

New Avengers changed but still the same

By BLAIR KIRBY

The great advantage of the Avengers was that it was totally different. No other show had the combination of science-fiction gadgetry and stiff-upper-lip spoof which allowed Steed and his various nymphs to do something unbelievable and heroic and then say "Tea, anyone?"

It was that difference, I think, which brought us The New Avengers, starting last night on Channels 9 and 13 and a week ago on most of the rest of the CTV network. No doubt the original producers, who are also behind the new show, noted what's on today's TV screens. There is nothing that is miraculous and fun and demands not a single bit of thought or worry.

The New Avengers is just like the old show, though with a few changes necessitated by the passage of nine years. Patrick Macnee, once of Toronto, still plays Steed with British restraint and with no acting to speak of.

Time has aged him, of course, and no doubt has done even worse by the beautiful girls who used to do his bidding. As a result we now have a new girl, and in addition a suavely handsome male to appeal to the ladies' fancies. They are Joanna Lumley and Gareth Hunt, and they fill their mechanical roles adequately.

Last night's instalment pitted all of them against an undetectable killing device, operated by one of the organization's traitorous employees. The gadgetry of the week was a "training device" which put each agent through a gamut of mechanical "killers." You shot them first or you lost marks in this game. In reality (?), however, the mechanisms should not pretend bullets but lethal curare darts.

Was there ever anything that was more unbelievable hokum? You could push Aga-



Patrick Macnee as Steed: British restraint intact.

until good old Nancy gave her the guts to go on. Among other incompetent artificialities was the 12-year-old boy always wanting a goggle at the girls, and always being sent away, not by the girls, but by his big brother. There were other samples of schlock too numerous to mention.

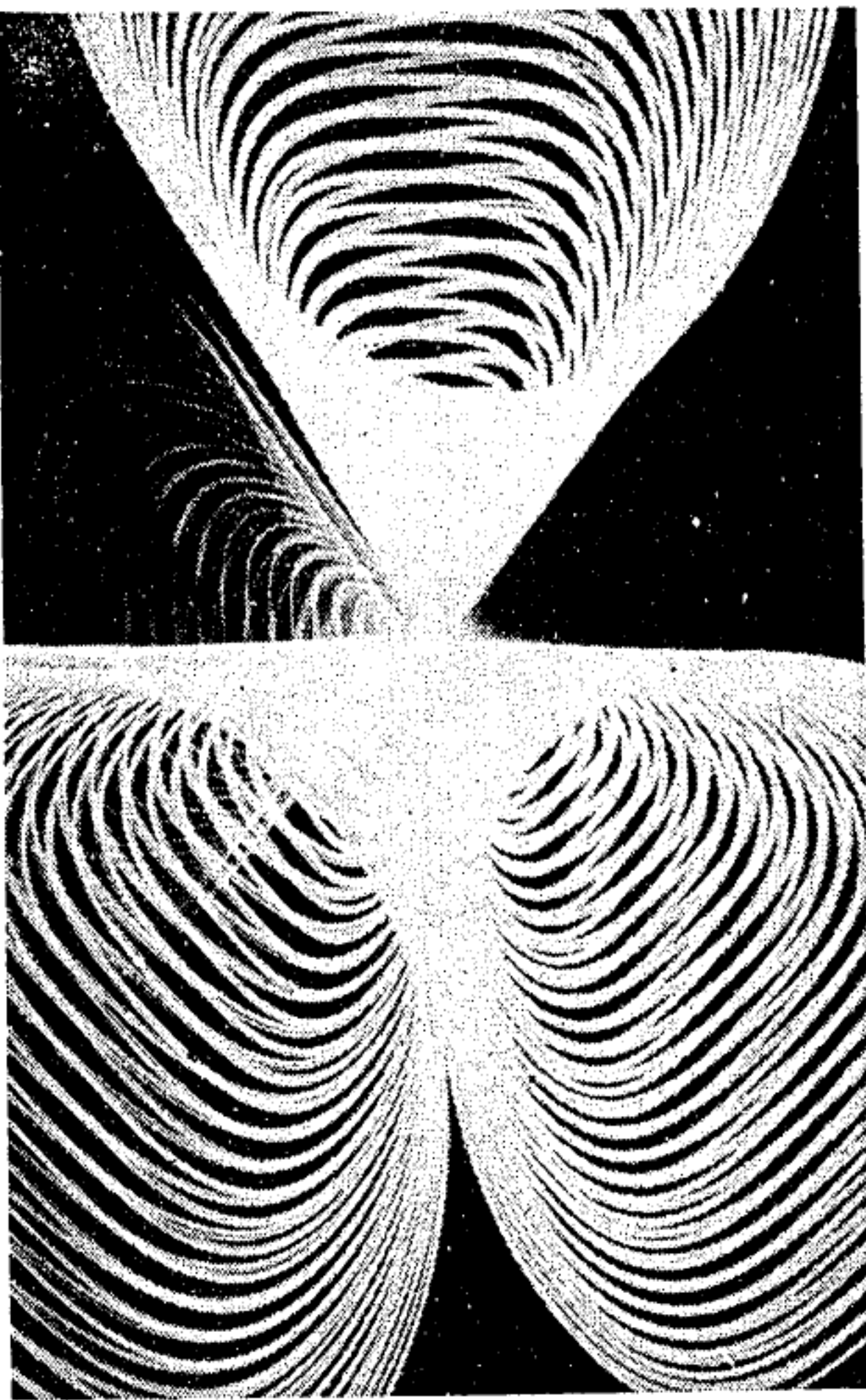
One other inconsequential sitcom also made its debut last night, at 7, but I found it much less offensive if not much more amusing. It was My Name Is Harry Worth, another of Channel 5's endless succession of British mini-series. They seem to come and go almost before you can notice them, and are not missed when they're gone.

Harry Worth is a British comedian, and in this series he plays a bumbling broom salesman, involved in silly mistakes such as going on the roof to rescue the cat while dressed only in a fur coat.

One thing this show does to its credit, however, and that is refrain from exaggeration, from the comic equivalent of wringing our necks to force us to laugh. I wish Blansky's Beauties was so considerate.

Shows such as Harry Worth's, however, are perfect samples of waste material used for padding. CBLT does not really have them there to entertain, but to fill a time slot cheaply. The CBC hasn't given the station enough initiative—to make local programs, for which the time slot is reserved.

If they are not an embarrassment to CBLT, they ought to be.



Laser: the optically opulent marred by a sameness to the music.

Laser rub-down a ho-ham affair

BY LAWRENCE O'TOOLE

Two years ago when Laserium, a laser light concert, came to Toronto for the first time the press was nearly beside itself with joy. Typewriters clacked away relentlessly to announce this new phenomenon, but nobody bothered to mention that, for the press screening, a special laserist was flown in from Los Angeles to show off the new product. He didn't stay for regular performances.

Laserium is a kind of visual rub-down parlor where you lie back and gaze at the ceiling of the McLaughlin Planetarium, where it is playing, while a one-watt krypton laser splits into dancing patterns overhead. The basic geometry of what you see is on tape, leaving the laserist with the option to embellish it the way he sees fit. The press saw a different show, and probably a better one than the public sees.

I talked to several people who had seen regular performances two years ago; they were people who would be quite receptive to a light show. They shrugged their shoulders and wondered what all the hype was about—the same response the thin audience Wednesday night might have had.

Although Laser Images Inc. brands its show as something for the entire family—a sort of celestial Fantasia—it wouldn't take any gargantuan grasp of the vagaries of selling to know the audience for which it is marketed. Remember all those kids who took the bit in their teeth and did the bacchanal, with pulsating globes of light backing them up? Where are they now? Maybe, just for old times' sake, they'll head for Laserium, just maybe.

Let's take a look at what's being offered: bars of multi-colored light drift-

ing in space, spider webs of light reorganizing themselves into new ones, clouds of light shifting from stratus to cumulus and dizzying waves of laser increasing in intensity. All very optically opulent for a minute or so, but the expansion and contraction of the laser back and forth into the same patterns, the sameness of the music which is rhythmically simple and the electronic insistence of the selections make the hour-long show too long by 40 minutes or so.

The music used—a Sousa march, a Joplin rag, Mason Williams' Classical Gas and a lot of rock—doesn't exactly inspire complex light arrangements on the part of the laserist, were he up to it, which he wasn't Wednesday night. A light show to a fugue, a canon, or even a rondo form, now that would be exciting. The selections used in Laserium at the moment (and I did like the bars of light behaving like cheerleader batons during the Sousa) don't develop into much. One strand of light that keeps jabbing at a dense centre to produce a concentric effect, for example, is simply repeated over and over; circles merely vibrate into contrasting shapes to the rag; and there is only a kindergarten musical connection to the images.

It's all very Rorschach—you bring to it what you will. At one point tiny sperm seemed to be circulating in tadpole fashion around what seemed to be a giant egg. But I suppose that's only me.

Perhaps, too, the cold, changing architecture is somewhat threatening; you just sit there and are fed all this visual information. It's Huxley's feelies manufactured for the optic nerve. At the end, the four basic colors spell out the word Laserium. Isn't that cute?

tha Christie through the holes in this yarn. But then, Avengers fans are not trained to think, just to enjoy. And yes, our heroine revives immediately after she gets a slug of curare cure, looks at her pals brightly, and says "Are we going on somewhere?"

Nancy (Retread) Walker tried again last night, with the debut of Mrs. Blansky's Beauties, her fourth show in less than a year. I think she should try for five.

Her new show, running Thursdays on CTV and Saturdays on ABC, is a sitcom about the choreographer of a third-rate Las Vegas hotel floor show. It has, I think, not one character of any amusement or potential, and even the guest star in the debut had not the slightest glow. It was downright embarrassing to have to squirm through a closing line which was ineptly designed, I guess, to warm our hearts:

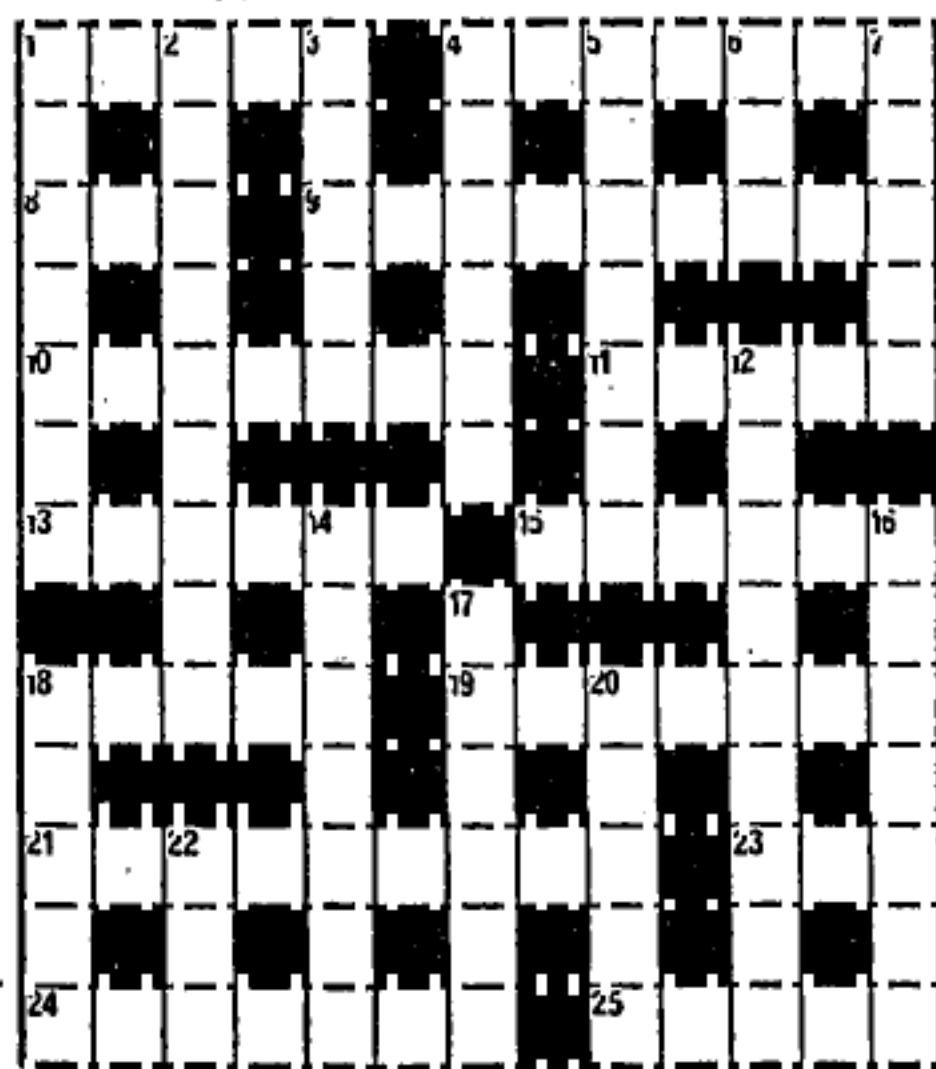
"When I see those girls walk on that stage with all their hopes and dreams, I feel they really need me. And 'cause they need me, I need them."

That wasn't the only insultingly obvious attempt to tug at our heartstrings, of course. There was also the tearful bungler who was going to quit

CROSSWORD

CRYPTIC CLUES

- | | |
|---|---|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 Ten dollars for a bird (5) | 1 Competitor in an event ran terribly (7) |
| 4 A decoration so often out of place (7) | 2 Happy to have fourteen pounds in a bag (9) |
| 8 Meal in the late afternoon (3) | 3 Point to a number consumed (5) |
| 9 Highland counsellor or persecutor (9) | 4 He makes money illegally (6) |
| 10 The attendant's not responsible for it (7) | 5 Evidence of a leak? Tell the attendant! (7) |
| 11 Fool goes around by a chasm (5) | 6 It's frequently curtailed (3) |
| 13 Subject about right for a mundane circle (6) | 7 They supply information from the ranks (5) |
| 15 Native porter wearing fewer clothes, we hear (6) | 12 It's a rigid rule (9) |
| 18 A source maybe of a parson's income from a single benefice (5) | 14 Sheet that doesn't stay put—it's cold! (3-4) |
| 19 Instrument possibly unites fifty (7) | 16 Fire Les, perhaps, and get others to take over the job (7) |
| 21 The story one tells (9) | 17 Empty article from a country (6) |
| 23 Their editorials show anger (3) | 18 Complete set of notes (5) |
| 24 Girl brought in to have a go at leather-making (7) | 20 Vessels were wrecked on the point (5) |
| 25 Dickensian character from the skies (5) | 22 Woman prepared to follow an order (3) |



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Frost-Nixon interviews sold to 75 stations

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The four 90-minute interviews talk show host David Frost will tape with former President Richard M. Nixon have attracted 75 television stations and four national sponsors so far.

By the time the first show goes on the air May 4, it is expected that more than 100 stations covering 90 per cent of the U.S. viewing audience will have signed up, said Leo Koch, executive vice president of Syndicast Services, the New York syndicator for the four-show series.

At least 10 foreign countries will also air the series, which will be edited from 12 two-hour interviews Frost will start with Nixon late next month at Nixon's home in San Clemente.

Frost said in August, 1975, a year after Nixon resigned, that he had bought the rights for the television interview.

Koch said the series was being offered to stations on a "barter" basis, which means the stations receive the programs free and can sell six of each show's 12 minutes of commercial time to local sponsors.

Frost and the syndicators will sell the other six minutes to national advertisers at \$125,000 a minute.

CONTRACT BRIDGE

By B. JAY BECKER

South dealer.
North-South vulnerable.

NORTH
♠ Q 9 8
♥ J 9 8
♦ A Q 7
♣ A J 9 4

WEST
♠ K J 5 2
♥ 7 4 2
♦ 10 6
♣ Q 10 8 5

EAST
♠ A 10 7
♥ 6 5
♦ J 9 5 4
♣ K 6 3 2

SOUTH
♠ 6 4 3
♥ A K Q 10 3
♦ K 8 3 2
♣ 7

The bidding:
South West North East
1♥ Pass 2NT Pass
3♥ Pass 4♥

Opening lead—five of clubs. When the opponents have six cards of a suit, they will be divided 3-3, 26 per cent of the time; 4-2, 40 per cent; 5-1, 15 per cent; 6-0, 1 per cent. With five cards missing, they will be divided 3-2, 68 per cent of the time; 4-1, 28 per cent; 5-0, 4 per cent. Memorizing these figures is not a matter of life and death, but anyone unfamiliar with them in a general way is operating under a handicap.

Let's see how the odds apply to the accompanying deal. Assume you're declarer and West leads a club. Obviously, you are sure of five trump tricks, three diamonds and one club. This comes to only nine tricks, but there is a chance of making a tenth trick if the diamonds are divided 3-3. However, this offers only a 36 per cent chance, not a particularly attractive prospect.

Fortunately, there is another way of measuring your chances. It depends on finding the missing trumps divided 3-2, which occurs in 68 per cent of all deals.

The best method of play is to win the club and ruff a club with the queen. Then cash the ace of trumps and play the three to the nine. When both defenders follow suit, you know the trumps are divided 3-2.

Ruff another club, enter dummy with a diamond, and ruff the jack of clubs with your last trump. Cross to dummy with a diamond and draw West's last trump with the jack. This brings you to nine tricks, and the king of diamonds constitutes number ten.

The prime purpose of all these plays is to score six trump tricks instead of the obvious five. The suggested line of play makes you about a 2-to-1 favorite, while if you draw trumps at once and rely solely on a 3-3 diamond division, the odds are nearly 2-to-1 against you.

QUICK CLUES

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 To sponge (5) | 1 Vie (7) |
| 4 Faraway (7) | 2 General instruction (9) |
| 8 Spoil (3) | 3 Keen (5) |
| 9 Undertake (9) | 4 Scarcity (6) |
| 10 Passage from book (7) | 5 Defamation (7) |
| 11 Misgiving (5) | 6 Skill (3) |
| 13 Puzzle (6) | 7 Apply remedies to (5) |
| 15 Gain (6) | 12 Baseless (9) |
| 18 To vow (5) | 14 A marvel (7) |
| 19 Happening by degrees (7) | 15 High chest of drawers (7) |
| 21 Awaiting eagerly (9) | 17 Horrified (6) |
| 23 Touch (3) | 18 Slumber (5) |
| 24 Omen (7) | 20 To change (5) |
| 25 Glowing red (5) | 22 Equality of value (3) |

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S PUZZLE

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 OPEN SECRET | 2 PURSUIT |
| 8 STRUT | 3 NOTED |
| 9 ANTIQUE | 4 ELANDS |
| 10 ROUNDED | 5 RETINUE |
| 11 NEEDS | 6 TOQUE |
| 12 PATASH | 7 PESSIMISTS |
| 14 BECALM | 8 SORE POINTS |
| 17 IDLER | 13 SURPING |
| 19 PITCHES | 15 ATHWART |
| 21 TANGIER | 16 SPIRAL |
| 22 AMASS | 18 LUNCH |
| 23 HIGHLIGHTS | 20 TWANG |
- QUICK**
- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 CHIVALROUS | 2 HAULAGE |
| 8 HAUNT | 3 VITAL |
| 9 SHELTER | 4 LASERS |
| 10 TRAWLER | 5 OVERSEE |
| 11 STOOP | 6 SET-TO |
| 12 HEADED | 7 DEEP-SEATED |
| 14 METTLE | 8 HOTCHPOT |
| 17 OFFER | 13 EARRING |
| 19 AFFLICT | 15 TRICKLE |
| 21 CALLING | 16 JARGON |
| 22 FALSED | 18 FALSE |
| 23 ENGINEERED | 20 FENCE |

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for the week's movies-theatre TV and radio listings-music places to go and things to do

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Program and casting subject to change.

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8:00 p.m. — \$4.50, 6:30, 9:30, 11:00, 13:50
Feb. 19 gala — \$5.50, 8:00, 12:00, 15:00, 17:50

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Ryerson Theatre Co. 43 Gerrard St. 595-5087.
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