

## **PATRIOT (2026): SURVEILLANCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND RESISTANCE IN CONTEMPORARY MALAYALAM CINEMA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Mahesh Narayanan's Patriot (2026), starring Mammooty and Mohanlal, is a socio-political thriller that interrogates the intersection of surveillance, technological misuse, political corruption, and resistance. Unlike conventional Malayalam blockbusters that rely on "superstar gimmicks," Patriot foregrounds systemic critique, situating its narrative within global dystopian discourse. This paper explores the film's thematic architecture—mass surveillance, technology as oppression, political corruption, whistleblowing, identity control, and the de-glamorization of stardom—while drawing parallels to canonical dystopian literature such as Orwell's 1984, Huxley's Brave New World, and Kafka's The Trial. Through comparative analysis, the study argues that Patriot exemplifies a hybrid dystopian framework, merging Orwellian fear with Huxleyan sedation, and thereby offering a cinematic reflection of contemporary anxieties about governance, technology, and autonomy. The film's refusal to indulge in spectacle underscores its commitment to systemic critique, positioning it as one of Malayalam cinema's boldest socio-political works in recent years.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Patriot (2026); Malayalam Cinema; Surveillance; Technology; Resistance; Authoritarianism; Orwell; Huxley; Dystopia; Identity Control; Whistleblowing; Political Corruption; Hybrid Dystopia.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Malayalam cinema has historically been a fertile ground for social commentary, often embedding political critique within melodrama, realism, or the moral dilemmas of everyday life. From the socially conscious films of the 1970s to the new-wave experiments of the 2010s, the industry has consistently reflected the anxieties and aspirations of Kerala's public sphere. Yet *Patriot* (2026) marks a significant departure in both form and substance. Directed by Mahesh Narayanan, the film brings together Mammooty and Mohanlal, two of Malayalam cinema's most iconic figures, alongside Fahadh Faasil, one of the industry's most versatile young talents. Together, they deliberately resist the temptation of fan-service spectacle. Instead of celebrating stardom, the film situates these actors within a narrative of systemic critique, foregrounding issues of surveillance, technological misuse, and authoritarian governance. This casting choice is itself a statement: by placing legendary stars and a rising prodigy in roles that serve the larger narrative rather than individual heroism, *Patriot* demonstrates that true cinematic power lies in collective storytelling. Their restrained yet compelling performances elevate the film's critique, proving that artistry is most impactful when it illuminates structures of power rather than indulging in spectacle.

This refusal of spectacle is crucial. In an industry where star power often overshadows narrative, *Patriot* consciously de-glamorizes its leads, treating them as characters embedded in a larger socio-political machinery. The film's thematic focus on surveillance and technological oppression reflects a growing global concern: how digital infrastructures, identity systems, and algorithmic governance reshape autonomy and citizenship. By dramatizing how everyday technologies—identity cards, toll gates, mobile tracking—can be weaponized against citizens, *Patriot* situates itself within a global discourse on the politics of surveillance.

The film's resonance extends beyond cinema into literature. This paper situates *Patriot* within the broader tradition of dystopian thought, drawing parallels to George Orwell's *1984*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. Orwell's vision of fear-driven authoritarianism, Huxley's model of pleasure-based pacification, and Kafka's critique of bureaucratic entrapment converge in *Patriot*, which dramatizes the erosion of autonomy in a world where citizens are simultaneously watched and pacified. The film exemplifies what scholars have termed the "hybrid dystopia": a system where Orwellian fear and Huxleyan sedation operate in tandem, producing a citizenry that is both obedient and complicit.

By analysing *Patriot* through this comparative lens, the study demonstrates that Malayalam cinema is not merely engaging with local socio-political realities but also contributing to global dystopian discourse. The film's refusal to indulge in spectacle underscores its commitment to systemic critique, positioning it as one of the boldest socio-political works in contemporary Indian cinema. In doing so, *Patriot* expands the scope of Malayalam cinema, transforming it from a regional industry into a site of global philosophical reflection on surveillance, technology, and resistance.

### Mass Surveillance and Loss of Privacy

At the heart of *Patriot* lies the theme of mass surveillance, dramatized through everyday technologies such as identity cards, toll gates, and mobile tracking tools, which are ostensibly designed for efficiency and governance but are weaponized to monitor citizens. Surveillance here is not passive observation; it is an active political instrument that destabilizes autonomy and reshapes the very conditions of citizenship.

This dramatization echoes George Orwell's *1984*, where the telescreen symbolizes the collapse of private life and the transformation of fear into governance. In Orwell's world, surveillance is omnipresent, instilling caution and self-censorship. In *Patriot*, surveillance is normalized under the guise of efficiency and convenience, making it appear benign while concealing its coercive potential. The film raises the provocative question: Do citizens truly have "nothing to hide"? By dramatizing how surveillance infrastructures can be exploited by political and corporate elites, *Patriot* dismantles this myth, showing that privacy is not merely an individual concern but a collective safeguard against systemic abuse.

Surveillance in *Patriot* becomes not only a tool of control but a **cultural condition**, shaping how individuals perceive themselves, their freedoms, and their relationships with institutions. Citizens internalize the gaze of authority, modifying their behavior even in the absence of direct enforcement. This mirrors Orwell's concept of "thoughtcrime," where the fear of being watched leads individuals to police their own impulses. In the film, surveillance is embedded into the fabric of everyday life, eroding trust between citizens and institutions, and creating a society where autonomy is perpetually compromised.

By situating surveillance within the narrative of systemic critique, *Patriot* underscores the fragility of democratic institutions in the digital age. It dramatizes how technologies designed for governance can be repurposed for domination, transforming tools of efficiency into instruments of authoritarian control. In doing so, the film not only reflects contemporary anxieties about privacy and digital identity but also situates Malayalam cinema within the global discourse on surveillance capitalism and the erosion of autonomy.

### **Technology as Oppression**

In *Patriot*, the fictional software *Periscope* becomes the central metaphor for the dangers of unchecked technological power. Far from being a neutral innovation, it is depicted as a mechanism of governance—an invisible architecture of control that embeds surveillance within convenience. This duality is crucial: citizens embrace the system because it promises efficiency and safety, yet in doing so they surrender autonomy.

The film's portrayal of *Periscope* recalls Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, where soma pacifies dissent by offering comfort and distraction. Just as soma anesthetizes emotional turbulence, *Periscope* anesthetizes political resistance, ensuring that citizens remain compliant while believing themselves empowered. Technology here is seductive yet oppressive: it reshapes social relations, curates desire, and embeds control into the rhythms of everyday life.

This dramatization resonates strongly with contemporary anxieties about **algorithmic governance** and **surveillance capitalism**, where convenience masks coercion. Personalized recommendations, predictive analytics, and biometric systems are often marketed as tools of empowerment, yet they simultaneously function as instruments of regulation. *Patriot* critiques this myth of technological neutrality, showing how digital infrastructures, when monopolized by elites, become instruments of domination rather than liberation.

By situating technology as both a tool of seduction and a weapon of control, *Patriot* underscores the paradox of modern digital life: the very systems designed to simplify existence can destabilize it, eroding autonomy while embedding dependence. In this way, the film aligns with global dystopian discourse, warning that the future of oppression may not arrive through overt coercion but through the subtle seductions of convenience and connectivity.

### **Political Corruption and Power Abuse**

One of the most incisive critiques in *Patriot* is its portrayal of political corruption and the abuse of power. Union minister J.P. Sundaram and his son Shakthi exploit surveillance systems for personal gain, dramatizing the collusion between politics and corporate interests. This narrative choice underscores how authoritarian tendencies are not confined to overtly totalitarian regimes but can emerge within democratic frameworks when institutions are compromised.

The theme directly recalls George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, where power is corrupted by self-interest and governance becomes indistinguishable from exploitation. Just as Orwell's pigs manipulate ideology to consolidate authority, Sundaram and Shakthi manipulate surveillance infrastructures—ostensibly designed for public safety—to serve private enrichment. The film thereby exposes the porous boundary between governance and exploitation, suggesting that corruption is not an aberration but a structural feature of modern politics.

By situating corruption as systemic rather than exceptional, *Patriot* underscores the fragility of democratic institutions in the digital age. Surveillance infrastructures, marketed as tools of efficiency and accountability, are revealed to be vulnerable to hijacking by elites. This dramatization resonates with contemporary anxieties about the collusion of state and corporate power, where technologies of governance are repurposed for domination.

The film also highlights the **ethical vacuum** that emerges when power is unchecked. Sundaram and Shakthi's actions reveal how surveillance systems can be weaponized not only against political opponents but against ordinary citizens, eroding trust in institutions and destabilizing the very foundations of democracy. In this sense, *Patriot* aligns with dystopian literature's broader warning: that corruption is not simply a matter of individual vice but a systemic condition that thrives when accountability is absent.

Through this lens, *Patriot* situates itself within global dystopian discourse, dramatizing how modern authoritarianism often operates through the collusion of political and corporate interests. It warns that the greatest threat to democracy may not be external enemies but internal actors who exploit governance systems for personal gain, transforming tools of public safety into instruments of private domination.

### Resistance and Whistleblowing

In *Patriot*, Mammooty's portrayal of Dr. Daniel James crystallizes the precarious position of the whistleblower in a society dominated by surveillance and corruption. His character embodies the paradox of truth in an authoritarian system: resistance is both necessary and perilous, heroic and tragic. By exposing the misuse of surveillance infrastructures, Daniel James becomes a fugitive, dramatizing how truth itself is criminalized when power is unchecked.

This theme resonates deeply with dystopian literature, where individual agency is simultaneously valorised and punished. Winston Smith in Orwell's *1984* attempts to resist the Party's epistemic control, yet his rebellion is crushed by the machinery of fear and torture. John the Savage in Huxley's *Brave New World* resists the seductions of engineered pleasure, but his refusal to conform leads to alienation and despair. Similarly, Daniel James's journey illustrates the difficulty of sustaining autonomy in systems designed to suppress dissent. His resistance is dramatized as both an act of courage and a tragic inevitability, underscoring the fragility of truth in a society structured to suppress it.

The film also highlights the **psychological burden of whistleblowing**. Resistance is not portrayed as triumphant but as isolating, destabilizing, and fraught with danger. By situating the whistleblower as a fugitive, *Patriot* underscores the systemic hostility toward truth-telling in authoritarian contexts. This dramatization reflects real-world anxieties about whistleblowers' vulnerability, who often face retaliation, marginalization, or exile.

In this way, *Patriot* situates resistance within the broader discourse of dystopian narratives, showing that the struggle for truth is both indispensable and tragic. The whistleblower becomes a symbol of integrity in a corrupted system, yet his fate reveals the difficulty of sustaining resistance against structures designed to neutralize dissent. By foregrounding this paradox, the film elevates resistance from a personal act to a philosophical question: how can truth survive in a society that criminalizes it?

### Identity and Control

One of the most unsettling critiques in *Patriot* is its exploration of identity systems and their transformation from mechanisms of empowerment into instruments of control. The film dramatizes how tools designed to streamline governance—such as identity cards and digital registries—become sites of surveillance, stripping citizens of autonomy and embedding them within bureaucratic machinery.

This theme recalls Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, where Josef K. is entrapped by opaque bureaucratic structures that define his existence without explanation or recourse. Similarly, in *Patriot*, identity systems are portrayed as labyrinthine mechanisms that entangle individuals, reducing them to data points within a larger apparatus of control. The film also

echoes Orwell's *1984*, in which individuality itself is criminalized and identity is subsumed under the gaze of the Party. In both literary and cinematic contexts, identity ceases to be a marker of autonomy and instead becomes a tool of regulation.

By dramatizing how identity cards shift from empowerment to control, *Patriot* situates itself within global anxieties about **biometric governance, universal identity systems, and the erosion of privacy**. The film highlights the paradox of modern identity infrastructures: while they promise efficiency, inclusion, and empowerment, they simultaneously constrain citizens by embedding them in surveillance systems. Identity becomes a site of regulation rather than liberation, transforming citizenship into a mechanism of compliance.

The film also underscores the **psychological dimension of identity control**. Citizens internalize the gaze of authority, curating their behaviour to align with bureaucratic expectations. Identity is no longer a personal marker but a performative construct shaped by surveillance systems. This dramatization resonates with contemporary debates on digital identity, where biometric data, universal ID programs, and algorithmic profiling raise concerns about autonomy, privacy, and the commodification of selfhood.

In this way, *Patriot* critiques the paradox of modern identity systems: designed to empower, they ultimately constrain. By embedding identity within the machinery of surveillance, the film warns that the future of citizenship may lie not in liberation but in regulation, where autonomy is eroded by the very infrastructures meant to protect it.

### **De-glamorization of Stardom**

One of the most striking stylistic choices in *Patriot* is its deliberate refusal to indulge in “superstar gimmicks,” despite featuring Mammootty and Mohanlal together after nearly two decades, a casting decision that, in most films, would have been leveraged for spectacle and fan service. Instead, Mahesh Narayanan situates these icons within a systemic narrative, treating them as characters whose significance derives not from their celebrity status but from their embeddedness in the machinery of power, resistance, and critique.

This de-glamorization of stardom is itself a political act. By resisting the commodification of cinema through spectacle, *Patriot* foregrounds narrative integrity over celebrity worship. The film redefines Malayalam cinema's relationship to its icons, embedding them within a discourse of systemic critique rather than individual heroism. In doing so, it challenges the traditional grammar of Indian popular cinema, where star power often eclipses narrative depth.

The restrained performances of Mammootty and Mohanlal, complemented by Fahadh Faasil's nuanced presence, demonstrate that true artistry lies in serving the narrative rather than dominating it. Their characters are not larger-than-life saviours but flawed individuals navigating systemic oppression. This stylistic choice strengthens the film's political message: authoritarianism is not defeated by singular heroes but confronted through collective awareness and systemic resistance.

By de-glamorizing stardom, *Patriot* also situates itself within global cinematic traditions that prioritize realism and critique over spectacle. It aligns with dystopian narratives in which protagonists are ordinary individuals caught in extraordinary circumstances, underscoring the universality of systemic oppression. In this way, the film not only critiques authoritarianism but also critiques the cinematic culture that often masks systemic issues behind the glitter of celebrity.

Ultimately, the de-glamorization of stardom in *Patriot* underscores its commitment to systemic critique. It transforms the presence of Malayalam cinema's greatest icons into a vehicle for realism, integrity, and philosophical reflection, proving that cinema's power lies not in spectacle but in its ability to interrogate structures of power and illuminate the fragility of autonomy in the modern world.

## ANALYTICAL TAKEAWAY

Taken together, the six thematic strands—mass surveillance, technology as oppression, political corruption, resistance and whistleblowing, identity and control, and the de-glamorization of stardom—situate *Patriot* firmly within the tradition of dystopian literature and cinema. The film does not merely borrow motifs from Orwell, Huxley, or Kafka; it reconfigures them into a distinctly contemporary narrative that speaks to the anxieties of the digital age.

*Patriot* dramatizes the **hybrid dystopia**, a world where Orwellian fear and Huxleyan sedation operate in tandem. Citizens are simultaneously watched and pacified, their autonomy eroded by overlapping systems of surveillance, convenience, and emotional engineering. Fear ensures compliance, while pleasure ensures complacency. Together, these forces produce a citizenry that is both obedient and complicit, internalizing control as part of everyday life.

By foregrounding surveillance, technology, corruption, resistance, identity, and stardom, *Patriot* expands Malayalam cinema into a site of **global philosophical reflection**. It demonstrates that regional cinema can interrogate universal questions about governance, technology, and autonomy, situating itself alongside dystopian classics while offering a uniquely Indian perspective on the politics of control.

The film's refusal to indulge in spectacle is itself a political gesture. By de-glamorizing its stars, *Patriot* insists that systemic critique must take precedence over celebrity worship. This stylistic choice reinforces the film's central argument: authoritarianism is not defeated by individual heroes but confronted through collective awareness and systemic resistance.

Ultimately, *Patriot* is not only a socio-political thriller but also a **cinematic meditation on the future of freedom**. It warns that threats to autonomy in the twenty-first century may not arise solely from overt coercion but also from the subtle seductions of convenience, entertainment, and digital identity. In dramatizing this hybrid dystopia, the film offers a powerful reflection on contemporary anxieties and a call to vigilance in an age in which governance and technology intertwine to reshape the very meaning of citizenship.

## COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK

The thematic architecture of *Patriot* gains clarity when placed alongside the canonical dystopian works of George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, and Franz Kafka. Each of these writers envisioned distinct mechanisms of domination, fear, pleasure, and bureaucracy that continue to resonate in contemporary contexts. Narayanan's film synthesizes these traditions, dramatizing a hybrid dystopia that reflects the complexities of the digital age.

**Table 1**

Theme in Patriot	Orwell’s <i>1984</i>	Huxley’s <i>Brave New World</i>	Kafka’s <i>The Trial</i>
<b>Mass surveillance</b>	Big Brother and telescreens enforce omnipresent observation, collapsing private life into political control.	Not central; conformity is achieved through conditioning rather than surveillance.	Bureaucratic observation entraps individuals in opaque systems, mirroring the film’s critique of identity tracking.
<b>Technology misuse</b>	Propaganda machinery manipulates truth and memory, weaponizing technology for ideological control.	Soma and genetic conditioning pacify dissent, embedding domination within pleasure and convenience.	Technology is absent, but bureaucratic processes function as oppressive machinery.
<b>Political corruption</b>	Party elites exploit power for self-interest, eroding democratic ideals.	Not foregrounded; corruption is systemic through engineered conformity.	Judicial bureaucracy operates arbitrarily, reflecting systemic exploitation.
<b>Identity control</b>	Thoughtcrime criminalizes individuality, reducing identity to compliance.	Engineered conformity erases authentic individuality, replacing it with manufactured stability.	Arbitrary legal identity entraps individuals, echoing <i>Patriot</i> ’s critique of biometric governance.
<b>Resistance</b>	Winston’s rebellion is crushed, dramatizing the futility of dissent under the threat of fear.	John the Savage resists pleasure-based conformity but is alienated and destroyed.	Josef K’s futile struggle against bureaucracy mirrors the whistleblower’s tragic isolation.

**ANALYTICAL EXPANSION**

- **Orwellian Parallels:** *Patriot* inherits Orwell’s concern with surveillance and epistemic control. Like *1984*, it dramatizes how observation erodes autonomy and how truth is destabilized by political manipulation.
- **Huxleyan Parallels:** The film also channels Huxley’s vision of seduction through convenience. *Periscope* functions as a digital soma, pacifying dissent while embedding control within everyday routines.
- **Kafkaesque Parallels:** Finally, *Patriot* resonates with Kafka’s critique of bureaucracy. Identity systems, designed to empower, morph into labyrinthine structures that entrap citizens, echoing Josef K.’s helplessness in *The Trial*.

By synthesizing these traditions, *Patriot* dramatizes the hybrid dystopia: a world where fear, pleasure, and bureaucracy converge to produce citizens who are both obedient and complicit. This comparative framework situates Malayalam cinema within global dystopian discourse, demonstrating how regional cinema can interrogate universal anxieties about governance, technology, and autonomy.

**HYBRID DYSTOPIA: PATRIOT IN CONTEXT**

Mahesh Narayanan’s *Patriot* exemplifies what scholars increasingly describe as the **hybrid dystopia**, a system of control that merges Orwellian fear with Huxleyan sedation. Unlike classical dystopias that rely on a single mechanism of domination, the hybrid model dramatizes a world in which citizens are simultaneously watched and pacified. In this framework, surveillance and sedation are not opposites but complementary forces: fear ensures compliance, while pleasure ensures complacency.

In *Patriot*, surveillance capitalism monitors behaviour while offering convenience. Everyday infrastructures, identity cards, toll gates, mobile tracking—become instruments of observation, embedding surveillance into the routines of daily life. Yet this monitoring is not presented as overt coercion alone; it is wrapped in the seductive promise of efficiency, safety, and personalization. Citizens participate willingly, echoing Huxley's insight that domination can thrive when individuals embrace their own subjugation because it feels pleasurable or convenient.

At the same time, the film dramatizes **emotional engineering**, where desire and belief are shaped through digital platforms. The fictional software *Periscope* functions as both Orwellian telescreen and Huxleyan soma: it observes, records, and manipulates, while simultaneously offering comfort and distraction. This duality reflects contemporary anxieties about algorithmic governance, in which curated feeds, targeted advertisements, and predictive analytics shape not only behaviour but also emotional life. Pleasure and outrage become tools of governance, producing citizens who oscillate between dopamine-driven gratification and algorithmically induced anxiety.

Another dimension of the hybrid dystopia in *Patriot* is the **erosion of truth**. Orwell feared a world where history is rewritten, and facts are controlled; Huxley feared a world where truth becomes irrelevant because citizens are too distracted to care. The film dramatizes both anxieties simultaneously. Misinformation, political manipulation, and algorithmic curation destabilize the very concept of objective truth. Citizens inhabit fragmented realities, shaped by the systems that monitor and pacify them. Truth is not forcibly suppressed but gradually dissolved—lost in a sea of noise, distraction, and engineered desire.

Perhaps the most striking feature of *Patriot*'s hybrid dystopia is the **internalization of control**. Citizens police themselves, curating their identities for visibility and conforming to algorithmic expectations. Fear of surveillance, cancellation, or invisibility reinforces compliance, while the seductions of convenience and entertainment encourage voluntary participation. This internalization reflects the convergence of Orwell's fear and Huxley's pleasure: individuals become both the enforcers and the subjects of control. Power no longer needs to impose itself externally; it operates through the psychological habits individuals adopt in everyday life.

By dramatizing this hybrid dystopia, *Patriot* situates Malayalam cinema within global dystopian discourse. It demonstrates that authoritarianism in the twenty-first century is not defined by singular mechanisms of domination but by **networks of interconnected systems, technological, economic, cultural, and psychological**. Autonomy is eroded not by one oppressive force but by the fusion of surveillance and sedation, fear and pleasure, coercion and convenience.

In this sense, *Patriot* is not merely a socio-political thriller but a philosophical intervention. It expands the scope of Malayalam cinema, transforming it into a site of global reflection on governance, technology, and resistance. By refusing spectacle and foregrounding systemic critique, the film exemplifies how regional cinema can contribute to universal debates about the future of autonomy in a world increasingly defined by hybrid dystopias.

## CONCLUSION

Mahesh Narayanan's *Patriot* (2026) is less about hero worship and more about systemic critique. By foregrounding surveillance, technology, political corruption, resistance, and identity control, the film situates itself firmly within global dystopian discourse. Its refusal to indulge in stardom underscores its commitment to realism and systemic analysis, making it one of Malayalam cinema's boldest socio-political works in recent years.

What distinguishes *Patriot* is its articulation of the **hybrid dystopia**, a narrative framework that merges Orwellian fear with Huxleyan sedation. In this cinematic world, citizens are not only watched but also pacified, their autonomy eroded by a network of interconnected technological, economic, cultural, and psychological systems. Surveillance capitalism monitors behaviour while offering convenience; emotional engineering shapes desire and belief through digital platforms; truth becomes fragmented and destabilized by misinformation and algorithmic curation.

This fusion dramatizes the erosion of autonomy in a way that resonates with contemporary anxieties about governance and technology. Unlike classical dystopias that rely on singular mechanisms of domination, *Patriot* reveals how modern authoritarianism thrives through **diffuse, overlapping structures of control**. Fear ensures compliance, while pleasure ensures complacency. Together, they produce a citizenry that is both obedient and complicit, internalizing control as part of everyday life.

By embedding these themes within the framework of Malayalam cinema, *Patriot* expands the scope of regional filmmaking into a site of global philosophical reflection. It demonstrates that cinema can interrogate not only local socio-political realities but also universal questions about autonomy, identity, and resistance in the digital age. In refusing spectacle and foregrounding systemic critique, *Patriot* positions itself as a cinematic intervention into the twenty-first century's most pressing debates: the balance between governance and freedom, technology and humanity, surveillance and resistance.

Ultimately, *Patriot* is not merely a socio-political thriller but a **cinematic meditation on the future of autonomy**. It reminds us that the struggle against authoritarianism is no longer confined to overt coercion but extends into the subtle seductions of convenience, entertainment, and digital identity. In dramatizing this hybrid dystopia, the film offers a powerful reflection of contemporary anxieties and a call to vigilance in an age where freedom is threatened not only by what we fear but also by what we enjoy.

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