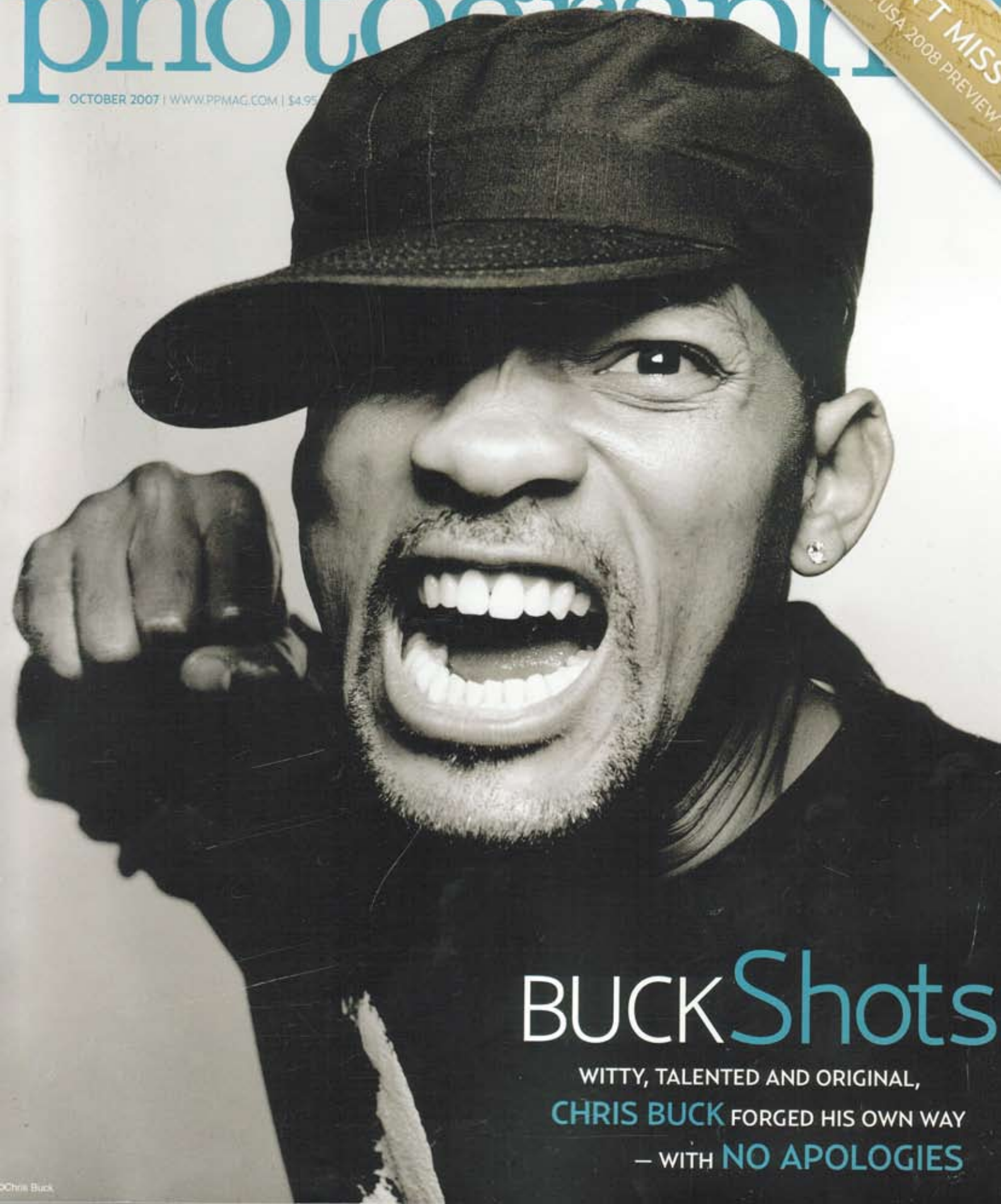


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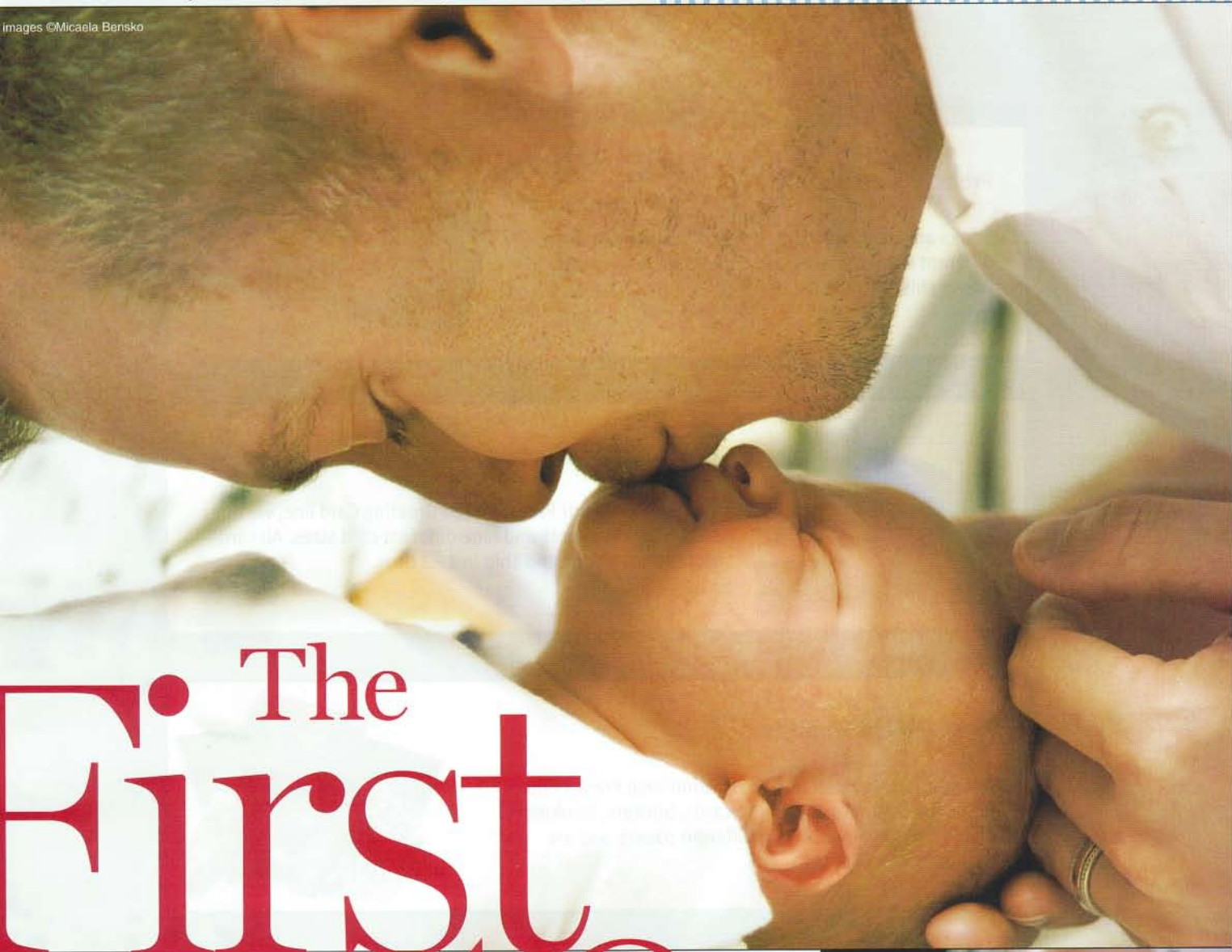
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The First 48

Micaela Bensko's
popular portrait
program for newborns

BY JEFF KENT

Sometimes a photography business expands unintentionally. A photographer will do something out of personal interest, or as a favor to a friend, and before she knows it, new clients

are beating down her door. That's just what happened when Micaela Bensko launched her newborn photography program, First 48.

"The program started in the most organic



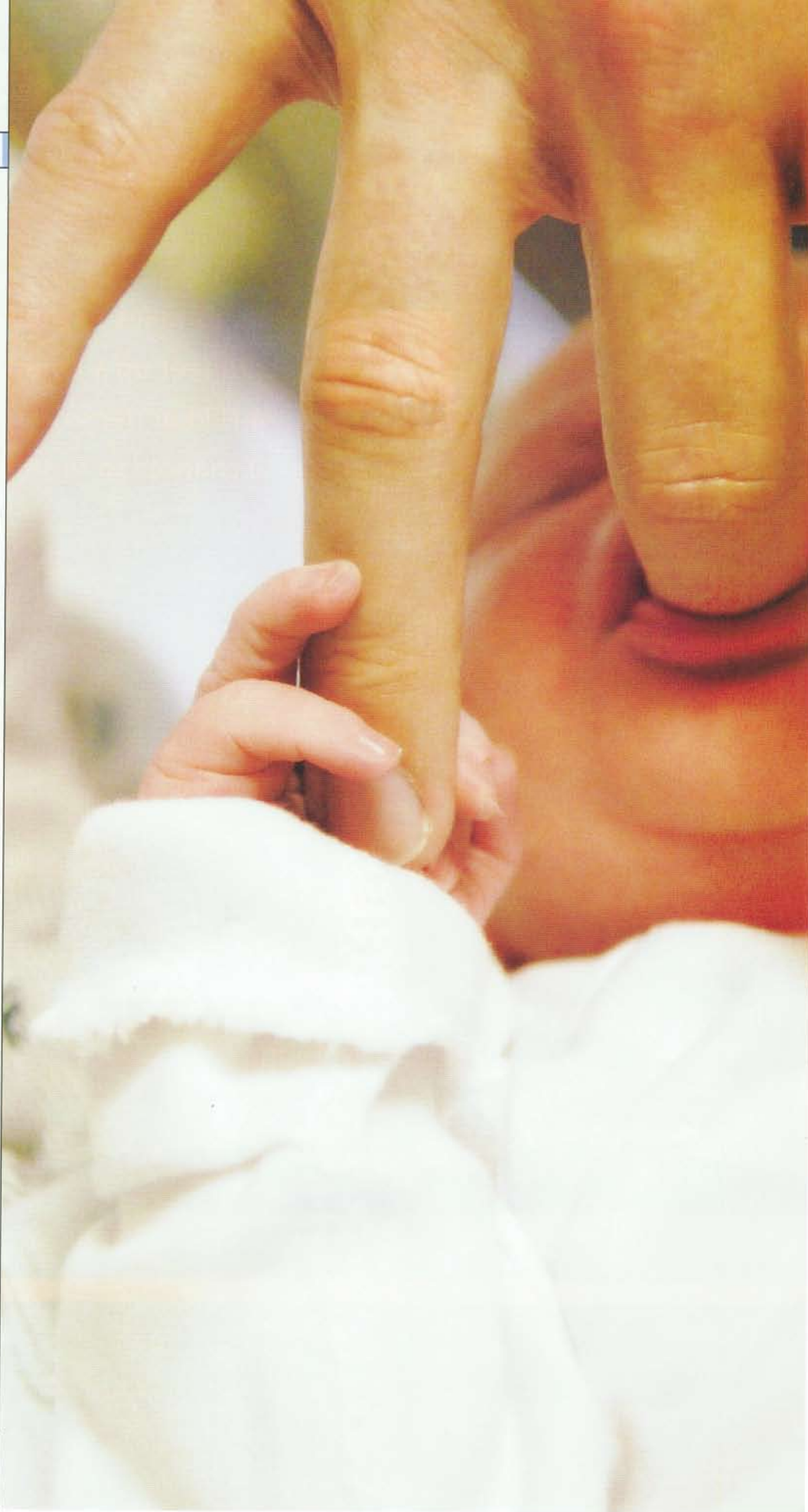
fashion possible," says Bensko. "Some friends had just had a baby. They'd been portrait clients, and we've become close. As a gift, I took pictures in the hospital of them interacting with their new baby. The situation lent itself beautifully to the genre of photojournalism. I created a slideshow presentation and e-mailed it to them the next day. They had Internet access right there in their hospital room, and they were so excited they sent it out to everyone they knew. Almost immediately, their friends and family started asking about the photographer. Is she a professional who would do something like that for us? How can we get a service like this?"

Not long after, Bensko granted a similar favor to two more friends who were portrait clients. The feedback was even more dramatic. The couple worked at a real estate brokerage, and they e-mailed the link to the slideshow to all 500 partners in the firm, as well as to friends and family. Bensko started receiving inquiries and Web hits in numbers unprecedented even after large wedding shoots.

A mother of four herself, Bensko is familiar with the emotional roller coaster of childbirth, and the intimate bonding that happens between parent and child in the first 48 hours of the child's life. Spotting the potential of in-hospital photography, she created a new division of her business, First 48.

The day after a session at the hospital, Bensko posts an online slideshow and places all of the images in a Web gallery for viewing and ordering. Within two weeks of the session she delivers a 5x5-inch keepsake album to the parents. For an extra fee, she'll produce customized birth announcements, as soon as the parents have selected their favorite image. She even books Special Delivery sessions for those who want the whole birthing experience documented.

(continued on p. 30)



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"The first two days are the most intimate time you will have with your child for the rest of your life," says Bensko. "Bonding for most mothers is precious. You are vulnerable, still discovering your newborn. You experience these moments that you will never have again. It's one of those experiences where people aren't usually allowed in. This program allows the couple to truly share the arrival of their newborn."

The service is also practical, says Bensko; it helps clients relax and enjoy their newborn without worrying about sending birth announcements, attempting to take pictures themselves, or repeatedly describing the newborn over the phone to their fifth cousins in Omaha. Instead, they can simply distribute the link to Bensko's images and invite everyone to share the emotional experience. It's much more immediate and engaging than opening an announcement days later, she says.

It's a business venture, yes, but Bensko wants to keep First 48 very intimate, very personal. She's not even broadly promoting the service, just distributing a few brochures to friends, doctors she knows personally and to hospital natal staff with whom she's established a relationship.

To see more, visit Micaela Bensko's Web site at www.benskophotography.com.

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