



## The Familiar

*K.A. Applegate , Katherine Applegate*

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Jake is just a normal kid. Well, as normal as possible considering he can morph animals, and he's in a war against parasitic aliens. But as unbelievable as it sounds, something even stranger has happened. One morning Jake wakes up, and he's twenty-five years old.

Okay. Maybe it's a nightmare. Or maybe Jake's just lost it for a while and misplaced a few years. And there's another problem. The world Jake-the-kid went to sleep in has changed. It's ruled by the Yeerks. Jake has to find out if the other Animorphs are still around. Still somehow fighting. Or if he's really on his own...

## The Familiar Details

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## From Reader Review The Familiar for online ebook

### Taarna says

I really didn't like that this one came right on the heels of Back to Before. That made it feel like the same story in reverse. Even if it had been elsewhere in the line up it still felt like a weird side story that didn't amount to anything. This close to the end of the series I also kind of don't want it to go anywhere. There's enough going on without another tangent.

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### Caitlin says

[Very interested to see who the voice was at the end??? I was like well, it's obv the Ellimist but it WASN'T???? (hide spoiler)]

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### Stephanie says

The Animorphs are barely surviving another battle, and from the very first page. Jake makes the decision to leave two behind, to save the other four. Between that and him rejecting Cassie when she needed to talk to him, to talk through what just happened, Jake has a lot weighing him down.

He retreats to the solace of his bed – but not before lying to Tom to cover his tracks and the blood on his leg – only to wake up and find himself about a decade older in a world run by the Yeerk Empire, where everyone is a Controller.

Jake must adapt quickly, or risk being taken in and subjected to who-knows-what at the hands of the Yeerk authority. Yet, there are so many coincidental encounters; and he ends up in so many diverse places where he witnesses many aspects of this new society which has arisen under the Yeerks. Will he be able to figure out what is going on before he is discovered by the authorities? Will he be able to survive in this world, and maybe even make a difference to it?

We are starting to see Jake's cracks in this book, even more so than before. He's coming up to and crossing more and more lines as this war drags on, with seemingly fewer and fewer ways to avoid crossing that line. The front he puts up to "stay strong" in front of the others is wearing him out, to the point that he's forgetting to foster the personal relationships – especially with the Animorphs – which help keep him grounded and centered.

Overall, this book starts out strong, with a compelling exploration of the new Yeerk-run world Jake wakes up into, and Jake's reactions to it. It is also great at re-centering Jake, reminding him who he is as a person (not just who he has become as a result of the war), and what is important to him, what is his reason for fighting and suffering in this war in the first place. However, as we meet more and more people from his "past", the threads start to unravel, the logic of the story starts to fray, with basic rules of the 'verse being twisted and even broken, hence why I am only giving it 3 stars. (view spoiler)

Humorous note: this book has the date of October 13, 2000 in it, as the date of when it came into my possession (Thank you Mom for writing that in there!). 15 years to the DAY since I got this book in my hands!

**Save what should be valued above all else.**

Quotes and comments:

So anyway, we're the only ones fighting back. We managed to slow the Yeerks down a little. But it was getting harder to keep up the fight. Harder to keep it together. – page 2

“Every day we’re more like [the Yeerks],” [Cassie] persisted. “Aren’t we?” Tears welled over her lower lids. “Jake?”

I didn’t have the energy for this. The doubt, the introspection, the analysis. I just didn’t have the energy. – page 11 – They are all just getting *so tired*. It’s really been showing lately – Applegate and the ghostwriters are not giving us any rose-colored glasses to wear anymore.

(view spoiler)

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### **Amalia Dillin says**

I... don't know what to make of this. We don't ever find out what the heck happened or why or who orchestrated it and the placement of this plot arc right after Back to Before also makes it feel a little bit strangely repetitive? So now I am just left with a feeling of vague confusion, though at least it seems as though Jake's character achieves some growth along the way.

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### **Kim Dyer says**

This could have been one of the best books in the series. It's bleak, powerful and makes a great character study of Jake - showing the weight of leadership finally breaking him as he's forced to make the call that he's been fearing since the beginning. It's one of the darkest, most depressing and violent stories to date, with disturbing imagery from start to finish. So why did I rate it so low? Because it's utterly pointless.

I was drawn in by this book. I loved the imagery, the glimpses of a tree growing in paradise and Justice's explanation as to what makes a hero. I loved that Jake finally got his chance to speak to Elfangor and unload what he really thought about the war. I was even curious as to the time slips and why reality kept breaking down. And for what? It was all a dream.

Seriously. It was all a dream. The weakest plot twist in history. The one that every writer knows never to fall back on. Why series, why? This is even weaker than the ending of *Megamorphs #4*. It's just a cop out. This book stands purely as a character study of Jake, something that's been the focus of several other books already. As nothing actually happened in this story, it was just filler. And that's a real kick in the teeth to discover after reading 135 pages to reach this revelation.

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### **Jerry says**

A different kind of story than usual from this series...but I enjoyed it!

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### **T Berry says**

I have pretty vivid memories of this book from when I read it as a kid. And it's a pretty interesting story. It makes no sense, it's ridiculous, and it gives you no answers as to what it is, but it's an interesting story.

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### **Julie Decker says**

After one of their battles during which Jake had to leave Marco and Rachel to fend for themselves, Cassie and Tobias seem traumatized and withdrawn, respectively, and Jake does nothing to comfort them. He just

can't deal with it, and then doesn't use much caution coming home, where he's seen by Tom entering the house in suspicious spandex clothes. He goes to bed, but when he wakes up he's in some kind of alternate future and he's ten years older. Finding out that everyone thinks he's a Controller with a Yeerk named Essak, he explores this world of Yeerk-controlled future New York, and finds quite a few things that just don't seem to add up.

He finds future Cassie, who's a Controller but her Yeerk is in the EF--Evolution Front--dedicated to make Yeerks turn away from parasitism. But Cassie is a war-hardened terrorist now. He finds out from her that Marco and Ax are Controllers and that Rachel is dead, and gets very confused as Cassie tries to get him to use his apparent status to mess up a plot to turn the moon into a Kandrona emitter. Jake later gets captured by Controller Marco, who is trying to destroy the EF. Fighting to figure out what his priorities are and what his mission is and who he should hide from, Jake ends up having to choose between destroying the ray that will let the Yeerks take over the world . . . and saving Cassie from a fatal fall. After he makes his choice, he is sucked back to his own reality with a voice in his head saying he made an interesting choice, and he knows this wasn't an Ellimist trick but doesn't know what it was. He does know, however, that Cassie is a high priority in his life and that he needs to act like it. He calls her and asks her if she's okay.

My favorite lines:

Jake: "Jake, you didn't plan this one, but now it's time to deal."

Cassie: "In a war, Jake, anything is justified. I'm not a kid anymore. I'm not concerned with the nonsense I used to be."

Jake: "Like life and peace?"

Tobias: "Victory without self-sacrifice? You know better than that."

Jake: "You don't have to give up your principles to win."

Tobias: "Save one or save many? The choice wasn't so hard for you at the Ragsin Building, when you left Marco and Rachel to save themselves. This is war, Jake. Sacrifices must be made."

Jake: I'd set the example. I was to blame for Cassie's hardness and Tobias's indifference.

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## **Bonesy says**

This book reminded me a lot of *Megamorphs* #4 and I can see why a lot of *Animorphs* fans wouldn't like it--it's yet another alternative world that goes against the *Animorphs* reality. I personally thought it was very well-written; even Applegate could have written this one. I personally thought it was really cool because it was so action-packed and sometimes it's refreshing to take the series in a different direction. However, now that we've had two of these in a row (since *Megamorphs* #4 is supposed to be read right before this one), I'm glad to be jumping back into a regular series after this. To be honest, reading both of these books back-to-back is just depressing, but at the same time, I felt this was one of the most realistic books in the entire series. The author even covered for the things that came off as unrealistic.

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## **Jen says**

Y'know, re-reading this series as an adult helps me understand so much of what made my younger self tick; no wonder I was a little unruly since I was busy being EMOTIONALLY GUTTED by the Animorphs.

Seriously, it's incredible that I read this as a kid because it gets sooooo dark. This isn't one of the strongest books in the series, but it's still got quite a punch. It plays off of the "what if" theme of the Megamorphs just before it; where that says what if this never happened, this says "what if they lose?" The Yeerks have taken over Earth in this fast-forward, and Jake leads us through finding where everyone is in the post-war world. The violence here is eerie when my real-life news is constantly covering insurgents in Syria and the continual war for survival in Israel/Palestine. There's a lot of foreshadowing to the end of the series here, I think, but basically this was just heart-breaking from start to finish. I can't say I \*liked\* this because it was so intense, but I do appreciate the truth of which characters would do what.

But Maaaaarrrrrco, nooooooo, that was basically the worst and ripped my heart out and I won't tell you because spoilers but Maaaaarrrrrco, nooooooo.

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## **Nemo (The Moonlight Library) says**

### **Brought to you by The Moonlight Library!**

It might be safe to say this is the stupidest book in the whole series. I thought about not finishing it because I've read it before, but really? Worse than the Helmacrons. See why in the full review on the Moonlight Library.

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## **Julie says**

Hoo boy. This is a bizarre book, and I have a lot to say about it!

Ghostwriter: Ellen Geroux, who wrote the grueling #33 The Illusion, which means there's finally some proper callbacks to #33, showing some of the lingering repercussions of that book on Tobias: the experience has left him shaken and withdrawn, which breaks my heart so much.

This being the same writer also makes sense because you guys, this book is a lot a lot *a lot*. Only 14 pages in, I was rattled and sending hysterical messages to a friend (hi Stephanie ♥?). The opening scene is *killer*, and if everything that followed was like that, this would have been 5 stars for me: in the span of such few pages it's one of the worst fights they've ever seen, unbelievably gory and violent and horrifying; Rachel enters a psychotic bloodlust rage (another sign of her devolution, and a foreshadowing of things to come); Marco assesses the situation and tells Jake to leave him and Rachel behind because otherwise none of them are getting out; Jake makes the call to abandon those two for the sake of the team; Cassie has a complete nervous breakdown afterwards complete with silent sobbing, and rather than comfort her, *Jake walks away from her*.

It's this crucial battle, and everyone's shattered reactions to it, that propels the plot for the rest of the book: launching 10 years into the future, where the Yeerks have won, a post-apocalyptic dystopia where all of the

Animorphs are infested or broken shells of themselves. It's reminiscent of Rachel's vision of a similar 'bad guys win' future in #7 The Stranger (how great is it that both cousins have had this vision now?), except this is *much much much darker*. And it's similar to the AU 'roads not taken' Megamorphs #4 -- which apparently came out right before this book too, but oops I got the order backwards so I'm going to be reading Megamorphs next.

Also, do I shelve this book as "time travel" or "dreams"? WHAT DO I DO??? In the end, though, I'm opting for seeing it as an extended dream sequence, because there's just so much that doesn't line up (e.g. (view spoiler)). Those inconsistencies and the way the book slides from scene-to-scene makes for a confusing, disjointed experience: nightmare sequences to waking up to Jake suddenly finding himself in a completely different place, with no memory of how he got there. The entire thing is definitely a dream, IMO: a sort of internal processing as he meets his team one-by-one and sees what's become of them, the horrible things that they've endured. (Rachel! So much nightmare fuel about Rachel!) (The description of Marco's expression and broken voice when his Yeerk temporarily allows him control OH GODDDD)

It's dark. The whole thing is dark. A dream-like, surreal, nightmarish examination of this war and its effects on the soldiers and on leadership; it's a cosmic thought experiment, a way of digging into Jake's psyche and, perhaps, foreshadowing where it's all going to go. (Spoiler alert: nowhere good.)

I need to quote an extensive portion from the middle-end, because I want to discuss and analyse it:

<But you would fight them differently? Sabotage and terrorist offensives make you morally uneasy. You want a better way.>

"What I want is to go home."

<Too much for you?> Elfangor was an awesome presence. I'd be lying to say he didn't intimidate me some. But I was a leader, too. I saw the fight for Earth as more mine now than his. I wanted to be respectful of him, but in my view he'd made a giant mistake with the terrorist campaign. I had to call him on it.

"No. I want to go home so I can keep all this from happening in the first place. If this is the future, I want to go back. I can stop the Yeerks without sacrificing my friends. Without botching the war, and bumbling into your brand of terrorism and half-freedoms. I can stop them before we sacrifice the very things we're fighting for."

Elfangor laughed in my mind. <Victory without sacrifice? You know better than that.>

"You don't have to give up your principles to win. Isn't there always an alternative to sacrifice if you just keep your mind clear, and step back, and see it and..."

<You know better than that.>

The repetition stung. How did he know I was just talking big? It was like he was inside my head, rifling through my personal file of fears and mistakes.

Now I was angry.

"It's all your fault," I said suddenly, surprising myself. "I always thought of you as a hero,

Elfangor. A leader. But the truth is you couldn't see another way out. You sentenced us to hardship, pain, and suffering. We were kids. You made us question every value we ever learned. You had no right to heap that weight on us, huge and impossible. You used us!"

<That's interesting, coming from you, Jake. [...] Let me guess what comes next. You didn't ask for leadership, right? You didn't ask to make the tough calls. Plan the missions. Decide how to use your small but loyal force. How and when to put them in harm's way, risking their lives. You're blameless. The role was thrust upon you. Well, I don't buy it, Jake. Every choice is yours. Always has been. You were and are free.>

This whole scene, man. It's Jake spouting so many optimistic hopes, almost child-like (the only other character in this book campaigning for the same thing is *literally a child*). And the ending of this book is ostensibly hopeful -- Jake deciding that he can't become hardened and cynical, that he can't sacrifice people -- but I'd say it's... not self-delusion, exactly, but that it's not going to hold up. *How did he know I was just talking big?* This is him *trying* to be idealistic, teetering on facing what this war has done to them. I can't remember every last detail of what happens later in the series, but I keep thinking of a particular line that Jake will cross later -- one that Elfangor himself refused to cross -- which I say means this conversation is both a) brilliant foreshadowing, and b) Jake mouthing what he'd *like* to happen, that they can stick to their principles and not lose their souls, but that that won't happen.

I also like that it's calling out the horrors that Elfangor doomed them to, when he forcibly conscripted them into this war. This far in, the series is no longer pulling any punches about what's happening: their childhood has been robbed from them, and their lives are now a nightmare. They've been *sentenced*.

This conversation is also part of the reason the whole thing feels so dream-like, Jake confronting his own internal fears through the form of "Elfangor".

And this happens elsewhere, but I loved the ruminations on Rachel and how she's the soldier that Jake sends into the fray the most, the one he risks the most -- it's also fucking chilling and ties back into past explorations of the same concept, such as during the David trilogy when she realised that she's the killer of the group, an efficient blade in Jake's arsenal.

The voice at the end wasn't the Ellimist, and I feel like Jake would have recognised the Crayak as well, so *who in the world was it???????* I love me some cosmic ineffable beings, but I really hope it comes back and there's more explanation later rather than being a one-off.

**So in conclusion.** If there's so much meaty thematic ground here, why is my rating so 'low' (3 stars)? Mainly because of the execution. I *love* the post-apocalyptic dystopian setting, the horrible wrenching things that they see (Jake's vision in which all of his office employees are the dismembered forms of every single person he's ever killed? yeah. wow.), but the bizarre dream-like presentation doesn't do it all that many favours either, because it comes across *extremely* disjointed and confusing to read. Plus the ending is really rushed and unexplained.

In the end, this book is like a cosmic wakeup call to Jake, getting him back on track and reminding him to look after his team, except that I have a feeling it's maybe not going to stick. He's going to do his best, but he can't maintain that idealistic, childish approach: there cannot be victory without sacrifice.

This whole book feels like a nice, extended psychological followup to the Drod's summary of Jake, too: "Right here, Jake. From me, Big Jake. Jake, the reluctant leader. Jake, the oh-so-tiresomely decent one. A sanctimonious killer: my least favorite kind."

I think it's also interesting because, again, the differences between Jake/Marco as best friends: at the end, (view spoiler)

In closing, oh jesus christ the last page, I almost burst out crying at the final lines, and the adorable comparison to how nervous Jake was when calling her at the very beginning of the series, and the callback to his *my name is Jake, I'm not a Controller* breakdown in the alternate timeline:

(view spoiler)

CRIES.

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### **Marie says**

This book is seriously weird. Good thing I'm a fan of seriously weird books.

It begins with one of the most gruesome fight scenes of the series. Later, a freakish moment occurs, in which all of the corpses of the enemies Jake has killed chase after him like a scene out of "Thriller" -- only without the awesome dance moves. Interestingly, Jake's narration doesn't really focus on either of these moments once they have passed. This reveals something about Jake's motivators: that they do not include guilt or fear.

Jake always claims his motivators are saving his brother and the rest of humanity (as well as other threatened races) and keeping his friends alive and uninfested. While I don't doubt that these are goals that do truly drive him, I think this book displays that they're not always enough to sustain him.

When Jake is faced with particularly difficult situations or when he is exhausted by the terrors and responsibilities of war, he loses focus and becomes apathetic and resentful, prone to outbursts of "I didn't ask for this!" and "Fine, then you make the call." Oftentimes, the books follow these outbursts with some kind of supernatural or strange scientific phenomenon (#11's Sario Rip or #7's Ellimist-provided vision of the future)

that steps into the story to give Jake a good scare, to show him why he is needed, to broaden his vision beyond his own plight.

This book is no exception; after the opening fight, Jake is transported, without explanation, to ten years in the future, at a time when the Yeerks have clearly won the war. What he experiences there serves the purpose of reminding him that billions are relying on him, and that it would be impossibly selfish and disastrous for him to give up. In true Jake fashion, he snaps back into good-leader mode as soon as he returns to his own time.

I enjoy how this book juxtaposes the ability of great responsibility to bolster Jake just as much as continually crushes him into a state of self-pity and frustration.

This book is an interesting dive into Jake's psyche (and that of the other Animorphs, to a lesser extent), but it begs one essential question: "So what?" Forty-one books into this series, we know his character pretty well. We understand what drives him, what tough choices he is capable of making, and what drags him down. So what, exactly, was the point?

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### **Ben Babcock says**

*Animorphs* has become so *dark*! I feel like a broken record, like I say this every review, but *wow*. *The Familiar* opens up, as several other recent books have done, in the middle of a big, chaotic battle. The Animorphs have inflicted damage on the Yeerk troops, but the latter are practically inexhaustible, while the former are six adrenaline-fuelled-but-scared kids. And as the tide of the battle turns against them, they start losing limbs. And guts. It's shocking for the explicitness of its imagery: this is not a series for children anymore; this is definitely YA.

In many ways, *The Familiar* recapitulates a lot of the themes that have been building and already touched upon in previous books. The Animorphs are starting to tire. They are lapsing into almost caricatures of their respective roles and ideologies. While some of this is ghostwriter syndrome, mostly it's that they are starting to suffer from the stress of being the only six people on the planet who are fighting back against an invading alien force. The pressure must be intense. So Rachel becomes more and more unfocused and aggressive. Cassie becomes more and more moralistic and interested in non-violence. And Jake—who has always expressed discomfort over his leadership position—once again hints that he's done with trying to be the leader of this group.

So something happens.

It's never really made clear, actually, *what* or *who* sends Jake into this alternative timeline/universe/microcosm/dream where it's ten years later and he's a planetary engineer on an Earth totally controlled by Yeerks. He and the Animorphs advance theories, but we never learn the truth. Maybe we would have if Applegate had ever continued the series. As it is, we can only speculate.

The ghostwriter, Ellen Geroux, does a fantastic job balancing Jake's confusion over his transposition with the pacing of the plot. We quickly get into the thick of it, with future!Cassie revealed to be a grizzled, cynical warrior who is fine with raining destruction down on the planet if it means denying the Yeerks a Kandrona-shining moon. I love how Jake is just so flabbergasted by Cassie's change. One has to keep in mind that he's still a (15?)-year-old kid, and the idea that you might be a very different person in your twenties is hard enough for a normal teenager to grok (I know it was for me).

*The Familiar* is one of the books that elevates *Animorphs* and belies the appearance as a pulpy escapist series for kids one might first see when learning there's like 50 books published in such close succession. Like #22: *The Solution* and other such sublime entries before it, *The Familiar* shows us that Applegate did not come to play. Despite the length restrictions of the ordinary *Animorphs* books (this story could easily have been *Chronicles*-length), Applegate is writing serious science fiction. It just happens to be serious science fiction pitched to teens and young adults (which, when you think about it, is where a lot of science fiction started off).

This story asks us to wrestle with so many deep questions. Would we sacrifice our friend for the “greater good”? At what point do the ends stop justifying the means, if ever? And is it OK to change one’s opinions on these questions over time—because this definitely isn’t the first time these questions have surfaced in the series. It’s almost as if you don’t get to put your philosophy to bed once you’ve confronted it a single time; you have to keep reaffirming your commitment to your values time and again as the world throws more and more adversity your way.

The ending is very postmodern, refusing to explicitly reveal whether Jake saves the world or saves the girl. *I* think it’s pretty effectively telegraphed, however, that he chooses to save Cassie. Firstly, the voice’s comment immediately afterwards suggests it wasn’t expecting that choice; usually, this is a signal that aliens are surprised when humans choose love/emotion over pragmatism. Secondly, the book concludes with Jake calling Cassie to see if she’s all right. **Because he’s in love with her and he wouldn’t ever sacrifice her ever asdfkjlghafdklj**

Anyway. Just a couple of strong feelings about these books.

Next time, the Helmacrons are back for some honey-I-shrunk-the-animorphs fun.

#### **My reviews of *Animorphs*:**

← *Megamorphs* #4: *Back to Before* | #42: *The Journey* →

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#### **Jenny Clark says**

So this book... especially right after *Back To Before*, just hits you like a freight train. Jake wakes up in a world 10 years after he decides to stop fighting, and boy is it crazy. Cassie and Marco have both become hardened soldiers, though for different sides. Rachel is horribly injured, Ax destroyed his own planet under the control of a Yeerk and Tobias has become Ax via morph and become the leader of Cassie's freedom fighters, who were the peace movement. Sure, they want peace still, but they blow shit up and kill people. Jake is horrified by this. (Elfangor is actually Tobias here)

"What I want is to go home."

Elfangor was an awesome presence. I'd be lying to say he didn't intimidate me some. But I was a leader, too. I saw the fight for Earth as more mine now than his. I wanted to be respectful of him, but in my view he'd made a giant mistake with the terrorist campaign. I had to call him on it.

"No. I want to go home so I can keep all this from happening in the first place. If this is the future, I want to go back. I can stop the Yeerks without sacrificing my friends. Without botching the war, and bumbling into your brand of terrorism and half-freedoms. I can stop them before we sacrifice the very things we're fighting for."

Elfangor laughed in my mind.

"You don't have to give up your principles to win. Isn't there always an alternative to sacrifice if you just keep your mind clear, and step back, and see it and..."

The repetition stung. How did he know I was just talking big? It was like he was inside my head, rifling through my personal file of fears and mistakes.

Now I was angry.

"It's all your fault," I said suddenly, surprising myself. "I always thought of you as a hero, Elfangor. A leader. But the truth is you couldn't see another way out. You sentenced us to hardship, pain, and suffering. We were kids. You made us question every value we ever learned. You had no right to heap that weight on us, huge and impossible. You used us!"

Jake even realizes he is the one who has made his friends into this.

What a great book.

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