

The Wedding of Jay Shanahan
Jason Shannon

We decided to elope in a tropical location to get away from it all.

We caught the first flight into Bogotá, high up in the mountains. The flight touched down at El Dorado International Airport, and we caught a Chinese-made Yutong tour bus through the crowded streets heading south, out of the sprawl, into the green slopes of Colombia's interior. Our hotel was a jungle resort south of the city, remote and secluded. Viktorya had found it in the back pages of a TransAt tourism brochure, small font, only a single picture of the resort lodge with high peaks in the background.

The bus cut down a sprawl of side streets and dirt roads. We arrived at the Montaña del Paraíso, dropped our bags in the room and immediately proceeded to the bar. Next to a kidney-shaped pool, the misty green mountains in the background, I sipped a caipirinha, while my lover took a healthy pull from her Pegu club.

We had not told anyone of our impending nuptials. A few friends could probably guess the purpose of this trip, as I'd mentioned years before I might do something like this, but officially we told no one.

My own parents had eloped in a secret ceremony nearly forty years before, four days before Christmas, with just two friends as witnesses and a justice of the peace. Their wedding license was presented as a gift to their parents four days later. I wanted the same thing, only no justice of the peace, no witnesses, no license.

Viktorya came from a religious household. Her parents were strict Catholics living in Lethbridge. When she Zoom-called with them, she had to pretend she and I weren't living together 'in sin', and even had a special alcove in the back room from where she'd make the calls to keep up the ruse. She had a cousin run for MPP on a platform of banning LGBTQ+ topics in education, a sister who protested outside a Calgary women's health centre once a month, and an uncle who's a doomsday preacher living on a commune outside of Fox Creek. She did not fancy the idea of those people witnessing and forming false perceptions of her most intimate moment.

On the day of the wedding, we dressed in simple hiking clothes, packed a bag each, and left the resort at the crack of dawn. I had my handwritten vows folded up and tucked into one of the pockets on the backpack.

We caught a cab across the small barrio, down a dirt road, and then rented a couple of donkeys to trek up the steep slopes. At a plateau about forty minutes up, we stopped at a gazebo. I tipped the muleteer well, and he assured me, in broken English, that he'd wait as long as we wanted. We trekked on foot a little farther up, and came upon a perch on the side of the mountain. The steep green slopes of the Cordillera Oriental outstretched before us, mists filling the valleys below.

"This is it," said Viktorya, smiling.

We were utterly alone. There was no one here except the muleteer fifteen minutes walk down the rocky path at the concrete gazebo. Viktorya ducked in behind a mossy rock on the side of the mountain, taking her backpack with her. She said, "No peaking. You can't see the bride before the ceremony itself."

I took my own bag and took a few steps in the other direction. I slipped out of the t-shirt and khakis, stripping to my underwear right there on the mountainside. I changed into black dress slacks and a white button-down shirt, black tie. Cufflinks. I re-applied my deodorant. Buttoning up the last of my buttons, I brought out my cell phone. There was no signal up here, yet I only needed the camera to check my hair.

Coming back to the cliffside viewing spot, I stood and admired the scenery while I waited for my fiancée.

“Well, aren’t you handsome.”

I turned around. Viktorya wore a light purple sundress. Spaghetti-straps over the shoulders, a loose skirt to the knees, a little cleavage. Her hair was down.

“Arr,” I said in a mock pirate accent, “ye be bootyful, lass.” I stepped in and kissed her, my hand snaking around and pulling her close to me.

She said, “You’re not supposed to kiss the bride until the end.”

“By whose rules, baby?”

“Good point,” she said with a smile, and kissed me again.

Eventually we separated ourselves. She went up to the edge, a sheer cliff falling below her. She said. “You stand here.”

She took up a position opposite me. Took my hands in her own. She began.

She did not have anything prepared in written form. She was going off memory, trying not to tear up. I didn’t interrupt her.

When my turn came, I pulled a folded sheet of paper out of my pocket. I had a speech prepared. It was poetically written, flowy yet clear. I began, “My beloved...”

But we were not alone.

About halfway through my vows, I heard someone coming. They were running up the path with great speed. I thought for a second it might be the muleteer, rushing to tell us of a mudslide of some other natural disaster. Yet when I turned—

It was Andy, my best friend. My friend who should still be in Golden Lake, Ontario. Had he... had he tailed us here? We hadn’t told anyone about Colombia, certainly hadn’t told anyone about this particular spot in the mountains.

Andy was disguised as a shrub. He wore grey-green camo, with branches and leaves pasted to his body, his face and his shaved head painted in the same camouflage pattern. He had a briefcase in his hand.

Running, panting hard, he bellowed, “I’ve got money in the bank! I’ve got money in the bank!”

Money in the bank? Isn’t that...

It was a WWE move.

To swoop in at the last minute and steal the title.

“I’ve got money in the bank! I challenge this union!”

I sighed heavily. Viktorya swung her head around, hung it low and shook it, unamused.

He kept charging towards us on the uneven path. “I’ve got money in the—” He shook the briefcase. His face pausing for a second, he suddenly changed his tune and proclaimed, “I’ve got *Funny Pages* in the briefcase! I’ve got *Funny Pages* in the brief—”

He tripped on a wet rock, stumbling forward. His legs came out from under him, his arms came up. The briefcase went flying, tumbling forward and bursting open on another rock. Sheets of printer paper came funnelling out in a cloud. One whooshed forward in a draft and pinned itself directly against my face.

I pulled it off myself. Reading from it, I said, “And the werewolf came out of the woods and took over the dance floor.”

Back in high school, I had been the scribe, writing down every funny one-liner, moment, or humorous tale that our group of friends had. Most of it, now, is garbled gibberish, unable to be read for lack of context, but back in the day, it was a brick of a manuscript, consisting of thousands of individual one-liners. Our group of friends referred to it as *The Funny Pages*.

Andy, scrabbling to his feet, took a breath and said, “I’ve got *Funny Pages* in the briefcase, and I challenge this union.”

It’s as if our nonexistent priest just put out the offer to speak now or forever hold your peace.

Viktorya rolled her eyes.

Andy then reached into his pocket and pulled something out. Then he got down on one knee, and opened the ring box. Inside was a silver cock ring, the Stag Shop label still looked around the band.

Viktorya said, “I told you not to tell him we were going to Colombia.”

“I didn’t,” said I. “He should be crashing a nonexistent wedding in Yellowknife right now.”

Andy said, “I—”

Then all hell broke loose. The bushes erupted with more than a dozen men in camouflage. They burst out of ditches, from behind bushes, from defiles in the rock. Two of them came right over the cliff edge, springing up like Tibetan Special Frontier commandos. They all had painted faces, camo berets, green and grey military-style uniforms, tightly laced boots. And they were all armed with AK-47s, aimed and ready, their eyes staring down the barrel at the sights.

All three of us froze. I think my hands went up slowly.

A man came forward, lowering his AK-47. In a thick Spanish accent, he said, “What is all this ruckus? You have money in bank? Where is money? It will be your ransom, *gringo*.”

“Oh, shit...” I whispered.

This interruption wasn't some elaborate prank of Andy's.

They were the FARC. The *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*.

Communist guerrillas.

The guy who spoke English saw my vows in my raised hand. He snatched the paper away violently. “Love... partner... give my life to this union... *Mierda*, is this a wedding?”

“*Si*,” Viktorya babbled through clattering teeth.

The guy next turned to Andy, who still had the cock ring in his hand. “And you are *puto* here to crash ceremony?”

“Uuuhhh...” said Andy.

One of the other armed men barked something in Spanish to the guy speaking English. The guy speaking English said, “Okay, all of you, come with us, *rápidamente*. We take you into jungle. Then we send picture of you with today's newspaper and *puto's* bank arrange transfer, *si*.”

The next thing I knew, my hands were being twisted behind my back and zipties were being synched around my wrists.

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We were force-marched for four hours without rest. Dense jungles, steep slopes, misty valleys, chilly high altitudes. I think they marched us clean over the mountain.

The guy who spoke English was named Xuarez. Early on, there was a lot of chatter between him and the others in Spanish. I didn't speak Spanish. Andy didn't speak Spanish. Viktorya spoke very little. After a time, Xuarez came back and explained the situation. He apologized to Viktorya and I about crashing the wedding.

“A marriage is a momentous occasion. We would not have barged in if we'd realized, instead just followed *puto* as he left in disgrace and disappeared him then. But we did not know. *Señorita* was not wearing white dress, and there was no one in attendance. And no *padre*. We thought you were just *gringo* backpackers. Do not fear, we will make it up to you. When we arrive in camp, we will throw you a lavish wedding. Beautiful white dress, sacred vows, big dancing reception. Our minister of intimacy will preside over the ceremony.”

The minister of intimacy... great.

Xuarez left it unspoken, but Viktorya spoke enough Spanish from the month-long trek to Mexico City during the Day of the Dead festival when she was twenty-one to know the prospects were not so bright for Andy. They continuously used a homophobic slur to refer to him. He had been ‘challenging the wedding’, seemingly to win my hand. And he had a cock ring in a jewelry box. And a tattoo of a squid on his forearm that, from the right angle, looked like a huge boner. From what Viktorya could gleam, he was being judged for being a sexual deviant, for breaking up our holy union with his ‘*puto* agenda’, and for being a self-centred egotist concerned with getting his rocks off at the expense of, or to the detriment of, civil society. Or some other such homophobic

nonsense. This, despite the fact that Andy himself is married to a woman (a ceremony, I might add, that I did not crash).

“They say they’re going to...” Viktorya whispered, squinting and concentrating on the Spanish conversation ahead of us. “I don’t know what the word *gulago* means.”

“What is she saying?” Andy whispered from behind me.

“She says you’re being unpersoned.”

Noon came and went, and, some hours later, we arrived at their camp. It was in a jungle, with barracks and lean-tos and small cabins all camouflaged under a canopy of green. Weathered-faced workers hacked machetes at plants in the field, while more guerrillas oversaw the operation while cradling their rifles. You could tell who the field workers were, and who were the supervisors. The workers were Indigenous, I realized, some remote group up here in the mountains, probably living their own lives until these Spaniards came marching in, proclaiming their liberation from European colonizers via the ideology of the European Karl Marx.

Then I realized what they were farming. It was coca leaves. Cocaine. The FARC didn’t just get its money from wealthy *gringos*, it seemed.

As it turned out, the minister of intimacy had recently been purged. Great, I thought. I won’t have to read vows in front of a bunch of guerrillas, we’ll just go straight to the coca fields. Except for Andy, who will probably suffer the same fate as the late minister.

But no, it turned out the minister of the economy was promoted. He was the new minister of the intimacy. He was actually running both departments for the time being. One of the guerrillas in the camp directed Xuarez and us to the new guy, who was knelt down showing some poor farmer how to tell when the coca was ready to be harvested.

When he heard his name, he turned. I saw the profile of his face. I saw the moustache.

“My god,” I whispered to Viktorya. “That guy looks like Pablo Escobar.”

“That’s rather racist,” she replied. “Not every Colombian looks like...”

But before she could finish, the man turned to face us and stood up. His left eye was gone, and the left side of his skull was blown away. In fact, now that I was looking at it, he had a pallid complexion.

“On second thought, I think he *is* Pablo Escobar,” she murmured.

The FARC had reanimated his corpse somehow. He wore faded, light blue, 90s jeans. He sported a bushy moustache. His hair, minus the part blown away at the exposed flesh wound on the left side of his skull, was black and wavy.

All three of us stood there slack-jawed.

Xuarez said, “This day is special for you, no? You chose today for a reason. Do not worry, *amigos*, this evening you will be wed. Pablo, Pablo, listen to me. At sunset, we do a wedding – *weh-ding*. *Comprende?* Come, *señorita*, the women will help you with a proper wedding gown, *si*.”

Then hands appeared on Viktorya's arm and she was being pulled away. She snorted "Hey!" and I stepped forward to grab hold of her other arm like a tug of war. But one of Xuarez's men rapidly stepped forward and rammed the butt of his rifle into my gut. I doubled over and collapsed to a knee. I heard Viktorya whimper, probably from seeing me struck. Then she was inside one of the shacks.

I gradually got to my feet.

Andy said, "You know..."

I snorted, "Unless your cock ring is a magical James Bondian gadget that can get us out of here by blowing all the mines you've placed, I don't want to hear it."

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Andy was put to work digging a latrine. Since he was a sexual deviant, he'd almost certainly be sent into the high mountains to mine minerals until he died, but they needed to run the show trial first. In the meantime, they gave him an unsavoury job at the camp, while his ankle was chained to a boulder with a heavy logging chain.

I was given some plantain chips for lunch, and then put with a group of Indigenous farmers who were cultivating coca leaves. They didn't speak English. I don't even know if they spoke Spanish. They communicated by gestures, showing me where to plant, how deep to dig.

Before I barely got started, I was pulled away and brought to a private shack. Xuarez was there, as was zombie Pablo Escobar. The drug lord was shirtless and lying on a wooden table. Bullet holes were scattered across his torso.

Xuarez said, "Minister Escobar wishes to speak with you regarding the statements you wrote."

"My vows?"

"Does that pass for vows in *Gringostan*? Anyway, he'll just be a minute. For now, try this shirt on. It's mine. I think it might fit you."

I had no choice but to strip to the waist. He presented me with a jungle-green camouflage Mao jacket. I buttoned it up. It fit.

As I was buttoning it up, a smoking, middle-thirties woman injected Pablo with something. He had some sort of cancer chemo port on his chest, and she looked to be inserting the very large needle directly into his heart. He twitched and roused a bit. Next, the woman brought in a car battery and set it on the table. Hooking booster cables up to it, she then connected Pablo's right index finger, and his left, being careful to stand back as she clamped on the latter. His body twitched and spasmed violently. She stood back and watched. Xuarez didn't even seem to notice. Instead, he handed me a pair of pants with the same camo pattern as the jacket.

At last, the woman disconnected the battery, and the corpse of Pablo Escobar sat upright on the table immediately. It blinked, shook its head. The woman offered him a shirt.

Coming back to himself, Escobar buttoned up the shirt, then turned his gaze to me. "*Señor Shanahan...*"

He ran through the plans. Weddings were not his usual duty. He was minister of the economy. I came to realize that he was here to maximize the coca output. But he was committed to a glorious, one-of-a-kind wedding. That, he would certainly accomplish, I thought.

He tore up my vows. They were nonsense, he proclaimed. Nothing in there about a covenant with God. Nothing in there about love and family blessed by the community. “You *gringos* have no connection to the past, to heritage. Everything is me, me, me. No concern for family. No concern for community. No concern for wider society,” said the world’s most notorious drug lord.

Xuarez left me and Escobar to plan the impromptu revolutionary wedding.

“Do not worry, it will be simple. *Señorita* will be walked down the aisle, given away, we say vows. Then, dinner and dancing.”

His English was quite good. I asked him, “Mr. Escobar, how exactly—”

“*Cadre* Escobar, *por favor*,” he insisted.

I got the hint. He was not to be questioned.

We went through a simple timetable for the evening, and then, zombie Pablo Escobar attempted to teach me how to tango.

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This was my wedding. Two dozen armed revolutionaries, ten or fifteen Indigenous coca farmers, one convicted unperson, and an undead drug kingpin were there to witness this most special and intimate of moments.

I stood at the makeshift altar. It was outdoors, the sun dipping towards the west. There was a small gazebo behind Escobar, the sun tinting orange in the valley beyond. A statue of the Virgin Mary was there as well. Revolutionaries sat on cheap wooden chairs and crates. I was dressed in a green camo Mao suit.

At the other end, Viktorya appeared. She was wearing a semi-traditional wedding dress, a long flowing gown, with sleeves to the wrists. The neckline wasn’t frumpy, but neither was it all that sexy. The dress and the veil were green, grey and white camouflage. Suarez, in another Mao suit, was at her side, ready to walk her down the aisle and give her away.

Andy was there, too. Probably to keep an eye on him. His wrists were still bound, and he had a guard posted to him. As Suarez began to walk my partner down the makeshift aisle, Andy fumbled with both hands in his pocket. They must have left him with his cell phone. It would do him no good out here; he’d have absolutely no signal. He pulled it out, fumbled with it. It began playing a song: Salty Dick’s *Whores of Sailortown*.

I looked over his way. He had a great big greasy smirk on his face.

Viktorya arrived at the altar. Suarez passed her off. With prodding from Escobar, I lifted her green veil. She looked just as bemused as I.

Zomblo Escobar said, “Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today...”

He read through the standard script. The *standard* script. There were nods in there to Catholicism, platitudes about commitment and celebration, and a sprinkling of communistic jargon.

On it went.

He turned to me. “Do you promise to have and to hold *Señorita* Skaiffe for as long as you both shall live?”

Seeing his pallid complexion, I wondered if death was the cutoff.

He continued, “In sickness and in health, for better or for worse, in richness or in poorness – although, parenthetically, I should add that in richness you would both get the firing squad.”

I sputtered, “Um, now? Do I say ‘I do’?”

“*Si.*”

“I do.”

“And you, *señorita*, do you take...”

She replied in the same tone.

“Do you promise to fight valiantly, side by side, for *la revolución*?”

“I do,” we both said in turn.

“Do you pledge to be fruitful and multiply, bringing joy into each others’ lives and new *revolucionarios* into the movement?”

I had myself sterilized eleven years ago. Perhaps I shouldn’t mention that.

“I do.”

“Do you promise to open your union to criticism and struggle sessions within the *comunidad revolucionario*?”

Viktorya and I met each others’ gazes. She was sighing with her eyes.

“I do.”

Zomblo Escobar smiled and clapped both of us on the shoulder. “Then, by the power vested in me...”

I saw something around his neck. Previously tucked into his jacket, now it was jostling about freely. A small cylinder on a chain.

“By the *Comunidad Revolucionario de la Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo*...”

It was a dog whistle.

“I now pronounce you *señor* and *señora*! You may now kiss the bride.”

Thinking quickly, I smirked a little to Viktorya. Then I leaned in to kiss her—

And at the same moment reached out and snatched the dog whistle around Escobar’s neck and yanked it. My lips touched Viktorya’s, but then I quickly pulled away and, bringing the whistle to my mouth, blew hard – blew until my face turned purple.

No sound was made. Escobar stumbled backwards and looked at me cockeyed. Xuarez grabbed his AK-47, unsure of what was happening.

All was quiet for a long moment. No one moved. The wind rustled through the trees.

Zomblo Escobar said, “*Señor*, when we convene our next struggle session, I’m afraid I’m going to draw attention to—”

The ground shook. A tremendous thumping echoed through the trees. Xuarez now whirled around, thinking Bogotá and the CIA were doing a bombing run. Every other revolutionary here likewise was on edge, many grabbing their rifles as well. A fearsome cry sounded throughout the jungle. It was a mix of a cow’s moo, a pig’s oink, and a lion’s growl. The thumping was getting closer, as though King Kong were charging up upon us.

A four-thousand-pound hippopotamus came rampaging out of the jungle. It was surprisingly fast, blitzing its way through a clearing and steamrolling a makeshift table where coca leaves were being bundled. It bellowed again, its call a furious howl.

“*Dios mio!*” I heard Xuarez hiss before opening fire.

Zomblo Escobar said, “Ah, Bessie, where have you been?”

I grabbed Viktorya by the wrist and yanked hard enough that I would have dislocated her shoulder had she not already been running. This was the most dangerous land animal on Earth. We had to get the hell out of here.

Another hippo came charging out of the woods. A revolutionary nearby dropped his rifle and ran. I heard Xuarez scream, and looked over to see him on the ground. His leg was trampled and pulverized. Soon the rest of him was, too.

I dashed to Andy, who was crouching behind some crates with all the gunfire going off. A little shaken, he said, “You know, I’ve still got *Funny Pages* in the briefcase.”

“Actually, you don’t. They were burned for being counterrevolutionary. And the briefcase is loaded up with a shit-ton of cocaine.”

Cadre Escobar was feasting ravenously on the pulped innards of a trampled revolutionary.

“Come on,” I urged, “Let’s get the hell out of here.”

Keeping low, we scurried for the treeline. Gunfire erupted overhead. The roaring bellow of a hippopotamus sounded. One of the lean-to shacks these guys had erected collapsed like so many dominoes. With our camo outfits, we fled into the jungle.

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Three days later, Viktorya and I were back at the resort in the barrio south of Bogotá. We'd had to answer a lot of questions with the Colombian national police. Someone named John Smith in a suit and tie, who I'm pretty sure worked for the CIA, had been there as well. Even now, I was pretty sure we were under surveillance from a vigilante within a Colombian rightwing paramilitary force. There was a van parked out front the resort, and the driver just sat there, behind the wheel, with a pair of binoculars.

After a long night's sleep, I awoke early and went down to the buffet, and ordered a tequila sunrise from the bartender in the corner. Walking back around the pool, I stopped dead in my tracks. There, sitting in a lounge chair, a little red from sunburn, was Bryant, my friend from Oshawa.

Noticing me, he did a double take. Then he raised his rum and coke in a salute. "*Hola*," he said cheerily. "How was the honeymoon?"

I stepped up next to his lounge chair. "What are you...?"

Before I could finish, Andy came strolling out of the bar on the far side of the pool. He was carrying a couple of martini glasses. To Bryant, he said, "They didn't have any cherry Smirnoff, so... oh, hey."

"This resort?" I gawked. "You're staying at *this* resort?"

He looked sheepish. "Well... this is awkward."

I grumbled and rubbed my temples.

Suddenly, I felt Viktorya's hand on my back. I turned. She was wearing a skimpy purple bikini, sunglasses in her hair, a towel over one arm.

"Andy," she said standoffishly. She swung her gaze to Bryant. "Bryant, nice to see you're enjoying the sun."

I told her, "Pack your bags. We're catching the first flight out of Bogotá this afternoon. We'll finish what we started in..."

I almost spat out the name of some other country, but I didn't want Andy to follow us there with another briefcase full of *Funny Pages*. Where could we go? The Tiger's Nest monastery in Bhutan? Eriksfjord? The isolated hills of the Kerguelen Islands? Perhaps a research station on the Antarctic Peninsula.

"You know, you are technically married," said Andy.

Yes, we were pronounced *señor* and *señora*. We are *technically* married, although that particular asterisk isn't the one I'd wished to have stamped onto my partnership.

A glass shattered in the buffet behind me. It sounded like a waiter dropped his tray. I turned. Dressed in camo gear, with fake insignia on the shoulder and above the breast pocket, the rightwing paramilitary commando from the van out front came marching up with three of his buddies. They all had pistols mounted on their belts.

“Señor Shanahan,” the lead guy said urgently. “We need you to come with us at once. Your expertise with black magic is required.” All four of the vigilantes crossed themselves at words ‘black magic’.

He grabbed me by the shoulder to persuade me of his seriousness. “A merman Laurens de Graaf has washed up on the beach south of Cartagena. Come, *rápidamente*.”

Before he could pull me by the arm, he noticed Viktorya, lithe and barefoot and sporting nothing but a small purple bikini. To me, he whispered, “You let your wife go out semi-naked in public like this?”

“She’s not my wife,” I grumbled.

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This concludes *The Wedding of Jay Shanahan*.

Rarely can an author pinpoint the exact moment a story popped into their mind. Often times characters, plot points, or ideas develop gradually, or at separate times, and come together slowly. That’s not the case here. On November 26th, 2022, while chilling in a hot tub late at night with friends, a little too inebriated on Gdansky Spirytus 76, this story came spilling out.

Here are the notes I made while under the influence:

- Jay and Viktorya get married in Colombia
- Andy shows up to disrupt ceremony with *Funny Pages* in the briefcase
- Zombie Pablo Escobar (Zomblo Escobar)
- His ghost hippopotamus
- The FARC
- Cock ring, because Jay is naked and erect
- Minister of Intimacy approves of ceremony
- Salty Dick’s *Whores of Sailortown*
- “Money in the bank” is a WWE reference, to show up at any time and challenge a match

Let that be a case study for anyone who petitions and author on where they get their ideas. An audio recording of the same notes, recorded in the hot tub, is included in the outro of the audio version of this story.

Jay Shanahan is a character I’ve been playing around with for a little while now. If you want more of him, check out the story *The Funeral of Andy Buttons*. I’m also working on a novel titled *Viva la Winter*. Both the story and the first chapter of the novel are available at www.jasonmshannon.com.

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