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Reviews

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Reviews

Abstract

The 1994 J.R.R. Tolkien Calendar. Illustrated by Michael Kaluta. Reviewed by Paula DiSante.

Spiritual Writings. Dorothy L. Sayers. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

Dorothy L. Sayers: The Centenary Celebration. Alzina Stone Dale, editor. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

REVIEWS

STAKING A CLAIM IN MIDDLE-EARTH

The 1994 J.R.R. Tolkien Calendar, Ballantine Books, New York, NY, ISBN: 0-345-38383-4

After an interminable delay, which kept it off bookstore shelves until mid-September, *The 1994 J.R.R. Tolkien Calendar* has finally arrived. At 11" x 12" it retains a slightly narrower format than in previous year's, save for last years 10½" x 12" offering. One hopes that future calendars will return to either the 11½" x 12" size, or even the 12" x 12" format of about a decade ago. Minor changes in size such as this do benefit the presentation of the artwork, which is why we buy these calendars in the first place.

Michael Kaluta, a British artist of comic books (graphic novels) is this year's Tolkien illustrator. He brings a fresh eye and practiced brush to the author's world. Working in watercolor, Kaluta dives into Middle-earth with (for the most part) self-assurance and skill. Not every painting is a success, but the good in this calendar definitely outweighs the bad.

January's "Gandalf the Grey in Hobbiton" has some very good things — and some not-so-good things — in it. It must be noted that, in the printing, the color separations (the "negative") was flipped, and this somehow got past the editors at Ballantine (the image is not flipped in the British edition). For verification of this, look no further than the backward G-rune on the fireworks packages and, of course, the reversed artist's signature in the upper right-hand corner.

Kaluta's Gandalf is very nice (although it remains a puzzle as to why and how artists continually miss or ignore the fact that the wizard's beard is supposed to reach below his waist). This is a fine Gandalf, whatever the beard length, well drawn and evocative of the character. The hobbits in the picture fare less well. Despite the fact that most of them (except for the three in the foreground) are supposed to be children, they are nevertheless rendered a little too small. The overall-clad, shirtless hobbit who races toward the wizard resembles a miniature version of Huck Finn, rather than a Chubb or a Bracegirdle. And, judging by those hobbits pictured, one would believe there were no females at all in the Shire.

But the colors are bright and inviting, the wagon jaunty, and the sky full of light and luminous clouds. The stately, ancient tree is solid, and the little red birdhouses in its branches are a quaint, pleasant touch.

February's "Elrond Recalls the Hosts of Gil-galad" also has a bit of good and bad in it. There is some nice color

treatment here, rich in parts and subtle in others. But the arrangement of the figures is odd, as if Kaluta were reluctant to turn any of the characters' backs to the viewer. Also, Sam's proximity to the group is hardly the unnoticed corner in which he seated himself.

It is unfortunate that the Elves in the picture, particularly Elrond and Glorfindel, appear overtly feminine. Glorfindel has the head of a Breck girl on the body of a warrior. Fair of face simply means beautiful, whether male or female. The masculinity of these characters should not have been sacrificed in this way.

Again, Kaluta serves up a great Gandalf, and his brooding Aragorn (right foreground) is also well done. But the sleeping, blond (!), bearded (!) Bilbo doesn't really fit in. The eagerly-listening Frodo possesses a jawline worthy of Charlton Heston. Most of the hobbits in the calendar have jaws that look carved out of granite. These are the most macho hobbits to appear anywhere. As for the dwarves, Gimli and Glóin favor an incongruous barbarian style, but on the whole they are not a total waste of paint. The images of the Second Age characters that Elrond evokes in his tale are physically bold and vigorous, even though they are rendered in more muted tones. The most prominently featured is probably Gil-galad, except that he should be armed with the spear Aeglos, and not a sword (the spear that can clearly be seen is not held by the Elven king). A case could be made that perhaps the figure is Elrond, who was Gil-galad's herald, since he does resemble the storytelling master of Rivendell. These are but quibbles and speculations, and they don't matter much when considering the merits of this painting.

March's "Legolas Draws the Bow of Galadriel" has a powerful dynamic working for it in this composition. Kaluta gets the viewer's eye moving from the sweeping curve of the bow, which is picked up by the curve of the elf's flowing cloak, leading to his head, on to his arm, and back down the bow again. Although appearing less feminine than in the previous painting, Legolas' face here is not an improvement. There's a blankness to it that leaves the viewer cold. However, his clothing, and the natural elements are handled beautifully.

April's "The Entmoot" is one of Kaluta's paintings most strongly influenced by artist Arthur Rackham. This work tackles the always difficult subject of Ents. Aside from hair that looks designed by boxing promoter Don King, or maybe Seinfeld's Kramer, Kaluta gives his Ents a fittingly arboreal guise. Merry and Pippin are quite satisfied to sit in the center of the discussion. The faces of the

Ents owe a lot not only to Rackham, but also to contemporary illustrator (and previous Tolkien artist) Michael Hague. This is especially true in the way the paint is handled. The Entmoot is a fun piece, whether or not one agrees with the depiction of the Ents.

May — “Éowyn Before the Doors of Meduseld.” It is unfortunate that, as compared to the British version of the calendar, this painting’s reproduction is noticeably fuzzy. There is a loss of sharpness and clarity of line in the American calendar that affects the face and the form of Éowyn. It is not, however, so pronounced as to ruin the work, but it does take away some of the look of dejection and frustration Éowyn wears at being left behind once again. The huge ornamented doors of the great hall give the viewer a sense that Meduseld is truly a seat of kings. A shaft of light (presumably the one that illuminates the large tapestry of Eorl the Young inside the hall) cuts a wide swath behind Éowyn’s head. A quirky, acrobatic flight of birds sweeps across the picture plane in a sinuous S shape, energizing what is otherwise a still moment. Even with the reproductions slight fuzziness, this is a very effective rendering of the scene.

June — “The First Stroke of Lightning at Helm’s Deep.” One of the least successful of Kaluta’s paintings, this work is strangely colored with aquamarine accents. It also lacks a particular point of focus. Kaluta’s orcs undoubtedly have destruction on their minds — a very orc-like trait. But they are too human in their visual conception, bearing more of a resemblance to barbarian warriors than mutated creatures of very ancient origin. The defenders of Helm’s Deep are minuscule specks on the wall far away. We do get a sense that the heavily armed, teeming horde is preparing to attack the stronghold. But since the defenders don’t come into play, a good deal of the potential danger and action is not realized. This painting isn’t a failure, but neither is it memorable.

July — “The Black Gate is Closed.” Kaluta depicts, if somewhat incorrectly, the grim gateway into Mordor. The two looming towers should be set upon bare, black hills, while the rampart (which contains the gate) should be recessed back, stretching not from tower to tower, but from cliff to cliff. Even so, this is a creepy, horrible, unconquerable place, and it produces the requisite fear and despair. Frodo, Sam and Gollum, positioned slightly right of center in the middle ground, nearly disappear among the weathered rocks. This is great for their relative safety, but to a viewer it makes discovering their whereabouts a bit of a challenge. The rocky terrain is appropriately bleak and foreboding. This is a good painting, which would have been even more successful if the figures were easier to locate.

August — “The King is Recrowned.” A fairly faithful rendition of this scene, Kaluta captures those fleeting moments when a few shafts of sunlight, escaping from under the pall of Mordor, illuminate the broken statue. Gollum, with oddly colored green skin, escapes the light of the Yellow Face by hunching behind the delighted

Frodo, who examines the statue. Sam, for some reason, looks on with pointed disapproval, which feels out of place in an uplifting moment, brief though that may be. But on the whole the painting, with its mixture of hope and gloom, works very well.

September — “Théoden Espies the Serpent Banner.” This is a wonderful illustration. All parts of this painting seem caught in a swirl of motion suddenly frozen, as if this were a single frame from a movie. Kaluta highlights his subject with rich golds, greens and blues. We get the feeling that Théoden has indeed fixed his eyes upon his enemy. If this were a scene from a movie, the next shot would be that of the Serpent Banner snapping in the wind. The painting is lush with closely observed detail. When all of its exceptional elements are considered, this ranks as the best illustration in the calendar.

October — “Éowyn and the Witch-King of Angmar.” Deeply influenced again by Rackham, this month’s oft-illustrated scene is almost operatic in scope. The scarlet maw of the beast is a little too dragon-like for its own good, but it commands the proper amount of terror. Éowyn is caught mid-stroke in her heroic effort to bring down the creature. The arching wing of the beast caps the top of the frame with ominous threat, forcing the viewer’s eye back into the middle of the action.

The Nazgûl lord would benefit from a more imposing crown on his invisible head. The mace he wields looks more like a ceremonial mace of public office, rather than a battle weapon. But this does not diminish his threatening appearance. The depiction of Snowmane’s last agony is also persuasive. It would have been nice to see Merry in the picture, but his absence doesn’t lessen the painting’s impact.

November (and calendar cover) — “Arwen and King Elessar.” This painting has been edited, and its original stone-like background (which does appear on the cover of the British edition) has been removed. This hurts the presentation a little, because it subjects the painting to too much white space (in the November slot) and to a busy geometric design on the cover.

Background aside, the encircling frame which contains the figures of the King and Queen looks almost like a Native American war shield, what with its spray of feathers adorning either side. The colors in both the shield and the figures are delicate and restrained. Kaluta’s comic book illustration experience is best evidenced in this painting. Aragorn appears suitably virile, but the expression on his face is far from happy. Rather, he looks like he’s got a bad taste in his mouth — hardly the expression one would expect in a man who has just gotten everything he’s ever wanted. The crown of Gondor on his head doesn’t much resemble the way it is described in the novel, but it is very opulent, as is the bejeweled sword Andúril.

Arwen is a little bitty thing — not nearly tall enough for the daughter of one of the greatest Elves who remains in

Middle-earth. Kaluta paints a delicate spider web of gems in her dark hair, and she possesses a silvery shimmer about her. Kaluta also makes a competent effort to portray the Elven light in her eyes. Still, Arwen seems a little distracted and bland, perhaps because of the artist's comic book approach.

Kaluta depicts the Queen fondling the mighty sword Andúril. Sure, she also caresses Aragorn's large, powerful hand in the process, but she pays particular attention to the jewel-encrusted scabbard. Perhaps its better not to question whether this has any other meaning!

December — "Meriadoc the Magnificent and the Children of Samwise Handfast." Yes, that *ought* to read Hamfast. This error was not made in the British calendar. The biggest error of all was to include this painting in the calendar in the first place. Compared to the hobbit children, Monster Meriadoc looks nearly as big as an Ent. He hardly seems to fit into the hobbit hole. And who would really want him there? This leering Godzilla looks too much like a lascivious child molester. Apart from some nice lighting effects and color choices, there's nothing to recommend this painting. It is unfortunate that it was included with the other works, especially as the very last illustration of the year.

Most of these paintings are worthy efforts, or have at least one or two redeeming features. Kaluta hits a solid stand-up double in his first Tolkien Calendar at-bat. A few better choices could have made this a home run. American and Canadian audiences will be relieved to know that the paintings are reproduced in their entirety, whereas in the British calendar a full one-quarter of each painting is rudely chopped off in order to fit it into a more horizontal format.

Compared to last year's dreary, desaturated disappointment, this year's calendar is a welcome shot in the arm. Although a little flawed, it is worth the investment of your attention. Recommended.

Paula DiSante

The Morning Star

Dorothy L. Sayers, *Spiritual Writings*, Ann Loades, Editor. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge [SPCK], 1993. 1884 pp. ISBN 0-28-04598-4.

If I could put one book into the hand of all *Mythlore* readers, as the immediate key to the understanding of the world-view of C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and J.R.R. Tolkien, it would be this one! Here is the faith as Western Christianity has proclaimed it, potent, immediate, alive, and absolute. This is what Sayers, Lewis, Williams and Tolkien were, each so uniquely, talking about. This is Tolkien's "Joy beyond the walls of the world," Williams' "Way of Affirmation," Lewis' "Great Story ... in which every chapter is better than the one before."

Superbly selected, introduced, ordered, and commented upon by Ann Loades, Reader in Theology at the University of Durham, *Spiritual Writings* contains breath-takingly apt selections (each the living heart of the work in

which it appeared) arranged in chronological order to culminating effect, accompanied by illuminating comments from a significant Christian feminist scholar who identifies Miss Sayers correctly as a "forerunner of contemporary Christian feminism." So much for the idea that you have to be unorthodox in order to be feminist! Laid out like this, the writings of Miss Sayers are clearly revealed as all of a piece, from the sweet juvenalia of her first published book *Op. I* (1916), "Hymn in Contemplation of Sudden Death," to the powerful affirmations of her essay "Christian Belief About Heaven and Hell" in *The Great Mystery of Life Hereafter* (1957), published in a collection of various authors the year she died.

The poem gives thanks

For all things merry, quaint and strange,
For sound and silence, strength, and chance,
And last, for death, which only gives
Value to everything that lives (p. 10)

Ann Loades proves by her selections that just as Miss Sayers began with a stance of full "strength," so she could develop and "change," as she did in her encounter with Dante, rightly shown here as the genuine culmination not only of her career as a writer of literature but as a theologian. The essay declares, in a metaphor not only contemporary with but chiming with the one I quoted above from Lewis in *The Last Battle* (1956): "...we need not puzzle our wits to find a time and place for ... [the resurrection body] within the universe, because, at the end of time, that universe 'shall be rolled together as a scroll' (that is, as a reader shuts up a volume when he has finished with it), and God will write a new book." (p. 182) I have quoted the last part of this essay at length because it, given in its complete form, is one of five items appearing here for the first time in an anthology easily available to readers of the 1990s. The others are selections from *Malvern 1941: the Life of the Church and the Order of Society* (1941), *London Calling* (1942), *A Christian Basis for the Post War World* (1942), and *Richard of Chichester* (1953), each with a potent addition to the now available canon.

Selections from the whole range of Miss Sayers' writings are included, from her poetry, her novels, (*The Nine Tailors* and *Gaudy Night*), her plays, her essays, her letters, and her interpretations and translations of Dante. The virtue of this selection is the way it makes clear the constant element in her work of classical Christian thought and of her characteristic way of emphasizing that thought. Many have recited the first line of the Creed from the Book of Common Prayer — "I believe in God The Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth" — but few have emphasized as she does the importance of that second title, "Maker," or pursued so eloquently the fact that the Creation of the Maker is so truly the medium of the Incarnation. The Church, Miss Sayers declares, "must include a proper reverence for the earth and for all material things, because these also are the body of the living god." (p. 95) As for humankind, "A sure mark of Catholic Christianity is the honouring of the 'holy and glorious flesh,' and indeed of all material things, because they are sacraments and symbols of the Divine Glory." (P. 170)

A discovery afforded by the editor's sensitive comprehension is Miss Sayers' profound interpretation of Mary, the mother of God: "When the angel's message came to me, ... I suddenly saw that ... no one is too unimportant to be his friend." (p. 103) This quotation of Mary's speech from the first play, "Kings in Judaea," in the dramatic cycle, *The Man Born to Be King* (1943) concluded, "I know very well that Wisdom and Power and Sorrow can live together with Love, and for me, the Child in my arms is the answer to all the riddles."

God as Maker, humanity as bearer of God's Image, and humanity as friend of God: these are the elements selected by Miss Sayers herself for emphasis in her works, all her works. Indeed, it is her emphasis upon humankind as workers and makers in God's image that brought me to tears in re-reading a speech from her play which explicates the doctrine of the Atonement, *The Just Vengeance* (1946), in which "The Image of the Godhead" declares to those who in choosing have been chosen:

come, receive again

All your desires, but better than your dreams,
All your lost loves, but lovelier than you knew,
All your fond hopes, but higher than your hearts
Could dare to frame them; all your City of God
Built by your faith but nobler than you planned...
Instead of happiness you shall have joy;
Instead of peace the emulous exchange
Of love; and I will give you the morning star. (pp. 157-158)

Highly recommended!

— Nancy-Lou Patterson

Comedy of Redemption

Alzina Stone Dale, Editor, *Dorothy L. Sayers: The Centenary Celebration*. New York: Walker and Company, 166 pp. ISBN: 0-8027-3224-0

A delightful tribute to its subject, *Dorothy L. Sayers: The Centenary Celebration* includes more than a few essays of substance. It well deserves to stand on the same shelf as previous volumes of essays upon the works of Dorothy L. Sayers, including *As Her Whimsy Took Her*, Margaret P. Hannay, Editor (1979); and *Encounters with Lord Peter*, edited by Christopher Dean (1991) along with the twelve issues of *The Sayers Review*, edited by Christie McMenomy (September, 1976 to January, 1981), all the essays of which could well be republished in book form, some of them having been cited frequently in subsequent volumes devoted to her life and works.

As is appropriate, nearly all of the authors included in *The Centenary Celebration* are themselves mystery writers, most of them highly distinguished; of these, several, along with the other authors included, are scholars on the subject of the mystery. Most, but significantly, not all, focus upon Miss Sayers as a mystery writer. All the essays are entertaining and informative; some are significant. The only author among them whom I have met is the editor, Alzina Stone Dale, whose biographical study, *Dorothy L.*

Sayers: Maker and Craftsman, I reviewed in this column; we exchanged letters concerning Miss Sayers' unfinished and unpublished last novel, *Thrones, Dominations*, the subject of her essay, "Thrones, Dominations: Unfinished Testament to Friendship?" The thesis of this essay, included in the present volume, is an intriguing one: after the death of Miss Sayers' long-time friend, Helen Simpson, in October, 1940, Dale Writes,

It is a testament to the strength of their friendship that the very busy matron of the hospital took time to write ... how much Simpson had cared for her and adding that she knew how sad Sayers would find life without her.

and, as Dale conjectures, "Sayers might have found going back to work on *Thrones, Dominations* too full of memories of Simpson." (p. 74) Helen Simpson was one of the three women to whom Miss Sayers dedicated *Busman's Honeymoon*. I hope that Dale may elaborate upon the friendship and exchange of ideas between Miss Sayers and her friend in a future study.

The Centenary Celebration concluded with a superb essay by Catherine Kenney on "The Comedy of Dorothy L. Sayers," written by the author of *The Remarkable Case of Dorothy L. Sayers* (1991), also reviewed in *Mythlore*. Probably the best and most important essay in the volume, it examines in detail the role of humor and comedy in the works of Miss Sayers, not only in her novels, especially in the characterization of Lord Peter, and in her delicious essays, but in her distinctive interpretation of *The Divine Comedy*; Kenney writes that "As a Christian, Sayers appreciated in Dante's poem the great comedy of redemption, the drama in which all comes round at the end because of God's grace — a significant variation of Fortune that underlies classical comedy." (p. 148)

The volume begins with "Dorothy L. Sayers: biography Between the Lines" by Carolyn G. Heilbrun (AKA Amanda Cross); this already classic essay is reprinted from *The American Scholar* (Autumn 1992), and gives a discerning feminist reading of James Brabazon's biography of Miss Sayers, and a necessary corrective and elaboration upon his efforts. She discusses two major failings in his otherwise excellent work: the first is that he "devotes too little analysis to Sayer's feminism," (p. 11) and the second is "his complacent acceptance of Sayer's anti-Semitism." (p. 11) Michael Gilbert's "A Personal Memoir" is a charming and revealing recollection of Miss Sayers as a founder of the Detection Club. "She was in every way its mainspring," (p. 16) he remembers, and gives a delicious picture of her powers in a discussion and as a raconteur. She got as good as she gave, of course; when "She said that she had never herself attempted a thriller but agreed about its difficulty... another member said, 'What, never, Dorothy? What about "The Cave of Ali Baba"?' Readers who do not know why this is funny have a treat in store for them when they read the short story of that title.

"D.L.S., An Unsteady Throne?" presents Ian Stewart's thesis that Wimsey is probably more popular nowadays in

the United States than in England," (p. 25) and declares that "The labored badinage between Wimsey and the insufferably self-absorbed Miss Vane make very heavy going nowadays," (p. 28) a point of view considerably at odds with Carolyn J. Hart's and B.J. Rahn's essays to be discussed below. William F. Love in "Jeeves to Wimsey to Bond" proposes the consecutive influence of Wodehouse upon Miss Sayers' characterization of Lord Peter Wimsey, and her influence upon Ian Fleming's use of elaborate detail in his James Bond novels (which, in case you have not read them, have very little to do with most of the films based upon them).

The first-class essays are addressed to the published novels about Lord Peter and Harriet Vane (as opposed to the unpublished one to which I have alluded above). These are Carolyn G. Hart's *Gaudy Night*: "Quintessential Sayers" and B.J. Rahn's "The Marriage of True Minds." Hart Calls attention to Gaudy Night's "pyrotechnic felicity with words" and "passionate espousal of an intellectual theme," (p. 45) and praises its dedication to "the impartial search for truth." (p. 49) Rahn's essay discusses *Strong Poison*, *Have His Carcass*, *Gaudy Night*, and *Busman's Honeymoon*, basing her interpretation of these novels upon the thesis that "Sayers employed the detective story to explain female integrity, independence, and identity." (p. 50) Her analysis of the shifting and developing relationship between Peter and Harriet is remarkably insightful, balanced, and detailed.

Catherine Aird, in "It was the Cat!" offers a spirited appreciation of Miss Sayers' short stories, about which, she says, "some commentators have been less than enthusiastic." (p. 79) Comparing the task of the short detective story to that of the painting of a miniature, she declares that "a short story is not a little story, nor is it a full-length novel either shrunk or compressed." (p. 80) Her analysis of the stories is intricate and convincing, a welcome contribution to this subject. Sharyn McCrumb does excellent service in analyzing and documenting the role of actual crimes (crimes which occurred in the primary world at an actual date in documented history (if that is not a redundancy!)) in the Sayers canon, in her extremely useful and informative essay, "Where the Bodies are Buried: The Real Murder Cases in the Crime Novels of Dorothy L. Sayers." She shows that Miss Sayers included references to actual crimes as a framing device for her use of similar methods of killing in her fictional murders, a very useful and illuminating revelation.

In his witty essay, "The Art of Framing Lies: Dorothy L. Sayers on Mystery Fiction," Aaron Elkins documents her major contributions to the art of mystery writing, showing that she was not only the prophet but the architect of much that has come to pass since, including not only the well-discussed "novel of character and manners" (p. 102) — Elkins is quoting the phrase from Miss Sayers herself — but in what she calls "the pedagogical novel," (p. 106) which introduces the reader to a whole sphere of knowledge, "exactly what she did with capanology (of all

things) in *The Nine Tailors*." (p. 107) Anne Perry, in "Dorothy L. Sayers on Dante," recounts the trip through Hell with excellent command not only of Dante's horrific imagery and its meanings, but of Miss Sayers' immensely useful commentary upon and illuminating interpretation of it. Readers who quail before the prospect of Dante are recommended to begin with this splendid essay, to which Perry adds her own contemporary and equally illuminating glosses. I would say of Perry that she says of Miss Sayers, that "She has written her translation with such lyricism, such perception and clarity, that I am richer for having read it." (p. 121) A briefer but equally attractive essay, "Unsoothing Sayers," by Ralph McNerny, searches for the anagogic meaning, a meaning beyond the literal narration of imaginary events," (p. 123) which Miss Sayers saw in Dante and which other readers find in Miss Sayers herself. Her detective novels are "distinctive and illuminating meditations on the meaning of human life as exhibited in action." (p. 125) McNerny explains that "In Dante's world, our eternal fate is settled by what we do in the fleeting moments of time," (p. 127) and in Miss Sayers' world, there is "the recollection of the importance of action in determining who we are."

H.R.F. Keating's clever essay, "Dorothy L.'s Mickey Finn," similarly identifies the hidden theses of Miss Sayers' fiction, in her skill at "telling... readers a simple ongoing story and feeding them, all unknowing, with the material for inner meditation." (p. 129) For specifically presenting this thesis, he chooses her often-neglected fifth book, *The Documents in the Case*, (p. 130), which for Carolyn G. Heilbrun "lacks the appeal of the Lord Peter Stories" because "for all its virtues... absence of the moral complexity that Wimsey ensured is sadly felt." (p. 9) Not so, according to Keating: this novel had "Murder plot and underlying theme beautifully coming together at the finale." (p. 138) What is more, he says the same of the apparently "frivolous" short story, "Uncle Meleager's Will!" Keating's exquisite analysis of this story you simply must read for yourself, as you may read, enjoy, and delight in this entire volume and the very good company you will keep in the process.

— Nancy-Lou Patterson

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