



**Sample Pages from
A Box of Puppies**

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A BOX OF PUPPIES

Constantly, Incessantly, All The Time
Huge Hands
Diatom
One Beer Too Many

FOUR ONE ACT PLAYS BY
Billy Houck



A Box of Puppies
Constantly, Incessantly, All The Time
Huge Hands
Diatom
One Beer Too Many
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A Box of Puppies

Four One Act Plays by Billy Houck

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Set

All you need is a bare stage.

Welcome!

Welcome to *A Box of Puppies*, a diverse and exciting collection of One Act Plays. Each play can be performed independently or the four plays can be performed together in the above order for an outstanding competition piece.

— Enjoy! —

Constantly, Incessantly, All the Time

Characters

Rikki

Setting

Bare Stage

RIKKI, a teenager, walks on stage carrying an incredibly huge backpack and a bathroom scale. She puts the scale on the floor, and the backpack right next to it downstage center.

RIKKI: Take a look at this.

RIKKI stands on the scale and looks down.

RIKKI: A hundred and twelve pounds. (*adjust to a realistic weight for the actor playing RIKKI.*) A buck twelve. That's all she wrote. That's all I got. There ain't no more. I'm a skinny kid, waddya want? Now check this out.

RIKKI steps off the scale and puts on the backpack, then steps back on the scale.

RIKKI: Um. Uh. Here. There. Now. Here you go. One hundred and seventy three pounds. That's the real deal. This backpack (*takes it off*) weighs...um...hold on, I've got it...one seven three minus one one two...that's...um sixty-one? Sixty-one pounds.

That can't be right. A sixty-one pound backpack. A sixty-one pound backpack? Come on. Seriously. Did I do the math right? Let's take a look inside this thing and see what's gonna give me teenage scoliosis. (*starts taking things out of the backpack's various pockets and compartments.*) Three-ring binder, complete with colour-coded dividers and tons of college-ruled paper. And a notebook. I know what you're thinking. If I have a three ring binder, all full of college ruled paper, what's the notebook for? Hey, it's a real cool notebook. If I ever wanted to take notes, I'm set. I'm down. Locked and Loaded.

Here's a calculator. Hey, I coulda used this thing back when I was trying to figure out how much it all weighed. Rubik's Cube. Red Bull. Twinkie. Math book! (*pulls out a HUGE math book. It takes two hands.*) Look at the size of this sucker! The tome. There is

so much math in here that they had to make up extra numbers to cover it all. You know how good I would be at math if I ever opened it up? I'll tell you. Good. Very good. Incredibly good. You know. A math master. A Math-ter. Never mind. That makes me sound like I lipst. I mean lisp.

OK, what else is there in here? An English Literature Anthology! Look. It's even bigger than the math monster. And here's why. Take a look at the table of contents. *Romeo and Juliet* without the nurse's dirty jokes, (*flipping through the book*) a fully illustrated *Beowulf* excerpt, a fraction of *The Canterbury Tales*, no sex, no politics, just a medieval travelogue, *Huck Finn* without any references to race, *Oliver Twist* without child abuse, some Robert Frost without regrets, some Edna St. Vincent Millay reduced to clever greeting cards, it's actually amazing how big this book is, considering how much stuff they took out. Oh, but here. You'll love this. To show how hip the editors are? The complete lyric to the Carpenters' *Close to You...* words & music by Burt Bacharach and Hal David. Uncut!

She starts to sing but stops suddenly.

RIKKI: OK, I'll stop.

No way is that a full seventy...what was it? That's right. Sixty-one pounds. The sixty-one pound backpack. All right, what else is there? Mechanical pencils. Sharpies. Smarties. A can of spray paint. Don't ask. A broken iPod, except you know what? A broken iPod is better than an iPod that works, because it still does the job. All you have to do is put the ear-buds in, and boom...automatic cone of silence. Everyone leaves you alone, as long as you keep bopping your head up and down. You're insulated from the outside world. And then if you accidentally attract the wrong types and someone jacks your iPod HA! They stole a broken iPod. So keep one handy.

OK, dirty PE clothes, sneakers, a copy of *Green Eggs and Ham*, just to keep it real, a padlock for my bike, a party hat, toothbrush, a tuning fork, sunglasses, a towel, sweatshirt, wait a minute. This isn't my sweatshirt. How did that get in there?

OK, check this out: a Physics textbook!

She holds up an impressive looking Physics textbook, smiles, poses with it as though she's the official spokesperson for Physics, then suddenly stops.

RIKKI: Let's face it kids, if I'm not opening the math book you KNOW I'm not reading Physics. I'll just do the worksheets, the extra

credit and take the tests. How can I do the tests without reading the book? Simple. The tests are multiple choice. And you don't have to find the right answer for that. Just figure out which answers are wrong. There are four answers, right? The teacher can't resist putting in at least one joke answer, like "five billion point two-oh-seven." Right. So now it's only one in three. The odds are getting better. There are going to be two answers that are close together. Unless your Physics teacher is really mean, these two are probably wrong, too, because they aren't going to give you the right answer and another answer that's one degree different. So now you have the right answer! But if your Physics teacher is mean, then the answer is one of those two close answers, so you can just flip a coin, because one out of two is much better odds than one out of four. Right? Isn't it? I think it is. If you can get it all down to fifty-fifty, and you do the extra credit clean-up-the-creek project, you've got at least a C. Maybe a B minus. Not too shabby.

I know what you're thinking. If you aren't going to read the books, why carry them around? Simple. Some teachers give points for bringing the book to class. And you know my extra credit policy. Do it to it. Not only that, some teachers will even give you extra credit for returning your book in good condition, so it's in your best interest to keep 'em with you, but keep 'em closed.

There must be more stuff in here...oh yeah, flute, sunscreen, gum, another notebook, not as cool as the first one, though...a sandwich...I wondered where that went to. *(takes a bite.)* Not bad. A little smooched, but isn't that the destiny of all food?

Highlighter, sketchpad, comic book, snickers, a water bottle, and... Yes, in answer to the question you didn't ask, I do play the flute. I like the way it sounds. It's soothing. I took lessons back in Elementary School before the program was cut. I'm not in the marching band though. It's too hard. I just like the flute. What else is there?

OH! History. *(pulls out a history book.)* Here's what you need to know about history: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." History teachers love this quote because they think that by doing their job, they're keeping future generations from having to live through the horrors of say, Dachau, the Spanish Inquisition, the Black Plague, or movie sequels. The problem is they aren't reading the quote right. It's not about history teachers. It's about history. Here's the deal: History DOES repeat itself. People DON'T remember the horrors of the past. Who would want to? They're horrors!

Anybody who's teaching history that can't see the repeating patterns must be reading something else. And another thing. The reverse of that stupid "remember the past" quote is "Children are our future." Wrong. Children are here in the present, just like everyone else. People who aren't born yet, THEY'RE the future.

OK, that's enough of that. What else is in here? Oh look, a smaller backpack inside the larger backpack. What's in there?

RIKKI looks inside the smaller backpack.

RIKKI: Oh. That's right. Never mind. We don't have to look in there right now, do we? OK. Fine.

Puts the smaller backpack aside. Looks at the stuff all around.

RIKKI: Wow. Look at all this stuff. Amazing. No wonder I can't stand up straight any more.

Pulls out a series of self-help and idiot's guide books, stacking them in a neat pile.

RIKKI:

Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul. Part 3!

Where There's a Will There's an A.

How to Succeed in High School.

The Idiot's Guide to Algebra.

A sock. Clean? *(sniffs the sock)* No.

She tosses the dirty sock into the audience

Ten Minutes to a More Powerful Vocabulary.

Ballroom Dancing for Idiots.

In Case of Zombie Attack.

In Case of Vampires.

In Case of Werewolves.

Study your way to a Perfect SAT Score. (tosses that one away) Yeah, like that works.

Look, I'm not trying to make you feel sorry for me or anything. Life is good with a giant backpack. Unless you fall over backwards and get stuck like an upside-down turtle.

That happened to me once.

I wasn't stuck too long. I was back up before lunchtime.

Huge Hands

Characters

Sparky, a small adolescent boy

Sparky's Mom

Sparky's Friend, but not really

A Random Kid

A Gang of Kids (6) who bully Sparky

Sparky is the smallest or at least the thinnest actor in the theatre. Aside from Sparky and Mom, gender doesn't matter. Race doesn't matter. Size is very important.

Setting

A bare stage.

Costumes

Sparky carries a pair of oversized hands in a backpack. The hands can be store bought or made of Papier-mâché. The important thing is that they be really big and super-strong looking.

SPARKY comes on stage, clutching his backpack and looks around. He is surrounded by A GANG OF KIDS who start pushing SPARKY around.

KID ONE: Hey, Sparky!

KID TWO: Spark meister,

KID THREE: Dude, that backpack is so gay.

KID FOUR: Ya scrawny little punk.

KID FIVE: Get outta here, ya stupid faggot.

KID SIX: Oops! Did I push you?

KID ONE: Sorry. Why doncha watch out where yer goin, kid?

They pick SPARKY up in the air, and "crowd surf" him for a while. Unable to resist, SPARKY suffers through their mischief.

KID TWO: Hey, it's rainin' sparks you guys! Ha! Get it?

KID THREE: Whoa, hey there Sparkplug. Better come down, or you're gonna get in trouble!

KID FOUR: Hope I don't drop ya.

KID FIVE: That'll teach ya to come where you aren't wanted.

KID SIX: Why don't you grow up or something ya little mouse?

KID ONE: Watch out, here comes Sparky!

They drop SPARKY and run off, laughing.

SPARKY: (*pops up, furious*) Hey, I'm really mad now. Somebody's gonna pay! You guys better watch out. You keep teasin' me and you're gonna be sorry. Yeah, you. I'm talking to you.

Of course, SPARKY's tormentors are long gone.

SPARKY: One of these days, bang, zoom! To the moon.

Then you'll be sorry you teased me.

Hey, you! You want a free pass to the gun show?

(*takes off t-shirt*) Get a load of these!

SPARKY, now stripped to the waist or wearing only a tank top, looks REALLY scrawny, but poses like a body builder.

SPARKY: I'll take you all on.

I'm not afraid!

SPARKY, breathing heavy, consciously calms himself down.

SPARKY: Ten...nine...eight...seven...six...five...four...three...two...one...a green leafy forest. A baby bird. A fawn. A bubbling brook.

"The calm" snaps.

SPARKY: AND THEN GIANT ALIENS COME DOWN AND EAT THE BABY BIRDS, RIP THE FAWN APART AND DESTROY THE FOREST! YEAH!

That's the way I roll.

So watch out.

Sparky is gonna gitcha.

SPARKY pulls out a pair of huge, oversized superhero hands out of his back pack. He puts them on. He looks like he has giant fists at the end of his skinny arms.

SPARKY: Sometimes I have a rage burning inside of me, and I don't even know it. Every day something happens to me. I mean it. Somebody calls me a faggot at least once every 47 minutes. I kept track. If you're in school for seven hours a day and somebody calls you a faggot at least nine times a day, it works out to once every 47 minutes. Roughly.

I kept a chart. I showed it to my math teacher, but she just said, "I don't give extra credit."

I don't make these things up.

And I'm not even gay. Not that that matters. I mean, it matters if you're gay or not, but when they say "faggot" they don't mean "gay." They don't even mean "gay" when they say "gay." When they call a thing "gay" like "oh, this class is soooooo gay" they don't mean it's bright or happy, or even homosexual. They mean it's boring, or hard, or both.

Idiots.

But when they say, "you're gay"

They mean, "I'm more pop-u-lar than you are."

They mean, "get out of my way."

They mean, "I'm bigger than you, I'm stronger than you, I've got a big ol' gang of guys, so we can do anything we want to you and **NOBODY WILL DO ANYTHING TO STOP IT!**"

Nobody.

Nobody.

So it's up to Sparky. (*he shows off his huge hands*)

With these mighty huge hands I fear no one.

I am invincible.

If you try to fight me, I will only get stronger.

SMASH CRASH!

When they see me coming, they'll get out of the way.

Because they'll see the rage inside of me.

They'll see that I may look like wimpy little Sparky, but if they mess with me, I'll come at them like a freakin' **TORNADO!**

I'm gonna destroy their houses.

Level the whole block with one punch.

Then they'll be sorry.

Someone's gonna be real sorry.

Sorry they messed with the Skip-Meister.

Yeah. I'm bad. I'm bad.

You know it.

SPARKY'S FRIEND crosses the stage. SPARKY tries (unsuccessfully) to hide his huge hands.

SPARKY'S FRIEND: Hey Sparky.

SPARKY: Um. Hey.

SPARKY'S FRIEND: How's it goin'?

SPARKY: Cool cool. I'm cool.

SPARKY'S FRIEND: Where's your shirt?

SPARKY: (*pulls shirt back on*) Nothing. I mean nowhere. I mean right here. I was just catching some rays. Working on my tan. You know.

SPARKY'S FRIEND: Yeah. OK. Catch you later.

SPARKY: Awwright. Don't do nothing I wouldn't do. Ha.

SPARKY'S FRIEND: See ya.

SPARKY: Oh, OK, you wanna go, uh, you know, the uh...

SPARKY'S FRIEND: What?

SPARKY: Oh, nothin'. Never mind. I was just, you know.

SPARKY'S FRIEND: (*leaving in earnest*) Whatever.

SPARKY: (*shouting after him*) That's cool. That's cool. Don't be a hater. See you later. And don't forget to tip the waiter. Ha. (*FRIEND is long gone*) My best friend. Really. That's my best friend who just left. Yep. Best friend in the whole world. He and I went to kindergarten together. When those guys stole my thermos, he was there. When I had to repeat the fourth grade, he was there. Of course, after that he wasn't there any more, because he was

then a grade ahead of me. But we see each other almost every day at lunch.

And he says Hi to me.

And I say Hi to him.

This may not seem like a big deal, but if NOBODY ever said anything to you except “get outta my way,” You would be pretty stoked when somebody said Hi.

Even if that’s all he ever said.

RANDOM KID crosses by.

SPARKY: Hi! Hey, how ya doin’? Nice day, isn’t it?

RANDOM KID: Huh?

RANDOM KID keeps crossing & exits without stopping.

SPARKY: See what I mean?

Sometimes when I’m home I go to the kitchen, you know, for a glass of milk, or some orange juice, or even just a glass of water, you know? And I get to the kitchen and my mom is standing there.

SPARKY’s MOM enters.

SPARKY: And then I forget what I went to the kitchen for. And I’m just standing there, you know?

MOM: (*rapidly, with no chance for him to answer*) What do you want? Why are you just standing there? Maybe I should put you on Ritalin. Did you do your homework? What’s wrong with you?

SPARKY: What’s wrong with me? What’s wrong with me? Are you kidding, Mom? How about my whole freaking life? How about I have horrible nightmares every night, but the only thing that’s scarier than my nightmares is the rest of my life when I’m awake?

I’m miserable! You give me clothes, you make sure I’m fed, but my life is miserable. School is hell, but home is – I don’t know... what’s worse than hell? Nothing. Home feels like nothing. I’m empty, and it’s all your fault!

MOM gasps in horror and freezes, her knuckles in her teeth.

Diatom

Characters

Dale and Robin

Setting

A bus stop.

DALE and ROBIN are teenaged friends. Any gender, but they don't have a car. They are waiting for a school bus. ROBIN has a water bottle.

DALE: Look in your water. It's full of them.

ROBIN: What?

DALE: Just look. You'll see.

ROBIN: I'll see what?

DALE: (*importantly*) Diatoms.

ROBIN: (*looks in water bottle*) What?

DALE: (*slowly*) Di-uh-toms.

ROBIN: Di – uh...

DALE: ...toms. Right. Hundreds. Thousands. Millions. Or at least a dozen.

ROBIN: I don't see anything.

DALE: You can't. They're microscopic.

ROBIN: Then why did you tell me to look?

DALE: I just thought you should know. They aren't bad. Won't kill you. Probably. As a matter of fact, you're more likely to kill them.

ROBIN: I am not. Who?

DALE: The diatoms. The little guys. The one-cell guys. They're that small. So small they can't even be seen. Your drinking them will probably kill them. Can you imagine being that small?

ROBIN: (*sighs*) Yeah. Easy.

DALE: What?

ROBIN: Easy. Like I said. I can imagine being small. Because I am.
Because you are.

DALE: No we're not.

ROBIN: Then why are we waiting for a bus? Just waiting. Waiting here.
Helpless. Can't do a thing until the bus comes.

DALE: What does that have to do with being small?

ROBIN: Cause if we were multi-cellular, WE'D HAVE A CAR!

DALE: Oh... yeah. I guess you're right.

ROBIN: Of course I'm right.

DALE: I wish I had a car.

ROBIN: A red car.

DALE: A fast red car.

ROBIN: A Mustang.

DALE: A Camaro.

ROBIN: An Impala.

BOTH: Yeah...

Pause. They look for the bus. It's not coming yet.

ROBIN: (*looking in bottle*) So what do they do in there?

DALE: Who?

ROBIN: The Diatoms? You remember. They're in the water. What do they do in there? Just float? Just wait to become bigger?

DALE: Oh. The diatoms. They don't get any bigger. They're one-celled forever. But they do...um...extrude exoskeletons.

ROBIN: Extrude?

DALE: Yeah. It means they squeeze 'em out.

ROBIN: I see. No I don't. Exo-skeleton?

DALE: Like bones. Bones on the outside.

ROBIN: Bones on the outside. On purpose?

DALE: That's right. You got it.

ROBIN: I think I saw that in a movie once.

DALE: A diatom? In a movie?

ROBIN: No. A skeleton on the outside. It was gross.

DALE: No, that's not what I mean.

ROBIN: On the other hand, a skeleton on the outside could be cool.

DALE: No, no, no.

ROBIN: It would be like armour. Keep the bullies away.

DALE: With the diatoms they're...

ROBIN: Go ahead, buster! Gimme your best shot! I've got an
EXOSKELETON!

DALE: (*plays "screaming victim"*) Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!

ROBIN: Don't bother me, puny human. Your teeny tiny cries for help
will never get any pity from THE EXOSKELETON!

DALE: Don't make me use the secret weapon! (*strikes "secret weapon"
pose*)

ROBIN: You wouldn't.

DALE: Don't try me.

ROBIN: OK. Never mind. (*pause*) Hold on. Hey. Here it comes!

DALE: You are so dumb.

ROBIN: I'm gonna extrude something!

DALE: I'm not going to ever tell you about anything ever again. That's
it. We're done. I try to explain something, and all you want to do
is... extrude.

ROBIN: Sorry.

DALE: I know.

ROBIN: Hey.

DALE: What?

ROBIN: Wouldn't they get filtered out?

DALE: Who?

ROBIN: The diatoms. The mighty extruders. I thought they made them filter out stuff like that from bottled water so you don't get sick.

DALE: Maybe. Or maybe they're so small they slip through the filters.

ROBIN: Oh. OK. I guess.

DALE: Here comes the bus.

ROBIN: I don't see it.

DALE: I can hear it.

ROBIN: I don't hear it, either.

DALE: It's on the next block. It's coming.

ROBIN: I don't think so.

DALE: It'll be here in just a second. Just wait.

ROBIN: *(pause)* I still don't...

DALE: I said just wait.

ROBIN: Fine. *(counts off seconds)* one-one thousand, two-one thousand, three-one thousand, four-one thousand, five-one thousand, six-

DALE: ShhhHHHshh! I can't hear when you do that.

ROBIN continues counting off seconds, but does it very quietly. DALE looks increasingly annoyed as ten seconds pass. After a very quiet "ten-one thousand," ROBIN quits counting.

ROBIN: I don't think it's coming.

DALE: Yeah. Probably a garbage truck.

ROBIN: A garbage truck doesn't sound anything like a school bus.

DALE: Yes it does.

ROBIN: No it doesn't.

DALE: Well, it works the same way.

ROBIN: No it doesn't.

DALE: Sure it does. Pick 'em up, dump 'em off, pick 'em up, dump 'em off. Garbage truck-school bus. The same.

DALE: What time is it?

ROBIN: I dunno. Um... 7:45, I think.

DALE: We're going to be late.

ROBIN: Again.

DALE: We should run.

ROBIN: Run all the way to school?

DALE: Sure. We could make it.

ROBIN: Are you crazy?

DALE: No, I'm positive. We could make it.

ROBIN: No we couldn't.

DALE: Well, I could.

ROBIN: No way.

DALE: I'm positive.

ROBIN: You couldn't be.

DALE: I tested it.

ROBIN: Tested what?

DALE: How fast I could run.

ROBIN: When?

DALE: Last month.

ROBIN: Oh, come on. (*a beat*) How?

DALE: I used a speed measuring machine.

ROBIN: What kind of machine?

DALE: You know those electronic signs they put up on streets where they want to slow traffic down, and the sign measures your speed and then it posts the speed you're going right next to the actual speed limit?

ROBIN: Yeah. I've seen those.

DALE: Well, that's what I used. There was one over near our cul-de-sac, and I used it to test my speed.

ROBIN: Those are for cars.

One Beer Too Many

Characters

Skip

SKIP, an average kid, stands in a sad pool of light.

SKIP: I used to enjoy English. I used to enjoy creative writing. My sophomore teacher, Ms. Lipshitz, told me I was good. Said I had promise. A real original. It was so nice to see student writing with such style. Real quality work. That's the way she talked. Ms. Lipshitz. I told my Mom I was gonna be a writer. She said: "That's nice, Honey." I told my dad. He just looked at me and sat in his black Naugahyde La-Z-Boy recliner and drank beer.

I hate beer.

Ms. Lipshitz said there was a contest for the best student-written play. The drama club wanted to do an original work and the winner would get fifty bucks and the play would be done by the kids in the drama club. Ms. Lipshitz said this was my perfect chance to show the world that I could write. I didn't know what to write about.

Ms. Lipshitz said, "Write what you know."

Write what you know? Write what y'know. Wriwachano.

I thought, what do I know? I don't know what I know. So I told my Mom and she said, "That's nice, Honey." And I was gonna ask my dad, but he was just sitting there, looking at me, drinking beer, so I didn't even bother. So I went to my room and got out a sheet of paper and wrote, "Write What You Know."

And I looked at the paper. And I looked and I looked and I looked at that white sheet of paper. And no words appeared on it.

I looked at that paper a long time.

I didn't see anything.

I could hear the TV in the living room and Dad's La-Z-Boy recliner creaking and Dad opening another beer.

And then I wrote a play! It was all about a man who was so self-centered that all he ever did was drink beer all day long in his La-Z-Boy recliner and he stacked up his empty cans in a pyramid

and the pyramid got too high and it tipped over and the man was crushed under it and he died. Nobody could believe it was an accidental death so the man's son was charged with murder and he said he didn't do it but nobody would believe him so he went to prison and when he got out he was old and all he wanted to do was sit in a La-Z-Boy recliner and drink beer all day.

I didn't have a chance to show my play to Ms. Lipshitz because the deadline was the next day, so I took it straight to the theatre and left it on the drama teacher, Mr. Larker's desk. I called the play *One Beer Too Many*.

I was pretty proud of myself. Ms. Lipshitz said so, too. "Just for trying." I guess that meant she thought I didn't have much of a chance of being picked. I thought it was a sure thing, though, 'cause nobody else at that school, at least nobody I knew, was gonna write a play. Except one girl. Her name was Melody. Melody Golden. Really. She told me she was going to write a play about young people's dreams of stardom and about how every young heart dreams of treading the boards and being in the spotlight. (*snorts*) I mean, Melody was cute and I liked her and all that, but who would want to see a play about young hearts on the boards? Not me. So when I got called out of class to go to the counselling office and I saw Ms. Lipshitz and Mr. Larker in there with my counsellor, Mr. Sanchez, I knew I was in.

They were going to do my play and they called me to the counsellor's office to congratulate me.

I was so proud.

Then I saw their faces.

Ms. Lipshitz looked embarrassed. And Mr. Larker looked mad. And my counsellor looked like he had some real bad news to tell me. Then I remembered that Mr. Larker was the drama teacher, and I figured that they were just...being dramatic...in...there.

So I pasted on a smile and swung in there and waited for the good news. And Mr. Sanchez shut the door. And Ms. Lipshitz wouldn't even look at me.

And I waited for a minute.

And nobody said anything.

And I remembered that blank page that didn't have any words on it except "Write What You Know." And all of a sudden Larker is shouting, "Who do you think you're dealing with here? I'm



help@theatrefolk.com www.theatrefolk.com

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