Fall 10-1-2007

Profile, Fall 2007

Columbia College Chicago

iam
Interactive Arts + Media

Fall 2007

PROFILE

STUDENT **Michaelia Kelley**

FACULTY **Tom Dowd**

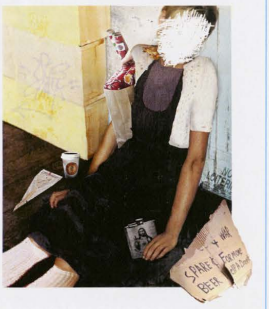
ALUMNI **Walker Hamilton**

Columbia
COLLEGE CHICAGO

student profile/

Michaelia Kelley
Junior, Digital Media Technology Major

Since day one, I've loved being a digital media technology major at Columbia College. I started in the major as a freshman and have never regretted it. This concentration has allowed me to learn and explore many different avenues of digital media — from static to motion — and everything in between. It's always hard to explain my major to others because it's so diverse, and I can never pin down any one thing I'm doing.



I was exposed to mixed-media artists in art history classes. They fascinated and inspired me and I think my work reflects this influence. But "mixed media" to me means mixing and combining aspects of multiple software applications into one piece. I like to move a project from Adobe Photoshop to Corel Painter and back again to Adobe Illustrator and so forth, applying techniques from each. I believe this procedure helps me create stimulating pieces. But my favorite technique is trompe l'oeil, which is French for "fooling the eye," and involves using realistic imagery to create illusion. I strive to create work that prompts the viewer to question whether it was created using a computer or not.

By the end of my freshman year, I added a marketing minor to my degree. I enrolled in a class called Culture, Race, and Media that enlightened me to the powerful effects advertising has on society. Embracing my potential as a future media-maker who can influence others as well as shape society norms and opinions, I realized I wanted to make work that would make an impact. I didn't want to create pieces that are only pleasing or interesting aesthetically. I started creating pieces that address social issues and include a message.

As I begin my junior year at Columbia, I'm excited about my fall semester schedule. I am also very excited about an internship I received to study in London during the spring semester. I'm hoping to immerse myself in a different culture and to see how the experience will help me grow and understand my own role in society. I look forward to the ways my internship will foster a broader perspective and how I apply that to my future work. ✲

faculty profile/

Interview with **Professor Tom Dowd**
by Ryan Batten, *Junior*, Game Design major

Your path into the game design industry wasn't exactly conventional. Describe how you began designing games?

I started in the pen-and-paper role-playing game (RPG) industry, writing games in the style of Dungeons and Dragons. Then I became one of the co-writers on the original Shadowrun RPG and started working for FASA Corp as the writer/developer for the line. >

I was also the electronic-rights overseer for FASA's licenses. One thing led to another, FASA Interactive broke away from FASA Corp and I slipped over to FASA Interactive. From that point on, I was a computer game designer.

Ryan Batten: ***How is getting into the industry different today?***

Tom Dowd: Back then there were as many ways into the industry as there were people in the industry. As programs like Columbia's become more and more common, a path has been established that can help you get closer to your goal. You still have to take that final step and get hired, but the path is becoming more navigable, so to speak.

RB: You've worked on several titles — a couple of major titles — during your career. Tell us about these accomplishments and what roles you played?

TD: I was fortunate to have entered into a senior position, which is unusual, the first time out. I do not recommend it, but I learned nearly everything I know now. Fortunately, my first boss, Denny Thorley (now running Day:1:Studios), was very patient. I've been lucky enough to be a senior or lead designer on nearly everything I've worked on.

How did you start teaching game design at Columbia?

TD: About eight years ago, I gave a tour of Virtual World Entertainment , a sister-company of FASA Interactive, to a group of Columbia College students. Michael Neiderman was their instructor, and through him I started teaching part-time at Columbia. When the Game Design major started, I had a considerable amount of adjunct teaching and game development experience, both of which worked in my favor.

RB: MechAssault, the Xbox Live launch title, was probably the biggest game you've worked on. How would you describe the experience? How was your experience working with Microsoft?

TD: Microsoft was great. They were very committed to helping us to create an AAA title and create the showcase product for Xbox Live. Having this honor was actually more stressful because we were the only ones representing the network. They put an enormous amount of resources at our disposal and worked very hard to make sure we remained focused on making the best game we could. It was an incredible opportunity and a huge responsibility.

RB: In addition to working at Columbia, you have been called on to create another game. Tell us about the new game and what role do you have in this project?

TD: I am the creative and administrative lead on a text-based, multiplayer RPG called "Castle Marrach" (www.skotos.net/games/Marrach), which is a very character/storytelling-driven game. It's about chivalry, fantasy, intrigue and things of that nature. Primarily, my job is to keep all the parts (staff, story and technology) working together in some semblance of harmony. Our situation is representative — on a smaller scale — of the problems that confront big-ticket Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) developers only without the burdens of scope and scale, but unfortunately, without the massive number of players as well.

RB: What do you think about the current state of the game industry? What's being done right? Wrong? What's changing?

TD: On the positive side, I think the game industry is beginning to pay attention to the fact that their market is changing. It is no longer limited to hard-core gamers who can spend forty or fifty hours on a single game. Older gamers, who now have families and jobs, just don't have the time. But they still want to play. More compact game experiences, manageable in smaller time periods, are the key.

RB: There seems to be a growing interest in "serious games" for developers these days. Do you think this is a worthwhile effort? Or is the target audience for these games going to be unreceptive to the technology?

TD: Absolutely. Remember, the target audience of "serious games" does not include the hard-core or even casual gamer. The target audience is the non-gamer who is looking to explore something, learn something, to experience a simulation of something. To me, game-related technology and processes are being applied, but the results are not games. Therefore, I'm not always convinced the term "serious games" is accurate because the game experience is not explicitly present.

RB: What are your thoughts about digital distribution? Will it be good or bad for the industry overall and is it a realistic future?

TD: My thoughts are that digital distribution is good and realistic. Industries change. Technologies change. Companies need to change as well. Some will and some will not. For the future of game distribution over the long term, it is the content that is key, not the delivery medium. →

Students should actively engage their interests in the field and supplement their studies. They should join groups and societies; read web sites and blogs; read magazines and books; play games; analyze games; download tools and "make" games. There is only so much one can learn in a classroom; students must aggressively build on their knowledge. The more one knows, the better one will do in class and beyond.

RB: There seems to be many more outlets cropping up for independent game developers. How do you think things are changing for the indie game developer?

TD: I think there are more opportunities for indie developers in terms of technology and distribution. Neither of these factors alone are going to help them create good games, though, and that's what's going to make or break these developers.

RB: Mobile games are becoming the most profitable sector of the industry. Why do you suppose that is?

TD: I think of mobile games as fidget games, something you play when you have ten minutes or so. The experience is short and something to do while waiting for something else. Currently, phone companies are paying a lot for mobile games. I don't know, however, how many of these games are actually being purchased for their own sake, or if consumers play them because they are already included with their cell phones. In either case, as long as phone companies pay for mobile game development, it would seem that everyone wins.

RB: What are your thoughts about Agile Development and Scrum? Can these really help improve the production process? Who are they helping the most (developers, publishers, individual employees, etc.)?

TD: Agile Development and Scrum both require the right team, the right mindset and necessitate a different kind of thinking. Without a change of mindset, there's all sorts of potential trouble. The current system has huge flaws that need to be addressed. Agile and Scrum, if nothing else, are attempts to address those problems.

RB: It's very well-known that the game industry can be viciously competitive and tough to get a start in. What advice can you give students in the program right now? What should they be doing? What should they remember?

TD: Students should actively engage their interests in the field and supplement their studies. They should join groups and societies; read web sites and blogs; read magazines and books; play games; analyze games; download tools and "make" games. There is only so much one can learn in a classroom; students must aggressively build on their knowledge. The more one knows, the better one will do in class and beyond. ※

alumni profile/

Walker Hamilton

I graduated from the Interactive Multimedia Department (now Interactive Arts & Media) of Columbia College in 2005. Currently, I run a web-development firm, Visicswire, dabble in another company, Black Point Editions and will graduate soon from the Illinois Institute of Technology with a Masters of Science in information architecture.

Black Point Editions, founded by alums Nathan Baker, Nathan Royer, Walker Blackwell — and newest member— Brandon Sorg, is established as a fine-art digital production house located in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood. This company is one of few "open-house" printers of black and white fine art in the U.S. Visicswire, founded along with Columbia photography alum Jonathan Greene, provides on-line services for commercial and personal web sites and develops applications for corporations and individual clients. We recently released a preview of a new, open-sourced software and vimages (http://vimag.es). This software allows web developers to easily create web sites geared towards fine artists and galleries representing fine artists.

I loved being a student at Columbia. Columbia made me feel like I was a part of the city, something initially distant to me when I first came. I am especially grateful to professors Wade Roberts, Jeff Myers, Andrew Hicks, Janell Baxter and Joe Cancellaro for giving me the instruction and guidance that helped launch my career as a web site application planner and developer.

Much of my time is spent writing code. While writing code bores most people, I find great satisfaction in using code to solve problems. I love figuring out ways to get processes on-line. Finding solutions to on-line problems that businesses face gives me a lift. When a company calls to say, "You improved our work-lives," I consider my work a success.

While I design the information display and build the mechanisms that power a web site, my talents and expertise are best actualized as part of a team. Because my strength does not lie in design, designers provide the front-end elements of the web sites I develop. I really enjoy it when the team can grasp an interactive paradigm and bring it to life on the web.

For almost a year, I have been working as the technical director for Digital Web Magazine (http://digital-web.com). An all-volunteer staff>

A LIST OF MY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ONGOING PROJECTS:

❖ **walkerhamilton.com**
My own site where I post code and projects I'm working on.

❖ **visicswire.com**
The visicswire site includes a small blog, portfolio and advertising landing pages.

❖ **quikorder.pizzahut.com**
I helped build the code base for this major redevelopment of the platform for Pizza Hut.

❖ **firm58.com**
I programmed and automated the content of Firm58. They are a Chicago firm that builds financial applications.

❖ *Some code I'm working on for a new web application to help manage landscaping crews.*

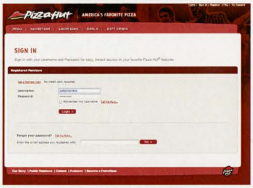
❖ **icarmenquintana.com**
I. Carmen Quintana is a site that incorporates an original and fun way of navigating through an artists' portfolio. Jon developed the site in flash.

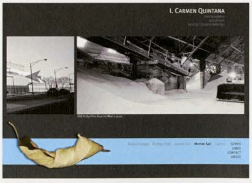
❖ **huntclubchicago.com**
Hunt Club restaurant and nightclub.

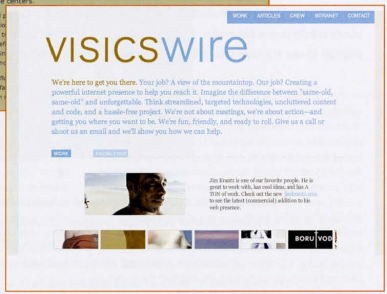
❖ **revealingchicago.org**
Revealing Chicago. This web site was created along with Jonathan Greene, Jennifer Keats and Walker Blackwell to display the work of photographer Terry Evans. Jonathan Greene and myself created Visicswire because of our work on this site.

❖ **chaiseloungechicago.com**
The website for Chaise lounge restaurant was produced by Visicswire.

❖ **signalfade.com/cakemarks**
Cakemarks is a clone of a popular bookmark-management web application, del.icio.us. I built it in my spare time.







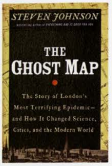
I love figuring out ways to get processes on-line. Finding solutions to on-line problems that businesses face gives me a lift.

runs the magazine. Working there is an excellent way to give back to the community while providing invaluable work experience. I'm in the process of developing the next version of software to power the site. Cal Henderson, the developer of Flickr and who I replaced at Digital Web Magazine, developed the previous version.

I decided more education ensures a greater chance of success. Enrolling in graduate school was the logical next step. Visicswire (and myself) are proud of our two staff members with advanced degrees in information architecture. Both Matthew Ephraim and myself will soon hold Masters Degrees from IIT in that field. Generally, only large companies have the budget and ability to staff individuals whom are both trained and knowledgeable in information architecture. I believe that this will give us the edge necessary to begin bringing the benefits of information architecture to small companies without straining their budgets, as a fulltime information architect.

book review

by Janell Baxter



The Ghost Map by Steven Johnson
The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic
– and How it Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World

Steven Johnson's The Ghost Map is an intriguing examination of London's cholera outbreak in 1854 and how a local doctor was able to advance scientific understanding of the deadly disease. The local doctor, Dr. John Snow, discovered that cholera was not transmitted by air but, in fact, thrived in water. While the disease raged on, killing almost 700 people during a two-week period, Snow set out to complete the formidable task of challenging prevalent ideas of cholera transmission. Johnson describes how Snow presented his data and the strategies he used to successfully prove his claim. Many variables contributed to the cholera outbreak and Johnson weaves these threads into a fascinating story that vividly brings the location and events to life.

In 1854, London authorities, the public and the medical establishment believed that cholera was spread by air. Snow not only disproved this notion and found that cholera was spread by water but he also methodically traced the epidemic's source to one single water pump, the Broad Street pump. Snow's claims were initially met with severe opposition so he therefore needed to build a solid case to prove his theory. Snow applied a variety of tactics including death counts and door-to-door interviews to gather data. Pressed for time, he collected information of behavioral patterns of over seventy people during a 24-hour period. Snow compiled the data and eventually convinced officials that the Broad Street pump handle had to be removed.

One of the most persuasive aspects of Snow's investigation was visual: He created a map. This map utilized and overlaid two methods that together proved very convincing. The first method used black bars to show the number of deaths at certain locations. This technique, called a dot map, showed that deaths around the Broad Street pump were far greater than anywhere else. The second method showed that most of the deaths were within the closest foot-traffic routes to the infected pump. Arranging and presenting the data as Snow did proved to be critical, because other data manifestations suggested that other factors may be to blame. But by using a dot map and a technique that shows the closest route between two points - a Voronoi diagram - Snow demonstrated that the Broad Street pump was the culprit.

While the map was convincing, a digital simulation of the 1854 London cholera outbreak could really bring Snow's theories to life. To be able to watch as residents visit a pump within walking distance and how those using the Broad Street pump have a much higher rate of infection could have a much more dramatic impact. Even better would be to include other variables mentioned in Johnson's book: how insufficient waste management contaminated the well in the first place, and how people traveling long distances for the "reliable source of clean water" that the Broad Street pump was known for became infected.

If you are interested in building a simulation of the London 1854 cholera outbreak, here are some resources to help you:

- IAM Courses: Simulation Design I (36-2500) and Simulation Design II (36-2501)
- StarLogo (an open source and easy-to-use simulation tool): *education.mit.edu/starlogo/*

game review

by Tom Dowd

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Anniversary
Crystal Dynamics, Developer
Eidos, Publisher
Single-player, action/adventure game
PC, PS2, PSP, Xbox 360 and Wii later this year

Any look at the recent release Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Anniversary has to start with the name. Ignoring the absurd title inflation afflicting many so-called sequels, this game title is correct in that it emphasizes the heroine, Lara Croft and the Anniversary classification is, as I will explain later, also accurate. The electronic game industry has few realistic break-out characters — as opposed to, say, cartoon characters like Mario — that are recognizable to those besides gamers, yet the popularity of Lara Croft clearly transcends the bounds of the game subculture.

Tomb Raider merchandising has become vast and includes video games on nearly all platforms, two big-budget motion pictures, comic books, action figures, trading cards, ancillary accessories and collectibles. The Lara Croft character was also featured in the "Got Milk?" print advertising campaign.

What does all this marketing of the Lara Croft character have to do with the game, you ask? Everything. Since the original Tomb Raider game came out in 1996, Lara Croft has been the focus on two distinct levels: Lara as a physical icon and Lara as gameplay mechanism. There is little question that the media – primarily mainstream media – was more focused on Lara's appearance than any other aspect of the game.

Certainly, Lara was designed as a male-idealized action heroine and it is this image that drove a significant amount of the Tomb Raider marketing.

Her look evolved over the years along with technology and its ability to render the human form with increasing fidelity. Interestingly, with each iteration, her physical proportions changed to more closely match realistic norms. Her appearance in Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend and in Anniversary resembles a more reasonable heroine-ideal than her prior sex-doll physique. Whether this is a nod to changing gender sensitivities and sensibilities or the simple reality that a traditionally disproportionate Lara Croft would look even more absurd in today's realistic/naturalistic game engines is hard to say. Perhaps it is an indication that there are more women entering the gaming industry.

Visiting Artists
Fall 2007 Schedule

ALL LECTURES ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

KEN RINALDO

September 20th, 5:00 PM
Ferguson Auditorium, 600 S. Michigan Avenue

ARTIFICIAL LIFE, ROBOTICS, AND EMERGENCE
Ken Rinaldo is an artist and Professor of Art and Technology at Ohio State University.
His interdisciplinary media art installations investigate the intersections between natural and technological systems. He integrates organic and electro-mechanical elements to assert a confluence and co-evolution between living and evolving technological material. His talk, featuring a DVD presentation of his installations, will explore theories on living systems, artificial life, interspecies communication and the underlying beauty and pattern inherent in the nature and organization of matter, energy, and information. This lecture is co-sponsored by the Interactive Arts and Media & Science and Mathematics Departments.

SHAWN DECKER

September 24th, 12:00 PM
623 South Wabash Avenue, Room 405

Shawn Decker is a composer and artist who creates sound and electronic media installations and writes music for live performance, film, and video. His work has been frequently performed, seen, and heard in the US and Europe at a wide variety of venues. He frequently collaborates with other artists, including most recently Jan Erik-Andersson and Anne Wilson. Recent exhibitions of both solo and collaborative work have shown at venues such as Kiasma Museum in Helsinki, Klosterruine in Berlin, ISEA2002 in Nagoya, Japan, the 21st Century Museum in Kanazawa, Japan, the Indianapolis Museum of Art, CAM Houston , ISEA2000 Paris, the Waino Aalto museum in Turku, Finland and numerous others. Decker is a Professor in the Art and Technology and Sound departments at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

SCOTT MCCLOUD

October 17th, 7:00 PM
Film Row Cinema, 1104 South Wabash Avenue, 8th Floor

COMICS: A MEDIUM IN TRANSITION
American comics are changing fast. Bolstered by the literary ambitions of the "graphic novel" movement, a flood of international influences and the growing importance of new technologies, the comics landscape shifts regularly in surprising and increasingly unpredictable directions. Author and comics artist Scott McCloud puts all these trends into perspective in a fast-moving visual presentation.

Scott McCloud has been writing and drawing comics since 1984. His book Understanding Comics was a New York Times Notable book for 1994 and is available in 16 languages. "Sin City" and "300" creator Frank Miller called him "just about the smartest guy in comics." His new book, Making Comics, explores the art and craft of telling stories visually. This event is part of the Creative Non-Fiction Week and is co-sponsored by the Film and Video, English and Journalism Departments.

VIPER VERTEX


RIC HEITZMAN

VIPER VERTEX

October 25th, 5:00 PM
623 South Wabash Avenue, Room 405

VIPER VERTEX is a contemporary electronic media arts company specializing in interactive and innovative multimedia, including exhibit/installation design and production, web design/production and DVD authoring. The two principals, JoAnn Gillerman and Rob Terry, provide a unique blend of digital media, fine arts, video, sound, computers and interface design. Viper Vertex has co-produced many interactive multimedia exhibits, including permanent installations at Chabot Space and Science Center, The Tech Musuem of Innovation, and the Saint Louis Zoo.

RIC HEITZMAN

November 8th, 5:30 PM
623 South Wabash Avenue, Room 405

Ric Heitzman straddles the fine and commercial art worlds as a designer, director, cartoonist and puppeteer. He has garnered three EMMY awards for Co-production design on *Pee wee's Playhouse*, the internationally syndicated children's television series. In addition, he has directed music videos, commercials and film. Some of his many clients are: Atlantic Records, Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Sprint and Chili's Restaurants.

A master of many forms of animation, he brought to life an array of characters in the pilot for the stop-motion animated series, *the PJ's*, staring Eddie Murphy for FOX-TV. Heitzman also co-wrote and directed Flash animated shorts, interactive games and two series, *The Banana Splits* and *Pink Donkey Goes to Japan* all for Cartoon Network. As a 20 year member of the Screen Actors Guild, Ric has supplied voices and puppeteered a number of characters for Cartoon Network, Children's Television Workshop, MTV, CBS-TV and Paramount Pictures. Ric designs from his studio in Los Angeles where he continues to paint, sculpt, write and direct.

WAFAA BILAL

November 15th, 5:30 PM
623 South Wabash Avenue, Room 405

Iraqi artist Wafaa Bilal, an instructor at the Art Institute of Chicago, has exhibited his art world wide, and traveled and lectured extensively to inform audiences of the situation of the Iraqi people, and the importance of peaceful conflict resolution. Bilal's latest video installation *Domestic Tension* placed him on the receiving end of a paintball gun that was accessible online to a worldwide audience, 24 hours a day. The month-long piece spurred online debates and intense conversations, garnering the praise of the Chicago Tribune, which called it "one of the sharpest works of political art to be seen in a long time," and Newsweek's assessment "breathtaking." But it is the resulting dialogue that Bilal seeks, as an artist who feels he does not have the privilege to create work that is not political. In the face of a war that stretches on, the 2005 deaths of his brother and father, the violence in his own history, Bilal seeks to imbue his audiences with a sense of empowerment that comes from hope in the enduring potential of humanity.

Survey Results

CORRECT RESPONSES	CONTROL GROUP	GAME ONLY	GAME AND VIDEO
Total Respondents	82	16	6
You are working at your desk on a weekend and you see smoke.	22.0%	93.8%	83.3%
The minimum number of stairwell exits in a high rise is...	70.7%	87.5%	83.3%
You have been asked to exit the building by your fire marshal but a coworker is visibly upset and unable to move.	20.7%	68.8%	100.0%
After dialing 911	30.5%	93.8%	83.3%
While attempting to exit the building through a stairwell you see smoke in the stairwell.	92.7%	93.8%	83.3%
All exits from your floor were smoke filled.	59.8%	87.5%	83.3%
All exits are blocked and smoke is filling your office after sealing the door.	39.0%	50.0%	83.3%
Your primary exit is blocked and the alternate exit door feels warm.	40.2%	81.3%	100.0%
If you are trapped in your office.	78.0%	93.8%	83.3%
While exiting your office	78.0%	81.3%	83.3%
You've been instructed by the fire marshal to stay on your floor but you see fire on your floor.	36.6%	0.0%	16.7%

Thanks to the pioneers of modern psychology, we know that games — by their very nature — are interactive and provide a function far beyond mere entertainment.

Each group, with the exception of the control group, was given the questionnaire after playing HELP or viewing the video and playing HELP. A comparison of results was used to ascertain how well each group performed in regard to the learning objectives of HELP.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. One section, comprised of six questions, was used to gather the background of the participants in the study. The other section, comprised of 11 questions, measured (preexisting) building evacuation knowledge.

The control group survey was sent via e-mail to faculty and staff of Columbia College Chicago invited to participate in the study. Of approximately 900 questionnaires sent out, a total of 87 were completed and returned.

The final two groups were given packets containing the game CD; install instructions and a link to one of the three surveys. These participants were randomly given packets that would place them into one of the two control groups. To keep track of who volunteered for the study, participants were asked to sign a roster indicating they had received the CD and would be expected to return the packet after completing the study. They were also asked to include comments about their experience.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of our study show that there was an increase of correct answers to survey questions as a result of playing the game. Because of time constraints, we were unable to gather larger populations within each assessment group. However, even with our sample size, results indicate that playing the game clearly met the learning objectives of our project. More time and participants, we believe, would strengthen our findings.

Comments from participants provided us with additional information on how to improve the game and make it more playable by a larger demographic. This project has provided significant insight on how serious games should be constructed and how to create methods of assessing their effectiveness. We hope to apply what we have learned to future projects as well as continue our research of video games as an important and better way of learning

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My special thanks to team members David Gerding, Jim Rohn, Dr. Joseph Cancellaro and Janell Baxter; Dr. Warrick Carter, President, Columbia College Chicago; Commissioner Raymond Orozco, The Office of the Commissioner, Chicago Fire Department; and U.S. Army Research Office, Aberdeen, U.S. Department of Defense.

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