

JIM MCCARTY



AGELESS
GUITAR HERO!

BY
TODD BEEBE

PHOTOS BY SALLY OMALLY SCHROEDER
(PICTURED OFF SCREEN)

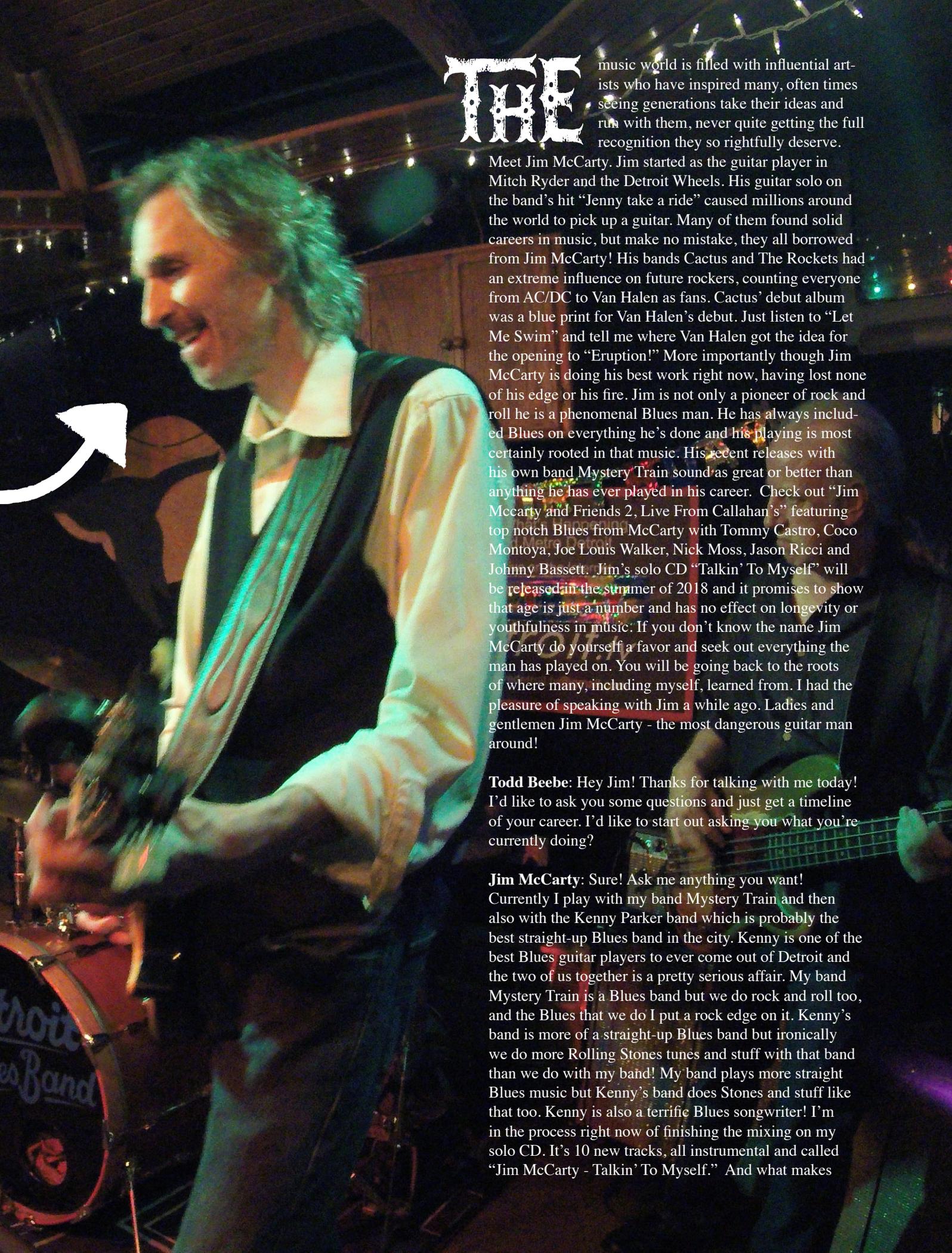
THE

music world is filled with influential artists who have inspired many, often times seeing generations take their ideas and run with them, never quite getting the full recognition they so rightfully deserve.

Meet Jim McCarty. Jim started as the guitar player in Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels. His guitar solo on the band's hit "Jenny take a ride" caused millions around the world to pick up a guitar. Many of them found solid careers in music, but make no mistake, they all borrowed from Jim McCarty! His bands Cactus and The Rockets had an extreme influence on future rockers, counting everyone from AC/DC to Van Halen as fans. Cactus' debut album was a blue print for Van Halen's debut. Just listen to "Let Me Swim" and tell me where Van Halen got the idea for the opening to "Eruption!" More importantly though Jim McCarty is doing his best work right now, having lost none of his edge or his fire. Jim is not only a pioneer of rock and roll he is a phenomenal Blues man. He has always included Blues on everything he's done and his playing is most certainly rooted in that music. His recent releases with his own band Mystery Train sound as great or better than anything he has ever played in his career. Check out "Jim McCarty and Friends 2, Live From Callahan's" featuring top notch Blues from McCarty with Tommy Castro, Coco Montoya, Joe Louis Walker, Nick Moss, Jason Ricci and Johnny Bassett. Jim's solo CD "Talkin' To Myself" will be released in the summer of 2018 and it promises to show that age is just a number and has no effect on longevity or youthfulness in music. If you don't know the name Jim McCarty do yourself a favor and seek out everything the man has played on. You will be going back to the roots of where many, including myself, learned from. I had the pleasure of speaking with Jim a while ago. Ladies and gentlemen Jim McCarty - the most dangerous guitar man around!

Todd Beebe: Hey Jim! Thanks for talking with me today! I'd like to ask you some questions and just get a timeline of your career. I'd like to start out asking you what you're currently doing?

Jim McCarty: Sure! Ask me anything you want! Currently I play with my band Mystery Train and then also with the Kenny Parker band which is probably the best straight-up Blues band in the city. Kenny is one of the best Blues guitar players to ever come out of Detroit and the two of us together is a pretty serious affair. My band Mystery Train is a Blues band but we do rock and roll too, and the Blues that we do I put a rock edge on it. Kenny's band is more of a straight-up Blues band but ironically we do more Rolling Stones tunes and stuff with that band than we do with my band! My band plays more straight Blues music but Kenny's band does Stones and stuff like that too. Kenny is also a terrific Blues songwriter! I'm in the process right now of finishing the mixing on my solo CD. It's 10 new tracks, all instrumental and called "Jim McCarty - Talkin' To Myself." And what makes





this interesting among other things is that I play all of the instruments! Guitar, Bass and Drums.

TB: Awesome! I can't wait to hear it! Going back to your early years- how did you get started playing guitar? You started as a drummer am I right?

JM: Yeah my dad was a drummer back in the big band days. He knew a lot of people: Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, Peggy Lee. I started banging on the pots and pans when I was 2 years old. I studied drums actually for about 5 or 6 years or so. More Jazz drumming than anything else. Then when I was about 13 or 14, somewhere around there, I picked up the guitar because I just love the instrument. I just thought it was the coolest thing. There's no other instrument of any kind that has the color palette that the guitar does. All the way from Segovia to Jimi Hendrix and everything in between- there's a lot of different tonal colors that can come from that one instrument. It's astounding! So when I was a young teenager I just picked it up and when Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels had their first hit record "Jenny take a ride", I still considered myself a drummer at that point. It was the number 4 record in the country in 1965 and then when "Devil with a blue dress on" went to number 2, at that point I said "well I guess I'll be a guitar player!"

TB: What were you playing during that time?

JM: Well "Jenny take a ride" was done with a Gretsch Country Gentleman through a Vox Super Beatle. I saw a

picture of George Harrison and I said "man I got to get me one of those!" They were cool guitars, with all the switches and everything! But then I went to a Gibson Byrdland cause I grew up listening to Jazz. That's still what I listen to more at home than anything else now is all the Blue Note stuff: Miles and Coltrane, Kenny Burrell, Wes Montgomery. But I got my hands on a Gibson Byrdland and I really liked it and that's when I was introduced to humbucking pickups and that became home. Give me a Humbucking pickup through a Fender amp and I'm home! I knew Mike Bloomfield. He came back from England one time and he told me about this guy, Eric Clapton, that was playing a Les Paul and then Bloomfield started playing one and he turned me on to it and once I got my hands on a Les Paul that was it! I've played a Stratocaster here and there occasionally down through the years but for me it's a Les Paul through a Fender amp.

TB: Did you play a lot with Mike Bloomfield?

JM: I knew Michael -he had the Electric Flag he put together and Buddy Miles was the drummer. When they broke up he put the Buddy Miles Express together and I was the guitar player in that band.

TB: So you met Buddy through Michael?

JM: Well the Detroit Wheels broke up around '66 or so -going into '67. The Wheels had power and that original combination was a great band! If that band would have



been nurtured and taken care of there's no telling what could have been. We could have been the American Rolling Stones! We would have started writing more of our own tunes or whatever, but in any case that band broke up and I played around and I would go see The Paul Butterfield band who I loved! Bloomfield had been in the band but the last time I saw them they didn't have Michael with them, it was just Elvin Bishop. Butterfield actually considered me for the band at one point. I went to Chicago and played with them but it just didn't pan out for whatever reason. Then around 1968 Corky Siegel from The Siegel-Schwally Blues band got in touch with me and we played quite a while with Sam Lay. We went to California and were doing a tour of the West Coast - The Fillmore in San Francisco and then down to The Whiskey a Go Go in LA. While we were playing the Whiskey Buddy Miles came down and he said "I'm putting a new band together - the Buddy Miles Express" He loved Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels and he asked me if I'd be interested in being the guitar player? The idea of playing with a horn section sounded really intriguing to me. It was a 4-Piece horn section and I was like "Man these guys are good!" Some of those guys were from the Electric Flag! So I said "Yes!" So I went from the Siegel-Schwally Band to the Buddy Miles Express. This was around 1969. We did 2 albums. The second album Jimi Hendrix produced half of it.

TB: Wow that had to have been an amazing experience!

JM: That was interesting! I mean, yeah I'm out in the studio doing a guitar overdub and Hendrix is in the control room right? It was a little daunting! But Jimi really loved Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels so he was super cool! But yeah I was in awe of the guy. There are a lot of great guitar players, and then there was him! I remember listening to "Voodoo Child" for the first time- Jimi brought an acetate from the studio over to the house where the Buddy Miles Express was living and put it on the big stereo and I heard that and I remember leaving the house and just walking the hills of Hollywood contemplating getting into another line of work! I mean it was mind-boggling. Nobody had ever heard anything like that. Nobody ever heard anything like that first album! It just completely changed the game. You know you have individuals like that, they pop up once in awhile. Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five with improvisational Jazz or Robert Johnson or Miles Davis, Coltrane or Jimi Hendrix. These are guys that aren't just real good, these are guys that changed the rules of the game for the rest of us and Jimi was one of those guys! Interestingly enough a lot of these guys don't last very long. They come in and blow everybody's minds and then they're gone!

TB: Definitely! So how did Cactus come about Jim?

JM: I Was with Buddy about a year, then I left Buddy Miles and I was in San Francisco. Tim Bogert and Carmine Appice got in touch with me. This would have been toward the end of 1969. Tim and Carmine had the band Vanilla Fudge, and when Led Zeppelin first came to the States on their first tour, Vanilla Fudge had Led Zeppelin as an opening act and they were blowing the Fudge off the stage! Tim and Carmine saw this every night and they said “this is the direction we want to go in - we want to put a power trio together.” They were going to form a band with Jeff Beck but Beck was involved in a car accident so then they called me. They got in touch with Rusty Day to sing. He was already in the mix when they called me. I flew to New York and we jammed some and then I decided “this is interesting!” I always thought Rusty Day’s strong suit was his lyrics. I mean when you can end up rhyming “Aurora Borealis” you’re into something! I think “Alaska” is one of his finest moments lyrically and I always thought “One way or another” was probably the best original song that the band ever did. The original band was together from 1970 through 71, then after a couple

drummer in Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels. We put the Rockets together and we were together for 10 years and did six albums. But we just never got that big breakthrough hit record. But we were a great rock and roll band! And we had a great run for 10 years. But by 1983 that band was pretty much over. By that time I made a conscious decision that I wanted to play Blues. I’d been putting it off for years. Everybody kept telling me to get a hit record first and then you can make your Blues album but when the Rockets broke up I said I’m just not interested in another rock and roll band right now. So I formed the Detroit Blues Band. That band put out a couple of CDs.

TB: So as the “2000’s” rolled in we saw Cactus reform!

JM: Somewhere around 2001 Randy Pratt called me. He is the man responsible for there being a later stage version of Cactus. He called me every year for about 2 or 3 years saying “Hey Tim and Carmine are going to be in New York next month! Are you interested in coming in?” He has a studio downstairs in his place. For a couple of years I kept telling him “Randy I don’t do that stuff anymore! I’m really not interested.” And finally around 2001 or

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years I left the band. It became three guys playing their ass off in three different rooms and that wasn't a band. To me if you're not playing together as a group then there really is no point. So after a couple of years I left the group and they carried on for a little while with somebody else, but it didn't really pan out and then they ended up doing the “Beck, Bogert and Appice” stuff.

TB: What are your memories of Eric Clapton and Cream in the 1960s?

JM: Well I saw them at the Grande in Detroit. Cream played there for two nights when they first came through Detroit. I was there both nights. I went down the first night and they had all these stacks on stage - that was the first time I'd ever seen walls of Marshall stacks. Clapton came out to check his wah wah pedal and it was like the sky opened up!

TB: That's great! OK so what happened after your time with Cactus?

JM: Once I left Cactus I came back to Detroit and I put the Rockets together with Johnny Bee Badanjek. This would have been about '73. Johnny Bee was the original

beginning of 2002 he just made me an offer I couldn't refuse so I went to New York and got together with Tim and Carmine. We looked at each other I started a line from “Muscle and Soul” off the Cactus 5 album and we started playing that and working it out. Then we did a couple more tracks and everybody looked at each other and said “We should continue this!” So we would get together about every 6 to 8 months and lay down a few more tracks. And then after three or four years we had enough tracks, 14 of them, for the Cactus 5 CD and that was put together. And then Carmine was talking to these guys in Sweden that have a label and they were wondering if he had any old Cactus stuff and he said “ Well how about some new Cactus stuff?” They jumped on that and put out the Cactus 5 CD which came out in 2006. It got killer reviews and I couldn't stop laughing because the original band got butchered by the reviews and the critics! We got skinned alive! But with the reunions it was “Cactus! One of my favorite bands of all time!” “Nobody rocks like Cactus did!” (laughs) So there you go!

TB: Then you reunited with your old band mate Johnny Badanjek a few years after the Cactus 5 release right?

JM: Somewhere around 2009 or '10 I put the “Hell Drivers” thing together which was like the Rockets

regrouping in a way for a short time. That CD is one of the greatest live CD's that ever come out of Detroit! It's like a little time capsule of history of Detroit Rock and Roll played by some guys that were part of that History. Every tune on that CD is a piece of classic Detroit Rock and Roll. It's just a trio - Guitar, Bass and Drums with a Front man - no overdubs there either! That CD just rocks from beginning to end!

TB: It does! That's some of your best playing without a doubt! One of my favorites!

JM: Then somewhere around 2010 or 2011 Jimmy, the singer from Cactus called me and asked me if I would be interested in coming back to the reformed Cactus and I said "yeah I think I would be." Because when that band is on it's on! I just love playing with Carmine, I mean Carmine Appice is one of the all time greatest Rock drummers that ever lived! He's one of the guys that invented that style of Rock drumming! So I got back together with them and the "Black Dawn" CD came out in 2016. When you consider the age of the two original members it's pretty amazing!

If you had to pick one guy- who's your main man?

JM: If I had to pick one guy it would be BB King. All the Kings - Freddy, Albert, they're all great! But BB, he was one of those guys we talked about earlier that just changed the game. If you're going to play the Blues, especially back in the 60's he was the guy! There was no way to avoid BB King! Whether you ended up playing that style or not you had to go through BB! Albert King had more balls but BB made you cry! And none of them had the voice that BB had. Wow what a voice!

TB: What do you think of newer players like Warren Haynes?

JM: Warren is a good friend of mine and he's a monster! Both him and Joe Bonamassa are great friends and I love playing with both of them! Warren is terrific I always envied those guys that not only have the guitar playing but they have the voice to go with it.

TB: It's always great how you have been able to go back and forth between the Rock and the Blues stuff.

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TB: While you're on that topic - what's your key to longevity and how do you keep that fire? I plan on doing this for life and guys like you that never stop are a huge inspiration! Some Musicians just quit if they're not "making it." You've been around for years and your playing is better than ever too.

JM: When you're in your twenties and thirties and you know, you're doing your thing and you're trying to make it, but by the time you're 40 then the wife starts going "...well you know I've given you 10 years on this thing." So usually the guitar ends up going in the closet cause you've got a wife and kids and you know you've got a responsibility to make a living. But for guys like me, and it sounds like you too, we're what I call "Lifers." Whether you make it or not, this is what you do. I'm playing the way I'm playing now because I'm clean, sober and focused. I don't smoke, drink or do drugs. I watch what I eat and I try to take care of what's left of my body. I don't mess around anymore. My energy goes into the music. When you hear my upcoming solo CD, that's not only one guy playing all that - that's a 72 year old man playing all that!

TB: You're a hero of mine and to many others as well Jim.

JM: Well I'm kind of like Eric Clapton in that regard - I need both of them really, to be musically happy.

TB: Hey Jim it was great talking with you, I appreciate it so much, thank you for your time!

JM: Oh no problem man you got it! Take care Todd!

Check out Jim and all of his endeavors at
www.jimMcCartyandfriends.com

Also check Jim and his band out on Facebook at

<https://www.facebook.com/Mystery-Train-130872343609817/>

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