

CULTURAL ROUTES OF THE

AZORES

*Personalities*



DIAS  
DE MELO



José DIAS DE MELO (1925-2008) is one of the few contemporary writers known nationally, not only because of the amount of books he wrote and published, but also for how often he did so; and, above all, because he chose subjects that only he knew how to build upon, touching the most profound and universal human traits, using the Azorean reality. For that, Dias de Melo is, therefore, a cornerstone writer in Azorean cultural production and, thus, essential for whomever wishes to understand the literature currently made by Azorean writers.

Dias de Melo's literary work was built upon two main parameters: the first has to do with our people and their cultural experiences, which so wonderfully document the relationship of life and death, presence and absence, love and hate — which, for centuries Azoreans established with the sea, their daily partner; the second is ruled by the writer's need to reflect on his condition of man and writer, projecting his own writing knowledge and experience: when he mentions whalers, emigrants or writers, Dias de Melo bases his work on what life has taught him — using an admirable narrative technique, a linguistic freshness which doesn't give in to folkloric ease or regionalisms, a simple authenticity of the human types he recreates, thus updating the living echoes of that telluric past, way beyond the islands' colonization, where, as Nemésio guaranteed, Azorean life is spiritually projected.

Amongst his vast literary work, one must emphasize *Dark Stones* (1964), a life narrative, labors and death of two defeated heroes — Francisco Marroco and João Peixe-Rei — written in a register appropriate to the awakening times Portugal lived through in the 1960s: the islands' chronic poverty, joined with the news of soldiers lost in the colonial wars, with no end in sight, which fueled a new wave of emigration towards America — not by jumping onto the whaling boats towards New Bedford, like before, but by invitation letters, or with a “tourist” visa to the dairy farms of California.

When we talk of *Dark Stones*, we mean Azoreanity, specifically Pico Azorianity, which is the same as saying, the soul of a hardy people that never let themselves soften by centuries of “hunger, droughts, cyclones, volcano fire, earthquakes”; surviving on an island of dark stones from hence one always yearned to leave (because “the island rejects people”), and to which one always yearns to return (because “the island beckons people”) — in a relationship of life and death, presence and absence, love and hate, prosperity and bankruptcy, of dreams and nightmares about the sea — that daily companion, sometimes opening the routes of the world, sometimes a tomb for man's dreams (like João Peixe-Rei, whose death in the far away Cape Horn is one of the narrative's highest and most heartfelt moments). An Azoreanity, with Francisco Marroco as its paladin, he who ran away from a hunger ridden childhood by jumping into an American whaling ship, thus sailing the world seas and then, through America, making a living which would eventually bring him back to the island and die there, not without first visiting his son, António, in prison, where he was sent for nothing more than denouncing the abuses of a capitalism — still incipient, although already triumphant — which would forever transform the old art form at which Pico men were so skilled, of mixing land work with whaling at sea...

Dias de Melo, on the path of this good tradition of men of two different crafts, mixed his experience of profound connoisseur of the life, suffering and death of whalers — let us remember his monumental collection of whaling related narratives, published in several volumes with the title *Na Memória das Gentes (In People's Memory)* (1985-1991) — with his experience as an abundant and versatile writer whom also reflects upon his condition of author, which legacy he left us

in the novel *O Autógrafo (The Autograph)* (1999) and, above all, as an honest hard-working man who, in a strong moment in his life, decided to reflect upon his life and work — for example, in the novel *Milhas Contadas (Counted Miles)* (2002).

The expression “counted miles”, collected from the heroes of the Azorean sea, signifies nearing the end of the journey, with land in sight, and our heroes — may they be Pico whalers, the writer who composed their epopee, or Pedro António, this novel’s protagonist — are back, bringing back with them a whole life story to tell those who never got away from the Island.

Also, more trivially, *counted miles* are the poems, the novels, the tales, the chronicles, the ethnographical collections or the monographies that Dias de Melo conceived and published throughout sixty-four years — and represent, by themselves, at least two lives: a talented, hard-working, passionate writer’s life, and the collective life of Pico’s people, who are, deep down, the real reason of being of Dias de Melo’s work. Mile by mile — i.e. book by book — Dias de Melo built what is, from many points of view, among which “authenticity”, one of the most unique works of Portuguese literature of recent years.

**Credits:**

The preparation of this route is owed to the dedicated cooperation of:

**Tomaz Gomes Vieira**, friend of the writer, present owner of “Casa dos Pais”

**Manuel Tomás**, friend of the writer, Chairman of the executive council of School of Madalena.

**Fernando Ranha**, VerAçor Editores.

**Manuel Francisco Costa Júnior**, Diretor of Pico’s Museum.

**Fátima Madruga**, author of the cover image *Portrait of Dias de Melo*.



PICO ISLAND

A TOUR of DIAS DE MELO's PICO

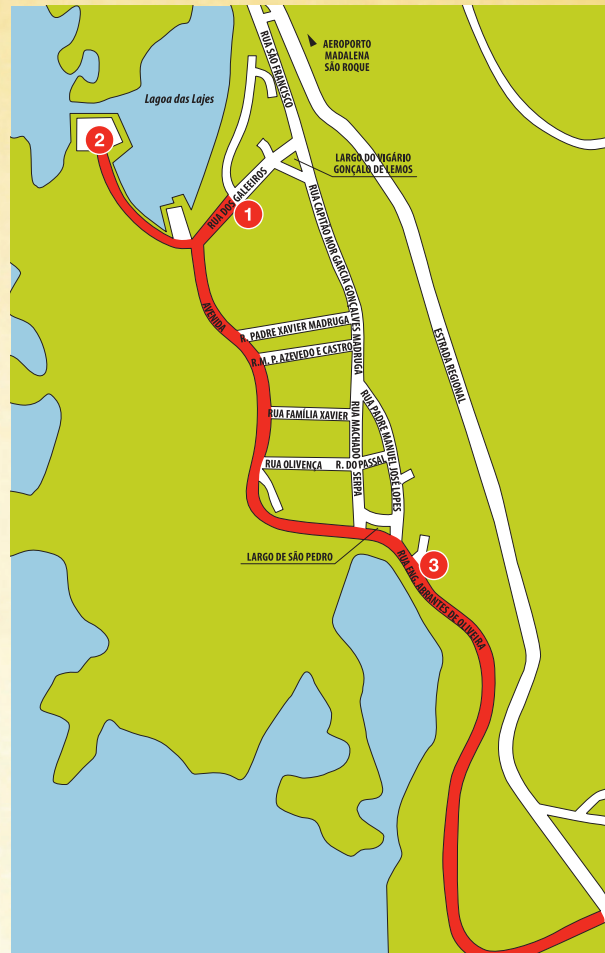
“I am a writer. Portuguese, because I’m a citizen of Portugal, my country. Azorean, because I’m a citizen of the Azores. However, more specifically, and above all: I’m a writer from Pico – my Island, my home. And, because I’m People – of the People from my Island, our Island, my home, our homeland. Many of my books take place in our Island, our homeland. Most of the characters in them are modeled after the People, our People. With their virtues and their faults, their love and their hate, their affections and their aversions, their dedication, and their indifference, their solidarity, and their hostilities, their loyalties and their betrayals, their heroism, and their cowardice. In short: their angels, and their demons. Those same angels and demons that are an intrinsic part of all human beings. Even of saints.”

*Dias de Melo*





scale: 1/10 000  
source: DRT, 2006



## LAJES VILLAGE

### LAJES VILLAGE – We start the tour on foot



- 1** Whaling Museum, at the old Boathouses of the "Lower Companies" site

We leave the **Whaling Museum**, and carry on until the pier, entering **Lagoa das Lajes**, and there we enjoy the Village's view of the sea front, facing **Northwest**, where you can see



- 2** The old Boathouses of the "Upper Companies", now the Nautical Club, and Convento de São Francisco, City Hall head offices

Lajes was the greatest whaling center in Pico and the Azores: they manned as many as twenty one boats and five whaling speedboats; there remain the boathouses of the "cá de baixo" (lower) companies, of the village, on the turn in the southeast bank of the Alagoa, of the "lá de cima" (upper) companies, of Ribeira do Meio, at the end, under Convento de São Francisco.  
*(Na Memória das Gentes – In People's Memory)*

We return to **Rua dos Baleeiros** and carry on South, along the Avenue, up to Largo de São Pedro where, at the start of **Rua Eng. Arantes Oliveira**, we can enjoy:



- 3** Ermida de S. Pedro

With its white houses, cuddled in the narrow flatness of the seafront, around its walled port bordering the church, the boathouse, the Parrish Center, on the corner of the great bay facing the rising sun, Santa Cruz das Ribeiras seems to kneel at the long and haughty hillside's feet (...). A good but small land, too small, unlike Santa Bárbara, for its own sustenance, must forcibly turn towards the sea and harshly – more so than anywhere else – give itself to the labors of the sea.  
*(Na Memória das Gentes – In People's Memory)*

We return to **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, carry on East for about 10 Km until **Canada da Saúde**, which descends towards the Parrish of



- 5** Calheta de Nesquim, terra natal de Dias de Melo

### We start the tour by car

Going up **Rua Eng. Arantes Oliveira**, we enter **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, heading East for about 7 Km, and descend the **Santa Cruz das Ribeiras** branch, an important port of the whaling fauna, and of tuna fishing:



- 4** Church of Santa Cruz das Ribeiras, by the harbor





scale: 1/10 000  
source: DRT, 2006

Poured over extensive irregular fields, up high, near the pastures, scattered houses and farm land (...), growing fields and houses descending towards the seashore fields and vineyards, with their cellars, (...) all roads leading to Terreiro, population and commercial center by the port side, under the Moorish towered church, between the Morroçao Pier to the West, the Bay and the lean Ponta da Feiteira to the East, Calheta de Nesquim is the oldest whaling spot in Pico, perhaps in the Azores. (Na Memória das Gentes – In People's Memory)

Here, all roads lead to **Terreiro** – by which the



**6** Church dominates the harbor

Many people came to the pier, to the public square, to the church on top of the rocks, and over the harbor, to watch them leave. People with troubled souls reflected on their stone scowls, who don't want them there, in their faces, with the boats and the speedboat from the Companhia Nova. (Mar pela Proa – Sea On The Bow)

Next to the port and **Terreiro**, one can visit the old **Boathouses**, where some whaling boats are exhibited and, by them, the **Medina** speedboat:



**7** Boathouse, atop the tidal basin, and the Medina speedboat

If one didn't go fishing, or if throughout the morning, sometimes through the afternoon, one had to wait to the appropriate tide for fishing, one would wait, old habit, on the boathouse shelter... (...) One day... We weren't in the boathouse, but outside, on the bench in front of Ernesto's tavern, on the upper cape of the dry dock. By the pier, the speedboat, Medina, awaited the Doida, ready to leave with her towards Terceira. (Crónicas – Chronicles)

Once we've visited the whaling part of the Parrish, we head on towards **Canada da Assomada**, where we can see the



**8** House where Dias de Melo was born

And then, to **Canada da Saúde**, where we find his



**9** Parents' House, where the writer was raised

In arriving in front of our House (the House built by my father – and what a sacrifice! – we were children, the elders, the younglings hadn't even been born, and came to the world in our House) I told the driver to stop, I paid him and told him he could leave, I got out. (Á Boquinha da Noite – At Nightfall)

Next, we return to the **Terreiro** and take **Canada da Costa**, then **Rua da Altamora**, **Rua Escritor Dias de Melo** and **Ramal da Calheta**, up to **Alto da Rocha**, and go down

into the small steep road that leads to the **Casa do Alto da Rocha do Canto da Baía**, where he wrote many books:



**10**

going down the road with my brother, António, the three of them with their bags on their backs, you behind – you look at Uncle Tom's Cabin flattened at our feet, our Bay's sea below, our girl picked a wild flower from amongst the weeds on the ground. (Tempos Últimos – Final Times)

Once I climbed the crucible of the access road and exited Uncle Tom's Cabin, off I went, on these roads I've known since I was a boy. (Poeira do Caminho – Road Dust)



SÃO ROQUE VILLAGE



**11** Casa do Alto do Canto da Rocha – A Cabana do Pai Tomás (Uncle Tom's Cabin)



And I stay, in the ice of this January day, watching the fog beyond the windows, here in our Uncle Tom's Cabin, on this, our Alto da Rocha do Canto da Baía. And waiting... and waiting... and waiting... (Crónicas – Chronicles)

Going up the road, we head **East** through **Ladeira do Miradouro**, following the way of **Portal do Cabeço** and, blending with **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, until the center of the Parrish of **Piedade** (about 4,5 Km), on the far end of the Island, where we find the



**12** Curral da Pedra

And along there we went, singing, always singing, until we would end up at the Festival, in the heart of the crowd that gathered in the Festival grounds, the Curral da Pedra (Poeira do Caminho – Road Dust)

When the weather is good, we can see the Island of **S. Jorge**, to the **North**, and, afar, to the **Northeast**, **Terceira** Island. We then take to **caminho municipal** (2 Km) leading us to



**13** Baía do Calhau, now on the North face of the Island

And here, in **Caminho do Calhau**, the whalers stare at the boats – their boats! – and the speedboat ripping the bay waters, sheltered by the land. (Mar pela Proa – Sea On The Bow)

We return to the center of **Piedade** and take the **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, heading **Northwest**, to the Parrish of **Ribeirinha** (2 Km), passing by the



**14** House where **D. José Vieira Alvernaz** (1898-1986), Patriarch of the Indies, was born, in the street named after him

We retake to **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, heading **Northwest** (about 11 Km), until **Canada da Costa**, going down into the Parrish of **Santo Amaro**, carrying on until



**15** Porto de Santo Amaro

The "Ilha Morena" ahead, the two boats and the "Deixa-Andar" behind, glued to the shore, pecking Santo Amaro, the hidden village behind the humble little church. Offshore, in the middle of the Channel, beyond the reach of land cover, – the sea bursts in white flocks. (Mar pela Proa – Sea On The Bow)





scale: 1/10 000  
source: DRT, 2006

From here, one can head **East**, by the sea, until **Rua do Canto**, which ends at the bay that goes by the same name, where one can admire the



**16** Rocha da Terra Alta

The wind twirls in the rags of the heaths and the beeches, rooted throughout and up Rocha da Terra Alta, which drops straight down for a few hundred meters, into the green, shallow waters.  
*(Mar pela Proa – Sea On The Bow)*

**SÃO ROQUE VILLAGE**

Returning to the center of **Santo Amaro** and retaking **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, heading **Northwest**, until **Cais do Pico** (16 Km), turn right at **Rua do Cais**, and visit the



**17** Cais Velho (old pier)

A land of sea people, one of the better placed ports for entering and exiting the Island in the connections between the Eastern Islands and the world (which doesn't mean it has the best natural conditions for boats' servicing and safety), Cais do Pico has, for many years, perhaps even since the end of the last century, been a land of whalers. (...) In the 1940s, it reached a preponderant position of progress amongst all whaling harbors in Pico.  
*(Na Memória das Gentes – In People's Memory)*



**18** Whaling Industry Museum, Pico Museum

The rise and prestige of Cais do Pico would be highlighted, no longer by its speedboats, since everyone now owned quality, fast ones, but by its factory that fully processed whales, the first to be installed in Pico.  
*(Na Memória das Gentes – In People's Memory)*

We head back in the opposite direction, to **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, heading **Southeast**, taking **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, crosscutting the Island, until **Silveira**, in **Lajes Village** (about 20 Km), and enjoy the magnificent rural panoramas of the Island. We blend with **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, and follow it heading **West**, towards the Village of **Madalena**. In passing through the Parrish of **São João** (5 Km), we find, by the roadside, the



**19** House where the poet Bernardo Maciel (1874-1917) was born, lived, and passed away

We carry on along the same Road towards the Parrish of **São Mateus** (12 Km), which marks the transition of the South of Pico to the **Fronteira** region, and we go down to



**20** São Mateus Harbor



**21** Boathouse

Although S. Mateus had already surrendered to the whale, there were the melting boilers, recumbent to the Wall, on a corner of the beach, and in S. Mateus the new structure would be installed in the 1940s (...). I don't think S. Mateus has been or is, truly, whalers', sea people, sailors, or fishermen's land, even though it possessed handcrafted fishing vessels, mostly barges, and a cabotage boat.  
*(Na Memória das Gentes – In People's Memory)*

Returning to **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, we head **West** until we find (4.7 Km), to the left, the access road to the **Guindaste** (crane) spot, where, in a state of ruin, we can still find the



**22** Solar dos Arriagas, of Manuel de Arriaga's (1840-1917) family, the first President of the Portuguese Republic, whom, according to unconfirmed opinions, would have been accidentally born here



**MADALENA VILLAGE**

In front of the house, crossing the road, we find the little



**23** Porto de Guindaste, where the barrels of wine made in this and the neighboring properties were shipped

We retake **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, heading **West** until the Parrish of **Criação Velha** (7.7 Km), turning right into **Rua Direita**, we take the first left, into **Rua das Dores**, where we'll find the



**24** House where the writer Martins Garcia (1941-2002), a friend of Dias de Melo, was born

**MADALENA VILLAGE**

From here, we carry on **Northeast** through **Rua das Dores**, make a left at **Rua do Capitão Mor**, crossing **Estrada Regional 3-2A**, make a left at **Rua Secretário Teles Bettencourt**, head towards **Rua do Carmo**, crossing **Estrada Regional 1-2A** (**Rua Carlos Dabney**), until we find the



**25** Wine Museum, part of Pico Museum, installed in the old Carmelitas Convent (17th/18th centuries)

And on that side of **Fronteira**, the grapes and figs are many people's only source of income; what grapes and figs give: grapes, wine; figs, firewater.  
*(Crónicas – Chronicles)*

We return to **Estrada Regional 1-2A** (**Rua Carlos Dabney**), we turn right towards the center of the town of **Madalena**, and we end our tour at the entrance to the



**26** Madalena old harbor

The town of Madalena, overflowing with houses around its slender towered church next to the slender araucarias, in those extensive vineyards, (...) leaned over the Canal, with arms wide open towards bordering and close-by Faial, is Fronteira's great center of intense and progressive life. Its harbor, which surrendered to whales, now being totally rebuilt and expanded, is, for many, the entrance and exit of the whole Island, and mostly of Fronteira, coming and going to Faial.  
*(Na Memória das Gentes – In People's Memory)*



**DIAS DE MELO**

CULTURAL ROUTES OF THE AZORES Personalities



## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE of DIAS DE MELO

- 1925** **April 8th:** José DIAS DE MELO was born in Calheta de Nesquim, Lajes do Pico.
- 
- 1940** **July:** he took his admittance exams to the National High School of Horta.
- 
- 1944** **November:** he founded the Associação Cultural Académica (Academic Cultural Association), in Horta. **December 20th:** He published his first literary story, the sonnet *Inspiração* (*Inspiration*) on the newspaper *O Telégrafo* (*The Telegraph*), in Horta.
- 
- 1949** He moved to Ponta Delgada, where he taught Elementary School.
- 
- 1954** He published his first book, *Toadas do Mar e da Terra* (*Melodies of Sea and Land*), poetry.
- 
- 1958** He published his first fictional book, *Mar Rubro*, (*Ruby Sea*) novelized chronicles (2nd ed. 1980).
- 
- 1961/62** He purchased the house at Alto da Rocha do Canto da Baía, which he named *A Cabana do Pai Tomás* (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*).
- 
- 1964** He published the novel *Pedras Negras* (2nd ed. 1985, 3rd ed. 2003; translated to English, *Dark Stones*, 1988).
- 
- 1968** **January 4th:** He published his first chronicle, “Café Amargo” (Bitter Coffee), from the series “Fumo do Meu Cachimbo” (*Smoke From My Pipe*) in the newspaper *Correio dos Açores*, in Ponta Delgada.
- 
- 1971** He published *Cidade Cinzenta* (*Grey City*), short stories and chronicles.
- 
- 1973** He delivered his didactic-pedagogic dissertation, *Tentativas de Teatro na Escola* (*Attempts in School Theater*). He published *Na Noite Silenciosa, Poemas de Natal* (*On Silent Night, Christmas Poetry*) (2nd ed. 2007).
- 
- 1976** He taught elementary school in Cova da Piedade (Almada). He published *Mar pela Proa, Narrativa Açoriana* (*Sea on the Bow, Azorean Narrative*). March 27th: he started collaborating with *Diário de Lisboa* on a regular basis.
- 
- 1978** He taught junior high school in Lajes do Pico.
- 
- 1979** He published *Vinde e Vede* (*Come and Watch*), short stories and chronicles.
- 
- 1983** He published *Vida Vivida em Terra de Baleeiros* (*A Life Lived in Whalers' Land*), chronicles.
- 
- 1985** He started to publish *Na Memória das Gentes* (*In People's Memory*), an ethnographic collection about whaling in Pico Island (6 volumes, the last of which, published in 1991, contains a collection of popular tales).
- 
- 1986** He published *Uma Estrela nas Mãos do Homem* (*A Star in the Hands of Man*), short stories.
- 
- 1988** He published the monographic *Lira Fraternal Calhetense*, about the Calheta de Nesquim Philharmonic.
- 
- 1990** He published *Das Velas de Lona às Asas de Alumínio* (*From Canvas Sails to Aluminum Wings*), a travel narrative. **January 27:** Distinguished with the title *Oficial da Ordem do Infante D. Henrique*, by Mário Soares, the President of the Republic. **August 8th:** he ended his regular collaboration at *Diário de Lisboa*.
- 
- 1991** He published the novel *Nem todos têm Natal* (*Not Everyone Has Christmas*).
- 
- 1992** He published the novel *O Menino deixou de ser Menino* (*The Boy is no longer a Boy*), novela, *Aquém e Além-Canal* (*On Both Sides of the Channel*), chronicles, and *Tempos Últimos* (*Final Times*).
- 
- 1993** He published the novel *A Viagem do Medo Maior* (*The Greater Fear Journey*).
- 
- 1994** He published *Pena Dela Saudades de Mim* (*Pity Her Missing Me*).
- 
- 1995** He published *Alto da Rocha do Canto da Baía Chronicles*.
- 
- 1996** He published *Inverno sem Primavera* (*Springless Winter*).



- 1999** He published the novel *O Autógrafo* (*The Autograph*).
- 
- 2000** He published the narrative *Reviver: na Festa da Vida a Festa da Morte* (*Reliving: Death Party at Life's Party*).
- 
- 2001** He published the narrative *À Boquinha da Noite* (*At Nightfall*).
- 
- 2002** **May 14th:** Lajes do Pico City Hall awarded him the honorary title and the gold key to the town. He published the novel *Milhas Contadas* (*Counted Miles*) (Lisbon).
- 
- 2003** **January 21st:** homage at the *Ler Devagar* Bookstore (Lisbon).
- 
- 2004** **February 8th:** the TV channel RTP Açores presents the documentary *Toadas do Mar e da Terra* (*Melodies of Sea and Land*) about Dias de Melo, directed by José de Medeiros. He published *Poeira do Caminho, Reminiscências do Passado, Vivências do Presente* (*Road Dust, Past Reminiscences, Present Living*).
- 
- 2005** **March 15th:** the Azores Autonomous Region Parliament unanimously agreed to congratulate him on his 50 years of literary life.
- 
- 2008** **May 2nd:** public homage from the Azores Government, in Ponta Delgada's Public Library and Regional Archive. **May 6th:** distinguished with the *Insígnia Autónómica de Reconhecimento* (*Autonomic Recognition Insignia*), by the Azores Autonomous Region Parliament. **May 10th:** he wrote his last chronicle "Condutor Ladrão" ("Thieving Driver"), which would only get published in *Açoriano Oriental*, Ponta Delgada, on September 24th, 2010. **September 24th:** he passed away in Ponta Delgada. **November 4th:** the exhibit *Dias de Melo: Memória de Mim* (*Dias de Melo: Memories of Me*) opened in Ponta Delgada.



## A tour of Dias de Melo's Pico

Two inner bays of calm, crisp clear water, on one side the Maré, where the Prince's sailors first landed and where the island's first temple, the ermida de São Pedro was built; on the other, Alagoa. In front of Maré and Alagoa, beyond the village's long defense Wall, the extensive dark rough basalt road, ripped along the Carreira, a narrow channel, twisted, shallow and very treacherous, which connects with the wide sea through which the ships enter and exit to leave Lajes and in it the Maritimes of this village have lived tragic hours.

(In People's Memory)



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Governo dos Açores

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DE MELO

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