# THE NEWSLETTER

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# The Group for Beardless Irises

Issue No. 3 Spring 2007

#### COMMITTEE NEWS

An appreciation by Anne Blanco White "So long, but not goodbye"

Raymond Bomford has been our chairman for all of a decade now and has seen many officers come and go. In 1996 he entered a circle of people who had known each other pretty well for many years and it must have been rather daunting to become chairman after only a year as a member of the Group especially as his predecessor had had to stand down rather suddenly.

However, he introduced himself charmingly in the Spring Newsletter of 1996 as not really an irisarian though he grew irises on a rather unsuitable Midlands soil where he gardened on a wide ranging scale. Any members who have taken over where developers left off should read that article for consolation and encouragement. Ray's basic enthusiasm is really for horse racing and it was necessary to have an eye to the major meetings before sending to him in a hurry. And there were the times when he took off for the high Himalaya regions in both the heights and the valleys, remaining well out of contact, but blissfully happy in his search for new plants. He was an enthusiastic collector of seeds and greatly in favour of their being made available for sowing as soon as possible while germination rates were high. The apparent changes in the British climate worried him, but always we were encouraged to think about offsetting them and to look after the plants more carefully.

During his years as chairman he gave solid and generous support to his fellow officers, especially when the Group went through a very difficult period, and particularly to Philip Allery whose efforts to get colour into the Newsletter were enthusiastically supported. The recent changes have had his full approval.

Over the last couple of years his health has given much cause for concern and it meant that he could no longer get around as in the past so that he felt increasingly unable to fill the post of Chairman. His fellow officers deeply regret his resignation hoping that he will be able to take pleasure from his life-long gardening interests and even go to the occasional iris meeting in coming years.

# Treasurer/Membership Report – Alun Whitehead

One good point about working with plants is that as each season brings a different mix of weather patterns, so each season is different and you never know what to expect. One bad point about working with plants is that each season brings a different mix of weather patterns, so each season is different and ....... You get the picture. With a normal season I would expect to be writing this for the Newsletter in March/April and wishing everyone a good season. With the shift in flowering by 3 weeks earlier, April was already a busy month and the chance to work on Group business had been missed. However, now that the summer lull maybe upon us (?), there is a respite and a chance to make amends.

The first point is one of housekeeping. Anne has reached a stage where she deserves to enjoy the Group rather than be burdened with any onerous responsibility. As you will see elsewhere, Raymond is no longer able to act as Chairperson and so the committee is nominating Anne for this figurehead post. We could not ask for a

better person to fill the position. The Secretary's position will remain vacant until we find someone with sufficient skill and enthusiasm to enjoy the challenge — please let Brita or myself know if you fancy getting involved. Any objections to the nomination should be addressed in writing to the Editor within 28 days.

Also whilst on housekeeping matters, I noticed that one or two banks have started levelling annual charges on some bank accounts. We have a good relationship with HSBC and do not think that there is likely to be a problem. However, just in case the committee proposes a change to the constitution so that paragraph 7 will now read:

**7 Finance** The Treasurer is empowered to open and maintain such accounts in the name of the Group with banks based in the United Kingdom as may be needed for managing of the Group's funds. The Treasurer shall present audited accounts annually which shall be published in the subsequent newsletter/review and shall be sole signatory of cheques up to £50.00 or such greater sum as shall be authorised by the members; cheques for larger sums must be countersigned by the Chairperson, Newsletter Editor or Secretary.

This will allow us to open an alternative bank account(s) should the need arise. Also as the Secretary's position is remaining vacant, we have added the Editor as a second signature for practical reasons.

In the last Review I mentioned that my two goals for this year were a colour flyer and an improved website. Luckily, a few nurseries locally clubbed together to save costs on the printing and this allowed us to have £200 worth of flyers for a mere £60. I would especially like to thank Ivycroft Plants and Hoo House Nursery without whose willingly offered assistance this could not have happened. A flyer is enclosed with this mailing for interest. Please give it to a friend or perhaps display it if you are running a nursery or a garden club. We do not expect it to bring a vast number of new members, but it should help raise the Group's profile.

The new website is still on the 'to do' list.

#### Extra Seed

As well as the photographs, Sharon sent the following additional seed. Unfortunately it arrived too late to be listed with the Seed Offer. Rather than hold it for the next offer, I am happy to send it to members if they send me a SAE.

06/081	x 'Chartreuse Bounty'	SHW US
06/082	x 'Ever Again'	SHW US
06/083	ensata 'Gingham Geisha'	SHW US
06/084	ensata 'Easter Pastel'	SHW US
06/085	ensata 'Returning Tide'	SHW US
06/086	ensata 'Suizi' – very few	SHW US
06/087	graminea	SHW US

The mention of seed brings us to thoughts of the Review again. The flowers that you are enjoying now will soon be followed by seed pods. Please think of us; we would appreciate any seed you can spare and send to:

GBI, c/o Aulden Farm, Aulden, Leominster HR6 OJT

If you have any photos of your garden or interesting seedlings, please send them along as well. (I am happy to return any prints or CDs. You can also send photos via email to <a href="mailto:alun@auldenfarm.co.uk">alun@auldenfarm.co.uk</a>)

#### Errata for CD accompanying the 2006 Review

By a slip of the brain I labelled *Iris* 'Easter Pastel' as 'Easter Parade' — my apologies to Sharon Hayes Whitney who kindly sent the photographs and more seed.

#### **A Final Thought**

Why beardless Irises? Our Group was founded in 1976 as The Siberian, Spuria and Japanese Iris Group. In 1996 the Group adopted its present title recognising the interest shown in the other apogon and Iridaceae species. However, is this still valid? Clearly, the Siberian, Spuria and Japanese irises are still centres of attention. as are others such as the Pacific Coast and water irises. Some of the iris relations such as Libertia and Sisyrinchium are not to be overlooked and make worthwhile contributions to the garden. But when talking to members. I feel the main focus we share is that we all like to grow plants which add to our gardens, whether these are raised by ourselves from seed or whether we are growing someone else's named cultivar. To my mind it is the garden worthiness of the irises and their relations which is our prime motivator. If this is the case, why should we arbitrarily exclude *Iris japonica* simply because it is a crested iris? It gives a very natural feel to the garden (assuming slugs are held at bay). I am raising the question here and not providing the answer. Clearly, many of the pogons do not make satisfactory garden plants for many members of the Group. However, the Group also covers Junos, many of which are impossible to grow in the normal garden and I am sure that the Species Group covers them better. I have no strong thoughts in the matter, but this is an anomaly and I would welcome members views.

## SECRETARIAL SECTION

#### Anne Blanco White

As far as I can make out moving house is this year's principle occupation. For those who go to good, well-tended soils it isn't too bad. For the rest of us it's difficult. My pet aversion at the moment is the blackbird which specialises in kicking small clods of earth across the decking; on the other hand it is possible that it is collecting slugs for its young, but I suspect it of really being after my worms. I've separated out the first lot of compost from my wormery, but have also put down some dozen sackfuls from the local authority. Some things are growing quite well and others are doubtful, but possibly the recent rain after the drought has cheered them up. Indeed, a lot of plants have enjoyed the wet winter and it emphasises what I keep saying: that the real time to water your gardens is in late February and early March to saturate the ground before the growing season gets under way.

At Wisley on May  $9^{\text{th}}$  'Holden's Child' was flowering well and so were at least three clumps of sibiricas. In general, everything on the Portsmouth Field has benefited from the rains and there is at least one spuria with a flowering spike up.

The Group seems to be in good form, but we still need a new Secretary. This is not an onerous job, but it really is preferable to have the work spread around. It can be very good fun and you do get to know other members. Email availability would help, but isn't essential and if you've just gone online it could be very good practice. Just get in touch either with Anne Blanco White or with Alun Whitehead; not with Brita who has enough with her removal. We'd love to welcome someone.

## Late Spring Show 2007

Thanks to Peter Taggart going to Claire Austin's new nursery and her generosity in letting him take large quantities of spikes, the show really filled the hall. However these plants were nearly all bearded cultivars and so do not really feature in reports for this Group. There were, however, a blue form and a pink form of *I. pallida*.

There were two pots of Evansia cultivars: one probably a *japonica* hybrid and the other - a very small form - allegedly a seedling from I. 'Graznya' though this was its first year of flowering and it will be interesting to see what it does next year. And, of course, I. confusa was present in good form. There was a good colour range of PCIs in their classes and one junior exhibit.

Class 19 for beardless cultivars gave the judges a real problem. Apparently outstanding was a spike of *I*. 'Dural White Butterfly' which first appeared last year, but it was marked down for a bloom defect and only came third (incidentally, this shows every sign of being a good garden plant). First prize went to a vase of 'old fashioned' sibiricas including the charming 'Wealden Summer' and second went to Claire Austin with a vase of blue sibiricas. In Class 20, a vase of Dutch irises included 'Gypsy Beauty' with violet standards and basically cream falls with heavy violet veining. *Ii. graminea, lactea* and *innominata* appeared in class 21 while in class 25 a nice spike of *I. setosa alba* stood out from *Ii. missouriensis* and *chrysophylla*.

The class for non-iris plants was quite well filled and it is nice to see their popularity increasing. The orange flowered *Tritonia coccinea* came top followed by a red *Ixia* and *Sisyrinchium macrocarpum*. A pot of *Romulea bulbocodium* with a fine set of seed pods failed to gain approval which was a shame.

The standard for decoratives continues to be good and the backing foliage was unusual and well chosen. The Emblemata displays were entertaining and well thought out

## Editor's Note

Apologies for this Newsletter being quite so late. We have all been unusually busy at the same time. Alun has explained the changes in his work load and Anne has moved house and is tackling a new garden. We are in the middle of moving to a very old run down house as explained in a couple of articles further on in the newsletter.

I hope it is not too late to ask you to write for the Review in the autumn if you have something you would like to say about your irises this year. Mine have just settled in and bulked out so at least I can lift part of the clumps to take with us without feeling guilty. Not the ideal time but I hope they will survive.

Articles don't have to be all about irises. We are a small group and it would be nice to know more about you and your garden. I am reduced to a completely blank canvas so I'm looking for ideas!

#### SUNDAY APRIL 15

#### Brita Carson

I don't usually have a birthday in April, but Sunday April 15 was a treat of a day, in fact, three treats in one. I'm sorry for anyone unable to attend this bonanza of lectures on irises. As soon as I saw it advertised I just had to hear these speakers.

Tony Hall started the morning off with fantastic slides and descriptions of junos in his inimitable style which I first heard in November 2000 at the Iris Convention in New Zealand. He was again the first speaker on that occasion and he used up my full day's concentration in the first hour. I was exhausted trying to take in this new language of plant names which I couldn't even begin to spell. In the seven years since then, and after reading about them I've enjoyed the challenge of growing a few. Now, I can even be brave enough to say that some I don't like. How can Tony love the spotty little *I. edomensis* when there are such classy individuals like *I. barnumae* or *I. iberica* subsp. *lycotis* to die for?

We all hope he is getting on with writing his book on junos because he owes us the chance to share his knowledge, not before he pops his clogs but before some of us do. This knowledge accumulated over many years of dedication, (or should that be "addiction"?), punctuated with a bit of earthy humour will make an absorbing read worth a fortune. I will take my chance that it won't actually cost a fortune and place my order now.

If it has got a "stan" in it then Jim Archibald has been there collecting information and seeds to share with the rest of us. Jim said he was the light entertainment for the day but I found his talk a fascinating lesson in geography and irises. A seed catalogue from Jim and Jenny is like an encyclopaedia of knowledge to keep as a reference book and a new edition makes an exciting start to a day.

Jim is now producing seed from home-grown plants of irises native to Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. This is lucky for the rest of us because who knows when these areas will become accessible again.

Up until that Sunday I had never been lucky enough to hear Brian Mathew speak but I became hooked on irises after seeing the front cover of his 1981 edition of "*The Iris*" displaying *I. korolkowii*. Had I seen the front cover of the 1989 version with *I. stolonifera* I might not have been growing irises now. I have to admit I garden with my eyes and end up growing only the ones that I see as beautiful.

Brian spoke on reticulata irises which are a joy to grow either inside or out for early colour. Although Brian showed enthusiasm for them all, some reticulatas are very beautiful but others lack grace so are deleted from my list of "must haves".

I'm not sure how the committee will be able to equal the quality of speakers again but hopefully Janis Ruksans is coming from Latvia to lecture at the next Species Day which is likely to be in February next year. I heard him speak at the Bulb Day of the Scottish Rock Garden Group, and enjoyed his enthusiasm for many different bulbs not only irises.

All iris cultivars must have had an origin in a species so if you love irises you should be a member of the Species Group.

# MARWOOD GARDEN, AN INTRODUCTION Roy Harris

My acquaintance with Marwood garden began nearly twenty years ago. This was before I retired and my time was not my own. It must have been during the winter or perhaps the early spring and I still remember the feeling of tranquility as I parked under the wall of the old vicarage just across the lane from the garden entrance which was unmanned with a notice requesting a donation. Walking along the path into the sales area, I came across an open potting shed cum office in which a young chap (remember this was twenty years ago and like us all he is not quite so young now) was dividing and potting plants, although which, I can't now recall, probably Japanese irises, now that I know it was Malcolm Pharoah. We chatted for a while, then he directed me to Dr Smarts house. This was my first meeting with Malcolm and I am happy to tell that it was not to be the last. I knocked on the door, or was it rang the bell, the door was opened by the doctor, I told him my business and although he was unable to assist me, he invited me in and introduced his wife, who kindly arranged tea and biscuits in the front room of the house which looks out through a large picture window over what was to be my first view of this beautiful garden. This was many years ago now and do you know, I still feel the same every time I visit as I did that very first time.

I don't consider myself to be much of a gardener. I don't like cutting hedges or mowing lawns very much and I am not too impressed with weeding, although quite essential I know. But I do like growing things especially growing from seed, the amazement that such beauty and so much of it can be conjured from such a tiny seed. I have recently been introduced to Arilbreds and the germinating procedure for successful growing and I am enthralled by it all.

I guess that like many folk I started off with bearded irises, although they didn't much take to our heavy waterlogged clay which can bake as hard as concrete in summer and as for the fierce sou'westers these didn't do much for them either. Then I found the B.I.S. and was introduced to a bewildering variety of fascinating and beautiful plants most of which I had never come across before and I became hooked. The article by a lady in the USA, whose super yarn in the yearbook a couple of years ago, not only gave me much amusement but described my efforts exactly. However, I also breed poultry and am by necessity and hunger a strict culler and sanity has been restored. My thanks are due to all donors to the seed exchange who gave me the opportunity of experimenting with so many different species and varieties which make up the world of irises and thanks also to the many people for their articles and practical assistance which has been so very helpful.

However I digress, it was Marwood we were discussing, yes it captivated me, it suited me so very well that now I feel as though it is something very personal to me. I love my own patch of course, I spend all day in it with my two JRT's (Jack Russell Terriers) and perhaps that is part of it, my jacks come to Marwood, as the notice says, dogs, as long as they are on a lead and behave themselves are welcome and Doctor Smart was accompanied everywhere by his black Labrador. It is so easy to really get to know all the family of people who are a part of this lovely place. I've never felt crowded as there is always plenty of room. The plant sales

area is friendly and very informal, with every treasure on sale, reasonably priced and very desirable and more to the point you can see all the sales plants growing in the garden.

I had occasion to contact Alum Whitehead recently, and offered comment on a piece he had written using the term 'Crowwing'. Now Crowwing is a term which was used many years ago to describe Fighting Cocks. They were often described by the breast and shoulder colours. For example a black breasted Blackred, would describe a bird which was black breasted, and had red shoulders and saddle, the remainder of the body being black. The wing butts on such a fowl would be bay, the legs and beak could be yellow, white, or willow. A similar bird, but with black legs and black wing butts would be described as a crowwing. Alun asked if I could do a short piece on the terms in common use which relate back to the old days and the old fighting cocks (cocking was first banned in about 1849, not because of cruelty to the birds, but because of the disorder which could attend such events, I believe it was banned on grounds of cruelty to animals around 1950 or so), however an unexpected adventure into the learning of the German language has rather put me behind on this venture, although I hope to do it later in the year. He also asked if due to my love of and proximity to Marwood I would do a piece with this garden as the subject. I said I would be glad to.

With these thoughts in mind I visited and spoke to Malcolm and sought his feelings on the subject. I had given the matter much thought and felt that the garden would be nothing without the family of staff and volunteers who make Marwood what it is. So we propose that we should make it a combined effort and turn it into the Marwood report, and produce it as a diary of the year's events in the garden with special attention given to the collections, especially the irises.

If we can achieve this, we hope you will enjoy the experience enough to make the journey to this lovely, peaceful corner of our country. You will meet all the people involved in making this extraordinary garden function and have a fabulous day out, and if you are really fortunate you may encounter Roland and Jack who enjoy our visits to the garden as much as I do and you will certainly be tempted to take a car load of the super plants home with you from the sales area. I promise you will not regret it. If you should chance upon a tall figure with all his hair on his chin accompanied by two Jacks it may well be me and it would be nice to say hello.

P.S. The Jack Russell Terrier, the true one that is, was first bred at Tordown, near by Swimbridge by the Rev John Russell, the vicar of Swimbridge at that time, if you have the time you can visit his grave in the churchyard of Swimbridge Church and you can refresh yourselves at the nearby pub aptly named the Jack Russell.

#### CHANGES IN THE SPECIES WORLD

#### Anne Blanco White

Dr. Rodionenko reports that there may be a new species in Inner Mongolia. At first this was thought to be a member of the Reticulata complex partly because the local wild life had nibbled the ends of the leaves so that the resulting withering made them resemble those of a reticulata, but the root systems suggest it is more likely that the plants, which were thick on the ground, are members of the Tenuifoliae. Time will tell.

In addition Dr. Rodionenko has been working on his classifications of irises and has recently separated out what we know as *Ii. songarica, ventricosa* and *bungei* into a Genus Sclerosiphon. He has also reclassified *I. lactea* into Genus Eremiris with two species: *E. lactea* and *E. oxypetala.* 

The first you are unlikely to come across in your local garden centre, but forms of the second are not unknown. There will be more detail in the Review.

#### A PREACHER OR AN ADVERT?

#### Brita Carson

The address is new but the house is old. The Old Manse at Johnstonebridge dates from 1709 with several additions over the years and now we intend to add our pennyworth. It was originally the manse for the Church of Scotland minister of the parish. Although Georgian it is very plain, in fact a real mongrel, with a sloping roof at one end and a gable at the other. The main door was changed from the front of the house to the side leaving its 'B' listed Doric columns in place, but the *Lady* from Planning described the odd shape of the exterior as "nice and quirky" as she cheerfully informed us we would have to change our plans. I hope it will become a joy to live in one day rather than the demolition site it looks at the moment with the floors removed to insert a damp course and the chaos that this entails. Skilled tradesmen are like gold dust; thin on the ground and worth their weight.

Conservation, recycle and recycle shout newspapers, magazines and T.V. but most people have bought their houses finished or at least with some form of heating already installed which would be wasteful to change. It isn't until the situation arises when you have the opportunity to actually make changes that your conscience kicks in. Starting with not much more than a soggy wet shell allows far too many options and the first has been which fuel to use for heating. I would like you to think that our decision is based on a desire to protect the environment by reducing carbon emissions but actually we hope our reward is a massive reduction in heating bills! No more paying the gas board monthly to come in an emergency and when you do need them they can't come until after the weekend in four days time which is an eternity without heat and hot water.

The Ground Source Heat Pumps are pretty pricey to install but they are "good for the environment" and we won't be using precious resources of oil or gas which cost a fortune anyway. However it still needs electricity to run them. Some bright spark asked the question "Will taking the heat from the ground make the ground colder than normal and will this affect which plants can be grown on top?". The jury is still out on that one. So what does this mean for a mere gardener having

all the lawn trenched three feet wide and JCB'd four feet deep. I don't know I haven't seen it yet but it is the golden opportunity to redesign the garden using a bit of heavy tackle! Thoughts of lounging in a sunken garden by a pool listening to the water fountain surrounded by pergolas heady with the perfume of old musk roses; or a small amphitheatre listening to a soliloquy by Hamlet; or more likely a wild life pond and lots of frogs with cold feet.

And for supplementary heating which may be needed we have enough wood to last several years from trees that have either fallen down or have been taken down for safety. The new wood burning stoves are so efficient they can even be used in smoke controlled areas, producing a fifth of smoke emissions of a conventional stove which used to cause air pollution. Trees absorb carbon dioxide and generate oxygen but if left to decay in the forest, old fallen trees release the same amount of CO2 back into the atmosphere. By burning the wood in one of these new stoves only 1/3 of the CO2 is produced. The extremely high temperatures reached result from their new design and feed the fire with hot combusted air causing turbulence, drawing unburned smoky gases back through the hot embers of the fire, and actually re-burns the smoke. An average open fire burns with an efficiency of less than 15% because so much heat just goes up the chimney. A new wood burning stove burns at 70% efficiency creating very little air pollution.

It seems to need only occasional cleaning with the removal of the small amount of ash deposits and can burn 24/7. And I can use the ash in the garden and compost heap (in small doses, of course).

The Manse sits on the top of a steep banking covered in various tall trees but they won't last for ever. We need a strategy, an unknown animal to me, to work out when to cut and when to plant. Logs need at least a year to dry out. How many logs will be used in a year? Should we just de-limb the odd branch and make the tree work some more? We need to plan for the future and carefully select the new trees to be grown for generations to come. Trees take on a different perspective now as I hungrily think about their rates of growth and burning potential. Look out all you ash seedlings I'm going to get out my mincer.

A few miles away there is a newly constructed Biomass Plant that is burning all the waste from the timber factory next door. Local farmers have been encouraged to plant up some of their fields with quick growing *Salix* which can be regularly coppiced for use in the Biomass plant to produce electricity. I have some small ornamental *Salix* plants which are two year cuttings meant for a plant sale. These could be planted well away from the house and drains and I could chomp them up for the wood burning stove.

I feel like a cross between a preacher and an advert! I may have to do something totally outrageous to counteract this goody two shoes image. Its bad for my street cred. I'll take out the gas guzzling "Chelsea Tractor", 10 miles to the gallon to get a pint of milk. OK in my dreams, come on Shank's pony.

I wrote this article for the Hardy Plant Society, Scottish Group's Newsletter. That was a month ago to explain my new address. Since then we have made a little progress and the next article explains our next stage.

# PSEUDACORUS, PSEUDABORUS! Brita Carson

While my halo is still in place I thought I would bore you with the story of our new septic tank, well not about the actual tank but how we hope to deal with the total operation. If you don't need a tank it doesn't usually come into day-to-day conversation but for us it has been weighing heavily on our minds. The present system is not up to standard and so we need a new one. That part is expense and straight forward but it's what happens afterwards that has been occupying our thoughts. The pipe taking the final discharge used to cross the field to the river. (I never have liked brown trout). Heavy modern farm machinery has broken this pipe while ploughing the field and so we have to have a new SEPA solution.

Tests prove that the very heavy clay soil is impervious so soakaways are unable to deal with the initial problem. Our first thought was to have a machine operated by electricity to do the necessary but our sewage expert suggested a reedbed. This was a bit of a shock for husband to come to terms with immediately. He has taken on board the ground source heat pumps and the wood burning stove and now he was expected to put his clinical mind to accepting a reedbed. But, with the mention of possibly using water irises, he knew the competition was too great and gave in gracefully knowing he didn't stand a chance.

We are going for the horizontal system which will probably need to be planted with *Phragmites australis* at the receiving end until the first filtrations have reduced the ammonia levels. The ammonia level should be down to 4-6 mg per litre after three months. I should then do tests on the soil pH but the exciting part will be when I feel I can start to plant my pseudacorus. Thankfully I've plenty to start this off but then I'll soon want to experiment with others. I should eventually be able to try growing ensatas which will provide loads of data for Alun as I try them closer to the business end. It will be interesting to see how rich a soil they really want.

At the end where the clear water comes out I hope to create more wetland iris beds although it seems we also need to have two uphill soakaways! Strange new technology. To be "oh so smug" I could use this water for a *Salix* bed and then coppice them for the wood burning stove.

Although the main growing season for reeds is spring to summer the reedbeds work equally well during the winter and it has been proved effective up to  $-12\,^{\circ}$ C and under 2 metres of snow near Roznov, in the Czech Republic. The planting fits neatly into the reeds situated on the north side of the bed and the irises on the south getting cold wind protection and all the sun which will be dappled from the trees on the hillside.

As always weeding is the basic maintenance required to keep everything happy. When the reeds become too vigorous and start to take over I've to thin them out. Can it be this easy? Should my halo slip, I'll let you know but until then I'll be *pseudacorus*, *pseudacorus*, pseudaborus.

#### OFFICERS and REPRESENTATIVES

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PLEASE NOTE SOME NEW ADDRESSES ABOVE.