

The Windownesian

Chapter 10

Bother My Bloodline



2003: Hong Kong launched the Individual Visit Scheme welcoming Mainland visitors to boost the economy.

Late 2021: The Policy Address was presented with a plan of Northern Metropolis Development Strategy.

Mid-2022: The Chinese Government announced to take control and oversee the Development Strategy.

2025: The first railway line across Hong Kong and Mainland was established.

2026: The first Public Estate was established in the Northern Metropolis.

2027: First batch of residents moved to the Northern Metropolis.

January 2028:

Winter holiday is not over. But here I am, taking a long trip from rural Yuen Long to the campus. For a very good reason. I need to borrow some books for my honours project. As I return to the stuffy room from the library, I see Alex the AI in his seat.

“I thought you are away until the next semester,” he says.

“I need to get these,” I put down two thick books on the table, “can’t get these elsewhere.”

“You don’t use E-books? They are easier to obtain and convenient to read.”

“Nah, I want to keep a physical copy, so that it would be easier to jot notes.”

“Doubt. You can highlight any line you want and they automatically become your notes.”

“Hand written notes are ten times better, you remember what you noted. Anyway. Why are you here? I thought you went travelling.”

“Well I did. And it was so much fun.”

“So, where have you been?”

“ShenZhen. And boy what a wonderful experience. You know, they are advanced, really advanced in technology! They use fully automatic cars to get themselves around. I can take a driverless taxi, basically a moving pod to go around. They use robotic dogs to deliver goods. They have service bots in cafes and restaurants. The whole thing is just superb! I have recorded some footage, wanna have a look?”

“What about the people there? Are they nice?”

“Well, most of them are nice and will kindly talk to you. Just... I don't like some of them. They talk aloud. The cars move fast and never let pedestrians go first. You know, I almost got hit by a manned car! Luckily I dodged that.”

“Or else you would have been this,” I point at my arm, having flashbacks of a car with a Chinese car licence crushing at me.

“Ooo yea. Oh wait, with just an arm, how are you going to move your books back home?”

“I have a backpack. Well, at least their windows are open right?”

“Indeed they are!” Alex exclaims, “fresh air and plants everywhere! Unlike the windownesian.”

“Speaking of the elephant, where is he?” I ask.

“Bobby is not an elephant,” Alex notes.

“I know. It’s metaphorical.”

“I don’t know man, can’t see him since I am here. But the windows are still closed. Anyway I will be leaving this airless room soon. I am just here to pack a few things for my next trip.”

“Oh really? To where?”

“ShangHai.”

“Good for you. I cannot go travelling now. I have books to read.”

“Told you to get digital books, so that you can read them on the way.”

“I will just read them at home. Bye.”

I return to my own home. It is a three-storey house in the middle of Tai Tong, Nam Hang Tsuen to be exact. My family lives on the middle floor, ground floor and third floor belong to our neighbours. There is a balcony just next to the living room, we use it for laundry. From time to time I love to meander on the balcony. After opening the loud heavy balcony gate, a similarly tall pink building is in sight. According to the previous owner, decades ago back when this house was just built, one could watch the sunrise from this direction. On the

right, there is not much to look at. There used to be short three-storey buildings filling up the scenery. Now that the so-called Northern Metropolis development strategy is a thing, I watched these concrete huts getting demolished one by one. Large trucks visited this rural land everyday and slowly, quite annoyingly, there were buildings reaching ten, sometimes twenty stories. It didn't take long for giant grey architecture to replace the sky. What the developers didn't dare to take, are the landlords' houses. When you move a few steps to the left side of the balcony, walk past the washing machine, there you can lay your arms on the railings and enjoy the scene. Short houses scatter scarcely across the road. Mountains fill the backdrop. These dark green giants stand next to each other with dense trees covering them. Each morning, birds sing to wake people up. There are fewer birds compared to several years ago because of the construction. Since the Northern Metropolis flattened many hills in the New Territories to create space, this is believed to be the last piece of green you can see in Yuen Long.

The neighbours downstairs have moved away since the father of the house died. Their children decided that it is a good idea to move the mother to town centre for better care, leaving the house empty. They had a garden, planting all sorts of greens you can imagine. There are two tall mango trees reaching our window. So close to us, we can touch them with ease. For some reason, we didn't collect even one. Every late Summer as the mangoes ripe, they managed

to collect all the fruits, and share some with us. Now that they are gone, the garden is filled with the remains of once thriving plants and long wild grasses. Every time I look down from the balcony, I can't help but feel hollow.

In the evening, a large truck appears on the ground floor. Noises start occurring since then. It takes us a few hours to realise, someone is moving in. After dinner, someone rings our doorbell. Since I am just reading on the sofa in the living room, I am closest to the door and I proceed to open the door. Outside the metal gate stands a guy, similarly old as me. His face is round, so round as if he comes from a cartoon. By instinct, I know he is not local. I proceed to open the gate as well. He reaches out a hand and in a Chinese accent he says,

“Ni hao, I am Ka Ho. I am new move in.”

“Oh hi,” I softly shake his hands with my right hand, “Jonathan.”

“Sorry, what are you saying?”

“Oh. My friends call me Jonathan or Jon. You can call me Zhuang Man.”

“Hi Zhuang Man.”

“Ka Ho, where are you from?”

“I am from Sichuan.”

“Sichuan? My brother is studying there.”

“Zhuang Man,” he glances at my left arm, “what happened to it?”

“Broken. Don't touch it!”

Mum comes to the door,

“Oh hi, you must be the new neighbour!”

“Nice night, auntie.”

I leave them talking at the door, and dive into my room with my books.

The next morning shortly after dawn, I am woken by something outside. It's music. My room is parallel to the garden downstairs. I can see the garden by looking out of my window. The Chinese melody is loud on full blast, sounds like it is from a cheap radio. I cover my head with my pillow, but a sudden fap of a folding fan wakes me. Half-annoyed, half curious, I look down from the window. Ka Ho's mother is in pink Chinese traditional cheongsam, or is that just pyjamas, dancing to the slow beat of the deafening rhythm. It's not a school day, I want to sleep more. So I put on my furry slippers and leave my bed. In quite a shock, the door of my house is open, meanwhile the music stops. Must be mum or dad standing up to that noise. But soon after some female chattering noises, the music starts again. I drag myself down the stairs, and reach their garden gate. Through the gate, oh no, mum and auntie are dancing to the music, looking cheerful. This won't end well. Reluctantly I walk back to the room, and force myself to sleep with tiredness. When I wake up several years later, not naturally but being disturb, I can hear the news. They must be watching TV in full volume. I can't stand them. I move to the living room to close the balcony gate so that it will be quieter. Thankfully, they close the TV and leave in the afternoon. The place is at peace again.

But peace doesn't last long. In the early evening as I am reading books on the balcony, my nose detects something stimulating. It is the smell of burning toxic grasses. I should know, that was the smell of my dead grandpa whom I hate being hugged by him. I look down, uncle is standing in the garden smoking. He notices me and waves hi. I disappear into the living room, and close as many windows as possible.

On the evening of Thursday the sixth, I meet up with Meander by the Victoria Harbour before she goes to work. Meander works as a part-time host at a local broadcast called "The People". And man how good they are at picking nice views. Depending on the season, we always get to watch the sunset shining dim gold on the buildings before or after, sometimes during the show. I find Meander leaning by the railing glancing at the amber waters.

"You are getting late," I greet her from behind.

"So as my interviewee," she takes out her holophone, "is it too difficult to understand addresses?"

"Is it a government official this time?"

"Big one, called...I need my notes."

"Well perhaps they are stuck not knowing how to take the MTR!"

"Very funny, Jonathan Wills."

The director has contacted the previous show to play one more song to buy us time. As everyone is in position, red lights are on and the director counts: five, four, three, two, and one...

“Good evening ladies and gentleman, welcome to ‘The People’, guardian of your voice and your right to information. I am your host, Meander Lee. Several years ago our government drafted the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy. With the first batch of residents ready to move into this metropolis, it is a good chance for us to review this quite revolutionary city development plan. With me is Mister Mok Kwan Yu, the Commissioner for the Development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.”

“Please Meander, just call me Benjamin. It’s a pleasure to be here.”

“Benjamin is here to share with us this development strategy. So, let’s cut to the chase Ben, tell us about the Northern Metropolis.”

“Sure. The Northern Metropolis is our new town development plan, a self-sustaining town across Hong Kong and Mainland China. It aims to alleviate the housing problem in Hong Kong and enhance Hong Kong-China cooperation. As a metropolis, it provides 926 thousand residential units and 650 thousands local jobs for the 2.5 million population. Basically a cross-border city.”

“You said a cross-border city with 2 and a half million people, but how does that number work? I mean, those populations are on Hong Kong’s side or China’s side?”

“We have no exact answer and statistics here. But we aim to include the population from both sides of the bay.”

“So, Benjamin, you said that the Northern Metropolis is going to be self-sustaining...”

“It is its biggest feature.”

“How self-sustaining is it?”

“How self-sustaining? To explain how it works, I first need to point out one thing, that it is different from previous projects. One weird thing is that in Hong Kong, jobs are generally concentrated in the South or the middle, when the residents live in the North. That’s why every morning and evening you see people travelling everyday. For instance, commercial areas are in Central or such, and Insurance companies are concentrated in Kwan Tong, people cannot live where they work. That is not self-sustaining, residents cannot completely fulfil their career need in the same area. Northern Metropolis on the contrary, is the whole package, we provide everything, you can work and live in the same area. Not any low-paying jobs such as salesman or local restaurants which have little career development, but a hub of top jobs such as business, insurance, research and creative industries. It is going to outperform the old towns we have here.”

“Right, I see that you are thoughtful. Now I don’t study town planning a lot, but a concentration of housing and jobs doesn’t sound reassuring to me.

Take Kwan Tong as an example, it is infamous for its traffic congestion because of its mixed land use. Now, how is the Northern Metropolis better?”

“The key here, Meander, is infrastructure. We admit it, we didn’t do well enough in Kwan Tong. To be fair, we didn’t foresee it to be that crowded when planning. When we first set the main roads, we didn’t know the place would develop this fast. This happens to many towns such as Yuen Long and Tuen Mun, we build roads and required infrastructure first before the houses.

Therefore the infrastructure can only sustain one land use. As towns developed, roads became too small. As population grew, we found out that mere housing was not enough and had hard times inserting schools, town halls, markets, everything a community needed. The Northern Metropolis is different. We are generous on the quality and quantity of infrastructure, overdoing it so that it not only sustains this decade, but for the decades to come when it further develops. It is also like when we first develop areas around Victoria Harbour, but with a far insight to prepare things for the future at the very start.”

“So you are building a Victoria Harbour of the North?”

“We are building the Victoria Harbour of the North but better.”

“I see. Now before we continue, ‘The People’ values your voice. So audience, should you have any questions or opinions, please don’t hesitate to message us via CloudSound The People 2028 one word all lowercase. Yes, we have updated our account name. Moving on. Benjamin, one important thing we

haven't tackled yet about the Northern Metropolis. If housing is the problem, then why does the metropolis connect with ShenZhen."

"Other than the cliché of telling you we want to connect Hong Kong with our own motherland, we have a more beneficial reason, Research and Development, we make use of the strengths of both places. We have to cooperate so that we can thrive together. I am saying every aspect from technology to business. A few years ago, we would say that Hong Kong shall do the research parts, whereas ShenZhen shall sustain the market and business promoting technological discoveries to the Mainland market. Now this kind of shift. ShenZhen is in many ways better equipped and advanced than Hong Kong, at least from a technology perspective. ShenZhen shall do more research. Hong Kong is still important, it is a stepping stone to the global market and we still need Hong Kong for business expansion. Building a metropolis across both prompts a more intimate cooperation."

"So you are building a Silicon Valley of the East?"

"Exactly, but perhaps Silicon Harbour in this case."

"So Benjamin, if R&D is your concern, why build a whole Metropolis around it?"

"Good question. Because that way we can kill two birds with one stone. Not only can we physically connect our people, but also nurture a love for the nation. HK has always been feeling like, we are not close enough to China. It shall not happen. We are Chinese. We belong to our Motherland. There can be

many factors leading to this rough conclusion but infrastructure is a major factor. See, you cross the border to the Mainland like visiting another country. We want to be more intimate, physically. Therefore the Northern Metropolis has 5 train lines across China and Hong Kong and is a cross-border city itself. It can also be a touchstone of the bonding between two places.”

“Right. Oh, we have our first question. Chan Paul asks, ‘Is it feasible to actually build the Northern Metropolis?’ Well that is quite general. Benjamin, what do you think?”

“There are two difficulties when it comes to town planning, cost and land. Well Hong Kong has never been concerned with money. Because if it deserves the investment, we will do it. Land, however, is the real issue. See, The Northern Metropolis uses land of Northern Hong Kong, where a few villages are present. It is not easy to negotiate land from them.”

“Gees my boyfriend lives in Tai Tong and you shall never underestimate their will to keep their own land.”

I whisper to the director, “no, I am not the landlord, but she is not kidding.”

“That’s why The Chinese Government took over. Using their rights and reasonable compensation, our great motherland has collected all the land needed for development. That’s the benefit of having the nation on your side. Above everything, our nation is effective when it comes to getting things done.”

“I see Benjamin. Next we have Kary 2651 asking, ‘what about the co-location arrangement in the Northern Metropolis?’ Now as it crosses the

borders, I think juxtaposed controls are a real issue. I remember this issue was controversial back when the High-speed railway was built and people argued whether we should cross the border inside Hong Kong. Ben?”

“By far our arrangements are, we want the Northern Metropolis to be in one piece, so we don’t have co-location arrangement inside it. But if you want to travel beyond it, you still need your passport with you. We are still reviewing this arrangement.”

“It is complicated alright. We have Avivit asking, ‘are you going to preserve the natural environment and the original lifestyle of preexisting residents?’”

“I am confident to tell you that we are preserving the outskirts and the wildlife there. Afterall, nature serves a recreational use and we need it if we want a healthy city.”

“Well, okay. We have Z Vendetta asking, ‘there has always been a Hong Kong China conflict. How would the relationship of the people of the two lands be in the Northern Metropolis?’ Now this is very practical. Benjamin?”

“How dare you speak of this. We are of one ancestor, we are of one family, the same blood. There shall be no problem living together. I don’t have to answer this.”

“No sorry Benjamin, this is an important issue I want your views on. We are of the same blood. That doesn’t mean there is no problem living together. Chinese-Hong Kong conflict has always been a huge issue. Some close friends

of mine even express conflicts in the subject matter. So, if many youths may live in it, it would be better if we get some ideas from you.”

“Fine, Meander. I can only tell you, we Chinese are of one family. Youths need to respect our nation, its flag and national anthem. It is our duty to love our own country.”

“Alright then. It is about the end of the programme. Thank you Benjamin for joining us. And thank you audience for tuning in ‘The People’. This has been your host Meander Lee, signing off.”

After the programme, I escort Meander back to her home, and head to the town centre to catch a bus for my own. I wait for my bus somewhere outside CityStore by the main road leading to Tai Tong. I stand in the long queue at the bus stop, looking left and right for buses. Unintentionally I glimpse at a mother-daughter combo. The girl is at most 4 years old. They stand next to a lamp post. The mother grabs her daughter by the shoulder facing out to the van, and the girl places her legs against the lamp post. I couldn’t see clearly but she doesn’t seem to be wearing any pants. It is until I see some water coming out under the little girl, I know what is happening. I quickly turn my head away. She is urinating here? How come? This is a public area next to the main road! Do they know how many eyes are watching them? The thing is, there is a shopping mall five minutes away, restaurants along the street, and more restaurants nearby. They don’t have to do that! When I look in their direction again, the

mother is checking her phone and the girl is fully dressed, dancing innocently as if she has just created rainbow.

On Friday morning, I hear song again. And just by imagination, I can see auntie dancing outside, possibly with mum joining. This time, I am not going to tolerate it. I pull out a device under Zedekiah's recommendation. It is a universal remote control, able to shut off certain devices. I aim downstairs, and press the button. The music finally stops. I look through the window and see them studying the radio confusingly. They turn it on, and once more I turn it off. After several rounds, they give up. Victory is mine. Man, I don't mind people dancing or playing music, as long as they are not bothering other people.

At night, we visit Zedekiah's home for dinner. It's a little tradition among Meander, Athena, Zedekiah and I to dine in one of our families every Friday night. Zedekiah rings the bell and his mother Aunt Mary answers the door.

"Hi ma." "Hi auntie."

"Oh hey guys. Come in. Jonathan, how's your arm?" (Jonathan had a car crash in the last chapter.)

"Well, it is completely shattered," I look at my bandages, "I don't think I will get well."

"It is already lucky that you live," Meander notes.

"Yea I know."

“Ma,” Zedekiah puts down several bags on the table, “where is sis?”

“Doing her usual,” she sounds sobbing here, “anyway, let’s eat first.”

During dinner, the TV is on and no one says a word. We just eat quietly. The house door is being opened by a key, and Rona appears at the door wearing a safety helmet, mask and black t-shirt. She disappears into her room, and sits at the dinner table again.

“Sister, we have bought yours,” Zedekiah hands her a lunch box.

“Rona,” her mother asks, “where have you been?”

“You know it already ma.”

“Have you done anything this time,” her father growls.

“It’s just a quiet protest. Nothing serious happened,” she starts eating.

“Ao Feng,” her mother says, “can you not go to those gatherings again?”

“Why not ma?”

“You got shot last time (see chapter 5), I don’t know what will happen next.”

“Ma, I am 30 la, I...wait...”

The TV is talking about The Northern Metropolis and how it links China and Hong Kong.

“Great,” comments Rona dryly, “it officially took our land. God knows when will China have full control over us.”

“You don’t like our motherland?” Uncle Ben says lowly.

“Ba, I was born and grew up in Hong Kong. My life and friends are here.”

“Then why do you protest so much?”

“Ba, there are many wrong doings the leaders have. Just in this Northern Metropolis Development Strategy Plan, do you know how many people are exploited, how much money is corrupted, how many evils they hide! We need people to tell them, we need the public to know!”

“Daughter,” Aunt Mary says, “I know, but that is not how you should do.”

“If you love your country you will not do what you do,” Uncle Ben says.

“Why then? It is exactly because I love my country, I don’t turn a blind eye to the evils so that the place we live in can be better!”

Uncle Ben sighs, “it is the way you do it is wrong.”

“Don’t worry ba, ma, I am not that bold after getting shot last time,” says Rona, “but do we pretend as if nothing is happening and abide our country to rot like this? Even if it risks my life, it is worth it to let these be known to the public.”

The house is silent. Uncle Ben is taking deep breaths.

“I’m done eating,” Aunt Mary puts down her spoon and goes to her room.

“I don’t understand,” says Rona, “why is ma so sensitive. I am like thirty years old! I can handle myself.”

“Girl,” Uncle Ben says to her daughter, “you have been shot before.”

“Ba I am alive,” Rona says, “even if I have to die,”

“Sis”

“I am willing to, for what is right! Against the evil and corrupted government and the hopeless reality we are having.”

“Rona, please,” Athena pleads to her.

We all expect Uncle Ben to punch her or lecture her in anger, but he lets out a long sigh,

“This is exactly why your mother worries.”

“Ba, what do you mean?” says Zedekiah.

“She haven’t told you two before?”

Zedekiah and Rona say together, “Tell us what?”

Uncle Ben turns off the TV, and he leans back to the sofa, closing his eyes for some contemplation.

“That’s understandable, this is a past she doesn’t bear to recall. 40 years ago...”

39 years ago, Beijing, in a Square:

“Water?”

“Thanks Yin Hua.”

I stood beside the statue of the Goddess of Democracy. Over the past few months we mourned Hu Yaobang, had a few hunger strikes, and our leaders had a few talks with the opposite side.

“Tsui Ling, they are going to give up, we will be winning.”

“We better be. Or else I don’t want to live here anymore. Thanks to chairman Tang, we are rich now. But Yin Hua, the government is severely corrupted.”

“I know right, a lot of people are not actually benefiting because of corruption.”

“Exactly. Let alone the wealth gap, pollution, freedom, and many more. This is my home, I shall fight for myself or else no one will be.”

“Even that means to be prisoned? Our government isn’t keen on dissidents.”

“I was born here, raised here. If I have to be arrested, let it be here as well.”

“Well said Tsui Ling. Here, let us cheer with water first.”

“Cheers Yin Hua. For democracy and freedom!”

“Tsui Ling! Tsui Ling, wake up!” Yin Hua shook me in the middle of the night.

I woke up seeing people running to my direction. Too weary to walk, Yin Hua grabbed me by my shoulders and forced me to walk.

“Come Tsui Ling, the army is clearing the place.”

“The army is clearing the place?”

I turned back, the liberation army was pushing towards us with some tanks.

Guns were fired and some people afar were blurred in red. I was fully awakened, I stood tall, and let go of Yin Hua’s hold.

“Yin Hua, we must run faster!”

More shots were fired. Suddenly, I heard a scream of pain next to me. I looked down right, Yin Hua’s leg was covered in blood.

“Yin Hua,” I grabbed her arms and threw it over my shoulder, “I got you.”

“No, Tsui Ling, let me go...I...I will slow you down.”

“Yin Hua...”

A strong hand appeared on her shoulder and another swung mine away, there were two young men.

“Ben, I got this one. You grab that one and run!”

No time to think, he pulled me away and ran. I gave a glance back, the man with Yin Hua was shot by the army’s bullet, and was bleeding on the floor. Yin Hua moved slowly with one leg covered in blood.

“Yin Hua, look out!” I shouted at the top of my lungs.

It was too late, the tanks had reached her. As she twisted her body a tank first tripped her, and rode on her. She reached out her hand for a last cry. Her flesh squeezed, that sound was weirdly clear under the screams and shots. Flesh was pushed from the toe to the head and splited, blood burst from the cracks. Her torso and face soon became blurry red and disappeared under the tank.

“YIN HUA!”

I ran to her, but several men grabbed me and pulled me away. Kicking wildly I shouted her name in agony.

Dawn broke. The Sun of early Summer shined coldly on the blood-soaked land. I stepped over one body after another. Some still intact with human shape, some were just minced. In the corpses, what I fear most became true. This particular one covered with blue jacket and dark jeans lying on her side. Her eyes fell out. Her flesh split open. Her golden necklace was on her neck, at the end of it a heart-shaped gem. It's Yin Hua. I collapsed kneeling, touched the already broken limbs, grabbed the necklace, roared to the sky, and sat down crying. A man, the man who grabbed me away, took down his hat, and sat next to me. The chairman announced that morning: Nothing happened in the Square.

"Many times," Uncle Ben addresses his children, "your mother does appreciate your thoughts. What she worries most, is that one day she would lose you too."

"Ma was an activist?"

"Or else who gives you two brats rebellious DNA."

Today is a Saturday. Meander, Athena, Zedekiah and I attend the first James Fellowship gathering of the year (last week was a public holiday). After some group sharing, we still have time. So I go to the library to search for some board games.

"Hey guys," I return to the room shaking a small card box in my hand, "how about a game of Saboteur before we go- What's happening."

One of our peers David is burying his head in his own arms. He looks devastated. Tim sitting next to him is patting him by his shoulder.

“Dave is visiting his relatives in Taiwan next month,” Tim reports.

“Oh. Well, why the long face?” I ask.

“Because the whole tribe will be there,” David says, “I...ugh.”

“Here,” Tim taps his own shoulder to signal David to lay on, and he continues, “this is no ordinary family reunion. David comes from a large local clan. Every several years they go to visit the family tomb and have a great ancestor worship ceremony.”

“In February?” exclaims Meander, “What family tomb sweeps in February?”

“Mine, alright. And that’s not the worst part,” says David, “this time, as the first born male of the line, I am old enough to kneel. I don’t know, I am a Christian, I don’t want to kneel.”

“Well I don’t see the conflict,” says Sally, “bowing, or even kneeling is just paying respect to our ancestors. My grandfather was a Sino-Japanese War Veteran, and everytime we visit his tomb we kneel. I respect my ancestors in this way, but they are not Gods. Has nothing to do with our own religious beliefs.”

“Not when you need to kneel at the very front with everyone watching,” David mumbles.

“See, that is where you are wrong Sally,” says Athena, “to us, it may not be a problem. But traditional Chinese view ancestors as Gods, to some extent. Bowing to them might give the impression that we are yielding to other Gods when we only have one God.”

“But if he doesn’t kneel,” adds Tim, “he might be viewed as disrespecting the family.”

“What kind of kneel is that?” Our mentor Bronze asks with hand signals. He is mute.

“Knees down, bend body and tap head on the ground slowly for three times,” David growls.

“Then do not kneel!” roars Zedekiah, “do not do things against your will and against what’s right.”

“No, kneel!” shouts Sally, “remember who you are and your duty as a family member. You are a Chinese alright!”

“Well I did not choose to be!” screams David, and he collapses on Tim’s shoulder.

After a bit of silence he says, “things are much more complicated than you guys might think. A few years ago when I was younger my family turned Christian. The first thing Mum and Dad did was to throw away or smash the idols in the house. That includes relocating the altar of my great fathers. That caused some quarrels among the family. It took many years for my parent’s siblings to understand them. But I will be facing a lot of relatives, and they may know that

my family bows only to God. What message am I trying to tell when I kneel on my ancestor's grave after claiming I belong to God? If I kneel, they may claim that I betray my God, so that my God is not trustworthy. But if I don't kneel, I will be scolded as I am turning a blind eye from my duty as a first born." He let out a long sigh.

"I see," Bronze gestures "it is a doom if you do and doom if you don't do situation."

"It is going to be a difficult choice," says Tim patting David.

"Yes, choosing between cultural tradition and religion is really difficult, David," says Athena, "I hope you don't mind me being talkative. Paul says that he could wish that he himself was cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of his own brethrens. I forgot where did he say that. Book of Romans perhaps. What I do think, is that he recognizes the ways of God can be contrasting to the culture he belongs to, Isarels who still stick to Moses' words. What he is saying here is that, if he can bring his own kin to God, even if that means to break some Godly rules and thus be separated from God, he will do it."

"See Athena, you might be wise," says Tim, "but comfort is not your zone of expertise."

"What I am saying is that," Athena responds, "we belong to God, but we also belong to the world, our race. If we have to reluctantly turn away from God's rules for our Earthly loved ones, I don't think God minds. If he does, I'd rather be the only one being punished. David, either choice is not easy. But don't

blame yourself for doing either, it is a really vivid struggle true Christians may have.”

For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

As I return home after escorting Meander back to hers, it has already passed midnight. Tired, I head straight to my room, change my clothes and drop onto my bed. I roll right, I roll left, and I roll right again. I cannot sleep. That is, because there’s loud music outside. Strong beats fill the air and vibrate the house. There are voices, singing off tune with a mic. I look at my clock, 1pm. With anger I head to the house downstairs, and ring their bell. Ka Ho answers the door.

“Hey Ka Ho,” I greet him, “I really don’t want to bother. But I need to work part-time tomorrow morning and really need some sleep.”

“Alright.”

“So, can you turn down the volume?”

“Oh, sorry Zhuang, but my friends are visiting me tonight, I cannot do that.”

“Ka Ho, I don’t know how things work back in your hometown. But here in Hong Kong, it is illegal to make loud noises after 11pm.”

“This is my house, I am free to do what I want.”

That angers me.

“Listen Ka Ho, you need to know that you are not the only one living here. There are many people suffering because of you. Your mother dances loud before everyone is awake, your father smokes, and you have been so...ugh! What’s that smell!”

“My mother is frying some chillies and garlic for me.”

“There is an invention called the kitchen exhauster fan! It can suck away the unwanted air.”

“Unwanted? Zhuang Man, why are you so unwelcoming to us here? We are both Chinese. I want to live well here, I don’t want to feel like a stranger. Zhuang Man, don’t bother me!”

“Do you know I can still sue you for the noise?”

“Try it, Zhuang Man, see what will happen!”

And he bangs the door.

I angrily return to my room and sit down on my sofa. I have a plan, a great plan! I record their noises, buy some loud speakers, and play the music back when they least expect it. Oh but wait, they may like it and mislead them thinking I enjoy their actions. Hopeless. I pull out my holophone and randomly browse it. Unintentionally I click onto my CloudSound and see a message from Zedekiah.

“Hey Jon, do you know that Professor Dawn Wong is flying tomorrow?
MML(message me later)”

“Where did you hear this from?”

“Eric”

“Which Eric?”

“Darn Jon, TA of our Eco Stud”

“I thought Professor Wong will teach us next semester”

“Mi 2. Jon, Eric is inviting us to bid him farewell. You r his top student u know”

“When”

“1pm, Terminal 1, gate H”

“Will be there. Don’t want to stay at the house anyway”

“LOL. C U then”

As we reach the airport, there is already a large crowd surrounding Professor Wong.

“Look at these,” Professor Wong shows us a pile of files, “Cynthia and Zita helped me, to make these! I cannot go to England without them. I am too old to handle these.”

Then he brings his three suitcases to check them in.

“Eric,” I whisper, “why is Professor Wong leaving?”

“Why?” Vice Professor Amanda Chan says, “Tales fired him, so that he can better reform the school.”

“What?” Zedekiah almost screams, “he cannot do that, he doesn’t have the right!”

“Unfortunately he has,” a chubby young man next to Eric says, “the university has always been wanting to reform and KY is in the way. Unwise. They are about to evolve, but backwards. Odin is not with us.”

“You still can’t let go of memes,” Eric notes, “but Tim is right. This is deep state boys.”

“Then where will Professor Wong go?” I ask.

“Quite a lot of choices,” says Assistant Professor Jose Lam, “the University of Chester is hiring him.”

After sending in the suitcases, Professor Wong stands with us. After a bit of silence he points at the crowd scattering across the airport.

“Look at the people here, people are flying away. They don’t fly themselves. They bring the young, and they bring the old! They are bringing, the whole family! It is a phenomenon, it is the trend here! People are mi-gra-ting, with the whole family. People feel unsafe here, and they move out!” He sighs. “What am I doing here? Still giving lectures before I go! Listen, children, Hong Kong is a small place. Travel more! Broaden your ho-ri-zons! You are going to find lifestyles and worlds, outside what you’re used to. And find many things, beyond what books can tell.”

“Yea, but we are way too poor for that,” says Eric.

Professor Wong walks to the gate with a bunch of followers. At the gate, he turns back, and hugs with the people he worked with, and people he taught.

“This is not over yet,” he shakes hands with Dr Chan, Dr Lam and Prof Resnick, “Tales can force me away, but he can never deny the value of Translation, the value of Cultural Studies, and the value of Interdisciplinarity. Show him he is wrong.”

And he turns to the crowd,

“Remember, you are English majors, you are my students! You are no ordinary people! For you guys have touched the sky. We think difference, differently!”

And he gets into the gate, oftentimes wave back to us, until he cannot be seen anymore.

“So,” Tim says to Eric, “how’s Elizabeth?”

“She is studying to be a professor now.”

“As expected.”

“Natasha became Professor, Momoko runs a kindergarten in Japan. Tim, out of the four first hons in our year, only us two weirdos accomplished least.”

“Not quite. Not you, you are a TA now.”

“Yes.”

“See, I won the bet,” says Tim, “told you long time ago you will be a good scholar. Still don’t understand why you became an insurance broker right after graduation.”

“I thought you said that was a good idea. Like KY said, to do some deterritorialization when we were still young. I was an agent because I want to help people. Actually help people. Call me when you are sick, I will contact a hospital for you, escort you to the hospital, and check how much you can claim when you are being treated. It is fun to read scholar journals and write papers. But it is a lot more rewarding to directly get into society and help people. I want to be with my client when they face adversity, and that’s where books cannot teach you.”

“That’s why I supported you.”

“It was tough, really tough. But I have learnt a lot. Now I miss writing and the days of studying. Amanda invited me, so I am here.”

“And finally, you made good use of your first hon,” Tim comments.

“Says the guy who got first place in our department but chose to be a secondary school teacher. You should have been a writer, Tim.”

“Told you many times I will never be a writer, at least not full-time. It’s too exhausting. Besides, when you become a scholar, you practically write for money. Not something I like. I am a teacher because it is much more fun. Rather than studying the theories of language acquisition, I witness language teaching in action and take part in it.”

“Then what about biosemiotics and sci-fi? You were like addicted to them when you were a student,” Eric says.

“Well, at least I still get to teach biosemiotics and sci-fi if there’s time left. And the students love it.”

Just as we are speaking, a group of people are speaking loudly in Putonghua. Zedekiah and I show despise in our eyes.

“You know what,” Tim says to us, “KY once said Putonghua is the more appropriate name. Mandarin isn’t. It was used some hundred years ago when the Qing Dynasty communicated with Western people. Mandarin means: Man Da Ren da Hua. Them talking loudly is normal. Afterall, China is full of mountains and they are used to speaking across hills.”

“You said as if they make sense,” comments Zedekiah.

“So Tim,” I ask, “you like Chinese?”

“Boys, don’t get me wrong, I generally don’t like Chinese either,” he looks at the crowd and turns to us, “the government always says to promote patriotism. People like me are not really welcoming that idea. Look, sentiment towards a nation can easily be governed by personal experiences. My parents may love China because they spent their childhood there and feel that this is where they belong. And Chinese to them are of one blood. Neighbours who help each other. That might be their experience. But mine was different.” He continues,

“Wherever I travel, I tell people I am from Hong Kong instead of I am Chinese. I was born in 1998, one year after the handover. In 2003, to boost the economy, the government launched the Individual Visit Scheme, allowing thousands of Mainlanders to enter Hong Kong for some shopping and sightseeing. Since I have memories, the streets are full of mainlanders pulling suitcases. They jump the queue so that we never get on a transport when we need to. The necessities such as milk powders and groceries are constantly shopped away. To me they are unwelcomed sight, uncivilised, loud and...ugly. Of course, I am not saying they are not good people. Individual Chinese I know are decent people I enjoy staying with. But as collective tourists, I don't like them. When I grew older I studied Chinese History and man it got worse. 4000 of Chinese History is okay. However, I haven't learnt much about modern and contemporary history except for the bad ones. Let's just say that I passed my DSE Chinese History exam by writing how bad Chairman Mao was. After the People's Republic of China was founded, it didn't turn out well. Chairman Mao failed in agricultural and industrial development, using stupid strategies and caused famine and suffering. He refused to be forgotten even when he was wrong, so he launched the infamous devastating Cultural Revolution as a personal worship. After Chairman Mao, Chairman Tang took over, the economy got better. Perhaps because 64 overshadows every other history, I had the impression that China is only rich in money. Well blame my history teacher, she might be taught this way

too by the British colony. See, with experiences and education like this, it is hard for me to love my nation.”

On the bus ride home, neither Zedekiah nor I said a word. Athena and Meander are toying with some kids they happen to meet on the bus, until the children are off the bus in the middle of the journey. Zedekiah and I both stare at Athena bidding goodbye to the kids.

“What?” Athena notices us.

We look away.

“You guys have something to say?” asks Athena.

“This batch plays louder than any other,” says Zedekiah

“Zed,” responds Athena, “you are just not used to Chinese kids. They are quite cute.”

Zedekiah and I are still silent.

“You are thinking, aren't you,” Athena suggests.

“Leave us alone, I am tired,” says Zedekiah.

“Ath, I, I am thinking about what Tim has said,” I utter, “my attitude is governed by my experience. That explains everything.” I look at my arm.

“Well, he makes sense,” comments Athena, “I think his experience is quite similar to ours as well. But Jonathan, I would say...”

“Love my enemy? Even with this,” I raise my broken arm hit by a Chinese car last time.

“Jon, I understand your sentiment. But there are 1.43 billion Chinese, not everyone hit you with a car. And not everyone is like...”

“Like Ka Ho?” I say.

“Well, if what you’ve told me are true, he is not wrong, he is just at most annoying. Hong Kong people have always been distinguished from mainland Chinese. That I get. Hong Kong people are, at least once, technologically more advanced. We have stricter education. We queue, we don’t smoke in public indoors. It is the difference we see. But I would say, the key is always respect. I don’t like them either. But I don’t show my hate.”

“Easy for you, you haven’t been hit by a car,” doubts Zedekiah.

“You are right, I haven’t. But I have seen far worse. So I choose to respect. They too are humans trying to live here. It is very difficult, like most right things are. Zed, I don’t say much about you. But Jon, you have lived with weird roommates. You can stand Bobby the windownesian. I can’t see why you can’t here. Well, at least if you cannot, you are not able to live well with them.”

Monday night, I return to the dormitory after the first lesson of this semester. Once I open the room door with my student card, Bobby rushes to me.

“Jonathan Wills, I have a favour to ask!”

“The fak ah, you want to scare the heart out of me meh? What happened?”

“Jon, can you go to the kitchen with me?”

“What is happening?”

“Just come.”

And he pulls me to the kitchen.

“Look, Bob, I have promised Meander to take her to...Ooo why is the kitchen door closed?”

We peek through the door glasses and see several people inside, smoking cigarettes while cooking.

“Jon, they have been in here since 5.”

“So, they are the door-nesian.”

“Very funny Mr Wills. I mean it, I cannot even get water. Things are just everywhere! They will just leave oily plates here. Every time!”

“Smoking is forbidden in dorm too.”

“Exactly!”

“Shhhh...Bob, dodge, they are looking at us. Wait, let me pull out my phone.”

“Jonathan, this is not the only thing they do. They play loud music all night long, rock and roll music. Once I go to the bathroom, there is hair in the shower, a head of hair on the top right!”

“Wait, you go to shower? I thought you were allergic to water.”

“Not after that time Dr Yuen did an experiment on me. Jon, I don't know how long I can stand them.”

“I get it Bob. Some people are just difficult to live with. Good thing we have HMU here.”

My holophone rings.

“Oh, it’s Meander. I am late for dinner. See you Bob.”

“I don’t get it Athena,” I complain at the border of Hong Kong, “it is Alex who wants to go, why am I coming too?”

“Com’on Jon, it has been a long time since you visited ShenZhen,” answers Athena, “good chance to have a look again.”

“It might be great fun!” exclaims Meander lifting her backpack.

“Ain’t you have an interview tonight? It’s a Thursday,” I say to Meander.

“No, not tonight. It is my day off. Besides, it is just a one-day trip. I can return in time if they need me.”

“Alex, do you know where we are going,” Zedekiah asks.

“Don’t worry, I have been to Science Land a few times. Prepare your ID cards.”

After an hour’s train ride, we finally reach our destination. We exit the train platform, and ride the escalator to ground level. As we leave the exit, sunlight shines onto the green land. The road is wide and quiet on the side with just a few cars. Trees fill the scene with several pedestrian roads. A large river is sighted on our left right next to the exit with birds of all sorts by the river bank.

“Alex, where city?” I ask.

“We have no overland city!” says Alex rushing to us from behind, “you guys walk fast, and you have missed a turn.”

“Alex, this is ShenZhen now?” Meander remarks.

“Well, part of it. In recent years, the government has been preserving natural land. We have been planting trees and recovering the original forest. China is now greener than ever.” He glances at the geese flying afar. “In the 80s, Chairman Tang said to ‘pollute now, and fix later.’ Now is later.”

“The air does smell fresh,” Athena sniffs, “unlike in my memory filled with dust.”

“It does. Come, you guys really have missed a corner.” And he pulls us back to the tunnel.

“China don’t build their cities on the ground anymore,” says Alex as we are walking in a tunnel, “ladies and gentlemen, may I present,” he stands next to an entrance, “Science Land.”

We are at the top floor. This is a shopping mall, a really large shopping mall without a visible end. The place is white and bright. Automatic cars transfer people on a traffic-specific line. There are trees under the ceiling. Cafes and shops scatter across the area with people sitting in them. Certain parts of the wall are not walls, but glasses for people to see through and observe the marine lives. Robots of all sorts spread across the land. There are bots for cleaning, delivering goods, and simply for companionship.

“All these are built,” Alex says to us, “in just 10 years!”

“10 years? How?” Awes Athena.

“Technology and research,” answers Alex, “come, let’s go to my favourite place.”

“Umm...Alex,” says Meander, “can we get lunch first?”

“Oh right, lunch. Lunch first then.”

“Where are we going to have our lunch?”

“Not here, certainly. Restaurants at the train stations are just tricking tourists with high prices. We need to drive further.”

“Drive? There is no driver here?” I exclaim.

“We don’t need drivers. Cars are automatic here. I’ll show you.”

He walks to a car stop, there are a few small cars awaiting. He opens the car door for Meander and Athena, “Madam?”

As we get inside, Alex guides us,

“There is a display board on the dashboard. You can just enter the destination, choose the address, and it will take you there. But I can do it for you. Tap the bluetooth icon on the top left, select “Unit 34”, and it’ll move like a train!”

“Alex, ain’t there family cars?” Athena asks.

“There are, but I haven’t used them before. Let’s stick with these first.”

As my car moves, I look outside. Everything looks exactly like what streets would look like, shops and streets, but without the sky, and with a space station vibe. Took some time to remind myself I exist in reality.

A while later we are in a restaurant. Strange, there are no waiters, just customers. We sit at the table and start looking at the menu.

“Hey Jon, can you see any waiter?”

“That old lady over there. She’s the only one wearing an uniform with this restaurant’s logo.”

“So, it will be her. Hey Biu-!”

“No no no, no need,” Alex points at a device, “we order with this. He is called Steward. Hey Steward.”

“Hello sir,” it speaks, “how may I serve you.”

“Order,” says Alex, “butterball mix.”

Meander says, “spaghetti bolognese.”

“Sweet and Sour pork chop and rice,” I order.

“Fish and Chips,” Zedekiah orders, “do you have these here?”

“Yes sir, we have fish and chips.”

“I...cannot decide,” Athena says.

“Agh, that’s the ingenuity of Steward, he can decide for you based on information you give,” Alex informs, “Steward, ask Ms Leung things.”

“What is your short-term goal and obstacle, Ms Leung,” the device utters

“Interesting! I want to lose some weight but I crave meat.”

“Acknowledged. Order complete.”

“Wait Steward, I have changed my mind,” I say, “my IG account is Jonathan69420. Surprise me.”

“You notice one thing so unfamiliar here,” says Zedekiah as we are waiting for food, “something doesn’t match the ShenZhen I know.”

“What do you expect,” Athena says, “last time you were here these high-tech thing didn't even exist.”

“No Zed, I get what you are saying,” I say, “I cannot smell it too. Smoke, that’s it! Last few times I visited Mainland, there were always people smoking, even in indoor restaurants.”

“Oh, that’s why I am uncomfortably comfortable,” Zedekiah realises.

“Come on,” Alex says, “ShenZhen has changed, there are anti-smoke policies. Smoking is not a trend you’ll see anymore.”

“Great, our food is here!”

The serving bots carry covered plates to us and reveal them in front of us.

Frankly, we are all excited for Athena’s and mine. Athena’s lunch is a bowl of grain and a block of light brown object. She is confused, she slices the block with the fork provided, and takes a small bite.

“It tastes good. What is it?” she asks the robot.

“Protein lite, artificial meat mixed mainly with soy beans and mushrooms, can reduce fat intake.”

“Oh I like it,” Athena comments, “it doesn't taste like chemical.”

“People here love to eat it with wheat bread as a quick meal,” reports the bot.

“Athena can I get a bite?” Meander tries, “should have ordered yours.”

“Jon,” says Zedekiah, “what’s yours?”

“Char Siu and Roasted Pork with...Spaghetti.”

“Seriously?” Zed expresses, “Steward, I would like to have a word.”

Well that is a surprise. A few years ago I visited London for the first time for Summer school. I can still remember the first few days there, I have already annoyed my host family. I played music as I was reading without headphones, and the strong beat bothered the father. I dashed whenever I crossed the road, not knowing they live at a slow pace. I also talked loudly, which they might not like. One night the mother of the house cooked me some char siu and roasted pork, and taught me some ways of living with the locals. Perhaps not knowing Chinese fully, she paired these with spaghetti. That time I was grown up enough to know that she is trying her best to show acceptance and to educate me. I took a photo of this meal and titled it “Wrong cooking, but good teaching”, told the story and that was my most liked post. Now I think of Ka Ho. Perhaps this is the way.

“Yes sir,” Steward responds to us, “how may I help?”

“How dare you give my friend such things?”

“Sir I sincerely apologise. I can change your order if you want.”

“No Steward,” I say, “this is fine. Thank you Steward.”

“Your gratitude is my best reward. Happy to serve.”

After lunch, Alex takes us to the Science Expo 2028.

“Oh, behold, the newest holophone design!”

Alex is excited at each and every exhibit.

“Oh look! The “Water Reborn”! It can purify any polluted water. Scientists are using these in Africa to provide clean water.”

“Oh! Look at this, biodegradable plastic. Future plastic is going to be this, completely degrade in ten months with certain microbotics, truly environmentally friendly.”

“Ohhhhhh! The robotic aqua explorer! Using deep sea fishes as inspiration, it can dive deeper than any existing submarines.”

“OOOhhhhhhhh...”

“Ohhhhh,” Zedekiah mimics Alex from afar, “it’s like walking a dog, never stops shouting and exploring,” then he pats my shoulder and we both laugh.

“Leave him alone Zed,” I say, “it is hard for him to find so many high-tech like himself.”

“Behold ladies and gentlemen,” Alex turns to us and stands next to a man, “my father.”

It is Doctor Albert Epoch.

“Hello, Uncle Albert.” We greet him.

“Hi guys. Alex, why are you here?”

Alex points at the back of his head and gives his father eager eyes.

“Oh yes I remember,” Doctor Epoch pulls out a USB from his pocket and plug it in Alex. Alex’s eyes flashes.

“Thanks father. Now I have all the books I need for the new semester.”

“Well Alex, I can just cloud drop them to you.”

Doctor Epoch stares at my left arm, and he says to me,

“Jonathan, you still need a prosthetic arm?”

“No thanks uncle. I am fine.”

“You cannot live without an arm, Jonathan,” he hands me a business card, “call me when you’ve come to your mind.”

“So, we can go back now!” Alex announces.

“Alex, there is one place I want to go,” I say, “can these cars get there?”

“Jonathan, they can go wherever they wan-”

“Can they get out of Science City?”

“Of course, the whole of China is now covered with 8G now.”

Soon we are in the outskirts of ShenZhen. In fact, it is just a few minutes’ ride outside the train station. In contrast, this is much less developed. The sky is

finally visible. And the little street is grey. Some old ladies are washing wok under a water hose. Men sit by the street and smoke. We meet up in the middle of the zone. Meander and Athena have just bought some street food, spicy roasted duck. Zedekiah returns from the toilet,

“Why are we going here?” He asks frustrated.

“I promised Zhuang Wu to buy some gum. Mission accomplished.”

“Well you can buy gum elsewhere. The toilets here are dirty, they are still using the squat toilet. I just crushed into a mist of smoke and that old lady splashed water on my knee. So uncivilised.”

“Think about it, Zed, every place has its developing times. We may not feel comfortable here but this is how they live. When they bring their lifestyle to our place, we have conflicts because of our differences. If this place has to be this, then let it stay this way. They will catch up soon.”

“From when on you became Athena?” Zedekiah mumbles.

“Hmm?” Athena hears her name.

“Anyway. Alex, get us out of here,” Zedekiah rumbles.

As we get back to the boundary and enter the train to Hong Kong Island, we see something. A Liberation Army Soldier is sitting in a train cart. Brings with him are three big bags, each bag occupies a seat. Zedekiah walks up to him,

“Hey you! Yes I am talking to you, army man!”

“What is it,” the soldier recognizes Zedekiah.

“Do you know that you are occupying seats?”

“I’ve bought ticket.”

“But have you bought these seats? You are not the only one here, this is a public transport. Seats are first-come-first-served!”

The soldier sits up and slowly opens one of the bags. A ceramic pot is revealed.

“This is the ashes of my brother in arms. These, are my fallen brethren. I promised them to take them back to their family if they die.”

“Sir, that is not an excus-”

I grab Zedekiah from behind, and Meander lifts his legs.

“Peter, how rude are you!” Athena then talks to the man, “I apologise for my friends sir. And sir,” she bows, “sorry for your loss.”

That night I buy a good amount of garlic and chillies, and fry them, put them in a glass box. And I walk downstairs to ring the bell. Auntie answers the door.

“Hello. Oh you are...”

“Zhuang Man. Auntie, is Ka Ho here?”

“Ka Ho...”

Ka Ho sees that it is me, and he opens the gate.

“Ka Ho...I come to apologise. I have been harsh to you. We have had a rocky start.”

“Don’t be. We are getting sued by many people here.”

“Oh really?”

“Yea. It seems that I have a lot to learn.”

“I can teach you.”

“Zhuang Man, what are those? They smell good!”

“Oh these? I made these for you. Don’t get me wrong Ka Ho, I still don’t like your behaviour. But I shall not be the one scolding you. Ka Ho, from now on if there is any problem, I want to politely inform you, as long as you are willing to listen.”

“We...may have a lot to ask you.”

“We can help you, as long as we are here. Deal?”

“Deal. How about we eat these as a vow?”

“What? No, you are just playing la. Just one spoon, Ka Ho, one spoon.”

And Ka Ho grabs two spoons.

“Neighbour?” He holds the glass box and the spoon.

“Neighbour.” I hold my spoon.

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By The Sapient Sabre

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