

HORRORS UNBOUND

BLACK ORC

by G. Scott Swift



5TH EDITION
COMPATIBLE



FROG GOD
GAMES

HORRORS UNBOUND

BLACK ORC

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SWYFTE'S PHYSIOLOGUS:

BLACK ORC

BY G. SCOTT SWIFT

Swyfte's Physiologus is a collection of ecologies of wondrous beasts, monstrosities, and horrors. Swyfte was a scholar hired ages ago to travel alongside the Company of the Frog to chronicle its exploits and to record information about any creatures encountered.

Sages and adventurers alike seek copies — even partial copies — of the ancient text in order to better understand these creatures and possibly to gain some advantage in combat against them.

BLACK ORC

(ORCO PULLEIACEUS)

Followers of Orcus, Demon Prince of the Undead, black orcs (*Orco pulleiaceus*) are larger and more barbarous than their cousins, the common orc. Believing themselves to be the favored of Orcus, they wage self-righteous wars of conquest on all their neighbors, be they goodly races, other evil humanoids, or even other clans of black orcs. Constant intra-clan warring usually keeps their numbers in check, much to the relief of neighboring civilizations. However, when a clan is led by a black orc high priest or priestess, who is almost always accompanied by one or more black orc champions, the clan becomes focused and organized, often forcefully welcoming other clans into its fold to create a powerful army capable of threatening the most well-defended kingdoms.

The black orc averages seven feet tall, weighs between 200 and 280 pounds, and has bluish-black skin and deep red, slightly glowing eyes. The glow in their eyes is believed to be a result of a smattering of demon blood in their breeding — a gift from Orcus, they boast. They prefer subterranean lairs but travel on land when needed for raiding or harvesting resources, and they do not suffer from photosensitivity as many breeds of orc do. Two large tusks, one on each side of the outer jaw, serve no purpose in mastication, but do add to their menacing appearance and can be used somewhat effectively during combat to jab a grappled opponent in the face or body. A game of dominance called the Hag Queen's Price, where two orcs fight with only their tusks and their hands tied behind their backs, has resulted in widespread facial lacerations. It is hard to tell from old scars who has been the victor and who the loser.



Black orcs owe their size and ferocity to a steady diet of white keep (*Agaricus illubrico*), a subterranean mushroom. Their intestinal fortitude allows them to eat the otherwise poisonous mushroom though not without the side effect of having frequent loose stools. They have accommodated for this unpredictable metabolic unrest by wearing only skirts of leather or tattered linen on their lower bodies, which allow them to relieve themselves where they stand without much pause or effort.

ECOLOGY

Black orcs prefer subterranean lairs, either moving into existing unoccupied caves, dispossessing a weaker enemy of its lair, or carving out living space from the rock itself. These lairs usually include a central temple dedicated to Orcus; otherwise, space is devoted to pragmatic purposes such as eating, sleeping, defense, and arms and armor production. The lair is dotted with any recently acquired slaves who are worked near to death, tortured for amusement, and then sacrificed upon an altar to Orcus.

Despite their preference for life underground, they are not bothered by light and often illuminate their lairs with torches and braziers, feeling that the fire honors Orcus while providing yet another tool in their myriad torture techniques. When traveling out of the lair to raid or gather resources, the orcs prefer to travel in the shade of heavily canopied forests — using the dark for concealment — but they can be encountered in any environment.

Differing levels of organization exist within various lairs. A priest-less clan has a chieftain who is usually the largest and strongest member of the tribe, with a face heavily scarred from battle and many rounds of the Hag Queen's Price (see above) as he ascended to his seat of authority. When a black orc priest is present, the chieftain maintains the air of authority, but the priest makes all clan decisions, with any black orc champions being second in command. The black orc priest is often the catalyst for the clan's domination of neighboring clans, and seeks to unite weaker clans under their banner to grow the clan stronger until they can assert a regional dominance.

Truly powerful non-orc wizards, warriors, or necromancers that are followers of Orcus may enlist individual black orcs or even entire clans into service if they are able to exhibit an overwhelming disparity of power. It is not unusual to see contingencies of black orcs dispersed within the ranks of a necromancer's undead army.

EVIDENCE OF ACTIVITY AND TRACKING INFORMATION

It is not difficult to find a black orc, for a path of carnage generally leads you directly to their lair or camp. They make no effort to hide their tracks nor dispose of their refuse or feces. Black orcs either wear boots or go barefoot, and such tracks are a bit larger than a typical human's but not giant-sized by any means. Any corpses left in their wake show obvious signs of torture.

COMBAT TACTICS

Black orcs are adept at using spears, glaives, and light crossbows in combat, though they can use any mundane weaponry. They are often disorganized in their combat formations and instead rely upon their brute strength and near-berserker level rage to overwhelm their enemies. When a black orc high priest or champion has been present long enough to mentor the clan, fighting techniques become more tactical and measured, which results in greater accomplishments on the battlefield and fosters a veteran fighting force that improves with each battle.

Black orc priests cast divine spells from the rear ranks or wade into melee range as deemed necessary while black orc champions prefer up-close combat, striking fear with their dreadful glare ability and swinging their mighty greatswords. The champion's priority, however, is to defend their priests, and they fall back to protect their priests if there is any perceived threat. Their defense of the priest isn't fully a product of loyalty, for they know if the priest dies so dies the formula for more mushroom extract.

In lairs, crude traps are set up for defense, including pit traps, triggered projectile traps, swinging blade traps, and drop traps (used to capture and not kill).

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

The black orc jailor delighted in our misery, laughing as he placed a half-empty bowl at my feet. The gruel still dripping from his chin attested that he had helped himself once more to our rations. He gave me a hard kick and then extended the same pleasantries to Finch before exiting our cell, grabbing his guttering torch from the sconce on the way out.

Finch and I had been captured three days ago during our foray into the black orc lair and had since been subjected to slave labor of the worst kind. When not working, we were chained by our ankles to the wall of our miserable, wet cell. The thief and I had been separated from the rest of the Company of the Frog as we made a fighting retreat after finding the orcs to be larger, fiercer, and more organized than anticipated. While running for the exit, the floor gave way beneath me, and I slid down a greased, man-sized tube, eventually landing hard upon the stone floor. Moments later, Finch dropped, somewhat controlled, on top of me, knocking the wind further from my chest. I struggled to regain my bearings, only to find the two of us had landed in a jail cell of sorts. Four red-eyed black orcs fell upon us as we recovered. We were beaten, stripped of our clothing and belongings, and thrown in our cell with only a loincloth for our modesty.

On our first day of captivity, a black orc came to our cell, threw a shovel and bag at each of us, and ordered us in broken Common to clean excrement from the floor wherever we found it. It was everywhere. The crude, unsophisticated orcs shat anywhere they pleased: hallways, eating areas, barracks, even once in our jail cell. There was only one place they dared not and that was a crude temple dedicated to their god Orcus. Once our bags were full of excrement, we would be taken deep into the complex where we dumped the feces through a poop chute into what sounded like quick-flowing water. A glimpse of sunlight spilled in whenever the chute was opened, and it brought us a sliver of hope.

Daily, they herded us toward the temple entrance, and our black

orc guard would point to the altar in front of an ornate, ten-foot-tall statue of Orcus beset with two large rubies for eyes. He'd laugh evilly and tell us we would be sacrificed to the great god once we were no longer useful as slaves. The first time this happened, Finch's eyes sparkled nearly as bright as the two large rubies before he re-adopted a miserable countenance. On the second day, we saw a huge orc champion, much larger than our jailor or guard, speaking an unknown language to what appeared to be an orcish priestess. The priestess wore a ram-horned helmet, fake leather wings attached to her armor, and a leather tail replete with a sharpened barb at the end just like her master's. When our gaze lingered too long, the black orc champion turned to us and roared, its piercing red eyes causing Finch and me to shudder in fear, dropping our shovels and bags and freezing in place, unable to move. We came to our senses only after our brutish guard smashed our heads together and told us to get back to work.

A hint of light entered our cell from the hallway torches, and its reflection danced upon the puddles of water that formed within the cell from a leak in the wall whose source must have been an underground stream. This allowed us ample hydration, but often flooded the cell, keeping it muddy. My ankle was abraded from being chained to the wall, and it yearned for the healing powers of Charles the Righteous, our cleric. It would soon develop the rot and lead to my premature death. Melancholy struck me on this third day as I sat in my loincloth pondering the many ways in which I might be murdered by these savage, evil creatures. There would be no rescue, I believed.

Finch must have noticed my sullen disposition. He extended his chain and self as close to me as he could reach and beckoned me closer. We came to within a few feet of each other and he whispered to me my part to play in his plan: I was to distract the orc and use my body as a sound buffer for him to fall upon. I agreed and then watched in amazement as Finch began to poke and manipulate his left upper inner arm. He silently grimaced as he squeezed and pushed at an object beneath his skin until a glint of metal protruded through. He had at some time in the past inserted a pair of short thieves' tools into his skin, allowing them to heal and scar over for a time such as this. No orc would ever find these tools upon searching his person. In a flash, his leg shackle had been picked and removed, and he was soon unlocking my shackle as well. We both refastened our ankle shackles so as to appear locked and awaited the delivery of our next meal.

When the jailor entered the room with our gruel, I began complaining that my ankle needed a healer. I knew it would draw his ire and earn me a kick, and I was right. "Shut up!" he barked, but as he drew back his leg for a kick directed at my ankle, a naked Finch leapt upon his back like a monkey. The thief wrapped his soiled loincloth around the great beast's neck and cinched it tight. The black orc fell forward onto me as planned with a muffled thud. As Finch twisted and tightened the improvised garrote, excess sweat wrung from the taut fabric, and the jailor raised no alarm, the garrote stifling all sound from the orc's lungs save for a sputtering gasp. The orc clutched at the loincloth, trying to make space to breathe, his red eyes bulging as it was drawn ever tighter. His struggles became more erratic, his urine spilling upon me and the floor, and I knew the end was near. When green blood began to trickle from his eyes and he lay limp, the thief released his hold.

Finch wasted no time. He had memorized the layout of the complex during our cleaning duty and cautioned me to follow his lead as silently as possible. The orc had left a long, curved dagger on a table at the end of the row of cells, and Finch helped himself to it as we approached the holding area of the jail. A single black orc sat at a table playing a solitary game of cards. Finch crept up behind him, and with an artistic stroke with the dagger, the black orc's head flipped backward unnaturally, still attached by the thick hide of the back of his neck, with red eyes staring lifelessly directly behind him and right into mine. Finch grabbed the keys to the jail door and revealed the rest of his plan quickly. We were to grab our shovels and excrement bags and make our way to the poop chute as quickly and



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silently as possible, hoping to find freedom. If confronted, we'd claim our guard left us on our own momentarily. Finch stuffed some wet mud from the floor into his bag without explanation, and we headed out. Luck was in our favor, and though we crossed paths with a few of the black orcs, none gave us a second glance. We found the poop chute unguarded as usual, and Finch ushered me in, explaining that death by drowning would be favorable to a sacrificial death on Orcus' altar. He began to rub the mud he had brought all over his body as I stared at the chute reluctantly. "I'll meet you on the outside," he laughed in a whisper and then shoved me down the slick incline.

My disgust with the filthy excrement lasted only a few seconds before I was plunged (and partially cleansed) into a brisk mountainside creek. I swam to shore and was relieved that there were no orcs on patrol nearby. I hid in a thicket and watched the creek closely for signs of Finch. Before I had lost all hope, the smiling thief emerged from the water, not thirty feet from my hiding spot. Together, we hiked a wide loop around the black orc's complex back toward our campsite, and hopefully, the rest of the Company of the Frog.

As our comradery grew during our travel, I finally asked Finch if he had fallen in the pit that led to our capture or if he had intentionally jumped in to rescue me. "I fell in," he insisted and then he reached into the excrement bag he still carried and pulled out two halfling-fist-sized rubies, holding them up to his eyes like lenses and saying, "Even the best of thieves can get distracted."

BLACK ORC

Medium humanoid, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (scale mail)

Hit Points 16 (3d8 + 3)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)

Skills Intimidation +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Blessing of Orcus. Black orcs have advantage on saving throws against the spells and effects of undead creatures.

Actions

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage, or 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage when used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

BLACK ORC CHAMPION

Medium humanoid, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (plate)

Hit Points 97 (15d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +4, Cha +7

Skills Intimidation +7, Perception +4, Religion +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Abyssal, Common, Orc

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Blessing of Orcus. Black orcs have advantage on saving throws against the spells and effects of undead creatures.

Spellcasting. The black orc champion is a 7th-level spellcaster.

Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following paladin spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *command*, *detect evil and good*, *false life*, *protection from evil and good*, *shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *magic weapon*, *silence*, *protection from poison*

Unholy Strike. Once on each of the black orc champion's turns when it hits a creature with a weapon attack, the champion can cause the attack to deal an extra 13 (3d8) necrotic damage to the target.

Actions

Multiattack. The black orc champion makes two melee attacks.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Dreadful Glare (recharges on a short or long rest). Each enemy within 30 feet of the champion must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or drop whatever it is holding and become frightened for 1 minute.

A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw on the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Reactions

Parry. The black orc champion adds 3 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the champion must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

BLACK ORC HIGH PRIEST OF ORCUS

Medium humanoid, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (scale mail)

Hit Points 127 (15d8 + 60)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +9, Cha +6

Skills Arcana +5, Deception +6, Insight +9, Intimidation +6, Perception +9

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages Abyssal, Common, Orc

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Abyssal Blessing. The high priest of Orcus gains 10 temporary hit points when it reduces a hostile creature that is not an undead to 0 hit points.

Blessing of Orcus. Black orcs have advantage on saving throws against the spells and effects of undead creatures.

Deadsight. The high priest of Orcus has truesight out to a range of 120 feet.

Spellcasting. The high priest of Orcus is a 10th-level spellcaster.

Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch*, *guidance*, *mending*, *resistance*

1st level (4 slots): *bane*, *cure wounds*, *false life*, *inflict wounds*

2nd level (3 slots): *aid*, *blindness/deafness*, *hold person*, *silence*

3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead*, *bestow curse*, *dispel magic*, *spirit guardians*

4th level (3 slots): *banishment*, *death ward*, *guardian of faith*

5th level (2 slots): *dispel evil and good*, *insect plague*

Unholy Strike. Once on each of the high priest's turns when it hits a creature with a weapon attack, the high priest can cause the attack to deal an extra 18 (4d8) necrotic damage to the target.

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Actions

Multiattack. The high priest makes two melee attacks.

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Caress of Orcus (recharge 5–6). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) necrotic damage, and the target's Strength score is reduced by 1d4. The target dies if this reduces its Strength to 0. Otherwise, the reduction lasts until the target finishes a short or long rest.

If a non-evil humanoid dies from this attack, a shadow rises from the corpse in 24 hours under the priest's control, unless the humanoid is restored to life or its body is destroyed. The priest can have no more than three shadows under its control at one time.

FIGHTING THE BLACK ORC

As they are humanoids, they are highly adaptable with few weaknesses. In general, one must match brawn for brawn and overwhelm with numbers. No conscripted force will be able to match the power and ferocity of a clan of black orcs; the fighting force must be skilled and disciplined.

If the black orc force is poorly led, one can take advantage of their tendency for rage and goad them into breaking rank, allowing for a veteran squad to flank and close ranks on the loose lines of the enemy.

It is always best to lure them out of their lair to avoid their traps and the darkness, and to otherwise disrupt their territorial advantage.

TREASURE

Black orcs hoard gold, silver, and other valuables though they rarely engage in commerce — they take what they want. They view the valuables as a symbol of their conquests over weaker clans and nations. Once they have an ample trove of treasure, they sacrifice the bulk of it to Orcus by dumping it into a “bottomless” chasm, lava pit, or through communing with their demon god directly.

Clans led by one or more high priests are better stewards of wealth, often using their spoils to enrich themselves with better weapons, armor, and lair fortifications though most sane nations and individuals won't deal with them. The high priests acquire fine inks and parchments (for scrolls), ceremonial incenses, and gem-encrusted religious paraphernalia made of precious metals. Large statues of Orcus, adorned with precious or semi-precious gems, are usually found in the temples of black orc lairs. Magical items of all types may be found in use or in storage, with a disproportionate number being cursed (25%) when used by good-aligned characters.

HARVESTABLE PARTS

The large facial tusks of the black orc can be removed for crude jewelry and sell for approximately 5 sp each. However, civilized kingdoms bordering black orc territory generally offer a larger bounty for the tusks, paying 5 gp for each pair.

WHITE KEEP MUSHROOM (*AGARICUS ILLUBRICO*)

The white keep mushroom is named for its white color and crenulated crown upon a thick stalk, giving each the appearance of a lone tower rising from the earth. This usually rare subterranean toxic mushroom commonly grows in black orc lairs. While most species of mushrooms spread their spores by wind, the white keep has adapted to the usually windless underground environment by producing a hardier spore capable of surviving the digestive systems of other organisms. Its toxic

nature ensures that the spores spend little time in the acidic environment of the stomach as the ensuing evacuation causes a quick passage through the alimentary canal, depositing the spore with a ready source of nutrition (dung). Though most creatures shun the white keep, limiting its distribution, its spores are widely proliferated by the black orcs' insatiable appetite for the mushroom combined with their poor hygiene and lack of proper waste disposal. Most creatures cannot tolerate eating the mushroom, even if they could get past the horrific, dung-tinged flavor.

EFFECTS WHEN EATEN

In its raw form, the white cap produces a euphoric rage. The eater is filled with a burst of adrenaline that increases strength and speed for a short while. The euphoria soon passes, but the rage remains for a bit longer, and the eater succumbs to the purgative effects of the mushroom and severe stomach cramping.

Black orcs are naturally immune to the negative effects of the mushrooms. They eat white keep mushrooms from the time of their weaning, and though they still suffer from chronic bowel problems from steady consumption, they have benefited as well. When eaten over a lifetime, the mushrooms cause a permanent increase in growth and strength in black orcs. Black orcs seem to be the only species of humanoids that can tolerate prolonged exposure to the toxic effects.

GM Note: Any character or humanoid NPC consuming the raw mushroom gains +2 Strength and +1 AC for 1d3+1 x 10 minutes. On the following round, the individual is stricken with a debilitating bout of stomach cramping and a fecal flux lasting 1d3 hours, essentially incapacitating the consumer who is unable to perform any basic task other than curling up into the fetal position. The ill effects may be alleviated by taking a short or long rest or a *lesser restoration* spell.

The high priests of the black orcs have learned how to distill and concentrate the active ingredient in the white keep mushroom. They drink it themselves as well as feed it to chosen black orc champions from birth. The orc champion is created, not born, through consuming the mushroom extract. Only a select few black orcs are nurtured in this manner as the black orc priests fear the champions would seize power if their numbers grew too large.

When the white keep mushroom extract is combined with the (otherwise inert) juice of slippery yellow waterfall fungus (*Laetiporus cataracts*), a concoction known as Orcus' Blood is created that allows the black orc high priest to commune directly with Orcus through a hallucinatory meditative state. The experience is often fuzzy and the link weak, but it is enough to grant the black orc priest its priestly powers or allow for some augury. The high priests guard this recipe closely but share measured doses with their black orc champions in order to strengthen their sub-commanders and to provide them with spellcasting abilities. So secret is the recipe that some clans even lack champions and high priests, for without priests there will not be champions (unless the priest died after the creation of a champion). It is said that Orcus himself sometimes reaches out to clans with no priest to impart the hidden knowledge of the recipe to the most deserving member of the clan, who then begin the unholy process of communing with the Demon Prince of the Undead.

GM Note: It is unlikely that this recipe is ever be written down for characters to discover due to the highly secretive nature. However, the ingredients for the concoction, or even a small batch of the completed mixture, may be found during a raid into a black orc lair. If any character drinks such a concoction, a mental link to Orcus is formed and the character suffers double the normal side effects of the white keep mushroom as described above. Any evil character may ask a favor from Orcus if the character agrees to become a follower. Any good or neutral aligned character must make a successful DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or suffer 1d4 permanent Intelligence damage as Orcus punishes the non-believer for disturbing him.

Adventure Hooks

Below are some adventure hooks with specifics that can either be used as written, expounded upon, or tweaked as you see fit.

- A representative from a clan of common orcs approaches the adventurers and asks for help defending their lair against a horde of encroaching black orcs. He promises a reward of 1,000 gp for successfully repelling the black orc threat.
- A black orc high priestess, while communing with Orcus through drinking Orcus' Blood, has been taught a ceremony to bring Orcus to the Prime Material Plane. She must be stopped before she can obtain the necessary magic items to complete the ceremony.
- An exiled black orc champion has gathered a following of evil humans, goblins, and lesser orcs. He has been raiding caravans and the local countryside. His base is an abandoned keep atop a deep labyrinthine dungeon. He's recently captured a noblewoman who had caught the eye of a local prince and is to be wed to him. The characters have been hired to infiltrate the keep and retrieve the noblewoman alive. If she dies in the process, the prince flies into a rage and orders his men to slay the characters.
- A character swallows a parasite while drinking from a stream and is showing all the signs of having ingested the rapidly growing fetus worm: abdominal pain, stretching of the abdomen, wriggling under the skin. In three days, it bursts forth through the skin of the abdomen, killing the victim in the process. The local medicine woman knows the cure — the victim must eat one pound of white keep mushrooms. The mushrooms cause the parasite to be expelled, and there happens to be some growing in a cave in the nearby mountains. The only problem is that the cave in which it grows is inhabited by a powerful black orc clan.
- Nedderbeen is a young student of the clergy who is haunted by a voice in his head telling him to do horrible things. He found the recipe for Orcus' Blood buried deep in the monastery and stole enough money from the treasury to offer a large reward to the characters for acquiring enough white keep mushrooms and slippery yellow waterfall funguses to concoct a large dose of Orcus' Blood. He pays them and later drinks the potion. He communes with Orcus, who commands him to poison all of the clergy. If successful, Orcus rewards him by sending four demons to do his bidding, with the first task being to kill the characters (in order to keep the potion ingredients secret).

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