

newsletter

The Bulletin of The Irish Science Fiction Association



DECEMBER 1961/ JANUARY 1962

First and foremost - a happy Christmas and pleasant New Year to all our members! Yet another New Year is almost upon us (by the time you read this it probably will be - I'm typing this December 13th) and we have the ISFA Aishling Gheal in May, countless films and the World Cup to look forward to:

This issue we have a couple of new columns - namely a Soundtrack Review column, a Letters column and an SF author biography column entitled 'Outline'. This latter column deals with Andre Norton this time around, to coincide with John McCarthy's review of her books. If any one would like to see a particular author outlined, let me know and I'll do my best. (Also, the same goes for their works - we'd like to see a few more authors done in the depth that John McCarthy did Andre Norton. Let me have the reviews before the end of January if you want them in the next n/l.)

Thanks to Niall Syms the ISFA has entered the age of electronics - yes, we've now got an electric typewriter! Unfortunately, this typewriter does not have spacing of 1₂ which I usually use for the newsletter and so I've had to go to spacing of 1 - this means I need more material so KEEP WRITING!

RECENT MEETINGS

November: The main topic at this meeting was a talk by David Lass on the recent monster movie season on BBC 2. He dealt with the classic 'King Kong' and, with the use of magazine material, gave it a good covering. The meeting was well attended and the talk gave rise to the subject of favourite films and two more 'Top Tens' are published on page two.

STAR TREK, THE MOTION PICTURE: this film was shown in the Association's Video Club season on Sunday 6th December. The film was attended by about 15 film fans and went off without a hitch. Once again, thanks for the use of a television to Bridget Anthony. This film is certainly causing a lot of discussion - I seem to be the only one who actually LIKES it! Well, goddammit, I'm typing this so - Star Trek rules O.K!

UPCOMING MEETINGS:

December: this meeting will be a quiz, similar to the one I gave at the June meeting (with a tape of various soundtracks and pieces from SF related programmes). Frank Roche (last quiz winner) has stated his intentions of winning again so read up all those SF encyclopedias over Christmas!

January: this meeting promises to be an interesting one. We hope to have a speaker on Philosophy to give a talk on this aspect of SF. This will hopefully be an introduction to the subject for members and, if enough interest is shown, a special section will be given over to the topic at each meeting. For more information on this, see the Letters column.

Needless to say, these meetings will be held at The Parliament Inn, Parliament Street, Dublin 2 at 7.30p.m. on the last Sunday of the month. (27th and 31st respectively)

COMMENTS

In this, the first of a new column, I hope to throw out a few ideas for discussion among you lot out there. I don't mind saying that a lot of the ideas will be 'ripped off' from other SF magazines, but as we're all (supposedly!) one big happy family, I'm sure they won't mind. However, naturally I'll give preference to your topics and views when they arrive so start writing about anything (at least marginally to do with SF) that you feel strongly about, be it the abolition of the Yogan race (for what they've done to poetry!) or whatever - let me hear it! To start off with, I recieved this letter last week:

Dear Brendan,

I was talking to you about starting off a philosophy section in the Association at the last meeting. Well, I managed to get someone I know (a degree holder in philosophy) to give a talk at the end of January meeting. His name is Joe Kennedy and he will be able to give a talk approximately 20-30 minutes long.

You also mentioned about putting an ad. in the newsletter (this is it! - ed.) Well, if you just said what the section would be about; ie. to add credulity to Science Fiction by holding conversations about the possibility and probability of various things in the Universe. Anyway, the speaker will elaborate more on such matters. The section would take the form of a panel discussion and all would have the opportunity to voice their opinions...

Yours sincerely,
Frank Puiguan.

((I think the section, as described by Frank above, would be an interesting idea. It will be explained more thoroughly at the January meeting and I feel it may add a little more seriousness to the meetings - without having them become too formal.))

The two top ten films given last n/l caused a lot of disagreement and discussion at the last meeting. As that's exactly what we want, I'm giving you two more this time! They are, those of Hugh Deasy and David Lass:

- | <u>Hugh</u> | <u>David</u> |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1. "Quatermass & The Pit" | "Metropolis" |
| 2. "Forbidden Planet" | "King Kong" (1933 version) |
| 3. "2001, A Space Odyssey" | "Things To Come" |
| 4. "Things To Come" | "Frankenstein" |
| 5. "King Kong" (1933 version) | "When Worlds Collide" |
| 6. "Silent Running" | "Forbidden Planet" |
| 7. "Alien" | "Quatermass & The Pit" |
| 8. "Soylent Green" | "2001, A Space Odyssey" |
| 9. "Superman" | "Alphaville" |
| 10. "Close Encounters Of The Third Kind" | "Solaris" |

Compare those with the previous two selections - a fair difference! So, you've now got about thirty different SF films to choose from. Let me have your favourites before the end of January and I'll publish the Associations choice in the next n/l (I've already gotten a lot of replies and I think it would be a fair representation of the Associations views if I was to publish now - but a few places are very close and your vote could swing the poll in favour of YOUR favourite - so vote!)

By Sean Lay: the SF media magazine "Starburst"'s following issues:
WANTED: Nos. 1, 5, 6, 7, 13, 14, 37. Good prices paid!

AIISLING GHEAL SHORT STORY COMPETITION

entries must be typewritten, less than 12,000 words in length, and in the post by 1st February, 1982. Entries to the address at the end of this newsletter.

NEWS



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"I can pick up a SF novel and it can be about anything. That so under-mined, and so important a phrase 'sense of wonder' does still exist in Science Fiction, but should now be updated to 'sense of wonder and enquiry' and it is this that keeps me reading SF and what I believe the modern SF novel is about. Let us hope that academic and commercial pressures do not force into a restricted area. Free thought is the foundation of Science Fiction."

Geoff Rippington, Arena SF 7

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Dear Mr. President,

The canal system of this country is being threatened by a new form of transportation known as 'railroad'... As you may well know, Mr. President, 'railroad' carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 miles per hour by 'engines' which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such a breakneck speed.

Martin Van Buren,
Governor of New York, 1829.

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A.E. Van Vogt collected \$50,000 recently for possible plagiarism of his short story entitled 'Discord in Scarlet'. The plagiarist was 'Alien'. (I think the story mentioned is a short story - I'd be very interested in reading it, though and as even the Encyclopedia of SF doesn't mention it, I'd appreciate anyone letting me know where to find it. Any ideas? -ed.)

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'The Penguin Dictionary of Modern Quotations' (new edition) has discovered SF. They have snippets from Asimov (his 'Laws of Robotics' - what else!), Heinlein (just the title 'Stranger in a Strange Land') and many more. Strictly for the fan who wants everything!

Outline - André Norton

Andre Norton is the writing name of Alice Mary Norton (1912 -). Before becoming a full time author, she was a librarian for 20 years. Her work, though mostly adult in theme and style, is billed primarily as being for children and adolescents. She prefers novel length works but her shorter work was collected in two collections - "Garan The Eternal" (1972) and "The Many Worlds of Andre Norton" (aka "The Book of Andre Norton") ed. Roger Elwood, 1974.

Her novel-length works make constant cross-reference to each other and, as a result, place her work into a broadly conceived universe, recognisably her own. Some of the books are more closely linked into series: the 'Dane Thorson' books - "Sargasso Of Space", "Plague Ship", "Voodoo Planet", "Postmarked The Stars"; the "Blake Walker" sequence - "The Crossroads of Time", "Quest Crosstime" and the "Witch World" sequence - essentially fantasy and not connected to the background common to the other books: "Witch World", "Web of the Witch World", "Year of The Unicorn", "Three Against The Witch World", "Warlock Of the Witch World", "Sorceress of the Witch World", "Spell of the Witch World" (collection), "The Crystal Gryphon", "The Jargon Pard" and "Trey of Swords".

The universe created by Andre Norton is one where her protagonists find excitement and riches. She uses the theme of Man vs. Machines regularly - in her series concerning the planet "Janus", the foe to be dealt with was a computer. She also pits her characters against bureaucratic insensitivity and oppression, having them escape repressive environments and establishing themselves free of the past with new homes on new planets.

Andre Norton's style has matured over her career - her characters are easy to identify with, she has a clear style and her universe is basically responsive to virtue, good will and spunk. The reasons for her not being to the fore as regards critically acclaimed author are probably the fact that she did not publish in the SF magazines, her label as a juvenile writer and the very large number of books published to date.

((Due to the VERY large amount of books Andre Norton has published, and my lack of space, I could not include a bibliography. The Encyclopedia of SF is recommended for this.))

REVIEWS

REVIEWS OF SOME NOVELS BY ANDRE NORTON

The Stars Are Ours
Star Born
The Last Planet
Star Gate
Quest Crosstime
Crossroads of Time
Breed To Come
Star Guard
Storm Over Warlock

It is a bit of a shame that more of Andre (really Alice Mary) Norton's earlier works haven't been introduced on this side of the Atlantic, as they are quite good SF in comparison to her recent offerings. Most of the books in this review come from the 1950's or early 1960's, the exception being a relatively forgettable Breed To Come from 1972.

A few words about her general themes though. She usually overemphasises the dichotomy between Good and Evil in a way that adults would find hard to accept. But these are all books for younger readers, so that's no damning complaint. There also seems to be a lack of rigorous scientific solutions to scientific problems: whenever she paints the hero into a tight corner, a bit of telepathy or something similar will come along unexpectedly to the rescue. The world picture of the earlier ones is definitely of the 1950's cold war era; yet the writing style is by no means clearly from that decade. Her style is a bit unique, though certainly not as much as that of her contemporary, Wilson Tucker. Her characterisations also tend to be a bit unbelievable --- a lot of them are fairly young, culturally deprived, warrior types, yet they tend to be unrealistically unaggressive and far too sensitive. Her characters are undifferentiable by sex, and often by age as well. But she certainly has no hesitation in using non-humans even as viewpoint characters, though not very convincingly to my mind. She has considerable difficulty in creating believable societies in which the events of the stories unwind, which is regrettable in view of how ambitious she has been. To summarise: her writing is often flawed technically - yet if one's throat is large enough to swallow some of what she cooks up, you'll find yourself well rewarded and entertained for your trouble. I'll now discuss these books in detail, pointing out a few weaknesses while concentrating on the plots.

The first book I'll talk about is The Last Planet which was originally released as Star Rangers in 1953. It is the story of the crash of a Galactic patrol ship on what proves to be the Earth in the year 8054 A.D. The Earth has been regarded as mythical by the largely Human Empire inhabitants. The few remaining Earth natives have reverted to barbarism, because the best and brightest of Earthlings have fled the planet (apparently simultaneously!) several tens of centuries earlier. Among the regular ship's company, anyhow, is a small detachment of rangers, who are apparently something like Space Marines but who act like Boy Scouts are supposed to. The regular crew of the ship is human to a man, while the rangers are either non-human or heavily mutated humans (highly telepathic, night-vision-only, and so on). As events unfold they find a group of survivors from a lost liner (the human contingent thereof), the non-human survivors who had fled for their skins and later on, some more refugees from a pirate attack on a main ranger base. Good action-adventure stuff that unfortunately fails completely to draw a coherent picture of the Galactic Society even when it tries so labouriously to do so. The technological aspects are far too contrived to convince effectively.

Star Guard (1955) is a fairly interesting book. The Earth has discovered FTL drive several centuries before the story opens. Unfortunately for them, the early FTL-nauts found the galaxy to be fully occupied by an empire which consists of humanoid and non-humanoid races in very large abundance. Fearing Earthmen's dynamic science and virility the Imperialists have decreed that Earthmen should be allowed out of the Solar System only to carry out tasks deemed to be appropriate to what the Imperialists see Earth's role in Galactic culture; to be mercenary surface soldiers.

There are two types: Archs, who use no advanced weaponry or other military equipment apart from cartridge rifles, and the Mechs, who are a sort of super panzer Corps. As the story opens, a young Arch named Kana Karr joins up on his first mission, a police action on a very primitive world. His side loses almost immediately because the enemy has somehow smuggled in a laser (not called thusly, of course -- remember, this was written in '55) to bump off the local King the Archs had been fighting for. Contrary to the usual existing rules of war, the Archs are not allowed repatriation after the war is over, and Karr and his buddies are forced to flee overland into a howling winter on a high sierra plateau. It soon becomes clear that renegade Mechs from Earth are involved -- but they turn out to be tools of a much deeper plot to discredit Earth and to close the Galaxy forever to Terrans. Another fine adventure yarn and well worth a read.

Storm Over Warlock (1960) is a bit weaker than the last novel. It concerns what happens when the evil insectoid Throgs wipe out a small advance survey team to Warlock, though missing a near adult kitchen helper named Shann Lantes, who had been out chasing his pair of escaped pet wolverines (!) and a survey officer whose flyer had been downed during the attack. They contrive to escape, hoping to remain free long enough to communicate a warning to an expected relief fleet from Earth. They wander through a variety of adventures before being cornered by Throgs. They get unexpectedly teleported to safety by three native women (race hitherto unknown and existence only vaguely hinted at) into a foggy cavern where various insulting parapsychological tests are wrought upon them to determine whether they are intelligent or not. (tests on the wolverines weren't so successful). Things happen and the nasty Throgs are done in parapsychologically.

Star Gate (1950) is one of my favourites. This book has an alien viewpoint character named Kincar S'Rud -- but he is soon to be revealed as the half breed son of a long dead Star Lord named Rud. The Star Lords are black Earthmen who landed on Gorth, the planet of the story, many hundred of years before in several ships. After a few hundred years, the Star Lords decided they were perverting the native culture (crossbreeding tactfully not mentioned here) and decide to leave the Gorthians to their own devices. The half breeds and some Star Lords who have fallen in love with the planet decide not to leave spatially however, -- instead they plan to go to an uninhabited parallel universe Gorth (existence only suspected). They are rushed in their search, however, and find themselves trapped on a Gorth where the local Star Lords have become relentless tyrants instead. (though crossbreeding was ruled out by the direst of penalties -- you can imagine how effective these were, though). Young Kincar does some scouting, gets himself nabbed, and escapes in a wild series of rapid adventures; then things eventually work themselves out. There is a very interesting religious motif in the story as well, plus a talisman of extremely coincidental power. A fine read indeed -- the portrayal of the society is a very interesting precursor to that of *pern*.

The Stars Are Ours (1954) and Star Born (1957) are a complete two book series, though no characters are common to both. This is not unrelated to the fact that events take place three hundred years apart. In the first, a group of scientists gather together to flee the anti-science tyranny of Pax on Earth. They barely make it, of course, and land (after a slower than light trip helped out with suspended animation) on another world, where the local civilisation has collapsed several earlier. This book is poor by Norton's usual standards. The characterisations are far too weak, and the juveniles are of no identifiable age. Since no-one is the viewpoint character, this is a grave shortcoming. Star Born on the other hand is quite well done. It uses parallel development until nearly the end -- the two viewpoint characters are Dalgard Nordis, a youth born on Astra, the new planet several centuries later, and Raf Kurbi, an air pilot of Earth's apparently first successful FTL ship in ten attempts. Pax and his gang have long since gone up against the wall, of course. It turns out that the old native race on Astra is on the verge of making a comeback, but it is soon revealed to the reader that they are Evil. Also in content are some escaped laboratory animals who escaped in the aliens' heyday and have since become intelligent on their own and who have allied themselves with Nordis's group. The different reactions to events by Nordis and Kurbi are very well done indeed -- and as the book approaches the end the two finally meet and things get resolved. But for an irritating and quite unnecessary use of telepathy to help the resolution, it is an interesting and very technically proficient story.

The Crossroads of Time and Quest Crosstime (1950 and 1965 respectively) are another mini series. This one is of a much more even quality. Both books are alternate universe stories. The first starts with the impressing of Blake Walker, a young man from our

Earth (though it is later realised that he might have been a crosstime refugee who had been fired off in infancy in a capsule by his dead scientist father seconds before a nuclear holocaust) into the crosstiming corps of agents from a much-farther-advanced-but-also-from-a-nuclear-holocaust-Earth who are chasing a renegade who is economically exploiting the various parallel worlds. Walker gets captured by the renegade, escapes through some hair-raising yet pointless adventures and finally finally finds himself in a post-Nazi-occupied New York (!), fighting with guerillas. The renegade is trapped here and captured with the aid of a kitten (!!). The second book continues with Blake Walker's career as an agent -- he stumbles onto the scene of a kidnapping of an entirely sterile Earth, helps chase the victim and her captors to an entirely Aztec dominated Earth and helps keep the victim's heart in the right place by subverting a religious ceremony designed to move the girl's heart somewhere else. The underlying threat that the kidnapping was a front for is gradually revealed in the course of the action, and the situation is eventually resolved. Unfortunately, the book has an extremely poor Deus Ex Machina which was necessary to prevent the good guys from dying from vitamin deficiencies after being marooned sans communication or transportation back on the sterile world -- "If we all think real hard, maybe Daddy will decide to come and rescue us" is its effect, even though Daddy has no idea that his daughters have been marooned, or even that they were in any difficulties. But in spite of this, the book is far from weak -- the culture portrayals are quite well done and well worth the read.

Breed To Come (1972) I remember very little about. I do recall that the earth is inhabited by intelligent cats and rats, who nevertheless are quite primitive. They had been left behind after a bacteriological war had caused men to flee the planet for another stellar system. Anyhow a ship comes back for a look around and things happen. I've had this book on the shelf since '73 and my recollection of it is that it was horrendously bad. I have never been tempted to verify my opinions by rereading it but if I ever do, I'll write a longer, though not necessarily more complimentary review.

REVIEWS BY: JOHN MCCARTHY

P.S. One enormous flaw in all of these books, which I hasten to point out cannot be blamed on Norton in the slightest; all are Ace paperbacks. All are falling apart and shedding pages like a TD's car sheds parking tickets. This even includes the poor, scarcely read Breed To Come.

New Writings in SF 20 - edited by Kenneth Bulmer (Corqi, 70p)

It was the cover of this book of short stories that attracted me more than anything else and when I first bought it I kind of ignored it, turning instead to the must-be-read novels of Stephen King, Frank Herbert, Philip Jose Farmer et al. Recently I read it from cover to cover and came up with the conclusion that I wasn't really missing anything anyway. It has some good stories, namely Face To Infinity by E.C. Tubb. Other stories worthy enough to be read are 'The Great Plan' by Leroy Kettle and 'Wordsmith' by Bryn Fortrey. The twist in Wordsmith is brilliant.

But aside from this precious few, the book on the whole is boring. 'What happened to William Coombes' had me asleep by the tenth page and if you've never heard of obscurity then read Brian W. Aldiss's 'The Bones of Bertrand Russell'.

As for the rest of the stories, well 'The Way Erving Kent' by Graham Leman and Michael Stall's 'Manganon' are probably the best of a bad lot. Read this book if you really feel up (or down?) to it. I don't know, I suppose it'll pass a rainy day if nothing else.

REVIEWED BY: SEAN MAY

Confident in the hope that I'm not the only SF soundtrack lover around, I have bravely decided to write reviews on all the different SF soundtracks available and so now I shall carry on regardless.

Over the next few (and hopefully more!) months I hope to keep all you music lovers in

track with the latest releases and possibly gain a few converts. So without any more talking I'll begin.

First I'm going to start with the soundtrack of 'A Clockwork Orange' and a later version, 'Walter Carlos's Clockwork Orange'. The latter version is the original soundtrack of the film 'A Clockwork Orange', one of my favourite films of all time. Most of the music from the film, with a few exceptions, is on the record. Probably the best piece on this is the 'March From A Clockwork Orange'. This is an abridged version of the Fourth Movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and is done on synthesizer by Walter Carlos, complete with electronic voices and all. It is sheer joy to listen to and probably the most expressive piece on the whole record. Following close on its heels is 'Timesteps', a really violent piece of music, totally original and also by Carlos. The title music from the film is another version of Berlioz's 'Dies Irae' ('Day of Wrath') and yet again it is composed, performed and arranged by Carlos.

Other tracks include Elgar's 'Pomp and Circumstance', 'The Thieving Magpie' by Rossini, the original 'Singin' in the Rain' by Gene Kelly, and a short but beautiful piece by Carlos, 'Theme From A Clockwork Orange'.

The other record I was talking about, Walter Carlos's A Clockwork Orange, is not the original soundtrack of the film, but contains music that was used in, composed and arranged for, or even just suggested by 'A Clockwork Orange'. On this record you get the full complete version of 'Timesteps' (all 13 minutes of it), the synthesised version of 'The Thieving Magpie' and an excellent piece of original music, 'Country Lane', that was unfortunately dropped out of the final version by Stanley Kubrick.

"Amazing!" isn't the word to describe the complete version of 'Timesteps'. This track is a musical poem based on Anthony Burgess's horrorshow novel 'A Clockwork Orange' but the uncanny thing is that it was started before Carlos read the novel, and he was struck by the similarity that the first three minutes or so - for that was as far as he'd got - of 'Timesteps' and the opening scenes of the novel. 'Timesteps' is a literal 'tour-de-force' of sound and it is really the most expressive piece of music that I have heard to date. Also worthy of mention is 'Country Lane' which combines the 'Dies Irae' theme with 'The Thieving Magpie', original rain and lightning sounds (Walter Carlos was the first to use this) and hints of 'Singin' in the Rain'. Besides these tracks the record also has the 'Scherzo' from Ludwig van's Ninth Symphony, the William Tell Overture by Rossini as well as all of the other Carlos music from the original soundtrack.

Personally I preferred the Walter Carlos version to the original but then maybe other listeners would prefer the original for its greater variety.

REVIEWED BY: SEAN MAY

The Empire Strikes Back - the illustrated version - Donald F. Glut, based on a story by George Lucas. Published by Ballantine (U.S.) at \$4.95 paperback.

Has the 'Star Wars' series of films hurt or helped Science Fiction? When the first Star Wars (SW from now on) came out the reception in SF circles was mixed. Geoff Ripington, in his editorial in 'Arena SF 6' (which had various publicity shots from the film covering the cover) asked just this question and the following issue had correspondence which basically said that SW would 'take SF back to the gutter, force a reassessment, and bring about a change in the same way that New Wave did in the sixties. It has to, otherwise SF will die of apathy.'. Strong words, but true. The whole SW machine hits at the basic emotions which is very enjoyable for a change. Which is a long winded way of explaining why I was up until 2.30a.m. last night reading this book - it's impossible to put down! It's a straight novelisation of the film and, although there isn't anything deep, enjoyable. The various passages describing Frank Oz's Yoda are well done and the illustrations (actual pre-production pieces) are, on the whole, quite good.

So if you want an enjoyable two hours, and you don't want to read anything too heavy, this is recommended. (I haven't seen this around Ireland - I got it as a present (thanks Alison!) in Scotland. Still, I'm sure 'The Alchemist's Head' would order it for you.)

REVIEWED BY: BRENDAN RYDER

Cinema: 'Raiders of the Lost Ark'; 'History of the World, part one'; 'The Clones of Bruce Lee' (I haven't seen this one but I class it as SF because of the word 'clone' in the title - although ONE Bruce Lee is enough torture for me!). From Friday 10th, the Carlton cinema in Dublin is showing the classic 'Superman I' - I call it a classic because your votes have it pretty high up in the Top Ten. I hope it's shown in the other centres around as it really is worth seeing.

Television: As I'm fast running out of room I can only briefly mention the films and series' on over the festive season: 'UEFA' (twice!); '2001, A Space Odyssey' and 'Warlords of Atlantis' are the films. I've heard a rumour that 'The Man who Fell to Earth' may be on too. T.V. series' which are due to be on are 'Blakes Seven', 'Spiderman', 'Mork & Mindy' (hey, they got married recently. I'd better not say anymore as this is a family Association - SF fandom is supposed

to be made up of 'thinkers' so think!) There are probably some other series due to be shown but I don't have the details to hand (I'm writing this early in December). Finally - Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all the members from The Committee!

This newsletter is published by The Irish Science Fiction Association and is copyright (c). The Association meets on the last Sunday of every month at 7.30pm at the Parliament Inn, parliament Street, Dublin 2. The address for reviews, artwork etc. and any enquiries you may have is c/o Brendan Ryder, 16 Beech Drive, Buncrana, Dublin 16, Ireland, phone no. (01)902594.

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