

Not Place, But People

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Not Place, But People

by [Beatrice Otter](#)

Summary

The older *Enterprise* wasn't destroyed after all. When it limps back to Earth, Trip finds Lorian and invites him home to meet the family.

Notes

My home is not a place, it is people, sir....--Cordelia's Honor, by Lois McMaster Bujold
Written for paranoidangel in Star Trek Holidays 2022
Betaed by VelvetMouse

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Trip leaned against the wall outside one of the many briefing rooms at Starfleet HQ and tried to occupy his mind with the latest paper put out by the Copernicus Institute on hypothetical designs for intermix chambers in warp engines. Nothing he could use on *Enterprise*, of course; the whole engine would have to be rebuilt, and probably the nacelles, too, but still fascinating.

It didn't work, of course. What was in the briefing room was far *more* interesting.

Also, it wasn't just his imagination. Everyone who walked by was giving him really weird looks. He nodded to a lieutenant who was side-eyeing him so hard she almost walked into a wall. The lieutenant blushed and scurried away.

Obviously, all the gossip about the other *Enterprise's* crew—and just who Lorian's parents were—had already made it around HQ. Trip wondered if they'd tried to keep it quiet, or if it had been too big for that from the start.

Trip sighed. The briefing was *supposed* to have been over almost half an hour ago.

He didn't blame Starfleet for being unsettled by having a time-traveling *Enterprise* that was a century old filled with the crew's descendants suddenly appear at Earth. *Trip* was still weirded out by it, and he'd had almost two years to process it.

Technically, so had Starfleet. But there were a lot of things in the *Enterprise's* reports that Starfleet HQ didn't quite seem to believe. Well, they now had proof they couldn't ignore about *some* of it, anyway.

The door hissed open, and Trip straightened. Two admirals strode out followed by a cloud of aides. Trip braced to attention. Neither admiral looked at him, though a couple of the aides did. One shook his head as he walked by.

Trip paid them no mind. He could see Lorian behind them, talking with Jonathan's great-granddaughter Karyn. "Lorian!"

"Father!" Lorian said. "I see *Enterprise* has been recalled." He and Karyn stepped out of the flow of traffic next to Trip.

"Captain turned us around the minute we heard," Trip said. "We weren't doing anything time-sensitive—just mapping."

"Where is he now?" Karyn asked.

"In his own debriefing," Trip said. "Starfleet's a lot more interested in you guys now you've shown up here than they were when you were presumed dead and just a footnote in a more important mission. And a footnote they weren't sure they believed, no less. T'Pol's with him, and

then the Vulcan Embassy has asked her to debrief with them. They *certainly* didn't believe the report, because they don't believe time travel is possible."

Karyn snorted.

Lorian raised an eyebrow. "Then she'll be busy for quite a while."

"Unfortunately, yeah," Trip said. He paused. "How's ... your mother?" he asked. His future self's relationship with T'Pol was unbelievable now in a whole *different* way than it had been when he and Lorian first met. How much simpler things had been, before T'Pol's marriage and divorce and the publicity surrounding Elizabeth's creation and death.

"Mother is in the infirmary at the Vulcan embassy," Lorian said. "They have not yet determined if she will need to go to Vulcan for treatment, or if the embassy's healers will be sufficient."

"I hope it's nothing serious," Trip said.

Lorian shrugged. "Our medical supplies were always ... limited, and after Phlox's death the quality of our medical staff declined rapidly. Mother was often at the forefront of the action, given the more durable nature of Vulcan physique, and so has a number of chronic conditions caused or worsened by various incidents over the course of our century in the past. That, combined with her age ... with proper healthcare and a quiet lifestyle, Vulcans can live to be almost 300."

"But she hasn't had either of those," Trip pointed out.

Lorian nodded soberly. "She will certainly live longer—and more comfortably—now that we are here than she would have otherwise. What that will mean, only time will tell."

Trip nodded, awkwardly. He'd always known T'Pol would outlive him, but the possibility that the *elder* T'Pol might outlive him had never occurred to him. It wasn't very likely, but he'd experienced too many bizarre long-shot things to completely discount it.

"They've given us all Earth identification cards and credit balances," Karyn said. "Groups of us have been going out each night to sample the local food. You're welcome to join us?"

"Thank you for the invitation, but actually I have one for Lorian," Trip said. "It's Friday, so they're not gonna bring you guys back in for more meetings until Monday morning. I'd like to take you to meet my parents. But if your mom's in the infirmary, I don't know if you'll want to leave her."

"Mother's health is no worse than it has been for some time," Lorian said. "She should not require my presence in the next several days. I would be happy to accept."

"Great!" Trip said.

"Then I'll see you in a couple of days," Karyn said.

"I dunno when they're going to be done with Captain Archer and T'Pol," Trip told her, though he wasn't sure whether Jonathan would be interested in the same sort of bonding with his descendants as Trip was.

"That's okay," Karyn said. "It's kind of different for us. There are a lot of Archers, and most of us are too young to remember him anyway." She waved and headed off with the rest of the generation-ship's officers.

"Now, normally for guests, my Mama would make her famous pan-fried catfish, or grouper caprese," Trip told Lorian, "but she knows Vulcans are vegetarians, so I dunno what she's made, but whatever it is, it'll be good. We can take *Enterprise's* transporters—my *Enterprise*, I mean." There was a whole crowd of people from the briefing waiting for the elevator, so Trip lead Lorian towards the stairs.

"I'm not strictly vegetarian," Lorian said. "But I don't eat much meat—it depended on what we had available. I do have some food sensitivities, but I'd never eaten any Terran or Vulcan food before we made it back to Earth, so I'm not sure what might be a problem for me."

"Not even when our ships were working together?" Trip said. "You were on our *Enterprise* a while, and I know we gave you guys some fruits and veggies."

"It was a high-stakes time," Lorian said. "The last thing I wanted was to be distracted. So I kept to food that was safe."

"Understandable," Trip said. "Well, if I know Mama, she'll have a variety of stuff you can try."

Stairwells were awkward to talk in, so they lapsed into silence as they walked down three flights and out into the reception area. Starfleet HQ never slept, but there were more people on dayshift than any other, most of whom had either already left or were heading out now. Knots of people stood talking together, and Trip and Lorian threaded their way toward the front doors.

"Wondered if you'd show up, Trip," came a booming voice Trip recognized all too well.

Trip winced, but made sure his face was pleasantly neutral when he turned around. "Commander Loduca, fancy meeting you here." Starfleet was small; everyone knew everyone else. Loduca was a fellow engineer, though better at politics than the actual work, and he'd been gunning for Chief Engineer on either *Enterprise* or *Columbia*. Fortunately, his string-pulling hadn't managed to get him anything, but the last couple of times they'd encountered each other, Loduca had definitely had a case of sour grapes.

"I see you've had a *second* half-Vulcan kid pop out of nowhere," Loduca said. "That's, uh, quite an accomplishment. Guess we know who to go to now for liaison work with the Vulcans. Congratulations on your fatherhood!"

"Thanks," Trip said dryly. It wasn't worth engaging any further, he had better things to do with his time. He waved and turned back towards the door.

"*Second* half-Vulcan?" Lorian asked as they walked outside.

Trip sighed. "Yeah." He walked over to one of the planters further away from the building and took a seat. Lorian sat next to him. He hadn't planned on telling Lorian about Elizabeth, not this meeting at least. They had a lifetime's worth of relationship to build, and that was more than enough for one weekend. Trip had figured he'd keep it simple, just a bit of getting to know each other without the pressure of saving Earth hanging over their heads. But thanks to Loduca's big fat mouth, that was no longer an option.

Trip wiped a hand over his face. "There's a xenophobic terrorist group called Terra Prime. Want to exclude all non-Humans from the solar system, make it illegal to do business with aliens, that sort of thing. They took a lot of their philosophy from Colonel Green. They were a fringe group before the Xindi attack, but they jumped on that with both hands and made themselves a force to be reckoned with. They're losing ground now, thank God, and their leader's in jail with a life sentence, but..." He shook his head. "They decided to 'prove' that humans and aliens shouldn't mix by creating a hybrid child with enough genetic flaws that she couldn't possibly survive to be more than a couple months old."

"And they used your DNA, and mother's, to do it?" Lorian said.

"Yup." Trip shrugged. "They chose T'Pol because she was serving on an Earth ship, and we never did figure out why they chose me to pair her with. There was never anything public about our relationship. They were trying to make a big public stink—surely the captain of the ship would be the logical choice for the human parent? The captain was the one who was in all Starfleet's publicity material." He sighed again. "We got tipped off to her existence, went looking, found her. Named her Elizabeth."

"After your sister?"

"Yeah. She died just a couple days later."

"It must have been difficult," Lorian said.

"It was," Trip said. "But at the same time, I didn't even have time to get used to the idea that she existed before she was gone. If she'd survived, I woulda loved her, been her dad. But she didn't, and ... part of what made it hard was the whole thing was so public. Starfleet broadcast the funeral as counter-propaganda. T'Pol and I had to be the picture-perfect grieving parents."

Lorian didn't say anything, which Trip appreciated. He'd heard all the platitudes a hundred times over.

He stood up and took out his communicator. "Well. Mom and Dad are probably wondering what's keeping us."

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After the destruction of Florida and the death of their daughter Elizabeth, Trip's parents had relocated to Tupelo, Mississippi. Their street was lined with elegant post-World War III rowhouses, with trees and small gardens in front of each house and a park two blocks down.

"Still strange to visit them here," Trip said, looking up at his parents' home. "I spend so much of my time in space that I haven't been *here* enough for it to feel familiar."

"I admit to much the same feeling about, well, all of Earth," Lorian said.

"Must be weirder for you, though," Trip said as he walked through the garden to the front door. "I mean, this isn't what I picture in my head when I think of my parents' place, but all things considered it's not *that* different from where I grew up. It's only, what about four hundred miles away?"

"Whereas for me, this entire *planet* was something found only in historical records and the stories my elders told," Lorian said.

Trip opened the door and stuck his head in. "We're here!" he said.

"Glad you made it!" Dad said, bustling up and giving Trip a hug. Mom poked her head out of the office and followed suit.

"Hey, Mom, Dad," Trip said. He stepped in, Lorian at his heels. "This is my son, Lorian. Lorian, these are my parents, Charlie Tucker the Second and Emily Szalay."

Lorian was clasping his hands behind his back, in the stiffest Vulcan posture Trip had ever seen him in. "It is a pleasure to meet you," he said, bowing.

"Likewise," Dad said. "Trip's told us about you, but ... he didn't know much. Just enough to know we were missing out by not knowing you."

"Goodness, you *do* have that Tucker look," Mom said. "I'm so glad you were able to make it to Earth so that we could meet you."

"I'm glad, too," Lorian said. He hesitated. "I'm sorry we weren't able to stop the Xindi weapon before it hit Earth."

Dad clapped a hand over his mouth. Mom wrapped her arms around her waist and turned away.

Trip put his hand on Lorian's shoulder and squeezed. He didn't know if Lorian could pick up his thoughts this way like T'Pol could, but he

tried to make his mind as reassuring as possible. "If it was possible to do, you would have done it."

"I'm sure Trip's right," Dad said unsteadily.

"It wasn't your fault," Mom said, still turned away. "It was the Xindi."

It was a bit more complicated than that, but now wasn't the time or place to discuss that. For the first time, Trip was glad it had taken the other *Enterprise* two years to get themselves safe, repaired, and limp back to Earth. If Lorian had shown up earlier—his guilt complex combined with everyone else's fresh grief would have been a hard combination.

Mom took a deep breath and turned around. "You must be hungry, if you've been in meetings all day. I wasn't sure what you liked, so I made a bunch of different things."

"I've never actually had any Earth food before we arrived two weeks ago," Lorian said, "so I'm not sure what I like, either. I do have some food sensitivities, but nothing has triggered any problems so far."

"Were they worse when you were a kid?" Mom asked, leading the way into the dining room.

"Much worse," Lorian said. "Doctor Phlox was able to go in and make some adjustments, which helped." He stopped in the doorway, surveying the table covered in food, and both eyebrows raised. Evidently he hadn't taken Trip's comments on Mom's cooking seriously enough.

"Let me guess," Mom said, gesturing for them to come in and take a seat. "When he was designing your hybrid genetics, he forgot that your gut biome would *also* have to be hybridized."

"Essentially, yes," Lorian said. "Are you a geneticist?"

"Trip didn't tell you?"

"His stories tended more to family moments than professional ones, for both of you," Lorian said.

"Also, I died when he was fourteen," Trip said. "Which was a long time ago, for him."

Dad sucked in a breath.

"Hey, things are different in this timeline," Trip said. "I'm not going to die the same way I did in Lorian's past."

"I'm a dietician," Mom told Lorian. "Most people forget the importance of the gut biome in peoples' digestive health and nutrient intake. Even doctors, who really should know better." She began pointing out the various food laid out on the table, with explanations of what it was and what was in it, along with nutritional profiles and other dietary information. Lorian responded in kind, and before long they were working out which ones would be safest for him to eat.

Trip and Dad just started filling up their plates and eating.

"Do you drink alcohol?" Dad asked. "We've got wine, or beer. Or coffee, tea, couple different kinds of fruit juice ..."

Lorian smirked. "We spent a lot of time and effort trading for food and other necessities," he said. "And a lot of the species that live in the Expanse, their tastes and nutritional needs aren't very compatible with Humans, Vulcans, Denobulans, or anyone else aboard *Enterprise*. So sometimes we'd end up with stuff that was edible, but not ... anything you'd choose to eat if you had a choice. But you know what you can do with just about any edible plant matter?"

"Turn it into moonshine?" Mom said.

"The alcohol might not taste any better than what we made it out of, but at least it didn't taste *worse*," Lorian said. "And it stored well. And it was pretty much always worth more than the original food, so we could trade it for food we liked better."

"So what you're saying is, you've had a wide variety of alcohol, some of it *very* bad," Dad said. "Interested in trying something that's actually good?"

"I would be delighted," Lorian said.

"So what did you do for fun, besides drink bad moonshine?" Mom asked as Dad got out some wine and poured for everyone.

Lorian shrugged. "We were always tight on space, and low on resources. Board games. Card games. Movie nights—both stuff the original crew had had, and media we picked up along the way. We have a choir, though I'm not in that." He took a bite of a black bean arepa and chewed. "Large-scale games, whenever we had a cargo bay free. Sometimes we'd dock with a station with more amenities, or more space, though most of them charged too much to make it a regular thing unless we had a job there, which meant most of us would be too busy working to enjoy the station." He took a sip of the wine, making an approving face. "Every so often we'd find a Minshara-class planet and stay in orbit for a few weeks, shuttling as many people down as we could for as long as we could. There were a couple of planets we hit regularly, as they had plants and animals we could harvest as food for ourselves and sometimes even sell. It was hard work, but at least it was a different *kind* of hard work, so we made a bit of a holiday about it." He started in on an eggplant fritter.

"Must've been hard," Trip said. "Keeping a ship and crew that size going without any outside support. I can't imagine. And food is one thing—what about spare parts? The warp core has some specialized stuff in there that the *Enterprise's* machine shops aren't equipped to make or repair."

"We figured out workarounds," Lorian said. "Of course, now Starfleet is throwing a fit at some of them—too risky."

"I'd like to see them do any better, under the circumstances," Trip said.

"They're welcome to try." Lorian shrugged, taking another sip of his wine.

"What's going to happen to your ship?" Dad asked.

"Well, it's barely spaceworthy, at this point," Lorian said. "The Kovaalans did a number on us. I'm honestly surprised we managed to make it all the way to Earth in one piece."

"I'm sorry we couldn't help," Trip said.

Lorian shrugged. "There was no way for you to know we'd gotten sucked into another time jump, and even if you had, no way of anticipating when we'd come out. And you had a mission to complete. I'm not saying it wouldn't have been nice to have you there when we came out of the corridor, I'm just glad things turned out as well as they did. Coming *forward* in time instead of *back* was a nice surprise."

"Especially given the much shorter jump this time," Trip said.

"A year was just enough time for you to make a treaty with the Xindi, so that the space around the Kovaalan corridor was safe for us to stop and make repairs in, and could limp to Earth," Lorian said. "There's some debate about who actually owns our *Enterprise*, whether Starfleet, or the crew as a whole. But it'll never fly again for anything other than short hops. Even if they decide we *do* own it, we're going to have to find another home. Homes."

"It's hard, to lose your home and have to start over," Dad said, somberly.

Mom took his hand and squeezed. "On a lighter issue, what about the *immediate* future? What do you want to do this weekend?"

Lorian spread his hands. "I have no idea." He turned to Trip. "What did you do for fun when you were home?"

"Well, you've already seen all my favorite movies," Trip said. "Other than that, I swam in the bay a lot, or sometimes went out into the Gulf on a boat. Fishing, or scuba diving, or just enjoying the water. Which, these days...." He shook his head.

"It'll be a long time before the geology and ecology of the Gulf Coast is stable enough for recreational water use," Dad said. "There's a lake not too far from here, where they rent boats, if you want?"

Trip made a face. It wouldn't be the same.

"I'd be happy with anything outdoors," Lorian said. "It's been a rare luxury my entire life."

"There's lovely trails and parks and things around this area," Mom said, and the conversation turned to local sights and trails.

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Mississippi time was two hours earlier than San Francisco, and neither of Trip's parents were night owls, so the two of them went to bed while Trip and Lorian stayed up to talk, sprawled on comfortable overstuffed chairs in the living room.

They chatted about *Enterprise*, for a while—all the little quirks that had somehow never been fixed, stories about things breaking at the worst possible moment, things like that. Lorian's century aboard the old girl had given him a vast font of knowledge, and Trip was humbled by the reminder that his son was a better engineer than he was.

A question had occurred to Trip, after they'd gotten through the Kovaalan corridor and thought the other *Enterprise* lost. "After I died," he said.

"Yes?" Lorian said.

"I know you still had your mother," Trip said. "I hope you had other people who were there for you."

"I did," Lorian said. "The crew was always very close."

"Jon?"

Lorian shook his head. "A little. He had children of his own, by then, and I was about ready to start my apprenticeship, and he was the captain. It was ... a bit awkward, figuring out where the boundaries should be. He was more of a mentor a few decades later, when he and mother were grooming me as a future captain. No, Uncle Mal was the one who really stepped in to help after you died."

"Mal, huh?" Trip said. "I can see that. You know, when we met up with you guys and he found out he spent the rest of his life alone, he was a bit disappointed with his future."

"Alone? No. Nobody on *Enterprise* was ever alone, not for long. We worked very hard to take care of each other, it was the only way it could work."

"You know what I mean," Trip said. "Never married, no kids, that sort of thing."

Lorian chuckled. "He can't have thought it through."

"What do you mean?" Trip said.

"*Enterprise* is not that big. Even the officer quarters are tiny. I understand that privacy was a premium even before we added families into the mix."

"But you knocked bulkheads out, combined cabins for married couples with kids," Trip pointed out.

"Twice nothing is still nothing," Lorian pointed out. "And you didn't get larger quarters until you had kids. One room, two people, no privacy except the head. He would've gone nuts. And say he'd had kids, and gotten that second room—Uncle Mal was great with kids. Older kids. Once they could talk. Babies ... not so much. And he *still* wouldn't have had space to himself." He snorted. "Uncle Mal, sharing quarters. We would've been peeling him off the ceiling within a month. No, he was *quite* happy to remain single, thank you."

"I'll have to be sure to tell him that," Trip said.

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The next morning the four of them drove out to the Pharr Mounds and spent the morning at the Interpretive Center, before having a picnic lunch.

They got a lot of strange looks and double-takes, when people noticed Lorian's ears.

"I'm sorry for peoples' bad manners," Dad said, frowning at someone who was too obvious in their repugnance.

Lorian shrugged. "I've always been an oddity. Even on *Enterprise*, where half our crew and families were mixed species by the end, there was only ever me and Mother."

"Still ain't right," Trip said.

"No," Lorian said. "But it is what it is. This is a bit worse than it is in San Francisco, but even there, it's not great. Some of our people have thought about getting another ship, maybe going into the cargo hauling business. But people want to stay together, and cargo haulers don't tend to be big enough for all of us. On the other hand, there aren't enough of us to start a viable colony."

"Anybody interested in Starfleet?" Trip asked.

"A few," Lorian said. "Mostly the younger ones. Personally, I'm ready for a career change. I've spent enough time as a captain."

"Any idea what you want to do?" Dad asked.

"Not a clue," Lorian said. "I spent most of my life focused on saving Earth and keeping the *Enterprise* going. Now that's done. But I have time to figure it out and re-train for any career I want. I'll be around for another century or so, probably."

"And you're ... already a hundred years old?" Mom said, faintly.

"About that, yeah," Lorian said.

"It is *weird* to have a grandson who is thirty years older than *I* am," Dad said. "I'm glad you're here, that you survived and came home to us. But it's ... nothing I could ever have imagined."

"It's pretty strange from this end, too," Lorian said. "Though I have had more time to get used to the idea, which helps."

When they were done eating, they headed out along the Natchez Trace for a hike. Most of the conversation was about the things they saw and that the various plants and animals were named. But some personal things cropped up.

"I notice you've never mentioned anything about a partner," Mom said at one point. They were walking in a line, with Dad up front, then Lorian, then Trip, then Mom.

"I haven't exactly been a monk, but no, nothing long-term," Lorian said. "Our dating pool was rather small, and then by the time I was XO, that made things even harder. I'm not pining away, but I wouldn't mind settling down with someone." Lorian turned to smirk at Trip. "Mother's *definitely* thinking of getting married, though."

"To who?" Trip said indignantly, stopping in his tracks. Then he realized Lorian meant the older T'Pol, not Trip's T'Pol.

"Whoever the clan finds for her," Lorian said. "Vulcans do arranged marriages," he explained to Mom and Dad, who had stopped as well and were watching both of them with interest, "and despite Mother's problems with that in her youth, they're usually very successful at matching people up with spouses they can be content with."

"Koss was a good man," Trip said, "and she fought like hell to avoid that marriage."

Lorian shrugged. "She wasn't done sowing her wild oats, yet. Still looking for adventure. And also, there was you." He gave Trip a significant look. "My mother is *done* with adventure, and you're a bit too young for her. A nice quiet life with someone new sounds appealing to her."

"I've been wondering this since I heard the whole story," Dad said. "How much of your parents getting together was just them being stuck on a

ship together, and how much was a deeper connection?"

"Dad!" Trip protested. "You've asked this before. You asked about it when I went to Vulcan on leave, you asked when we found out about Elizabeth, and I've told you all there is to tell."

"You haven't given me a straight answer," Dad said, "and I'm even *more* curious with the fruit of that deeper connection standing right here in front of me."

"They were ... very close, even before they were thrown into the past," Lorian said. "Would anything have happened between them without the time travel, I don't know. She would have had to make a major break with her clan and all of Vulcan, and to hear Mother tell the story, she was deep in denial. I'd certainly *like* to believe my parents loved each other so deeply they could overcome any obstacle—they did love each other deeply by the time I was old enough to pay attention—but things are ... very different now, than they were in my past."

"Right," Dad said, nodding. He opened his mouth to say something, then looked at Trip and changed his mind.

"*Thank* you," Trip said. "If we wanna finish this section of the trail and get back in time for dinner, maybe we should get a move on?"

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The next day, they went to the Buffalo Park and Zoo. Instead of a series of enclosures with different ecosystems, much of the park was an open area filled with animals interacting naturally, with visitors being driven through in buses. There wasn't any privacy to talk, so their conversation was mostly mundane things about the different animals they saw.

In the late afternoon they went back to Trip's parents' place and had lemonade in the garden.

"This has been a very pleasant few days, I'll be sorry to have to head back to San Francisco this evening," Lorian said.

"There's plenty of fun things to do in the Bay Area," Trip said. "You just aren't going to find them at Starfleet Headquarters."

"True, but I will miss the company," Lorian said, lifting his glass to his father and grandparents.

"Thank you, Lorian," Mom said. "You're welcome back any time, and we might come out there, if our schedules line up."

"I don't know how long *Enterprise* will be allowed to stay on Earth this time around," Trip said. "But I'd like to keep in touch. No matter what happens or where you end up."

"So would I," Lorian said. He paused. "It's been ... good to see you again. I've missed you."

Trip smiled, and put his hand on his son's shoulder. "Well, with any luck, this time around we'll have all the time in the world."

End Notes

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