

**MENTAL GROWTH TACTICS
FOR BRAVE HUMANS**

THINK WILD

VOL 1

WILD + BRAVE GROWTH TACTICS



MORGAN HENDRIX

THINK WILD

Mental Growth Tactics for Brave Humans

by Morgan Hendrix



Wild + Brave



Wild + Brave

Created by Morgan Hendrix at Wild + Brave in Fort Myers, FL.

WildandBrave.com

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Dedication

For the Journey Friends who have supported my writing as thinking partners, email subscribers, tactic testers, and relentless cheerleaders. Whether you helped me untangle my words, or pre-purchased a copy of this unfinished book on faith, *Think Wild* was birthed from our shared adventure, chasing our wild purpose by taking brave action each day. Even when my steps felt small, your companionship on the journey inspired me to continue.

May you receive generous love when you need it most, just as I have from you.

THINK WILD.



**“Placing one foot in front of the other,
investigating and overcoming
are intrinsic to our nature.”**

— Erling Kagge¹

¹ Erling Kagge, *Walking*, 5.

Author's Note

Sudden onset hyperacusis has changed almost everything about how I engage the world, use my brain, and experience relationships. When it started in 2020, this auditory suffering pulverized my ability to focus, to think, and to live a vibrant inner life. I was forced out of the zone of effortless thinking and into the gym of mental limitations.

Overnight, I transformed from someone who loved dancing with friends, biking our barrier islands, and traveling constantly into someone who could barely tolerate the whisper of a friend's voice. They still don't know why it happened.

While this book is not about sensory disability, chronic illness, or facing cognitive challenges *per se*; it is about learning how to engage wild ideas on purpose, even when faced with barriers and limitations.

Most of us haven't found our mental boundaries. Mental growth tactics are ways of using our minds on purpose to solve problems, savor life, and actively pursue the flow of fulfilling productivity. Unlike physical effort, it can be less obvious when we are doing heavy lifting with our minds. It can be even murkier to figure out what restores our mental resources.

This book offers ways to get to work on our brain, becoming intellectually stronger, more creative, and more engaged with life. In the process we will overcome anxiety, stress, and distraction. We will get unstuck and energize our life, right from the control center between our ears.

If you're experiencing cognitive limitations right now, you may be encouraged to know I've tested each tactic described here during times of heavy cognitive impairment. I picked the ones that worked even when my brain felt broken, ones that restored my

ability to think and enjoy life without waiting for my circumstances to improve.

Wild and brave growth is all about discovering our life's adventure and bravely pushing past distraction, anxiety, and numbness to experience wonder and meaning in the life we actually have. When my team and I launched Wild + Brave, our hope was to offer wild ideas—the kind of ideas we can wrap our hands around, understand and share easily with our friends and families — and help each other take small, brave actions every day that move us in the direction of our purpose. Whether you've joined us for one-on-one coaching, a live Challenge Group like Camp Mo or Negotiation Bootcamp, or use the free tools we share with email subscribers, we hope this book delivers on our promise to keep growing together.

This book draws on my coaching experience and the hundreds of incredible humans I've served in thousands of coaching sessions. And yet, these solutions are not anecdotal. I've built these processes from the best research I can find, and have tested them with real humans. I leave bread crumbs to the research and thought leaders I've learned from so you can follow your fascination beyond these pages.

I've done my best to keep each tactic brief, and offer extended research and bonus material online at **WildandBrave.com/Think-Wild**.

May these words be useful in your life. If even one of these tactics resonates with you and comes to live in your skillset I will be incredibly gratified.

“It is by being fully involved with every detail of our lives whether good or bad, that we find happiness.”

— Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi³

³ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 2.

**“The targets of your attention are the
building blocks of your life.”**

— Winifred Gallagher²

² Winifred Gallagher, *Rapt*, 15.

Introduction

Welcome to the *Wild + Brave Growth Tactics* series. At Wild + Brave we believe life becomes an adventure when we explore **wild ideas** that challenge our thinking and engage the world around us. Everything we produce is designed to inspire and energize us as we take **brave action**, fueling ourselves through rest, delight, and connection. This series explores core wild ideas that we've watched help our clients and friends grow more confident, effective, connected, and fulfilled in all kinds of circumstances.

Volume one focuses on mental growth tactics because how we think is foundational for building a brave, remarkable life of meaningful action and rest. Our internal experience of life massively impacts our ability to overcome challenges, do what matters, and feel deeply satisfied in life. Not only is our inner life more powerful than circumstances—our inner life is the key to making the most of whatever our circumstances may be.

What follows is not an exhaustive report on controlling attention, memorization techniques, or forcing your brain to do more. The bibliography is packed with authors who offer that if you're curious. Instead, we will unpack a few wild ways our brain works using twelve tactics for letting our brain support the flow of our busy lives.

Working as a life and business coach has convinced me that no one fears hard work; they fear investing effort without return. This is true of every area of life the *Growth Tactics* series covers, especially the life of your brain.

Most of us deal with some form of procrastination, perfectionism, or overwork; we battle cynicism, discouragement, or frustration; we distract ourselves from and avoid things our brain doesn't see how to solve, win, or survive. Especially in seasons of opportunity

or moments of freedom, our brain tries to protect us from investing effort that will not bring value. In the following pages, you'll see ways to increase your cognitive confidence—using the right parts of your brain to do the right jobs so your mental returns skyrocket.

Mental growth goes beyond solving problems at work, learning complex information, or creating intellectual property. The brain is our primary vehicle for enjoying life, experiencing fulfillment, and feeling connected with others.

It's wild what happens when the work we invest in our thinking converts ideas into actions, experiences into delights, and memories into wisdom. Getting even one percent better at this can shift the course of our life's adventure and impact our community for decades to come.

The twelve growth tactics that make up this volume are ways of building a wild and brave brain. They'll help us to overcome anxiety and mental overwhelm, develop our skills for enjoying life, and strengthen our confidence and clarity for decision-making and getting things done. All are key to accessing flow, feeling fulfillment, and growing wiser and more resourceful with time.

Future volumes will focus on building a wild and brave heart, spirit, and body. We've even got plans for sharing growth tactics for wild and brave families, teams, and businesses. But foundational to all of that is strengthening our access to think wild thoughts in a way that makes room for brave action. On behalf of all of us at Wild + Brave, thank you for thinking with us.

A Note on References

We are endlessly indebted and deeply grateful to all of the incredible humans whose wild ideas formed the foundation of this book. The citations and references throughout are aimed to give due credit, share relevant research, and support your fascination as you read. To reduce flipping to the back for endnotes, we've opted for simplified footnotes and included a detailed bibliography with full references for each work cited.

Visit **WildandBrave.com** for additional research, reading guides, and bonus material.

Section 1:

Overcome Anxiety, Distraction, and Stress

I confess to feeling more anxiety over this section than the following three combined. Why? The same reason anyone feels anxious: this matters to me.

Anxiety only ever shows up when something important is involved. The fiercest stresses and distractions provide a direct track to connecting with what truly matters to us. Because they hijack our attention, these urgent feelings, anxious thoughts, and stresses of life can cause major problems when trying to get stuff done or enjoy life.

For that reason, we will spend the first section of this book learning how to reclaim the mental space anxiety, distraction, and stress can monopolize. We'll start by imagining the workspace of the mind.

Like a multi-purpose workbench, we have the most fun and success using our mental workspace when it's filled with the right stuff, unencumbered by distractions, interruptions, or leftover thoughts. There is a limit to how much our mental workbench can hold before information gets lost.

Working Memory

When researchers talk about the workbench of the brain, they often call it working memory. This function retains ideas, information, and feelings in the brain long enough to do something with them. The ability to hold things in working memory is what makes it possible to understand something,

draw connections, and make decisions.⁴

I used to think that the best mental workbench was a quiet mind. But have you ever been in an epic workspace? There's activity! Only unused workbenches look pristine.

The best workbench I've seen belonged to Mr. Poorman, a retired neighbor who lived across the street from my childhood home. An accomplished carpenter, he sourced rejected pieces of lumber from an Ethan Allen factory and used them to build furniture modeled on the Ethan Allen catalog. His garage-turned-workshop had a sense of tidy action. There was always sawdust and something on the bench. Even my seven-year-old mind sensed magic was loading.

Since the onset of hyperacusis and tinnitus, my brain no longer has a quiet setting. Maybe your brain doesn't get quiet, either. That's okay. The following tactics won't keep your mind empty any more than Mr. Poorman's workshop was empty. You don't need to silence all your thoughts. Instead, we will process the contents of working memory into savored memories, gleaned insight, and brave action.

Even in the roar of debilitating sensory symptoms, the following tactics have helped me carve mental room to write this book, deepen relationships, and enjoy discovering new possibilities for life. Let's see what a clear mental workbench will do for you.

Tactic 1: Escape Thought Circles

In tactic one, we'll escape circular thought patterns, unclogging our working memory. Mental switching, chronic distraction, and rumination can all create thought circles. Anything that lands on our mind's workbench is solvable. But even simple things get stuck as long as those thoughts are swirling.

Whether plagued by worry, painful memories, or replaying conversations—whether weighing decisions, revisiting nostalgia,

⁴ Chris Bailey, *Hyperfocus*, 27.

dreaming for the future, or rehearsing tasks to be done—we need to help our brains process and use our thoughts rather than being chased by them. We'll use a technique that converts thoughts into awareness and clarity, releasing them with action.

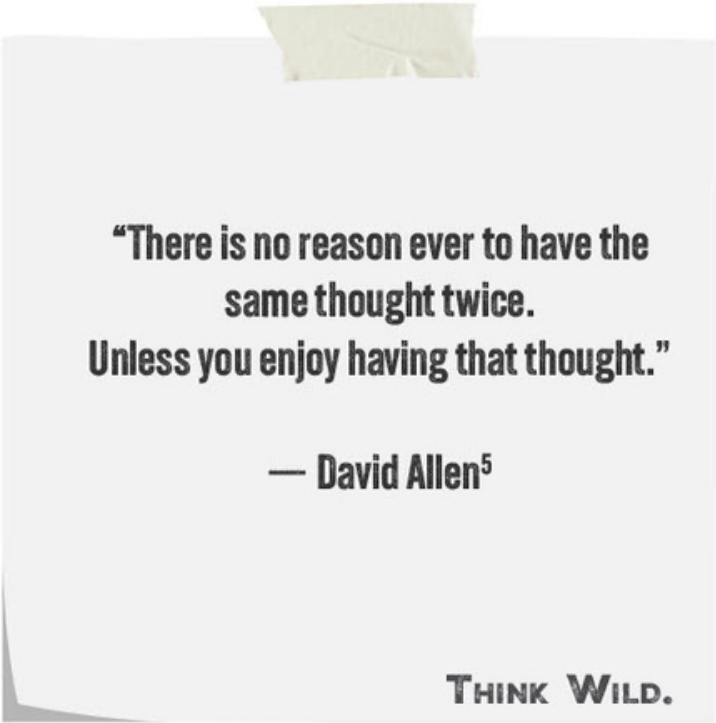
Tactic 2: Shift Your Stress Response

In tactic two, we'll explore how stress changes the workbench of our minds. We'll discover three different stress responses that your brain already has and learn to switch to the most optimal one for the moment. One stress response makes us **fast** and rescues us from danger. Another makes us **wise and creative**, helping us achieve and succeed when the stakes are high. A third response makes us **brave and tenacious**, drawing power from and connecting us with others.

Tactic 3: Reset Your Fear Filter

In tactic three, we'll discover how to engage the help of another function of our brain: the attentional filter. This is key for addressing the main cause of mental clutter: brain notifications. This process searches our environment, plucking whatever is tagged as “urgent” and tossing it in the center of our mental workbench. But what qualifies as urgent?

How can we shift from high alert to something more conducive to savoring the moment or focusing on the current task? By balancing our sense of urgency. This tactic will help us care about what is important without letting it drive us crazy.



**“There is no reason ever to have the
same thought twice.
Unless you enjoy having that thought.”**

— David Allen⁵

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⁵ David Allen, *Getting Things Done*, 24.

Tactic 1:

Escape Thought Circles

It can be hard to focus on work, settle down to sleep, connect with loved ones, or enjoy being ourselves when our inner voice gets caught in a thought loop. Bouncing between thoughts quickly interrupts us before we resolve things.

Tasks account for a lot of what circulates in our brains. Deadlines, shopping lists, and half-remembered to-dos show up as mental action reminders. Thinking about all we have to do can amp up our sense of time poverty, adding anxiety to the thought circle.

Thought circles can contain worry, racing thoughts, nostalgia, or daydreams that explore “what if” questions in a self-amplifying loop. When these mental loops prompt negative emotions or focus on pessimistic possibilities, we experience the chatter of rumination.

Rumination often focuses on people, experiences, and relational dynamics. We replay the feelings, motives, or attitudes of others. We mull over our perception of what another person or group thinks (of us, our work, or our tribe). But even when the contents avoid negative topics, these thought circles clutter the workbench of our working memory.

Thinking is fulfilled by action, and wild ideas get lost in the fog of circular thinking. When we don’t act on the thought “I should _____,” we lose the spark of activation energy that arrives with it. Because it’s impossible to take action on ideas as quickly as they circulate, our motivation to take brave action depletes the longer our thought loop delays us.

Let’s use a simple process to lay these recurring thoughts to rest while benefiting from the meaning they contain.

Process Your Thoughts

Complex situations, decisions, feelings, and projects are vulnerable to thought loops if we haven't finished figuring out what "done" really looks like and don't know what action to take.

Things that sound simple often conceal complexity that becomes apparent when you try to take action. Failing to anticipate the complexity leads to abandoned—though unresolved—thoughts. Between now and later, that thing lives in our working memory, jostled to the center any time we re-remember it, keeping it alive until we (hopefully) resolve it satisfactorily.

If you give your brain a simple process for untangling the complexity of tasks, that untangling can become a habit that helps shorten the time any thought gets trapped on your mind's workbench.

CAPTURE EACH THOUGHT ON A CARD

Imagine taking all the thoughts, tasks, and emotions flying around in your head and etching each one onto a separate stone. This would capture them for sorting and analysis. Once sorted, responding to them becomes more manageable.

Since carving whirling thoughts onto stone is impractical, grab a stack of index cards with lines on one side. Flip the blank side up, and write only one thought, worry, or task on each. Leave the lined side facing down. You'll need those lines later.

Get all your pressing thoughts onto cards, stacking them in a single pile so only one thought is visible at a time. Avoid sorting the stack in any way. Let them fall in the order they come out of your head, one on top of the other. You will work through the stack from top to bottom.

Keep blank cards available in case more thoughts reveal themselves as you're trying to focus on the one in front of you. If something pops up, write it on its own card and stuff it into the pile.⁶

6 Once you start processing your stack, any interrupting thought needs to wait its turn. Stay focused on the current card.

Capture Your Thoughts

*I thought I'd be
past this by now.*

*I should be
better at this.*

*I need to work on
my taxes.*

*Someone is
mad at me.*

*Why did I mess
that up?*

I'm missing out.

*Life shouldn't be
so hard.*



THINK WILD.

Capturing and expressing your inner thoughts is an analytical process that boosts awareness and presence. The more you practice, the stronger your metacognitive awareness will become. You can't mess it up either, so proceed with confidence.

By putting these thoughts onto cards, your hands can help you think in a straight line to resolve things instead of circling through them without making progress.

Don't replicate the mental chaos by shuffling cards.

CLARIFY THE THOUGHT

Step one transfers the thought to the blank side of the card. But often, the words we hear are not the real issue. Ask “What do I mean by this?” Give all of your attention to whatever is on the top card to see if you can sharpen or clarify it. Ask yourself if it looks like something to do, something to decide, or a warning.

At least some of what circulates in our thoughts are things we disagree with. This exercise gives us space to question our own thinking. I may keep hearing my inner voice say, “I hate this,” if I’m working on a tough problem and feel like I’m failing to solve it. But is it true? I never say “I hate this” unless I’m working on my favorite projects; maybe “I hate this” isn’t the full truth.

The truth inside “I hate this” might be “I’m experiencing friction on a project that excites me, and I’m scared I won’t break through.”

More often than not, thoughts that begin with “I can’t,” “I have to,” or “I should” aren’t really true. Search for the deeper issue.

When you’ve gotten to the heart of the issue, flip the card over and write the clarified thought on the top line.

Strategize, Take Action, or Rethink

Circular thoughts seem to fall into one of three categories: complex thoughts we need to think all the way through, things we clearly see how to take action on and false or unhelpful thoughts we need to challenge or gain perspective on. For complex thoughts that need some reflection, write **Strategize** below the thought on your card. For thoughts that clearly call for action, write, **Take Action**. And if the thought is something you want to challenge or change, write **Rethink** below the statement on your card.

Strategize

For complex issues, a few minutes of directed attention allows us to think it all the way through and strategize what action needs to be taken to see progress or resolution. Strategizing is essentially a planning activity, which we will discuss more in tactic ten. But for now, use your index card to jot down what success would look like, and any actions involved in laying this thought to rest.

This exercise aims to think more productively about what action needs to be taken and when to do it. When we have complex goals, we cannot honestly plan to execute an entire strategy immediately. We just need a sense of what will need to be done to get things moving, and when we need to revisit the strategy.

My favorite way to move these strategy thoughts toward resolution is to see the big picture of what the project needs and set a clear, firm intention to take the next step to keep it moving. Sometimes, thinking something through gives us permission to move this project off of our mind's workbench while we focus on other priorities. And often, we can see a small action that can be taken to move us forward.

Write down the action you will take on the card. Schedule a reminder or visualize when you will take the action. By keeping this mental commitment, we resolve this thought circle for good.

Your clarified thought.

STRATEGIZE

- List steps to complete, deadlines, or sketch what success could look like.
- ☐ Use check boxes to clarify what action you intend to take.

Take Action

Some things are in our heads because they need to be done. Maybe they aren't complex, but we need more than a second to determine when we can finish them. If the thought on this card is an action item, clarify exactly what needs to be done and check if you have what you need to complete it. Do you have the information, permission, or resources you need? Have you figured out the right time? Do you know the requirements for success?

Sometimes, tasks get caught in thought circles because some hidden preparation, research, or decision needs to be done before we can complete it. If this thought has hidden tasks, write them on your card. Then, make a mental plan for when you will take action.

We escape the need to keep a task in working memory by doing any task that takes less than two minutes.⁷ If the thought on your card could be done quickly without getting off on a tangent, hold the card in your hand while you take action. Be intentional to return to your stack of thoughts immediately after taking action. Write **done** on your card and set it aside before moving to the next on the stack.

Beware of tasks that seem quick but which are associated with making other decisions. Putting something on your calendar may be a twenty-second task, but finding space may take twenty minutes and three text messages. Batching short tasks can improve your ability to resolve the tasks well and feel a sense of settledness that you've got that domain on track.

Batching Tasks

Batching similar tasks is a productivity technique that involves grouping similar action items to be completed all at once. Batching is often used for emails, scheduling, decision-making, planning, and other categories of focused work.

⁷ Productivity expert David Allen and the generation of consultants who use his wisdom often teach a two minute rule of action. David Allen, *Getting Things Done*, 123.

Write a clear action on the card, and estimate the time it will take to complete. Note any resource or preparation needed before action can be taken. Make a mental plan of when you will do it, schedule it in a task or reminder app, or write it on a list to be checked off at the appropriate time.

Your clarified thought.

TAKE ACTION

- ☐ Write a clear action statement.
- ☐ Take any action on tasks requiring less than 2 minutes, and mark the card **DONE**.
- ☐ For tasks > 2 minutes, make a plan when you will complete or revisit.
- ☐ Identify deadlines & schedule reminders.

If you'd like, convert your stack of action cards into a reminder pile that can be reviewed for completion, and executed one card at a time. Similar tasks can be grouped together, and task stacks can be easily shuffled to represent prioritization during planning sessions.

Our action management tools do not need to be fancy. We just need to be able to trust and return to them to keep tabs on the things we promise our brain we'll take care of.

Often, when circular thoughts contain negative emotions, they should be treated as action items. Because emotions are designed to help us notice and respond to the world around us, identify **actions that actually address the causes** of the negative emotion rather than actions designed to distract ourselves or avoid contact with what is bothering us.

Rethink: The ABCDs of Belief Change

But what about the things we think that we shouldn't act on? What if they're circular thoughts that reflect negative emotions, pessimistic thoughts, or unhelpful beliefs?

These cards labeled "rethink" in step two need more than action.

If you're like most of us, simply telling yourself, "let it go," does not work. We need a framework for engaging the false thought without getting sucked into rumination.

Let's use the cognitive countering process taught by behavior change experts James and Janice Prochaska for a framework. They call it **the ABCDs of Belief Change**.⁸ In it they teach us to notice Activating Events, identify the Beliefs that are revealed by our reaction to those events, see the Consequences caused by holding those beliefs, and to reflectively Dispute the beliefs that are causing negative consequences in our lives.

At Wild + Brave we add the final Step Out to prompt brave action today to use what we've learned from the A B C and D. On each thought card you want to **rethink**, use the acronym A.B.C.D.S. to guide the process.

Your clarified thought.

RETHINK

A: *Activating Events*

B: *Beliefs*

C: *Consequences*

D: *Dispute*

S: *Step Out*

⁸ James and Janice Prochaska, *Changing to Thrive*, 66-68.

A: Activating Events

Review what's written at the top of your thought card. Try to identify what events prompted the thought, feeling, or belief statement to rise. Our mind often labels these as the "causes" for the thought, but it is helpful to realize the event only activated a thought that was already lurking. After the A on your card, identify what seemed to activate this belief. By noticing what "made us" think this thought, we gain insight into changing it.

B: Beliefs

What beliefs do you hold about those activating events? Beliefs could sound like "This is terrible" and "I shouldn't have to deal with this." Optimistic and pessimistic beliefs may mix together, combining "If I do my best, I'll be okay" and "Something always goes wrong." Write any beliefs after the B on your card. Don't be discouraged if this feels awkward at first. Identifying beliefs takes practice but offers a useful perspective for navigating our thoughts. We get better with practice.

C: Consequences

The only reason this thought landed on your stack is because the beliefs behind it are having consequences. Is thinking this thought causing you to feel discouraged, shortening your fuse, or changing your behavior in some way? Pessimistic beliefs have distressing effects on our mood, energy, and ability to think.

Write what consequences you notice from this thought after the C on your card. Be sure to check for internal consequences (impacts on your feelings, inner dialogue, or health), as well as external consequences (changes in how you treat others, shifts in your behavior).

If this is hard, imagine this belief being held by one of your closest friends. Ask yourself how they might behave differently if they believed this. Imagining the consequences of others can raise our awareness to what consequences we might be experiencing with-

out noticing. Check with your experience to see if some of that is happening for you.

D: Dispute

One of the ways you strengthen your wild mind is by bravely challenging thoughts that are bringing negative consequences into your life. It takes guts to notice a thought, recognize what activating events dragged it to the surface, and take a stand against the beliefs that animate it.

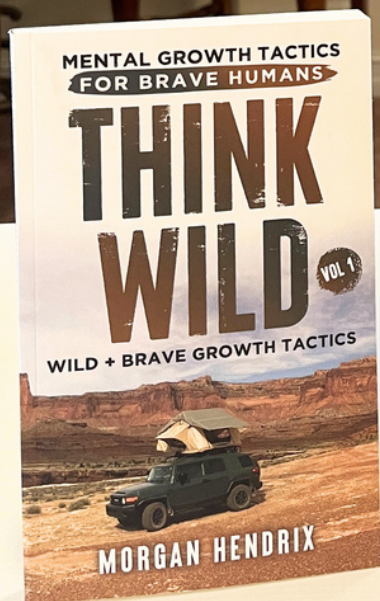
Bring out your inner scientist, your contrarian voice, your doubter. Instead of doubting yourself, take a moment to doubt the beliefs that are hurting you. Take something written on your “beliefs” line and ask, “when have I ever noticed this **not** being true?” Let your inner scientist gather data, and your contrarian voice offer other ways to think about it. Dispute the beliefs that are hurting you, and recruit help from friends or mentors when you want new arguments to use.

S: Step Out

The researchers who provided me with the ABCDs of Belief Change shared it in a framework of the stages of change.⁹ They taught the ABCD above. At Wild + Brave we add the S to put this into practice during thought stack exercises. The S stands for Step Out.

9 The stages of change are part of the Transtheoretical Model of Change, explored in a book called *Changing for Good* by James O. Prochaska, John Norcross, and Carlo DiClemente in 1994. In the decades since publication, Prochaska has gone on to help humans move through the stages of change, witnessing the framework’s effectiveness and publishing his process of application in *Changing to Thrive*.

KEEP READING...



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