

# RETURN WITH US

The Radio Historical  
Association of Colorado, Inc.

# NOW...



VOLUME 13, NUMBER 2

SEPTEMBER, 1987



RETURN WITH US NOW...is the official publication of the Radio Historical Association of Colorado, Inc., a non-profit organization. The cost of membership is \$15.00 per year which entitles the member full use of the Club's resources. For further information, contact one of the following officers or board members:

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#### NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of R.H.A.C. will be Thursday, Sept. 17th at The Church of the Master, 5152 E. 17th Ave. at 7:30 P.M.

Following a brief election of officers, our special speaker will be Joy Caylor, who on April 1, 1940, formed the Joy Caylor All-Girls' Band.

We know that you will enjoy hearing Ms. Caylor tell of her experiences with her band doing radio remotes and special appearances during the career of her group.

Let's give her a big R.H.A.C. welcome by having a good turnout.

#### ABOUT THE COVER

Many thanks to Dick Mullens, former R.H.A.C. founding member who provided us with the cover photo of Ben Wright and the article "The Radio Murder Hour" which is reprinted in this issue.

#### A NOTE FROM THE NEW EDITOR

It is with deep appreciation to the club for placing its confidence in me as the new editor of Return with Us Now.... I also wish to especially thank John Cook, the former editor, for showing me the "tricks of the trade" in editing such a periodical as this. I only hope that I can maintain the high standards that he has set. May I also encourage all of the membership to give me input about what they would like to see included in future issues. I want to be your servant, and it is my wish that the newsletter will reflect the excellence that the club stands for. Good listening!

#### THE COLORADO SPRINGS CHAPTER

The next meeting of the Colorado Springs chapter of our club will be Monday, Sept. 21st, at 7:30 P.M. Please call Mike Fields at 5980253 for directions if you plan to attend. An interesting program is planned.

# CONVENTION NOTICE ! -3-

## IMPORTANT NOTICE: CHANGE OF SITE FOR CONVENTION

Due to an error by the hotel, Inn at the Mart, where the convention was to be held, it has been necessary to change the site to The Regency which is located at I-25 and East 38th Avenue. We are sorry for any inconvenience. The schedule will remain the same.

## SCHEDULE OF KEVIN SHIELD'S OTR SHOW ON KCMN IN THE SPRINGS

9-13	Woodbury Soap Show - 1935	9-27	Eddie Cantor -- --
	Halls of Ivy - 1-6-50		Life of Riley - 2-7-48
	Duffy's Tavern - 7-29-40		NBC University Theatre - 9-17-48
	Les Miserables - 8-27-37		Escape - 8-8-50
	Pat Novak - 3-12-49		
		10-4	Jimmy Durante - 3-3-48
9-20	Bing Crosby - 1-22-53		Lux Radio Theater - 6-24-40
	Great Gildersleeve - 8-31-41		Suspense - 10-22-55
	Screen Director's Playhouse - 11-25-49		Mysterious Traveller --
	Les Miserables - 9-3-37		
	Luke Slaughter - 2-23-58		

## SCHEDULE OF DON TUCKER'S OTR SHOW ON KNUS IN THE DENVER AREA ON SUNDAYS

9-13	Our Miss Brooks 8-7-49
	Bing Crosby Show 1-31-51
	Mysterious Traveller ---
9-20	Mercury Theatre on the Air 7-25-38
	The Shadow 11-13-38
9-27	Red Skelton Show 9-17-46
	Suspense 3-8-54
	Lum 'n Abner 2-14-40
	Lum 'n Abner 2-16-40
10-4	Theater Guild of the Air --
	Gangbusters 11-1-40

Once again, a big thank-you to Mike Fields, Don Tucker, and Kevin Shields for their support and promotion of old-time radio and particularly for their support of our 1987 convention. We are all most appreciative of what you fellows are doing!

THANKS, TO YOU ALL....

Serving as your Newsletter Editor for the past 18 months has indeed, been a pleasure and a satisfaction because of the numerous compliments I received. It has given me an opportunity to get to know many of you through your correspondence, and phone calls. You have helped me a great deal by sending articles of interest, voicing complaints and expressing your kind remarks regarding the newsletter.

All I ask is that you continue your support by helping the new editor, Dr. Daniel Decker, whom I'm sure will honor us with his literary talents. Perhaps we can get him to print his doctoral thesis on old time radio in a serialized form

Thanks again, and ...GOOD LISTENING!!!!

John Cook

## TAPE LIBRARY NEWS

Attached with this newsletter once again are additional pages for the tape catalog.

As usual, the reels for this month are also available on cassette.

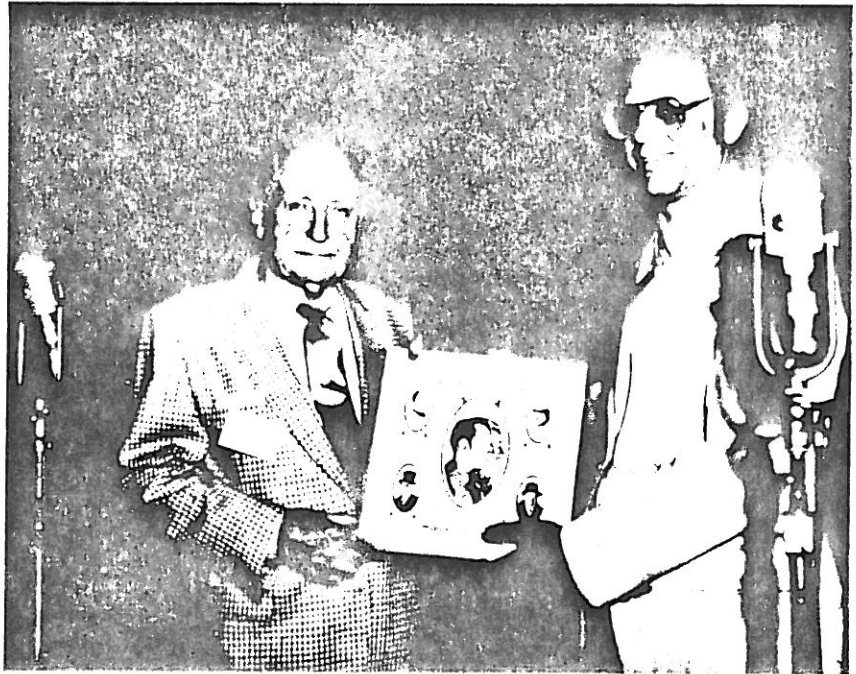
Thanks to Elmer Westbrook for all the hard work as tape coordinator and providing these pages for us!

# The Radio Murder Hour

by Chris Steinbrunner

Among the most tantalizing of lost treasures for lovers of yesteryear's radio mystery are surely the half-hour audio adventures of Sherlock Holmes featuring Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce in their prime. Some of the shows have filtered down over the decades, but not many, and usually the sound track has not been in perfectly listenable condition. But the memories are exquisite. Best of all is a genial Nigel Bruce as Watson, far less silly than in his screen portrayals, welcoming the show's announcer to sit before the warm fire of his California retirement cottage (!) and—perhaps over a glass of port, during the time when a wine company was the program sponsor—recalling a long-ago exploit he shared with his friend Sherlock Holmes, for the stories were all period, set in specified years before the turn of the century. Rathbone's crisp-voiced Holmes was ideal for the radio medium, and Bruce's double roles as both companion and narrator gave him new, vigorous assurance. His epilogues alone, teasing his announcer guest (and us) with hints of the following week's tale ("I call it the adventure of the . . .") represent the very heights of superb storytelling. And the stories were very often written by the legendary Anthony Boucher—from the pantheon of mystery writers—in collaboration with Denis Green. Like so much of radio's glory, most of these Boucher-Green collaborations have been thought lost forever.

Until now. The good news from California is that a group of young radio enthusiasts have acquired from Phyllis White, the widow of Anthony Boucher, more than a year's run of the programs, and is issuing a limited edition of two shows from 1945 which have not been heard since the original broadcasts. And they have done this project *right*. In an industry in which most radio re-issues start with grave-robbing, the 221 "A" Baker Street Associates has secured the permission of Dame Jean Conan Doyle for the project, the blessing of both Boucher and Green's widows



**Dick Mullins, co-producer of "The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes," is shown presenting a copy of the album to Glenhall Taylor, the original producer and director of the radio shows.**

and other artists still living who were involved in the shows, and has made donations to the Motion Picture and Television Fund in the names of the deceased actors. They have fine-tuned the audio electronically to sound perhaps better than the first listeners heard it, and wrapped the shows in a stunning album with a new introduction.

The album cover features Victorian oval

portraits of the principals, but the interior illustration is a breathtaking centerfold of a misty London street. The album is numbered and limited to 3,000, with the twin records pressed in either gold or scarlet vinyl. Enclosed is a short essay on the history of the Sherlock Holmes radio programs, interesting reading on some of the other craftsmen—William Gillette, Edith Meiser, Leslie Charteris—who contributed to the series, and who it actually was who brought collaborators Green and Boucher together (Mary Green, who had gone to college with Boucher, suggested him to her husband). The loveliest touch of all, however, are the brand-new commentaries which begin each episode, done against London street sounds by veteran actor Ben Wright.

No student of radio murder hours needs an introduction to the distinguished Wright, the English-born character player who has added substance to many Golden Age mystery shows. He substituted for an ill Tom Conway as Holmes after Rathbone was seduced away from the series, and was the nameless Sherlockian detective in the *Escape* version of Conan Doyle's "The Lost Special." Even

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## RHAC TAPE LIBRARY

<u>TAPE 723 X MINUS ONE</u>			1200'
1L	5-1-55	The Parade	
	5-15-55	Universe	
2L	6-5-55	Perigi's Wonderful Dolls (AFRS)	
	7-14-55	Dr. Grimshaw's Sanitarium	
1R	8-11-55	Almost Human (AFRS)	
	8-18-55	Courtesy	
2R	8-25-55	Cold Equation (AFRS)	
	9-8-55	The Martian Death March (AFRS)	
<u>TAPE 724 X MINUS ONE</u>			1200'
1L	9-15-55	The Castaways	
	10-6-55	First Contact (AFRS)	
2L	10-27-55	Requiem (AFRS)	
	12-7-55	Nightfall (AFRS)	
1R	12-21-55	Marionettes, Inc.	
	12-28-55	A Logic Named Joe	
2R	1-4-56	The Roads Must Roll (AFRS)	
	2-8-56	The C-Chute	
<u>TAPE 725 X MINUS ONE</u>			1200'
1L	2-15-56	Skulking Permit	
	2-22-56	Junkyard	
2L	4-24-56	Sense Of Wonder	
	5-8-56	The Seventh Order	
1R	12-12-56	Hostess	
	12-19-56	The Reluctant Heroes	
2R	1-2-57	The Moon Is Green	
	1-9-57	Saucer Of Loneliness	
<u>TAPE 726 X MINUS ONE</u>			1200'
1L	1-16-57	The Girls From Earth	
	1-23-57	Open Warfare	
2L	1-30-57	The Caretaker	
	2-6-57	Venus Is A Man's World (AFRS)	
1R	2-13-57	The Trap (AFRS)	
	2-27-57	Real Gone	
2R	3-6-57	The Seventh Victim	
	3-20-57	Protection	

## RHAC TAPE LIBRARY

<u>TAPE 727 X MINUS ONE</u>			1200'
1L	4-17-57	The Discovery Of Mornial Mathaway (AFRS)	
	4-27-57	Man's Best Friend	
2L	6-20-57	Inside Story	
	6-27-57	The Category Inventor	
1R	7-11-57	Early Model	
	7-25-57	The Haunted Corpse	
2R	8-22-57	Drop Dead	
	9-19-57	Tsylana	
<u>TAPE 728 X MINUS ONE</u>			1200'
1L	9-26-57	Native Problem	
	10-17-57	Point Of Departure	
2L	10-24-57	The Light	
	10-31-57	Lulu	
1R	11-21-57	Coffin Cure	
	11-28-57	Shocktroop	
2R	12-19-57	Double Dare	
	12-26-57	Target One	
<u>TAPE 729 DIMENSION X</u>			1200'
1L	5-13-50	Almost Human	
	6-10-50	The Green Hills Of Earth	
2L	7-7-50	Mars Is Heaven	
	7-14-50	The Man In The Moon	
1R	8-11-50	The Castaways	
	9-15-50	Hello Tomorrow	
2R	6-3-51	The Last Objective	
	6-24-51	Child's Play	
<u>TAPE 730 THE MAN CALLED X</u>			1200'
1L	1-20-51	Mitsubishi 101	
	1-27-51	Aboard The Orient Express	
2L	2-3-51	Pirate Submarine	
	2-10-51	As Black As Diamonds	
1R	2-17-51	North Of Thirty-Eight	
	2-24-51	Missing Microfilm	
2R	3-3-51	Opium Smuggling	
	3-10-51	Cargo Contraband	



**Suspect or villain in countless radio and television murder dramas, actor Ben Wright is alive and well and "host" voice on an album of Sherlock Holmes radio plays.**

more memorably, he was the dogged and most realistic Scotland Yard Inspector Peter Black in the CBS sustaining series *Pursuit*, which failed to find the audience it truly deserved. Wright's face and urbane voice can be spotted in countless television and

theatrical films, generally playing bankers and barristers; you may recall him as the villainous Nazi pursuing the Trapp family across the Alps in *The Sound of Music*. Wright serves as the "host" of the two Sherlock Holmes radio programs, and we

hear his warm and friendly voice describe walking down Baker Street, climbing the stairs to the rooms which Holmes and Watson shared—an absent Mrs. Hudson has given permission to enter—to look around and peek (!) at the good doctor's notes. It is very winning. After the shows, Wright returns in unexpected epilogues, commenting on Canonical references and Watson's intelligence (which he spiritedly defends).

The two programs reissued are interesting contrasts. The first, "The Unfortunate Tobacconist," takes place, Watson tells us, on a summer evening in 1906, and is set mainly in London's sinister dockside. Someone—a bearded Hindu with a knife, it is rumored—has been murdering helpers in a pipe shop, and of what possible interest could these rough deaths be to Holmes's brother Mycroft and the Foreign Office? The fog-drenched atmosphere is first-rate, and the scene in which Holmes and Watson await a killer in the darkness of the shop's back room is perfect radio, but the solution to the mystery is something of a let-down in terms of logic. Fun to get to, though.

The second program is an unquestioned joy, though with an unlikely premise. "The Paradol Chamber" is set in 1887, and begins with Watson and his wife in domestic bliss; Holmes is not in the first part of the show, and one starts to wonder if Rathbone is on a holiday. Although a sensible woman—Nigel Bruce's wife would *have* to be—she talks her husband into investigating a walk-in machine, made of an unstable new alloy invented by an American woman scientist, which can cast objects into another dimension. (Boucher's science fiction interests clearly intrude here.) People can also be moved ahead in time, but Mrs. Watson draws the line at experimenting with her husband: "I think John would be very unhappy in the fourth dimension." The good doctor is ready to invest in the Paradol Chamber, but first decides to talk things over with his old friend Holmes. He returns to Baker Street—where we hear the film series's Mary Gordon reprise her role as Mrs. Hudson, and hear Rathbone at his neurotic best railing against renewed attacks from Moriarty. Is he paranoid about the evil professor? Are his snide remarks about domestic bliss ("Holmes, you talk as if Mary were a tyrant!") an indication of his resentment at Watson's marriage?

One thing is certain: when later we hear Watson say, "We're in a nasty mess," it is not an understatement. For he and Holmes are locked in the air-tight, metal Paradol Chamber *with a corpse*, and without hope of rescue. The climax is hair-raising. The sexist byplay throughout is amusing, and the very audible chagrin in Rathbone's voice as we hear his final exchange with Mary Watson is just a delight.

The limited album set can be had from 221 "A" Baker Street Associates, P.O. Box 351453, Los Angeles, California 90035-998. The cost is \$27.50. It is worth it to sit once again with the good Dr. Watson before his cheery fireplace and listen to two more of his wonderful stories. □



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# Blimey! It's 'Ethel and Albert'

By Milton R. Bass

**T**HREE YEARS ago, a man with an English accent phoned Mrs. Odd Ronning at her home on High Street in Becket and asked if she were the Peg Lynch who wrote and acted in a half-hour television show called "Ethel and Albert" back in the 1950s. She allowed as how she was.

He then gave his name, said he was retired from the British Broadcasting Corp., but that he still was in contact with several former colleagues there. Twenty-two years before, while on a visit to New York, he had watched the "Ethel and Albert" show on his hotel TV set, found it entertaining, and secured some scripts from CBS to take back to the BBC with him.

His colleagues in London also were amused by the scripts, but the consensus was that the language could not be Anglicized enough so that the English public would understand the humor of what was transpiring before their eyes.

Peg told him she thought great strides had been made since the Boston Tea Party in terms of understanding between Great Britain and the Colonies. Could he give her an example of such a language barrier?

"Well," said the gentleman, "there was a frightfully amusing script in which the whole plot line depended on the word 'garbage,' and that is a word not used in England. We say 'trash,' and that is just not as funny as 'garbage.'"

"However," he said, "Americanisms

have become much more familiar in the past 25 years, and if you are at all interested in getting your show on the BBC, please send some scripts and films and I will show them to my friends in London."

The scripts and films were sent forth with and the result was as expected — NOTHING! She returned to the gay social whirl of Becket.

Then, out of the blue, just like that, one year ago, word was received from Granada Productions in London that they were interested in doing a TV series based on "Ethel and Albert."

"There were the usual frenzied negotiations involving agents and actors, lawyers and contracts," said Peg, "and last November I was notified that Granada would be videotaping the English version of 'Ethel and Albert' immediately. 'SEND SCRIPTS!' they ordered. I did."

The show has been renamed "Chintz," which is a British expression for the middle class (they are still very class conscious in England, what with the queen and her equerries and all that), and the first of seven episodes just premiered in the prime spot of Monday nights at 8. The "London TV Times" described the series thusly:

"Seven-part situation comedy about Kate and Richard Carter, a middle-class, middlebrow couple verging on middle age, who live in Cheshire. In this first episode, the Carters invite their neighbors, Dottie and Fred Nelson, over for an evening of stimulating conversation. Unfortunately, it turns out to be more stimulating than expected."

"I have final approval on everything," said Peg, "but since my scripts were gathering dust, you can be sure I charmingly approve of everything like a shot. The actors are superb, but then, the English have always played comedy better than we do. The sets are cleverly designed and astonishingly elaborate at times. There is a studio audience and

THEIR laughter is on the tape, no canned reinforcements later. The first seven shows are being aired now. The next six-part series will be taped in July. Why the BBC presents all these in parts I forgot to ask, though I don't see how they build up an audience with this off-again, on-again schedule. It can't be lack of faith, for they're most enthusiastic and we're already discussing next year.

"As for the scripts, they're being done exactly as I wrote them 25 years ago, or with minor changes that I wish to rewrite. In any case, the material has held up mainly because I've always written about the little things in everyday life — losing the car keys, waiting all day for the repairman, wishing your wife would fill out her check stubs, etc., etc., and despite world turmoil, these things don't change. I just send the scripts over to the writer-actress Dilys Laye, and she does the Anglicizing, which mainly means updating things.

"For example, back in 1955, Ethel was furious that a restaurant was charging 75 cents for a shrimp cocktail. Those were the days, weren't they? Now that has to be changed to five or six dollars, and then translated into pounds and pence. A reference made to Spencer Tracy was changed to Albert Finney, just as president is changed to prime minister. Of course, words like gas, faucet, adhesive tape and flashlight become petrol, tap, sticking plaster and torch, that sort of thing. I must credit Dilys Laye with doing a masterful job of adding British idiomatic and slang expressions which admittedly enhance the reality of the show.

"All in all, I can hardly believe it. Twenty-two years on the networks, 13 of them in radio and eight in television. And now, the BBC. 'Ethel and Albert' are getting old. But, boy, what a great way to grow old."

As time has shown, there is little dan-



Peg Lynch Ronning enjoys the quiet pace of Becket, where she lives with her husband Odd K. Ronning and their collie, Alex, but Peg is ready to plunge back into the world of writing with her new-old show, "Chintz."



# ENTERTAINMENT HERE & THERE

ger of "Ethel and Albert" ever growing old. They are assuming the proportions of a classic. In the future, libraries will hold the collected works of Sophocles, Shakespeare and Peg Lynch. The lady obviously writes about more than losing the car keys or waiting all day for the repairman. She writes about what is universal in human nature. And she has paid her dues along the way.

Peg Lynch was born in Lincoln, Neb., of what is usually described as sturdy Norwegian and Irish stock. The adage failed somewhat in that her father died when she was only 2, and the family moved from Lincoln to Kasson and finally, 10 years later, to Rochester, Minn., where Peg attended high school and the University of Minnesota.

She majored in writing and dramatics, and discovered she had a flair for comedy in the college productions. Upon graduation, she took a job with radio station KATE where she wrote and delivered commercials, as many as 250 a week. She found the easiest commercial format to be a dialogue between husband and wife in which they praised whatever product was at hand, and as she was naturally bent that way, the "husband and wife" and their commercials became funnier and funnier.

When Peg moved on to station WCHV in Charlottesville, Va., to do a woman's variety show on food and fashions, her married couple grew into a 5-minute segment sans commercials — just funny. And when she went on to station WTBO in Cumberland, Md., the couple had their own 15-minute program five days a week.

In 1944, she was well enough known to be invited to New York by CBS to write a radio serial, but inside of three months, "Ethel and Albert" were a five-times-a-week network radio show.

In 1950, "Ethel and Albert" became a television fixture as a 10-minute segment on "The Kate Smith Show," and finally became a half-hour weekly series on its own.

Peg had wanted to be only the writer of the show, since that took her 14 hours a day as it was, but once they heard and saw her reading the part, both the network executives and sponsors insisted that nobody else would do. The first "Albert" she worked with on the network radio show in 1944 was a young actor named Richard Widmark, but he left after six months to go into a Broadway play. About 100 actors then auditioned for the role, but the moment Peg heard Alan Bunce she knew he was "it," and they worked together until his death.

In 1946, Peg's third cousin, Odd Knut Ronning, came to this country from Norway to take further courses in engineering. Two years later they were married, and in 1951 their daughter, Elise Astrid, was born.

Odd Ronning has been an executive with Jones-Beloit for many years, and some 10 years ago the family moved from Connecticut to Becket to cut down on his commuting time between his many business trips to various parts of the world.



**Peg Lynch and Alan Bunce were the stars of the popular husband and wife situation comedy, "Ethel and Albert." The show originated on radio during the 1940s, and evolved into a weekly television program in the '50s and '60s. The above photo was taken around 1955, at the height of their popularity.**

"Ethel and Albert" was as respected by the critics as it was loved by its public. *Newsweek* reported in 1953 that when the program's time slot was shifted, 11,000 people wrote in to complain. John Crosby, then TV critic for *The New York Herald-Tribune*, wrote that "Miss Lynch can suspend a whole half hour of fragile domestic comedy which generally hinges on the inescapable differences between men and women, differences which are by no means eradicated by years of married life."

After "Ethel and Albert" had run its allotted course on television, Peg and Mr. Bunce returned successfully to radio as "The Couple Next Door," and in 1975, Peg did a weekly 15-minute segment on ABC radio titled "The Little Things in Life."

And now "Ethel and Albert" have surfaced again in England as the Carters (no relation to Jimmy) in "Chintz."

The most interesting aspect of this is that some of the most successful American television shows have been derived from English originals — "All in the Family," "Three's Company" and "Sanford and Son." It is not without the realm of possibility that some hotshot American

TV network executive, hardly dry between the ears, will see the British series "Chintz," go bananas over it, buy the American rights and produce it over here. Might even come up with the name "Ethel and Albert."

There is only one thing that bothers Peg Lynch Ronning about the whole business. The original Englishman who brought it all about has disappeared. She knows his name but doesn't have a current address. The people she presently deals with at the BBC know nothing about him at all and do not seem inclined to do any research to find out.

Being a show biz veteran, Peg can't help but wonder about it.

"Ordinarily," she said, "the guy would have glued himself to me, demanding 50 percent, appointing himself producer and insisting that his daughter be the star of the show. But all I have is a long-ago, final postcard saying 'I got the ball rolling and hope it all turns out well for you. Good luck and best wishes.' This sort of thing just doesn't happen. I hardly know what to make of it. But I'm not getting all choked up. I've been too long in the business. He may show up yet and start telling me how to write the scripts. Now *that* I can handle."

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K8

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{1/88 }



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