Cruel To Be Kind
A Political Fantasy
Francis W. Porretto

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[A fantasy about an atypical politician in a fictitious nation. You might like him, or you might not. It’s the same to me either way. But I’ve become so tired of the mealy-mouthed insincerities of “real” politicians that I had to create a character of the opposite stripe and portray him at work. Enjoy, or not!]

1. Kindness At The Shoreline.

John Whiteman, recently chosen to be the Prime Minister of Erehwon, had decided upon a change to his country’s “refugee” policies. He was aware that he couldn’t change the requirements of the law, which had been duly passed by the Chamber of Deputies, so he did the next best thing: he changed how those requirements would be implemented. After his directives had had a week to take effect, he decided to address the “refugees” that had made it to Erehwon’s shores.

Whiteman arrived at the newly erected, enclosed, and populated Refugee Detention Center at eight o’clock AM local time, accompanied as always by his security detail. One of his guards raised a bullhorn to his lips and shouted:

“Attention refugees! You are about to be addressed by our prime minister, the Honorable John Whiteman, on matters of importance to all of you! Please assemble by the furthest inland run of the fence.”

He repeated the call to attention twice more as masses of unkempt refugees emerged from the tents provided and moved toward the elevated speaking platform on which Whiteman stood. As the crowd swelled and milled toward his perch, Whiteman took the bullhorn from the guard and spoke through it.

“Refugees, eh? Yet more than ninety percent of you are young men, all of you look healthy, and it looks like most of you have smart phones. What do you seek a refuge from, the fathers of the girls you knocked up?

“According to our laws, I am required to house you ‘refugees’ here…but only until we can return you to your home countries in safety. So here’s the deal: you’ll be living in those tents, in this compound, which you won’t be permitted
to leave until the day comes for your repatriation. There’ll be no WiFi, no electricity, and no entertainment of any kind. Yes, there’ll be food and water, but we won’t care about your opinion of the food, and water will be all you’ll get to drink. Clothes? What’s wrong with the clothes you’re wearing? Should they become soiled, feel free to use any of the washtubs in your compound. The soap and scrubbing boards are being provided gratis, by one of our larger charitable institutions.

“Your compound is surrounded by crew-served machine gun emplacements that will be continuously manned. Anyone who tries to scale the fence will be shot down, no questions asked. His neighbors can dispose of his body. We certainly won’t want it.

“For extra security, you’ll all be wearing ankle monitors. Very special ankle monitors: if you cut through the band that holds them on, they explode. Guaranteed amputation of your lower leg. If one of you is detected outside the compound, he’ll be tracked down and executed wherever he’s found, again no questions asked. Yes, children too. Some of you ‘teenagers’ have mighty impressive beards.

“We aren’t interested in hearing any demands from you. In fact, the very first demand any of you makes will get all of you loaded onto a raft and dragged a mile out to sea. Think you could make it back?

“Whoever survives this regime will be returned to his homeland when we think it’s safe. You won’t get a vote. After all, we didn’t get one when you decided to come here, and fair’s fair.

“So make yourselves at home! Those of you whose phones are working should call your friends and relatives back in Dumbfuckistan and Upyourassov and tell them about the
conditions here. Especially you should tell them about the size of this compound – the fixed size of this compound. No matter how many ‘refugees’ arrive here, they’ll all be confined to the space you occupy now. No enlargement will be considered.

“Have a nice day!”

#

Prime Minister Whiteman considered his task accomplished and returned to his desk in the Icosahedron Office. He’d been there barely a minute before his secretary began to bombard him with messages. All of them were from Deputies, and they were unanimously upset. Angry minorities among their constituents were bombarding them with complaints that ranged from decorous protests to death threats.

Whiteman had a uniform response to those calls: “Ignore the protests. I have defined the policy. The Solicitor-General has ruled it within the requirements of the law, so I intend to enforce it as it stands. See to it that the law is enforced in your constituency, and leave mine to me.”

Over the next three days the cascade of complaining parliamentarians dwindled to a trickle. Presently it ceased altogether. There were scattered reports of angry street protests, which Whiteman ignored. A couple featured low-level violence. Whiteman directed the relevant police forces to enforce the law without fear or favor, and they did so. After a week there were no more protests.

Whiteman reviewed the reports from the “refugee” compound each morning. For a week there were no hints of difficulty; the “refugees” appeared to have accepted their lot. The absence of any discord made him increasingly suspicious. He ordered a doubling of the guard force.

Then came the escape attempt.

#
“How many dead?” Whiteman said. He did not look up from his paperwork.

“Twelve.” Interior Minister Frank Tenderfoot was desperate to get the chief executive to alter the “refugee” detention policy. He hoped the announcement that bloodshed had occurred would do it.

His hopes were dashed.

“Good,” Whiteman said. “That should be enough to get the rest to draw the moral. Was there anything else?”

“Mister Prime Minister,” Tenderfoot faltered, “aren’t you the least bit concerned about the loss of innocent human life?”

That brought Whiteman’s eyes up. Tenderfoot was shocked to see him smile.

“Not at all, Frank,” the prime minister said. “First, by definition the escapees were not innocents. They broke parole. They chose to defy the conditions I placed on their refuge. Second, I put the existing policy in place well before they arrived here, so they had no excuse for not knowing what the consequences would be. They chose to doubt my will. That was on them.”

Tenderfoot was taken aback. He’d known Whiteman to be callous about refugee rights, but he’d never imagined that it would lead to mass bloodshed. He groped for words.

“Was there anything else, Frank?” Whiteman said. “I am rather pressed, you know.”

“Mister Prime Minister…” Tenderfoot breathed once deeply. “You should be aware that—”

“That the Justice Crusaders will be staging a protest right in front of the compound fence later today?” Whiteman shrugged. “I know, Frank. I’ve known since last night. My agents inside that organization reported it to me. As long as they don’t obstruct the gunners’ view of the fences, I’ll have
no problem with it. If they do, on the other hand…” Whiteman’s smile became shark-like. “Let’s just say that their troubles will be worse than they can imagine. As will yours.”

Tenderfoot staggered where he stood.

“Yes, Frank, I know about your involvement. I’ve known for a while. Good intelligence is vital to a chief executive, especially in Erehwon’s snake pit of a government, so I made it a high priority from day one in this chair. I probably have the best network any prime minister has ever had. And I will nail you to a cross if your comrades should pose my patrols the least little difficulty. So be sure to tell your Justice Crusaders to keep out of the way of the compound guard force. I can trust you to see to that, can’t I?”

Tenderfoot stuttered, choked, and shambled out of the Icosahedron Office. Whiteman returned his attention to his paperwork.

#

The next morning’s news coverage was all about the medical condition of Interior Minister Frank Tenderfoot. Apparently he’d been set upon by an angry mob during what the papers called a “gathering of his constituents.” Why that gathering had occurred far outside his parliamentary constituency went unaddressed. Those who attacked him had beaten him savagely, some with clubs. The hospital to which he’d been taken reported him to be in critical condition.

Whiteman noted the reports and had his secretary send a bouquet to Tenderfoot’s hospital room.

It was barely nine o’clock when his secretary told him that a large majority of Parliament had demanded that he appear before them at once. He shrugged, buttoned his jacked, and went to the Chamber of Deputies to confront them. When
the speaker admitted him, he strode to the lectern, panned a smile around the members, and said, “Well? What is it?”

The gathering drew a collective breath so sharp that Whiteman could feel a draft flow from him toward them. After a moment, a Member rose pointed an accusing finger at him.

“Mister Prime Minister,” the Member shouted, “your refugee detention policy has already caused twelve deaths and could well be responsible for the assault on Interior Minister Tenderfoot!”

Whiteman nodded. “So? What of it?”

There was a moment of shocked silence.

“Aren’t you the least bit concerned about these events?” the Member continued.

“I did not send Minister Tenderfoot into the den of villains where he was attacked,” Whiteman said. “Therefore I will accept no responsibility for the consequences. As for the fatalities at the refugee compound,” he said, “that was in accordance with policy. My policy. And as long as I have the authority over such matters that the Refugee Relief Act gives me – you did vote for that bill, didn’t you, Arthur? – that policy will not change.”

The Member was visibly stunned. He’d plainly expected the spilling of blood to force Whiteman to modify his detention policy. He had not dreamed that the prime minister would choose to stand fast.

“While I’m here,” Whiteman said, “allow me to acquaint you with a few facts. First, the refugees are all fed, watered, and protected from the elements. There have been no reports of violence within the compound. No one has attempted to tamper with the fences or the ankle monitors. Second, statistics on the refugees’ home countries are now generally available, and they point to a single, inarguable fact: They’re
better off in the compound, statistically, than they were where they came from. They’re eating twice as many calories per man per day as their compatriots. They’re not subject to political persecution. Not one of them has asked to be repatriated. Yes, twelve did attempt to escape. They paid a price that had been made known to them in advance. It’s my hope that no others will pay it, but that’s up to them. So tell me, Members all: Are you ready to deport them en masse? Because that’s their sole alternative to detention in that compound.”

Whiteman started to turn and depart the dais, checked himself and turned back to the gathering. “You should also know, Members all, that since I had the compound fenced and guarded as it currently is, not one additional refugee craft has approached our shores. Word has gotten around, it seems. Nearly all of the refugees came equipped with phones, and they sent word to their homeland about the reception they’d received. Inasmuch as controlling the refugee influx and the associated crime, welfarism, and other social pathologies, was one of the tasks you set me, I deem the goal achieved.”

“You’ll be unseated at the next election!” came a shout from the gathering.

Whiteman smiled. “Will I?” he said. “Perhaps. But perhaps not. Perhaps you gentlemen should consult your constituents before you decide to range yourselves against me. And with that I shall say, as I said to the refugees when I addressed them a week ago yesterday: Have a nice day.”

Foreign Minister Lane Scheisskopf was plainly upset. As there could only be one reason, Whiteman had to repress a smile. He’d known it was coming; the only uncertainty was how soon it would arrive.

“Mister Prime Minister,” Scheisskopf ventured, “while your refugee policy has admittedly quelled the problem for us domestically, there have been…other consequences.”

Whiteman nodded. “I assume those consequences are pertinent to your area of responsibility, Lane?”

“They are, sir.”

“Well,” Whiteman said, “other nations were never guaranteed to approve of our domestic arrangements. As long as they confine themselves to verbal criticism, I think we can endure it.”

“Sir, some of them are speaking openly of retaliatory measures.”

“Of what sorts?”

“Tariffs and trade barriers.”

“Ah!” Whiteman allowed his expression to brighten. “What does our nation import from them, Lane?”

“Sir?”

“Come, come! What goods does our country import from those countries? More to the point, how would our people and our economy be affected by the absence of those imports?”

Scheisskopf was deeply flustered by the inquiry. “Sir, I’m not prepared with that information.”

“Are you prepared to say which of our domestic industries would be affected by the inability to export to those nations?”
“No, Mister Prime Minister,” Scheisskopf mumbled. “I’m not.”

“Hmph.” Whiteman rose from his desk, went to the little bar built into the north wall, and poured himself two fingers of Calvados. “A drink, Lane?”

“No thank you, sir.”

“You know,” Whiteman said after a sip, “if you were prepared with that information, it would be a significant datum. It would mean that the consequences of a trade skirmish with those countries would be widely felt, and perhaps deeply enough that our people would feel some pain. As that’s not the case, allow me to say that I’m unconcerned over the matter. Was there anything else?”

“Yes, sir,” Scheisskopf said after a moment. “The ambassadors of Dumbfuckistan and Upyourassov have urgently requested to meet with you. Today, if possible.”

Whiteman finally allowed himself to smile. “Of course it’s possible, Lane! I’d be delighted to chat with them. Where are they at the moment?”

Scheisskopf glanced at his watch. “At this time, sir, I imagine they’d be at their respective embassies.”

“Well, ring them up! Tell them I’d be happy to see them here, at any time today. But together, Lane. Together only.” Whiteman waved an arm. “My time is limited, but as the refugees could tell you, my hospitality is boundless.”

Scheisskopf winced, nodded, and departed.

#

Whiteman didn’t hear from Scheisskopf until late that afternoon. He sensed that Ambassadors Jihadiki and Jerkovich had wanted one-on-one time with him and were resisting the notion of meeting with him together. But at about four his secretary announced that they had presented themselves as he
suggested. The two trooped into the Icosahedron Office, with Scheisskopf in the lead.

Whiteman remained seated as they entered. “Well, gentlemen? What is it?”

Both ambassadors bridled at Whiteman’s expression of disdain. They bore themselves as representatives of sovereign states, and as such entitled to respect. It was how Whiteman’s predecessor had treated them. To be regarded as supplicants grated on their self-esteem. Scheisskopf was equally upset at the blatant disregard of the diplomatic courtesies, but he kept silent.

It was Jihadiki who spoke first. “Prime Minister Whiteman, we must protest your treatment of our citizens in the strongest possible terms. What you have done amounts to incarcerating them as criminals, treatment that is explicitly forbidden by the bylaws of the World Council on Refugee Resettlement!”

“Surely, Ambassador,” Whiteman purred, “you’re aware that my nation is not a member of that council? That we reject its assertions of authority and have never agreed to any of its decisions or decrees?”

“We are,” Jihadiki said, “but—”

“Then you may consider that point to have been dealt with and dismissed with prejudice, Ambassador.” Whiteman paused and looked off theatrically. “Did I hear you say a moment ago that you were here to protest our treatment of your citizens?”

The Icosahedron Office grew silent. Scheisskopf’s look of anxiety intensified still further.

Presently Jihadiki said “I meant to say that—”

“What you did say is what concerns me, Ambassador.” Whiteman chose that moment to rise from his desk and cross
his arms over his chest. “Which of your citizens have I mistreated, and when and where?”

Jihadiki merely glared. Whiteman nodded as if the ambassador had confirmed an important supposition for him.

“You mentioned refugees in the same sentence with your citizens, Ambassador,” Whiteman said. “From that I infer that the citizens you’re concerned about are in our refugee detention center. Is that or is that not the case?”

Jihadiki drew a deep breath. “It is, Prime Minister.”

Whiteman smiled. “Well, in that case,” he said, “I’ll happily order them transferred to your custody—if you’re willing to take personal responsibility for transporting them directly back to your nation. Otherwise, I’m afraid they’ll have to stay in the detention center. They did arrive here illegally, you know.”

“There is no such thing,” Jerkovich grated, “as an illegal refugee in international law.”

“And what makes you think,” Whiteman said, “that I have the least concern with ‘international law,’ Ambassador? By conforming to the ‘international law’ of which you speak, the nations of Europe have found themselves overrun by savages that are rapidly destroying their continent. Present trends continuing, twenty-five years from today Europe will be a Third World hellhole indistinguishable from Dumbfuckistan and Upyourassov.” He grinned viciously into their shocked faces. “Why else would the flow of refugees be exclusively from your countries to mine? Did you think I would put a happy gloss on something so obvious, as a gesture of respect to you?”

It took a moment for Jerkovich to find his voice, but when he did it came out at volume.
“Your attitude toward a sovereign nation is intolerable!” Jerkovich roared. “When I have informed my president there will be repercussions that will bring your nation to its knees.”

Whiteman shrugged. “Such as?”

Jerkovich opened his mouth to continue, but closed it without speaking. He glared daggers at Whiteman, who merely smiled.

Presently Whiteman said “Unless you’re contemplating military action against us, I’m unconcerned with any ‘repercussions’ you have in mind. And if military action is on your agenda, allow me to state quite explicitly that a fifth of our navy could beat the snot out of the whole of yours and be home in time for lunch.” He turned to Jihadiki “I hope your nation isn’t about to make any such threats. I’d be unable to restrain my laughter.”

There was a thump from the far side of the room as Scheisskopf fainted and collapsed.

“Never have the representatives of civilized nations been treated so rudely!” Jerkovich screamed. “You will regret this!”

Whiteman shrugged again. “I don’t think so. But I will refrain from comment on your implication that your two nations are ‘civilized.’ Now, gentlemen, was there anything else? Anything of substance? I do have a country to govern, you know.”

After a few seconds’ silence he pressed the button that would summon his security detail to escort them out.

“What do you think?” Tenderfoot murmured. “Will he be re-elected?”

“By his constituents?” Scheisskopf said. “Without a doubt. He’s the most popular man ever to emerge from Querendon, and one of the most popular in Erehwon. Will he be reinstalled as premier? Not bloody likely.”

“The tenor of the country was difficult to judge,” Tenderfoot said, “before he was made prime minister. It’s a completely different complexion today. If the office were awarded by popular vote—”

“Which it isn’t,” Scheisskopf said, “and thank God for that small blessing.”

“—he’d probably get ninety percent of the tally.” Tenderfoot shook his head. “I can’t grasp it. Parliament is against him. The media are against him. His own party is against him. Yet he keeps winning.”

“Other autocrats have done the same,” Scheisskopf murmured.

“Usually by mowing down their adversaries with machine-gun fire,” Tenderfoot countered. “He hasn’t done anything of that sort. The voters, may God bless the noisy little simpletons, are in love with him. They haven’t the faintest conception of their own interests.”

Scheisskopf allowed himself a small smile. “And we do, Frank?”

“Enough of one to fan-dance it for our constituents, at any rate,” Tenderfoot said. “He tells them the exact opposite of what they want to hear. He tells them he’s resolved on policies that will bring dislocations, privations, suffering…and they applaud! They swallow it down and clamor for more.”
“Give the man his due,” Scheisskopf, “he also tells them that there’s a better future ahead if they’ll only be patient. He’s enough of a politician for that.”

“And when it doesn’t arrive?” Tenderfoot countered. “It hasn’t, you know.”

Scheisskopf shrugged. “Perhaps our sense of matters is not the one that matters most.”

The bailiff rose. “Deputies of the Commonwealth of Erehwon, honorables all,” he boomed out, “the Honorable John Whiteman, the Member from Querendon, by the will of His Grace the King and by your choice the Prime Minister of the realm, begs leave to address you.”

The gathering rose to its feet as the premier stepped to the lectern.

#

Whiteman scanned the throng for a long moment before speaking.

“Honorable colleagues,” he said, “I am here for a solemn purpose. The time will soon be upon us to face our constituents. The great majority of you have stood for re-election, as have I. If history is any indication, the great majority of you will be returned here. Though you chose me to head the administration, over the two years just past you have consistently opposed every one of my initiatives and legislative proposals, often all the way to the High Court. It is a state of affairs that has caused me to wonder whether our aspirations for our nation are truly in concert.

“To be effective, the chief executive of our realm must be able to govern with the cooperation of the legislature. This chief executive has not had such cooperation. Rather, I have had to wheedle, to cajole, and to bargain with you all over every proposal I have ever made. It has been a wearing
experience, good neither for me nor for our nation. Therefore I feel that with the election only two weeks distant, it is time to resolve whether you will have me as Prime Minister for the two years to come.”

A muted gasp rose from the assembly.

“What is he doing?” Scheisskopf whispered.

“Haven’t an earthly,” Tenderfoot returned, “but somehow I doubt we’ll like it much.”

“It is pointless,” Whiteman said, “for a nation to have a premier who cannot govern it. While that doesn’t capture our current condition in all particulars, it comes acceptably close. Moreover, it is debilitating for such a chief executive to know that no matter how he may struggle and strive, he cannot command legislative support for his policies. Therefore I rise today to call for a vote of no confidence in His Majesty’s government, of which I am the head. Let the proposition be put to you as we are gathered today: Shall the Whiteman government continue on for a second term, with John Whiteman at its head?” He smiled. “I call the question.”

“This makes no sense!” a member from the capital district shouted. “The election could turn you out no matter what we might say!”

Whiteman nodded. “Indeed it could, and it might. But if my surmises prove accurate, you, my fellow members, will remain near to uniformly in your seats. If so, we may neglect the possibility of an electoral reversal. Besides,” he purred into the microphone. “ought we not to give our voters a sense for what their government will be before they decide whether to return us to our offices as Deputies?”

An unnatural stillness gripped the chamber. Whiteman waited in silence.
“So moved and called,” the bailiff boomed out. “Is there a second to the member’s motion?”

A figure from the back of the chamber rose. “Aye,” he grated in a rheumy voice. “I second it.”

Whiteman turned to the bailiff. “Bailiff,” he said, “I request a formal tally.”

“The bastard,” Scheisskopf whispered. “He’s going to have us on record before the election about whether we intend to remove or retain him!”

Tenderfoot nodded mutely.

“Then let a formal tally be taken,” the bailiff called out. “All those voting in the affirmative, please insert your member’s card into the slot outlined in green. Those voting in the negative, please insert your card into the slot outlined in red. You have three minutes to register your preference.”

Whiteman turned to gaze up at the tally board as the system counted the votes. They came in slowly.

Tenderfoot fumbled out his card. He stared down at the tally box for a long moment before sliding the card into the green-bordered slot. The registration light lit at once. He removed the card, returned it to his pocket, and glanced at Scheisskopf.

The foreign minister did likewise. His mask of agony was a terrible thing to see.

The closing gong sounded. Four hundred fifty-nine pairs of eyes fixed themselves to the tally board.

“The tally is taken and recorded,” the bailiff boomed. “Four hundred fifty-nine votes aye to zero votes nay. The motion is carried.”

Whiteman bowed to the gathering. “Thank you, fellow members.” He stepped down from the dais and exited the chamber.
Whiteman had been back at his desk in the Icosahedron Office for about twenty minutes when Scheisskopf and Tenderfoot appeared to request his attention. He smiled, invited them in, and told them to sit.

“What can I do for you gentlemen today?” Whiteman purred.

“Mister Prime Minister,” Scheisskopf said, “by your actions this morning you have pre-empted one of the Deputies’ most important functions: the choice of an executive administration. Now regardless of the electoral outcome—”

Whiteman nodded. “The odds are overwhelmingly in favor of my continuation in this office,” he said. “That was the point, Lane. Anyone else the party might place here would all but certainly reverse my administration’s policies, all of which have proved immensely popular.”

“Based on a lot of Promised-Land nonsense,” Tenderfoot ventured, “most of which hasn’t come near to reality.”

“No?” Whiteman smiled. “Our borders are secure. The influx of ‘refugees’ has ceased. Those who arrived before I became the prime minister have nearly all been repatriated. The budget, at long last, has been balanced. Taxes have been reduced and stabilized. Our friends in the permanent government have had their teeth largely pulled. And so private citizens can walk about in something approaching safety, can keep a decent slice of their earnings, and can operate their enterprises, and perhaps start a few new ones, without having to fend off bureaucrats and QUANGOs from dawn to dusk. The people seem to like it, though I’m sure there are some, notably here in the capital, who would differ. Perhaps you do, Frank?”

Tenderfoot grimaced but held his tongue.
“Well then,” Whiteman said, “why should your constituents, among whom I seem to be as popular as I am among my own, not be allowed to know how you feel about my premiership?”

“It was a violation of our traditions!” Scheisskopf exclaimed.

“True!” Whiteman said. “But so was the Supreme Charter, back when it was ratified. So was the Declaration of Common Rights and Protections, a few centuries afterward. And so is the recent tendency among our colleagues in Parliament to hide their true intentions while promising to do the exact opposite. That particular violation, gentlemen, has troubled me more and longer than you know.”

He rose and went to the picture window that gazed upon Central Boulevard. The commerce of Erehwon flowed steadily over that great avenue, yet with a curious sedateness. It was as if the tensions of the most recent decades had been bled from the land, that its common folk might relax and enjoy their lives in peace and security.

“I look out this window daily,” Whiteman said, “and I reflect upon the lives that pass it. The little men, the men who wield tools and make things. The men who are Erehwon, as we are not. For what we, gentlemen? What is our true significance? One of our countrymen once wrote in a novel that we are deemed important only because the papers daily say so. He was more right than wrong, I think. And it is time—past time, really—that we should cease to imagine ourselves as important beyond the stature of those little men. Time we should cease to believe what the papers say about us.

“A playwright with whom you may be familiar had one of his greatest characters proclaim, albeit to himself alone, that ‘I must be cruel, only to be kind.’ I have followed such a course,
and until a few months ago the cruelty did out-mass the kindness. But the tide has turned, gentlemen. Erewhon is headed upward again. And your constituents are aware of it.” He spread his arms in an encompassing gesture. “Perhaps you are too…but it will make no odds if you fail to acknowledge it. Now, if you please, I have a great many matters to attend to.”

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About The Author

Francis W. Porretto is an engineer, fictioneer, and commentator. He operates the *Liberty’s Torch* Website, a hotbed of pro-freedom, pro-American, pro-Christian sentiment, where he and his Esteemed Co-Conspirators hold forth on every topic under the Sun. You can also email him at the address below. Thank you for taking an interest in his fiction.

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