

NORAS BUSY YEAR A BOOK ABOUT THE FOUR SEASONS

He went upstairs to change out of his dark blue suit and badly scuffed black shoes..With only a faint twinge of sentimental longing, he drove away from the house that had been his and Naomi's love nest for fourteen blissful months.. "When you called earlier in the year, to ask for a referral to a private investigator down there, the woman had recently turned up dead and Vanadium was gone, but no one put the two together at first." By dawn, when the intestinal paroxysms finally passed, this bold new man of adventure felt as flat and limp as road kill..Jacob grunted, but probably not because he'd heard what had been said about him, more likely because he'd just turned the page to find a photo of dead cattle piled up like driftwood against the American Legion Hall in some flood-ravaged town in Arkansas..Her awful sense of weightlessness became something much better: buoyancy, an exhilarating lightness of spirit. Fear remained with her-fear for Barty, fear of the future and of the strange complexity of Creation that she'd just glimpsed-but wonder and wild hope now tempered it.. "My little girl," she said, and belatedly she realized that this might not be a policeman, after all, but someone trying to determine if she and Angel were alone in the apartment..He spat on his right thumb, scrubbed the thumb against one of the dried drips on the floor, rubbed thumb and forefinger together, and brought the freshened spoor to his nose. He smelled blood.. "Are you all right?" he asked as he opened the passenger's door and helped her into the car..Junior was accustomed to having women seduce him. His good looks were a blessing of nature. His commitment to improving his mind made him interesting. Most important, from the books of Caesar Zedd, he had learned how to be irresistibly charming..He drove his yellow-and-white 1955 Ford Country Squire station wagon. He'd bought the car with some of the last money he earned in the years when he had been able to hold a job, before his ... problem.. "You'll catch pneumonia," she warned, reaching across the boy to flip the passenger's-side vent toward him..Eventually, a braless blonde in shiny white plastic boots, a white miniskirt, and a hot-pink T-shirt featuring the silk-screened face of Albert Einstein, said, "Sure, I know her. Had some classes with her. She's nice enough, but she's kind of nerdy, especially for an Afro-American. I mean, they're never nerdy--am I right?"..He closed his eyes to know the kitchen as Barty knew it. The fine aromas, the musical clink of spoons, the tinny rattle of pans, the liquid swish of a stirring whisk, the heat from the ovens, the women's voices: Gradually, denying himself sight, he was aware of his other senses sharpening..Scamp was a multitalented woman, with smoother skin than a depilated peach, with more delicious roundnesses than Junior could catalog, but she proved not to be the remedy for his tension. Only Bartholomew, found and destroyed, could give him peace..Unable to hold his breath or to quiet his miserable sobbing, Junior couldn't hear clearly enough to discern whether the sounds of the stalking sculpture were real or imagined. He knew that they had to be imaginary, but he felt they were real..When the convulsive seizure passed, as he collapsed back on the spattered pillow, shuddering at the stench rising from his hideously fouled clothes, Junior was suddenly struck by an idea that was either..Using a false name, claiming that he was an adoptee, Junior made inquiries with several child-placement organizations, as well as with state and federal agencies. He discovered that Wulfstan's story was true: Adoption records were sealed by law for the protection of the birth parents, and getting at them was all but impossible..Running footsteps, heading toward the ambulance. Apparently Kenny. The second paramedic.. "Living high. When I wasn't on the road, I had a fine house here in Bright Beach, not this rental shack I'm in now, but a nice little place with an ocean view. You can guess what went wrong."..Supposing that this new enthusiasm was an attempt to uncover skullduggery in Seraphim's accident, then the girl would be doing Junior a service even after her demise. Whether or not the traffic accident was an accident, Junior hadn't had anything to do with it..Inevitably, he had to wonder if Naomi had kept her pregnancy secret because, indeed, she suspected that the child wasn't her husband's..Nothing in life was risk free, so he hesitated only a moment: at the foot of the porch steps before climbing them and knocking on the door.. "Well, you see, that's the funny thing about all the important choices we make. If we make a really big wrong choice, if we do the really awful wrong thing, we're given another chance to continue on the right path. So the very moment I stupidly stepped off the curb without looking, I created another world where I did look both ways and saw the rhinoceros coming. And so-"..The moonlight had faded and the gentle waves had ebbed out of his mind's eye. He concentrated, trying to force the phantom sea to flow back into view, but this was one of those rare occasions when a Zedd technique failed him".Edom complied, and in the arc of red Bicycle patterns, one card revealed too much white comer, because it was the only one face up.. "Nah. Every secret society has a secret handshake. We'll have this instead." Her face was still close to his, and she rubbed noses with him..She looked down at her clutched hands. Made for work, these hands, and always ready to take on any task. Strong, nimble, reliable hands, but useless to her now, unable to perform the one miracle she needed. "Barty's birthday is in eight days. I was hoping. . ."..The window gave way an instant before Celestina squeezed off the shot. The man dropped out of sight. She didn't know if she had scored a hit..Neddy cooperated by not deigning to look back. Eventually, he stopped a young man who, judging by the name tag on the lapel of his blazer, was a gallery employee. They put their heads together in conversation, and then the musician headed through an archway into the second showroom..Halos and rainbows loomed in her memory, ominous as they had never been before.. "Peach, raisin, walnut pies," Agnes said, "with regular bottom crust and a chocolate-crackle top crust."..This thought startled Agnes, disturbed her-yet, inexplicably, it also poured a measure of warm comfort into her chilled heart..Since discovering the quarter in his cheeseburger, Junior had been half convinced that the maniac cop survived the bludgeoning. In spite of his grievous wounds, perhaps Vanadium had swum up through a hundred feet of murky water, barely avoiding being drowned..Already the fortune foretold, which she had strived to dismiss as a game with no consequences, was coming true.. "Done," Agnes said. "Now put away the three dollars, and let's have our lesson before my water breaks."..Nothing remained to be done but to

press her shoe in the butter and hammer her head into the corner of the oven door..This is a tale of those times. Some of it is taken from the Book of the Dark, and some comes from Havnor, from the upland farms of Onn and the woodlands of Faliern. A story may be pieced together from such scraps and fragments, and though it will be an airy quilt, half made of hearsay and half of guesswork, yet it may be true enough. It's a tale of the Founding of Roke, and if the Masters of Roke say it didn't happen so, let them tell us how it happened otherwise. For a cloud hangs over the time when Roke first became the Isle of the Wise, and it may be that the wise men put it there..During the past few years, he had discovered that a lousy few million could buy even more freedom than he had thought when he'd shoved Naomi off the fire tower. Great wealth, fifty or a hundred million, would purchase not only greater freedom, and not just the ability to pursue even more ambitious self-improvement, but also power..The pubescent physician returned with three colleagues, who crowded behind the privacy curtain to proclaim that none of them had ever seen any case remotely like this before. The oldest-a myopic, balding lump-insisted on asking Junior probing questions about his marital status, his family relationships, his dreams, and his self-esteem; the guy proved to be a clinical psychiatrist who speculated openly about the possibility of a psychosomatic component..Suddenly Junior intuited the identity of the man in the chair. Beyond question, this was the plainclothes police officer with the birthmark..Onward he came, past the left front fender, gleefully hopping up and down, as if on a pogo stick, still waving..Worrying is what mothers do best. Celestina was her mother, as far as Angel was concerned, and the child was not yet of an age to be told, and to understand, that she had been blessed with two mothers: the one who gave birth to her, and the one who raised her..Over many proud generations and at least to the extent of second cousins, no one on either side of Celestina's family had skin of this light color. They were without exception medium to dark mahogany, many shades darker than this infant..Lifted from his despair by this exhilarating wrath, Junior turned away from the mirror, looking for the bright side once more. Perhaps it was the bathroom window..Indeed, Junior suspected that they might be here at Vanadium's urging. The cop would be interested in determining how avaricious the mourning husband would prove to be when presented with the opportunity to turn his wife's cold flesh into cash..Other rooms were furnished as sparsely as those in a monastery. Indeed, the dining room contained nothing whatsoever..Dining room. Two place settings at one end of the table. Wineglasses. Two ornate pewter candlesticks, candles not yet lit..By November 1967, the Father Brown detective stories, written for mystery-loving adults by G. K. Chesterton, thrilled Barty. This series of books would retain a special place in his heart for the rest of his life-as would Robert Heinlein's *The Star Beast*, which was among his Christmas gifts that year..The traffic light turned green. Now onward home. Rolex recovered and bright upon his wrist, Junior Cain drove his Mercedes with a restraint that required more self-control than he had realized he could tap, even with the guidance of Zedd..When Agnes and Paul returned from a honeymoon in Carmel, they discovered that Edom had finally cleared out Jacob's apartment. He donated his twin's extensive files and books to a university library that was building a collection to satisfy a growing professorial and student interest in apocalyptic studies and paranoid philosophy..In reaction to a terrible sense of weightlessness, Agnes's two-fisted grip on the steering wheel grew so tight her hands ached. She held on with all her strength, as if at real risk of floating out of the car and up toward the source of the raveling skeins of rain..The air was spicy with incense and with the fragrance of the lemon oil polish used on the wooden pews..be entombed in one of those memorial walls, well above ground level, where nothing was likely to seep into them..She kicked off her shoes and sat beside him in bed, with her back against the headboard, still holding his hand. Even though this darkness wasn't as deep as Barty's, Agnes found that she was better able to control her emotions when she couldn't see him. "I think you must be sad, kiddo. You hide it well, but you must be."..Finally: "A trial lawyer, whether specializing in criminal or civil matters, is like an actor, Mr. Cain. He must believe deeply in his role, in the truth of his portrayal, if he's to be convincing. I always believe in the innocence of my clients in order to achieve the best possible settlement for them."..The coin stopped turning, pinched flat between the knuckles of the cops middle and ring fingers. He retrieved a box of Kleenex from the nightstand and offered it to his suspect. "Here."..Holding fast to the boy's right foot, Jacob observed that one elevator might descend safely but that if they took two, one or the other was certain to crash to the bottom of the shaft, considering the unreliability of all machinery made by man..The next thing he knew, he was at the kitchen sink, turning off the water, which he couldn't remember having turned on. He appeared to have washed the bloody candlestick-it was clean-but he had no recollection of this bit of housekeeping..Using the brochure as an ice-breaker, Junior circulated through the throng, seeking anyone who'd attended the..Testing Celestina's nerves as fully as Barty had tested his mother's, Angel pulled-levered -shinnied-swung herself so fast up through the tree, arriving at the boy's side while red streaks still enlivened a sky that was repainting itself purple. She stood in the crook of limbs with him, and her delighted laughter rang down through the cathedral oak. 1975 through 1978: Hare ran from Dragon, Snake fled from Horse, and '78 bounced to the beat, because disco ruled. The reborn Bee Gees dominated the airwaves. John Travolta had the look. Rhodesian rebels, grasping the dangers inherent in any battle between equals, had the manful courage to slaughter unarmed women missionaries and schoolgirls. Spinks won the title from Ali, and Ali won it back from Spinks..Curiosity brought him here. Curiosity and a talent for self-preservation. Earlier, Vanadium had not come to Naomi's graveside as a mourner. He had been there as a cop, on business. Perhaps he had been at the other funeral on business, too..Because his lacrimal glands and tear ducts were intact, Barty could cry with his plastic eyes. Consequently, it didn't seem all that much more incredible to be seeing with them..Under a sullen afternoon sky, in the winter-drab hills, the yellow-and-white station wagon was a bright arrow, drawn and fired not from a hunter's quiver but from that of a Samaritan..evening. She brought her daughters, seven-year-old Bonita and six year-old Francesca, who came with their newest Barbie dolls-Color Magic Barbie, the Barbie Beautiful Blues Gift Set, Barbie's friends..Standing over the body, he squeezed off the last three shots.

Finished, he detested guns more than ever..were a favorite pair when he was puttering around the house on weekends. "Oh," he said, "that dog." She twisted her sweat-drenched face in what might have been frustration, closed her. She kissed his cheek, and he pulled his arms out from under the covers to hug her. Such small arms, but such a fierce hug..He already had the pistol he had taken from Frieda Bliss's collection, but it didn't come with a sound-suppressor. He was preparing for all contingencies. Focus..His apartment, over the large garage, was reached by a set of exterior stairs. The space was divided into two rooms. The first was a combination living room and kitchenette, with a corner dining table seating two. Beyond was a small bedroom with adjoining bath..to prayer instead, asking for the wisdom to understand why this was happening to her and for the strength to cope with her pain and with her loss..He raised one hand to halt the genteel debate. "The whole reason I stopped here first, before taking you folks on to my place, is so I wouldn't have to bring your suitcases back after Agnes won you over. This is where you'll be happiest, though you're always welcome if she tries to work you to death."..Similarities between Naomi and her mom- ended with appearances. Sheena was loud, crass, self-absorbed, and had the vocabulary of a brothel owner specializing in service to sailors with Tourette's syndrome..He woke at noon, eyes gummed shut with the effluence of sleep. He felt lousy, but he was in control of himself-and strong enough to fetch his suitcase, which he'd been unable to carry upon arrival..Using this apartment as a base, Nolly and Kathleen had conducted some of the small skirmishes in the first phase of the war, including the ghost serenades. They left the place tidy. Indeed, the only sign that they had ever been here was a packet of dental floss left behind on the sill of a living-room window..Into new avenues of the labyrinth he moved, but then back again, back upon his own trail, twisting, turning, from the occult to modern literature, from history to popular science, and here the occult once more, always the shadow glimpsed so fleetingly and so peripherally that it might have been imagination, the scent of a woman no sooner detected than lost again in the perfumes of aging paper and bindery glue, twisting, turning, until abruptly he stopped, breathing hard, halted by the realization that he hadn't heard the singing in some time..twenty-eight pounds. Typically, seven to eight pounds of this is the fetus. The placenta and the amniotic fluid weigh three pounds. The remaining eighteen are due to water retention and fat stores..Cradling the baby, the nun turned with it to Celestina, folding back a thin blanket to present her with a good look at the tiny girl..Still looming over her, he snatched the pad out of her hands and examined the sketch. "Where would you have seen this?"..Already another contraction racked her, so intense that the pain was not limited to her lower back and abdomen, but seared the length of her spine, like an electric current leaping vertebra to vertebra. Her breath pinched in her chest as though her lungs had collapsed..Of course, when turning a quarter across his knuckles, the cop had made no noise. And he had glided across the hospital room, in the dark, with feline stealth..CELESTINA RETURNED TO Room 724 to collect Phimie's belongings from the tiny closet and from the nightstand..of Zedd constituted the most thoughtful, most rewarding, most reliable guide to life to be found anywhere. When Junior was Confused or troubled, he turned to Caesar Zedd and never failed to find enlightenment, guidance. When he was happy, he found in Zedd the welcome reassurance that it was all right to be successful and to love oneself..Nolly, Kathleen, and Sparky had prepared him for Industrial Woman, but when the flashlight beam flared off her fork-and-fan-blade face, Vanadium twitched in fright. Without fully realizing what he was doing, he crossed himself.. "You haven't had previous episodes like this?" Parkhurst asked, standing at the bedside with a file folder in his hands, half-lens reading glasses pulled down to the tip of his nose..Since her conversation with Joshua Nunn the previous Thursday, she'd had more than four days to armor herself for the worst. She prepared for it as well as any mother could while still holding on to her sanity..Junior was pleasantly surprised by his flexibility and by his audacity. He was, indeed, a new man, a daring adventurer, and by the day he grew more formidable..She herself had been too nervous to eat anything. She'd held the same glass of untasted champagne throughout the evening, clutching it as though it were a mooring buoy that would prevent her from being swept away in a storm.. "Go home. Sleep," he said. "You'll be no help to your sister if you wind up a patient here yourself."..Because his pinching fingers deformed the shape of her mouth, her voice was compressed: "I see all the ways you are."..The coin stopped turning across his knuckles and, as though with volition of its own, it slipped into the tight curve of his curled forefinger. With a snap of his thumb, he flipped the quarter into the air..Being ruthlessly honest with himself, as always, he acknowledged that killing Tammy would not solve his problem. She might have told friends and colleagues about the Rolex, just as she had surely shared with her girlfriends the juiciest details about Junior's unequalled lovemaking. During the two months that he and the cat woman dated, others had heard her call him Eenie. He couldn't kill Tammy and all her friends and colleagues, at least not on a timely enough schedule to thwart the police..The afternoon was winding down, and the lowering sky seemed to be drawn steadily toward the earth by threads of gray light that reeled westward, ever faster, over the horizon's spool. The air smelled like rain waiting to happen.. "Oh, Wally, I am worried. I'm deeply worried. My mama is going to buy herself a first-class ticket to the fiery pit if she doesn't stop this prevaricatin'."..Fresh from sedative-assisted sleep, which hadn't ended until they were in the taxi between the hospital and the hotel, Angel had proved as fully resilient as only children could be when they still retained their innocence. She didn't understand how seriously Wally had been hurt, of course, but if the attack by Cain had terrorized her while she'd watched it from beneath her mother's bed, she didn't seem in danger of being permanently traumatized..He also sought a supplier of high-quality counterfeit ID. This proved easier than he anticipated..just as the smile curved to completion, however, an awful thing happened. The humiliation began with a loud gurgle in his gut..Whereas Paul had been confounded in his desire to express his admiration for Salk, he was able to speak about Perri at length and with ease. Her wit, her heart, her wisdom, her kindness, her beauty, her goodness, her courage were the threads in a narrative tapestry that Pad could have continued weaving for all the rest of his days. Since her death, he hadn't been able to talk about her with anyone he knew, because his friends tended to focus on him, on his suffering, when he wanted

them only to understand Perri better, to realize what an exceptional person she had been. He wanted her to be remembered, after he was gone, wanted her grace and her fortitude to be recalled and respected. She was too fine a woman to leave without a ripple in her wake, and the thought that her memory might pass away with Paul himself was anguishing. "I know what you mean. Mr. Cain, I'd never turn my back on that much money if there was any damn way at all I could earn it." After much oily commiseration, sanctimonious babble about Naomi having gone to a better place, and insincere talk of the government's desire always to ensure the public safety and to treat every citizen with compassion, Knacker or Hisscus, or Nork, finally got around to the issue of compensation. Fortunately, just as he was about to declare his gut feelings to his superior and risk dismissal, he saw his potential patient. At fifteen, Seraphim was breathtakingly beautiful, in her own way as striking as Naomi, and instinct told Junior that the chance of being physically or morally polluted by her was negligible. She slipped into her shoes and stood for a moment watching his lips move as he gave thanks for his blessings and as he asked that blessings be given to others who needed them. The bandaged man stormed up from the ruin of the living room, gauze fluttering around his lips as his hard exhalations seemed to prove that he wasn't a long-dead pharaoh reanimated to punish some heedless archaeologist who had ignored all warnings and violated his tomb. So this wasn't a *Weird Tales* moment. "Why do you think he's spending his money for all this tricky stuff?" Kathleen wondered, not for the first time. Angel liked to perch sideways with a drawing tablet in the window seat in Barty's room, look out at the oak tree from the upper floor, and draw pictures inspired by things she heard in whatever book he was currently listening to. Everyone said she was a pretty good artist for a three-year-old, and Barty wished he could see how good she was. He wished he could see Angel, too, just once. "Yes," she admitted, her face still close to his, "I'm afraid. But Dr. Chan is a fine surgeon, and this is a very fine hospital." "Why are you here?" "Where else I should be and for why? I watch you over." As the tears cleared from Agnes's eyes, she saw that Maria was sewing. A shopping bag stood to one side of the chair, and to the other side, open on the floor, a case contained spools of thread, needles, a pincushion, a pair of scissors, and other supplies of a seamstress's trade. You greater strength and determination than any other motive. But you should know this much.... You need to keep her safe for another reason. She's special. I don't want to explain why she's special or how I know that she is, because this isn't the time or place, not with your dad's death and Wally in the hospital and you still shaky from the attack. Weatherworkers used to carry a leather sack in which they said they kept the winds, untying it to let a fair wind loose or to capture a contrary one. Maybe it was only for show, but every weatherworker had a bag, a great long sack or a little pouch. Agnes got out of bed, switched on the lamp, and tucked Barty in once more. "Say your silent prayers." Otter stated it as an unfortunate fact, not as a moral assertion. Hound looked at him with appreciation. Living with the pirate king, he was sick of boasts and threats, of boasters and threateners. In spring, summer, and fall, they brightened the grave with the roses that Edom grew in the side yard. In this less rose-friendly season, these Christmas bouquets had been purchased at a flower shop. "You feel remorse, though," said Agnes. "I can see you do. And not just because of what happened to your hands." Junior lifted the pattie with a fork, found no quarter under it, and put the meat on one half of the bun. He constructed the sandwich from these fixings, added ketchup and mustard, and took a great, delicious, satisfying bite. He was about to go in search of the canapes when he half heard one of the guests mention Bartholomew to the reverend's daughter. Only the name rang on his ear, not the words that surrounded it. When people didn't apply themselves to positive goals, to making better lives for themselves, they spent their energy in wickedness. Then. "The one I'm about to start is Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, which is maybe pretty scary." Later, at home, after Agnes sent Edom back to his apartment, she opened a bottle of vodka that she had bought on the way back from Maria's. She mixed it with orange juice in a waterglass. The boy dashed for the front passenger's door. Agnes didn't follow him, because she knew that he would politely but pointedly express frustration if any attempt was made to help him with a task that he could perform himself. His patience exhausted, the pianist wrenched his hand out of Junior's grip. He glanced around nervously, certain that they must be the center of attention, but of course the reception guests were lost in their witless conversations, or they were gaga over the maudlin paintings, and no one was aware of this quiet little drama. Even the Shantung-softened lamplight blazed too bright and did not serve her well, so she switched it off and said, "Scoot over." Descending the stairs, Edom said, "September 18, 1906, a typhoon slammed into Hong Kong. More than ten thousand died. The wind was blowing with such incredible velocity; hundreds of people were killed by sharp pieces of debris-splintered wood, spear-point fence staves, nails, glass-driven into them with the power of bullets. One man was struck by a windblown fragment of a Han Dynasty funerary jar, which cleaved his face, cracked through his skull, and embedded itself in his brain." Frantically, he squirmed around on the floor until he was facing the entrance to the kitchen. Through tears of pain, he expected to see a Frankensteinian shadow loom in the hall, and then the creature itself, gnashing its fork-tine teeth, its corkscrew nipples spinning. With a thin hiss of disgust, Junior pulled away from the thing, whatever it was, withdrew the flashlight from his belt, and listened intently for sounds in the alleyway. No voices. No footsteps. Only distant traffic noises so muffled that they sounded like the grunts and groans and low menacing growls of foraging animals, displaced predators prowling the urban mist. By Thursday, the eruption passed from him. Because he'd had the self-control not to claw his face or hands, he was presentable enough to venture out into the city; although if people in the streets could have seen the weeping scabs and inflamed scratches that tattooed his body and limbs, they would have fled with the grim certainty that the black. ONWARD THROUGH THIS Monday, January 17, this momentous day, when the ending of one thing is the beginning of another. Wally gave her tests. She's got an exceptional understanding of color, spatial relationships, and geometric forms for a child her age. She may be a visual prodigy. Rhythmic breathing. Slow and deep. Slow and deep. Per Zedd, the route to tranquility is through the lungs. Switching on the lights as he went, Junior sought the source of the

serenade. He carried the 9-mm pistol, which would have been useless against a spirit visitor; but his extensive reading about ghosts hadn't convinced him that they were real. His faith in the effectiveness of bullets and pewter candlesticks, for that matter-remained undiminished..She woke weeping from the dreams, and she wanted no witnesses. She wasn't embarrassed by her tears. She just didn't want to share them with anyone but Barty..open grave. In his hand: the white rose, its thorns slick with his blood. He dropped the bloom, and it fell out of sight, into the gaping earth, atop Naomi's casket..But on March 23, 1966, after a bad date with Frieda Bliss, who collected paintings by Jack Lientery, an important new artist, Junior had an experience that rocked him, added significance to the episode in the diner, and made him wish he hadn't donated his pistol to the police project that melted guns into switchblades..As she clambered through the open door into Celestina's lap, the girl said, "Uncle Wally gave me an Oreo."..Even Angel, mere wisp of a cherubim, couldn't squeeze through a seven-inch opening.."Is it as bad as that?" Celestina wondered plaintively, though she knew the answer. "I love San Francisco. The city inspires my work. I've built a life here. Is it really as bad as that?".. "I didn't know her well. She didn't hang out or party much--especially after the baby."..Convinced he was alone and unobserved, Junior leaned into the car and shifted it out of park. He released the hand brake..Delighted to be dating someone who lived neck-deep in culture especially after two months with Tammy Bean, the money maiden. Junior was surprised that he didn't score with Frieda on the first date. He was usually irresistible even to women who weren't sluts.

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