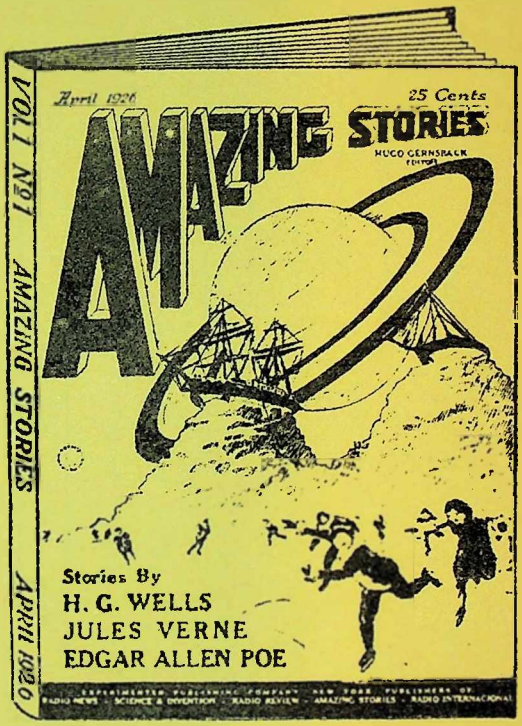
SCIENCE FICTION *News*



The first (April 1926) issue of AMAZING STORIES, pictured here, had far reaching affects, since from it grew the science fiction movement. Now to celebrate its forty-fifth anniversary Science Fiction News takes a backward look at the oldest science fiction magazine.

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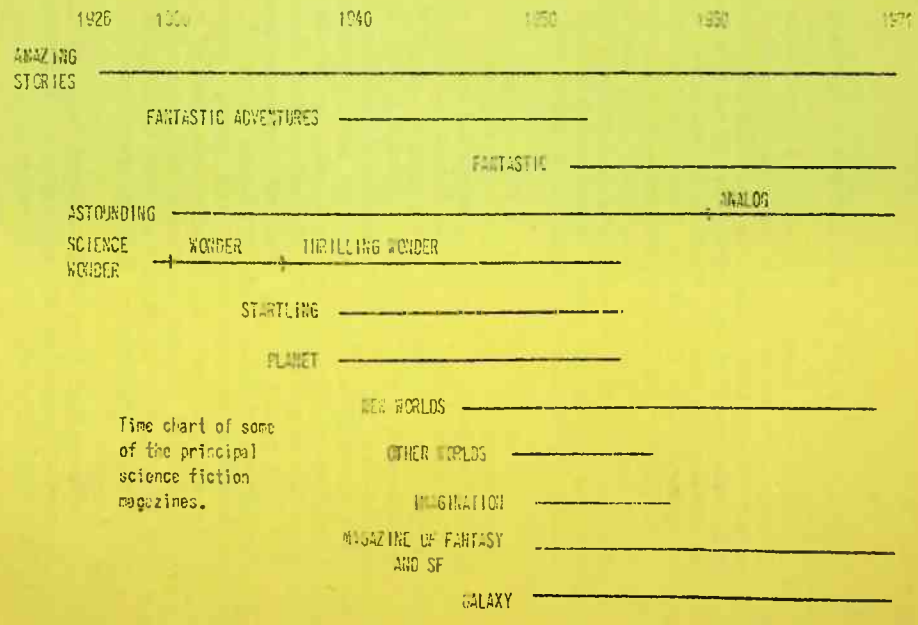

Time chart of some of the principal science fiction magazines.

F O R T Y - F I V E A M A Z I N G Y E A R S

How many popular periodicals survive to see a forty-fifth anniversary? Not too many. Of the other all-fiction magazines that flourished in 1926 only Argosy-All Story survives, metamorphosed into something its readers would not recognise; Adventure, Top-Notch, Blue Book, Short Stories, Popular, Mystery Stories, Wings, Detective Weekly, Weird Tales and all the rest have gone. But Amazing Stories is still in business, and through all the changes it has undergone it has never ceased to be a part of the field it created in the first place.

For create the field it did. Yes, of course many science fiction stories were written before 1926, including the great pioneering works of men like Wells, Verne, Griffith, Cummings, Farley, Doyle, Merritt and many more, Argosy and a few other magazines had been regularly printing them for a generation, and Gernsback had been building up the idea since 1911. But it was at best an underground tradition without an accepted name -- Gernsback had only been talking about "scientific fiction" for four years, Argosy used various terms including "pseudo-scientific" and "different stories" -- and without a recognised outlet and forum, Amazing by its mere existence established the idea of a body of work with its own character and potentialities, and by its success suggested that other publishers might also try science fiction magazines.

The actual term at first was "scientifiction", long an alternative but now rare. But it was the idea that counted.

Leadership was lost almost as soon as uniqueness, and it must be said that Amazing has more often been a handicap, even an embarrassment, than a constructive element in the movement. It has produced plenty of surprises, but not often enough pleasant ones. It has changed hands repeatedly, abandoned by one publisher and revived by another perhaps better describing some of the changes, and has had a bewildering series of editorial changes. But it has survived, when scores of magazines have risen and fallen, outlasting the competition of bad magazines like Fantasy Fiction and Planet; tolerable magazines like Astonishing and Startling; good magazines like Worlds Beyond and Science Fiction Plus; fine magazines like Infinity and Satellite.

Let us take a brief survey of its career.

1926 A handsome magazine in a bulky 11" x 8½" format, illustrated by Frank R. Paul. The physical appearance was fairly consistent for three years, with only an occasional interior by Bob Dean or some photographs. Paul helped give not only Amazing but science fiction itself a certain atmosphere of its own from the beginning.

Hugo Gernsback had been toying with the idea of a magazine devoted to "scientifiction" for years and even made a premature announcement in 1923. He was thus not acting impulsively. He had a good backlog of stories to use — for the magazine was entirely a reprinting operation at first — and could choose a varied selection of what he thought the best. He was assisted in selection by Conrad A. Brandt, a bibliophile with a deep knowledge of early SF in several languages, who also read the

manuscripts that began to come in. Many others in later years were to do much of the editorial work on Amazing, for which the nominal editor of the time got the credit or otherwise. Gernsback set the policy and set forth his ideas on the new literature in leaders on such points as "Plausibility in Scientifiction". Before the year was out the public response to the magazine had been enormous; it was obvious that Gernsback had been right, there was already a strong following whose interest had been stimulated by the trickle of books, the many stories in magazines like Argosy and finally those he had been printing regularly in Radio News, Science and Invention etc. The volume of letters from readers prompted a regular correspondence section, Discussions, beginning a permanent feature of most SF magazines.

In the first issue of April 1926 were the cover story, serialised in two parts, Off on a Comet by Jules Verne; The New Accelerator by H. G. Wells, representing the tradition of the story built around a single invention; The Man from the Atom, also the first of two parts, by G. Peyton Wertenbaker, enlarging (pardon the expression) on Ray Cummings' size-changing concept; The Thing from Outside by George Allan England, an eerie encounter with an extraterrestrial invader; The Man who Saved the Earth by Austin Hall, an early example of the invasion genre; and The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar by Edgar Allan Poe, really a weird item by modern ideas but reinforcing the air of established respectability which Wells also contributed. The new literature could not afford to seem too new at first.

There was no doubt as to who was the leading author in the early years. Wells appeared in every

one of the first 29 issues; the runners-up were Verne (in 15 of those issues with 8 stories), A. Hyatt Verrill (10 issues, 8 stories), David H. Keller (8 stories), Miles J. Breuer (7 stories), Garrett P. Serviss (7 issues, 3 stories) and Poe (6 stories).

The oldest item used was Richard Adams Locke's Moon Hoax of 1835, and the 19th Century was rather over-represented in the first few issues. Another strong element was the work of such as writers as H. H. Simmons, Clement Fezandié, Charles C. Winn and Jacque Morgan resurrected from the radio magazines: short, often mildly funny stories about remarkable inventions.

Verne aside, there were usually two or more serials running. Station X by G. McLeod Winsor was a popular one, dealing with a top secret radio installation that picked up interplanetary messages and found an invasion from Mars imminant. Murray Leinster appeared with The Runaway Skyscraper and The Mad Planet. Among the few new stories were the first appearances of Verrill, Breuer and lesser lights.

1927 Amazing had hit its stride by now, and the first full year was of better standard with predominantly new stories. The Machine Man of Ardathia, involving time travel and a remote, rather repugnant future, introduced Francis Flagg. H. P. Lovecraft, established in the weird field, appeared with The Colour out of Space. The most popular story of the year was The Moon Pool by A. Merritt, which had already been in Argosy and in hard covers. Another Argosy reprint was Treasures of Tantalus by Garret Smith, continuing from his On the Brink of 2000 the remote observat-

ion device of world wide scope. It would stand reviving today, when we are all too well acquainted with surveillance and the loss of privacy.

The readership was enough for more than one monthly magazine: Gernsback rejected the idea of going twice-monthly, but decided to put out an occasional supplementary issue. The first was a 50c Amazing Stories Annual. Featuring a complete new Burroughs novel, The Master Mind of Mars, it also included The Face in the Abyss and The People of the Pit by Merritt, the last a reprint from a few months before — and another four reprints from the monthly magazine! But it sold well.

1928 Edmond Hamilton, another recruit from Weird Tales, led off the year with The Comet Doom, a characteristic world-saving yarn, on the January cover. Other writers of note appearing through the year included David H. Keller with The Revolt of the Pedestrians; George McLociard with Smoke Rings; Charles Cloukey with Sub-Satellite; Harl Vincent with The Golden Girl of Munan; Jack Williamson with The Metal Man; Fletcher Pratt, in collaboration with Irvin Lester, with The Octopus Cycle, with an ecological theme that would appeal today apart from some obvious objections. But the two most far reaching introductions came in the one issue, August: E. E. Smith and Lee Hawkins Garby's The Skylark of Space began and took the cover, introducing the interstellar story; and Philip Francis Nowlan's Armageddon 2419 A.D. was a well constructed, original story, which of course was later adapted into Buck Rogers.

The success of the 1927 Annual led to the new

Amazing Stories Quarterly, a hefty 144-page magazine which was good value at 50c. Each issue ran at least one booklength novel complete, loading off with Wells' When the Sleeper Wakes, and the stories were carefully selected.

1929 The first six issues continued in the same vein. The Airlords of Han, Nowlan's second story, continued the first and wound up Rogers' story neatly. Others worth mentioning were The Last Man by Wallace West -- his first in a SF magazine, he was another who began in Weird Tales -- and The Worm by Keller. Amazing now passed from Gernsback's hands. Arthur Lynch was briefly named as Editorial Director, but T. O'Conor Sloane and C. A. Brandt continued, with Miriam Bourne and Wilbur C. Whitehead, to do the actual work involved for the next few years. The immediate changes were slight, aside from the somewhat different style and artwork. Hans W. Wessolowski or Wesso appeared now with the first of the many covers and interiors that give him a place in the story of SF. Wells and reprints generally vanished but many of the same writers contributed.

However, quality suffered a little from the circumstance that Gernsback promptly started two new monthlies and a quarterly in opposition, and the talent was spread thinner. The advent of Astounding in January 1930 aggravated this. But on the other hand the broader market attracted more writers before long.

1930 Smith was back with Skylark Three, a far better story than The Skylark of Space. The Green Girl by Williamson, The Prince of Liars by L. Taylor Hansen, The Hungry Guinea Pig and The

Gostak and the Doshes by Breuer were notable. With SF established reality now, there was a different atmosphere, some consistency of purpose as well as better overall quality than three years before. A new writer, John W. Campbell Jr., began to make his presence felt: his third story, Piracy Preferred, began a series as influential as Smith's epics. Leo Morey replaced Wesso as the main artist, growing steadily less exciting as time went on.

1931 More names who were important later on appeared. Paul Ernst, Raymond Z. Gallun, Nat Schachner, Arthur Leo Zagat, P. Schuyler Miller, Neil R. Jones. Smith's third novel, Spacehounds of the IPC, was memorable. SF books were being published often enough for Brandt's reviews of them to become a significant feature.

1932 For whatever reason, the magazine faltered in its stride this year and there was little of note. Cloukey's serial The Swordsman of Sarvon was a fairly successful attempt to rationalise the Burroughs formula, an enjoyable yarn which, alas, is rather too dated in its concept of Venus to go over today.

1933 There was a depression on in more ways than one, and like the other SF magazines Amazing suffered seriously. John Russell Fearn appeared with The Intelligence Gigantic, a feeble superman story; Festus Pragnell with an interesting offbeat item, The Essence of Life. Morey went from dull to duller, while someone called Sigmond painted seven unpopular covers of abstract to symbolistic character. Not too bad really, but before their time. Size changed to what now became the

standard pulp size of 10" x 7" with rough edges. The actual make-up of each issue and indeed most of the editorial work credited to Dr. Sloane was now actually done by Florence Bothner; the change in the magazine under Sloane with its two distinct phases can probably be ascribed largely to the difference between Bourne and Bothner.

The Quarterly meanwhile was fading away with the decline in the monthly, expiring the next year with a weak all-reprint issue.

1934/37 Mediocrity was the keynote of this homogeneous period. Triplanetary by E. E. Smith led off 1934, his best so far and some would still rate best overall, but there was little anywhere near its class. Much bland entertainment but few memorable stories and much garbage. Joe W. Skidmore's childish series about personified subatomic particles was a nadir deeper than SF deserved. Neil R. Jones' Jameson series was highly esteemed by the faithful, which will give you an idea of the standard. By Jove! by Walter Rose was one of the best intelligent ant stories and deserved hard covers more than most of the post-war resurrections.

1938 It had to end. Sales eventually fell low enough for Teck Publications to give up. The Ziff-Davis firm took over and produced a radically different kind of magazine edited by Raymond A. Palmer. It was a rude shock to readers of the time, but in perspective it has to be called an improvement. It was no sillier or more juvenile than the old Amazing had often been, its scientific element was just as good (at first) and it had considerably more relation to the life and problems of its time. And it had a lot more ginger.

Palmer was greatly maligned for failing to do things he never set out to do, and he certainly didn't help SF reach greater maturity even when he tried later on. But he knew what he was about, he understood how to make Amazing into a lively magazine of popular appeal. His first few issues were mostly written by established SF writers, if not perhaps at the peak of their form. Time for Sale by Ralph Milne Farley -- his first in Amazing -- was perhaps the year's best story.

1939/44 But if circulation continued at a high level after rising sharply after Palmer took over, quality did not. Part of the reason for the way things developed lay in the explosive growth of the field. Consider: in 1937 there were three magazines (four counting the British Tales of Wonder which wasn't really in the field) with 24 issues; in 1938 there were four magazines with 27 issues; in 1939, there were ten magazines (not counting the all-reprint Famous Fantastic Mysteries) with 53 issues; in 1940 there were 14 magazines with 79 issues; and in 1941 there were 16 magazines with 88 issues. As in 1930 there was not enough good material even though there were plenty of new writers and better writers. If at the top Astounding grew better and better, at the bottom the least prestigious magazines suffered badly. Palmer's response was to work harder at cultivating his own group of new writers, and in this period the situation developed where Amazing and its companion Fantastic Adventures were written almost entirely by a clique who rarely or never appeared in other SF magazines. Chester S. Geier, David V. Reed, H. B. Hickey, Berkeley Livingston, William P. McGivern, Charles F. Myers, David Wright

O'Brien, Don Wilcox, Dwight V. Swain, Rog Phillips and so on.

The art work...There were good ideas. Palmer's first two issues had posed photographic covers, for instance. And using the back covers for varied pictorial features was an improvement on whiskey ads. Innumerable artists worked for Amazing, but apart from Paul and Virgil Finlay they could have all been the same: mechanically competent and tasteless — which in fact is the way it has been ever since.

Rebinding unsold copies in threes as fat quarterlies was an ingenious idea, employed in 1944 and again 1947-52. The regular magazine added pages during the war — perhaps with the thought that paper rationing would hit it less hard — some issues reaching 244 pages, but quantity as ever was not the same as quality, and this was a thoroughly bad magazine. Monthly schedule lasted to September 1943, slipping to bimonthly, then quarterly, back to monthly in 1946. Howard Browne joined the staff in 1942.

A companion magazine, Fantastic Adventures, began in 1939, at first in the old 11" x 8½" size but otherwise undistinguished.

1945 The main thing that happened in 1945 — the ending of the war made no immediate difference — was the publication of I Remember Lemuria by "Richard Sharpe Shaver" in March, and the rapid escalation of the so-called Shaver Mystery. Broadly, the gist of it was that these stories were claimed to be based on fact, the fact being a classic paranoid delusion of persecution: Shaver and others later were being persecuted because they had clues to the existence of a secret conspiracy of nasties hiding in caves, descendents

of a remote prehistoric civilisation who among other things meddle in human affairs and even torment individuals. There was some stuff about banoful affects of hard radiation (the good guys of the ancient civilisation had left Earth because they were getting too much of it from the Sun), as well as some remarkably quaint ideas on language and semantics, religion and you name it. Palmer later admitted writing the original stories at least, basing them on a typical crank manuscript such as publishers often receive. But at any rate, at appeared that there were droves of neurotics ready to adopt such a body of ideas, and readership profited considerably while the mailbag was full of letters from people with their own evidence on the cave dwellers.

After numerous pieces signed by Shaver and others more or less carrying on the hoax, it ended abruptly in late 1943 when the Ziff-Davis management decided it had gone far enough. Rumor has it that either Ziff or Davis looked at Amazing for the first time and found out what was going on.

1946 Shaver dominated the scene, but there was some fairly good material, such as Agharti by Heinrich Hauser and several by Rog Phillips. W. Lawrence Hamling joined the staff.

1947 The Star Kings by Edmond Hamilton was the outstanding story of the year at least in popularity at the time. So Shall Ye Reap by Rog Phillips and One More Spring by Frances Yerxa were good reading.

1948 More of the same. The popular department The Club House began, in which Rog Phillips encouraged amateurs: at the time a clear move

to appeal to informed readers and move in the direction of better class SF, in the long run this had the affect of encouraging SF's considerable lunatic fringe more than attracting constructive elements. It is impossible to single anything out from the puerile fiction used.

1949 Some recovery from the blight many attributed to Shaverism, with some worth while stories: Phillips' Unthinkable, The Shortcut and The Awakening for instance. Palmer left at the end of this year, replaced by Howard Browne, with Hamling continuing. Palmer claimed that since his promotion of Shaver had been suppressed the management had interfered with Amazing and prevented raising standards. On the one hand this did not explain why quality had been so bad since 1939; on the other, it must be admitted that Palmer did a far better job with his new magazine Other Worlds. Browne's Amazing was not noticeably different from Palmer's last years at first, though more recognised authors began to appear more often. Browne had no real feeling for science fiction and ran Amazing as any action pulp.

1950 Browne did try to move in the direction of a better class magazine, aiming at a better format and more slick appeal -- the kind of change that Galaxy and If were soon to achieve. A good quality digest magazine was almost produced this year, but the slight slump in general interest caused it to be shelved. The editorial office was moved from Chicago to New York, which simple change had quite a strong impact on content. The old Chicago-centred clique of writers was at a disadvantage while the New York based group were given

a more readily exploitable market. Hamling stayed behind to start his own magazine Imagination, which like Palmer's Other Worlds was a lot better than the Amazing he had worked on. Lila Shaffer replaced him.

Some interesting stories were Let Freedom Ring by Fritz Leiber, If This be Utopia by Kris Neville, The Eternal Eve by John Wyndham.

One thing that did not help raise the tone of the magazine was the large number of short filler items, mostly quite idiotic.

The first substantial British edition of the magazine began, and a Japanese edition was produced for seven issues, not only the first SF magazine in an Asian language but the first foreign language edition of a SF magazine

1951/53 More of the same, with the trend to more writers familiar with the requirements of the field generally. Mack Reynolds, Charles Beaumont, H. Beam Piper, Kendall Foster Crossen, Isaac Asimov, Frank Robinson, Frodric Brown and Ross Rocklynne appeared. After some premature announcements the change to modern digest format with trendy artwork came indirectly: first a completely new magazine, Fantastic, was started, then Fantastic Adventures "combined" with it, then Amazing followed, incidentally going bimonthly. The new magazine was different rather than better, with some rather sick material intended as sophisticated. But Kuttner's little classic Or Else first appeared here. Other good stories were Project Nightmare by Robert Heinlein, Encounter in the Dawn by Arthur C. Clarke and Here there be Tygers by Ray Bradbury.

Lila Shaffer left at the end of 1952, and Paul W. Fairman arrived: formerly the first editor of If, he was an able editor.

1953/56 Under Browne and Fairman Amazing continued in much the same vein, going monthly from November 1955. There were quite a number of supernatural plots (there had been occasional ones for years, but they became more noticeable from 1953 onward). Post-atomic war stories were at a peak about 1954 in number if not in credibility or readability. Few stories deserve mention before 1956, when there was an improvement with the appearance of writers like Robert Silverberg, Randall Garrett and Harlan Ellison.

The 30th anniversary issue, April 1956, was a special with 13 reprints (a curiously mixed bag) and articles by Heinlein, Moskowitz and short bits by an extraordinary collection of worthies not associated with SF giving their predictions for the year 2000.

The aloof and impersonal character of the magazine early in its digest phase was changed with the return of a substantial correspondence department. Book reviews began in May 1955, a feature that has generally been one of Amazing's best points ever since. Flattering the pretensions of amateurs also resumed just then after a lull.

Fairman leftfor a while, returned and continued when Browne left late in 1956, Cele Goldsmith becoming his assistant.

1957/58 A period of fair success and stability while the field as a whole prospered more or less. Other magazines rose and fell but total activity was at its highest. Fantastic continued as a poor relation with its role as such

confused by its high non-SF content. A proposed series of paperback novels in imitation of the earlier Galaxy Novels failed with the first issued, a memorably bad novelisation of a feeble film called Twenty Million Miles to Earth. Flying saucers -- something never much exploited in the lunatic days of the late forties -- were featured briefly, with Shaver incidentally putting in an appearance.

Some interesting stories were The Steel Napoleon by Harlan Ellison, The Edge of the Knife by H. Beam Piper and This Crowded Earth by Robert Bloch.

The title changed to Amazing Science Fiction Stories between March and May 1958. Fairman was replaced in December 1958 by Norman Lobsenz.

1959/65 Early in 1959 Amazing was improving so noticeably that for the first time in a generation it looked like competition for the leaders. In the sixties it remained a fairly good magazine but declined slowly and began to aim more at young readers again.

Better art work, less of it and the return of back cover pictures, though now black and white, were external signs.

The Galaxy Primes by E. E. Smith, his first here for 25 years, was not his best but has interest. Other notable stories were Transient by Ward Moore, Hunters out of Space by Joseph E. Kelleam, The Last Vial by Sam McClatchie, Pawn of the Black Fleet by Mark Clifton, Recovery Area by Daniel F. Galouye, The Stars ar Calling, Mr. Keats by Robert F. Young, The Corridors of Time by Poul Anderson.

Reprints, one each issue and carefully chosen, were a valuable feature. And the series of articles by Sam Moskowitz made a solid contribution

to SF history. April 1961, the 35th anniversary issue, was another all reprint issue with seven excellent choices.

The full title from October 1960 was actually Amazing Stories Fact and Science Fiction. It is hard to see why.

Schedule slipped to bimonthly from June 1965: at this time Amazing changed hands again, passing to Sol Cohen's Ultimate Publishing Co. Lobsenz left, but his assistant, now Mrs. Lalli, remained for a while.

1965/71 Joseph Ross, Herbert A. Lehrman, Laurence M. Janifer, Barry Malzberg, Harry Harrison and Ted White were on the editorial team at one time or other in the last period. As the policy was mostly reprints not too much work can have been involved in the sixties. While there were plenty of stories in Amazing's long history that were worth reviving they are not an inexhaustable source, particularly as they have also been exploited in a bewildering array of occasional all-reprint magazines as well: so the quality did not keep up, and there have been many stories with nothing to recommend them. The new material has been good, bad or indifferent in no particular pattern. The editors' idiosyncrasies have run riot within the narrow limits available and made for a lively and varied magazine. The reviews have been generally good, the factual articles slight but often excellent. Unfortunately the tradition of being kind to the lunatic fringe has continued unabated. The art work has been generally bad.

Some new stories that can be singled out as praisworthy are Sunjammer by Arthur C. Clarke, Born under Mars by John Brunner, Up the Line by Robert

45 Amazing years

Silverberg,

There is no April 1971 issue. The March issue is a disgrace to science fiction with its editorial blather about comics and its repellant advertising, the May issue is to celebrate the anniversary in some fashion.

Will there be a 50th? In all probability there will. The magazine has survived many difficult times, not the least the last period when all the magazines have been under stress. But it is not in a very sound condition.

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