

A smattering revue of summer-movie reviews

Back to the Future. It's hard to go wrong with an interesting plot, good direction and fine acting, and *Back to the Future* didn't. Steven Spielberg did his usual excellent work behind the camera (even though he wasn't billed as the film's director) in telling the story of a boy (Michael J. Fox) who travels back 20 years in a time machine. The boy meets his parents as teenagers and tries to get back to the present without upsetting the natural course of their lives. There were plenty of laughs, many of them cleverly derived from the wide gap between the generations, and Fox was winning and likable. So was the film, which easily became the summer's most beloved. (M.D.)

Cocoon. Is Ron Howard even capable of making a bad film? From *Nightshift* to *Splash* to this new jewel, Howard has proven himself a director of comedies with subtle and delicate touches of human drama. *Cocoon* was his most dramatic film, and it was a film for all ages, about all ages. A group of old men stumble upon a swimming pool that belongs to a band of friendly aliens visiting Earth to retrieve their hibernating friends. The pool is a fountain of youth and the men find themselves acting like college kids. The film explored the fine lines between the old and the young, life and death. The story was well-conceived and the cast — in particular, Brian Dennehy as the gentle leader of the aliens — was superb. (A.M.)

European Vacation. Some sequels attempt to breathe new life into their originals; others are content simply to

recreate the past. *European Vacation*, a continuation of the wacky wanderings of Clark Griswold (Chevy Chase) and his family, fell into the latter category. The only difference between it and *Vacation* was that this time around, the hapless Griswolds bumbled through Europe instead of the States. Some of the gags were repetitive and a few of the jokes preceded Milton Berle, but there were also some inspired scenes and several choice bits of satire reminiscent of director Amy Heckerling's superior work in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. All said, the movie was funny. If Chase and the gang weren't original, at least they were consistent. (M.D.)

Fright Night. A modern-day vampire tale with an edge of self-parody, *Fright Night* proved to be the summer's giddiest delight. It was also one of the sexiest, most stylish scare flicks in many moons. A handsome bachelor with suspicious nocturnal habits moves into a small neighborhood, and the curiosity of the boy next door plunges him — and his prudish girlfriend — into danger. As the suave, insouciant vampire, Chris Sarandon, an accomplished actor whose screen appearances are all too infrequent, turned in one of the summer's most memorable performances. Also noteworthy were *Fright Night's* very special effects, which, like the film, were alternately bloodcurdling and laugh-provoking. (F.B.)

The Goonies. Another addition to the growing list of Steven Spielberg-produced epics, *Goonies* also bore the fingerprints of another filmmaker,

director Richard Lester. The duo's teamwork kept the film moving at a dizzying pace and their attempt to show the world from the eyes of misfit children made for a charming adventure. Viewers who were willing to suspend disbelief and just sit back and enjoy this cornucopia of pitfalls and cliffhangers found *The Goonies* a fine entertainment in the formidable Spielberg tradition. (A.M.)

Pale Rider. After spending much of the past 10 years wearing a badge, Clint Eastwood returned, at least for the moment, to the Western — a genre that many feel suits him best. In *Pale Rider*, an allegory set in the 19th century, Eastwood played the Preacher, a figure perhaps symbolic of God triumphing over Evil as he helps a small gold-mining protect their land from a corrupt marshal. The movie's special merit was its ability to be both exciting and meaningful, to pack a violent enough punch to satisfy Eastwood fans while also reaching out to a wider audience. (M.D.)

Perfect. This film was such a confusing mess it was hard to believe that *Rolling Stone* magazine would lend its name to it. John Travolta played a less-than-honorable reporter who "uncovers" a posh southern California health club. His character lies and cheats his way into interviews, and his editor, played by Jann Wenner, *Rolling Stone's* actual publisher, condones his actions. The film didn't make much sense, and it went in too many directions at once without ever getting anywhere. The only mildly interesting sequences were the

aerobic classes taught by Jamie Lee Curtis, but even her perfect body couldn't save this turkey of a movie. (A.M.)

Prizzi's Honor. While even the best of the summer releases were mere confessions, *Prizzi's Honor* was an intelligent, artful film for all seasons. Directed with considerable daring and an unsettling black humor by veteran John Huston, the film ricocheted between parody and poignance in its quirky examination of a Brooklyn mafia family and its absurd code of honor. As the lovers doomed by the Prizzi family's "honor," Jack Nicholson and Kathleen Turner were a mesmerizing pair, but the real scene stealer was Huston's daughter, Anjelica, whose portrayal of the scheming Maerose is sure to be remembered when Oscars are handed out. (F.B.)

Rambo: First Blood Part II. Two years after the infinitely superior *First Blood*, *Rambo* sent Sylvester Stallone back to Vietnam as a one-man fighting machine that killed anyone and everyone enroute to rescuing American POWs still in captivity. Stallone returned to the States unscathed, but he left behind a host of casualties, including the film's plausibility and any sense of purpose. *First Blood* was an effective movie that showed the clear contrast between the code of living for the vets in Saigon and the code of living for them back in America. *Rambo* was nothing but a bloody cartoon that succeeded at the box office but failed to do what it most wanted to: make a statement on behalf of veterans. (M.D.)

St. Elmo's Fire. Featuring an ensemble of the most gifted young actors currently working in movies, *St. Elmo's Fire* was more a showcase for their abilities than a good story. It was a film worth seeing, however, for the sheer talent of these performers, and the energy they generated made up for the lack of a coherent story. The film focused on a group of friends coping with the pressures of life after college graduation, but the diverse storylines that were supposed to come together ended up going in different directions. There were no slouches in the acting department, though, and especially commendable were the remarkable Ally Sheedy and Demi Moore. (A.M.)

Silverado. There wasn't a frame of this exhaustingly long, tediously confrontation-packed Western that seemed the least bit inspired. Director/writer Lawrence Kasdan, whose previous credits include *Body Heat* and *The Big Chill*, doesn't so much make movies as mimic them, and *Silverado* was like a compendium of every Western ever produced. As such, it never succeeded in establishing believable characters or an involving story of its own. Kasdan seemed content to settle for high production values and an admittedly splendid cast, both of which made the film's essential absence of purpose all the more frustrating. (F.B.)

A View to a Kill. He was still the same old James Bond, fond of martinis, good food and beautiful women — although not necessarily in that order. However, *A View to a Kill*, the latest

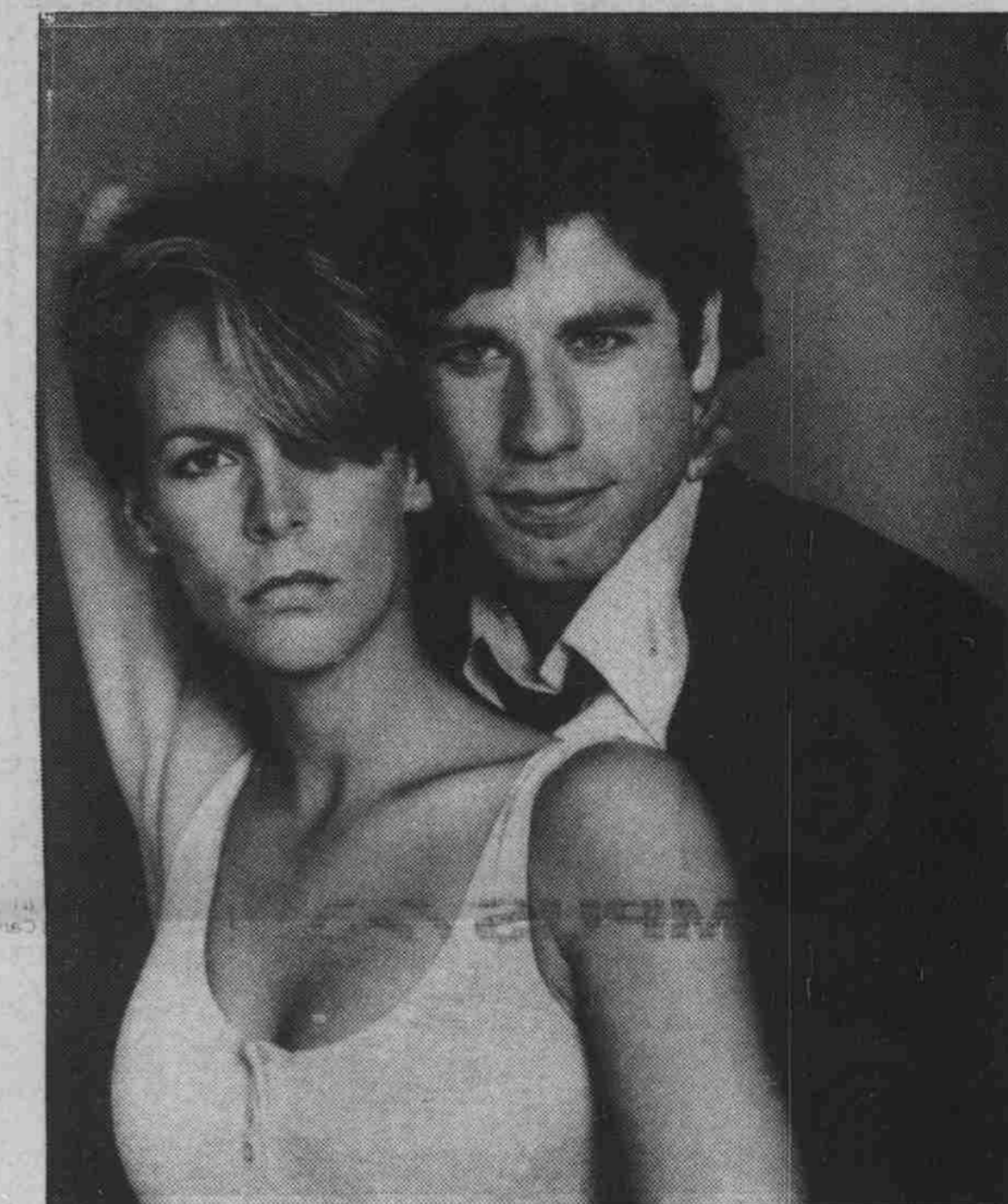


Sarandon (right) in 'Fright Night': A memorable performance

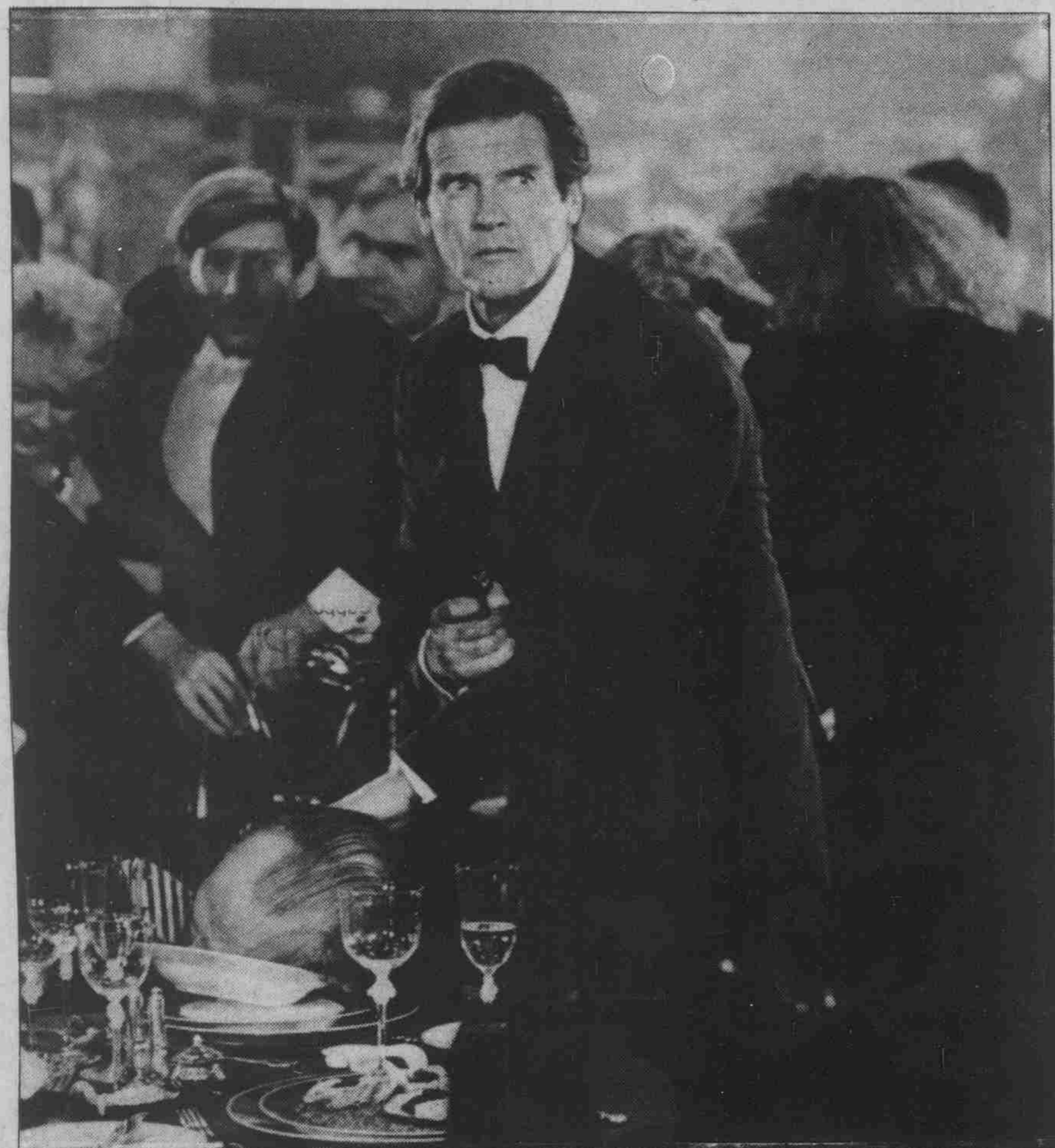
in the 007 chronology, was a rather wearisome film that didn't make audiences marvel at the breathtaking chase scenes as much as it made them wonder how much longer the Bond series could go on. The trick gadgets and well-choreographed action sequences were here, but they seemed old-hat, and the exhilaration of other Bond films was gone. Also lifeless was Roger Moore,

who seemed merely to be going through the motions. If the Bond films are to continue, their producers should re-examine the tired formula and find a way to create the spark that this film failed to ignite. (M.D.)

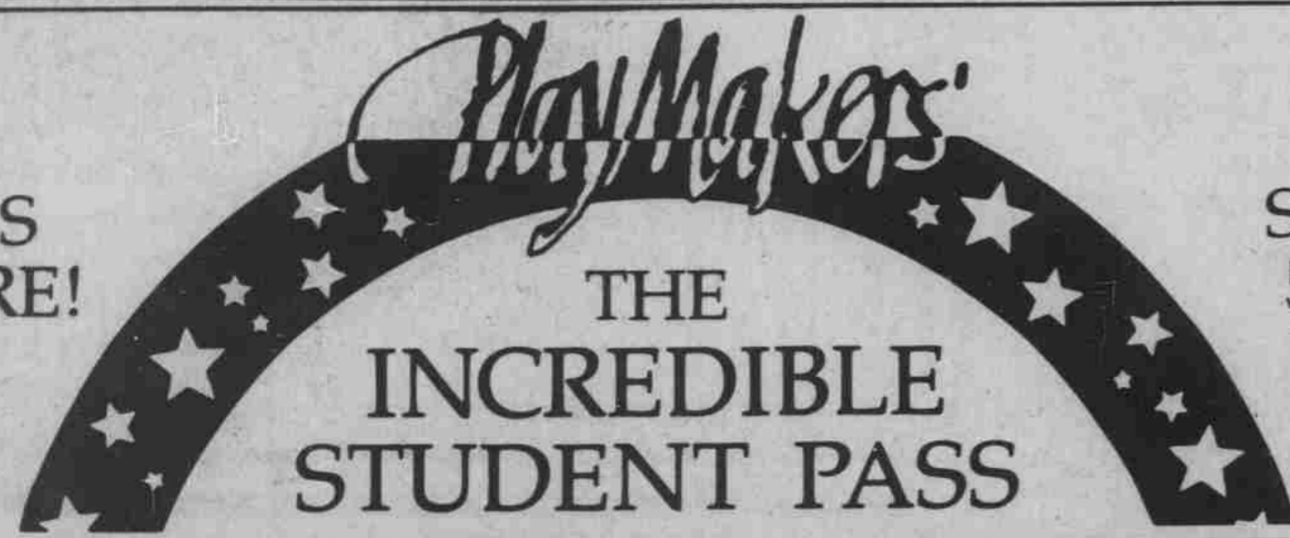
Staff writers Frank Bruni, Mark Davis and Alan Mason contributed to this article.



Curtis and Travolta in 'Perfect': Great bodies but turkeys all the same



Moore in 'A View to a Kill': Still fond of martinis and women, but unable to breathe new life into tired formula



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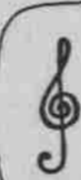
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