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DUNGEON DRESSING: GATES & PORTALS



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DUNGEON DRESSING: GATES & PORTALS

Tired of your dungeons lacking in verisimilitude? Want to add cool little features of interest to your creations but don't have the time to come up with non-essential details? Want to make your dungeons feel more realistic? Then Dungeon Dressing is for you! Each instalment focuses on a common dungeon fixture such as stairs, pillars or pools and gives the harried GM the tools to bring such features to life with interesting and cool noteworthy features.

This instalment of Dungeon Dressing presents loads of great features and details to add to the gates and portals in your dungeon. Designed to be used both during preparation or actual play, Dungeon Dressing: Gates & Portals is an invaluable addition to any GM's armoury!

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GATES & PORTALS

Most adventures take place in a medieval fantasy world. One of the advantages of that setting is the many environments the adventurers can experience, but the drawback is that in general, adventurers often can't move from one to the next any faster than a horse can carry them. Magical portals or gates solve this problem, rushing your characters headlong into the next adventure in yet another amazing locale, with the added bonus of mystery. For most portals, the adventurers never know exactly what's on the other side until they step through!

DEFINITIONS

Although both gates and portals transport travellers from one place to another instantaneously, there are slightly different to one another. A portal generally transports characters from one place to another on the same plane of existence while a gate moves travellers from one plane to another. The tables in this supplement use the word "portal," but feel free to change it to whichever is most appropriate for your game and the destination you want the party to explore.

CONSTRUCTION

Some portals or gates arise naturally; the result of a planar rift or other occurrence. However, most gates or portals are the result of intentional construction by a magically talented creator. They are generally at least 15-ft. across, though some are smaller or larger and can shed light or be invisible (these characteristics are set at the time of creation). They are normally enclosed by a frame or doorway-type structure, but they do not need to be. Generally unattended objects won't pass through a portal unless it has been designed that way.

The construction of a permanent magical portal can take many forms and this results in widely varied appearances. In all cases, their creation requires a powerful spellcaster. To create a permanent fixture, the creator must know *teleport* for a portal or *gate* to create a gate.

Portals enabling travel over exceptional distances, such as other planets or hard to enter planes, may need special components, which increases the project's cost and complexity.

LOCK AND KEY

One of the more useful and important properties of portals and gates is the ability to control who can use them. A direct path to one's home, laboratory or secret vault is a dangerous thing to leave unprotected. Below is a selection of options that might be added to a gate or portal at the time of its construction.

If you desire, magical portals and gates can be activated through trial and error.

- **Doors:** Portals can be blocked at their destination. If the exit portal is blocked by doors, rubble or other objects completely obstructing the exit, the portal does not function.

- **Passphrase:** The portal does not open unless a magical password or passphrase is spoken aloud, in the correct language, near the gate.
- **Portal Key:** Portals can be designed so only those holding a particular object can pass through. These can be anything the caster desires from actual keys to holy symbols and suchlike. Whatever the key is, it is non-perishable and specifically keyed to the portal. Creating new keys requires the portal itself, either an existing key or the original spellcaster, and components costing 1/100th of the construction cost.
- **Specific Persons:** Portals can also be keyed to only allow specific persons, races, genders or alignments to pass through. Construction of these types of locks requires an appropriate *detect* spell (for example, *detect evil*), as well as an additional expensive suitable material components.
- **Traps:** It is not uncommon to trap portal entrances using the normal rules for traps. However a particularly devious, yet risky, trick is to trap the destination. Traps at the destination cannot be detected or disarmed from the entrance of most portals, but if they do not eliminate or neutralise the intruder, the foes have already breached the protected area.

THERE AND BACK AGAIN

Most portals or gates are designed for two-way travel. However, whether due to malfunction or design, some portals vary.

- **One-Way Travel:** The portal travels in a unidirectional manner. Travellers can pass through the portal, but once they've arrived, they cannot return the way they came.
- **Variable Destination:** Some portals lead to more than one place. If this is due to a malfunction, this may be a random location. Otherwise the destination fluctuates based on some cycle of time, weather or light, which portal key is carried, passphrase used or the traveller's race, alignment or other characteristic.



MAJOR PORTAL FEATURES

Use this table to generate interesting characteristics for your dungeon's portal. Some features listed below may be inappropriate based on your dungeon's setup—ignore or modify such entries as appropriate.

D%	MAJOR FEATURE
01-04	The portal is invisible ¹ and has no obvious features to mark its location. Only strange airflow near the portal betrays its presence.
05-08	An arch of birchwood and vines encloses a swirling mass of fresh green leaves. When any creature steps through the portal, the leaves momentarily change to rich autumnal colours.
09-12	A locked set of double doors ² made of human bones bar the portal.
13-16	The portal, a disc of red light hovering in midair, is cold and hard to the touch. Only those carrying the correct token can push through the barrier.
17-20	The magical portal is behind a false wooden door. Opening the door, causes its yellow, shimmering light to pour forth.
21-24	The portal is set into the bottom of an otherwise empty shallow pool. Steps lead down to the portal.
25-28	Two great iron pillars, depicting roaring demonic faces in a whirl of flame, flank the glowing red portal.
29-32	The portal appears as a male bearded face of glowing golden light. As a creature approaches, the face's mouth widens to accommodate their entrance.
33-36	A huge painting of a hillside road hangs on the wall. By touching the painting one can walk into the scene. Those in the room see a painted version of the creature walk over the hill out of sight.
37-40	Dozens of birds flit among the trees in a sunlit clearing. If a character whistles the correct sequence of five notes, the birds fly into the clearing and form a circle, rotating counter clockwise, with a portal of white clouds in the centre.
41-44	The portal is composed entirely of shadows at the top of a dark and winding stair. The stairs are spaced close together, such as might be appropriate for a halfling-sized individual.
45-48	Curtains of white gauze are drawn across the portal. Red braided sashes hang from hooks on either side of the doorway so the curtains can be cinched up.
49-52	The portal is a miasma of flame and smoke in a fireplace of brass-edged brick. When the portal is closed, the flames die down to a few glimmering coals that never burn out.
53-56	The portal is a full-length silver mirror. When activated, a faint image of the destination overlays the reflection in the glass and one can step through to that location.

57-60	A simple wooden gate breaches a hedge. Opening and stepping through the gate from either side transports the creature through the portal.
61-64	The portal takes the form of a bookshelf full of tomes. By reciting a passphrase, the shelf slides to the side revealing a dark hallway of stone. Somewhere in the distance, a flickering light and the crackling of a fire can be heard.
65-68	A small, plain altar sits in the middle of a simple room with only a white mat before it and a uncoloured wax candle on the altar. Lighting the candle transports everyone in the room to an identical room at the target destination. A quiet gong sounds to signal the arrival of new guests.
69-72	A great wine tun is set into the wall. By twisting its tap, a character can cause the tun to pivot. This reveals a glowing blue portal piercing the wall beyond.
73-76	The portal appears in four different locations, and is active for only fifteen minutes of every hour in each location. All four entrances reach the same destination.
77-80	A crystal arch in the shape of an inverted catenary glows with a soft white light at its heart. The glow is slightly warm and a relaxed sense of calm emanates from the arch.
81-84	A complicated floor mosaic depicts a creature iconic of the portal's destination (such as an angel, elemental or demon). By pressing on the creature, the tiles fall away into a void below the floor to reveal a spiral stair leading down filled with bright light. The colour of the light provides a clue as to the portal's destination.
85-88	Two cherry trees wind together, petals falling from their blossoms in an endless, vision-obscuring rain. The "rain" is the portal.
89-92	The portal is a ring of white spotted, red toadstools growing in moist, loamy soil. One round after a character steps into the ring, a blue-white smoke rises from the mushrooms and blocks all vision. When the smoke clears, the character is somewhere else.
93-96	A silver wire frame, the size of two grown men, bejewelled with moonstones, encircles a cloying mist. The mist does not react to breezes or movement, but instead seethes and roils of its own accord. As a living creature gets within 5 ft. of the frame the mist reaches out to enfold them in its cool, damp embrace.
97-100	A small music box sits upon a marble pedestal. If opened, wound and played, the little dancer inside slowly spins to a sad melody. After it finishes, a swirling portal opens in front of the pedestal and faint strains of music sound from within.

1: *Detect invisibility* or successful find secret door roll spots.

2: Successful open lock roll opens.

MINOR PORTAL FEATURES & DRESSING

Use this table, to generate interesting features for the portal. Some features listed below may be inappropriate based on your dungeon's setup—ignore or modify such entries as appropriate.

D%	MINOR FEATURE OR DRESSING
1-2	Two rotting human legs protrude from the portal, in a puddle of dried blood. If pulled, they freely come away. The other half of the body is not present, even if someone goes through the portal to look for it.
3-5	The portal shimmers, reacting noticeably to a breeze coming from the other side.
6-7	Pure water runs in rivulets from the portal, creating a puddle on the floor.
8-10	The portal has malfunctioned and no longer reaches its intended location. Instead, a traveller appears 2d100 feet from the destination in a random direction.
11-12	The portal requires the keyword "Paticio" be spoken to operate. Someone has faintly carved the word into the floor nearby.
13-14	The portal has been warped by time and magic such that only sentient creatures can pass through. Mounts and other animals do not pass through, instead reappearing at the entrance one round after they enter. Animal companions, special steeds or familiars connected to their owner can pass through normally.
15-16	The portal's key is lost or destroyed and there is no way to open it short of powerful magic or the construction of a new portal key.
17-18	A one-foot thick stone wall blocks the portal. The wall's construction is obviously slipshod and hurried. It can be easily pulled down.
19-20	The portal is trapped on the other side with a <i>dispel magic</i> (CL 10) that targets anyone passing through.
21-22	The portal has been drained of all magic. If a <i>cure</i> or <i>caused</i> spell is cast into the portal, it opens for one round per level of the spell used.
23-24	The portal is damaged, and travel is now one-way only. Anyone entering from this side arrives safely, but must find another method of returning.
25-26	Travellers passing through the portal are injured by a burst of elemental energy bleeding through from another plane. To determine the type of damage roll 1d6: 1-acid, 2-cold, 3-electricity, 4-fire, 5-sonic, 6-two types of energy, roll twice ignore 6s.
27-28	The borders of the portal are painted on the ground in bright purple paint.
29-30	Several plain stones lie on the floor in an arrow pattern, pointing directly to the portal.
31-32	A bloody handprint mars the portal. The print is smeared as if the person leaving it was trying to resist being pulled through the portal.
33-34	A rickety wooden chair sits next to the portal. A quarterstaff leans against the chair and a wineskin hangs from it.
35-36	A brightly coloured children's ball floats in the centre of the portal, caught in it and travelling neither forward or back.
37-38	The ceiling, wall or other nearby feature has crumbled and buried the portal. In the recent past, someone has cleared away some of the rubble, creating a path that a human-sized or smaller creature could use to access the portal. A larger creature might be able to reach the portal by squeezing through the path, but may dislodge some of the unstable rubble.
39-40	Signs of a battle are evident around the portal. Dried blood, broken crossbow bolts and burn marks cover the floor.
41-42	A piece of parchment flutters in the breeze, held in place by a stone. In Common it reads, "Waited but you did not arrive. Will try to re-establish contact each midday." The ink is still damp.
43-44	A dog, cat, rat or other animal appropriate to the location, sits nearby howling at the portal. Animals seem to instinctively notice the portal, whether it is active or not, and it unnerves them.
45-46	While still functional, the portal shows signs of damage. The gate is hacked, burned and dented, but remains operational.
47-48	Wooden crates are neatly stacked near the portal. Inside is a wide selection of hemp rope, lanterns, oil and rations. The letters RQV are burned into the side of each crate.
49-50	A stained, white linen sheet is tacked up in front of the portal. It can easily be ripped down.
51-52	The horse-sized corpse of an alien reptilian beast with only two legs rots in front of the portal.
53-54	A map drawn in charcoal on the ground before the portal, displays the general layout of the destination and its surrounds. No names or dangers are noted; only the terrain features.
55-57	Acrid, black smoke pours from the portal filling the area around it with choking fumes and providing concealment. The smoke has no obvious source.
58-60	The remains of a campfire and general camping detritus lie 100 feet from the portal. The campsite has not been used for at least a week.
61-62	The odour of rotten meat is strong near the portal, and gets stronger the closer one gets. Adjacent to the portal, the stench is intense.
63-64	The portal hums loudly when living things approach within 20 ft. The volume of the noise increases the closer a creature approaches. The hum is not harmful, but does alert those nearby that someone is approaching the portal.

65-66	A young human boy sits near the portal. He is hungry, bored and willing talks with the party, introducing himself as Sencil Van. He says he and his father found the portal and his father told him to wait here while he checked it. His father went into it, but hasn't come out. That was several hours ago. The boy may be telling the truth or may be a monster in disguise.
67-68	The portal has become unstable and now fluctuates through different destinations. When it does so, the colour of the portal rotates from red to green to gold. Placed near the portal are three landscape paintings depicting the different locations: a red blasted landscape with fire raining from the sky, a stag drinking from a forest-shrouded river and an ornate temple with angelic symbols prominently displayed on its walls.
69-70	The portal attracts insects. Flies, beetles and other vermin crowd the surrounding area. A dangerous swarm of vermin could lurk just beyond the portal.
71-72	Rusty chains with bloody hooks hang from the ceiling around the portal. The chains are not magical.
73-75	A bear rug, complete with head and claws, lies on the floor in front of the portal. It has suffered the ravages of time and age, but is still worth 10 gp.
76-78	Air whistles towards the portal, as it is sucked inside. Any creature or loose object under 300 lbs. within 30 ft. of the portal may be pulled five feet toward it ¹ every round. A creature adjacent to the portal, may be pulled inside ² .
79-81	A plain brass key hangs from a nearby hook. The key radiates magic and is a portal key. It enables a return journey through the portal. Without it, a traveller is trapped on the other side.
82-83	A stoppered, dusty bottle lies on the ground. It is half full with faintly salty water. The liquid is children's tears gathered by a necromancer for some foul purpose.
84-85	After the creation of the portal, someone built a great iron clock ³ around it. The doors only open for one minute every hour on the hour. A character looking through cracks in the clock's housing spots the portal.
86-87	The portal interacts unusually with the local area, disrupting the normal flow of gravity. Small rocks float ⁴ on the ceiling or 20 ft. above the portal. The effect is similar to a <i>reverse gravity</i> spell but those in its area of affect fall upwards slowly (as if affected by <i>feather fall</i>) and take no damage from striking objects. If the portal is in a place with solid objects to grab onto, a character can easily grab it to arrest their upward motion. The effect is part of the portal and cannot be dispelled without destroying the gate's magic.
88-89	A path of small, brightly coloured stones has been set into the ground leading directly to the portal, from 50-ft. away. If the stones are pried up, they weigh 20 lbs. and could be sold for 5 gp. This does not affect the portal's operation.

90-92	Shadows of creatures and terrain at the destination dance across the portal's surface. These shadows could provide vital clues as to what lies beyond.
93-94	On the floor in front of the portal lies a non-magical gold ring with three empty settings, each scarred with the flame of a small explosion. In one of the settings is a sliver of a ruby, a fragment of a larger gem that once sat there. The was once a <i>ring of three wishes</i> . The ring is worth 100 gp.
95-96	Someone has scrawled "What is your heart's desire?" in Elven upon the portal's frame.
97-98	Five shallow claw marks in the floor lead toward and into the gate. One of them has a bloody fingernail from a human-sized humanoid lodged in its furrow.
99	The portal is barely functioning. Every round, the light within flickers and dims. The portal has only a 1 in 4 chance of sending a traveller to its destination.
100	A rough barricade of boxes, barrels and furniture has been thrown up in front of the portal. The barricade is less than sturdy and blood mars the side facing the portal. The stonework surrounding the portal is scorched and burnt.

1. Roll equal or under Strength on 3d6 to resist.
2. Roll equal or under Dexterity on 3d6 to resist.
3. AC 3, hp 60.
4. Characters searching the area spot.



PORTAL DESTINATIONS

Use this table, to determine where the gate or portal leads. Some locations listed below may be inappropriate based on your dungeon's setup—ignore or modify such entries as appropriate.

D%	DESTINATION
1-4	The portal is designed as a quick escape route and leads outside the dungeon or ruin in which it stands. Choose a place distant, but within view of the entrance to the dungeon. This portal is one-way. Perceptive characters searching the area outside the dungeon find faint tracks in the portal's vicinity hinting at its occasional use.
5-8	Those passing through the portal arrive in a cage, though their possessions do not. A sickly tree, a bucket and shallow depression filled with hay are in the cage. The travellers are now exhibits in a zoo with their captors being dragons, outsiders or a powerful wizard, as suits your campaign.
9-12	The portal leads into a 30 ft. by 30 ft. treasure vault. The vault is lined with shelves, marble pedestals and bins. Unfortunately the vault has already been raided and most things of value are gone, though there are still enough dropped coins and scattered knickknacks to total 6d10 gp. This is an excellent place for the characters to find a piece of treasure, a tome or map they might need for a future adventure.
13-16	The portal exits into a cavern deep beneath the surface, dominated by a huge, alien city. A circular gate pierces a black stone wall and behind the city wall rise buildings that appear as odd swirling columns decorated with dim purple and green lights. Shadowy forms flit between the columns, though they are too far away to be certain what they are. Several tunnels exit the area to further adventure. If the characters have a light source active when they arrive, it stands out dramatically against the otherwise oppressive darkness and they likely find out what lives in the city sooner rather than later.
17-20	Stepping out of the portal, travellers find themselves in a shallow cave of ice and stone on the side of an arctic mountain. A fierce wind screams past the mouth of the cave and a slippery narrow path climbs both up and down, the mountain. Barely perceptible through the swirling snow is a large fortress atop the mountain. Those without magical protection quickly feel the effects of the intense cold.
21-24	Heat immediately assails the characters, followed quickly by the foul odour of brimstone. From the desolate and blasted rocky red landscape and the fire falling from the sky, it is likely the travellers have arrived in one of the lower planes. A demonic creature appropriate to the party's level notices their arrival and immediately moves to enslave them.
25-28	The sun shines brilliantly over the exit to the portal which lies on the beach of a tropical island. A spear's throw from the water lies dense vegetation and on the horizon, smoke rises from a volcano. A few moments after the travellers step through, drums sound from deep in the jungle.
29-32	The portal exits on a cloud. Inexplicably the cloud is solid and does not seem to be drifting on the breeze. A small cottage, as one might find in any forest, is nearby. Inside resides an elderly human-looking woman who calls herself Mother Bell. Mother Bell invites travellers into her cottage and offers to make them tea and sesame cakes while she determines what they desire.
33-36	This one-way portal exits in the ceiling of a hollow 10-ft. stone sphere filled with an <i>anti-magic shell</i> that stops a paper's width from the portal. The sphere is designed to be a cell from which there is little chance of escape and, as such is buried 200-ft. below ground. Four skeletons of previous explorers are here, having starved to death decades ago.
37-40	The portal leads into the faerie realm. Taking in the surroundings from the scrub-covered hill topped with standing stones where they appear, a traveller can see an ancient, murky forest to one side and a prairie covered in wildflowers towards the other. On the horizon, the sun is setting, covering the sky in a fiery red and orange and allowing just the hint of full moon to be seen in the sky.
41-44	The portal exits on the first floor of a dreary tower. Rotting tapestries depicting nobles at leisure decorate the crumbling spiral stairs rising to the next floor. A human skeleton, dressed in finery, steps forward and offers a decanter of fine wine and crystal glasses on a brass platter. The necromancer that lives in the tower happily welcomes guests. How else will he gain raw materials for his experiments?
45-48	Stepping through the portal transports the explorer into a chill darkness. A vaulted ceiling rises more than a bow shot into the air, held aloft by pillars wider than any giant. Great bearded faces and anvils are carved in the pillars. The explorer has found a lost dwarven hold, now home only to deadly traps, forgotten memories and what dangers you wish to spring on unsuspecting adventurers. The characters are likely far underground and far from civilisation.
49-52	The portal exits into a dusty shop overcrowded with books in the middle of a busy city. All about, rises the clamour of commerce. A bespectacled clerk looks up briefly at the characters' arrival before returning to his work. If the characters enquire as to their location, the clerk tells them they must speak "to the master" before shuffling off into the gloom. The shop smells of mildew and rotting paper; shadows fill the spaces between towering piles of books. No-one comes to help them.

53-56	The portal leads to a desolate ravine in front of a large cave. Smoke drifts from the cave mouth and gnawed humanoid and animal bones litter the ground. Some still have bits of bloody flesh clinging to them. The corpse of a knight, blackened by intense flame such that joints of his plate armour have melted together, lies face down not three paces from the entrance. A deep, rumbling voice echoes from the cave and says, "Has my next meal found its way to my door?"	77-80	The portal leads to a perfect cubic room with a perfectly square door in the middle of one wall. The door opens easily and leads into a city where each block is a perfect cube and all of the citizens are constructs going about a life of complete order. Any disruption of that order draws the local authority's prompt attention.
57-60	The portal opens onto the middle of a soaring white and gold bridge, so high that wisps of cloud tickle the bottom of it. To either side rise the towering buildings of a pristine city. Citizens in alabaster togas, gold sandals and braided hair marvel at the strange travellers, but do not accost them. The locals appear almost human, but are clearly touched by whatever plane the portal has lead to.	81-84	The portal leads into a wet underground room. The walls are mould-covered stucco with a red fresco band of geometric shapes now barely noticeable ringing the room near the ceiling. The room radiates moderate transmutation magic. Half of the floor is a pool of water which leads to the bottom of a canal, and from there to a city of marble porticos and long canals.
61-64	Exiting the portal, the characters finds themselves at the bottom of a canyon. The sun is already setting and strange unrecognised stars are just beginning to make their appearance, shrouding the canyon floor in gloom. Firelight flickers from one direction, and approaching the box canyon's end, the characters finds an abandoned campsite complete with roaring fire, tents and a goodly supply of gear and equipment. In the canyon, night falls suddenly, plunging the area into deep darkness.	85-88	The portal's destination is a rocky shore, pelted by surf and driving rain. A light shines from a high hill where a narrow, leaning mansion leers in the night. A slippery path rises to the building, who has clearly seen better days and now barely stands against the storm.
65-68	The portal deposits the characters in the basement of an inn. Everything is covered in dust and it does not appear that anyone has visited it in some time. Climbing the stairs to the main floor requires pushing through fallen and charred timbers that block the passage. Once the characters are aboveground, it is clear the inn has suffered a fire. The town it is in is eerily abandoned. Doors stand open, shutters creak in the wind, and wagons wait in the street without horses. The town has the appearance of having been suddenly abandoned, as if life just stopped and vanished with no warning. There are no bodies. A sign lies in the dirt at the edge of town, labelling this forgotten place—appropriately—as Desolation.	89-92	In a flash of light, the travellers finds themselves inside a mausoleum. Burial niches on the walls, capped with marble plaques mark this as the final resting place of the de Montceux family, though from the dates, none have been interred here for over 200 years. An iron door exits the tomb, though the lock is easily opened from the inside. The tomb lies in an overgrown cemetery at the centre of a swampy wood. A vine- and leaf-choked fountain in the centre of the cemetery has a statue of a winged cherub, eyes downcast limply holding a sword. The sword has weathered badly, and rust stains the marble.
69-72	The portal drops the characters into a stark white waiting room. After a few minutes, a man in white robes enters, followed by several hulking thugs, also wearing white. The man smiles blandly, asks the characters their names and then records them in a small white ledger titled "Craghill Asylum for the Criminally Insane".	93-96	The portal leads to a hallway whose walls, floor and ceiling are entirely mirrored, creating a disconcerting image of the characters repeating endlessly. The only non-mirrored surface are two doorknobs at each end of the long hallway. One is silvered and warm while the other is painted black and is faintly sticky, as if recently grasped by a moist hand.
73-76	The portal leads to a small oasis, not more than three wagons wide, filling a narrow valley between towering sand dunes. A few trees provide shade and the water is cool and clean. Characters clambering up a sand dune see nothing but brutally hot sun and glaring white sand, in all directions. A few vultures circle high up in the sky.	97-100	The portal leads to a library in the attic of an abandoned farmhouse on the edge of the woods. Through a cracked window, it is clear a battle is taking place outside as dawn breaks. A large band of humans and halflings defend a low rise against a horde of goblins being driven forward by a few hobgoblins. While the band on the ridge is currently holding out with bows and flaming oil, it is obvious they are vastly outnumbered and will eventually be overwhelmed. Indeed, from their vantage point in the attic the characters can see a group of goblins sneaking around the rise using the cover of the woods. The defenders have not seen them.

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