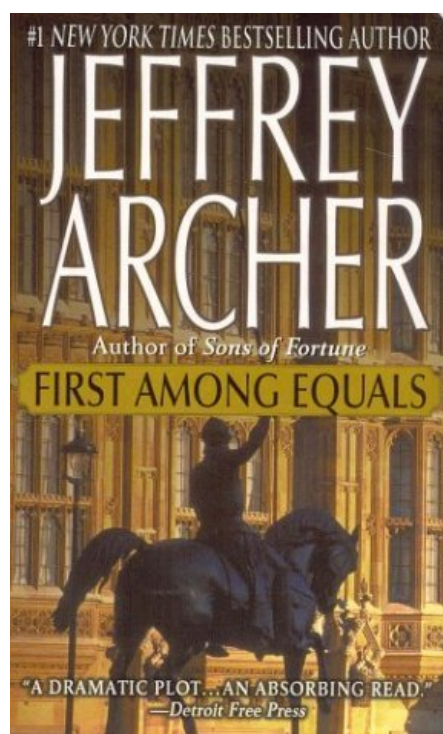




First Among Equals

Jeffrey Archer

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First Among Equals

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First Among Equals Jeffrey Archer

Playing for the highest stakes of all . . .

In the 1960s, four ambitious new MPs take their seats at Westminster. Over three decades they share the turbulent passions of the race for power with their wives and families, men and women caught up in a dramatic game for the highest stakes of all. But only one man can gain the ultimate goal - the office of Prime Minister.

First Among Equals Details

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Author : Jeffrey Archer

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From Reader Review First Among Equals for online ebook

Wsm says

Archer has himself been a politician and this is the story of four ambitious men aiming to reach the pinnacle of power. Which one would succeed ? I did guess well before the end. It is an absorbing story and one of Archer's best books. (Four stars.)

Sridhar Babu says

AUTHOR...

Jeffrey Archer..

CHARACTERS..

Charles Seymour and Simon Kerslake (both Conservative members), Raymond Gould and Andrew Fraser (both Labour Party members) Fiona, Joyce, Lousie, Elizabeth and Margret Thatcher (Prime Minister UK) and others..

LOCATION..

House of commons (English Parliament LONDON),

GENRE...

Political Thriller...

ABOUT THE BOOK...

Four men from different family backgrounds, all of them strangers, embark a journey for the highest post in their life- Becoming the Prime Minister of England. All of them are equal in every aspects. In Qualification, Experience, campaign and public charisma they have equal scores. But for qualifying for the highest post, there should be a FIRST among equals. This ultimate goal becomes their passion and obsession. For achieving this goal they outsmart each other in every possibly way. Unfolding over three decades their honor tested, loyalties betrayed and the love of family and country challenged. But in this passionate, obsessive game among the equals..only one can triumph.....

PLOT...

CHARLES SEYMOUR..second born son in the prestigious earl family.. inherits nothing from his father but courage and strength, from his mother. During his first month at the Oxford prep school, Charles excelled everybody in reading, debating and progressed with the air of a man who found university something of an anticlimax. It was assumed once Charles had left Oxford that he would succeed his fathers Seymour bank first as a director and then in time as its chairman. But the 'best laid plan' was changed when Charles listened to the motion " I would be a commoner than a lord" proposed by the Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill. From then on his ambition changed from Banking to Politics.

He was elected as MP in the House of Commons from the Sussex constituency for more than thirty years as the Right Member of The Conservative Party. Starting as the Back bencher of the House, From the year 1964 he gradually climbed the ladder whenever the Conservative Party formed the Government , as the Under Secretary of the Junior office (1966-74), Minister of State (during 1974-77), The Cabinet Member (during 1977-1989) and finally finishing long career as the Speaker of the Parliament in 1991. When his party was in the opposition he was invited as a junior spokesman in the Housing and Local Government Shadow team as a junior spokesman.

Right from the beginning of his political career, Charles considered his fellow party man Simon Kerslake as

his adversary. The rift between them started in the election process of the leader for the Conservative party, when they backed different men during 1965, Charles mentioning Simon as "Pushy and self made man" in public. Because of Charles's personal wish to ruin Simon, he goes extremes to put Simon out of the House of Commons in every possible way. When Simon loses his Coventry Central Constituency on the basis of Boundary Commission's report, Charles by making secret and out of the way dealings with his fellow party man, makes it impossible for Simon to contest in the 1974 General Elections. When British Navy destroyer HMS BROADSWORD was captured by Colonel Gaddafi's men, Charles takes an entirely opposite stand of recapturing Ship by gaining diplomatic victory.

Charles Marriage with disloyal Fiona fails miserably. He remarries Amanda, but after Harry was born, they go for a divorce.

SIMON KERSLAKE..... although first born, he had otherwise very few of Charles Seymour's advantages. Being the only son of a family solicitor, he had appreciated his father's effort in sacrificing everything to make sure his son's dream come true. Simon's father died during his son's last year at College, leaving his widow a small annuity and a magnificent grandfather clock. His mother sold the clock for the sake of Simon's studies. From his first days in the school and at college, he always outdistanced his rivals. He showed every signs of an ambitious "achiever", while many of his contemporaries thought of him as pushy, or even arrogant according to their aptitude of jealously.

He was elected as the MP as the Right member of Conservative Party in the House of Commons, first from the Coventry central Constituency, later from the Pucklebridge constituency due to reallocation of constituencies on the basis of Boundary Commission's report. Staring as the back bencher he served in the House of Commons starting from 1964 to 1991 for three decades. When his Conservative party sat in the Opposition, he always surprised the ruling Labour members with his sensible and intelligent questions. He emerged victorious when his adversary and fellow party man Charles, went to the extremes to put Simon out of the House of Summons in every possible way. Charles in his personal wish to ruin Simon, makes him bankrupt, makes a fellow party man to ask a question regarding Simon's investment by making him disgraceful in the House. Simon with his calm and gentle attitude overcomes all the hurdles and obstacles created by Charles.

Simon was appointed as the Minister of State for Ireland after Conservative's win in the General Elections during 1979. Simon makes a genuine attempt in peace negotiations, by preparing a peace charter, in an effort to unite Catholics of North and Protestants of South Ireland. After a terrible bomb blast, targeting his life, he takes our charge as the Defense Minister of State moving from the Northern Ireland Office.

During his tenure, one of the English Navy destroyers HMS BROADSWORD, was took over by Colonel Gaddafi's mercenaries posing them as coast guard officials. Simon's stand of immediate joint military action with the Defense officials code named "shoplifter" was highly appreciated in House of Commons, against Charles's stand of gaining victory through negotiations in a diplomatic way. Finally in a neck to neck fight for the Leadership of the Conservative Party, Simon defeats Charles in a comfortable margin.

Simon's marriage with gynaecologist Dr.Elizabeth turns out to be a successful one for the couples. Elizabeth with her loyal support to her husband Simon at the times of crises, makes Simon's climb in the political ladder easy and successful. The couple had two children, Micheal and Peter.

RAYMOND GOULD...was born in a tiny windowless room above his father's butcher's shop in Leeds. For the first nine years of his life he shared that room with his ailing grandmother until she died at the age of sixty-one. His grandmother's stories filled Ray with sadness, as he became aware that she had been a widow for nearly thirty years. All she possessed was yellowed envelope containing 500 irredeemable war bonds. After her death, Ray converted the room into his study, full of ever changing library books. Ray won the top Scholarship to Roundhay School. At the age of twelve the title of the essay he won at the school competition

was : "The First changes I will make When I become the Prime Minister.

Raymond Gould served the House of Commons as MP as the Right Member of the Labour Party for three decades from 1964-1991 from the Leeds constituency. Whether his Labour party was in power or in the opposition, his main obsession was to decrease the unemployment prevailing all over England and to raise the pensions of the war widows. Starting in the Back Benches of the House of Commons he climbed in the political ladders to become the deputy leader Chairing the Cabinet meetings in the Prime ministers absence. After his win in the General Elections in 1989., his first budget presented as the Chancellor of Exchequer ((a cabinet minister level position)) turned out to be a great success. The budget reflected Raymond's sole purpose of not robbing the rich and giving the poor, but rather to make those who live in comparative ease pay taxes that will ease the sufferings of the poor. Raymond's visit to Washington, to receive loans for his country from International Monetary Funds and the speeches he made at the Chamber of Commerce was highly appreciated. During this period he had a brief affair with an American Banker Kate, but ended in a very short period.

Assisted and well supported by his wife Joyce he went on to become the Leader of the Labour Party, at the end of the year 1989.

ANDREW FRASER..was raised by a soccer hero turned politician. His father Duncan Fraser was a staunch Conservative, hailing from Edinburgh, Scotland. Duncan was able to win his place only as a City Councilor, not as an MP for his party. By the age of thirteen Andrew learned enough about local politics to help his father organize a campaign in the Edinburgh Carlton constituency. At the Edinburgh Academy and in the University he read politics and by his third year he was elected President of the Union and Captain of Rugby.

He surprised everybody by representing Edinburgh constituency as the Labour Party candidate and won by huge margin. He served as Labour Party MP for some time in the House of Commons, later due to misunderstandings with the Party leadership, he left the party to join SDP/ Liberal alliance.

After two miscarriages and his son Robert's tragic accidental death, Andrew and Louise adopted a black girl named Clarissa from the orphanage.

FIRST AMONG THE EQUALS..WHO...??

The General Election, held during 1989 resulted in a "hung parliament" with no clear majority to any party. Both Conservative and Labour parties were to depend on Andrew's SDP/Liberal alliance for forming a Government. Simon and Raymond were called by His Majesty at the Palace for making the final decision regarding who to be the future Prime Minister. Finally His Majesty King Charles III, invites Raymond Gould to be his Prime Minister.

THUMBS UP PARTS...

Actually ...this fiction is just a compilation of events in the form short stories involving the four major characters. This Novel has no ordinary elements such as murder, suspense and adventure that other fictions have, yet the author makes this novel a gripping page turner with his innovative theme of "England's political Scenario", unfolding over three decades from 1964-1991. He narrates the story in such a way that the reader is made to travel with the characters to the English Parliament, The House of Commons and watch the proceedings with awe. The Parliamentary procedures, the role of MPs, ministers, cabinet ministers, the Whip's office are all explained in a wonderful way, so that even an ordinary man can easily visualize the happenings from the author's flawless narration.

THUMBS DOWN FACTORS...

Though the four characters are credited "as equals", there is no strong part in the plot to prove their worth. In many parts the novel looks like a mere description of the tussle and challenges between Simon and Charles,

while the other two characters Raymond and Andrew were pushed to backseat with out any depth in their characterization.

MY COMMENT...

As an Indian, I find very close resemblance between the British and Indian Parliamentary system, though the office bearers in England are mentioned in different wordings...for example..

England----- India
House of Commons----- Lok Saba..
House of Lords ----- Rajya Sabha..
His Majesty King----- The President..
Chief Whip -----Minister of Parliamentary affairs..
FIRST AMONG EQUALS....THE BEST ..!!!

Gea says

Archer, Jeffrey "First Among Equals" Linden Press/Simon & Schuster; 1984

Being a fan of Mr. Archer I picked up this book at the annual Plano Book Sale along with some of his other books. However, this book was not only dull reading but it was lengthy and the characters vacillated between good and evil with the exception of Simon Kerslake. It was hard to follow the characters from one escapade to the next, one relationship to another. Both Charles Hampton and Raymond Gould round out the characters along their shenanigans. If you are English you probably will understand this novel set around Parliament more than if you are an American. Once again Mr. Archer leaves you hanging wondering after each episode which is his favorite way to get you to continue to read it. I found the book less than exciting and more melodramatic than any of his other books. Wishing it were otherwise but I would not give him a thumbs up for this novel. Was I surprised at the ending? No because the 'good guys always win' in the end right? The fly jacket says "It is a story of titanic rivalry" but you really do not see that after the first introduction of Charles Hampton. It is I presume to be about his rivalry against his brother Rupert another addition to the flock of characters but who plays a minuscule role and in fact you hardly remember him when he is reintroduced at the end.

Would I recommend it? If you are a Jeffrey Archer fan probably. Otherwise I would say pass it by. It is dull reading.

Anirudh says

I am sure many readers will find this very interesting. But personally I didn't like reading this. I didn't know anything about English Politics and didn't feel like doing much researching. One thing that annoyed me was the sudden change in POV. But its certainly good for those who like politics.

Onlooker says

In this book, Archer gives the reader an insider's view of the parliamentary form of government. Four candidates each vying to become the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Canavasing votes, a coin toss, scrambling for coalitions to get the the required absolute majority, a minority party getting to play the king maker like I said earlier, it shows most of the ins and outs of the parliamentary form of government. A well written political drama.

And a titbit, I read somewhere that different characters became the Prime Minister in different editions of the book.

Matthew says

I have enjoyed most of Archer's books, finding them not only interesting but informative and entertaining. This is a clear exception. The book was tedious and boring with only momentary and fleeting episodes of interest or intrigue. Overall, it was disappointing.

Leseparatist says

So, the full story. I first read this novel when I was about 15 or 16, and knew next to nothing about the British parliamentary system (thanks, Polish education). I'm sure a lot of the novel went over my head, and I have no idea how accurate the translation was, but I have to say what I remembered was mainly the scheming and how cool it made politics seem.

I decided on this re-read because I wanted to see how I'd feel about it now. And I started reading the book only to realise something was strangely wrong. One of the characters was missing! Turns out, I was reading the early US edition, which was bowdlerized because the publisher assumed Americans wouldn't be able to cope with the amazing complexity of a non-two party system. Meaning, one of the four characters (Andrew! *The nice one!*) ended up on the cutting floor.

So, I had to go back and re-read the beginning.

From my current perspective, I have several things to say. First, Archer really does so, so badly by his female characters. It's very apparent looking at historical figures: Archer predicted that Thatcher wouldn't make it to third term (she did) and that Elizabeth II (view spoiler) But it's even worse with the wives and girlfriends. They might not necessarily fall into wives-and-whores categories, but they aren't *much* more nuanced. We have the long-suffering Joyce who (view spoiler). We have Amanda. I think Fiona and Elizabeth are the closest to being complex (Louise doesn't really get enough pages to have that much of a characterisation other than her fertility troubles), but even so, it seems like there's more Alec Pimkin, the flamboyantly gay stereotype, than either of the wives.

And when it comes to Clarissa... I'm not sure what the point of having the whole self-hate was. Nothing comes of it, it is just gross.

When it comes to the male characters, I have to say Charles feels like Archer had a huge grudge against his party colleagues, Simon feels like Archer's beloved character and possibly a tiny bit of a self-insertion (but not too much, I'd say, especially considering the ending). Andrew is the likeable one, even without all his tragedies. Charles's scheming is actually mostly enjoyable, aside from all his woman problems. And then there's Raymond, who is essentially the best at what he does (try to make the UK a more equal place! Save the war widows!) but... really bad at acting like a human being.

The novel is engrossing, but it's mostly on the strength of the main idea, not of the writing. The writing itself is not only terribly dry and fragmentary but also very gimmicky, relying on withholding information from the reader and telling the reader that the information is being withheld. Tune in for the next chapter if you want to know what Andrew/Simon/Raymond/Charles/Raymond's wife/King Charles III decided to do! It can work, from time to time, but when it's done a dozen times and in each case almost the same phrases are used, what it becomes is mostly annoying. And then there are some really cheap plot twists, and the occasional awfulness. The political bias (anti-socialist) is very apparent, and then there's the occasional Rule Britannia enthusiasm. Still, I found the ending quite satisfying, for all that. (view spoiler)

It would have been so much more interesting if the novel had more developed female characters, or female protagonists, and if the writing was more sophisticated (and if Archer's editor actually added the missing commas). But the book makes for a decent beach read, at least.

Sheetal Dash says

'First Among Equals' is quite a different tale. Some of my friends told me that they found the initial part boring. Well, I didn't find that assessment to be true. This novel makes a very interesting reading, and like many other Archer novels, it picks up action as you reach 200-odd pages.

This is a tale of four aspiring gentlemen: Fraser, Gould, Kerslake and Seymour who enter the House of Commons in the 1960s, each aspiring to win the highest office - and to reach 10 Downing Street. But only one man can do it. Archer, the master storyteller that he is, narrates in detail the lives of each man - the ups and downs each must face - and winds it up with the final battle.

The suspense is gripping and the man who becomes the Prime Minister is revealed only in the very last paragraph of the novel.

Overall a great story... hats off.

Deidre says

Wonderful if you want to learn about, or like British parliament. I read the abridged version (they leave a character out for the Americans I guess)but I'm looking forward to reading this version with the 4th man in it!

Luisina says

The ending was a huge disappointment. I have nothing else to say about this book.

Aleeeeeza says

It took me almost four months to finish this book. FOUR MONTHS! Even then, I skipped a couple of chapters near the end to finally finish it. Don't get me wrong. This book is actually pretty good. But politics? NOT my thing. So it was a mistake just to pick it up. Besides that, Archer's storytelling is top-notch, but the slow pace of this entire-career-of-four-different-men-documenting novel really grated on my nerves. I was skipping lots of pages at times, more interested in the personal lives of the characters than their careers, which, despite trying pretty hard, I failed to really understand. Bottom line: If you like political sagas, then this one's for you.

Felicity says

This is a story about four very driven characters competing in the British political environment from 1964 - 1991, all aspiring to be Prime Minister one day:

Charles Seymour (Viscount)- an Eton/Oxford graduate born to money and banking - obviously a Tory (Conservative) but also an aristocratic, arrogant snob. Doesn't have much luck with wives, nor the board of his family business.

Simon Kerslake - another Conservative, but also a devoted family man who makes some risky investment choices in his personal life, due to his association with Ronnie Nethercote. Simon's a nice guy, who tries to do everything right (whom some say Archer based on himself - obviously while wearing rose coloured glasses).

Raymond Gould - Labour Party intellectual from working class background, the son of a butcher, who went on to become the youngest Queen's Counsel in the country. Blackmailed by a prostitute and later spends most of his political career with a mistress. Eventually rediscovers his love for his wife.

Andrew Fraser - Chooses to be a Labour man and later leader of the Social Democratic Party, despite the fact his father, Sir Duncan, is a strong Conservative politician. Andrew suffers a number of personal tragedies, but has the strength to pull through and continue his political career.

These four very different personalities are developed against the real life PMs - Wilson, Callaghan, Heath and Thatcher. Queen Elizabeth, Prince Charles and Lady Di also get a look in, and it's interesting that given this book was written in 1984, Archer chose to have Charles king by 1991.

Considering "a week is a long time in politics", Archer has to cover a lot of ground quickly in this novel, and he does it well. He doesn't always explain the outcomes or spell things out, leaving the reader to figure it out for themselves, or, draw their own conclusions.

In the race to lead the country, there is plenty of backstabbing, blackmailing and controversy. Archer has obviously drawn on a lot of his own life experiences to create this insight into the inner workings of the machinery of government, but he adds a dramatic flair that makes electioneering, party factions and the passing of legislation an exciting battle.

There are some great support characters in the novel too, but my particular favourite is Alec Pimkin: "My darling, the only Etonians who have been seen in Hammersmith pass through it as quickly as possible on a boat, representing either Oxford or Cambridge." And on the subject of the whereabouts of Charles's second wife: "In Switzerland producing a baby, which we can but hope will bear sufficient resemblance to a white

Caucasian to convince one of Charles's limited imagination that he is the father." And on inserting himself in the leadership ballot: "Dear simple creature...there are some members of our party who do not care to be led either by a middle-class pushy minor public schoolboy or an aristocratic, arrogant snob. By voting for me they can lodge their protest clearly...Irresponsible it may be, but you can't imagine the invitations I have been receiving during the last few days. They should continue for at least a year after the election is over."

Anie says

It's another great book of Jeffrey Archer. Recommended for those who love politics and all those who want to keep themselves occupied till the last page. It also defines how the parliament works. As a reader, you come to know in depth about the British government system. Further, it shows in detail about the life of people in political stream. What are the pressures, highs, and lows in life that politician observes. How media affect their personal lives. After this book, I have become a fan of Jeffrey Archer as he is one of the finest story makers and keeps on rotating the strike and keeps the balance. Also, the author shows very smartly about different personalities, their plan of action that would shape their career.

Basha1971 says

Having been sure I'd read all of JAs books, I was surprised to find this one at a vacation house we rented on the Mediterranean. Well, they say to write what you know and Archer knows the British Parliament. I never would have cared to learn all the ins and outs but Jeffrey makes learning fun! ;)

Firoz says

Pick this book only if you are interested in politics and if you did pickup, You will find it boring in the start but keep reading, you will love the characters.

This one is quite different from the other archer's books that I have read. It gives inside information about how British parliament works.I liked all the four characters.It tells a lot about different personalities and how their decisions would shape their career.I find it hard to remember the characters in the start.It is lengthy but makes up with the interesting plot.

Michelle says

Warning: Do not read this unless you are actually interested in politics!

First Among Equals is an epic saga which follows the lives (including scandals, wives and lies) of four British MP's. The book spans more than 20 years and would be nowhere near as good were it not for Archer's superb writing style.

Charles Seymoure is the ruthless second son of a wealthy Earl and will literally stop at nothing to make No.10 his home. *Simon Kerslake* is an ambitious "career Conservative" with a loving wife who backs him all

the way. *Raymond Gould* is the 'working class hero' born above his father's butcher's shop. *Andrew Fraser* the son of an eminent Conservative member who joins the Labour party and captures his father's former seat. The question is which one of these ambitious men will become the Prime Minister?

Although this book is about politics, Archer weaves through the book the personal stories of each of the men. This worked effectively and by the end of the book I was surprised to feel a strong connection to each of the characters. I found this book intriguing, but I am sure that most would struggle with the heavy political focus. Archer's narrative hooks worked wonders, and although the story is told in third person omniscient, the change from character to character kept me on the edge of my seat.

Although I did not back a winner right from the start (rather, I started to lean towards one or the other as their personal lives changed) I found the suspense and twist in the final chapter absolutely thrilling. I put it down, looked at the wall and said "Wow! What just happened? No, did he really do that?" And that is the feeling I love to have at the end of a book.

While this book may not be for everyone, it shows clearly Archer's ability to write a captivating tale. He will certainly be on my to-read list from now on.

Ernest says

Time has made me more aware of both the parliamentary process and the role that personalities plays in politics. This reread of this book has that added dimension to the previous thoughts I had below.

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This was one of the greatest insights into the British Parliamentary system that I have read. Archer manages to weave the lives of four individuals together as they travel through politics with a skill that does not crassly portray simplistic good or bad characters, but fleshes them out as fully fledged characters. Archer's experience evidently aided in constructing this novel, and his respectful insights into the work of parliamentarians should be made compulsory understanding to those who mock and decry all who serve in parliament. I also somehow found the story strangely inspiring.

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### **Jayne Charles says**

I rather liked this slightly soapy tale of political life. Because Archer has been there and done it, the story has a certain authenticity, though I'm sure it has been greatly simplified. I thought the characters were well drawn, avoiding too much stereotyping. The only thing I didn't particularly like was the ending, and the convenient personality transplant of one of the main characters

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### **Maggie says**

Fortunately I love politics, as I worked in the Australian Federal and State political scene for a number of years, so this book grabbed me by the throat.

It is a great story and reveals how earlier actions by people in public life, no matter how covert, can rebound and have major consequences down the track – even 20 years later.

Archer also captures the fickleness of human nature, how ambition can undermine integrity and how personal jealousies can knock a good man down – no matter how good he is.

I thought it was a great read. No eloquent phrases or salient and profound messages, but a very real portrayal of the Machiavellian rough and tumble in the political arena. I enjoyed it immensely and I will definitely go on to read more of Archer's books.

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### **Clari Zimmermann says**

NO LO PUEDO CREER!!!! invertir tanto para que no gane mi candidato :(  
No estoy de acuerdo con el final porque mi corazón estaba con Simon, pero la verdad que Raymond se lo merecía, como político, como persona me quedo con Simon (o Andrew).  
Muy buen libro, súper entretenido. Me reí, llore y me mantuvo al vilo siempre. Excelente.

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