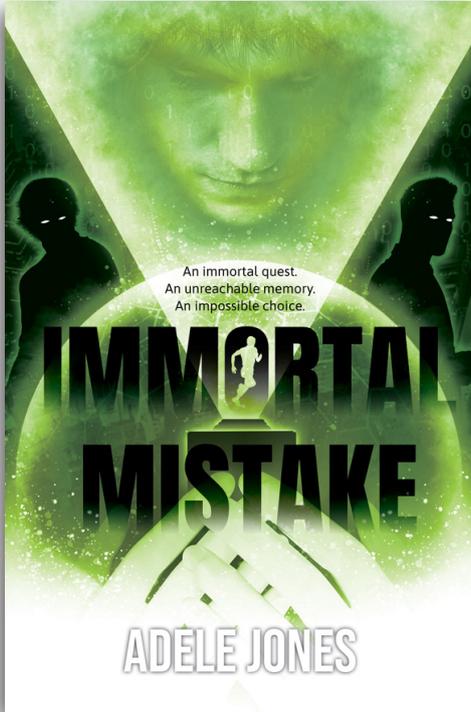

Teachers' Notes



IMMORTAL MISTAKE

Adele Jones

ISBN: 9781761110085

Reading level: 13+ years

BOOK SUMMARY

Fourteen-year-old Rennie Parker is a victim in his own home. He dreams of living with a caring family like the one his half-brother was adopted into. One night of domestic turmoil sees him finally get his wish—but not before he witnesses a bionic stranger unearthing a small, high-tech safe from his backyard. Rennie manages to retrieve the top-secret contents of the safe-box and discovers inexplicable links to his brother. When the box disappears, he investigates further, only to be left with painful injuries, crazy dreams about bionic people and lightup children, and a time gap he can't explain. Finding himself on the wrong side of the law, he must piece his world together before—? If only he could remember.

THEMES

- Domestic violence • Youth crime • Self-worth/Invalidation • Belonging • Mental Health
- Substance Abuse • Neglect vs Safety • Child trafficking • Forgiveness • Bioethics • Artificial Intelligence

CONTENT GUIDANCE: Please take into consideration that *Immortal Mistake* contains scenes depicting domestic violence and themes alluding to parental neglect, substance abuse and child exploitation, which may trigger certain audiences. It is recommended discretion be applied with vulnerable or younger readers.

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**Adele Jones is available for author talks and workshops.
Contact Rhiza Edge for more information.**

Immortal Mistake Teachers' Notes can be used in schools (independent learning, small groups, and whole classes); at home with caregivers; and as part of mental health support programs facilitated by counsellors, psychologists, children's charities, etc.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



'Science fiction for the real world.'

Australian author, Adele Jones, writes young adult fringe, science-fanta-sy and near-science fiction that explores the underbelly of bioethics and confronting teen issues, including disability, self-worth, loss, domestic conflict, and more. She also writes historical fiction, poetry, inspirational non-fiction and short fictional works, with themes of social justice, hu-manity, faith, natural beauty and meaning in life's journey. Adele's first YA novel *Integrate* (book one of the *Blaine Colton Trilogy*) was award-ed the 2013 CALEB Prize for unpublished manuscript. As a speaker she seeks to present a practical and encouraging message by drawing on themes from her writing.

To find out more visit www.adelejonesauthor.com

AUTHOR NOTES

Rennie's story was not easy to write. Often emotionally confronting, he is frequently misunderstood as he attempts to navigate his difficult existence and the complex factors enfolding victims of domestic abuse and young people who get entangled in youth crime. I first began putting together ideas for the novel in 2017, but a spike in youth crime over the past two years has made this an urgent issue across Queensland, and even more broadly, Australia. *Immortal Mistake* is not an attempt to justify the actions of young offenders. However, it is my hope Rennie's story may open conversations that provide a bridge of understanding towards identifying some of the reasons our youth get drawn into criminal activities, including the sense of belonging that can be found in "safer" groups when home is a battlefield. It is also hoped the story may provide a path towards better understanding of those who have been victims of domestic abuse and cut through some of the stigma surrounding this important social problem.

The theme of child trafficking embedded in the science-fantasy story thread was not originally part of the plan and took me by surprise as the manuscript developed. To try and broach this in an age-appropriate way for the target audience was exceptionally challenging. However, this issue remains a significant problem today. By shedding light on this type of crime, even in this fictional medium, I believe it in a small way can expose this evil. By so doing, I hope to see a safer future for the children of our world, where these criminals are brought to justice.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is a complex problem characterised by a driving desire for one person to dominate, oppress or control their intimate partner or another person within their family, and manifests as a pattern of ongoing abusive behaviour and fear against the person/s experiencing abuse. The 2021-22 Personal Safety Survey for Australia revealed over 14% of adults had experienced abuse by an adult before they were 15 years of age. Of the men who abuse their partners, it is estimated 50-70% also abuse the children in their home. Depending on the age and gender of those children, they tend to respond to domestic violence in different ways, with boys generally exhibiting a wider variety of behavioural problems, while girls tend to manifest their experiences through relational instability and low self-esteem. Consequences of exposure to domestic abuse may include:

- Poor educational achievements
- Social isolation in adolescence
- Physical and psychological disorders
- Suicidal ideation
- Anti-social behaviours
- Homelessness or unstable housing
- Future victimisation and/or violent offending

Experiencing violence in the home can cause a child to see this as a normal way to get their way or resolve disagreements, which can impact the quality of future relationships for that child.

- 1.** By gaining a better understanding of the impacts of domestic violence on behaviours, education and social outcomes, we can see many of these factors playing out in Rennie's life. Rennie believes living with a caring and supportive family will 'fix' his problems. Do you agree with his logic? Explain your response.
- 2.** Throughout the story, we learn of Rennie's prior involvement in the youth justice system. In 300 to 500 words, write a short critical essay to justify your position on one of the following issues.
 - a)** Is the violence and neglect Rennie experienced at home an excuse for his involvement in youth crime?
 - b)** Is violence ever an acceptable way to solve a disagreement if it is in self-defence?
- 3.** In chapter 27, Rennie has a choice to leave his father in the collapsing warehouse facility or save him.
 - a)** Describe your emotional response to his initial decision to walk away? Were his actions justified?
 - b)** What do Rennie's final actions in this scene tell you about him and the power-balance between him and his father at this point in the story?

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YOUTH CRIME

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 45,210 offenders in Australia in 2020–21 were youth between 10 and 17 years-of-age, and although overall there was a 2% increase in youth offences, overall statistics report a slight reduction nationwide when population changes are accounted for. This conflicts with the experiences of communities across Australia, which hold rising concern over the increase of youth crime offenses and the brazenness of these acts with minimal penalty, seeing news outlets run special reports with the growing number of victims of youth-instigated crimes. In seeking answers to a seemingly impossible situation, communities have been left divided on an appropriate response to address the harmful actions of these young people.

In Australia, and internationally, a disproportionate association between involvement with child protection and juvenile detention has been recognised, with considerable evidence linking contact with the criminal justice system to trauma. The increasing number of reoffenders on bail from existing charges, is a theme of growing community concern with this highly complex issue of children engaging in crime. An innovative, strengths-based, approach to tackling youth crime is through mentorship programs.

1. What do you think was the main reason Rennie first got involved with youth crime? Was there a single thing or experience you believe could have changed this trajectory for him?
2. In Chapter 7, when Blaine first notices Rennie's tattoo, he tells Blaine, 'It's not like I wanted to get it.' Are there things you feel you have done, not because you wanted to, but because it made life easier or helped you fit in? Applying these experiences, write a short scene from Rennie's point of view, exploring his thoughts and feelings during his first encounter with petty crime.
3. Would you describe Blaine as a positive mentor for Rennie, or does he make Rennie's situation worse? Explain.

SELF-WORTH / INVALIDATION

The looking-glass-self principle describes how individuals process social interactions and judgements of others as a type of "mirror" in determining their own worth, values and behaviour. The earliest and most lasting impressions of these reflections are received from a child's parents. From these reflections they draw '... conclusions about themselves, others, God, and the world around them ...' and deficits in the beliefs they build around these conclusions can lead to an increased susceptibility to suicide and despair. If a child is invalidated, that child often interprets this as meaning they're not a good or 'worth knowing' kind of person, which can lead to a poor sense of self-worth and even a lack of value on their existence. Abuse and neglect further erode self-esteem and may lead to higher-risk behaviours and delayed development. In the mind of an invalidated teenager, even a negative response received from misbehaviour can provide a sense of affirmation, due to supplying evidence of their influence on the world around them.

1. Read the first page of Chapter 5 (p. 35). In one or two paragraphs, describe how Rennie's perception of self-worth influenced his response to the conversation he overheard between Belinda and Blaine.
2. Consider the impact the invalidating nature of Rennie's parents has had on him and discuss how these experiences could shape a person's sense of worth.
3. At the top of a fresh page ask students to write the heading, 'I am ...' In one or two minutes have them write down as many things as they can in response to this prompt. At the end of this time ask them to:

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- Mark each statement as positive, negative or neutral.
 - What do these lists say about you? (self-esteem, body image, relationships, etc)
 - If the lists were to be read aloud, is there anything you would change?
 - Consider your ratings (+ve, -ve, neutral) and reflect on why you've assigned them to each respective statement
 - Can you identify any overarching themes?

BELONGING

"If teens don't feel a sense of belonging at home, they'll seek it somewhere else, regardless of the cost," and that sense of belonging begins at home. Connectedness and closeness with family and friends is a critical part of building belonging. Connectedness infers a sense of being cared for and supported within families, schools, and communities, and is highly protective for adolescents in building and sustaining healthy relationships. Conversely, domestic abuse erodes this connectedness, and thus a sense of belonging, in the parent-child relationship.

1. Once Rennie moves into the Coltons' house, do you think he feel like he belongs? Explain using two or three quotes from the novel.
2. Based on the information in the novel, how many friends does Rennie have? What does this say about his connectedness and sense of belonging?
3. What connection outside of family and other relationships brought Rennie a sense of comfort, safety and belonging? Explain.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health Australia describes mental wellness as "thriving, not just surviving", and uses degrees of feeling: happy; energised; capable and in control; productive; etcetera, to make this assessment. Victims of domestic and family violence are often left feeling powerless, traumatised, hypervigilant and constantly unsafe in their own home, which can impact long-term mental health and create a vulnerability to anxiety, depression, learning problems, unhealthy relationships, and substance misuse. The primary point of contact for seeking mental health support is family and friends. When living in isolating, high-stress situations like volatile domestic environments, the risk of mental illness increases and if left untreated, can create an inconsistent and unpredictable environment that increase the risk for both the unwell parent and their children.

1. How might Rennie's situation be different if his mum, Victoria, had received consistent support to help manage her mental health and addictions?
2. Read Chapters 29 and 30. Discuss Rennie's response based on his previous experiences. Do you think he is being fair to his mother? Explain.
3. Rennie's mother exhibits strong traits of borderline personality disorder. Research these personality traits and describe how this was evident in the interactions between Rennie and his mother. Consider how this disorder may have complicated their relationship further.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The term “substances” refers to alcohol, illegal and regulated drugs (illegal or not), and other materials that can alter mood. Misuse of these substances can be damaging to individuals, families and communities. Harmful alcohol consumption and psychoactive drug dependence is significantly higher in women who report lifetime adult intimate partner abuse, compared to those who have not experienced abuse, while doubly abused women (childhood and adulthood abuse experiences) report an even higher rate of harmful alcohol consumption and lifetime drug dependence. Nine childhood traumas identified through an American-based Adolescent to Adult Health Longitudinal Study were each found to have a cumulative trauma and drug initiation impact that frequently emerged in young to later adulthood. These traumas were: “neglect; emotional, physical, sexual abuse; parental incarceration and binge drinking; witnessed, threatened with, and experienced violence.”

In Chapter 12, Rennie tells Blaine, ‘... drugs messed up Mum. I don’t do that stuff.’

1. Do you feel Blaine is justified in doubting the reliability of Rennie’s claim? Why?
2. Is Rennie correct in his statement suggesting drugs were the catalyst that saw Victoria’s spiral into the situation depicted in the first few chapters of the novel? Ensure you consider the events of her past referenced in the final chapter when formulating your response.
3. Write the scene before the opening of the novel from Victoria’s point of view, but with her having healthy coping mechanisms for her mental health and a strong, consistent support network for her recovery from addiction.

NEGLECT VERSUS SAFETY

“Child neglect is one of the most common forms of maltreatment.” Socioeconomic factors strongly linked to neglect include poverty, which often leads to higher incidents of parental stress, substance abuse, unstable housing and domestic violence, with younger children more vulnerable to the effects of neglect. A child can be robbed of their sense of safety if they are exposed to violent crimes, tragic accidents, substance abuse and domestic violence.

Queensland Government “Stay safe” plan for young people in unstable domestic environments make the following recommendations:

- Work out who you can trust to talk to about what is happening in your home.
 - Find a safe place in the house where you can go when the violence is happening.
 - Plan the best way to get out of your house quickly.
 - Ask a neighbour or friend who lives nearby if you can go to their house in an emergency. Make a plan for how to get there.
 - Make a list of people you want to call if you have to leave home quickly.
 - Make sure you have their telephone numbers written down in a safe place or in your mobile.
1. Based on the above dot point recommendations and the information in the novel, develop a safety plan for Rennie.
 2. What do you think is the most important lesson Rennie learns about his experiences of neglect from his

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time with the Coltons and his interactions with Devlin Phoenix, Wyatt and the experimental children?
Break into small groups and discuss.

CHILD TRAFFICKING

The Australian Federal Police reported that in 2022, human trafficking and slavery statistics had increased to the highest ever reported, with around 7% of those reports referencing child trafficking. This issue of human trade is wide-scale and crosses international boundaries, with Australia a destination country for trafficking victims. Though difficult to definitively determine the full scale of the brutal, hidden crime of human trafficking, it's estimated approximately 21 million people are trafficked for profit today at an estimated US\$150 billion profit, with nearly a third of that generated in wealthy industrialised countries like Australia.

In Chapter 16, Devlin Phoenix makes the following statement: 'These are not children anyone leaves a light on for. They are unwanted waste, like you. Fortunately, I've found a way to recycle these products into a much-desired international commodity, whilst gaining significant benefits in the process.'

1. Should a human being ever be commoditised, even if 'unwanted'? Discuss.
2. In 2020 the United States Department of State delivered a "Trafficking in Persons Report: Australia" rating Australia's management of human trafficking. This report delivered recommendations on how to improve Australia's rating and prevention measures in curbing the trafficking of people across the nation's border. Many of these recommendations would require modifying existing legislation.
 - a) Referencing this report, write a response to one of these recommendations and explain why you believe this will make a significant difference, or not.
 - b) Develop a legal alternative to those proposed in the Trafficking in Persons Report.

FORGIVENESS

Psychology Today describes forgiveness as the release of resentment, revenge or anger, however, this does not mean reconciliation or returning to a toxic relationship. Highly credentialled medical institutes like Johns Hopkins recognise the enormous physical burden of unforgiveness, hurt and disappointment, with forgiveness offering healing benefits from reduced pain and risk of heart attack, improved cholesterol and better sleep, decreased blood pressure and a reduction in anxiety, depression and stress. Psychologist Robert Enright described four steps for forgiveness, but when someone is a victim of abuse, forgiveness can be difficult. Depending on the nature of the offense to forgive, along with a person's faith or value-system, those who have been injured can get stuck at certain points of this forgiveness process, highlighting the complexity and intensely personal journey forgiveness involves. Briefly, the four steps are:

- i. Uncovering Phase: Confronting and clarifying the nature of the offense.
- ii. Decision Phase: Gaining an accurate understanding of the nature of forgiveness and committing to this. Must be a choice.
- iii. Work Phase: The person gains a cognitive understanding of the offender and begins viewing them in a new light. This step affects positive change about the offender, self, and the relationship.
- iv. Deepening Phase: An increased connection with others, whilst gaining greater meaning in the suffering, enabling a process of release from their "emotional prison" of "unforgiveness, bitterness,

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resentment and anger". In this phase the person may also find it necessary to confront the injustice of their treatment of their offender or others.

1. Based on the final chapters of the novel, do you think Rennie has begun moving towards forgiving his father? Provide evidence for your position from the text.
2. In Chapter 30 Rennie stops himself from comforting his mother. Discuss with a classmate how his perception of self-worth and his need for emotional safety might impact his capacity to forgive? Present the key points of your discussion to the class.

BIOETHICS

Bioethics is the "... study of ethical, social, and legal issues that arise in biomedicine and biomedical research ..." and is a complex issue highly relevant today. This field includes the legal and ethical management of practices within these disciplines, guiding what is acceptable within the scientific community and society when conducting research. In recent years it has become evident how manipulable society can be when catalysts of fear, greed or ease are injected into a volatile climate, sparking a rapid shift and erosion of "acceptable practice" within a community feeling under threat, if a proposed solution is presented by seemingly trustworthy sources. Common ethical standings against human experimentation, including the use of aborted by-products and foetal cell lines in generating human therapies, were cast aside by the majority of traditionally resistant groups, in exchange for a "for the greater good" and "trust the science" catchcry. The readiness of governments worldwide and large biomedical corporations, employing captured media outlets, to take full advantage of this shift has been nothing short of staggering. Reasoned thought is gradually unravelling much of the hysteria and media-driven narratives that paved the way for this shift, and remain a reminder of the critical importance of independent regulation of bioethics in our world.

1. Consider how ethical boundaries are determined by government and institutional authorities and how this might link to shifting moral positions in society. In 200 to 300 words, based on the information in the novel, write a reflective piece on the bioethics of Devlin Phoenix's goal of immortality. Describe whether you believe this concept has merit, or not.
2. Break out into small groups and discuss what societal attributes may contribute to perspectives of what is "acceptable" and why might this change from one generation to another? (Consider what practices and knowledge bases inform our values.) Share your group's conclusions with the class.
3. Chapter 14 references medical practices that generate embryonic by-products and provides a hint of the way Devlin Phoenix is using this for his "research". Write a paragraph describing your emotional reaction to Rennie's mistreatment by his father in the first part of the chapter. Repeat this reflection describing your emotional response when the actual use of these "by-products" are revealed later in the novel, particularly in Chapters 19 and 20. Compare these paragraphs and write a brief explanation as to why you think you responded in this way.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

AI and virtual worlds are big buzz words in our modern world. Social media platforms have proposed engaging users in a virtual context, while identities like Elon Musk have promoted "neuralink"-type technologies, which are fully implantable brain-computer interfaces currently being developed by existing organisations. This may seem far-fetched, but spokes-persons for the World Economic Forum

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have described humans as nothing more than “hackable animals” and have placed a strong focus on the willingness of people to be monitored with “under the skin surveillance” since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic (for example, the Swedish microchip “passport” implant). The recently released ChatGPT, the fasted growing AI language processing tool developed by OpenAI, is described by company co-founder, Elon Musk, as, “... scary good. We are not far from dangerously strong AI.”

1. The AI applications in the novel reveal a nefarious side of this technology. Consider and justify potential applications of AI like this that could be beneficial in certain circumstances.
2. Did Rennie accidentally kill Devlin Phoenix, or not? Explain.
3. Imagine the AI technology described in the novel were available on a voluntary basis, however, a person would be required to surrender free will if they were to access it. Pick either an affirmative or negative argument and formulate a debate statement to support your position.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. The Australian population has become more widely aware of nanoparticle technologies in recent years due to the use of lipid nanoparticles in gene transfection injectable products, but this is just one type of nanoparticle. Different nanoparticles have been proposed for use in a range of applications. Although the reference to nanoparticles in the novel has been fictionalised, there is a genuine industry interest in nanotechnology and artificial neural networks. Research this topic and explain the properties of popular nanomaterials, potential and proposed applications, and the cost (environmental and financial) of harvesting the elements for manufacturing these products.
2. Rennie mocks Devlin Phoenix’s programming, suggesting he needs upgrades to present himself as properly human. Explore what it means to be human in a technological world, including whether you think people could ever be replaced by droids and other forms of artificial technology.
3. In December 2022, reports emerged of “EctoLife”, a conceptual proposal for a world first artificial womb facility for growing genetically engineered babies. Debate has ensued as to whether this report was fact or fiction, but in recent times influential identities have also suggested society could move towards ending reproduction in favour of “artificial wombs”, much like those referenced in the novel. Justification for forays into this technology claim it will be “safer” and “more efficient” than natural pregnancy, and some reports even include the concept of robotic nannies to care for these developing babies. Write a 300 to 500 essay on the potential bioethics, biological and social implications of such technology, if ever realised.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND PLOT

1. Rennie is the point-of-view narrator for the novel.
 - a) What do his responses throughout the story tell you about his perception of self?
 - b) Does his self-perception change as the story progresses? If so, how?
2. Identify the following story “beats” (these are some of the key beats from the hero’s journey story structure). Write a brief two to three sentence summary of each beat from the novel:
 - a) the status quo

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- b)** inciting incident or catalyst
 - c)** rising action
 - d)** false loss or false victory
 - e)** bad guys close in
 - f)** all is lost moment
 - g)** resolution
- 3.** There is a story gap between when Wyatt and Mark Two storm the Faraday's house in Chapter 21, and Rennie's realisation they have also taken Blaine to the warehouse. In 500 to 800 words, write this scene from Sophie's point-of-view, using what you know of her from the novel to inform her emotional responses, thoughts and actions.
- 4.** Read the first two pages of Chapter 6:
- a)** Identify two independent clauses.
 - b)** Identify two dependent clauses.
 - c)** Are there some coordinating conjunctions?
 - d)** Can you find a sentence with:
 - Simple structure? (subject – verb – object)
 - Compound structure? (two simple sentences joined with a coordinating conjunction)
 - Complex structure? (at least one independent and one dependent clause joined with a subordinating conjunction)
 - e)** Select a paragraph from this passage of text and re-write it using only simple sentences. Does this change the feel of the paragraph? Explain.

CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISES

- 1.** Imagine a new future for one of the children rescued from the warehouse. In 600 to 1000 words, write a story about their new life one month after their escape, pivoting the narrative around a symbol that has personal significance to them.
- 2.** Write a 400 word interview with Rennie for either "SLAM SKATEBOARDING" or "KRASH" magazine. Ensure you tailor your article to the respective audience and format according to the magazine template.

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

YEAR 7

English, Science, Design and Technologies, HASS

AC9E7LE01	AC9E7LE02	AC9E7LE03	ACELT1783
ACELT1589	ACELT1584	ACELT1620	
AC9S7H03	ACSSU116		
AC9TDE8K02			
ACHASSI152			

YEAR 8

English, Science, Design and Technologies

AC9E8LE01	AC9E8LE02	AC9E8LE06	AC9E8LY04
ACELT1731	ACELT1731	ACELT1735	ACELT1736
ACELT1807			
AC9S8H03	ACSSU153		
AC9TDE8K02			

YEAR 9

English, Science, Design and Technologies

AC9E9LA01	AC9E9LA05	AC9E9LE01	AC9E9LE02
AC9E9LE05	ACELT1633	ACELT1635	ACELT1639
AC9S9H02	AC9S9H03	AC9S9H04	ASSU180
AC9TDE10K02			

YEAR 10

English, Science, Design and Technologies

AC9E10LA05	AC9E10LE01	AC9E10LE02	AC9E10LE04
AC9E10LA02	AC9E10LE05	AC9E10LY04	AC9E10LA03
AC9E10LA01	ACELT1639	ACELT1812	
AC9S10H03	AC9S10H04		
AC9TDE10K02			

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