



Secondary Genders in Omegaverse Fanfiction: Heats, Knots, and Hierarchies

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Abstract. This study examines the omegaverse fanfiction, challenging the assumption that it solely reinforces patriarchal norms. The argument is that omegaverse often serves as a speculative laboratory in which fandom writers engage in sophisticated thought experiments concerning the nature of gender, power, biology, and consent. The aim is to demonstrate how the primary elements of this subgenre – heats, knots, and hierarchies – can be utilized innovatively to convey profound social commentary. This study conducts a thorough analysis of a specific text using a qualitative approach that combines fandom studies and feminist theory. The text analyzed is the fanfiction entitled *Ethics & Aesthetics* by FragileTeacup, a 106,000-word work that incorporates the television series *Hannibal* with Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice*. The analysis was conducted through a comprehensive contextual reading to examine how the author modified and deconstructed the biological framework of the subgenre to address the research questions. The study reveals three subversions of the subgenre’s conventions. First, this work critiques interrelated power structures by incorporating the biological hierarchy of the omegaverse into the rigid Regency class system, thereby opening up space for the exploration of intersectional prejudices. Second, the heat trope is not used to eliminate individual agency, but rather as a storytelling device to model and highlight enthusiastic and sustained consent. Third, knotting and mating bonds are transformed from symbols of biological determinism into depictions of romantic relationships that are voluntarily chosen, mutually beneficial, and equal. In conclusion, fanfiction, such as *Ethics & Aesthetics*, serves as a complex cultural space where fans engage in nuanced ethical and social discussions outside the traditional academic sphere.

Keywords: Consent, Fanfiction, Fan Studies, Feminism, Omegaverse.

1 Introduction

In the vast and interconnected landscape of digital media, fanfiction has emerged as a dynamic and powerful form of cultural production [1], [2]. In the context of digital platforms such as Archive of Our Own (AO3), a multitude of creators and readers engage in cultural practice [3], [4], [5] that Henry Jenkins, a preeminent scholar in the field of fandom studies, has termed “participatory culture” [6], [7], [8], [9]. Admirers

of popular culture do not merely consume content passively; instead, they actively engage in the process of creation, taking characters, settings, and concepts from mainstream media and combining them to tell new stories^[10] that explore untapped potential and marginalized perspectives. In this dynamic ecosystem, few subgenres are as popular, complex, and controversial as the omegaverse.

Subsequent paragraphs, however, are indented. At its core, the omegaverse, frequently abbreviated as A/B/O, is a speculative fiction framework centered on the concept of “secondary gender” [11], [12], [13]. In these narratives, individuals are classified into distinct biological castes, designated as alpha, beta, or omega [14], [15], which often supersede conventional gender identities [12], [16]. This social hierarchy is not merely a social construct; rather, it is a profound biological hierarchy that is manifest through powerful physical manifestations. Omegas, irrespective of their primary gender, undergo periods of heightened fertility and sexual desire, known as “heats.” Alphas frequently possess the capacity to “bond” with an omega during sexual intercourse, a biological mechanism that can result in a permanent, often psychic, mating bond [17]. These tropes – hierarchy, heat, and knots – are the fundamental building blocks of the subgenre.

While superficially problematic, this framework appears to reinforce biological essentialism that has drawn sharp criticism. Some academics and fans have dismissed this subgenre as a “dogfuck rapeworld,” [18] a term that glorifies questionable consent and reinforces patriarchal dynamics [11]. However, despite these valid criticisms, omegaverse remains one of the most prolific and enduring subgenres in online fandom, with hundreds of thousands of works tagged on AO3. This prompts a critical inquiry: What is the source of this subgenre’s influential and enduring appeal? Could critics be overlooking the complex cultural work occurring in these narratives?

This paper argues that omegaverse functions not just as a space that reinforces established norms of oppression, but rather as a speculative laboratory in which fandom writers engage in sophisticated thought experiments concerning the nature of gender, power, biology, and consent. To explore this argument, this study conducts a qualitative text analysis of a representative case study, the fanfiction entitled “*Ethics & Aesthetics*” by FragileTeacup. This 106,000-word novel is a transformative work in the truest sense, blending characters from the dark and modern TV series *Hannibal* with the plot and social setting of Jane Austen’s masterpiece, *Pride and Prejudice*. By layering the A/B/O hierarchy onto the rigid class structure of Regency England, the author creates a complex world in which to explore the core tensions of the subgenre. Through a close reading of this narrative, this study shows how the tropes of “heats, knots, and hierarchy” are used not to remove agency but to place it under immense biological and social pressure, thereby creating a high-risk environment in which the themes of consent, mutual respect, and intellectual equality can be explored with surprising depth and nuance.

Based on the explanation provided previously, the research questions are formulated as follows: how does the layering between the biological structure of omegaverse and established social hierarchies (such as the class system in *Ethics & Aesthetics*) create critical space to explore the relationship between prejudice and power dynamics? and how is the representation of “heat” utilized in the narrative?, and 3. How are the tropes of “knotting” and the “mating bond” presented in the story?

2 Method

This study aimed to address the research questions formulated through qualitative textual analysis, utilizing a case study approach. This study focuses on a single fanfiction text, entitled “*Ethics & Aesthetics*” by FreagileTeacup, which comprises 106,000 words. The analysis is guided by a combination of fan studies by Henry Jenkins [10] and Kristina Busse [19], which serve as transformative works. This analysis examines how the authors adapt characters and plot from the canons (*Hannibal* TV Series and *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen) to produce something original.

From the feminist perspective, this research draws upon the analyses of experts in the field, including Marianne Gunderson^[11] and Milena Popova^[18], who have previously examined the omegaverse concept. The text is approached as a feminist dystopia, a world where biological roles are used to maintain a strict social structure. The primary analytical method relies on a comprehensive interpretation of the text within its context, a fundamental tenet of literary studies. This includes a careful analysis of the text itself, as well as an understanding of the social and cultural context in which it was created. This comprehensive analysis examines the literary elements in the fictional work, including character development, plot structure, symbolism, and meticulous and intentional word selection, which effectively depict biological processes.

This framework enables an examination of how the narrative confronts themes of power, gender, and sexuality. Omegaverse is not merely regarded as a depiction of romance; instead, it is conceptualized as a speculative laboratory for exploring concepts related to consent and biological determinism. Although this framework offers analytical depth, this study has several methodological limitations that need to be explicitly acknowledged. First, the use of a single case study approach limits the generalizability of the findings. However, *Ethics & Aesthetics* serves as a representative example of subversion within the subgenre; this work cannot fully represent the vast heterogeneity and diversity of tropes that exist throughout the fictional landscape of omegaverse fanfiction. Second, as a qualitative research approach, this textual analysis is inherently interpretive and subjective. The conclusions drawn are inseparable from the theoretical lens of feminism and fan studies applied, so it does not rule out the possibility of alternative readings of the narrative.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The following analysis presents the results of a comprehensive study on *Ethics & Aesthetics* fanfiction, conducted through a contextual methodology. The results are grouped by theme to address the research questions previously outlined. Furthermore, the results of the analysis demonstrate that the author does not perceive the omegaverse framework – which incorporates elements such as hierarchies, heat, and knot – as binding rules. Instead, the author regards these elements as flexible and highly effective tools. A thorough examination of the text reveals the utilization of fictional biological

concepts to profoundly explore the dynamic of power in society, the importance of consent, and the essence of equal romantic relationships.

Findings 1: The Collision of Hierarchies

The initial primary analysis suggests that the fundamental conflict in the narrative arises from the intricate and often distressing interplay between two distinct power systems: the biological hierarchy of the omegaverse and the rigid social class stratification characteristic of the Regency period in England. This combination, representing a creative innovation in fan-driven worldbuilding, gives rise to a complex and paradoxical social world for the protagonist, Will Graham. The text explores the relationship between prejudice and power through the character Will, who simultaneously enjoys privilege and experiences marginalization.

As a rare male omega, Will possesses a high biological value, which is regarded as a “most coveted social treasure” [20, p. 7] and is associated with enhanced marital prospects compared to his sister. However, this biological superiority is constantly suppressed and almost unrecognized due to his social status as an illegitimate child. A comprehensive understanding of this ambivalence is imperative. In an early and candid dialogue with Alana, he discloses his dilemma and rebuffs his sister’s offer of entertainment. In response to Alana’s assertion regarding his biological value, Will offers a cynical perspective informed by his personal experiences:

“You know very well that as an illegitimate son, my marriage prospects are materially damaged, coveted Omegan status or not. Who of good standing would wish to attach themselves to someone with such a scandalous past?” [20, p. 5].

This quote reveals the central conflict in his life: the paradox between his high value to society due to his reproductive potential and the worsening social stigma caused by his past. The antagonist in the story embodies and enforces this tension. Initially, Hannibal Lecter appears to uphold social norms. His public rejection of Will in the Red Dragon assembly clearly illustrates the layered prejudices that exist. His cold comment, “He is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me,” [20, p. 10] is a direct echo of Mr. Darcy’s insult regarding Will’s perceived lack of attractiveness. However, he immediately follows this with a more vicious attack on Will’s social origin: “Nor am I in any humour to give consequences to the local gentry’s by-blow” [20, p. 10]. Hannibal’s internal monologue reveals that Will’s rejection also drives his prejudice; he sees an “unmistakable smirk” [20, p. 10] on Will’s face and, because he hates arrogance so much, he is determined to obliterate it. This initial dynamic is not merely about social class, but a battle between a dominant alpha and an “inferior” omega who refuses to submit.

The implementation of the dual hierarchy is increasingly evident in the character of Lady Bedelia du Maurier. When she opposes Will’s marriage to her nephew, her rebuke reflects a perfect combination of both power systems. Initially, she targeted Will’s social standing, posing the rhetorical question, “Yes, it is true that you are a gentleman’s son, but who was your *mother*? Who are your uncles and aunts?” [20, p. 223] – and then moved into his biological traits, cynically accusing him of using his “omegan arts and allurements” [20, p. 222] to ensnare Hannibal. From this perspective, Will’s lineage was considered tainted, and his biological characteristics were viewed as a means of

attracting attention and deceiving others. This supports the notion that the omegaverse theoretical framework is a suitable vehicle for feminism. The author subjects the male protagonist to a level of scrutiny typically reserved for female characters in literary works. Will's self-worth is called into question in public, as his lineage (or "purity") and reproductive capacity, which places him in a position of "female-coded otherness" [11, p. 5;26] and sharply exposes the repressive nature of the patriarchal and class systems.

Findings 2: "Heat" as a Crucible for Consent

The second study examines how fiction explores the theme of "heat," which is often a subject of heated debate in the omegaverse world. Critics usually regard "heat" as being a simplification of the storyline to justify questionable consent, a biological urge that takes away the characters' freedom. However, *Ethics & Aesthetics* employs the "heat" scene as a tool to assess and accentuate the necessity of "enthusiastic, ongoing consent." The narrative does not disregard the biological aspects of Will's heat; it is characterized as a formidable, immobilizing, and nearly excruciating force. The text notes that his desire is "now almost painful" [20, p. 112] and his body produces "uncontrollable, copious slick" [20, p. 178] – a physical response that is entirely beyond his control. At that moment, Will finds himself overwhelmed by biological processes that are beyond his ability to control with his own volition, as he stated:

"Frustration boiled over quickly into anger. 'You fool.' His voice shook, and he knocked Hannibal's hand away, glaring fiercely. 'It is not *you* I do not trust. It is *myself*.'" [20, p. 181]

In this dangerous situation, when Hannibal is physically vulnerable, his actions become a deliberate moral demonstration of ethical conduct. Instead of yielding to his primordial instincts as an alpha, he constantly prioritizes Will's agency. Rather than requesting approval in a single instance, he employs a strategy of ongoing negotiation, characterized by repeated requests for approval. The communication he uses is straightforward and empowers Will, giving him complete control over Will. He states, "If you wish to go no further, then we should stop now," [20, p. 110], then provides the assurance that is central to the ethics of the scene: "for I will not take what you are not willing to give freely" [20, p. 110]. The climax of this interaction is Hannibal's final request, which requires not only permission, but also sincere desire: "Tell me that you want this, Will" [20, p. 110].

Will's response brings the storyline to a satisfying conclusion. He evolves from fear and doubt to a firm statement and initiative regarding his desires, which is both a response to Hannibal and an acceptance of his sexual orientation. He responds, "I do want this," and then, more boldly, "I want *you*" [20, p. 110]. This finding aligns with Popova's research on sexual scripts [18, p. 177]. The author deliberately changes the standard omegaverse scripts. Instead of focusing on inevitable biological needs, we see a script that emphasizes mutual consent and deep respect for one another. By placing enthusiastic consent negotiations at the centre of scenes driven by strong biological instincts, the author conducts a speculative experiment [11, pp. 31–33] that convincingly refutes the subgenre's most pointed criticisms. This finding indicates that even

under the influence of the strongest instincts, human agency and ethical choices remain essential.

Findings 3: Subverting the “Knot” and the Mating Bond

This study highlights how the author makes significant changes to the general concepts of “knot” and “mating bond” in the omegaverse. In the omegaverse world, the knot is a biological mechanism that physically binds alphas and omegas, often resulting in a permanent, life-changing bond. In the most problematic representations, the knot is depicted as an uncontrollable and instinctive act – a biological trap that eliminates freedom of choice. However, *Ethics & Aesthetics* deliberately and purposefully deconstructs this convention, transforming the knot from a potential symbol of coercion into a powerful representation of conscious choice and mutual agreement.

This subversion is evident in the intimate scene in the hunting tower. At the height of tension, Hannibal experiences an instinctive urge to knot, a biological impulse to complete the bond. However, he consciously resists the urge, then explains this reasoning to a confused Will, emphasizing the critical distinction between physical pleasure and lifelong commitment: “But knotting is for mating, Will for bonding. If I were to knot you, I would wish to mate with you. And I know that is not what you want” [20, p. 173]. This scene presents a fresh perspective on the prevailing view. It separates sexual relations as physical activity from the possibility of long-lasting biological consequences. By suppressing his natural urges, Hannibal transfers the central control of the act to Will, emphasizing that the commitment of marriage must be the result of an emotional and rational decision, not just a biological event.

This idea reappears later in the story as the couple’s relationship is reconstructed upon a foundation of unwavering trust and complete emotional honesty. During their last intimate encounter in Florence, they finally formed a lasting bond. This time, the act is consensual and mutual. The narrative depicts it as a moment of unity filled with happiness and mutual involvement, in which Will plays an active and eager role. The text describes him as he “bucked and writhed and pushed back, fingernails scoring into Hannibal’s shoulders as he was penetrated by that wonderfully hot, swollen knot” [20, p. 272].

The previous excerpt shows that Will is not merely the recipient but an equal partner in building the relationship. The relationship that develops is not about ownership but about deep and emotional intimacy. It is a two-way relationship, an emotional and mental union in which he feels Hannibal’s happiness as a “beautiful echo” [20, p. 273] within himself, and he expresses his amazement at the sensation of “It is strange to have *you* inside *my* head too.” [20, p. 273].

This suggests that fan writings, following the tradition of transformative fanfiction works [19, 21], do not simply repeat stereotypes but actively deconstruct and reinterpret them with new meanings that are often more progressive. By reversing the dynamics of the relationship, the author rejects hierarchical relationship models and presents an idealized image of a partnership based on perfect equality and mutual understanding.

3.2 Discussion

The comprehensive analysis of *Ethics & Aesthetics* reveals that this fanfiction surpasses the confines of the romance genre. It cleverly and consciously uses various controversial elements in the omegaverse, not merely as storytelling devices, but to speculatively examine and reconstruct complex social issues. An investigation into the intersecting hierarchies within the story, the careful representation of consent during biological phases, and the subversion of the mating bond ultimately provide strong evidence for rejecting the convention of this subgenre entirely. This discussion outlines these findings, interprets them through the lens of fan studies and feminist theory. The findings obtained from this analysis align directly with the initial hypothesis put forward, which simultaneously validates the proposition that this subgenre serves as a speculative medium for social criticism and does not merely replicate established patriarchal norms.

Discussion 1: Critiquing Power through Layered Hierarchies

The initial research questions focused on how the layering of the omegaverse biological hierarchy system into an established social structure opens up opportunities for further examination of prejudice. The findings from the fanfiction of *Ethics & Aesthetics* reveal that this element is not merely an artistic choice in fiction, but rather a fundamental analytical approach within it. The concept of the omegaverse can be viewed as a speculative laboratory [11] that functions optimally in this regard. The author conducts a conceptual experiment through the work: What if the cruelty of a society built on arbitrary social classes meets the cruelty of a society determined by seemingly inevitable biological factors?

This work presents a compelling critique of hierarchical structures, challenging conventional assumptions about their stability and effectiveness. Through the character Will Graham, who is caught between two systems – valued biologically as an omega but socially despised as an illegitimate child – the author presents a representation of intersectional prejudice. Lady Bedelia’s condemnation of Will, who is considered socially inferior and biologically questionable, is a clear example of this. Her attacks on his “ignoble background and infamous youngest sister” are immediately followed by a sneer about the “shades of Ravenstag” being “polluted” by his presence [20, p. 223–24]. In her view, Will is considered a threat to the social order and the sanctity of her family’s bloodline. This layered oppression enables readers to gain a deeper understanding of the inherent folly and injustice inherent in all such systems. The cruelty of the biological hierarchy highlights similar arbitrariness in the class system of the Regency era.

This study exemplifies “low theory” as described by Marianne Gunderson [11], which is a complex theoretical study that develops outside of the formal academic setting. The author does not simply create a story; instead, they utilize elements of speculative fiction to convey social criticism. This topic is closely related to a fundamental concept in fan studies, in which Henry Jenkins [10] states that fans not only act as consumers but also as active “poachers” who interpret cultural material for their creative and intellectual satisfaction. In this context, the author draws inspiration from the character of *Hannibal* from the TV Series and the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane

Austen to construct a complex alternate universe, utilizing the omegaverse framework to raise important issues related to values, identity, and power. The finding that the central conflict in this fiction is rooted in an interrelated hierarchy answers the initial research question, demonstrating that the omegaverse can be, and in this case, does function as an effective tool for commenting on social dynamics. More than just a biological matter, the core of omegaverse is how society utilizes biological differences – both real and imagined – to create and maintain power structures.

Discussion 2: Rewriting the Scripts of Consent and Desire

The second part of the discussion examines the role of the heat trope. It considers whether this trope reinforces biological deterministic views or can be used to explore the concept of consent instead. Analysis of the hunting scene in the tower shows that, in this narrative, heat functions as a storytelling device to illustrate and emphasize the importance of voluntary and ongoing consent. This topic may be the most important political and ethical aspect of the work.

To comprehensively grasp these implications, it is imperative to connect them to the most severe criticisms directed towards the subgenre. The concern that omegaverse is “dogfuck rapeworld” arises from the assumption that heat removes omega individuals’ ability to act, making them subject to biological urges and incapable of giving valid consent. *Ethics & Aesthetics* directly responds to this criticism. The author initially affirms this assumption – that Will’s heat is an uncontrollable biological force. In fact, he acknowledges the potential loss of control over himself, which he expresses to Hannibal with the words, “It is not *you* I do not trust. It is *myself*.” By acknowledging this biological imperative, the author actually highlights the importance of consent, making it even more meaningful.

Popova’s work on sexual scripts is relevant in this context [18]. She argues that fanfiction can serve as a medium for exploration, challenging, and rewriting the norms that govern sexual interactions. In *Ethics & Aesthetics*, the author makes a deliberate effort to revise these scripts. For example, the familiar and problematic omegaverse script often depicts alphas as naturally dominant and omegas as submissive. However, this fanfiction replaces that script with an alternative narrative that emphasizes communication and values independence.

The recurring dialogue from Hannibal, who stated, “If you wish to go no further, then we should stop now,” to his final request for affirmative consent, “Tell me that you want this, Will,” is part of this new script. Will’s firm and clear answer, “I want you,” affirms his agency in the interaction. The author utilizes moments of perceived biological vulnerability to construct a detailed model of what healthy, consent-based sexual interactions should look like. This finding directly answers the second research question: rather than eliminating autonomy, the intimate scenes in this fanfiction become an arena where autonomy is most strongly expressed and valued.

Discussion 3: Reimagining Partnership and Defying Determinism through Bond

The third study examines how the concepts of “knot” and “mating bond” are portrayed in the story and whether they represent biological traps or choices that defy societal

norms. The results show a clear storyline that transforms these two concepts from symbols of biological determinism into images of consciously chosen and equal partnerships. This change becomes the climax of the story. It demonstrates the power of fanfiction as a transformative work that not only influences its source media but also in relation to its own genre conventions.

This subversion begins when Hannibal consciously refuses to consummate their first intimate encounter with Will. As he tells Will, for knotting is for mating and bonding, and he believes Will is unwilling to do so. This is a very bold statement in the omegaverse subgenre. It severs the automatic link between sexual relations, biological urges, and long-term consequences. The bond is not established as a result of biological instinct but rather as something that must be consciously chosen and agreed upon by both parties. This action clarifies Hannibal's character development: from a figure who initially upheld social and biological hierarchy, he evolves into a partner who values Will's independence over his alpha instincts, which he views as "vestiges of a savage, long-dead ancestry".

The conclusion of their relationship was marked by the final bonding scene in Florence, which was the result of the foundation of trust, forgiveness, and shared thinking that they had built. This bond is mutual, ecstatic, and consensual. This is based on the emotional and psychological unity between two equal individuals. Will feels Hannibal's happiness as "a beautiful echo," and he remarks with wonder, "It's strange to have you inside my head too". This two-way connection, reinforced by their hyphenated name, "Lecter-Graham," signifies the highest achievement of a partnership that transcends social norms and biological boundaries.

It addresses the third research question and yields a vital conclusion. The happy ending in this story is not merely an escape into clichéd of romance but rather a powerful utopian statement within the dystopian setting created by the author. The story implies that love – based on absolute respect for independence, intellectual equality, and shared vulnerability – has the power to destroy all forms of hierarchy, whether social, economics, or biological. Through the omegaverse framework, the story imagines a world where a person's identity is not determined by birth or biology, but by the choices and character they develop.

In conclusion, this analysis of *Ethics & Aesthetics* answers the final research question by highlighting the importance of applying critical analysis to fan works. This fiction serves as a significant alternative narrative, showing how fans utilize speculative elements to discuss crucial issues such as consent, power, identity, and the definition of healthy relationships. It proves the potential of participatory culture in creating works that not only touch the emotions but intellectually and ethically sophisticated.

4 Conclusion

This study examines the rich and often misunderstood subgenre of omegaverse fanfiction through a qualitative analysis of fanfiction *Ethics & Aesthetics* as a case study. Guided by fandom studies and feminist literary criticism, this analysis reveals that the

omegaverse not only reinforces patriarchal norms but also serves as an innovative speculative laboratory. Within this space, fans perform complex cultural work to deconstruct and reimagine contemporary discourse on gender, power, and consent. The results of this study provide a clear and comprehensive answer to the research questions posed.

First, this study explores how the intersection of biological and social hierarchies creates space for critique. Analysis of *Ethics & Aesthetics* shows that by combining the biological hierarchy of A/B/O with the rigid Regency class system, the narrative effectively critiques the entire hierarchical power structure. This intersectional approach highlights the arbitrary nature of social and biological determinism, using the protagonist's experience of double marginalization to explore the complex mechanisms of prejudice.

Then, this study also examines the narrative role of the "heat" trope and finds that, rather than reducing the role of the individual, the motif is used as a story framework to emphasize the significance of voluntary and ongoing consent. By centering careful consent negotiations in scenes driven by strong biological instincts, the authors deliberately subvert the problematic sexual patterns common in this subgenre, presenting examples of ethical and progressive intimate interactions.

Furthermore, the study scrutinizes the negotiations' surroundings, "knotting" and "mating bonds," concluding that these motifs consistently undergo subversion. Rather than being potentially harmful biological traps, they are transformed into potent symbols of conscious, mutually beneficial, and equal romantic partnerships based on choice and deep respect. These bonds are ultimately depicted not as a form of ownership, but as a psychological and emotional union between equal individuals, representing an ideal vision of love that transcends social and biological hierarchies. Based on these findings, future research is recommended to expand the scope of the analysis to involve a more heterogeneous corpus of texts from different fandoms, to verify whether this pattern of narrative subversion is a widespread trend in the omegaverse subgenre or a phenomenon specific to a particular fandom. In addition, follow-up investigations can enrich academic insights by integrating audience reception approaches, particularly to examine how the community of readers responds to and renegotiates discourses about consensually and genre in digital discursive spaces such as the comment column.

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