NIGHT ——OF THE ——MASKS

A RAGING SWAN PRESS EVENTURE





NIGHT OF THE MASKS

Every year, Duke Armas Nenonen hosts a fabulous masked ball to celebrate Ashlar's Day of Founding. The duke's guests number in the hundreds and include some of the most famous–and infamous–citizens of Languard and beyond. On occasion, invitations are extended to adventurers who have somehow managed to impress the duchy's nobility. Song, dance and drink are the entertainment of the night. At the same time, secret alliances are forged or broken and sinister plots hatched in the castle's candle-lit halls. When the masks come off at midnight, not all is revealed.

Not all quest rewards are measured in gold. Invite your PCs to the Night of the Masks and let them rub shoulders with Ashlar's high and mighty. Deception, intrigue and opportunity await!.

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WHAT'S AN EVENTURE?

An eventure is akin to a normal adventure, but does not (normally) feature violence or physical challenges. Instead, an eventure focuses on the use of social skills and role-play to resolve the challenges, or events, therein. Most eventures take places in a settlement or on the road. Few occur in traditional adventure locales such as dungeons, ruined castles and so on.

Eventures are an excellent change of pace and can be used as filler between adventures or as situations in which PCs who have invested in social skills can shine. They are also perfect for players who enjoy role-playing.

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The duke hosts the Night of the Masks in Castle Languard's grand ballroom. The event marks a rare opportunity for those of lower rank to visit the castle and socialise with the ducal family and Ashlar's other movers and shakers.

Armas Nenonen graciously allows his close acquaintanceswhich include Ashlar's nobles, high-ranking clergy and wealthy merchants-to invite guests of their own to the event. Officially, the gesture is meant to reward promising individuals and provide them further contacts and opportunities. Cynics, however, claim such courtesies are merely a pretence for the nobles to easily identify potential agents (or threats).

With a dispute over Longbridge threatening to escalate into all-out war it's an open secret the duke is using this year's ball to broker peace between lords Wido Gall and Hilduin Lorsch. Both desire to add the village to their dominion.

HOOKS

There are several ways the PCs may secure an invitation to the Night of the Masks:

- The PC' recent exploits somehow gained admiration from an influential guest and they are rewarded with an invitation.
- A mysterious patron has invitations anonymously delivered to the PCs so they can observe them safely and in secret. If the patron likes what they see, they may then approach the party with an offer of employment.
- The PCs either need, or want, to rub shoulders with Ashlar's nobility. It's all but impossible for commoners or heroes of little repute to get an audience but the Night of the Masks provides a perfect opportunity to meet the powerful and influential. Securing invitations requires bribes of not less than 100 gp per ticket.
- For some PCs, simply realising they are not invited to the event of the year provides enough incentive for them to find a means to crash the party.

RUNNING THE NIGHT OF THE MASKS

Running a large-scale social event like the *Night of the Masks* may seem daunting. "The Night of the Masks" presents a basic timeline of the major events of the night while additional sidebars scattered throughout the text present other events you can use to add spice and flavour to the ball. Additionally:

CODE OF CONDUCT

Guests are forbidden to carry weapons or engage in violent behaviour at the ball. Troublemakers are swiftly ejected from the castle. The normal social rules regarding decorum are relaxed for the night's duration, however, and members of different social classes may find it easier to meet and chat.

- **Castle Languard**: This section describes the ballroom and surrounding areas in which the masquerade ball is held.
- **Guest of Interest**: Hundreds of guests attend the ball, but the PCs are most likely to dealings with these guests. Design other guests as appropriate for your campaign.
- **Making Conversation**: This sidebar presents various topics of conversation doing the rounds at the ball.

With all these elements prepared, running the eventure becomes as easy as combining the various events and guests in interesting ways. Encourage the party to split up (for once) and allow PCs to engage with different NPCs during the ball. Present each scene and give everyone ample opportunity to act, then move to the next event. Shake things up by throwing in a special event or two.

THE SEVEN MASKS

Languard has a rich history and tradition regarding the Night of the Masks. Those attending the ball wear one of seven styles of mask. Guests are generally expected to wear disguises befitting their status and occupation.

- **Irvikuva**: This style of full mask resembles a leering avian gargoyle, and is reserved for noble men.
- Kotka: This feathered half-mask resembles a bird of prey, and is worn by noble women.
- **Surma**: Worn by high-ranking clergy this pale, featureless mask portrays death and old age.
- **Tumma**: Styled after Tumma, a sad old miser from Languard's folklore, these dark half-mask are worn by Ashlar's wealthiest merchants.
- **Varjo**: Meant to depict Varjo, a cheeky beggar from Languard folklore, these pale or tan full mask are worn by moderately wealthy merchants.
- **Villi**: Those attending the ball at the behest of the aristocracy or influential clerics wear these carved half-mask representing Villi, a legendary wild man.
- **Houkka**: This long-nosed three-quarter-length mask is styled after Houkka, Arndul Nenonen's favoured jester, and is worn by the guests of merchants.

In practice, the rules are rarely enforced. The duke and his entourage always dress outside these conventions and it is not uncommon for the wealthiest merchants to adopt modest Irvikuva or Kotka designs. Some guests might intentionally dress down, wearing masks below their status. The unwritten rule here is simply, "Don't push it." In the weeks prior to the ball, masks are widely available throughout the city. The price ranges anywhere from five to 500 gold crowns. Considerate patrons often provide their guests with appropriate masks. The Night of the Masks is a glittering social occasion attended by Ashlar's movers and shakers. Literally hundreds of guests and servants course through Castle Languard's ballroom and its surrounds, during the ball.

A rough timeline of the evening's major events appears below. Use these events as the main parts of the evening, improvising other smaller encounters and events as desired. Sidebars scattered through the text present several minor events. Use, or ignore, them, as desired.

1: THE GUESTS ARRIVE

Like most guests, the PCs enter Castle Languard through the main gates cross the courtyard and through the atrium. Here they must wait their turn to be admitted to the ballroom and the ball proper. The wait is at least 30 minutes. Use this time to build atmosphere and introduce the one or two other guests (see "Guest of Interest" overleaf). Feed the PCs a few snippets of gossip (see "Making Conversation" overleaf) to whet their appetites.

2: THE NOBILITY ARRIVE

Shortly after the last of the normal guests enter the ballroom, members of Ashlar's nobility join the throng. Their entrance is

MINOR EVENTS

Guests discuss many rumours, subjects of interest and the like while at the ball. Such subjects include:

- A courier rushes in with a message for one of the nobles, who leaves immediately. This creates a stir among the other guests. The noble returns looking annoyed, an hour later.
- 2. A minor merchant instigates a (brief) brawl. It is all a cover to damage a rival's much more impressive costume (about which he is insanely jealous).
- 3. Two lovers (Aatu Hirvi and Hedvig Ahti) enlist the PCs to help them meet away from the watchful eyes of their families.
- 4. The drunken, puffed up, ageing and self-important duellist, Brusi Kainu (who the PCs have never met before) slaps one of the PCs with a glove and "demands satisfaction" before wandering off in search of more wine.
- 5. An agitated person is frantically searching for someone specific among the masked guests.
- 6. A rumour about one of the PCs-they are having an affair with a prominent, unnamed noble-spreads like wildfire through the throng.
- 7. While the PCs are enjoying a drink, a pale blue, lacetrimmed handkerchief is dropped over their glass.
- 8. A guest insists one of the PCs is a long lost, distant relative, despite the fact the PC's face is completely covered, and is unrecognisable. He follows the PC around for the rest of the night asking annoying questions.

loudly announced by the duke's personal herald, Hannu Lankinen (LN male human), who wears a gilt leather Houkka mask. Prominent guests, each accompanied by close family members and their entourage, arrive in the following order:

- **Hilduin Lorsch** (LE male human fighter 2), lord of Woodridge, wears a brushed steel Irvikuva mask.
- Ilmari Issakainen (LN male human fighter 2/wizard 3) and his wife Aelliah (NG female human bard 5), lord and lady of Wellswood, wear identical masks depicting woodland dryads.
- Aelfgar Wymer (LN male human fighter 2), reeve of Thornhill, wears a bronze minotaur mask.
- **Mira Lankinen** (LG middle-aged female human paladin 5), lady of Kingsfell, wears a simple silver Kotka mask.
- Elina Vuolle (LN female human wizard 6), lady of Coldwater, is disguised as a water nymph and wears a veil of black and white pearls. Elina hates living in Coldwater and would love to sell the village and her noble title for enough gold to make a new start elsewhere.
- Azthur Erdukr (LG female dwarf fighter 5), thane of Don Galir, wears a golden Kotka mask adorned with a single ruby. She seems ill at ease among all this finery.
- **Barro Godwyn** (NG male human), mayor of White Moon Cove, wears an ivory Varjo mask.
- **Benjam Oksanen** (LN old male human fighter 5), lord of Dunstone, wears an amber three-quarter dragon mask.
- Wido Gall (LN male human wizard 4) wears a shimmering, featureless mask of disconcerting aspect.
- Armas Nenonen (LN male half-elf fighter 4/wizard 8), duke of Ashlar, wears a dazzling golden griffon disguise. His betrothed, Hanna-Mari Nenonen (N female half-elf wizard 2), wears a golden headdress and half-mask, exquisitely wrought to resemble an exotic bird, complete with folded wings and a tail so grand it must be carried by a handmaiden.

3: LONGBRIDGE NEGOTIATIONS COMMENCE

After a while, the duke retires to the lounge (location E), along with Hilduin Lorsch, Wido Gall and the other nobles. The lounge is then cleared of all other guests, and no-one is admitted until the discussions about Longbridge have concluded. It's up to the GM to decide how the negotiations proceed, when they come to an end and whether the duke succeeds in defusing the growing enmity between Hilduin Lorsch and Wido Gall.

4: THE UNMASKING

Traditionally, the unmasking takes place at midnight. The orchestra stops playing, silence is called and all present solemnly remove their disguises. Most identities have already been guessed, no doubt, but feigned gasps of wonder and amazement are proper etiquette. The unmasking marks the end of this Night of the Masks.

CASTLE LANGUARD

During the Night of the Masks, Castle Languard receives three to four hundred esteemed guests. Since it would be both impractical and unsafe to open up the entire castle to them, guests are restricted to the grand ballroom and castle gardens. Pairs of masked ducal guards prevent access to off-limits areas and patrols are common on the grounds to ensure everyone's safety.

A: CASTLE GATES AND COURTYARD

Blazing braziers flank the gate leading into the part of the castle hosting the Night of the Masks. Twelve guards (LM human fighter 1) wearing plain black half-masks discreetly scrutinise the guests and their invitations.

B: Atrium

Four dozen brass lanterns, their windows tinted with vermillion and navy ink, float in a shallow pool at the centre of the atrium. Six ushers, clad in the livery of House Nenonen and wearing simple half-masks, provide refreshments and offer to take heavy coats and other accoutrements. Muted chamber music echoes through the closed doors and the guests' anticipation and excitement hangs tangibly in the air.

 Elo Virta (CG male human), Languard's most talented and eccentric mask-maker, sits behind a counter handing out masks to guests who have lost theirs or whose disguises he believes, "...simply will not do!" Elo has barely slept and is quite tired. He could easily make the mistake of handing someone a new mask far above or below their status.

C: GRAND BALLROOM

The sight of Languard's grand ballroom is nothing short of breathtaking. The wide open checkered parquet floor, smooth like a still lake, stretches from wall to wall. Four blue-veined marble pillars carved with floral motifs hold aloft a groin-vaulted ceiling decked with frescoes of house Nenonen's illustrious past. Some thirty pairs of masked and attired noble men and women are dancing to an enchanting rondo played by a 16-piece chamber orchestra. A long table against the west wall contains a myriad of fine foods and drinks, and is kept permanently stocked by masked servants. To the southeast, two grand staircases rise to a balcony providing a marvellous overview of the ballroom. Beyond the trellised windows glow the burning braziers of the far quieter castle gardens.

D: BALCONY

A half-dozen tables and twice as many chairs stand along the carved wooden balustrade, providing a magnificent view of the grand ballroom twenty feet below. A well-stocked bar sits against the southeast wall. As the set of imposing double doors to the north swings open, the PCs briefly glimpse an opulent lounge, reserved for the most important guests. A vigilant warrior stands beside the doors, eyeing all who approach.

 Airi Wymer (LN female human fighter 4) is one of the duke's most trusted retainers, and is ever vigilant in his service. Clad in fine plate armour she does not eat, drink or stray from her post during the ball.



E: LOUNGE

Four sturdy chains suspend a wrought iron chandelier, decked with gold leaf, at the centre of the room. Sumptuously clad guests mostly wearing Irvikuva and Kotka masks sit on velvet-cushioned chairs surrounding low tables, talking gossip and politics. Even the air smells luxuriously–of honeyed perfume and spiced tobacco. Along the west wall stand five small cells, closed with heavy velvet curtains offering some conversational privacy. The windows stretch from floor to ceiling, overlooking the beautifully lit castle gardens.

F: CASTLE GARDENS

Fire-lit gravel paths cut through neatly outlined beds containing ornate flowers and shrubs. Bronze statues, half-eaten by verdigris and losing a steady battle against creeping ivy, representing heroes from House Nenonen's history dot the grounds. To the northeast, a flagstone path runs underneath the drooping branches of a centuries-old weeping willow and into the castle's labyrinth. Above its juniper hedge rows emerges the mossencrusted slate roof of the arbour sitting at the centre.

G: LABYRINTH

Seven lit lanterns sit alongside a couple of empty wine glasses on a flat-topped boulder next to the labyrinth's entrance. Furtive giggles, hushed whispers and the sounds of gravel crunching underfoot abound as guests explore the labyrinth, their lanternlight scattering distorted shadows through the tangled evergreen branches. (Perhaps the PCs overhear interesting conversations from unseen guests while walking the labyrinth's twisting paths).

The old arbour at the labyrinth's centre is carved from granite and overgrown with brown moss and pale lichen. A stone-hewn table and two benches inside provide room to seat up to four people. The pitted marble slab making up the table top shows a bas-relief of a sleeping knight, his features now faded beyond recognition. The marble slab in the arbour was taken from a sarcophagus in Castle Languard's crypts. If anyone spends ten minutes or longer alone and in complete darkness near the stone, they hear a low voice whisper in Elven, "Get out of my house."

H. GARDEROBES

Fragrant herbs hang trussed on twine from the ceiling of this tiny chamber. Balls of raw cotton surround a bowl of rosewater sitting on a low table nearby. A heavy chaff-filled cushion lies on a low wooden bench. It covers a circular hole leading to a cesspit some fifty feet below. The sturdy oaken door can be locked with a deadbolt from inside.

Little of interest tends to happen in the privies, though on occasion they may be used to conceal items, people and illicit dealings or-even-romantic assignations.



Along with some 300 other guests, the following folk of note are present at the ball. Use these NPCs to portray the folk the PCs meet during the Night of the Masks.

Noomi Alanen

LN female human wizard 2

With her long auburn hair tied in a knot and features hidden behind a buff Varjo mask, this woman appears to be masquerading as a man. Nevertheless, her attire spectacularly fails to conceal her feminine form.

Noomi believes she is descended from the accursed Alanen line and is therefore heiress to the Alanen fortune. She is here incognito, seeking the duke's ear, but fails to get anywhere near him. Adventurers who seem trustworthy are asked to prove her claim to the family name by seeking evidence amid the tumbled ruins of Greystone.

Roni Auvinen

LN male human fighter 5

A latticework of ropy scars shows on the stubbled chin of this broad-shouldered man, below a gilded Villi mask. He seems ill at ease, in his tight-fitting outfit.

Roni is a champion, hired to fight on Simo Turunen's behalf in an important ordeal by combat tomorrow. He feels out of place in his borrowed clothes and has a weakness for wine and red-headed women. In his employer's absence Roni is free to indulge in both.

AIRI LUOMA

NG middle-aged female human

With an elaborate beehive hairstyle this woman and her bedazzling ball gown cleave through the crowd like a regal galleon.

Every now and then, Airi receives thanks and compliments which she answers with a practiced smile. Airi is Languard's most talented tailor and owner of the Needle's Poise (location H11 on the City of Languard map). She seems preoccupied tonight,

EVENT: JOYS OF BATRACHIANISM

Eskil Rupikonna (NG male human fighter 3) approaches one of the PCs. Despite his rich embroidered clothing, the flat-nosed olive green Houkka mask he wears seems poorly made. Shortly after introducing himself, Eskil steers the conversation towards his glorious hobby of batrachianism, explaining he is an avid connoisseur of toads. Though quite harmless and friendly, Eskil is terribly boring and clingy. He follows his new friend around while regaling them with pointless trivia on toads. As a result, others avoid the pair. Dumping Eskil proves to be a challenge.

SEDRIK PELKONEN

N male human cleric (Conn) 3

This man wears a bone white Surma mask which he lifts every now and then to wipe sweat from his brow.

Sedrick is being blackmailed by an unknown party who has evidence of certain indiscretions committed by the priest. His personal funds dwindling, Sedrik has taken to stealing from the dead at the Father's Hall to make his payments.

LASSI SAARELA

NE male human

Silver and copper coins make up the entirety of this man's impressive Varjo mask. He absent-mindedly runs his ringed fingers through a grey-streaked blonde beard and his pale blue eyes regularly scan the ballroom.

Though a wealthy man, Lassi stands to lose a lot in a legal dispute regarding land ownership. A trial by combat has been scheduled to decide the matter tomorrow, but Lassi's champion is no match for Roni Auvinen, Simo Turunen's fighter. He has paid Aura Sulkava to ply Roni with so much drink as to render him ineffectual in tomorrow's combat.

HAGUK SALONEN

LE male half-orc thief 8

The richly embroidered navy blue coat, carved whale-bone cane, and gem-studded Irvikuva mask reveal this tall, dark-haired man as a gentleman of impeccable taste.

In spite of Haguk's obvious taste and wealth, the other guests seem to give him a wide berth. The glint in his jaundiced eyes

EVENT: POISON?

Suddenly,, Benjam Oksanen (LN old male human fighter 5) lord of Dunstone, wearing a silver-scaled Irvikuva mask, gives a loud gasp. As he drops his glass, his eyes roll back in his head and he falls to the floor and begins to violently convulse. Poisoning is immediately suspected, but Benjam actually suffers from strange fits; a fact known only to himself and his wife, Tarja. He recovers after a few minutes. Benjam considers his condition a political weakness and urges those who aid him not to reveal the truth. When it has been confirmed the drinks are safe, the evening continues as if nothing had happened. suggests he could not care less. Haguk, an eminent member of the Shadow Masks, is here because many nobles owe the selfstyled gentleman explorer of Gloamhold a favour. He flaunts his presence and revels in the disapproval of those considering themselves his betters.

MAKING CONVERSATION

Guests discuss many rumours, subjects of interest and the like while at the ball. Such subjects include:

- Hanna-Mari Nenonen is actually duke Armas's third cousin. The young bride-to-be is said to be deeply unhappy with the upcoming wedding.
- 2. Having dragged on for years, Simo Turunen and Lassi Saarela's dispute over land ownership is finally coming to an end. Simo has invoked his right to trial by combat, and has hired a seasoned champion. The duel takes place tomorrow.
- 3. Eskil Rupikonna is quite insane. He used to be an adventurer until one fated expedition into Gloamhold's doom-shrouded halls led to his companions' deaths. Eskil barely escaped with his life and has since repressed the memory of his last adventure, developing a strange (and curious) obsession with toads and other slimy things.
- 4. The competition between Wido Gall and Hilduin Lorsch over control of Longbridge is nearing open conflict. Duke Armas is hosting negotiations at the ball to stave off armed conflict
- There's been a recent string of thefts at the Father's Hall (location T2 on the City of Languard map), where belongings of the deceased were stolen shortly before the funerary rites. Every time, Sedrik Pelkonen was the attending priest.
- It's no secret the duke is desperate for a male heir. This is the real reason behind his recent betrothal to Hanna-Mari. Supposedly, she is already with child. (False rumour.)
- 7. Adventurers of the Shining Fellowship brought back the carcass of a seven-foot long stark white eel from the Breathless Narrows. The fermented innards of these monsters are a powerful aphrodisiac. Pharran, the lady who runs Pharran's Shroud (location H13 on the City of Languard map), buys all such specimens. (False rumour.)
- Rumour has it High Bank (location H6 on the City of Languard map) was robbed a few nights ago. Allegedly, several vaults were plundered but no victims have yet come forward. Tacitus Greev, the manager, denies any theft took place but his nervous demeanour of late suggest otherwise.
- Aavo Oksanen (ruler of Dunstone in all but name in his aged father's stead) seeks an artefact of great power hidden in the Mottled Spire. He sponsors groups of ambitious adventurers to explore its unmapped valleys.
- 10. Elo Virta, the mask maker, and Airi Luoma, one of Languard's most renown tailors, have a long-standing rivalry when it comes to the Night of the Masks. Each strives to outdo the other through their elaborate outfits and masks. Both would stop at nothing to sabotage their rival's work. (False rumour.)

AURA SULKAVA

N female half-elf thief 2

Emerald eyes set in a beautiful red-feathered Kotka mask catch your attention. The woman runs a delicate hand through her long, copper-coloured hair and shoots you a quick, mischievous smile before turning her gaze elsewhere.

Aura is a top-class courtesan, both renowned and reviled among Languard's aristocracy. She was invited by an unknown benefactor (actually Lassi Saarela) and paid handsomely to entertain Roni Auvinen and get him as drunk as possible.

Alvi Wymer

N male human fighter 3

This foppish young noble struts about as if he were the duke himself, his eyes continually darting left and right from behind a silver Irvikuva mask.

Alvi is the second son of Aelfgar Wymer (reeve of the swampvillage of Thornhill) and an accomplished duelist with three kills to his name already. Desperate to win Aura Sulkava's affection, Alvi is looking to challenge someone to a duel, hoping this will impress the beautiful half-elf.

JALMAR WYMER

CN male human fighter 1/thief 1

A loud guffawing sounds from underneath the hooked beak of this scarlet and black Irvikuva mask.

Brash and boisterous Jalmar is the middle child of the Wymer noble family and fourth in line to their family's "fortune", which in truth comes from levying ancient, half-forgotten taxes on wandering adventurers and the like visiting the marsh-bound village of Thornhill. He habitually gambles away his stipend and is fond of embarrassing his father, Aelfgar.

EVENT: HANNA-MARI CHANGES

Hanna-Mari (N female half-elf wizard 2) will shortly marry duke Armas Nenonen. Before then, she is determined to enjoy as much freedom as possible. When her betrothed, retires to the lounge for the Longbridge negotiations, she retreats to her private chambers to switch costumes with her disapproving handmaiden, Kata Vainio (LG female human expert 1).

When the pair return to the ball, Kata keeps up the charade as best as she can. Meanwhile, Hanna-Mari enjoys her temporary freedom and anonymity. She might drink a bit too much, perhaps getting flirtatious with one of the PCs or other guests. Kata then intervenes, approaching the PCs and askingor rather demanding-they save her "handmaiden" from embarrassing herself. Depending on how they handle the situation, the PCs would make a powerful friend...or foe.

THE EVENTURE CONTINUES

At the end of the Night of the Masks, the PCs should have made several new acquaintances and learned more than a few interesting rumours about goings on in Languard and the wider duchy. Any of these friends, foes or rumours could lead to new, exciting adventures. A selection of possible future adventure hooks appears below:

- The Longbridge Situation: If the PCs sense opportunity in the situation surrounding Longbridge they could quickly find themselves in the middle of the feud between Wido Gall and Hilduin Lorsch.
- Noomi Alanen: Noomi believes she is the sole heir to the Alanen fortune, but other folk also claim the title. If the PCs manage to prove her claims by going to Greystone, they gain an influential ally; not to mention several powerful enemies as well: the Alanen's numerous debtors.
- Eskil Rupikonna's Memories: Eskil's harrowing memories of Gloamhold may yet resurface, and if he has befriended one or more of the PCs he may babble about his experiences when next they meet. Perhaps his crazed mutterings reveal some secret the PCs could exploit for fame and fortune.
- Thefts from the Father's Hall: Sedrik Pelkonen's blackmailers are still at large, and he continued his theft of burial goods from the dead. Who is blackmailing the priest? If the PCs have befriended Sedrick, or if the party contains fellow worshippers of Conn the cleric turns to the heroes for help.

Trusted Friends of the Duchess: If the PCs handled discretely Hanna-Mari's costume change and subsequent highjinks they have earned the soon-to-beduchess' trust. In the future, she might ask the PCs to hunt down certain items for her in Languard or the surrounds. Things could get uncomfortable for the PCs if she starts sending a receiving messaged with a mysterious individual lurking in Languard. What is going on?

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