



An Extended Guide · No. 1756

Lightning Safety Basics for Your Home

Protecting your electronics
— and yourself — in a storm

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! Read this first — two kinds of protection, one safety rule

There are two kinds of surge protection in this guide, and they are not the same job. A whole-home surge protector wires into your electrical panel, where the power is always live and a mistake can be deadly — that is strictly a licensed electrician's work, almost always with a permit, and never a do-it-yourself project. (It isn't something I do myself, either; I help you understand it, choose wisely, and line up a trustworthy local pro.) The other kind — the surge-protector strips and plug-in units you use at the wall — are perfectly safe for you to set up on your own. One honest note either way: no surge protector is a lightning rod or an iron-clad guarantee, so in a violent electrical storm, unplugging a treasured device is still the surest protection of all. This guide is about lightning in particular — the rare direct strike, the far more common nearby strike that sends a surge down your power and data lines, and how to keep both your electronics and yourself calm and safe when a storm rolls through.

Staying calm and safe when a storm rolls in

Lightning worries a lot of folks, and I understand why. The good news is that a few simple ideas — and a couple of easy habits — take most of the fear out of it. Let's walk through them together.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. In 30-plus years of helping people with their home electronics, I've learned that storms feel a lot less scary once you understand what's actually a risk and what isn't. That's all this guide is: plain sense, no drama.

We'll cover two things, and they matter equally. First, protecting your electronics — your televisions, computers, and the like. Second, and more important, keeping yourself and your household safe during the storm itself. Neither one is complicated.

★ There's no silly worry here

If storms make you anxious, that's nothing to be embarrassed about. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you get set up so you can ride out the next one feeling ready instead of rattled.

The whole guide, on one page

If you hold onto just these few things, you've got the heart of lightning safety already.

- ❑ A direct strike on your home is rare but catastrophic — and honestly, little that plugs into a wall reliably survives one.
- ❑ Far more common is a nearby strike, which sends a surge into your home on the power lines — and on your cable and phone lines too.
- ❑ Whole-home and plug-in protectors together greatly reduce the everyday and nearby-strike damage. That's your layered defense.
- ❑ In a severe storm right overhead, the surest protection for a treasured device is to unplug it — including its data lines, like the cable.
- ❑ For yourself: stay off corded phones and wired devices, keep away from plumbing and water, and away from windows, until the storm passes.
- ❑ You don't have to unplug the whole house every time. Pick your treasures and let your protectors handle the rest.

✓ One idea to hold onto

Think of it in two layers of calm: good protection running quietly all the time, and one simple habit — unplugging the treasures — for the rare storm that's genuinely fierce.

The two ways lightning does harm

Almost everything about protecting your electronics from lightning makes sense once you see these two very different paths.

The direct strike — rare and severe

This is the one everyone pictures: a bolt hitting your house or its power line. It's genuinely rare, and I'll be honest with you — when it happens, the energy is so enormous that no plug-in protector can reliably stop it. That's not a knock on protectors; it's just physics.

The nearby strike — common and sneaky

Far more often, lightning hits the ground, a tree, or a power line somewhere down the road. That energy jumps onto the wires and travels into your home from a surprising distance, arriving as a surge. This is the everyday reality of a good Ohio thunderstorm, and it's exactly what good protection is built to handle.

✓ Where to put your attention

Because direct strikes are rare and nearby ones are common, most of your protection is really aimed at the nearby kind — and that's the kind good protectors handle well.

Why the nearby strike matters most

This is the part that surprises people: lightning doesn't have to come anywhere near your house to hurt what's inside it.

When a strike lands even a good distance away, it can push a jolt of energy onto the power lines that feed your neighborhood. That jolt rides the wires right through your walls and into your outlets, where it can damage whatever is plugged in — often a television or a computer.

Here's the part folks forget: the surge doesn't only travel the power line. It can just as easily ride in on your cable or coax line, your telephone line, or an outdoor network cable. That's why protecting only the power cord leaves a back door wide open.

! The data lines are a real doorway

A surge that comes in on the cable line can sail straight into your TV or modem even if the power cord is perfectly protected. We'll cover guarding those lines a couple of pages from now — it's easy to do.

How layered protection fights lightning

You've got two tools, and against nearby strikes they're a strong team. Here's how they divide the work.

A whole-home protector at the panel

This is your first line of defense. A licensed electrician fits it at your electrical panel, where it catches a big surge — including one from a nearby strike on the lines — and knocks it down before it spreads through the house. It's an electrician's job with a permit, never a do-it-yourself one; our whole-home surge protection guide covers it in full.

Plug-in protectors at the wall

These are your second line, and the part you can set up yourself. They guard the sensitive electronics plugged into them from whatever gets past the panel unit, and many also have jacks to protect the cable or phone line running to a TV or modem.

✓ Two layers, fewer worries

Neither layer alone is the whole answer, but together they greatly reduce everyday and nearby-strike damage. Our layered-protection guide shows how they cover each other's blind spots.

The surest step in a severe storm: unplug

For all that good protection does, there's still one step that beats everything else when a storm is truly fierce.

When a violent electrical storm is right overhead — the kind where the thunder and lightning come almost together — the surest protection for a device you'd hate to lose is simply to unplug it. No plug-in protector can promise to survive a direct hit, but an unplugged device has no wire for the surge to travel.

And unplug the whole path, not just the power cord. Pull the cable or coax line, the phone line, and any outdoor network cable too, because a surge travels those just as happily. It takes a minute, and it's the closest thing there is to a sure bet.

! Unplug before the storm, not during the worst of it

Do your unplugging as the storm is approaching, not once it's raging. And never touch wiring, an outlet, or a plugged-in device if you see or smell anything scorched — if something already looks wrong, leave it be and call a licensed electrician.

Don't forget the data lines

Guarding the power cord but ignoring the cable and phone lines is one of the most common misses — and one of the easiest to fix.

Surges love a data line. The cable or coax feeding your TV, the telephone line, and an outdoor-run network cable are all pathways a nearby strike can use. The good news is that protecting them is simple, and often built right into a good surge protector.

The line	How to guard it
Power cord	A good surge protector
Cable / coax	A protected jack, or unplug
Phone line	A protected jack, or unplug
Outdoor network cable	Unplug it in a bad storm

✓ **Look for the extra jacks**

Many quality surge protectors include jacks for a coax or phone line right on the strip — you run the line in and back out through the protector. If you'd like, I'll set those up for you so nothing's left unguarded.

Keeping yourself safe during the storm

Electronics can be replaced, so let's spend a page on what matters most — you. None of this is alarming; it's just calm, sensible habit.

- ❑ Stay off corded phones and wired devices during the storm — a surge can travel a phone or power cord. A cordless or cell phone is fine.
- ❑ Keep away from plumbing and water: hold off on the shower, the dishes, and the sink until the storm passes.
- ❑ Stay away from windows and doors, and settle somewhere comfortable in an interior part of the house.
- ❑ If you're outside, head indoors when you hear thunder, and wait until the storm has clearly passed before going back out.
- ❑ Give it a little time after the last thunder before using wired things again — there's no rush.

! When in doubt, keep it simple

You don't need to memorize a rulebook. Indoors, away from water and wired things and windows, until the storm has clearly moved on. That simple picture covers the great majority of it.

When protection is plenty, and when to unplug

You don't need to leap up and unplug the house at the first raindrop. Here's how to tell the everyday storm from the one that calls for a little more.

For the ordinary storms that pass through all season, your layered protection — a whole-home unit plus plug-in protectors — is doing its job quietly in the background. You can carry on as normal; that's the whole point of having it.

It's the rare, violent storm sitting right on top of you — the kind that rattles the windows — where unplugging your treasured electronics earns its keep. Think of unplugging as the extra seatbelt you reach for only when the road gets truly rough.

✓ A simple rule of thumb

If the lightning and thunder arrive almost together, the storm is close. That's your cue to unplug the treasures. If there's a comfortable gap between them, your protectors have it handled.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Lightning doesn't treat every home the same. Where you live changes how exposed you are — and a farmhouse on a well faces a good deal more than a tidy lot in town.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town and the suburbs, the power lines feeding you are often shorter and sometimes buried, which gives lightning fewer places to jump aboard on its way to you. Storms still roll through, but your exposure to the lines is generally lower, and city water keeps flowing even in an outage.

- You still get plenty of nearby-strike surges and grid jolts — plug-in protectors on the TV, computer, and network gear cover most of it.
- A whole-home protector is a fine, affordable upgrade here too, backing up all your plug-in protection.
- In a severe storm, unplugging the treasures is still the surest step, data lines included.
- Closer neighbors often mean shorter outages, but the jolt when power returns is just as real.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, long overhead power lines run for miles across open land, giving nearby lightning far more chances to jump on and reach you. Storms arrive with less in the way, outages last longer, and a 240-volt well pump and other costly hardwired gear are on the line.

- Long overhead lines mean more exposure to nearby-strike surges — rural homes often have the most to gain from good protection.
- A whole-home protector at the panel is an especially smart first step, since it guards the hardwired well pump and furnace a strip can't reach.
- Ask that same licensed electrician about a protector at the well pump's controls too.
- With longer, fiercer storms, the habit of unplugging your treasures pays off more often out here.

★ Not sure how exposed your home is?

Tell me where you are and how your power behaves in a storm, and I'll help you sort out what's worth doing — no pressure and nothing to sell. Call (330) 200-8042.

What no protector can promise

I'd rather you know the honest limits now than feel let down later. Good protection is powerful, but it isn't magic.

No surge protector — not the best plug-in strip, not even a whole-home unit — can reliably survive a direct lightning strike. The energy in a direct hit is simply beyond what any plug-in device is built to absorb. That's exactly why unplugging in a severe storm remains the surest step of all.

What protection does, and does very well, is greatly reduce the damage from the common threats: nearby strikes, grid jolts, and the everyday surges born inside your home. It turns 'my TV is dead' into 'my TV is fine' the vast majority of the time. That's a very good deal — just not a guarantee against the rare direct hit.

! Beware anyone who promises the impossible

If a salesperson tells you a gadget will make your home completely lightning-proof, be skeptical. Honest protection reduces risk a great deal; it doesn't erase it. Anyone claiming otherwise isn't leveling with you.

A quick routine when a storm is coming

When the sky darkens, a calm two-minute routine settles the electronics side of things. Here's the short version.

- Unplug the treasures you'd hate to lose and don't need on — the television, the computer, the game console — data lines included.
- Glance at your surge protectors to confirm their indicator lights are still healthy (usually green).
- Make sure phones and any battery backups are charged, in case the power goes out.
- Leave the things that need to keep running — the refrigerator, and a sump pump on its own backup plan — alone.

✓ There's a whole guide for this

This is just the quick version. Our storm-season prep guide lays out a simple 'what to unplug' routine you can keep by the door, so you never have to think it through in the moment.

Once the storm has passed

When the worst is over, a calm look-around tells you whether anything needs attention. Most of the time, all is well.

Give the storm a little time to clearly move on, then plug your treasures back in. Glance at your surge protectors' indicator lights, and notice anything that won't turn on, acts strange, or — most important — smells burnt. A blinking clock on the microwave just means the power blipped; that's nothing to worry about.

If a whole-home unit is fitted at your panel, it has an indicator too. A glance at it after a big storm season is a good habit, and your electrician can check it if you're ever unsure.

! A burnt smell is a stop-and-call moment

If anything smells burnt or electrical, or looks scorched, don't use it — unplug it if you can do so safely and call a licensed electrician. Our after-a-surge guide walks through the whole calm check, step by step.

A few lightning myths, cleared up

Lightning attracts tall tales like nothing else. Here are the ones I hear most, set straight — calmly and accurately.

- **'A surge protector will stop a lightning strike.'** Not a direct one — nothing plug-in reliably survives that. It does greatly reduce nearby-strike and everyday damage.
- **'Lightning has to hit my house to hurt my electronics.'** No — a nearby strike can send a surge down the lines from a good distance away.
- **'If it's not raining right here, there's no risk.'** When you can hear thunder, it's close enough to take the simple indoor precautions.
- **'Rubber-soled shoes will protect me.'** They won't meaningfully. The real safety is being indoors, away from water, wired things, and windows.

✓ Accuracy beats folklore

A lot of lightning 'wisdom' is just folklore. The plain, accurate version is simpler and calmer: protect your gear in layers, unplug the treasures in a fierce storm, and keep yourself away from water and wired things.

Common mistakes people make

Knowing the usual slip-ups ahead of time is half the battle. Here are the ones worth sidestepping.

- **Guarding the power cord but not the data lines** — the cable and phone lines are a wide-open doorway for a surge.
- **Trusting a plain power strip** to do the job — a basic strip only adds outlets and offers no protection at all.
- **Waiting until the storm is raging to unplug** — do it as the storm approaches, not in the thick of it.
- **Assuming a whole-home unit means never unplugging** — it's wonderful, but the treasures still come out in a truly severe storm.
- **Forcing a protector into an ungrounded outlet** with a cheater adapter — without a real ground, it can't do its job.

! Never use a cheater plug

A three-prong protector needs a real ground to shunt a surge away safely. Never use a 3-to-2-prong adapter to force one into an old two-prong outlet — it quietly defeats the protection. An electrician can add a grounded outlet.

You don't have to remember all of this

If this feels like a lot, take a breath — it boils down to a few small habits, and you can keep them on a scrap of paper.

The truth is, once your protection is set up, it does the heavy lifting on its own, every day, without a thought from you. Your part is just the one simple habit for the rare fierce storm: unplug the treasures, stay away from water and wired things, and wait it out somewhere comfortable.

- ☐ My sensitive electronics are on real surge protectors, data lines included.
- ☐ I know which few treasures I'd unplug in a severe storm.
- ☐ I keep a short storm note where I'll see it.
- ☐ I know to stay off wired things and away from water until a storm passes.

★ Let me set the calm part up for you

The everyday protection that runs in the background is exactly what I'm glad to put in place, so all that's left for you is the easy habit. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Lightning at a glance

Here's the whole picture on one page, so you can see how the pieces fit without flipping back and forth.

The threat	How common	Your best move
Direct strike	Rare	Unplug the treasures
Nearby strike	Common	Layered protection
Grid jolt in a storm	Common	Layered protection
Surge on a data line	Common	Protect or unplug it

✓ **Notice the pattern**

The common threats are exactly the ones layered protection handles well. The rare, severe one is the ones you meet by unplugging. Between the two, you're covered from both directions.

Which things to unplug first

In a severe storm you don't have to sprint around the whole house. A short mental list of treasures is all you need.

Think about what would genuinely hurt to lose or be costly to replace, and what you don't need running through the storm. For most homes that's the big television and its cable box, the computer and its network gear, and a game console. Those are the ones worth pulling — power and data lines both.

Leave alone the things that need to keep working: the refrigerator, and a sump pump that's on its own backup plan. And don't fuss over lamps and simple, inexpensive items — they're not worth the trip, and they shrug off small surges anyway.

★ I'll help you make your short list

On a visit I'll walk your home with you and help you settle on your handful of treasures, then set up their protectors and label the plugs so unplugging is quick and clear. Call (330) 200-8042.

Where to begin, without overthinking it

You don't need to do everything at once. Here's a calm order that works for most homes.

First, put good plug-in surge protectors on the electronics you already own — the TV and home theater, the computer, and the internet equipment — and protect their data lines while you're at it. That's the part you can do this week, and it covers a great deal.

Then, when you're ready, ask a licensed electrician about a whole-home protector at the panel — an affordable addition that's especially worthwhile if you're rural and more exposed. There's no rush; even one layer is far better than none, and the unplugging habit costs nothing at all.

★ A plan that fits your home and budget

Tell me your home and what you'd hate to lose, and I'll help you put things in a sensible order — starting with the cheap, easy wins. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

How I can help

This is exactly the sort of practical, worry-easing thing I love to take off your plate.

I can walk your home with you, set up the right plug-in protectors on your sensitive electronics — data lines included — and label the plugs so unplugging before a storm is quick and clear. I'll show you the indicator lights and what they mean, so you'll know at a glance if one ever needs replacing.

For a whole-home protector at the panel, I don't do the electrical work myself — that's a licensed electrician's job. But I'll help you understand it, decide if it's right for your home, and line up a trustworthy local pro, so you're never sorting it out alone.

★ Real help, close to home

A first in-home visit is a flat \$99, and for simple things I can often help over the phone or a screen-share for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about lightning and storms, answered plainly and calmly.

Q: Will a surge protector stop lightning?

It greatly reduces the damage from the common threats — nearby strikes and grid jolts — but nothing plug-in reliably survives a direct hit. That's why unplugging the treasures in a severe storm is still the surest step.

Q: Does lightning have to hit my house to hurt my electronics?

No — and that's the big surprise. A strike a good distance away can send a surge down the power lines, and along the cable and phone lines too, right into your home.

Q: In a bad storm, what's the surest way to protect my TV or computer?

Unplug it — the power cord and the data lines both, like the cable or coax. An unplugged device gives a surge no wire to travel. Do it as the storm approaches, not during the worst of it.

Q: How do I keep myself safe during a storm?

Calmly and simply: stay off corded phones and wired devices, keep away from plumbing and water, and stay away from windows, until the storm has clearly passed. A cell or cordless phone is fine.

Q: Do I really have to unplug everything, every single storm?

Not at all. For everyday storms, your layered protection handles it in the background. Save the unplugging for the rare, violent storm sitting right overhead.

★ Still have a question?

That's what I'm here for. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and ask away — there's truly no such thing as a silly question about storms and safety.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made lightning and storm safety feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do the licensed electrical work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Direct Hit vs. Nearby Strike

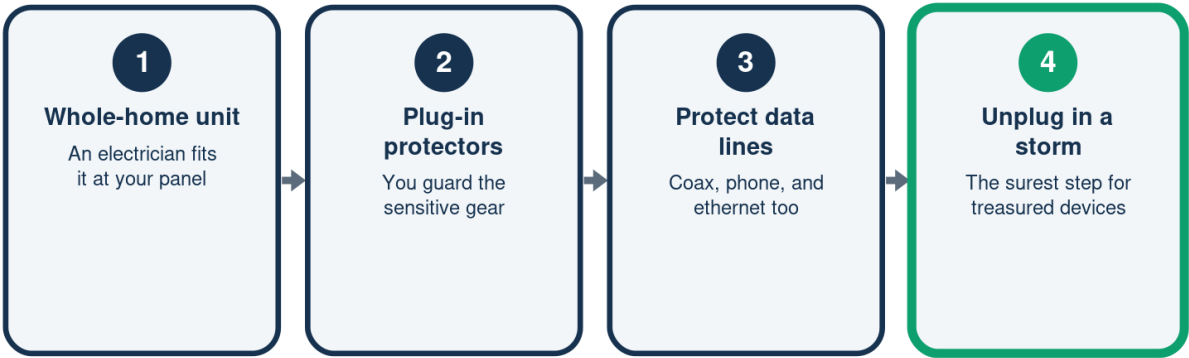
Two very different threats -- handled two ways

	Direct hit	Nearby strike
How common	Rare	Common
What it does	Catastrophic	A surge
Plug-in survives?	No	Usually
Best defense	Unplug	Layered

The common threat is the nearby one -- and it's the one you can guard.

Layers Against Lightning

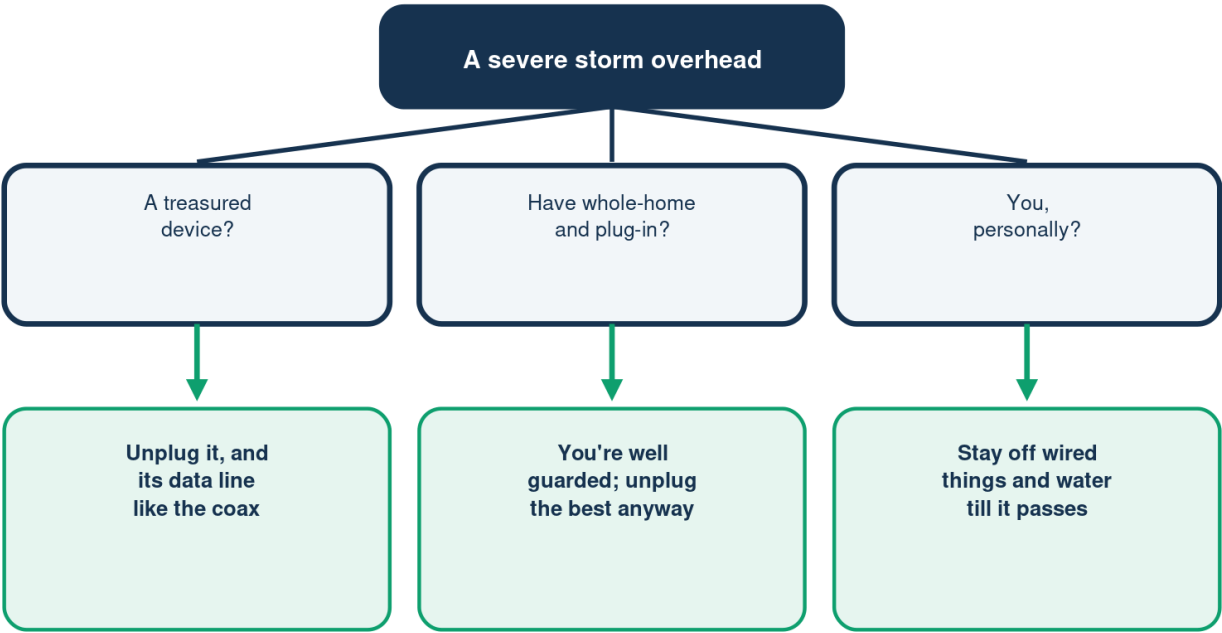
Each layer does a job the others can't



Layered protection every day; unplug the treasures in a fierce storm.

When a Severe Storm Is Overhead

A calm decision for your gear -- and you



No plug-in device fully survives a direct hit. Unplugging is surest.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Guarding Each Kind of Line

A surge travels the data lines too

	Everyday guard	In a big storm
Power lines	Whole-home + strip	Unplug the best
Cable / coax	A protected jack	Unplug it
Phone line	A protected jack	Unplug it
Ethernet	Guard if outdoor	Unplug it

Protect the power cord and the data lines -- or unplug both in a storm.



Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.
You just have to remember you can call.
Friendly, in-home tech help -- I come to you.

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If you are not 100% happy with a visit, I will
make it right -- or refund it. No awkwardness,
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— Bill

Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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