Boyd, Jacqueline Kittrell, Judy Loest, Robert Lydick, Kay Newton, Caroline Norris, Elaine Oswald, Pamela Schoenwaldt, Laura Still, Kim Trevathan, Penny Tschantz, and Don Williams. Dues are \$20, \$15 for students. The KWG does not discriminate against any person because of race, age, gender, handicap or country of national origin. Send e-mail messages to editor, jmd531k@msn.com, or to president Julie Auer at hildegaard@earthlink.com

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HOW TO JOIN

To join the Writers' Guild, complete the form below and mail to P.O. Box 10326, Knoxville, TN 37939, along with annual dues of \$20, or give the form and your check to any board member of the Guild. Dues are \$15 if you are a student. Membership allows you to participate in study groups, receive discounts on books and Guild-sponsored merchandise, and monthly issues of the newsletter.



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