

Rare silver ball images emerge from collection

Work has started on telling the stories behind the Fletcher Jones factory – as rare images of the silver ball emerge from engineer Ralph Jones' personal collection.

Missing: one old cross, last seen at FJs.



Retired: the second (and final) Fletcher Jones cross sits in council storage, having been replaced by a more modern cross that is erected on the Uniting Church. The whereabouts of the original FJ cross, first used in 1967, remains

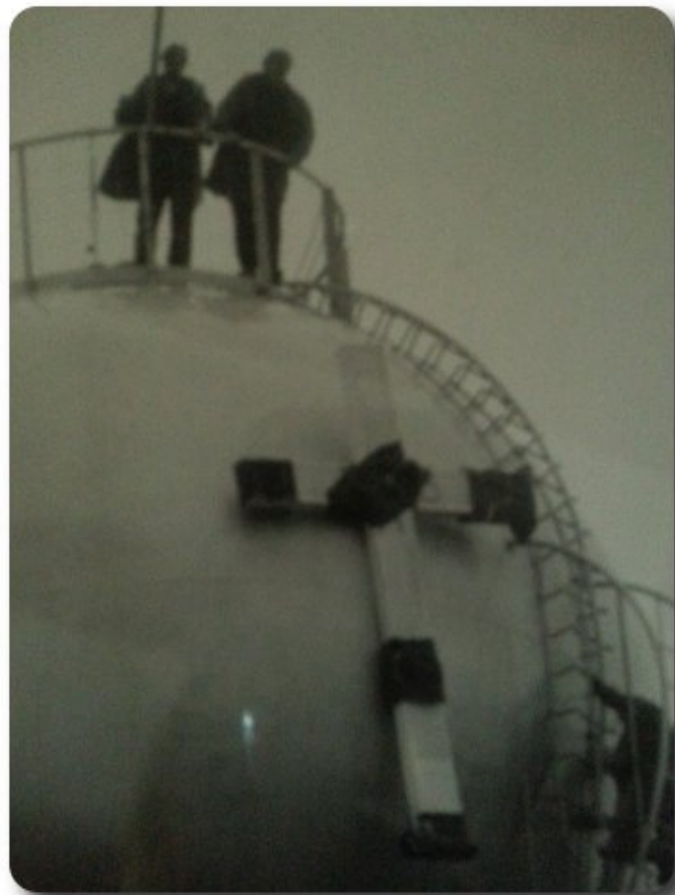
unknown*.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] W [/dropcap]ith the former Fletcher Jones factory in Warrnambool [officially changing hands](#) last Thursday (19/6), there has been a renewed focus on tracking down the iconic, original fixtures in the hope that they can be returned to the site, including the very first FJ cross.

New owner, the Geelong-born, China-based businessman **Dean Montgomery**, has indicated his willingness to restore the garden furniture and features, including what we call 'The Man in the Pressed Pants', but who was formally known as 'the FJ man', who once stood so proudly in his pleats at the front of the property.

The man, unfortunately, is now a broken shell of his former self. What does remain, however, has been enough to inspire Mr Montgomery to consider commissioning an artist to rebuild his legs and restore him to his full glory.

Another iconic piece of the original factory that is proving harder to trace is the original Fletcher Jones illuminated cross that was winched up the silver ball water tower each Christmas (and removed after every Easter) to cast its comforting glow across the city.



Up she goes: this image is believed to show the original, much heavier cross being hoisted into position using a boat winch. Image courtesy Amy Fitzgibbon.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] S [/dropcap]ir Fletcher Jones was a socialist Christian, or what might now be called a left-leaning Christian, who believed the cross would provide a gentle reminder of the role of Christ around an increasingly consumer-driven Christmas.

The cross was first erected when the silver ball was built in 1967 and, it is understood, was literally plugged into a powerpoint on top of the silver ball and ran off a timer.

At some time in the late 80s (nobody we spoke to was exactly sure when), this cross was replaced with a much lighter, aluminium structure that had light bulbs mounted along its sides.

This newer cross continued to be placed on the silver ball each year, right up until 2010 when the deteriorating condition of the ball made it unsafe.

In a now infamous move, the Warrnambool City Council (WCC) – who had taken over responsibility for the cross – found a new home for it on top of a west Warrnambool water tower, owned by Wannon Water.

The cross had barely been lit, however, before it was removed by Wannon Water [after a single complaint](#) by a resident, Graham Keith, who claimed that it was “religious advertising” on “public property”. (Mr Keith must have been apoplectic during all of those years that Sir Fletcher Jones and his family kept “advertising” their religious beliefs).



The second cross, with its somewhat antiquated light system, was relocated – briefly – to a water tower in west Warrnambool before a single complaint saw it removed in 2011. Image: Robin Sharrock, Herald-Sun newspaper.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] A [/dropcap]fter a fierce backlash to the decision by Wannon Water to remove the 2.5m tall cross, the WCC found a new home for it on top of the Uniting Church, in Koroit St, not far from where Fletcher Jones once ran his clothing store, "The Man's Shop".

The cross, however, again proved to be a safety hazard due to its basic lighting system. This cross – the second FJ cross – was retired and placed in council storage and a new, smaller cross, with environmentally friendly LED lighting, was built for the church to use.

What became of the original 1967 cross, however, remains a mystery, despite our attempts to track it down*.

The Uniting Church has certainly had never seen it, and the WCC only have the second cross in storage.

WCC media spokesman **Nick Higgins** sent us the following words about the mystery:

"Our infrastructure chief thinks the wooden cross may have its origins in the 1960s. It's possible it was replaced with aluminium, not because it was rotten, but because aluminium was lighter and easier to install. But we don't know for certain – this was at a time when the council was not closely involved with FJs."

Perhaps a reader can help to fill in the gaps?*

* We now know the answer – [see story here](#).



The second Fletcher Jones cross shone like a beacon across the Warrnambool skyline for more than 25 years, after replacing the original cross that was first erected in 1967. Image: Courtesy Mitch Stansfield.

[box] Former Warrnambool City Council planner and [photography enthusiast](#) **Lisa Gervasoni** is one of the few people to photograph the cross on all three structures. Lisa no longer lives in Warrnambool (although she maintains close ties), but she kindly gave us permission to reproduce the three images below:[/box]





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Motor museum to revive Fletcher Jones site



The new owner of the Fletcher Jones site, Dean Montgomery, is in Warrnambool for a couple of days to check out his purchase and to chat with locals about their ideas. He has also arrived with a few of his own.

OPINION

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] I [/dropcap]t has been a long time since there has been a feeling of genuine excitement around a project in Warrnambool, but the new owner of the former Fletcher Jones factory, **Dean Montgomery**, is about to change all that.

Dean, who is based in China but who grew up in a working class family in Geelong, took some time out today (26/5) to have lunch with *Bluestone Magazine* and the two key players in the [grassroots campaign](#) to save the best of the FJ site, **Tonia Wilcox** and **Julie Eagles**.

Although it was not planned as an official interview, and hence I am writing this as an Opinion piece rather than a story with quotes from Dean, he was quite happy to sketch out his very broad brush plans for the derelict factory and revealed that a key component will be **setting up a classy motor museum in the eastern end**.

Did you hear that? A museum. How absolutely magnificent and not only is this just the sort of usage that *Bluestone* has [always argued](#) would be perfect for such a large and high-profile site, it will provide a much-needed shot in the arm to Warrnambool's tourism appeal.

Dean is a self-confessed motor enthusiast – and so why wouldn't he take this opportunity to create his own giant garage in an industrial space? – but don't be fearful that this will be a museum full of bogan cars and hot rods. Having spent a couple of hours chatting with him today, it is clear that he has much more class than that.



Plans for a classic car motor museum in the former Fletcher Jones site has the potential to open up a new tourism market for Warrnambool, just as the National Motor Museum in Birdwood has done in the Adelaide Hills (pictured above).

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] W hile it is very early days, with so much to be done, such a museum has the capacity to again put Warrnambool on the map as a must-visit destination, just like the [Birdwood National Motor Museum](#) has done in the Adelaide Hills.

It will provide an incentive for tourists on the Great Ocean Road to keep driving beyond Port Campbell rather than cutting up through Timboon, as so many now do, to reconnect with the Princes Highway back to Melbourne.

My head is already running away with ideas, as it tends to do, for an annual classic car rally along the Great Ocean Road that would start at the T&G building in Geelong (which Dean and his brother own and have restored), and finish at the Fletcher Jones site in Warrnambool.

Warrnambool has a strong classic car culture (I can still remember the customised panel van shows held at the Warrnambool Drive-In in the 70s) and, from what I can see, there is no large-scale, up-market, classy car museum anywhere else in Victoria.

What a fantastic opportunity and even though I can't tell the difference between an EH and EJ Holden, I would much rather see a car museum on the site than a hardware store.



The stars have aligned for the Fletcher Jones silver ball and the future is again looking bright. Image courtesy of Andrew Kirkham, [A&E Photography](#).

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] D [/dropcap]ean, who is a

self-made millionaire from manufacturing commercial kitchen equipment (everything from stainless steel benches to chef aprons, glassware and crockery), also has plans for a cafe within the FJ site and has made a very public commitment to keeping (and restoring) the iconic silver ball and gardens.

Indeed from how Dean was talking today, he is not planning to pull down anything, but rather to repair and restore what is there – including removing the asbestos that has, for some strange reason, always been held up as an insurmountable obstacle.

Dean doesn't talk about obstacles: he talks about opportunities. He doesn't appear to fret about "red tape", but talks about finding a way through it.

This is how he has, to date, been able to take on projects such as the T&G building in Geelong and the Leura Hotel in Camperdown (be sure to stop and take a peek in the window next time you are passing through).

For those who had written the FJ site off, it is a reminder of what positive, creative thinking can do. For those who always believed in its potential – like the 600-plus people in the [Save the Silver Ball and Fletchers Gardens](#) group – it is a dream come true.

Warrnambool has a beating heart again, and it is round, silver and sitting on top of three red legs.

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A different way of doing things



Up it goes: The Fletcher Jones silver ball (sans silver)

is hoisted into position in 1967 with campaigner Julie Eagles' sister watching the action.

OPINION

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]T[/dropcap]oday marks the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the former Fletcher Jones factory and iconic silver ball, with confirmation that it has been sold for about \$1 million to a man by the name of **Dean Montgomery**.

I say a new chapter, because Dean – even at face value – appears to be a person who does things very differently to what Warrnambool is used to in that he doesn't see heritage as an obstacle, but as an asset.

We know this because he is already involved with restoring and renovating the historic Leura Hotel in Camperdown. We also know this because, even more incredibly, Dean joined the grassroots campaign, [Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher Jones Gardens](#) which is being driven via Facebook, prior to the announcement of the sale. He even posted a wonderful photograph of the ball that he was given by the volunteer groundsman at Pleasant Hill, **Lex Caldwell**.

This doesn't sound like a man who is about to bring in the bulldozers and knock the whole thing down to replace it with apartments or "big box" retail like that which dominates the outskirts of Warrnambool.

Indeed, in 2011, Dean was quoted in the [local Camperdown newspaper](#) as saying: "We're (he and his brother) both passionate about heritage buildings and restoring them, it's what we do."



The new owner of the former Fletcher Jones factory, Dean Montgomery, who is passionate about history.
Image: Camperdown Chronicle.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]D[/dropcap]ean, to my mind, represents a generational change for how things can be done in Warrnambool, where a developer with a vision and the funds works *with* the community to create something special, and enduring, on what is one of the most prominent and important sites in the city.

This doesn't mean the whole derelict building will be preserved (nobody expected or wanted that), but it does mean that an iconic landmark that is so special to the community will be retained. Word has it that Dean already has cranes organised to start tidying up the ball.

That all of this is happening is testament to how grassroots activism can work when people unite for a common cause, and the Save the Silver Ball campaign has united people.

Living in Tasmania for about six years taught me everything I know about the ability of ordinary people to fight for something they loved, even if they were told that they were being unrealistic, out-of-touch or nostalgic at the expense of progress.

The people who fought, and continue to fight, for Tasmania's precious native forests have had everything thrown at them, including physical violence, yet they keep going because they know the battle is worth it. Native forests cannot be replaced simply by planting more trees: each forest is unique.



The Weld Angel (aka Allana Beltran) became a potent symbol of the campaign to save the Weld Valley in Tasmania from being logged. Image: Matthew Newton/Tasmanian Times.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] A
[/dropcap]mong the bravest of those fighting for Tasmania's forests was a woman called **Allana Beltran** who became the potent symbol of the anti-logging movement after dressing as an angel, decorated with cockatoo feathers and a long white

curtain, and hoisting herself high among the trees in the Weld Valley, in southern Tasmania, where she sat poised on a tripod in silent protest.

“The Weld Angel”, so beautifully captured by freelance photographer **Matthew Newton** who’s image went around the world, provided an evocative reminder of what would be lost if the value of everything in the world was measured only by economics.

In Warrnambool, the Fletcher Jones silver ball has proven to be a Weld Angel: a galvanising symbol of what is irreplaceable and worth preserving.

More than 600 people fell in behind the campaign on Facebook to share their memories, photographs and ideas about how to preserve a unique part of the skyline and landscape.



An early image of the silver ball that was posted to the Save the Silver Ball page by new owner, Dean Montgomery.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] B
[/dropcap]ehind the scenes, campaigners **Julie Eagles** and **Tonia Wilcox** – among others – met with the powers that be, agitated, asked questions, wrote reports, emailed, filmed, phoned, photographed and held gatherings at the Warrnambool Hotel to thrash out how to keep the ball in the air. (And *Bluestone Magazine* was right behind them.)

Of course there were the critics and doubters who said it was all too hard (for whom?) and would cost too much (compared to what?) and that it would be so much easier to just knock it all down and start over again, just like in the Tasmanian forests.

But some people think – and act – very differently and **Dean Montgomery** looks like one of those people.

A new chapter is not only starting for Fletcher Jones, but for the whole city.

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**Don't drop the ball on FJ's
silver icon**



And up it goes...the Fletcher Jones silver ball (which is not looking quite so silver) is carefully placed onto its tripod. The ball has watched over Warrnambool for more than 45 years. Image supplied by: Julie Eagles.

OPINION – Carol Altmann

[box] The campaign to restore the Fletcher Jones silver ball is gathering pace, amid questions of whether it is still structurally safe. [The group working to save the ball](#) held its first think-tank last week to map out a strategy.[/box]

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] I [/dropcap] want to offer some words of reassurance about Warrnambool's iconic Fletcher Jones silver ball: it will not suddenly topple off its perch and roll down Lava St.

Ralph Jones, an engineer and the son of Sir Fletcher, was much smarter than that. He made sure that the water tower not only

looked fabulous, but was engineered to withstand Warrnambool's excoriating weather.

According to those who worked on the ball, it sways a few centimetres in the wind and this is not a bad thing, as it means it bends to weather, rather than chests it like a brick wall.

The ball also has legs that extend into the silver ball itself (see photo above), and this means it can't roll away unless all three pylons were rusted through and, as of its last thorough inspection in 2010, there was no suggestion of this being even remotely close.

Now that we have cleared that up, the question remains as to why this magnificent, retro, visionary and unique piece of industrial art that has watched over Warrnambool and welcomed its visitors since 1967, is being left to rust.



The campaign to preserve the silver ball

has prompted some wonderful images of the structure, including this one by Kate-Maree Jackway.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] D
[/dropcap]espite being heritage listed for its local and state significance, the job of caring for the silver ball has fallen into the too-hard basket all because its most recent owner, Ian Ballis, went into receivership in 2012.

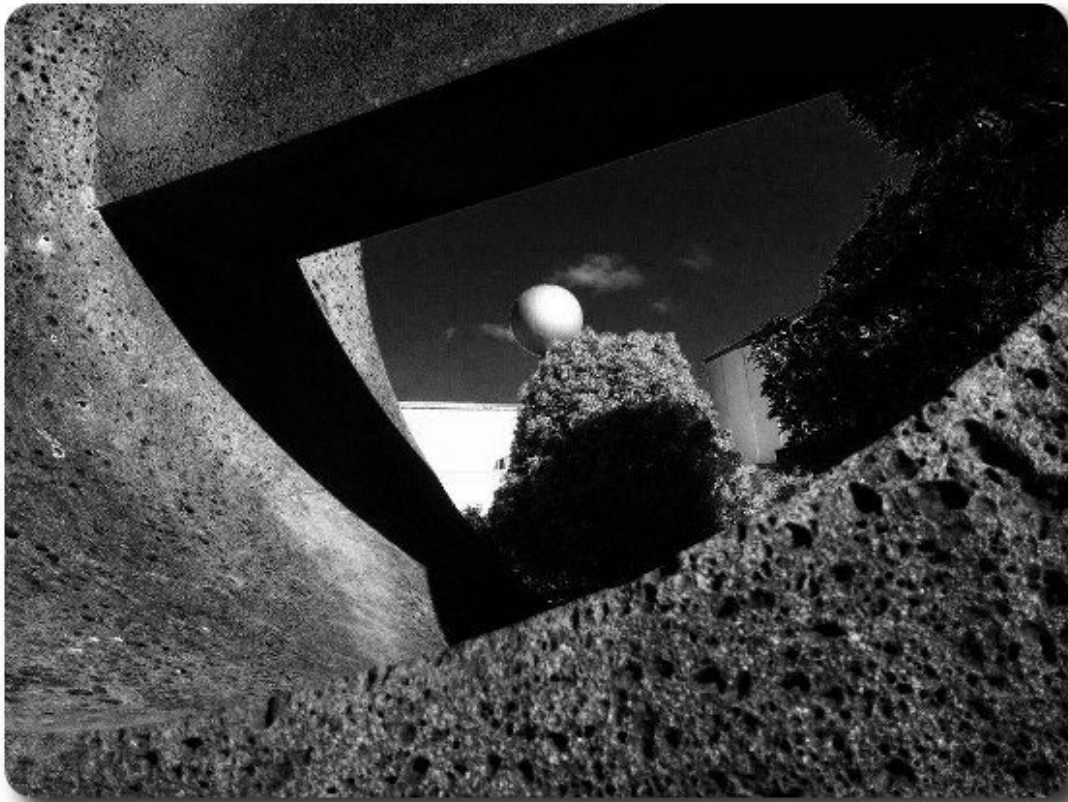
The financial misfortune of just one man has been enough to throw the future of an iconic Warrnambool landmark into jeopardy.

There was no plan B.

The ball is not about to topple over, but it does need annual inspections and on-going repairs, as required, to keep it from rusting in Warrnambool's sea air. It has also not been painted for many, many years.

Given how shabby it looks these days, no wonder some people consider it an eyesore and question whether it is worth saving.

But the [Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher Jones Gardens](#) group thinks differently.



Another perspective, this time by Gordon Baldwin, shot through the Robert Ulmann sculpture that pays tribute to Sir Fletcher Jones.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] T
[/dropcap]his motivated bunch of people know that if the silver ball is removed, Warrnambool will lose an irreplaceable part of its skyline and its social heart.

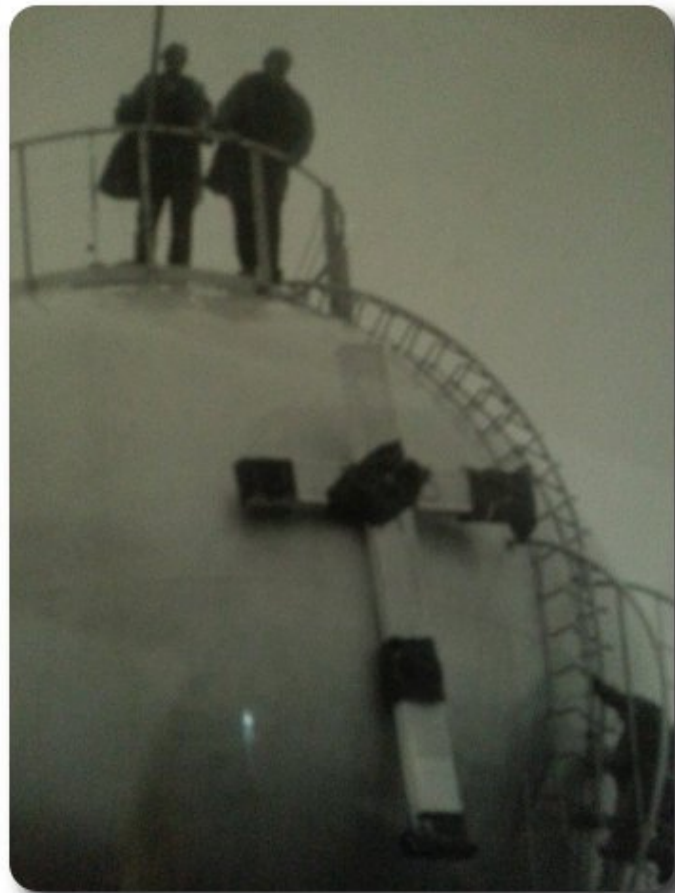
The group held a think-tank last Thursday to brainstorm ideas to save the ball and a lot of the discussion was around how much it would cost to maintain each year, where to find a crane for the work, and how to raise funds for all of these things.

In trying to answer these questions, it is worth looking back at recent history.

The Warrnambool City Council owned the Fletcher Jones site from 1992 to 2007 and, I presume, had a maintenance plan in

place for the ball during those 15 years. How much did this cost and what work was involved? Could it continue this work if the community helped to off-set some of the expense, as is happening with [the \\$4 million redevelopment](#) of the Reid Oval football park?

There is a precedent with the Fletcher Jones silver ball for such an arrangement.



This image, supplied by Amy Fitzgibbon, shows workers pulling up the illuminated cross for the festive season. Vertigo? What vertigo?

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] A

[/dropcap]fter the site was sold to Ian Ballis in 2007, the council continued to pay for the illuminated cross to be hoisted onto the silver ball each Christmas up until 2010, when the cross was removed completely.

For those three years, **Keppel Prince Engineering** donated the use of a crane, so perhaps Keppel Prince would consider donating a crane again for annual inspections and maintenance work?

And maybe Hammonds Paints, Ponting Bros or even Bunnings might consider subsidising the cost of the paint and other materials?

If one thing is certain, it is the ball will only be saved through creative – not mainstream – solutions.

The Save the Silver Ball group is already working on ideas for a public fundraising campaign and a spring picnic. I really like the idea of a reviving an annual Christmas picnic in the fabulous Pleasant Hill gardens, with food, musicians, market stalls and a treasure hunt for the kids, with a portion of the proceeds to go toward annual maintenance of the ball.



The silver ball can be seen for miles around Warrnambool, including from above Lyndoch. Image by Butter Nutz.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] A [dropcap]nd then there is crowd-sourcing through online fundraising sites like [Pozible](#), where author Regina Lane recently raised \$15,000 in a matter of months to write the story of [Saving St Brigid's](#) at Crossley.

If we can find \$4 million for an upgrade of a football oval, and [\\$2 million for steeplechase](#) horse racing in Warrnambool, surely we can't give up on the silver ball because it might cost 10, 20 or even 30 thousand dollars a year to maintain?

The greatest travesty would be to see the ball pulled down because of a perceived lack of money: what is lacking is not money, but positive, creative thinking and a large dose of motivation.

And the Save the Silver Ball group has this in spades.

Far from giving up, as [our local newspaper appears to suggest we do](#), the fight has only just begun because the silver ball does not belong to Ian Ballis, or the council, or the State Government or Heritage Victoria – it belongs to *all* of us and we each need to do what we can, however small, to help keep the ball in the air.



The iconic silver ball is far from a write off, but needs an ongoing commitment by the community to keep it in the air.

[box] Bluestone Magazine is committed to the campaign to save the best of the Fletcher Jones site. Please join the 500-plus people at the [Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher's Gardens Facebook page](#) to be part of this effort. [/box]



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