example with intertextual references to earlier sounds and music, from liturgical chants to classic horror-film samples), effects such as echoes, reverb, delay, drones, sustained chords, and repetition (also often deployed to excess), and futuristic noise (crossing the boundary between human and machine, intensifying the disembodied quality of sound). As previously indicated, Gothic music manipulates time. Elferen argues, then, that the immersion in this music enables listeners to become engulfed in its temporality and to encounter "the existential uncanniness of Being beyond time" (p.186).

This is an extraordinarily rich book. Elferen systematically demonstrates the crucial and complex role played by sound and music across a wide range of Gothic media, engaging with theoretical, metaphysical, social and political questions, uniquely and brilliantly making links from Gothic literature through to contemporary Goth scenes. Gothic and Goth are often separated in academic discourse, while *Gothic Music* shows how music in all cases enables listeners to enter uncanny borderlands.

Shelley Trower

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BOOKS
Fiction

Neil Gaiman, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*
(London: Headline, 2013)

A man remembers something he is rarely permitted to remember. When he was seven, his family's lodger, deep in debt, committed suicide; this caught the attention of an entity that, manifesting first as an amorphous canvas tent, then as a worm, and then as the boy's nanny Ursula Monkton, sought to establish a life in this world by way of the boy's family. And the boy was only believed by Lettie Hempstock, the girl from the farm at the end of the lane who had been eleven years old for a very long time, and by her mother and grandmother, who liked to make the moon shine full and could snip and stitch the course of human lives when the details required correction.

Such is the story told in Neil Gaiman's new novel *The Ocean at the End of the*

Lane, a book concerned with the reliability of memory, and with the conflict between the innocent loves of childhood and the more cynical desires of adulthood. While frequently compelling, it is not without weak points where instructive complexity is lost to narrative closure, causing the fantastic to seem commonplace, the terrifying merely bothersome.

Gaiman is mostly good – better than good – at avoiding broad brushstrokes, instead working his prose into the corners of his characters' emotional experience. This is seen in the relationship between *Ocean*'s narrator and his father, described thus in the bleak seventh chapter:

> I was terrified of him when he was angry. His face (angular and usually affable) would grow red, and he would shout, shout so loudly and furiously that it would, literally, paralyse me. [...] In the school stories I read, misbehaviour often resulted in a caning, or the slipper, and then was forgiven and done, and I would sometimes envy those fictional children the cleanness of their lives. (pp.89-90)

This is written from a naïve perspective: there is in reality nothing clean about hitting children. Yet Gaiman understands that a little boy comforted by books might find even the clichés of suffering consoling; and he ensures that the protagonist's suffering is not clichéd. That the father is not physically abusive makes all the more shocking his attempt to drown his son in the bath. Yes, the father is by this stage under the seductive influence of Ursula Monkton – "a cardboard mask for the thing that had travelled inside me as a worm, that had flapped and gusted in the open country under that orange sky" (p.81) – and, yes, it is unclear to what extent the drowning is a mere threat. But the effort is real enough, and the boy fights back:

> Now he pushed me down again, but fear of death gives us strength: my hands and my teeth were clamped to his tie, and he could not break my grip on them without hitting me.
>
> My father did not hit me. (p.98)

Hypocrisy, unsettlingly, saves the day, and the boy: there is no change of heart, only a man's commitment to a hollow principle. When the father complains "'You ruined my tie'" (ibid.) and sends the son to bed, Gaiman invokes the state of mind that George Orwell, remembering the corporal punishment of his school years, calls "a sense of desolate loneliness and helplessness, of being locked up not only in a hostile

world but in a world of good and evil where the rules were such that it was not actually possible for me to keep them" ("Such, Such Were the Joys", in *Essays* (Knopf, 2002), p.1294). The impression of callous illogic and disproportion serves the chapter well. And the uncertainty of the father's intentions recalls, as does his implied self-justification, the recent attempts to undermine the classification of waterboarding as torture. In the words of Christopher Hitchens, "You feel that you are drowning because you *are* drowning – or, rather, being drowned, albeit slowly and under controlled conditions and at the mercy (or otherwise) of those who are applying the pressure" ("Believe Me, It's Torture", in *Arguably* (Atlantic, 2011), p.450). Gaiman similarly shows how little a word like "albeit" means when applied to matters of basic human survival.

Further commentary on contemporary political matters arises through occasional references to economic concerns. The tent/worm/nanny will achieve her ambition – "'I will take all I want from this world, like a child stuffing its fat little face with blackberries from a bush'" (p.71) – by giving people what they want. And what people want is money. As the narrator suggests, this is what "'all the fighting and the dreams'" are about (p.41). The creature confirms this:

> "Something came to me, and pleaded for love and help. It told me how I could make all the things like it happy. That they are simple creatures, and all any of them want is money, just money, and nothing more. Little tokens of work. If it had asked, I would have given them wisdom, or peace, perfect peace..." (p.57)

Here is some dark thinking, which might have been sustained for longer, about the aspirations of both the haves and the have-nots: a life lived on the basis of the acquisition of wealth is lived under the thumb of whoever, or whatever, can help to acquire it. Ursula Monkton is not evil *per se*, but does catalyse the petty anger, lust and greed of humankind; to view her as the novel's only villain is to ignore her as she laughs, or screams (possibly only within the protagonist's mind), "I NEVER MADE ANY OF THEM DO ANYTHING" (p.174).

Given that the novel is so thematically rich and disturbing, it is surprising that the tension of the main narrative is quite poorly controlled. There is an oddly clumsy approach to the question of naming. Early on, as they travel beyond the borders of the ordinary world, Lettie and the narrator are forced to hide from a presumed threat:

> Something came through the woods, above our heads. I glanced up, saw something brown and furry, but flat, like a huge rug, flapping and curling at the edges, and at the front of the rug, a mouth, filled with dozens of tiny sharp teeth, facing down. (p.52)

The creepy description is somewhat spoiled when Lettie casually tells the narrator that the animal is a "'manta wolf.'" The name is too reassuring, defines too tidily; were this an isolated incident it would not matter much, but it foreshadows the point at which Ursula Monkton's true name, long withheld, is revealed by Lettie, who "'went looking for it'" (p.162), apparently at no great inconvenience. On such occasions Gaiman's novel is neat and complacent where it should, like its antagonist, be ragged and ambitious.

Ocean is not explicitly marketed as a horror novel, let alone a Gothic one, and one cannot legitimately condemn it for not adhering or contributing to a tradition to which it claims no connection. Yet there are enough explicit acknowledgements of fear to suggest that it should be considered a driving force. And insofar as this is a short novel with a child protagonist, if not necessarily a "children's book", comparisons with other recent Gaiman books seem permissible. While similarly not works of straight horror, the uncanny doubling involved in the button-eyed Other Mother (*Coraline*, 2002) or the black-suited ghouls with names like the Duke of Westminster or the Emperor of China (*The Graveyard Book*, 2008) demonstrate Gaiman's eye for the skull gradually revealed beneath the skin, for the skewed reflection of human anxiety and weakness in inhuman eyes. Expectations, however unfair, make the uncomplicatedly *heimlich* portions of *Ocean* a touch disappointing.

The Hempstocks, with their maternal warmth, are part of this problem. The book's hero might be a weak boy, but if his friends are immortal beings whose power is apparently limited only by their preferences or by the page-by-page demands of the story, there is little sense of threat: when an encounter with Ursula Monkton, "every monster, every witch, every nightmare made flesh" (p.116), can be followed under ten pages later by "I was not at all afraid of Ursula Monkton, whatever she was" (p.125), the novel seems overprotective of both its hero and its readers. Towards the end, when a meaningful sacrifice is replaced by a sacrifice that lacks significant negative consequences, one might even wonder why the tale is being told at all. A novel about memories and fears, and the difficulty of negotiating these phenomena, should not be

happy to let such experiences come and go as if, well, by magic. Gaiman's fantasies tend to resonate, but this one, while making some admirable claims, ultimately seems willing to stay in its own world.

Adam Crothers

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John Freeman (ed.), *Granta 117: Horror*, ill. Kanitta Meechubot and Jake and Dinos Chapman (Autumn, 2011)

It is not easy to define what purpose horror serves in the twenty-first century. Living in a digital landscape where never-ending newsfeeds are constantly taking us straight into the bloody heart of warzones, massacres and natural disasters, where we can be looking into the haunted face of someone slowly dying of a terrible disease one minute and then find ourselves unable to escape the expressionless eyes of a serial killer the next, the notion that we need *more* horror – fantasy horror –to supplement the glut of real horror overflowing everyday life, can often seem irredeemably perverse. In fact, it is more than a mystery why the horror genre survives at all. How did it not become redundant in the wake of the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, atrocities whose inhumanity exceeded even the most nightmarish imagination's capacity to conceive? After these revelations, surely horror was something we didn't need to invent anymore.

The fact of the matter is, however, that fictional horror has survived, thrived and diversified in ways that its earliest practitioners could never have imagined. Of all popular genres it is easily the most robust, mutating with the ease and rapidity of a super-virus to suit each new climate of fear. From pandemics to terrorism, from anti-social behaviour to the seemingly unstoppable rise of new technologies, horror writers have developed new breeds of narrative that capitalise on our freshest nightmares. Arguably, unlike other genres, which often have their own distinct audiences, the market for horror is boundless and it now infests our global culture. We simply cannot get enough.

One clear acknowledgement of the genre's sheer omnipresence is that the prestigious literary magazine *Granta* has dedicated an entire issue, its 117th, to the theme of horror. Characteristically of this renowned publication, editor John Freeman

has drawn together a stunning list of international contributors, from bestselling novelists and award-winning journalists to superb short-story writers and beguiling poets whose reputations are no more than a few years old. This volume's panoply of household names includes Paul Auster, Stephen King, Don DeLillo and Will Self, while the fledgling, but no less impressive, talents include Sarah Hall, Rajesh Parameswaran, Mark Doty and Julie Otsuka. Read side by side, these pieces amount to a startling mosaic of the grotesque, the uncanny, the monstrous and the liminal, and make *Granta 117: Horror* a panoramic and engrossing survey of the countless shapes of fear.

Granta has only ever had one editorial policy; to publish new writing of the highest quality and the broadest range of categorisation, from fiction and poetry to essays and reportage. All of these are represented here, and the reader is encouraged to contemplate the meaning of the word "horror" from a multitude of perspectives, and to speculate on what fears may be common to all human experience. The nine pieces of fiction are certainly varied, but they are united by their oblique approach to the unnatural, the fact that they disturb by implication and suggestion and manage almost entirely to resist looking horror in the face. For example, while the succession of Bible-thick novels he has published over the last twenty years might indicate otherwise, "The Dune" proves that Stephen King has not lost his knack for writing superbly eerie short-stories which leave the reader in a constant state of unease but unable ever to determine why. The tale of an aging judge's fateful encounter with his past, as he returns to a beloved landmark, "The Dune" displays enough of King's mastery of style and tension to explain why he is one of the most popular storytellers alive.

Magic realism is a species of literature not often spliced together with horror but *Granta 117: Horror* contains not one but two examples. "The Infamous Bengal Ming", by rising talent Rajesh Parameswaran, is a successful, exotic mixture reminiscent of Saki or even Roald Dahl. Focusing on a tiger's confession of its love for its captor and the grisly chaos that results when it finally tries to express this affection, this is a sly piece of narration with a plot that creeps along and gradually builds to a witty, jet-black denouement. Every bit as flamboyant, Sarah Hall's "She Murdered Mortal He" is an even more memorable literary hybrid of this kind. Brimming with strange characters and enigmatic images, it weaves its spell with great

elegance and accomplishes one of the hardest tasks a writer can set themselves – to conjure up a convincing dreamscape.

A hypnotic, disorientating piece, Julie Otsuka's "Diem Perdidi" darts back and forth in time as its narrator's splintered memory moves in and out of focus, leaving the reader to fill in the tantalising blanks in her father's stories and her own. It also asks the intriguing question of whether unimaginable horror is something that human beings might be capable of forgetting. "Brass", by Joy Williams, has a similarly light touch and is also open to all kinds of interpretations but overall works less well, remaining too vague and impressionistic to capture one's interest fully. Nevertheless, it is a fine example of the suburban Gothic and a queasy glimpse beneath the bland surface of everyday life.

"The Colonel's Son", a wickedly effective little story by the late Roberto Bolaño, follows the twisting plot of an imaginary Mexican zombie movie and it is a tale with more than a whiff of Quentin Tarantino about it. Hinging upon our collective pleasure at seeing zombies butchered on the cinema screen, it then interchanges these metaphorical representatives of Otherness with real social and political outcasts. Bolaño's message, that mindless violence is always unacceptable and the entertainment industry should never encourage unthinking hate, is a valid one which he delivers with much linguistic liveliness.

Don DeLillo, the foremost chronicler of Post-War American alienation and paranoia, might seem an odd name to appear in a book of horror writing and yet his story, "The Starveling", is the most quietly horrific and unsettling one in this volume. The tale of a lonely man's obsessive quest to learn the identity of a strange woman he sees in the cinema, the piece uses anorexia as a powerful metaphor for a contemporary culture in which people are literally starving themselves of human contact. Every bit as grim and troubling as it sounds, "The Starveling" overflows with DeLillo's trademark morbid humour. The beauty and precision of his prose are as breath-taking as ever and almost every paragraph reinforces his status as one of America's greatest living writers.

Moving from fiction to non-fiction, *Granta 117: Horror* features two pieces of war reportage. "The Mission" is Tom Bamforth's account of working with those displaced by the conflict in Darfur, and at times reads like some ghastly piece of surrealism. Finding himself in "a landscape of unparalleled bleakness" (p.96),

Bamforth tries, and admittedly fails, to make sense of such sights as a child soldier brandishing a rocket launcher while an ancient donkey caravan begins a daily twelve-hour round trip simply to procure water. "Deng's Dogs" is Santiago Roncagliolo's brief and bloody history of the Shining Path, a league of Peruvian Maoists and one of the most brutal guerrilla forces in Latin America. What makes both of these pieces so shocking is not just the fact that they take us into societies where violence and murder have become perfectly common, but also their depiction of the international community as utterly disinterested in the plight of the unfathomable number of innocent people caught up in the bloodshed.

The first of three autobiographical essays included in *Granta 117: Horror*, Mark Doty's "Insatiable" is an intriguing discussion of the self-destructive urge whose point of departure is the famous exchange of letters between Walt Whitman and Bram Stoker. Having been a drug addict and a keen participant in some of the more dangerous varieties of sex for many years, Doty is led to ponder whether his own overpowering desire to keep putting himself in these situations, to test the limits of his physical and mental being continually, is akin to the kind of desire which Stoker imagined as the driving force and the allure of the vampire Count. Could it be, Doty asks, that in actuality vampirism is but "a matter of the overly self-conscious being awakened into life by the vitality of those who are barely self-conscious at all?" (p.204)

Doty believes that what both Whitman and Stoker really wrote about was "the intersection of the chosen and the compulsive, of consuming and being consumed" (p.205). The difference, as he sees it, is that, whereas Whitman celebrated this view of human nature, Stoker became so repulsed by his own secret longing to give way to it that he projected it "onto a horrifying sub-human or post-human creature, who has no firm foundation in biology, but must feed off the juices of others, without choice or sunlight" (p.204). It is an interesting argument and a brave essay, but one cannot but feel that it is undermined by Doty's leaping to some massive conclusions based on what was an extremely brief correspondence.

Granta 117: Horror's two standout contributions, however, are Paul Auster's "Your Birthday Has Come and Gone" and Will Self's "False Blood." A reminiscence of his charming but unbalanced mother, Auster's piece begins with her sudden death. This leads him to confront an aspect of his own personality that has never worried

him before – the fact that every time a significant member of Auster's family died, he never felt the need to cry. Numb from shock and exhausted by the task of putting his mother's estate in order, Auster suffers a panic attack. He is then forced to re-examine the years he shared with her, asking some painful questions about her precarious mental health and the degree to which he may have inherited some of her less desirable traits. An extremely moving treatment of loss and the imminence of our mortality, Auster's essay also manages to be unexpectedly and consistently hilarious.

Another powerful contemplation of the fragility of life, Will Self's essay "False Blood" is the most genuinely horrifying contribution to *Granta 117: Horror*. This is because its subject is the ultimate nightmare; what happens when our bodies turn against us. Self is the first to admit that he has not treated his own body with much kindness and relates, in stomach-churning detail, how more than thirty years of drug, alcohol and tobacco addiction have managed to deplete his health. What Self was not prepared for was the sudden transformation of his hands into bright red, lobster-like claws. A blood test leads to a diagnosis of *Polycythaemia vera*, a rare form of blood cancer. What can be done, he asks, when one's very life blood turns renegade?

The short-term answer, and a more Gothic one can scarcely be imagined, is that Self must be bled, and he begins having two pints extracted every week. A long-term solution proves more elusive and Self is plunged into a seemingly endless cycle of hospital visits, consultations and referrals, all of which he records in his own inimitably dry, laser-beam-precise style. The hours spent in drab waiting rooms and grubby corridors, the whole loathsome business of sickness, agonised uncertainty and gradual recovery is described with such alarming, detached wit and cruel honesty that you can hardly believe Self is writing about his own condition. Indeed, it's ironic that these pieces, by far the most clearly written and harrowing in this collection, should be by Auster and Self, two novelists constantly attacked for being pretentious and tricky, show-offs whose books play clever games to hide their emotional emptiness.

While it is fantastic to see the genre treated so well, *Granta 117: Horror* nonetheless provokes some troubling questions about its future. Does this distinguished collection suggest that horror has become too fashionable and, even more worrying, too respectable? If the genre is so common and its conventions so overfamiliar to readers, is it possible that it has lost its radical spirit, the subversive

streak that gives the great works of horror their ultimate power? Fortunately, by the time you've finished this collection, such worries fade away, for if *Granta 117: Horror* confirms anything, it is that we need a vastly expanded set of critical equipment if we are going to keep pace with horror's own expansion as an art form. Horror is something as unique to each author, and each reader, as their own dreams and nightmares, and now that publishers seem to be positively encouraging writers to venture into the darkest regions of their imaginations, we can look forward to having countless new worlds of horror to explore.

Edward O'Hare

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Graham Tugwell, *Everything is Always Wrong*
(Dublin: Independent Publishing Network, 2013)

Seduction by a sluttish crab ("Pleon, telson rubbing" (p.18))… Friendless schoolboys plotting to get rid of the least befriendable of them all… Desecration of Catholic monuments, egged on by Daniel O'Connell, ideological founder of modern Ireland… Further seduction, this time by a woman who has chosen to have her neck turned into knives… A man who paints house doors red to warn his town of the "wrong" that has been unleashed behind them.

The five stories collected in Graham Tugwell's debut collection of horrific tales are introduced by three rules:

1) There is no God.
2) Love is Impossible.
3) The Universe is Malign. (p.3)

Tugwell's characters, however, are either unaware of these rules or refuse to believe in them: those who do dare to hope for happiness or peace or goodness are ruthlessly undeceived. Be this as it may, it is their futile attempts at defiance that give these tales their animating tension. The typical Tugwell protagonist is characterised by a terrible naïve sincerity that makes us, as readers, care about what happens to them, but which is also, ultimately, more ruinous than any of the terrible things they encounter. It is Darren, the pathetic lover in "Romancing the Crab", and not his crustacean paramour, who is unable to come out of his shell. Within the world of the story, what is wrong

with him is less that he desires a crab than that he actually believes himself to be in love, and is therefore utterly exploitable. He is unprepared, for example, for the possibility that he might have a rival in his affections. The narrator of "High Five, Danny O'C", meanwhile, is self-evidently deluded – his account is even punctuated by Wikipedia-style insertions stating "[*citation needed*]" (p.39) – but, because *he* believes so wholeheartedly in the truth of the story he tells, he is pitiful, and the punishment that awaits him seems disproportionate. And the ersatz-twee beginning to "They've Come To Paint The Doors Again", in which a kettle rumbles and bubbles "happily to itself" (p.56), serves only to exacerbate the despair that follows, that kettle becoming, in retrospect, a portent of the fate of the story's victims, who are destroyed by the "wrong" that is bursting to get out of them.

Tugwell's parochial Gothic owes debts to Edgar Allan Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, and Terry Pratchett, while the wordplay and the satire of small-town Ireland are unmistakably both Joycean and Beckettian. Each piece can be read, in one respect, as a study in closed-mindedness – or rather of the cost of trying to escape closed-mindedness. It is imagination – the ability to fall in love with someone or something that one shouldn't fall in love with, to make imaginary friends, or to question the established order – that is punished above all else. The bullying, disappointed love, exploitation, and fear of sex that mark the stories are all symptoms of the failure to defy an entrenched set of very local expectations. Read allegorically, the collection can be seen as a critique of a stifling and impoverished contemporary Irish moment.

Tugwell is well versed in standard tropes of psychological horror: the crab and the knife-necked woman, for instance, represent strains of *vagina dentata* that have taken over the entire female body, to the extent that any contact at all brings with it the threat of castration. "We Left Him With The Dragging Man", meanwhile – the most frightening of the stories gathered here – relies for its effects upon suggestion and suspense. The Dragging Man himself, and the things that he has done, are hinted at rather than described, but the story's real queasiness lies in its twist: the recognition that the Dragging Man – who, living without hands or feet in a ruined house, is so *manifestly* "wrong" – is less horrific and damaged than the "brown-haired and blue-eyed" (p.27) boy who is left with him. This story and "High Five, Danny O'C" are Tugwell's most developed in terms of plot and characterisation. You think that they are winding back to an original starting point, only for them to take a further

unexpected – and invariably unhappy – twist. "Romancing the Crab" and "Unskin Me With Your Neck of Knives", are less narrative-driven. The latter especially is a set piece without plot and, though still discomfiting, consequently forgoes some of the tension that impels the others.

Everything is Always Wrong is both macabre and funny in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable about laughing: Danny O'C's attempt to put a bra on a Jesus monument is a typically blasphemous bit of slapstick, the eventual outcome of which is fatal. But the collection's most remarkable quality is how adeptly Tugwell juggles conflicting tones and how economically he sketches his scenes of ruin. His paragraphs are typically a single sentence long, rarely more than three. This can be frustrating: justifiably parodic though it may be of bad porn scenes, the panting dialogue of "Unskin Me With Your Neck of Knives" refuses to let us encounter anything of the characters' interiority. This may well be the point, but it gives the reader too little to care about, as the disjointed dialogue makes clear:

> "*I've always…*"
> "*Wanted…*"
> "*This…*" (p.51)

and

> "And it hurts you?"
> "*Agony.*"
> "*Like I'm breathing fire*."
> "*In*."
> "*And out*." (p.52)

Elsewhere, however, a single sentence or even word is enough for Tugwell to define a character or destroy their dreams. Of Alby Gorman, the terrifying bully of "We Left Him With the Dragging Man", we learn: "He lived with his grandmother and little sister until, one day he lived with just his grandmother" (p.27). And reticence bears the emotional weight at the climax of "They've Come To Paint The Doors Again". "'Go *home*, Tom'" (p.63), the door painter's superior tells him – but at a point at which "home" has lost all association with comfort, solace, or rest.

The pared-down style often blooms into a lyricism that seems incongruous for such gruesome subject matter. At the climax of "We Left Him With The Dragging

Man", for example, the assonantal and alliterative inflections of "Blood gushes and Kevin collapses and Tommy is softly sick through threaded fingers" (p.34) belie a tenderness that only makes the despair (despite the hilarity) worse. Form and content thus prove inextricable, while perhaps Tugwell's greatest strength is his refusal to give us the get-out clause of reading his stories as mere fantasy. The horror always seems to come from within his characters. In "They've Come To Paint The Doors Again", without ever stating it, Tugwell insinuates that Tom, the door-painter, might himself be unwittingly responsible for his daughter's affliction. And in trying to deal with the problem of Alby Gorman, the four boys in "We Left Him With The Dragging Man" succeed only in unleashing their own murderous impulses. Their grief is real and there is no redemption.

The stories collected here are only a sample from an output of over a hundred. A stage adaptation of "High Five, Danny O'C", performed with Tugwell's own "Risky Proximity Players", was well received in March. More recently, three further versions of other Tugwell stories have been unsettling audiences as part of the *10 Days in Dublin* festival. Presumably Tugwell hopes, in due course, to gather all of these pieces into a single *magnum opus*. For the time being, however, *Everything Is Always Wrong* should convince readers as to whether or not they dare venture any further into the unhappy world he has created – and I would (cautiously) recommend that they do.

Alexander Runchman

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