

## THE HOME PLACE: MEMOIRS OF A COLORED MAN'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH NATURE

Lanham, J.D. 2017. Milkweed Editions, Minneapolis, USA, 240 pp. Paperback: ISBN 978-1571313508, US\$16.

Love for the land may be a form of religion, particularly for those who end up loving the great outdoors, from butterflies, birds and wolves, to seascapes. For those that admire a haunted hoot of an owl or wake up early to get their feet wet in a bog before dawn and watch flamingoes landing in the morning twilight, the land is the giver of all. Wild places can be a healer for those who seek comfort and a savior for those who seek salvation. Same goes for family—a form of rudimentary tribe, a religion, a church to find peace and a place to find oneness. Joseph Drew Lanham takes us on a journey through these deep valleys down memory lane. In the process he explores our human roots and the very foundation of our engagement with nature. It is not just Drew's story, it is a story about most naturalists, biologists, poets and painters, and those who feel 'out of place' in the hectic urban landscape. Drew's *The Home Place* is not painted in black and white; it is painted in color. Through color, the dark history of a continent is clinically exposed in a charming, soft, feathery tone. No harsh language or bitter examples; the somber darkness just there in the corner is seeping like a band of fog in a cold autumn evening.

*The Home Place* is a memoir of a farm boy of a unique phenotype, one prone to prejudice in his society who became an ornithologist. 'Colored' phenotype in American ornithology is as rare as a Spotted Owl in the old growth forests, a Short-tailed Albatross in the Pacific, or a Dovekie in the Atlantic. In a birder's eye though, the rarer the phenotype, the cooler it gets—the vagrants are sought after amongst the ubiquitous residents! Simply because we are oddities in the city-doused majority, biologists would share most of Drew's feelings more than once, irrespective of color, race, religion or status. A fear of the safety of your gear, your life, and the danger of losing your passport—strangled in a strange land. However, experiencing such fears in your homeland, amongst your own people, would be something of a whole different level. Through an eye of an ornithologist, Drew shows us the cruelty of racism.

Like many budding naturalists, the little Drew found his God and Heaven both in his backyard woodlands. In his own words "nature seems worthy of worship". *The Home Place* shows how childhood experiences, adventures, and imprinting could shape a 'wildling' into a scientist and conservationist. The urban sprawl and disappearing traditional ways of living bar today's majority from such experiences and advantages. The modern kids are imprinted to technology and a sterile world around them. What would be the path of a future conservationist in the decades to come? As for future seabird biologists, will they have enough puffins, fulmars and kittiwakes let alone, albatrosses, shearwaters and auklets left for them to inspire and imprint in their childhood?

The painting of the farmer—in Drew's dad—created a vivid picture of a man who ploughed, weeded, and fought with nature to control and tame it, so that the beef, the bacon, the cereal, and the pulses would come to the table to nourish. The smell of freshly ploughed earth and salty sweat are there all over the

pages providing a stunning description of wilderness and man's struggle to keep it at bay. Similar experiences made me a birder and a scientist many moons ago. I am sure such experiences are key in making wildlings into scientists across the globe. *The Home Place* talks about the importance of introducing birds into kids' routine as well. Most of Lanham's success in science and conservation had apparently begun from a few tiny childhood experiences; some were planned, such as getting a seven-year old to paint a mockingbird, and some were unplanned, such as seeing the grace of a soaring vulture.

A birder's taste for color depends on rarity. The red feet of the Red-legged Kittiwake in a Black-legged Kittiwake world is sought after and celebrated with the same enthusiasm as the black beak of the Aleutian Tern in a world of red-billed Arctic Terns. Throughout his *Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature*, Drew talks about how the color of man is perceived differently. As a brown birder and an ornithologist, I, too, share similar feelings. At the seabird colonies in windswept Aleutians and in the barren, lichen-clad Labrador, my colleagues look colorless. It has not changed even in the city in bird conferences such as in IOC, NAOC or PSG – I am still surrounded by a sea of colorless colleagues. Sharing Drew's feelings, at times "*it is discouraging*". At the same time, as an immigrant grad student turned into an ornithologist without much social biases—I started to like it. After all I am the 'rare bird'. One of a kind..... an Asian vagrant in the Americas, far away from its native South Asian rainforests.

In North American woods or on a skiff, a brown birder with a pair of bins may be a less of a thing compared to that of a black birder. Though birding in Alaska, Labrador, Yellowknife, Florida and Texas has its own effects, mostly pleasant, where few were curious about what this brown-sugar lad is after. An occasional 'F' word or a middle finger from a truck just spiced up the moment...for me.

In his gentle feathery tone, the college professor preaches to us, urging us to reach out to paint a better picture for wild things and wild places in the minds of the public. The same way Aldo Leopold's *Sand Country Almanac* (Leopold 1949) inspired Lanham, a colored kid who already had enough nature in his nurture to become a wildlife biologist and a conservationist, *The Home Place*, a story of farmland turned into a childhood paradise, would be an inspiration for kids across the globe. Especially for kids of immigrant minorities who are craving a source of identity and inspiration, to become somebody significant, to get the recognition that their parents never had, and to be part of a community they were introduced to by forces alien to them in global politics and socioeconomics.

On a more personal note, as a brown farm boy turned into a birder, biologist and forester, I loved the gentle path that Drew took, from the family to the farm to the school and to the science of landscape restoration. My path has been, so far, surprisingly similar. The next step for me, I wonder, might lay in the Gulf

of Mannar in the Indian Ocean, where Jouanin's Petrels soar at night amongst thousands of breeding terns in sandy islands and the opportunity to convert the devilish concrete tide into a green veil! *The Home Place* is already churning something deeper in me. Would that be the same thing that E.O. Wilson had churned in a colored birder a few decades ago?

J. Drew Lanham's *The Home Place* is a stunning read, a masterpiece, a soft rebellion that touches the deepest of our instincts: love for the family, love for the wilderness, and our propensity for discriminative tribalism. *The Home Place* is a reminiscent first love of a farm boy who moved away from time and space. The adventures pursued, the lessons learnt and the

experiences gathered will continue to inspire all of us to see ourselves colored in nature's hues.

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## THE SEABIRD'S CRY: THE LIVES AND LOVES OF THE PLANET'S GREAT OCEAN VOYAGERS

Nicholson, A. 2018. Henry Holt and Company, New York, USA, 400 pp. B&W illustrations. Hardcover: ISBN 978-1250134189, £65.00. Paperback: ISBN 978-1250181596, £29.95.

Most seabird ecologists can attest to the sense of wonder at their first encounter with a seabird colony. The deafening sound of seabird calls above pounding waves, the smell of salt and guano, and the breathtaking sight of thousands of birds coming in from or returning to the sea. *The Seabird's Cry* explores 10 seabirds: the fulmar, puffin, kittiwake, gull, guillemot, cormorant and shag, shearwater, gannet, great auk and its cousin razorbill, and albatross in the perfect marriage of seabird science and storytelling. "The astonishing findings of seabird scientists mean that a sense of wonder now emerges not from ignorance of the birds but from understanding them," says Nicholson. *The Seabird's Cry* eloquently captures the feeling of magic that seabirds inspire.

Nicholson, whose father bought the Shiant, a group of islands off the Scottish coast for 1 300 pounds in 1937, approaches the plight of seabirds from the perspective of a life-long admirer of the oceanic environment. Nicholson has a background in great literature and history, which is demonstrated as he weaves poetry throughout. As many of us have likely imagined when observing seabirds gracefully soaring around the hull of a ship—Nicholson describes seabirds as being otherworldly, transcendent—they are "a part of what we long for: beauty on the margins of understanding." From Homer to Milton, it will delight and perhaps surprise seabird ecologists to learn of the role of seabirds in mythology: kittiwake-like seabirds are portrayed as the bringers of salvation and a cormorant was sent by Satan to corrupt Eden.

Nicholson regales the reader with the classic revelations of seabird science. The chapter on shearwaters describes Ronald Lockley's eccentric experiments releasing Skokholm Island Manx Shearwaters at different locations around the Atlantic, from Devon to Venice. The journey that made Lockley famous was from the Boston harbor, where a shearwater flew over 3 000 miles back to Skokholm in 12 days, beating the mail sent from Boston by Lockley's correspondent who released the bird. In the chapter on albatross, Nicholson chronicles the efforts of Henri Weimerskirch and Pierre

Jouventin to track these enigmatic birds. The first tracking of a wandering albatross, flying over 10 000 miles from Crozet as far as Antarctica, is a "vision of life at sea which Coleridge would have loved." This referring to perhaps the most famous poem featuring a seabird: *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Coleridge.

As someone who has been battered by penguin flippers, soaked by a storm petrel's orange fish-smelling regurgitation, and covered in sticky guano after days of burrow-scoping, I commend Nicholson's ability to capture something that popular culture rarely reveals about seabirds—their malevolence. In the chapter on gannets, a gannetry is described vividly as a "monument to unkindness." When a researcher or lost chick wanders through a colony, gannets slash with "beaks of barbed wire." Between gannet nests, which are spaced a "beak thrust" apart, lies a "glutinous black ooze of mud, decayed seaweed, ordure, and spilt fish" that releases the foulest of smells when punctured by squabbling male gannets. In the chapter on gulls, the bird's existence is described as a "version of hell" in which cruelty and violence can be pervasive. Nicholson goes on to describe Jasper Parson's observations of herring gulls cannibalizing large numbers of neighboring chicks.

Where *The Seabird's Cry* truly shines is emphasizing seabird's beauty and wonder. In the chapter on fulmars, when observing the birds flying in loops above a colony, dancing on the wind, it inspires introspection: fulmars "make [us] wonder what life consists of." Nicholson borrows a term from philosophy to describe them: *inscendent*—the act of climbing into life and looking for its essence. The description of cormorant courtship and mating systems or *love* (as off-putting as that term may be for most scientists, in this context it seems almost natural) is sublime. Observe pair bonding between these "glamorous birds and you will witness a slow and careful ballet of tenderness and sweetness between them." Nicholson's description of Nathan Emery's study of the correlation between brain size and increasing lengths of monogamy are poetic in and of themselves. Birds need to be clever to understand their

mates; it's easy to anthropomorphize here. "Intimacy between shags is evidence of tight bonding between birds, [an elevated] principle of life and survival. Love matters for seabirds, because a harsh environment...can make raising healthy offspring more difficult" - could be a proverb.

Although the threats that seabirds face in a rapidly changing world are subtly present throughout the book, Nicholson underscores in the last chapter how dire the situation has become. Seabirds are more threatened than any other vertebrate and world populations have dropped by about 70 % in the past six decades, meaning there are one billion fewer seabirds now than in 1950 (Croxall *et al.* 2012). No surprises here, but the abrupt switch from magnificent stories of seabirds and their ecology to the grim conservation situation snap the reader to attention. As Nicholson correctly states, seabirds are indicators of ocean ecosystem health—if they are in trouble, life in the ocean is in trouble—and deep perturbations are evident around the world. After spending my entire adult life and over 300 pages reveling in my love for seabirds, my despair at this final chapter parallels my feelings about the current biodiversity conservation crisis we are facing.

Nicholson concludes on a reticently positive note. In 2016 he facilitated the removal of ship rats from his father's (now his) Shiant Islands, resulting in a recolonization of wren and

wheateaters and a new booming chorus of bird song. In a world of frightening human-caused global change, we could all show a little more love for nature. In *The Seabird's Cry*, Nicholson captures the enchanting world of seabirds, inspiring its readers to fall in love with these birds.

My hope is that in my time as book review editor for *Marine Ornithology*, I can help facilitate a collective celebration of love for nature, science, seabirds, and the marine environment. In this time of crisis, it's important as a scientific community to band together to solve problems—from mothers (Wang *et al.*, this issue) to "rare phenotypes" (Seneviratne, this issue) to those on the conservation front lines (Karnovsky, this issue). In Nicholson's words, seabirds 'display beauty in the most demanding moments life can offer'; perhaps we as scientists can do the same.

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## THE END OF THE END OF THE EARTH

Franzen, J. 2018. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, USA, 225 pp. Paperback: ISBN 978-0374906757.

Most people know Jonathan Franzen based on his brilliant novel *The Corrections*, and many of you are likely wondering why his book is being reviewed in *Marine Ornithology*. *The End of the Earth* is a collection of essays spanning diverse subjects, some of them addressing the conservation challenges facing birds across the globe, including a few on seabirds in particular.

Franzen begins with 'The Essay in Dark Times' about birdwatching in Ghana, the election of Donald Trump, climate change, and the nature of essays. He writes that essays are inherently deeply personal and, if done well, are a form of literature that "invites you to ask whether you might be somewhat wrong, maybe entirely wrong, and to imagine why someone else might hate you." Throughout this book he contemplates the right or wrong ways to respond to the dire state of our planet. Franzen's essays are all deeply personal and, truth be told, he often reveals parts of his personality that will make you cringe. He is completely aware of how these confessions sound and is mortified right along with you. Franzen reveals in his first essay that he is a compulsive lister, which he confesses makes him "morally inferior to birders who bird exclusively for the joy of it." His obsessive quest for counting species provides the backdrop for several of the incisive essays about the conservation of birds. For example, his quest to see the Crested Quail-Dove leads to a heartbreaking essay on habitat loss in Jamaica.

Franzen spends a lot of energy in his essays worrying that people hate him. One thing I have come to realize while writing this

review is that his anxiety is not unfounded: people have really strong opinions about him! Reading this book on an airplane, total strangers declared to me whether they loved or hated him. At the last Pacific Seabird Group meeting, Beth Flint received a well-deserved Lifetime Achievement Award for her work conserving seabirds. She gave an exquisite talk on new work being done to save seabirds from sea level rise. I ineloquently asked the question of how we can balance the need to be proactive about climate change with other impacts on seabirds, such as introduced species, mentioning Jonathan Franzen in reference to this debate. It was an eye-opening experience—this mention of his name resulted in me getting tracked down and yelled at by his supporters.

Franzen revisits the moment when he became a vilified target over the issue of climate change. His essay 'Carbon Capture,' originally published in *The New Yorker*, is reprinted in this book in the essay 'Save What You Love'. Franzen was a fierce critic of the National Audubon Society when it declared climate change as the primary threat to birds. He felt that this campaign would take away from support to combat other impacts on birds (e.g., introduced species, habitat loss) that have more tractable solutions. He skewers the National Audubon Society for what he saw as a hollow, money-making pitch. He goes on to highlight the work of two small-scale but enormously successful conservation projects: the work of Amazon Conservation in Manu National Park in Peru and of the Area de Conservacion

in Costa Rica. In the process he gives wonderful vignettes of conservation heroes Daniel Janzen, Winnie Hallwachs, and Don Alberto Manqueriapa.

After the original essay was published, many declared Franzen a climate denier and enemy of the National Audubon Society. Reading about what motivated him to write the essay and how the fallout affected him in 'The Essay in Dark Times' before reading 'Save What You Love' is illuminating and may make some critics soften their invective. The fact is, Franzen does not shy away from asking hard questions about how to best protect birds, given the many stressors on their populations. He asks the questions that we often ask ourselves.

One of the essays that I continue to be haunted by is called 'May Your Life Be Ruined'. In it, he travels to Egypt and Albania and witnesses the widespread and indiscriminate bird hunting. He gives an account of both the birds and the hunters who hunt them. I was left with a deep worry for the decoy kestrel that escaped, the young hunters, and the fragile bird populations who are funneled into bird traps during their migration across the Mediterranean. I had read an earlier version of this essay in *National Geographic* and assign this extraordinary piece of journalism in my undergraduate classes. In his essay 'Invisible Losses', Franzen describes the conservation challenges of many seabirds. He brings the reader into the 'murre blind' on the Farallon Islands where he beautifully describes watching the Common Murres return to their nest sites with food for chicks with seabird biologist Pete Warzybok. He recounts their long history of challenges, from egg collecting and gill nets to a changing ocean. He goes to South Africa and relays conversations between tuna-boat captain Deon van Antwerpen, seabird biologist Ross Wanless, and Andrea Angel, who leads BirdLife South Africa's Albatross Task Force, about how to best modify longlines to reduce bycatch of albatross. He describes in painful detail how mice are eating Tristan Albatrosses alive on Gough Island. It is not all bad news, however; he also reports on the rodent eradication success stories on South Georgia and Anacapa Island. It is a treat to read about conservation in action and to meet, through Franzen, the individuals who were responsible for these hard-won victories. The vignettes of Nick Holmes, science director of Island Conservation, and of Liz and Bruce Tuanui, founders of the Chatham Island Taiko Trust, show that profound changes can be made by dedicated, creative people who have managed to undo some of the harm caused by humans.

In his essay 'Postcards from East Africa', Franzen reluctantly goes to the Serengeti. He desperately wants to set himself apart from others who go on safari just to check off the trip on their bucket list. Franzen's whining about the trip and having to watch mammals (which he views as much less worthy) is hard to stomach as someone who would give my eye teeth for the chance to see a lion take down a

gazelle. He does come to appreciate the mammals ("Who could resist the sight of worried cheetah cubs? I couldn't, for about five minutes.") and his ecstatic descriptions of the birds makes you wish you could get there immediately with binoculars in hand.

Franzen describes his trip to Antarctica on a three-week-long cruise with Lindblad Expeditions and National Geographic in the essay that gives the book its name 'The End of the End of the Earth'. He gives a withering account of the Lindblad summer-camp type of experience. His journey from pariah to hero on the ship is very funny. Once again, as someone who has never seen the sublime King Penguins of South Georgia, his misery about the vacation is annoying. However, his description of the poorly attended final lecture onboard the ship on climate change is one of the most sobering parts of the book that will resonate with many readers.

This collection of essays will appeal to birders, conservationists, and lovers of literature. I enjoyed the parts of this book that had nothing to do with birds as much as the rest. Franzen often includes sentences with long lists of birds, which folks who are not interested in birds may struggle with. To me, these sentences read like a list of succulent treats.

This book is paean to birds. Franzen's passion is deeply infectious and non-birders will likely catch bird fever from reading this book. Birders will enjoy reading about his pursuit of lifers across the globe and his hilarious bird-spotting superstitions. Readers interested in Franzen's stunning prose will not be disappointed and will thrill to the essays about fellow writers such as the late David Foster Wallace and Edith Wharton.

Franzen provides several shocking statistics throughout the book. For example, "Every minute in America, thirty thousand paper cups are chucked." Franzen asks himself and the reader how to best cope with the overwhelming problems facing birds and planet earth. Fortunately, he provides many examples of people who are in the trenches making a difference. It is my hope that readers will use this book as a suggested guide to where donations could really make a difference in advancing conservation.

I am grateful that Franzen loves birds. His insights will be read by many who probably never thought about birds or climate change or loss of biodiversity across the globe before. How amazing that they now know of the Ashy Storm Petrel and the Magenta Petrel! In fact, I have thought of several areas of the planet that I hope he visits and will write about. I wonder what is left on his life list that might lead to a sequel to this book.

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## MAKING MOTHERHOOD WORK: HOW WOMEN MANAGE CAREERS AND CAREGIVING

Collins, C. 2019. Princeton University Press, Princeton, USA, 360 pp. Hardcover: ISBN 978-0691178851, US\$29.95.

*Making Motherhood Work* is an insightful and eye-opening read on how mothers around the world try to balance family life and careers. Caitlyn Collins transports the reader into the homes and lives of working women in Sweden, Germany, Italy, and the United States. For scientist and seabird ecologist moms, *Making Motherhood Work* preaches to our choir and empowers us with knowledge of how policies and cultures in different parts of the world shape a working mom's struggle. Collins's book helps us take stock of how the culture within the scientific community perpetuates the conflict between science and motherhood (Buxton *et al.* 2019). Lack of support for scientist moms is one of the sources of the leaky pipeline for women in science (Cech and Blair-Loy 2019) and *Making Motherhood Work* offers demonstrable solutions through examples from other countries.

Collins introduces the concept of 'work-family justice' to replace the notion of work-family balance and the unattainable goal of 'having it all'. Framing the conflict between work and family life as an issue of 'balance' individualizes the problem, placing the blame on working mothers. This misguided framework suggests that working moms' stress is a result of our own shortcomings and mismanaged time commitments: if we could just work a little harder, we could 'have it all'. Instead, Collins argues, the onus should be placed on society—the conflict between work and family is not inevitable and it's not the fault of women or parents. To achieve work-family justice for working moms is to create a system where everyone has the support necessary to be successful in their careers and in motherhood.

The book presents many statistics that were surprising for us working moms in the US and Canada. For example, in Sweden, a 'dual-earner' career model is not only encouraged but expected of parents, which promotes equality between parents. Sweden is a social democratic country and Collins writes that there is a sense of collective responsibility to children, family, and to society as a whole. Parents in Sweden are legally allowed 240 days of *paid* leave to take care of a newborn, and if you're a single parent, you're allowed all 480 days (16 months) of leave! Moreover, Collins found that it is highly unusual—and even viewed as strange—for a parent to stay at home beyond the time allotted for parental leave after a baby is born. This is because of the strong support for free daycare options beginning at a young age. But the grass is not always greener on the other side of the world. In the former East Germany, although the 'dual-worker' family model resulted in women being encouraged to combine child-rearing with employment, women also are expected to maintain responsibility for the home. In combination with the tumultuous history of the fall of the Berlin Wall and mixing of west Germany's 'stay-at-home mom' culture, this has led to feelings of pressure for working moms to live up to an idealized version of motherhood: "the demand that society has for moms are that 'mom has to do everything perfectly...and [when there are problems], it's the mom's fault'". These sentiments echo what so many of us feel as working moms in the US and Canada.

At times it was disheartening to read the stories of other working moms' struggles. At the conclusion of the book, we felt frustrated

but cautiously hopeful that one day change may come to the US. Currently, the US does not have any nationwide policy on paid parental leave to take care of a newborn. The lack of formal policy across the nation leaves it up to employers to come up with their own policies, resulting in unequal opportunities for parental leave and childcare. In Canada, where policies fall somewhere between Sweden and the US, working moms receive up to 18 months maternity leave paid at 33 % (or 12 months paid at 55 %), with some employers topping-up salaries.

While we can relate to the feelings of pressure and stress from the professional moms interviewed in *Making Motherhood Work*, as scientist moms we face unique conflicts. For example, in many fieldwork-oriented careers (including seabird ecology), spending long weeks or even months in the field or at sea are often an important part of the job. As a result, many early-career female field ecologists report having to cope with being discouraged from getting married or having children. Furthermore, working moms are often removed from field projects without warning because they seem "no longer able or interested because they had a kid." As a working academic-scientist mom, there are many additional expectations including managing graduate and undergraduate students, serving on committees, writing grant applications, and the deeply entrenched 'publish or perish' mantra, all of which leave little room for maternity leave and family commitments. Yet seabird ecologist and conservation biologist moms offer a unique set of perspectives. Encouraging parents in field ecology and promoting gender diversity, which has a range of benefits in scientific endeavors (Nielsen *et al.* 2017), have the added benefit of demonstrating to children and young aspiring scientists that a career dedicated to the conservation of the natural world is feasible in combination with motherhood.

We were left wondering how we can promote the cultural change necessary for the scientific community to promote work-family justice. For starters, we, as a society, need to promote gender equality at work and at home; break down gender stereotypes; recognize the judgement that working moms experience from all facets of their community; and create flexible, workable solutions to accommodate the diversity of working scientist moms (Buxton *et al.* 2019). Working parents should lead by example and divide the labor of parenthood equally. In the US, policies are in dire need of change, but before nationwide policy changes can truly gain momentum, we need to radically evolve our cultural and societal perceptions of working moms. *Making Motherhood Work* is a good start, bringing to light a continuation of a fight that was started long ago by generations of working women before us.

All of us have spent weeks and months on seabird colonies, endured extreme remote conditions to count birds, dangled off cliffs in dank weather to capture birds for measurements, tissue sampling, and banding. The fragrant odor of seabird guano is a distant memory for most of us now that we have kids and can't be away for long periods of time. But that doesn't mean that we stopped contributing in our fields. On the contrary, we have adapted to our changing personal

environment, holding positions that allow us to direct research and science, ones that don't require long stints of field time. We are successful because we have persevered at finding a work-family balance that works for us on an individual level. However, achieving balance has not been easy and we have seen many bright scientist moms overwhelmed by the pressure. As we aim for inclusion that will benefit the field of ecology (and arguably the planet), there is value in shifting the paradigm—from balance to justice.

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