RAGING SWAN PRESS VILLAGE BACKDROP: VULCANBRIDGE 2.0





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A thriving village is the last thing a traveller expects to find on a cracked and blasted volcanic plain belching lava and poisonous gases. However, Vulcanbridge defies expectations and offers a haven for wayward souls and desperate travellers alike. Primarily home to dwarven and gnomish engineers and miners, the village also attracts adventurers and greedy merchants keen to turn a healthy profit. The village relies on trading valuable metals and gemstones harvested from its surrounds for necessities, and this influx of wealth has also attracted the wrong kind of attention. Vulcanbridge seems like a tempting target to raiders who see an isolated village endowed with treasure. This threat adds to the dangers posed by the environment itself and the fiery creatures dwelling in the magmatic caverns beneath the plain. Then there are the dark rumours the deep-dwelling owner of all the treasure harvested by the villagers has awoken and intends to take it all back...

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VULCANBRIDGE AT A GLANCE

Ruler: Korron Greymantle

Government: Autocracy

Population: 185 (91 dwarves, 31 gnomes, 23 half-orcs, 15 halflings, 14 humans, 11 half-elves)

Alignments: LG, LN, NG, CG

Languages: Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Gnome Resources & Industry: Mining, shelter, sightseeing, trade

The volcanic plain upon which Vulcanbridge stands was uninhabited until 350 years ago. A group of dwarf and gnome adventurers wound up on the plain through a series of mishaps (or divine providence, depending on who tells the tale). A minor eruption spat unfinished emeralds up onto the plain, and one of the adventurers noted the lava contained traces of gold and silver. Realising they had discovered a treasure trove beyond their wildest reckoning, the group vowed to settle the area.

The original settlers perished trying to tame the volcanic plain, but their associates and family carried on. Eventually, dwarf engineers erected several pylons, and bridges to connect the pylons, allowing the settlers to live safely above the plain while scooping up whatever material the eruptions provided. A gnome alchemist, Tervor Vulcan, further enhanced the pylons to protect against the seismic events plaguing the settlement. In his honour, the village took his name from the alchemist.

Even with the innovations brought by the dwarves and gnome, early life was not easy for the inhabitants. The volcanic plain attracted fire elementals and giants from the nearby volcanically active mountains, and the villagers often had to repel the creatures' attacks. Additionally, the air itself proved poisonous to all but the doughtiest of villagers, requiring Tervor and his apprentices to develop alchemical purifiers.

Vulcanbridge's leaders made the wise decision to forgo ostentatious displays of wealth gained from the plain, instead using it to draw other like-minded people to the village. Very few have the wherewithal to make a permanent home here, and new inhabitants must sign a contract to live and work in the village for at least two years. Upon the contract's completion, the contractor can leave with the villagers' blessing, and earnings based on the amount of work done as specified in the contract.

Today, Vulcanbridge still reaps the benefits of the gems and minerals buried in deep caverns below the plain. However, the workers have shifted their focus to delving beneath the surface lava, which no longer has the ready supply of treasure accounting for the village's initial prosperity. Additionally, the village protects travellers who blunder across the dangerous land and provides a safe site to enjoy the plain's breath-taking vistas.

VILLAGE LORE

A character may know something about Vulcanbridge, its history and surrounds. Determine how knowledgeable the characters are and then impart some (or all) of the information below:

- Founded centuries ago, Vulcanbridge built its fortune on the gems and metal readily available in the lava flowing from beneath the surface. Collection was not a trivial matter, as those collecting the wealth endured hellish heat and poisonous gases.
- Vulcanbridge also serves as shelter for those desperate or crazy enough to cross the volcanic plain.
- The village no longer benefits from easily obtained wealth. Instead, the workers must delve beneath the plain's surface to find its treasures.

VILLAGERS

Appearance: Natives of Vulcanbridge have black hair, dark eyes of various colours and reddish skin. Most residents have shorn heads, but dwarven residents still insist on full beards.

Dress: Most villagers wear loose-fitting utilitarian clothing. Those who deal with outsiders dress more fancily and wear jewels and gems harvested from beneath the village.

Nomenclature: *male* Berrik, Kaarl, Trystan; *female* Dioni, Nessa, Quionne; *family* Deepdelver, Forgeborn, Vinnis.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in Vulcanbridge, a character may hear one or more rumours. The PC can learn this information in several ways: perhaps by overhearing two locals gossiping, chatting with regulars over a few drinks at the local taverns and so on. Use the table below, to determine which rumours the character learns.

1D6 WHISPER & RUMOUR

1	The planned Pylon Six never got completed, since it sank beneath the plain.
2	Water is difficult for the village to obtain, and the latest delivery never arrived.
3	When Verrix drinks too much, he turns discussion to an ancient red dragon whose hoard has fattened Vulcanbridge's coffers while the creature sleeps.
4	Pylon Five's damage was caused by sabotage timed with a convenient earthquake.
5	To every villager's surprise, Rooster Geyser failed to erupt last week-this marks the first time in living memory this has happened.
6	A couple of villagers have seen fiery human shapes several hundred yards to the west just after sunset.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of the village comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

- 1. **Crimson Light Inn**: Situated at the base of Centre Pylon (Pylon One), this inn gets its name from the constant glow shed by lava covering the plain.
- 2. **Sorrel's Sundries**: The gnome Sorrel sells protective gear (mainly to visitors) and rations from this store.
- 3. Hale Imports and Exports: Here, Ander Hale conducts his business deals that have proven lucrative for Vulcanbridge.
- 4. **The Hall:** This utilitarian building houses Vulcanbridge's government and serves as headquarters for the guard.
- 5. **Cooling Vault**: This refrigerated chamber provides sanctuary in emergencies and relief for those succumbing to the heat.
- 6. **Watchtower**: Situated atop Pylon Two, this location has the clearest view of the surrounding land.
- 7. **Manda's Pylon**: Pylon Three is named for Vulcanbridge's most successful delver.
- 8. **Rooster Geyser**: West of Pylon Four, superheated water blasts up 100 feet every morning at precisely the same time.
- The Skunkworks: Located on the little used Pylon Four, this workshop is named for its smell. Here, Dwilla and her subordinates perfect mineral extraction techniques.
- 10. **Pylon Five**: A recent powerful earthquake cracked Pylon Five's foundations, forcing an evacuation of the crew there; several engineers work day and night to repair the pylon.

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking miners. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

- **Ander Hale** (location 3; LN male human fighter 3) believes he can improve the village's prospects, and seeks lordship when Korron retires. He is a shrewd businessman.
- **Dwilla Copperpot** (location 9; CG female gnome) possesses remarkable engineering insight and loves danger.
- **Korron Greymantle** (locations 4 and 10; LN male dwarf) leads Vulcanbridge, and looks forward to returning to "real work" in two months when he retires.
- Manda Grimsdottir (location 7; LG female dwarf) has an uncanny sense for the volcanic plain's irregular eruptions. She is Vulcanbridge's most successful miner.
- **Tagrissa** (locations 4 and 6; LN female half-orc fighter 4) serves as head of Vulcanbridge's guard, and has done so for her entire adult life.
- **Verrix Gravelbeard** (location variable; LG male young gold dragon) masquerades as a dwarf, and has not broken from his assumed persona since he arrived 27 years ago.
- **Yendari Indra** (location 1; NG female halfling thief 3) took refuge in Vulcanbridge eight years ago and has since taken ownership of the Crimson Light Inn.



LIFE IN VULCANBRIDGE

Even with the protections afforded by Vulcanbridge's pylons, the residents know they live in a hostile environment. Able-bodied citizens delve below the plain to extract gems and collect metalladen lava, devise engineering marvels to aid in this work, protect the village or ensure the pylons do not fall into disrepair. Those who cannot mine or engineer–mainly children or miners who have major injuries–instead maintain residences, collect supplies or assist engineers. Life is not all work, though, and the villagers get quite rowdy during their downtime.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

Gathering and selling precious gems and metals generates most of Vulcanbridge's income. The settlement is relatively affluent for a village of its size.

Since very few trading partners are willing to travel to Vulcanbridge to buy its goods, Ander Hale and his team make the treacherous journey-aided by the finest in fire protection-on a bimonthly basis. This trip serves two purposes: selling material wealth to interested parties and obtaining goods, notably food and water. Ander has developed numerous contacts in various locations, which allows him to sell Vulcanbridge's wares for a high price and to buy necessities at a fair rate.

Since the majority of the residents are concerned with day-today operation of the mines and pylons, Ander usually discusses terms with visitors passing through the village hoping to find warriors to guard the caravans during trading missions to more hospitable climes. He likewise dangles the twin carrots of pay and the chance to travel to an exotic location to entice guards for the journey back to the village.

As an incidental secondary market, the alchemical items and magic providing protection from the harsh environment sell nearly as well as the village's material wealth. The processes developed over the decades have rendered the creation of fire protection items cheap, and Hale's group sells the items at a nice mark-up while keeping the prices under normal market value.

LAW & ORDER

Tagrissa captains the guard, which normally has very little trouble from Vulcanbridge's residents except for the occasional unruly drunk. When the village hosts visitors, Tagrissa stations guards at all the bridges leading from Centre Pylon. Unless Korron has given permission to the visitors to move outside of Centre Pylon, the guards stop them from crossing the bridges. Tagrissa's group knows all the residents by sight–even dwarven characters find bluffs and disguises difficult.



EVENTS

While the characters are in Vulcanbridge, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

1D20 DRESSING/EVENT

DRESSING/EVENT
A mighty roar emanates from below Pylon Five and repeats on an hourly basis. It shakes the pylon.
An unprecedented geyser-like eruption splashes lava on the upper sections of Centre Pylon. The characters can assist in the rescue and healing of victims.
One of the miners has discovered molten mithral in a cavern below Pylon Three.
Five large fire elementals stand sentry around Manda's Pylon. They make no threatening gestures but defend themselves, if attacked.
Raiders clad in fireproof gear attack Vulcanbridge, in search of gold and gems.
An envoy for a fire giant chieftain arrives to discuss the chieftain's demand Vulcanbridge submit to his rule.
Cinders rain down on the village for one minute, burning all creatures for 1d4 fire damage per round (successful save against breath weapon negates).
The image of a firebird appears briefly over Pylon Four. It wheels to the east before fading away.
A goat outside the Crimson Light Inn breaks its tether and dashes to the northern edge of Centre Pylon.
An explosion a mile distant creates tremors throughout Vulcanbridge. Moments afterward, a cloud of ash rushes toward the village.
Poison gas vents from below the bridge connecting Pylon Three to Centre Pylon. A trapped gnome miner cries for help.
At night, a jet of magma streaks into the air, lighting the village in orange and red hues.
A soot-stained dwarf shouts a warning about shadowy hounds in the cave where he was working.
The ground shakes violently for 15 seconds (characters rolling under their Dexterity on 3d6 fall prone.
Chunks of black rock breach the ground's surface northwest of Pylon Four.
A fire giant throws a fiery rock, which just misses the Crimson Light Inn's northern wall, before running off.
A visiting merchant loudly argues with a dwarf, claiming the dwarf's gems are fakes.
A strong wind kicks up as the Rooster Geyser erupts, scalding everyone outside the Crimson Light Inn (1d4 fire damage, save against breath weapon negates).
Vented gas distorts the light, giving the sun a strange green corona. The gas is harmless.
A crack forms in the earth near Pylon Five. Dozens of glowing beetles scuttle out of the crack.

THE SURROUNDING LOCALITY

Vulcanbridge is a relative oasis in a hostile land of cracked earth, bubbling magma and poisonous gases. While this makes the village seem inaccessible, determined caravaners have marked a safe path through the plain. This path carries no guarantees, as geysers, lava eruptions and general degradation irregularly force changes in the path, often annihilating unprepared travellers in the process.

Ten miles west of Vulcanbridge, the plain slopes sharply upward leading to a range of active volcanoes. The most powerful volcano, which towers over all other mountains in the range, has been dormant for over a century. Wary and knowledgeable residents keep an eye out for any sign of

life from the sleeping giant, as an explosive eruption could be disastrous for the village.

Between six to twenty miles in all other directions, hardy grasses and shrubs poke through the ground eventually giving way to thriving plains. Depending on localised magmatic activity, these boundaries shrink and expand by miles over the course of months.

The surrounding terrain proves advantageous to Vulcanbridge, especially when it comes to the fire giant clans inhabiting the nearby volcanoes. Though the giants are immune to the land's incredible heat, ' they are too large to traverse the broken plain in large groups, thwarting their ability to send armies to take the village. Village leaders have slowly built up a stockpile of siege weapons to repel the raiders who harass Vulcanbridge.

Oddly, though the volcanic range hosts a handful of red dragons and other fire-immune draconic beasts, and Vulcanbridge's riches would contribute greatly to their hoards, the village has never experienced a draconic assault. The villagers are not aware that the gold dragon who has taken the guise of the dwarf Verrix Gravelbeard is responsible for Vulcanbridge's good fortune in this regard.

BELOW VULCAMBRIDGE

With the easy pickings seemingly exhausted on the surface, Vulcanbridge's miners have been forced to delve ever deeper beneath the village in search of gems and precious metals.

Some of these tunnels-in particular, the ones furthest from the village-are nothing more than passages hacked through the volcanic rock. Other sections-the older, more traversed sections-have been extensively worked to better suit the miners' needs (and to guard against earthquakes, seismic shifts and eruptions). Miners often go about their business armed-many fire-loving creatures dwell near the village, and sometimes the mines break through into natural caverns home to fire elementals, mephits and the like.



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

1: CRIMSON LIGHT INN

Centre Pylon sits atop a long-dormant section of the volcanic plain and is the most hospitable location in Vulcanbridge. The majority of Vulcanbridge's residents live on the pylon's upper levels, leaving the lowest level for the village's guests. Vulcanbridge's only inn, lit by slowly cooling pools of lava that give the inn its name, dominates the pylon's bottom level. It serves not only as quarters for visitors, but also as the locals' watering hole. The common room occupies three-fourths of the inn's total space.

- Food & Drink: Meal (typically mutton, lizard or squab, accompanied by hardtack) 2 gp, ale 3 sp, wine (pitcher) 1 gp. The prices reflect the short supply of food and drink. Visitors can instead pay for their meals with labour, typically four hours' worth per meal.
- Accommodation: A standard room costs 4 gp a night. A pair of bunks allow four guests to sleep comfortably in the room, which is, in turn, uncomfortably warm.
- **Magic Item**: Yendari has a *scroll of fire shield* she is willing to part with for 1,200 gp.

Yendari Indra (NG female halfling thief 3) makes sure she is one of the first villagers to greet newcomers to Vulcanbridge. The sociable halfling queries all new arrivals on their travels and reasons for visiting Vulcanbridge, but she also seeks out interesting stories from delvers.

Several halflings, gnomes and young dwarves (LG, NG or CG) work for Yendari, serving drinks and preparing rooms for Vulcanbridge's rare visitors. A small, seldom-used stable adjoins the inn.

2: SORREL'S SUNDRIES

Quint Sorrel (CG male gnome) continues the tradition established by his grandfather, Myre, who built this store in the optimistic assumption Vulcanbridge would serve as a waystation for



adventurers and travellers cutting across the treacherous volcanic plain. The friendly–some would say overly familiar–gnome gets a little business and sells general adventuring equipment, rations (at a slight mark-up), hot weather outfits and the like.

Since Quint's store only provisions travellers, he only opens up when Vulcanbridge has guests. Quint otherwise spends his time at the Skunkworks trying to assist Dwilla, with whom he is smitten.

3: HALE IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

Ander Hale (LN middle-aged male human fighter 3), a grey-haired human in his 50s, is another former adventurer who settled in Vulcanbridge after realising he could make more money with less risk by managing trade for the village. In the relatively short 30 years Hale Imports and Exports has done business, Ander has made Vulcanbridge quite profitable and established trade partners for sundries the village cannot provide for itself.

Ander has turned his focus toward the impending election for the next 17-year mayoral term. He believes he can introduce more efficiency to Vulcanbridge's industry to further increase the village's revenue. While many residents acknowledge he is a great businessman, they feel he does not truly understand the villagers, since he is not an engineer or miner. However, no other reasonable candidate wants to give up his or her livelihood to manage the village's administrative concerns.

4: THE HALL

The smallest permanent building on Pylon Two gives proof to the lack of necessity for a governing body in Vulcanbridge. Ostensibly from where Korron Greymantle (LN male dwarf) governs the village, the plainly named "Hall" stands empty while Korron travels from pylon to pylon checking on the mining and delving operations. Korron conducts business at the Hall for the rare rights dispute between miners. The dwarf views his acceptance of

Yendari Indra

NG female halfling thief 3

This cheerful halfling woman has shoulder-length brown hair and brilliant blue eyes. She moves with catlike grace.

Mannerisms: Yendari moves from patron to patron, asking about their business in the village and tales of their trials while travelling to Vulcanbridge. She listens with rapt attention to everyone's stories.

Personality: The halfling considers herself to be a good judge of character, and her ebullient inquiries allow her to gauge newcomers. Yendari is still haunted by her fellow adventurers' deaths, so a shadow of sadness crosses her face in rare quiet moments when she thinks no one is watching.

Background: Yendari, the sole survivor of an adventuring party overwhelmed by travel on the plain, decided to settle in Vulcanbridge. She worked at the Crimson Light Inn, where she used her talents to size up visitors and villagers alike. Yendari took over the inn when the previous owner retired.

Vulcanbridge's lordship as a mistake and greatly desires to return to mining. The engineers and miners understand this and forgive Korron's occasional outbursts during mediation sessions. Despite this, many want the village's next lord to come from their ranks and oppose Ander Hale's selection.

Pylon Five's recent shutdown has become Korron's primary focus, and he welcomes the challenge in the waning days of his tenure as mayor. He spends much of his time at Pylon Five overseeing the pylon's repairs. Korron's offers to help have met with polite dismissal, which chafes the dwarf.

The Hall also has a desk for Tagrissa (LN female half-orc fighter 4) for the occasions where she must fill out reports about incidents in the village. Her desk typically stands empty as she spends most of her time working in the village with her guards.

5: COOLING VAULT

Pylon Two currently endures the most volcanic activity, so it holds the largest of the so-called cooling vaults to where residents can retreat when an eruption occurs. It also serves an infirmary for those burned or otherwise injured during delves. Staffed by healers of varying power (one cleric 4, 1d2 cleric 3, 1d6 cleric 1), the vault receives at least one person a week. Heat-stricken visitors in dire need receive exemptions to the rule limiting them to Centre Pylon.



• For Sale: The healers sell *scrolls of cure light wounds* (300 gp each). They currently have 4 scrolls.

Frozen Corpses: Recently, one of Tagrissa's guards stumbled upon a pair of hastily buried corpses, which indicated they had been frozen to death. Tagrissa reasoned the murderer used the cooling vault to commit the crime. She has kept the information quiet–only she and a couple of dependable guards know about the deaths–to keep from inciting panic among the villagers. Since the method implies someone knowledgeable about the cooling vault, she welcomes trustworthy outsiders who might aid in her investigation before the killer can strike again.

6: WATCHTOWER

Pylon Two rests on a rise in the volcanic plain, making its base 20 feet higher than the other pylons. This grants those atop the pylon the best view of the surrounding land. From here, two of Tagrissa's guard (or one guard and Tagrissa herself) scan the horizon for approaching threats. Other than the potential danger presented by visitors to Vulcanbridge–Tagrissa has no real concern with the village's residents–the majority of attacks derive from fiery creatures living beneath the plain, creatures the delvers inadvertently disturb. On average, Tagrissa and her guard must repel one monstrous attack a month. More worrying to Tagrissa is the increase in raids on Vulcanbridge as the village's reputation for wealth spreads.

Verrix Gravelbeard (LG male young gold dragon) is a frequent visitor to the Watchtower, citing the worrying reason he is watching for dragons. Many residents regard Verrix as an eccentric, albeit highly knowledgeable, dwarf, so they take much of what he says with a grain of salt. Verrix learned about a terrible relic buried under Vulcanbridge and awaits its retrieval, so he can purchase or steal it. The dragon may ask visitors with good alignments to seek the relic, for which he promises a hefty reward.

7: MANDA'S PYLON

Against Manda Grimsdottir's (LG female dwarf) sense of humility, Korron decided to rename Pylon Three for Vulcanbridge's best delver. Korron admitted he felt entitled to this sole abuse of power during his full tenure.

Short of stature even for a dwarf and socially reserved, Manda seems to have an innate sense for the most lucrative finds and has discovered wealth valuing tens of thousands gold pieces during her lifetime of delving. The naming honour comes not only from the treasure she has amassed for the village. She also has an uncanny sense for volcanic eruptions, ground shifts and other dangerous seismic activity. Dozens of miners owe their lives to her timely warnings. Thus, only the most jaded village resident feels Pylon Three's name is unwarranted.

8: ROOSTER GEYSER

If Vulcanbridge were considered to have a tourist attraction, Rooster Geyser would provide it. Every morning at six o'clock, superheated water, just shy of boiling point, shoots 100 feet upward, and the watery spray forms a rooster's comb (if one were to squint at it the right way). More to the point, the geyser whistles shrilly when it erupts. The sound is audible for two miles, and serves as the village's morning alarm.

9: THE SKUNKWORKS

Hyperkinetic gnome Dwilla Copperpot (CG female gnome) is Pylon Four's sole resident, which provides access to the least lucrative underground section. Dwilla's laboratory, staffed by the gnome and four assistants, belches a cloying stench that never dissipates. Dwilla does not mind the smell, so she stays nearby in case a flash of insight strikes her while she rests. Her assistants, on the other hand, spend eight to twelve hours in the laboratory depending on their tolerance for the environment before returning to their homes.

The village's residents permitted Dwilla's virtual takeover of the pylon, since she has used the space to create several machines used for mining, smelting and the like that benefits the village.

• For Sale: Dwilla has an *potion of fire resistance* (400 gp) and a ring of fire resistance (5,000 gp) for sale.

Other than the laboratory staff, and the few delvers who travel to and from Pylon Four, only Quint Sorrel visits the pylon (out of his affection for Dwilla).

10: PYLON FIVE

Pylon Five is the third most active delve location, but it currently does not serve that purpose thanks to a strong earthquake that cracked its foundation. As one of Korron Greymantle's few challenges during his lordship, he shut down the pylon while it awaits repairs. Korron spends most of his time here, unofficially overseeing a team of dwarven and gnome engineers. The team estimates they will repair the pylon in five weeks, barring any delays due to further seismic activity.

DWILLA COPPERPOT

CG female gnome

This spindly, wild-haired gnome woman wears a simple shift covered in soot and various alchemical substances, some of which have burned holes in the garment.

Mannerisms: Dwilla is a blur of motion, stirring flasks, mixing compounds and checking in with her assistants. She stops only to jot notes in a book jammed with loose paper. Outside her laboratory, she makes observations about improvements she should make to major structures. Though she seems lost in her own thoughts, she pays attention to conversations, to the point she can recite discussions verbatim.

Personality: Many villagers find Dwilla difficult to keep up with, because she rarely talks down to others. If she encounters someone with interest and/or knowledge in alchemy or engineering, she becomes excited at the prospect of gaining an outside perspective on one of the many conundrums she is untangling. When she needs to test a discovery, she uses herself as a guinea pig. While she refuses to experiment on others, she gladly accepts volunteers to accompany her on trials.

Though aware of Quint's feelings for her, Dwilla remains devoted to her work and sees a burgeoning relationship as a distraction she can't afford. She enjoys the other gnome's company and doesn't want to give him false hope about a

future together. She hopes to hand the Skunkworks over to a competent assistant (or talented outsider who might stay in Vulcanbridge) soon, so she can return Quint's affections.

Background: Dwilla is a secondgeneration resident. She displayed aptitude with alchemical concoctions at a young age and apprenticed to the Skunkwork's previous head alchemist. When her father became ill after accidentally inhaling poisonous fumes, she made the difficult decision to stay in the village when her parents departed. If she talks to travellers who might pass near her parents' home, she hires them to take letters and offers

village when her parents departed. If she to travellers who might pass near her pa home, she hires them to take letters and alchemical supplies worth at least 200 gp for the trouble. The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

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