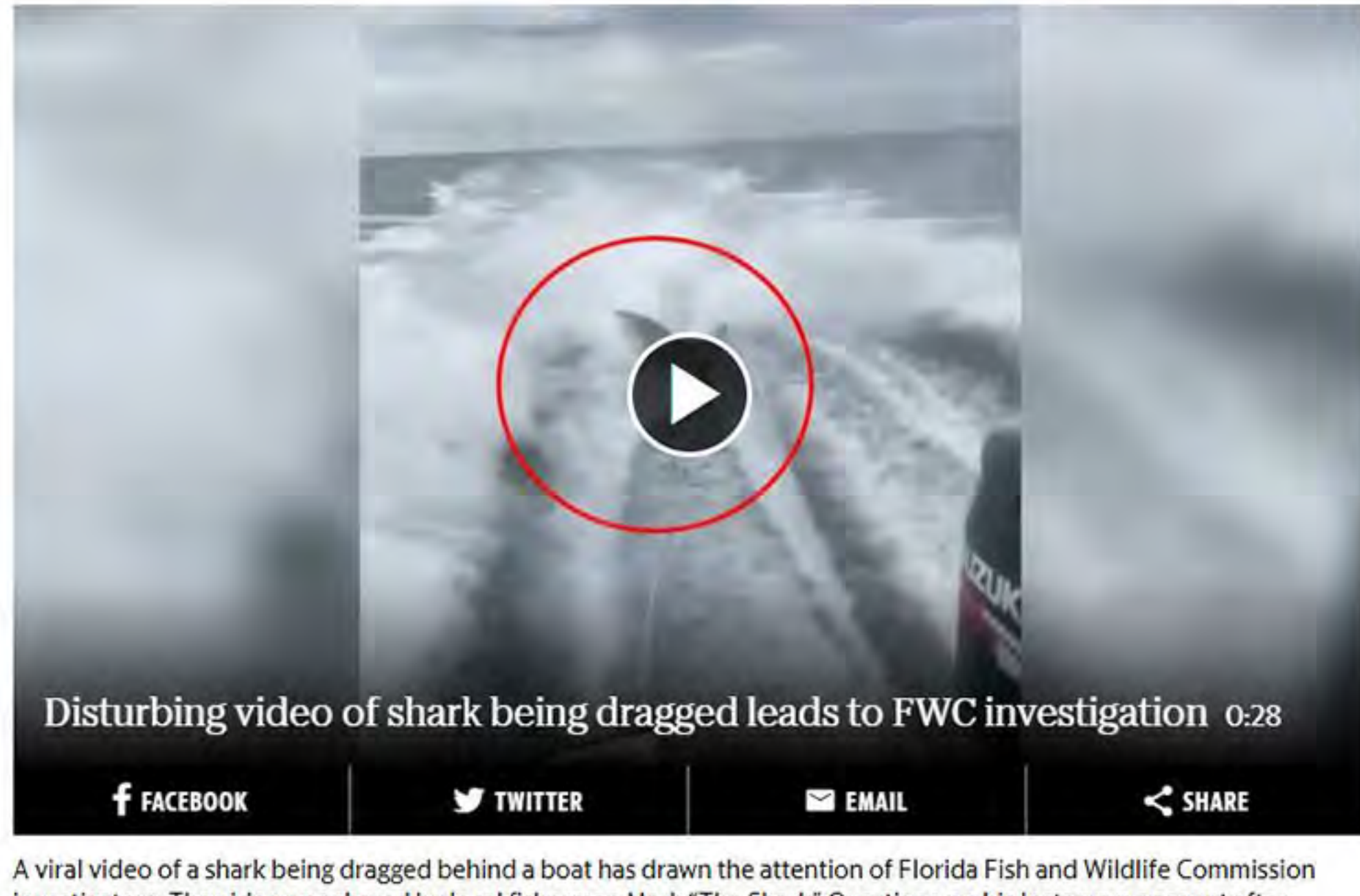


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Disturbing video of shark being dragged leads to FWC investigation 0:28

A viral video of a shark being dragged behind a boat has drawn the attention of Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission investigators. The video was shared by local fisherman Mark "The Shark" Quartiano on his Instagram account after Quartiano was alerted to its existence by a concerned party. - marktheshark via Instagram

ENVIRONMENT

Angler in shark-dragging video has history of posting troubling wildlife photos

BY JENNY STALETOVICH
jstaleto@miamiherald.com
JULY 26, 2017 10:51 AM

At least one of the men pictured in a brutal video depicting a shark being dragged by its tail behind a speeding boat has a history of posting troubling pictures of himself handling wildlife.

Florida wildlife officials investigating the video said Wednesday they have confirmed the identities of the men. They are not yet releasing their names while they look into the as a Manatee County angler who in the past has repeatedly drawn protests for posting pictures of himself manhandling birds and fish.

In one, he dangles a spotted eagle ray from a rope. In another, he and friends grip a white pelican with its wings outstretched. Another post shows him holding two dead tarpon.



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission investigators looked into the posts but ultimately filed no charges before closing their case in January, said spokesman Rob Klepper.

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It's also not clear whether the latest video breaks any laws, he said. Investigators are still trying to identify the species of shark and location of the video. It is believed to have happened off Florida's West Coast.

"We're trying to let our investigators do their work, and we don't like to get out in front of them," he said. "And we really appreciate the public's help. We had a huge amount of tips come into our hotline, and it was really helpful."

The video triggered outrage in Florida's fishing community Tuesday after its creators sent it to Capt. Mark Quartiano, the celebrity Miami shark hunter known as Mark the Shark.

Quartiano reposted the video on Instagram, slamming its content, and notified state wildlife officials.

"I don't know what they expected me to do. Laugh it off and say nice work? Oh no, that's not me," Quartiano said. "I've killed tens of thousands of sharks but not tortured them, not inhumanely and not disrespected them like that."



A group of men who videotaped themselves dragging a shark behind a speeding boat sent Capt. Mark "The Shark" Quartiano a picture of the shark taken after the dragging. Courtesy of Mark Quartiano

Quartiano's post noted that he had received the video from two Instagram accounts, @bearjew428 and @MICHAELWENZEL.

Wenzel and his family did not respond to calls from the Miami Herald. His Instagram account was shut down Wednesday.

WFTS, an ABC television affiliate in Tampa, spoke to someone who went to school with Wenzel.

"I was very saddened by it and hurt just because I know him, and it was hard to see someone that I know do something like that, especially to marine wildlife," Sydney Thomas told the station.

In the video, the three men point and smile as the shark, tied by its tail, is dragged behind the speeding boat, twisting and flopping in the boat's wake. Quartiano said the shark, about six or seven feet long, looked to be a blacktip. The men also sent a picture of the shark's mangled body taken afterward.

After Quartiano notified investigators, they asked him to leave the post online, hoping to generate tips. Quartiano's followers quickly identified one of the participants, who they said is well known among Florida's west coast anglers for posting images of himself with dead fish.

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"I heard he's a real nut case, to be nice about it," Quartiano said.

In 2015, *SavetheTarpon.com*, a group formed to improve an annual raucous tarpon tournament in Boca Grande Pass, posted more than a half-dozen of his pictures that drew hundreds of angry comments. The group's organizers did not respond to messages.

E. Jon Weiffenbach, an attorney representing the anglers on the boat, told WFTS, "None of the individuals in the video have been charged criminally and no one has been arrested."

Shark fishing in Florida has a bloody history: Not that long ago, anglers packed pistols and bang sticks to dispatch hooked sharks. And shark-finning remains a problem, even though it is outlawed in the U.S. In March, state wildlife officers discovered between 30 and 40 pairs of fins sliced from sharks on a shrimp boat off Key West. The shark's bodies are typically tossed overboard, leaving the sharks to suffocate or be attacked by predators.

But shark conservation, and a better understanding helped by education efforts like this week's *Shark Week* airing on the Discovery Channel, has highlighted dwindling numbers and changed practices. Strict limits are set for many species like blacktips, while others, including hammerheads and tiger sharks, cannot be landed at all.

Still, sharks seem to continue to draw a disproportionate number of abusive antics and macho-fueled selfies.

"I see it all the time," Quartiano said. "It goes against everything in my body. Don't get me wrong. I'm not a PETA guy. But in this case, PETA may have a case."

In February, a man pulled a thrashing shark ashore in Palm Beach to pose for pictures. A pair of Fort Lauderdale men drew protests in 2014 when they photographed themselves dragging ashore an exhausted endangered hammerhead.

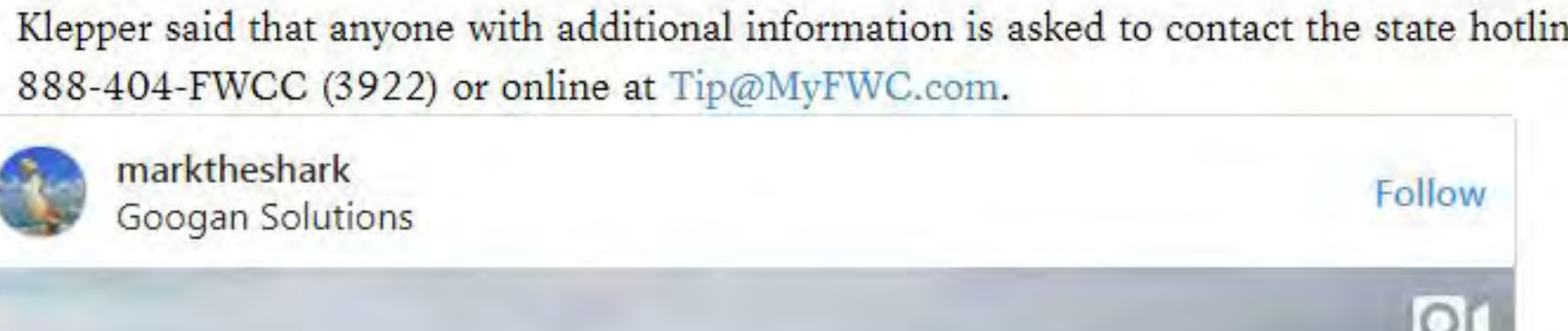
"Maybe if you're able to overcome a big shark, there's a sense of accomplishment," said Neil Hammerschlag, a shark expert at the University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science. "But there's other ways to express that, and certainly animal cruelty is not a good one. You know, arm wrestle."

Pulling the shark by its tail at high speed would be especially damaging, he said, considering "they're built to move the other way around."

In addition to the trauma of being slammed against the water, if alive, the shark was likely suffocating from lack of water moving through its gills, he said.

If the shark was alive when it was dragged, that could violate state laws prohibiting cruelty to animals. The crime is considered a first-degree misdemeanor that carries a maximum sentence of a year in prison and or a \$5,000 fine.

Klepper said that anyone with additional information is asked to contact the state hotline at 888-404-FWCC (3922) or online at Tip@MyFWC.com.



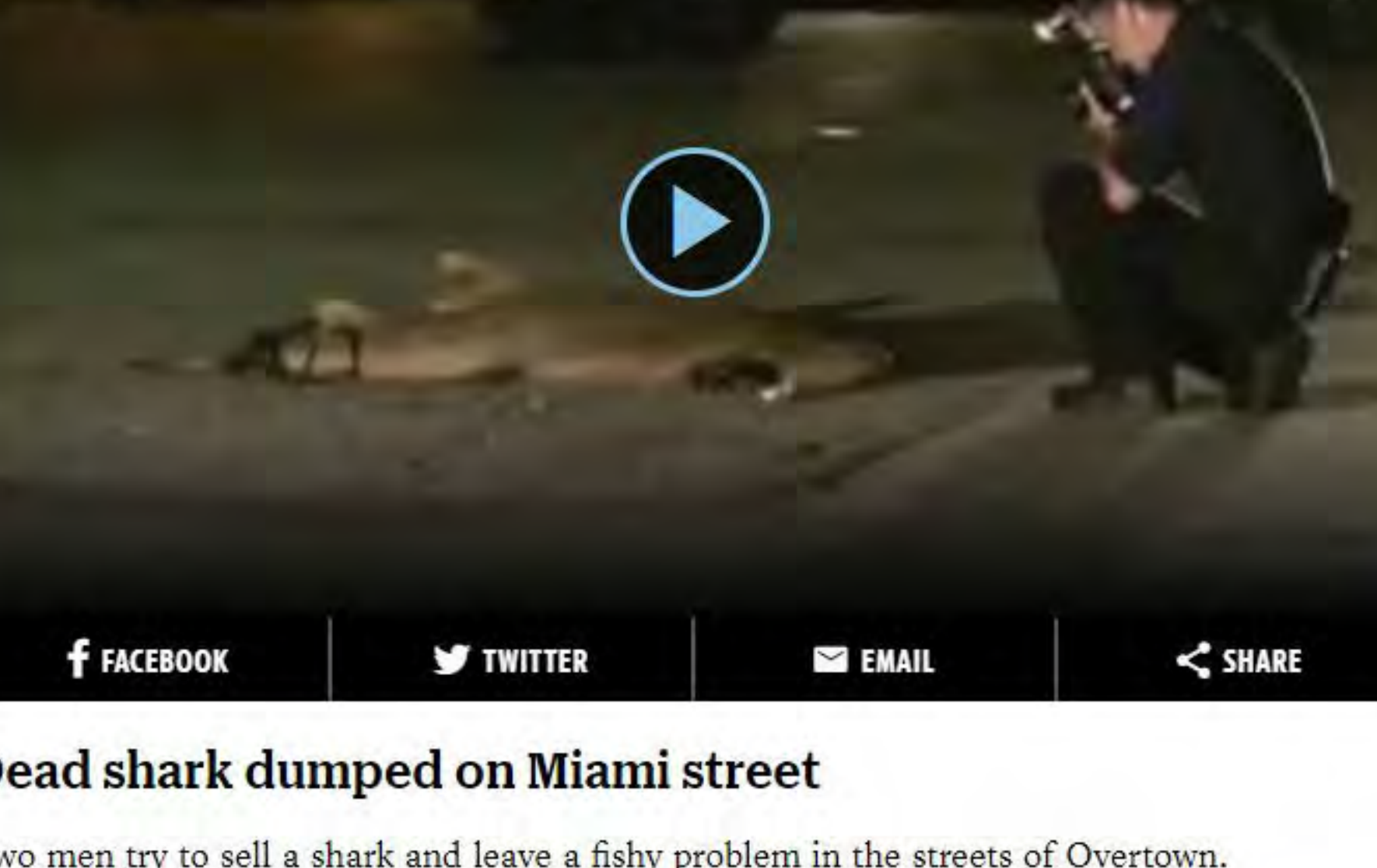
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JULY 24



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Dead shark dumped on Miami street

Two men try to sell a shark and leave a fishy problem in the streets of Overtown.

Miami Herald Staff

An earlier version of this story misidentified the ABC Tampa affiliate, WFTS.

Follow Jenny Staleto on Twitter @jenstaleto



Officials have confirmed the identity of the participants but have not released their names while they continue to investigate.

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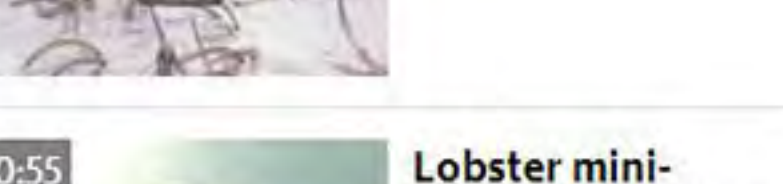
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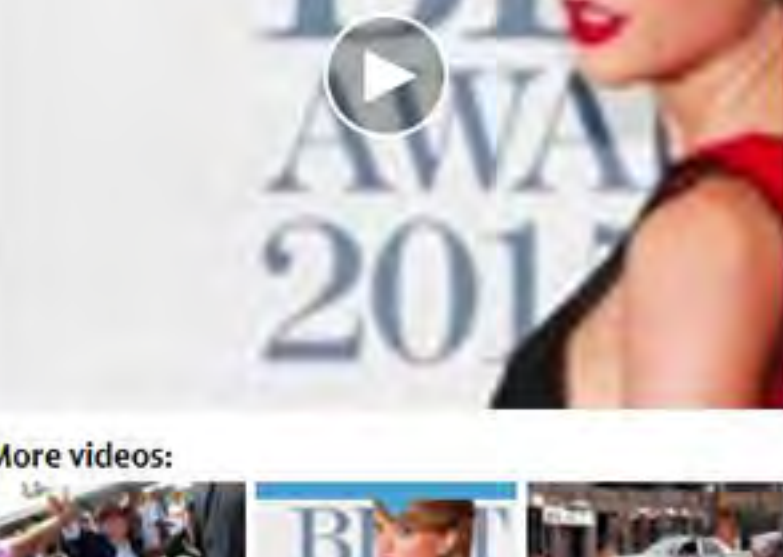
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