

# THE 2021 JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

Montricher, Friday 23 November 2021

The Jan Michalski Prize for Literature 2021 has been awarded to Memorial International, Alena Kozlova, Nikolai Mikhailov, Irina Ostrovskaya and Irina Scherbakova for the collective work *Знак не сотрется. Судьбы оstarбайтеров в письмах, воспоминаниях и устных рассказах* (Мемориал, 2016), translated from the Russian by Georgia Thomson under the title *OST: Letters, Memoirs and Stories from Ostarbeiter in Nazi Germany* (Granta, 2021).

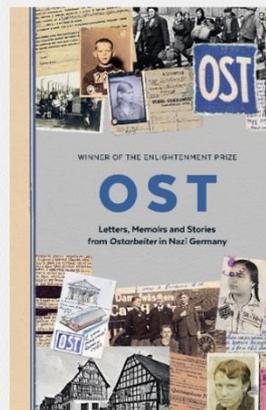
The jury commended *“the hard work by the Russian non-government organisation, Memorial International, that went into restoring the historical truth through this reference book documenting the destiny of millions of Ostarbeiter, and accomplishes the complex task of preserving oral history from obliteration and misappropriation. By providing a written record of the voices of civil society in a situation where history is rewritten according to political context, the work OST creates an essential memorial for the future of our society which must preserve the memories and use them well in order to confront their current challenges.”*

The Prize will be awarded by the Fondation Jan Michalski pour l'écriture et la littérature at Montricher, Switzerland, on Tuesday 23 November at 11a.m.

## THE 2021 JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

**Memorial International,  
Alena Kozlova,  
Nikolai Mikhailov,  
Irina Ostrovskaya,  
Irina Scherbakova**

***OST: Letters, Memoirs and  
Stories from Ostarbeiter in  
Nazi Germany***



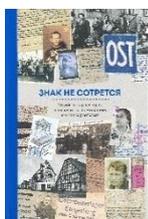
The term *Ostarbeiter*, literally “workers from the East”, is used to define citizens of Eastern Europe, notably of the Soviet Union who were deported and subjected to compulsory labour throughout the Third Reich’s territory following the occupation of their countries by the Nazis in 1941. Between three and five million mainly Ukrainians, Poles, Belarussians, Russians, Tatars, most of them under the age of 18, were sent to work in factories, mines, farms and as domestic servants. As well as being taken from their families and distinguished from other compulsory workers by the badge “OST” sewn onto their clothing, they encountered working conditions closely approximating slavery – hard work, living in closed camps under constant surveillance, undernourishment, lack of hygiene and care, humiliations and punishment, despite the few acts of kindness from German civilians.

Almost half of these adolescents were girls who were also subjected to sexual violence, from which arose tens of thousands of unwanted pregnancies. Many died of starvation, exhaustion and bombing raids as they were not allowed access to bomb shelters, or from other abuse when they were not simply executed by their Nazi camp guards.

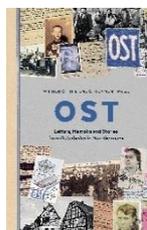
At the end of the war, more than 2.5 million *Ostarbeiter* were repatriated to the URSS, where they had to face a double traumatism. Already grappling with the totalitarian Stalinist system which suspected them of being traitors to the homeland, they were subjected to interrogations in so-called “filtration” camps, judged and frequently condemned to various punishments for having “collaborated with the enemy”. Some were sent to the Gulag for “re-education”; others were enrolled in the Red Army or in the contingents of workers assigned to rebuilding the nation’s economy. These repatriates were never considered as victims or heroes of the Second World War. They lived with the weight of fear and guilt and were subjected to surveillance, disgrace and were socially ostracized for several decades following their return. Furthermore, they had to suffer the State’s deliberately orchestrated silence.

It is only since the 1990s that the question of the *Ostarbeiter* has found its place on the public stage; first through the initiative of the Greens in the German Bundestag before the Russian non-governmental organisation, Memorial, which works to obtain the moral and legal rehabilitation of people subject to political oppression in the URSS, the current Russian state and the countries of the old Eastern Block, set out to have them recognized.

Winner of the Enlightener Prize 2017 in Russia and now of the Jan Michalski Prize for Literature, the book *OST: Letters, Memoirs and Stories from Ostarbeiter in Nazi Germany* is the fruit of a long-term undertaking led by Memorial International and its staff who have gathered numerous archives – including photographs, correspondence and diaries – and taped hundreds of hours of interviews with former *Ostarbeiter*, in order to exhaustively document what they suffered during their captivity and what they had to live through on their return to their homeland. By compiling, putting all this testimony in order and in context, the book breaks the silence of a slice of history of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and provides a collective memory of the tragic and complex destiny of the *Ostarbeiter*.



**FIRST EDITION IN RUSSIAN**  
**Знак не сотрется. Судьбы оstarбайтеров в письмах, воспоминаниях и устных рассказах**, Мемориал, 2016



**ENGLISH EDITION**  
**OST: Letters, Memoirs and Stories from Ostarbeiter in Nazi Germany**, Granta, 2021  
Translated from the Russian by Georgia Thomson

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**The Jan Michalski Prize 2021 awards Memorial International, Alena Kozlova, Nikolai Mikhailov, Irina Ostrovskaya and Irina Scherbakova an amount of CHF 50,000.00 as well as a work of art chosen for each of them: an ink drawing by the artist Frédéric Pajak.**

## | THE AUTHORS

### **MEMORIAL INTERNATIONAL**

Arising from initiative action groups that appeared after 1987 in the URSS, Memorial was founded in 1989 and officially became the International Historical Educational Charitable and Human Rights Society "Memorial" in 1992.

Memorial International is the oldest and the most important organisation for the defence of human rights in Russia. It promotes the development of civil society, democracy and the rule of law excluding any return to totalitarianism; participates in educating the public conscience regarding democratic values and law and upholding the rights of individuals; it participates in restoring historical truth and perpetuating the memory of victims of the political repressions of totalitarian regimes.

More of a movement than a centralised organisation, Memorial has more than 60 sections and various affiliated organisations throughout Russia, as well as sections in Germany, Italy, France, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Latvia and Georgia. Since the law on "foreign agents" came into force in July 2012, the organisation has been subjected to growing official pressure. Declared to be a "foreign agent" in October 2016, meaning an enemy of the State, Memorial is menaced today with dissolution by the judicial authorities of the Russian Federation.

### **ALENA KOZLOVA**

Born in 1956, Alena Kozlova holds a degree in history and has been the Director of the Gulag History Archive at Memorial since 2002, where she is responsible for oral history projects. She co-authored the book *My Father's Letters: correspondence from the Soviet Gulag* with Nikolai Mikhailov, Irina Ostrovskaya, and Svetlana Fadeeva (original edition by Memorial, 2014, English edition by Granta, 2021).

### **NIKOLAI MIKHAILOV**

Nikolai Mikhailov was born in 1939 and holds a doctorate in philosophy. He worked at the Chelyabinsk Pedagogical Institute before becoming an editor and journalist for various media in 1982. He was chief editor of *Vechernyaya Moskva*. He is the author of several books, notably in collaboration with Memorial.

### **IRINA OSTROVSKAYA**

Born in 1955, Irina Ostrovskaya holds a degree in philology and has been working for Memorial since 2000 as curator of the Gulag History Archive and as a contributor to the Centre for Oral History and Biography. She has been involved in the international projects "Survivors of Mauthausen" and "Documentation of forced labour and slavery in Nazi Germany".

### **IRINA SCHERBAKOVA**

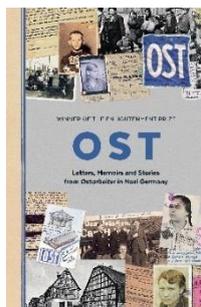
Born in 1949, Irina Scherbakova is a historian, philologist, translator. She contributed to the origins of Memorial. Starting from 1999, she has been the coordinator of the annual Russian history competition for high school students run by Memorial and Director of its Oral History Center. She coordinates also the "History Course" website ([urokiistorii.ru](http://urokiistorii.ru)), a popular scientific project on 20<sup>th</sup> century history and the culture of historical memory. She has published numerous books on the history and current politics of Russia. She holds a number of prestigious awards: the German Federal Cross of Merit (2005), the Goethe Medal (2017), and the Austrian Decoration for Science and Art (2019).

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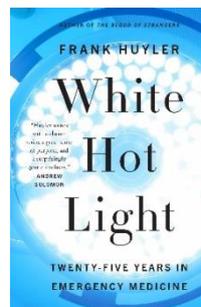
| THE BOOKS SELECTED FOR THE 2021 JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE



{Finalist}  
**Eduardo Halfon,**  
*Mourning,*  
 translated from the Spanish  
 by Lisa Dillman & Daniel  
 Hahn  
 Bellevue Literary Press, New  
 York, 2018  
 Proposed by **Lidia Jorge**



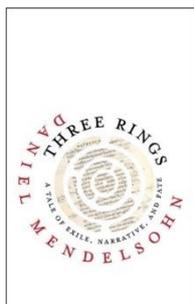
{Finalist}  
**Memorial International,**  
*OST: Letters, Memoirs and  
 Stories from Ostarbeiter in  
 Nazi Germany,*  
 translated from the Russian  
 by Georgia Thomson  
 Granta Books, London, 2021  
 Proposed by **Ludmila  
 Ulitzkaya**



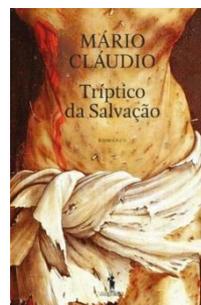
{Finalist}  
**Frank Huyler,**  
*White Hot Light: Twenty-  
 five Years in Emergency  
 Medicine,*  
 Harper Perennial, New York,  
 2020  
 Proposed by **Siri Hustvedt**



**Sophy Roberts,**  
*The Lost Pianos of Siberia,*  
 Doubleday, London, 2020  
 Proposed by **Vera  
 Michalski-Hoffmann**



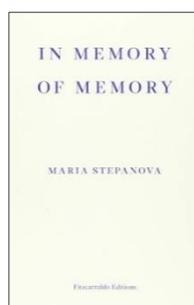
**Daniel Mendelsohn,**  
*Three Rings: a Tale of  
 Exile, Narrative and Fate,*  
 University of Virginia Press,  
 Charlottesville, 2020  
 Proposed by **Vera Michalski-  
 Hoffmann**



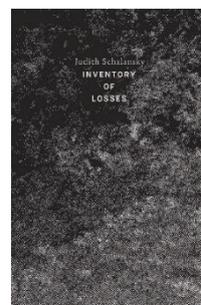
**Mário Cláudio,**  
*Trípico da Salvação,*  
 Dom Quixote, Alfragide,  
 2019  
 Proposed by **Lidia Jorge**



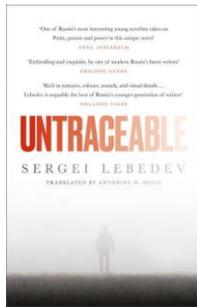
**Ksenia Buksha,**  
*Открывается внутрь,*  
 Аст, Москва, 2018  
 Proposed by **Ludmila  
 Ulitzkaya**



**Maria Stepanova,**  
*In Memory of Memory,*  
 translated from the  
 Russian by Sasha Dugdale,  
 Fitzcarraldo, London, 2021  
 Proposed by **Tomasz  
 Rozycki**



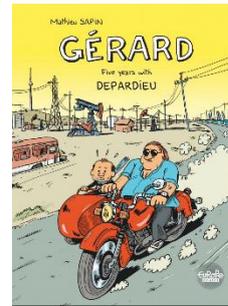
**Judith Schalansky,**  
*An Inventory of losses,*  
 translated from the  
 German by Jackie Smith,  
 New Directions, New York,  
 2019  
 Proposed by **Tomasz  
 Rozycki**



**Sergei Lebedev,**  
***Untraceable*,**  
translated from the  
Russian by Antonina W.  
Bouis,  
Apollo, New York, 2021  
Proposed by Carsten  
Jensen



**Édouard Louis,**  
***Who killed my father*,**  
translated from the French  
by Edouard Louis & Lorin  
Stein,  
London Vintage, London,  
2018  
Proposed by Carsten Jensen



**Mathieu Sapin,**  
***Gérard : five years with  
Depardieu*,**  
Europe Comics, 2020 (e-  
book)  
Proposed by Jul (Julien  
Berjeaut)



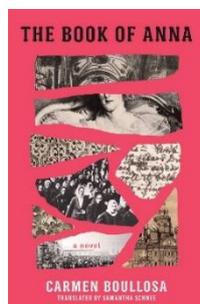
**Lisa Mandel,**  
***Une année exemplaire*,**  
Lisa Mandel, 2020  
Proposed by Jul (Julien  
Berjeaut)



**Patrice Jean,**  
***L'homme surnuméraire*,**  
Rue Fromentin, Paris, 2017  
Proposed by Benoît  
Duteurtre



**Claudie Hunzinger,**  
***Les grands cerfs*,**  
Grasset, Paris, 2019  
Proposed by Benoît  
Duteurtre



**Carmen Boullosa,**  
***The Book of Anna*,**  
translated from the  
Spanish by Samantha  
Schnee,  
Coffee House Press,  
Minneapolis, 2020  
Proposed by Siri Hustvedt

## THE JURY OF THE JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE 2021

### **Vera Michalski-Hoffmann, President of the jury**

The publisher Vera Michalski-Hoffmann, born in 1954, who has always been committed to promoting literature and the written word, founded the publishing group Libella with Jan Michalski. Since 1986, numerous authors have been brought out in French, Polish and English at various publishing houses, including Noir sur Blanc, Buchet-Chastel, Phébus, Wydawnictwo Literackie, and World Editions. In 2004 Vera Michalski created the Jan Michalski Foundation for Writing and Literature, whose mission is to foster literary creation and encourage the practice of reading through a range of initiatives and activities.

### **Jul (Julien Berjeaut)**

The political cartoonist and author of French comic books Julien Berjeaut, known as Jul, was born in 1974. He graduated with a teaching degree in history and was teaching Chinese history when he decided to devote himself to cartooning. He has worked for a number of newspapers and magazines, including *Lire*, *Charlie Hebdo*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Libération*, and *Le Monde*. In 2005 he published his first comic book with *Il faut tuer José Bové*, a popular success that poked fun at anti-globalists. Jul has also worked as a cartoonist for various television shows (*Le Grand Journal* on Canal+, *La Grande Librairie* on France 5, *28 minutes* on Arte). In 2012 his series *Silex and the City* was adapted for television (Arte) as an animated series, followed by *50 nuances de Grecs*, inspired by his comic book of the same name. In 2016 he became the new cartoonist behind the venerable *Lucky Luke* series of comic books, the volume in English, *A Cowboy In High Cotton*, was published in 2021.

### **Benoît Duteurtre**

The novelist, essayist, and music critic Benoît Duteurtre was born in 1960 in Normandy, France. He took a degree in musicology and published his first novel, *Sommeil perdu* in 1985. *Drôle de temps* was awarded the 1997 Prix de la nouvelle de l'Académie française, and *Le voyage en France* the 2001 Prix Médicis. *La petite fille et la cigarette* (2005; *The Little Girl and the Cigarette*, 2007) has been translated into a score of languages and was adapted for the stage. Since 2006, he writes for the literary review *L'Atelier du roman* with Milan Kundera and Michel Houellebecq. His recent titles are *Livre pour adultes* (2016) and *En marche! Conte philosophique* (2018). He is the author of numerous music shows that have been broadcast by France 3, France 5, and France Musique, and writes for the magazine *Marianne*, as well as *Le Figaro littéraire* and *Le Monde de la musique*.

### **Lídia Jorge**

Born in 1946 in the Algarve, Portugal, Lídia Jorge is considered a leading light of new wave Portuguese literature after the Carnation Revolution. She is the author of novels, short stories, children's books, plays, essays, and poetry. Her debut work, the novel *O Dia dos Prodígios* (1980) is deeply rooted in the history of Portugal. Today Jorge's substantial body of work includes *A Costa dos Murmúrios* (1988), written in the wake of the years she spent in Mozambique during the colonial war; *A Última Dona* (1992); *O Vale de paixão* (1998; available in English as *The Painter of Birds*); *O Vento Assobiando nas Gruas* (2002); *Combateremos a Sombra* (2007); *A Noite das Mulheres Cantoras* (2011); and *Os Memoráveis* (2014). Her most recent novel, *Estuário* (2018), took the XXIV DST Grand Prize for Literature in 2019, while its French translation was shortlisted for the Prix Médicis the same year. Translated into over twenty languages, her work has been awarded numerous other prizes over the years, including the Internationaler Literaturpreis Albatros 2006 and the Premio FIL de Literatura en Lenguas Romances 2020.

### **Siri Hustvedt**

Siri Hustvedt was born in 1955 in Minnesota (USA) to Norwegian-American parents. This American writer, poet and essayist is also specialized in psychiatric studies. Hustvedt, after earning her PhD in English literature from Columbia University, published her first novel in 1992, *The Blindfold*. She followed this debut work with a series of novels that includes *What I Loved* in 2003, *The Summer Without Men* in 2011, and *The Blazing World* in 2014, all of which enjoyed international success. Her nonfiction book *The Shaking Woman or A History of My Nerves* (2009) examines psychiatric troubles while drawing connections between the humanities and the neurosciences. Since 2015 Hustvedt has also taught as a lecturer in psychiatry at Cornell

University's Faculty of Medicine. In 2012, she was given the Gabarron International Award for Thought and Humanities. In 2019, she received the Princess Asturias Award for her work as a whole, and the Charles Veillon European Essay Prize for *The Delusions of Certainty*. Her books have been translated into over thirty languages.

### **Carsten Jensen**

The writer and journalist Carsten Jensen was born in 1952 in Marstal (Denmark). After graduating from the University of Copenhagen with a master's degree in literature, Jensen started writing for the daily *Politiken* and became a regular contributor to a number of titles in the Danish press. In 1997 he received the Danish booksellers' Golden Laurel Award for his travel book *Jeg har set verden begynde*. In 2001 he began teaching at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Odense. His first novel, *Vi, de druknede* (*We, the Drowned*), published in 2009, enjoyed great critical and popular success and earned him the prestigious Danske Banks Litteraturpris while the French translation of the book took the Prix Gens de mer at the Étonnants Voyageurs (Amazing Travelers) Festival of Saint-Malo. In 2010 Jensen was awarded Olof Palme Prize. His monumental novel *Den første sten* (*The First Stone*) about a group of Danish soldiers who volunteered to serve in Afghanistan was published in 2015. His work has been translated in some twenty countries.

### **Tomasz Różycki**

The poet, essayist and translator from the French Tomasz Różycki was born in 1970 in Opole, Poland. After taking a degree in Romance philology at the Jagiellonian University (Kraków), he joined the teaching staff at the teachers training college for foreign languages in Opole. His work, emblematic of a generation caught up in the current uncertainties roiling world politics, is published in France, Germany, Italy, Slovakia, and the United States. His long poem called *Twelve Stations* (2015), originally published in Polish in 2004 under the name *Dwanaście stacji*, was awarded the 2004 Kościelski Foundation Prize and was nominated for the 2005 Nike Prize. *Colonies*, translation into English from *Kolonie*, won the 2014 Northern California Book Award for Poetry in Translation. He has translated Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Segalen, and writes for numerous reviews, such as *Czas Kultury*, *Odra*, *PEN America*.

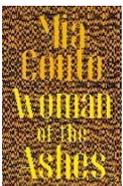
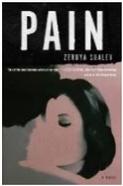
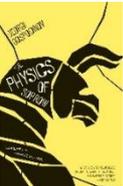
### **Ludmila Ulitskaya**

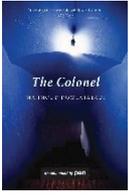
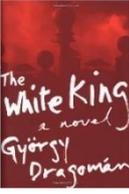
Born in 1943 in the Urals, Ludmila Ulitskaya is a Russian writer, dramatist, and scriptwriter. A graduate of Moscow University in the 1960s with a Master's in biology and genetics, Ulitskaya lost her chair at the university for helping to spread writings that were banned by the Soviet regime. She has written short stories and plays for stage and radio, but it was after the fall of the Soviet Union that her work gained widespread acclaim. Now translated and recognized internationally, she is the author of some fifteen works of fiction, including *Sonechka* (1995), *Medea* (1996), *Funeral Party* (1997), *Daniel Stein, Interpreter* (2006), *Yakov's Ladder* (2015), and *Just the Plague* (2020). She has been awarded a number of prestigious prizes, notably the Russian Booker Prize (2002) for *The Kukotsky Enigma*, and was named a Chevalier des arts et des lettres in France (2004).

## THE JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

The Jan Michalski Prize for Literature is awarded each year by the Foundation to crown a work of world literature. An original feature of the Prize is its multicultural nature. It is open to authors from all over the world and is intended to contribute to their international recognition. The Prize is awarded for a work of fiction or non-fiction, irrespective of the language in which it is written. To form the prize jury, the Foundation has invited a range of exceptional writers who are multilingual, selected for their knowledge of various literary genres. The laureate receives 50,000 Swiss francs as well as a work of art especially chosen or ordered for her or him.

## THE JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE PREVIOUS LAUREATES

	<p><b>The 2020 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature</b>  <b>Mia Couto, <i>Sands of the Emperor</i></b>  <b>Word Editions, 2019</b>          Translated by David Brookshaw          First edition in Portuguese</p>
	<p><b>The 2019 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature</b>  <b>Zeruya Shalev, <i>Pain: A Novel</i>,</b>  <b>Other Press, 2019</b>          Translated by Sondra Silverston          First edition in Hebrew          זכר, Keter-books, 2015</p>
	<p><b>The 2018 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature</b>  <b>Olga Tokarczuk, <i>Księgi Jakubowe</i></b>  <b>Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2014</b>          First edition in Polish          English edition: March 2021  <b>Nobel Prize in Literature 2018</b></p>
	<p><b>The 2017 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature</b>  <b>Thierry Wolton, <i>Une histoire mondiale du communisme</i></b>  <b>3 volumes, Grasset, 2015 and 2017</b>          First edition in French</p>
	<p><b>The 2016 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature</b>  <b>Georgi Gospodinov, <i>The Physics of Sorrow</i></b>  <b>Open Letter, 2015</b>          Translated by Angela Rodel          First edition in Bulgarian  <i>Физика на тъгата</i>, Janet 45 Publishing, 2011</p>
	<p><b>The 2015 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature</b>  <b>Mark Thompson, <i>Birth Certificate: The Story of Danilo Kiš</i></b>  <b>Cornell University Press, 2013</b>          First edition in English</p>
	<p><b>The 2014 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature</b>  <b>Serhiy Zhadan, <i>Voroshilovgrad</i></b>  <b>Deep Vellum, 2016</b>          Translated by Isaac Wheeler and Reilly Constigan-Humes          First edition in Ukrainian  <i>Vorochilovhrad</i>, Publishing House Folio, 2010</p>

	<p><b>The 2013 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature</b>  <b>Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, <i>The Colonel</i></b>  <b>Haus Publishing, 2011</b>  Translated by Tom Patterdale  First edition in German translated from the Persian:  <i>Der Colonel</i>, Unionsverlag, 2010</p>
	<p><b>The 2012 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature</b>  <b>Julia Lovell, <i>The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China</i></b>  <b>Picador, 2012</b>  First edition in English</p>
	<p><b>The 2011 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature</b>  <b>György Dragomán, <i>The White King</i></b>  <b>Black Swan, 2015</b>  Translated by Paul Olchvary  First edition in Hungarian:  <i>A fehér király</i>, Magvető, 2005</p>
	<p><b>The 2010 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature</b>  <b>Aleksandar Hemon, <i>The Lazarus Project</i></b>  <b>Riverhead, 2008</b>  First edition in English</p>

## PRESS AND COMMUNICATIONS CONTACT

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