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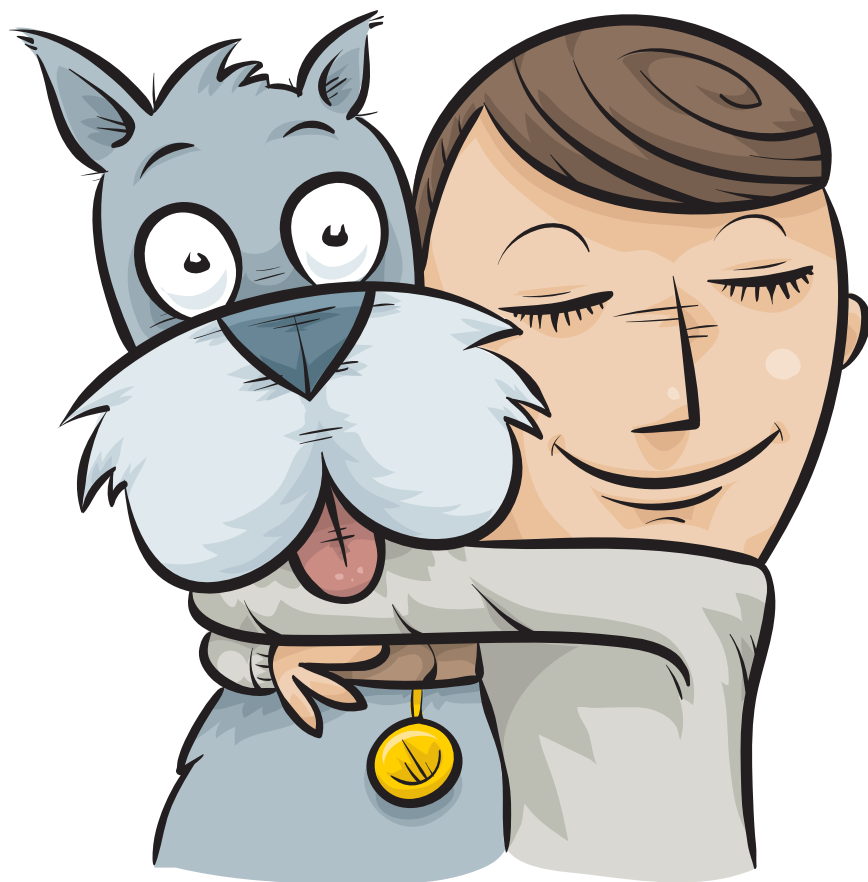
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# Laugh, Love, Play

By Michelle Heald



If you were fortunate enough to have a dog as a young child, you probably remember all the good things that special four-footed member of the family contributed to your childhood days—companionship, guardianship and most often, an on-tap playmate. As kiddies, not many of us had the full responsibilities of feeding, grooming or exercising our family mutt. But most of us would have spent a great deal of time incorporating the family dog into our playtime.

Our dogs made for great fielders for backyard cricket and were keen to join in with fast paced footy games played with neighbourhood kids. Family dogs weren't just reserved for team activity, they became great play friends when no one was around or able to play. I still remember the look on the face of our dog, Gunter, when I dressed him up in my baby doll outfits—mostly bonnets and booties. His wincing look only made the game more fun. Gunter was also a great stand-in for home theatrical productions my friend, Mandy and my older sister performed. He was our best (and only) audience for our staged puppet shows. A memorable moment was the time he snatched my Kermit The Frog puppet from my hand midway through a rendition of 'It's Not Easy Being Green'. Looking back I realise Gunter was a fearless critic.

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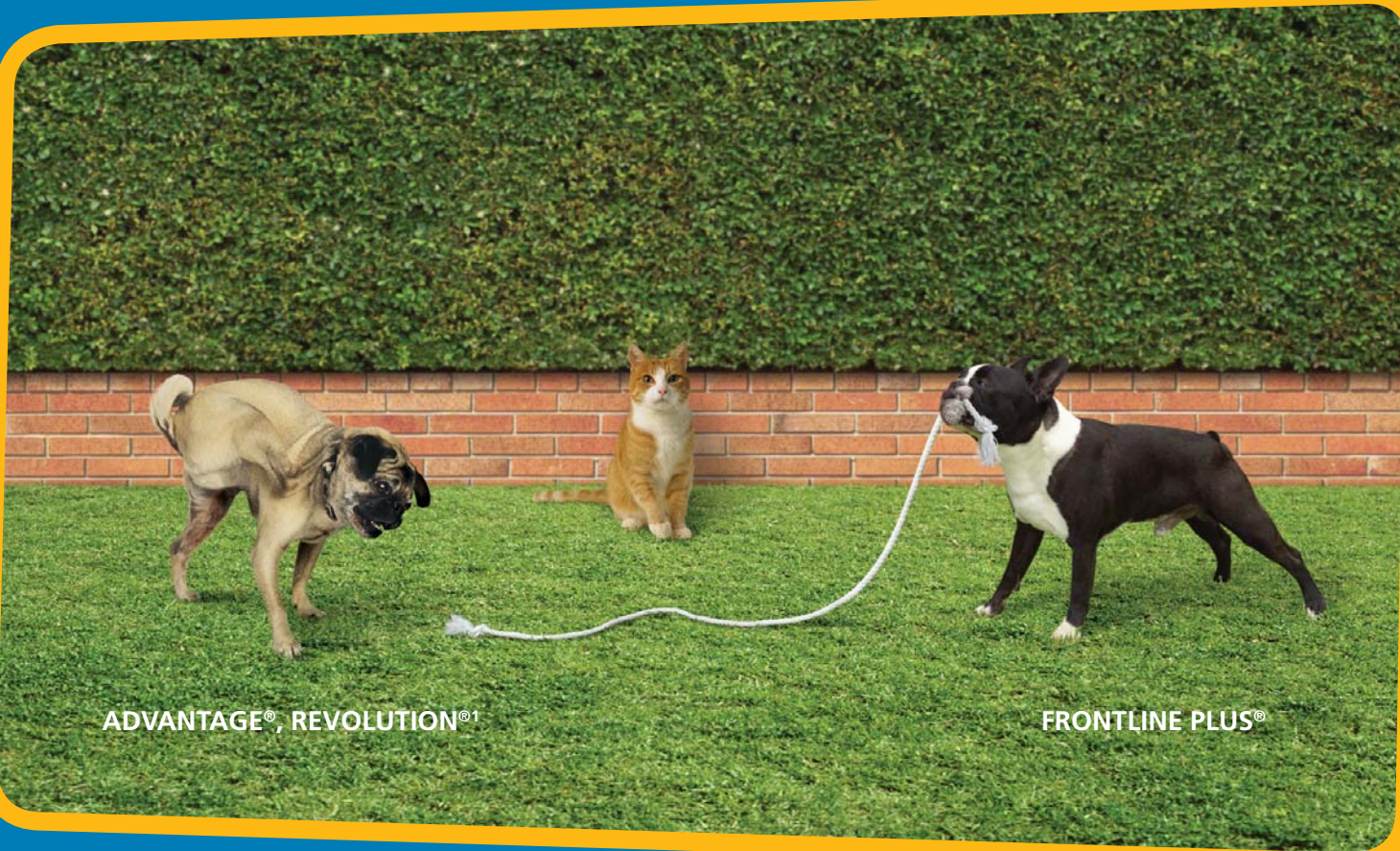


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Reference: 1. Burton, G., Shipstone, M. and Burrows, M. (2003) Veterinary guidelines for the control of fleas in dogs and cats in Australia, *Aust Vet Practit.* 33:117-124. 2. McTier, T.L. et al. (2000) Evaluation of the effects of selamectin against adult and immature stages of fleas (*Ctenocephalides felis felis*) on dogs and cats. *Vet Parasitol.* 91:210-12. 3. Dryden, M.W. and Broce, A.B. (2001) Integrated flea control for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. North American Veterinary Conference January, 2001. 4. Ritzhaupt, L.K. et al. (2000) Evaluation of efficacy of selamectin, fipronil, and imidacloprid against *Ctenocephalides felis* in dogs. *J Am Vet Med Assoc.* 217:1669-71. 5. Young, D.R., Jeannin, P.C. and Boeckh, A. (2004) Efficacy of fipronil/(S)-methoprene combination spot-on for dogs against shed eggs, emerging and existing adult cat fleas (*Ctenocephalides felis*, Bouché) *Vet Parasitol* 125:397-407. 6. Jeannin, P.C., Green, S.E., Boeckh, A. and Soll, M. (2003) Efficacy of FRONTLINE PLUS (fipronil/(S)-methoprene) for cats against developing stages and adult fleas (*C. felis*) *Proc 19th Int Conf of the World Assoc for the Adv of Vet Parasitol.* Merial Australia Pty Ltd, Level 6, 79 George Street, Parramatta NSW 2150. \*FRONTLINE and FRONTLINE PLUS are registered trademarks of Merial. \*Advantage is a registered trademark of Bayer AG. \*Revolution is a registered trademark of Pfizer Products Inc. ©2007 Merial Limited. All rights reserved. FRLN-07-004. H&T MCA0059/UB

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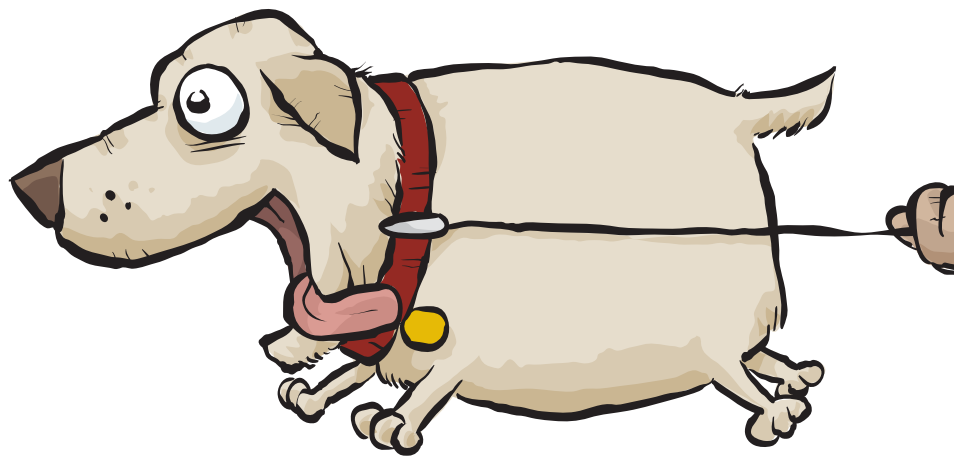


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Gunter's abilities to entertain us weren't relegated to sissy girl stuff. My little brother enlisted him as co-pilot when he decided to break his own version of the land speed record on a homemade go-cart. Will had been sternly reminded by my mum that steep neighbouring driveways were off limits. This was something Will clearly ignored the day that he encouraged Gunter to sit in the front of his go-cart as they prepared to tackle the Pependopolis' family driveway. Us girls watched from below as Will and Gunter careered down the driveway, narrowly missing a parked trailer and letterbox before coming to an alarming skid on an abutting neighbour's flowerbed. I still remember the squeals of scared exhilaration from Will and how Gunter's jowls looked like he was momentarily trapped in a wind tunnel.

## Take time out to really play

The sobering responsibilities of adulthood and pressures of modern living mean that our leisure time is at a premium and space for play is diminished. Sadly, even the responsibility of having a dog means that we often forget to have meaningful playtime with them. Morning and evening walks to the park are a wonderful way to have some one-on one-time with your canine friend. But many of us, once getting to an off-leash zone, tend to let our dogs zoom around and play with other dogs while we engage their humans with our daily chatter. It's hardly a time to really connect to your inner child or inner dog.

Taking time out to really play with your dog is not only beneficial to you but will also be appreciated by your dog. Instead of hanging with your regular posse of off-leash walkers, make a regular date with your dog to go to a different park or beach and spend one-on-one time together. Play ball, run together or find some other action activity to do. In essence, make time to play.

A friend of mine often hides behind a tree or other large obstacle on his walks. He waits until his dog is distracted and then hides. Very quickly his dog, Jesse, realises he's 'missing' and uses his nose to seek him out. My friend believes the mixed look of relief and joy on Jesse's face is priceless and always gets a laugh.

Another friend taught her dog how to jump small obstacles and discovered her dog enjoyed bounding over the low pine pathway borders in Centennial Park. They both made a game of it, her dog Xena, jumps them in a zig zag pattern all the while her human owner runs along praising and encouraging her. At the end of the 'course' both dog and human are panting, almost breathless but always smiling.

## Dogs laugh

Dogs understand laughter and even smile when they're happy. Some breeds actually smile in a way that to the untrained eye can look like a snarl. It's very common in the Dalmatian breed and I've met people who've told me about other breeds that have this similar trait. The lips curl up, the front teeth are exposed and the nose wrinkles—all the while a thin, whippy tail is wildly wagging somewhere in the back. The Dalmatian example might seem a little extreme but all dogs in a happy state of mind show examples of smiles. Look for the relaxed jaw, an open mouth and slightly upward tip of the sides of the mouth. It's a relaxed and blissful face that tells us how happy they are.



## THINK ALL DOG TOYS ARE ALIKE? THINK AGAIN!

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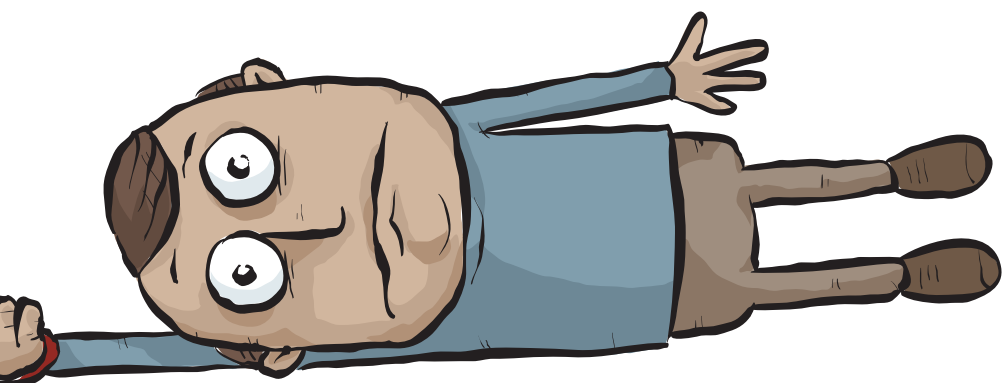
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## It's never too late to have a happy childhood

Since my friend Gisele can remember, she begged her parents for a dog. "I grew up without siblings, initially I wanted a little sister and that never happened so around age ten I started begging and hounding my parents to get a dog. The constant line was that I had to wait until I was older and could be responsible for its care and exercise. I never stopped harping on to Mum and Dad." Finally at age 18, Gisele's parents relented and allowed her to get a mutt of unknown parenting and origins.

"I loved that dog so much, we spent hours together whenever I was home from Uni. He was so much fun to play with and even though I had dreadful allergies, rolling and playing in the grass took my mind off the pressures of Uni and those angst late teen years. He wasn't allowed inside so had his bed in the garage. I used to sneak out at night and sleep with him. Looking back now I laugh at how most of my girlfriends were sneaking out behind their parents back to be with a boyfriend. And here I was sneaking out to sleep with my dog."

## Games you both can play

Games to play with your dog needn't be physically active ones. You can play a range of games that require little exertion that still deliver maximum fun. Remember to always keep games upbeat with plenty of praise. Some tricks will take time to master and that's a good thing as you want her to concentrate and use her brain. Progress in short steps if needed and don't forget to reward your dog when she makes a breakthrough. Always keep game training short—you never want play to become a chore or bore for you or your dog. Once the trick or game is mastered, progress to new or more challenging ones.

### Scent games

Find the treat!

This is a game best played on a dreary day inside. Start with a couple of disposable plastic drinking cups (the opaque kind) upside down on the floor and place a treat in one. Encourage your dog to sniff out the cup with the treat in. Some dogs will paw at the upturned cup or nose it until they tip the cup over to reveal the treat. Voila! You have a star in the making. So now practise this a few times and always applaud and make encouraging hoots and hollers when she gets the treat.

### Field games

Trail of treats

Another scent game that's fun to play in a park is to hide little treats in a quiet area of your dog park. Ask your dog to sit while you place treats behind trees and even perched on low branches. It's great to watch your dog hunt every little treat out while you praise her for her fine olfactory skills.

### Just for fun

Balance a bickie on your nose!

Most of you don't think for a moment that your dog could possibly do something like balance a dog biscuit on their nose, wait... and then snaffle the treat in mid air. But with a little patience they can achieve this fun trick.

Start by having something like a plain water cracker and hold your dog's snout level. Carefully place the cracker in the middle (bridge) of the nose, once balanced say something like 'hold' or 'balance', let go and cry something like 'catch it' or 'it's yours'. Most dogs will drop their nose, the cracker will fall to the ground and then they eat the cracker. Practice this every few days. The aim is to get your dog to balance the cracker or treat without you holding her snout. With time she'll probably be able to snaffle the treat mid air before it hits the ground. More complex items to balance would be the long bone shaped dog biscuits. It will make for a great party trick and your dog will love the attention, praise and laughter.

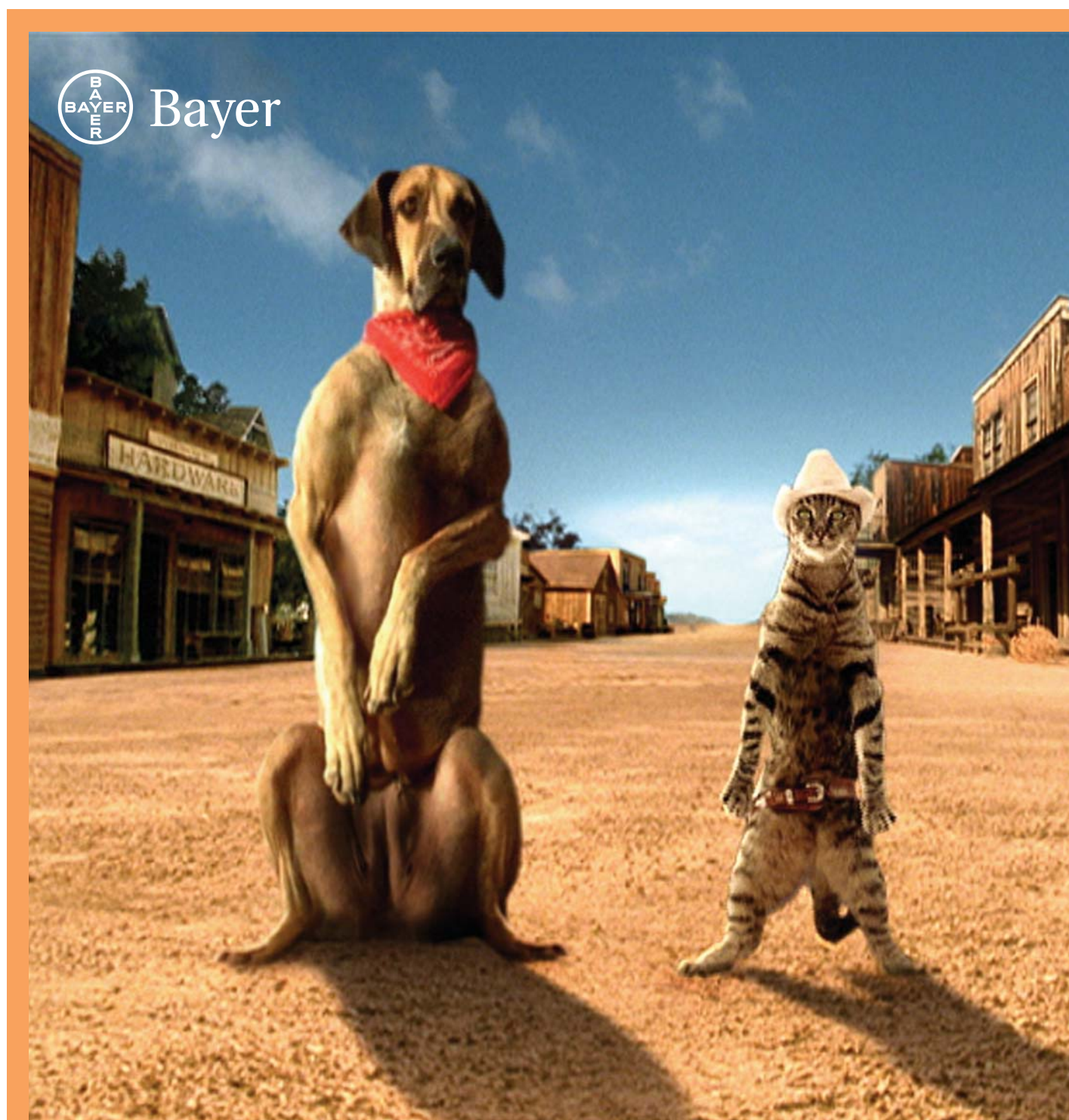
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