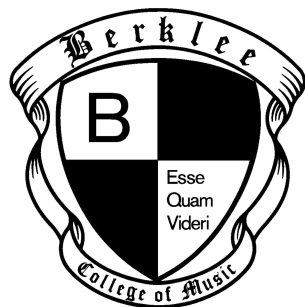


Berklee College of Music



Journey of Jonathan Livingston:

Process of creating an original composition and a musical narrative based on a
written story.

Submitted in Partial fulfillment of the Degree of
Master of Music in Scoring for Film, TV and Video Games

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Abstract

This paper is a reflection of a Culminating Experience created for a specific learning outcome as provided by Scoring for Film, TV and Video Games master program. In this experience an author was set with a task to create an original piece of music based on a visual media, script or any other available source material, that could serve as an inspiration for writing music. Once selected, an author was tasked to compose and orchestrate an original composition, to be recorded at Air Studios located in London, with a 51 piece orchestra, and mix and master the recording to its final release form. The complexity of the task is a test of the skills acquired through the academic year, which in theory a composer for the media should possess and be familiar with. The ability to take the process from the very first initial stage and successfully finalise the piece of music up to a high standard is a crucial test for any aspiring professional. Even more so if the composer is dealing with a great standard of expectations at such professional environment as was provided and expected by Air Studios. In this document an author will take the reader through all the major stages of a production, as part of which he'll explain the process and reflect on the challenges that might have occurred. Lastly, an author will reflect on the overall outcome of the project and provide an evaluation of the achievements as well as failures.

Acknowledgments

Firstly I want to thank all my classmates and staff of the Scoring for Film, TV and Video Games 2018/2019, who were an amazing support and inspiration throughout the whole year. Special thanks to Lucio Godoy - program director, for creating an environment which is incredibly demanding yet friendly, and supports a rapid progress. Another special thanks goes to my two directed studies mentors Alfons Conde and Vicente Ortiz Gimeno, who provided me with great feedback and evaluations directly suited for my personal improvement, particularly in the craft of orchestration. I want to thank our little group of friends, they know who they are, with whom we formed a very strong bond. They served not only as friends but as advisors, producers and a constructive critics of the music I composed and I am incredibly hopeful that we shall maintain this friendship in a both personal and professional world. Lastly and most importantly I want to thank my parents and family who are an amazing support and who granted me this amazing opportunity to pursue my dream of becoming a composer.

3.0 _ Pre Production

3.1 _ A Story

Initial stage of the CE was to pick a representative idea that would allow me as a composer to improve upon my skills and which would allow my compositional style to be well represented. Through the year I've gone through multiple different forms of writing music, and after evaluation, my goal was to improve a skill of creating a narration within a musical score. Therefore I've chosen to write a piece of music based on fable novella by *Richard Bach* in 1970 titled *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. Main reason why I choose this over scoring a different form of visual media is the abstraction of the written word. My goal was to compose a piece music that would create an imaginary landscape and story in a mind of the listener based on a narration within the instrumental music itself. Therefore I am attempting to leave a space for imagination, particularly for anyone who might not be familiar with the source material. Major themes of the composition which I'm trying to evoke could be summed up in keywords such as: flight, ocean, beauty, struggles, happiness, open space, wind and freedom.

For a short synopsis, the book is about a seagull named Jonathan Livingston, who cherishes and pursues the art and technical knowledge of flight. As opposed to the rest of the "seagull community" whose main idea is perseverance and a search for food, and are rather ignorant to the capabilities that the natural selection gave them. Jonathan Livingston could be an embodiment of an ambitious personality that is striving to achieve a very specific goal, and rather than focusing on the bare minimum, he wants to explore the possibilities of his world and therefore give his existence a greater meaning. This whole idea is represented by the theme of a flight, which is a main passion of Jonathan Livingston. Throughout the book we see him fail as well as achieve and despite the rejection from the rest of the community, he pursues his dreams without fear, only to reach a point becoming a teacher and a legend for those who strive for more in life, upon the finale of the book.

3.2 _ Themes

As mentioned in a chapter 3.1, the main theme for the piece was a flight, therefore this became the core of the idea when I started composing. I wanted to create a dynamic piece with a few changing motives to represent different situations and moods of the flight of Jonathan Livingston. At the final stage I composed 3 main motives. I nicknamed them 1st Flying Beyond Horizon (*Tomas Simon, 2019, Journey of Jonathan Livingston, bar 3 - 29*), 2nd Angry Sea (*Tomas Simon, 2019, Journey of Jonathan Livingston bar 29 - 60*), 3rd Jonathan In the Distance (*Tomas Simon, 2019, Journey of Jonathan Livingston bar 60 - 75*). The goal was to create a narrative and themes that were memorable. 1st motive is based around A flat major, with an introduction that establishes the dynamic of the piece up to a bar 17 where I introduced the first theme. The idea here was to have as best of a representation of a flight as possible as the rest of the narrative would derive from it. In this part I wanted to give the listener a feeling of a joy from the wind that Jonathan experiences when he glides, the ambition of a hope, ambition of progressing in life while enjoying what he really loves and the strong will. 2nd motive titled Angry Sea, was an abrupt transition, when Jonathan is experiencing a failure and a hardship and his constant battle with it. Therefore I decided to switch to a darker tone and introduce an independent and dynamic movement to empower the different struggles that might appear. Lastly the motive named Jonathan In the Distance served as a conclusion to the composition, capturing the beauty of everything that Jonathan learned and a goal that he has achieved and might want to achieve in the future. This was meant to be a soft and an emotional theme, representing hope and a conclusion to everything that one might experience through a journey.

3.3 _ Approach and Inspirations

Three major names I would reference as an inspiration in creating this particular score would have to be Alexandre Desplat, John Powell and Bedrich Smetana. More specifically, the compositional style of Alexandre Desplat, which feels very close to my approach, particularly with his rather minimalistic structure, very strongly focused around textures of an orchestra. He's frequently using an ostinato phrase which creates a rhythmical and textural basis of the music, around which he creates various harmonies and themes, with a great attention to dynamics between sections. In my personal observation, despite Alexandre Desplat is being a versatile composer, I truly admire the way he can capture an emotional theme and even with a use of a larger scale orchestra, he manages to make it sound rather more intimate and personal. This approach is definitely inspiring for me and I was trying to capture it in the score in my own way. One of my greatest inspirations growing up was Minimalism and therefore I feel that my compositions are strongly inspired by it, although I'm constantly trying to improve my versatility. Also the idea of having a harmonic and textural basis is very helpful for my process of composing melodies as it boosts my musical imagination in an orchestral writing and a narrative of the score. I suspect that this process is also massively influenced by my background in music, which is majorly music production and electronic music, as opposed to classical background which is considerably more based around the counterpoint and thinking in melodies. Another piece that was more specific to this project as an influence was a score to *John Powell, 2010, How To Train Your Dragon, Spotify*. My major reason was to capture the idea of a flight in a theme. This score has a multiple cues which I consider beautiful representations of it. While the score has various Celtic and Nordic folk influences in orchestration and melodies, the main inspiration for me was the density of the orchestration and the movement, for example on cues such as Test Drive (*John Powell, 2010, How To Train Your Dragon, track 11 Spotify*) and Romantic Flight (*John Powell, 2010, How To Train*

Your Dragon, track 15, Spotify). These two cues were influencing mostly the first two motives in my composition. Lastly I listened and analysed the score by *Bedrich Smetana, 1874, My Homeland, The Moldau*. Reason why this score seemed as a piece of music to consider for this specific project was the idea of a wavy textures, the author created at the very beginning of the musical piece. Bedrich Smetana was supposedly trying to capture the flow of the river, through the capital of Czech Republic, Prague. This is a piece well known for its musical narrative and a beautiful orchestration, at least amongst the people that originated from these geographical parts of the world as myself. Therefore keeping that in mind, it seemed as a viable inspiration for a portrayal of a water movement, which was part of the story I was capturing. In the 3rd motive I was attempting to capture that specific texture by giving a slurred ostinato phrase to the strings with a repetitive crescendo and diminuendo performed by the orchestra to emulate the flow of waves (*example A*). This really supported the impression of a flowing water and the softness I intended for the musical finale, while maintaining the grandiosity of the orchestra.

Example A;

The image displays a musical score for 'Example A', consisting of three staves of music. The top staff features a melodic line with a slurred ostinato phrase, marked with dynamics *p*, *mf*, and *p*. The middle and bottom staves provide accompaniment with similar rhythmic patterns, also marked with *p*, *mf*, and *p*. A 'play' button icon is present on the left side of the middle staff. The word 'div' is written below the first measure of the middle staff. The word 'simile' is written above the first measure of the third staff. The score is divided into three measures by vertical bar lines.

4.0 _ Production

4.1 _ Mockup and Orchestration

This particular stage of the composition was definitely a process of trial and error. As I've mentioned before, I usually start writing in a full orchestral setup to establish a texture before developing the themes. Nevertheless in this case, the very first idea that I've had, was based on a piano sketch. I've initially written 5 different motives rooting around movement in between G major and G Mixolydian scales, however as I've started to progress with the orchestration they've changed immensely and I was constantly struggling to capture the idea of a flight. Only after a few different variations I've realised that my piano writing was perhaps not ideal. While the piano sketches were capturing the idea of a flight in their own way, I've realised that I'm constantly trying to maintain a rather complicated structure of the composition, initially built for a piano. Therefore I've chosen to abandon the idea as it quickly became unsatisfactory and got me stuck. This is something I frequently observe, when I start composing a piece. I tend to directly start with an instrumentation in my head, and then it might become harder for me to abandon the idea. Therefore when I've started with the piano, I've composed a piano piece rather than orchestral one. That caused me a difficulty to translate the sketch into a full orchestration. This doesn't necessarily cause the problem in a scenario when I intend to orchestrate a piano sketch written by a different composer. At that level I'm not as connected to the initial idea, therefore it seems easier to expand on it. After I've abandoned the first draft, I've started composing directly in a full orchestral palette. From then on it went much smoother. As mentioned in the chapter 3.3, I've had a clear textures in my mind which I wanted to achieve. The whole piece started with 4 motives. Initially I had composed a rather soft violin and cello solos for the beginning, with a held long notes divided between the rest of the strings and woodwinds, as a gentle introduction of the theme I have introduced later. Nevertheless due to a time limitation of 3 minutes I had to abandon this introduction to shorten it and by logical evaluation this part felt the least advanced and effective in

terms of utilising the orchestra to its full potential. After shortening I was left with the 3 motives the listener can hear on the final master. 1st motive I've started with the ostinato phrases, in strings and woodwinds. In this part I was attempting to establish the pace and the dynamic of the cue, expanding on the density of the score rapidly by immediately introducing a thicker instrumentation with a brief 8 bar introduction moving towards bar 17 where the listener can hear the first theme. The idea here was to capture the listener in the very beginning, with a full sound of an orchestra and transfer his mind into the narration of the piece, or in other more abstract words, directly into the flight. The theme from bar 17 is majorly performed by violins with some doubling in oboe and flutes to enrich the timber, while the rest of the orchestra is mostly performing a harmonic bed, and violas are performing an ostinato to maintain the effect of the motion. At bar 29 there is a sudden contrast, rapid change of the mood. I've instantly reduced the density of the orchestra with a sudden tonal change towards a more ominous sound. This part is mostly held by contrabass section with a rest of an instrumentation performing short phrases to empower the atmosphere, however I'm only introducing and preparing the listener to what is about to come. This section leads to a crescendo towards bar 36. This in my view was the section which meant to, for the first time, introduce the idea of "Angry Sea". Therefore I've chosen to write an ominous, ostinato based motive in a complex 7/8 (3+2+2) performed with a thinner density yet, higher dynamic to really exaggerate the change in a mood and let the woody timber of the strings take over. This short 4 bar introduction then progresses back to a dense 6/8 for a grandiose battle of phrases. Following part was meant to represent a battle with the struggles, with waves and strong winds on an open sea. This metaphor is representing the idea of Jonathan crossing the boundaries and his comfort zones and to add a drama to the narrative. Therefore the movement is becoming much more aggressive. In bar 40 I'm introducing a form of a musical dialogue, exaggerating 3rd beat of a bar with an accent amongst most of the instruments, while trumpet 1 is performing a melody in a flutter tongue to add harshness and general impression of an ongoing battle. During the next four bars the trumpet and the rest of

the orchestra is having an argument. This serves as a representation of an unpredictability of the weather conditions during the flight. I've imagined Jonathan flying in the rain and heavy wind, avoiding high waves and being overwhelmed by the wind. Only to build up towards a last stand at the beginning of a bar 48 where I'm introducing a forte ostinato phrase evolving between the majority of the orchestra. Here a listener should hear a sense of panic, fear, a last instance of a constantly evolving battle, yet also a dedication to win. This leads to a massive accented crescendo in a unison for the whole orchestra as a finale to the ominous motive. It should represent the idea of a finish, where the listener shouldn't know what has happened with Jonathan. I've tried to emulate this tension with a *sul tasto* high note held on the violins, which also serves as a bridging note into the next motive. The last motive starting at bar 60, is a conclusion of the narrative, at this stage I'm trying to take the listener into a picture of Jonathan flying out of the storm and into a sunset and clear skies, however he is changed by what he has learned and achieved on the way. He has matured in the process, understanding not only the enjoyability, but the dangers of the goals that he has set for himself. This motive was meant to represent beauty, maturity and dedication. The listener should hear that Jonathan is now one with the both positive and a negative aspects of his ambition, and therefore is able to teach and guide those who'd listen. The wavy textural movement in strings and woodwinds is the pinnacle of this motive along with a new theme introduced and doubled by violins and flutes. Brass is providing the thick harmonic texture in long notes, along with the softness of the *pizzicato* in contrabass, and playfulness of a *glockenspiel*. Another element which differentiates this motive from the rest is an introduction of a piano and harp into the overall timber. Both perform an ostinato phrase to enrich the palette and make the motive more matured, elegant and texturally different from the rest of the composition. Last motive is gradually growing until the last bar, with a sudden cutoff at the end, to empower to continuity of the story. In more poetic words, while the music ends, the story continues. "No limits, Jonathan? he thought, and he smiled. His race to learn had begun." (*Richard Bach, 1970, Jonathan Livingston Seagull, p.28*)

4.2 _ Preparation for the Recording

Getting to this point I've finalised established my idea and the narrative of what I've intended for the composition to represent, therefore from this point I was trying to be much more technical and critical about the possible outcomes and obstacles. First general idea was to properly evaluate my orchestration, as from a past experiences, a recording scenario and purely digital form of composing can be different in various ways. Firstly DAW allows a composer to add as many layers and density as a composer might crave, as opposed to a live recording with an ensemble of a specific size without a possibility of an overdub. Therefore I've reduced dividing in strings and woodwinds, and simplified it particularly with the themes, to really achieve a strong balance in the phrases and to exaggerate the intentional parts. This required me to transfer and properly notate the physical score early in the process. I was generally satisfied with the way I treated the orchestration towards the goal, apart from the specific flutter tongue melody from bar 40 to bar 43 which was not as exaggerated as was originally intended. This would've been probably easily fixed by letting both trumpets play in a unison instead of dividing them into two separate phrases. Additional process was to make sure that, my voicing is correct and I'm fully utilising the orchestra, as this specific recording opportunity provided us with players of an exceptional quality. Voicing is something I was especially vigilant about, as it can be tricky particularly translating from the layering capabilities of the DAW and I acknowledged during a learning process with my supervisors at Berklee that this aspect I tended to underestimate in my previous works. Therefore once I had the piece notated I simplified the bass and its distribution between instruments in lower registers. I also generally simplified harmonies, as I've had a few complex added chords in a mid registers which I figured might cause an unwanted result as it became very dense and I wanted to save it especially for the main themes. Utilisation of the orchestra was another goal. As I've mentioned all of my pieces begin in a rather more minimalistic, timbral way, therefore this time I wanted to explore the

movement of the orchestra, and add as much detail to it as it seemed appropriate for the composition. Therefore once I've established the basis of the harmonies and the themes, I tried to observe the score in a more visual aspect and utilise instruments equally through the score without overcrowding it. The composition was quite heavily dependent on the string section and dividing timbers between woodwinds and brass, therefore I always had a space to add small additional phrases and details onto resting instruments just to exaggerate the movement or create an extra timber, while maintaining the main idea of the motive. At the end of the process I became quite satisfied with the general movement of the score and an utilisation of the players for the purpose of this composition. Nevertheless, personally I felt I perhaps shouldn't have abandoned the complex chords, for that extra spark and the uniqueness of the colour they might've brought to it. Lastly one of the challenges was a dynamic marking of the phrases. This is something I had to revise on a multiple opportunities prior to the recording as it was a challenge to make them as detailed as I've intended them to be, particularly as it was the first time dealing with such a size of an orchestration. In the process I've learned that this is something that really requires a very keen self discipline, as particularly between multiple staves and parts, small mistakes and imperfections are truly lurking in the darkness from the eye of the composer.

5.0 _ Recording

5.1 _ London Experience

The recording was set to happen at Air Studios's Lyndhurst Hall. This phenomenal studio located in London with it's spacious 300 square meter live room provided an exceptional environment to record the final piece of the academic year. The musician and recording team of an astounding quality were to participate, therefore it was imperative that the preparation was very attentive and to a high industry standard. This was particularly important with the preparation of the

parts for the performing musicians. Based on an advice from our staff we were preparing special sizes and specific type of yellow non-reflective papers for the music parts. Details which seemed subtle and yet made a massive difference in a comfort of the musicians and the general perception of our approach and professionalism. These details served as ones, amongst the many valuable lessons towards the future. Air Lyndhurst Hall provided a very special environment along with a pressure that came with the idea of conducting an ensemble of this size but especially quality. The live room is located in the building of a church, with only a subtle acoustic treatment to suppress resonances that might occur in the room, therefore the sound during the recording is fairly amplified and lively. Air studios is famously know for it's reflective capabilities to exaggerate the size of an orchestra. This particular feature provided a challenge in form of monitoring, due to the amplification in the room the monitor mix was set to exaggerate click track, and therefore it was rather difficult to truly focus on the performance of the orchestra. This really took an amateur conductor like myself a minute to adjust to. This and for the first time experiencing an ensemble of that size. The recording process went smoothly in my case, this is by all means a merit of the orchestra. I truly cherished the responsiveness and the questions of the players, who really seemed to be trying their best to perform the music as best as they could. However during my recording a few mistakes had occurred on my behalf which I definitely shall improve, and all of them are connected to the revisions of the score and the little mistakes lurking in the dark as I've mentioned in a chapter 4.2. Mistake number one, were that parts of the oboe and the cellos, which were on one occasion missing some accidentals in a repetitive phrases, and a few unmarked slurs that were obviously intended. These small details hadn't caused too big of headache to the orchestra of professional musician, yet the fact that they had to confirm with me something so obvious truly made me slightly embarrassed and I shall be even more attentive to these kind of details in a future. One thing that I truly appreciated, as engineering is one of my backgrounds, was the speed with which these professionals, specifically engineers, were dealing with the workflow. A fact that our

main engineer Jake Jackson was providing us with a valuable production notes along with our college staff, and was dynamically controlling the click in the monitor to be compatible with the orchestra was stunning. The click is a small yet a very handful detail that I've observed for the first time. Amongst other things the delivery of the Pro Tools sessions was brought to an amazing standard, providing us with a desk print mix, a pre-made compilation of the best takes and a document marking the takes, along with a possible issues we might come across during the mix. This is something I've always saw a producer do in my previous experiences, and yet the fact that an engineer is doing it makes a lot of sense, as it provides the producer with an extra focus span.

5.2 _ Conducting

In a role of a conductor, I was trying to first and foremost step on the scoring stage with a good attitude and a strong presence. However I could not deny that the adrenaline took control during the first take. Generally to self evaluate I have to admit that as a conductor, I wasn't really satisfied with my performance, as I've made quite a few mistakes which I will aim to eliminate before my next conducting experience. So while it was an incredible moment that I cherish, the self realisation of the gap that I still have to cross in order to become a good conductor is enormous. With me it all starts with the reactions and a sight reading of the score which, especially under that kind of a pressure, simply become insufficient. While I am fairly confident that I can maintain the energy and a mood of the score with my gesture, I have to improve my attention towards sections and specific instruments and also the proficiency, with which I can answer questions in between the takes. All the issues feel connected to the ability of sight reading a score and instantly thinking and evaluating the composers intention. Conducting is a craft that takes years to perfect, and I've just started my journey. I truly want to become an effective conductor, therefore this experience was incredibly exciting, very humbling and definitely most informative for a future progress.

6.0 _ Post Production

6.1 _ Mixing and Mastering

Process of mixing the piece was very pure and rather simplistic due to the acoustical nature of the Lyndhurst Hall, the quality of the engineers and the equipment which provided a very balanced sound. The Decca tree and the wide stereo microphones as well as the surrounds provided a sound image with only a few minor resonances. The only challenge in the mix was to create a realistic balance between the multiple spot mic techniques and a room. String section was recorded in a dividing technique that gave us an opportunity to focus the spot mics on the first chairs of the string ensemble, along with an additional spot mics focused on the back chairs and a central mic creating an overall image of the section. This technique is very useful in the mix particularly for the thematic material and a general control of the density of the string section. In my case I've created a rather equal balance between all of the spot mics. Focusing majority of my mix on enhancing the room. EQ was generally very surgical amongst all of the mics, with most of the dominant resonances happening in the fundamental notes of the instruments. This could have possibly caused a certain struggle for a less experienced mixing engineers who are not specifically trained to find frequencies and therefore might take a wrong decision of reducing a major portion of them, as a result of what a section might lose its timber, resulting in an unbalanced mix. Nevertheless in a world of a spectral EQ plugins with a visual analyser such as Fab-Filter Q series, this hardship might be significantly lowered. One of the major procedures in the mix was to control a bleed of the additional frequencies in between the sections to achieve a clean sound. It was imperative to reduce the spot mics to fundamental frequencies of the specific section. One struggle that occurred was mixing the percussions, specifically timpani, which were recorded with overhead microphones, without any proper isolation. Therefore the bleed in the spot mics, and a very distant image in the room mics, forced me to double the timpani with a stems from the sample library. That gave me a better control

over the attack and a presence in the mix. I've added stems of a piano and a harp from a mockup, which I treated with a large hall reverb resembling the sound of the live room to emulate the placement and I've sent the overall mix into an additional reverb to emphasise the space and also blend all of the sample based instruments into the live recording. The only instruments that I've treated with a light compression in the mixing phase were low strings and timpani, to achieve a thicker more present sound, which is characteristic to the film music. Generally the room sounded rather bright, particularly on violin mics, therefore I've reduced some of the more significant frequencies in a high mid register, as I've felt they were overpowering. The brightness of the room was very special compared to the most of the spaces I've experienced. Recordings tend to generally sound darker in an initial phase. In my mastering chain I've applied more EQ, where I've reduced a number of frequencies in mids and high mids, to reduce the overpowering brightness of the mix, and also applied more significant cuts in lower frequencies, as the bass seemed too resonant and out of control, particularly at around the area of 100 Hz nevertheless I really liked the frequencies below, as they felt, even without any significant processing, very well rounded. After this I've treated the mix bus with an emulation of an 1176 Universal Audio compressor, reducing only about 1-1.5 gain at the loudest peaks. This created a more glued and interlocked mix. Lastly I've applied Ozone 8 in which I've added a surgical amount of dynamic EQ in high mids, where there were a few resonance that I felt still needed control. After this I've introduced a multi band compression, again very softly, controlling mostly the low mid range, then a tape machine emulation softly saturating highs and lows, and finally a maximiser targeting an integrated LUFS around the area of -18dB.

7.0 _ Outcome and Reflections

I have to say that I'm generally satisfied with the outcome of the process. It had provided me with a very valuable piece for my portfolio. The highlight of it was undoubtedly the London recording experience which pushed the boundaries and attention to detail to a higher standard. It was a very humbling experience to observe such a high standard of quality, and it made me personally realise that there is still a long journey, before I can truly feel confident being in front of such experienced players, nevertheless it also represented the progress we've achieved in a year of studying at Berklee which lead to this unforgettable experience. The musicians really did manage to make everything sound beautiful. Looking back as I've mentioned in previous chapters, there were but a few struggles and mistakes that served as a very good learning experience for the future progress. I'm definitely convinced that my orchestration skills became much better during the year, as much as I'm very convinced that there is still a lot to improve upon in my orchestral writing. The complexity of the process gave me a very detailed insight on these things. One thing that I've proven to myself is that I can truly handle a musical narrative with care and detail, and create an abstract idea using only music as my tool. However any creative mind is only as good as the knowledge it possesses. Therefore the message I've got is the one to be expected. Learn more, and constantly work towards an improvement. Not unlike Jonathan Livingston Seagull who I've introduced among these pages.

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