

# THE MAN

# 

# FAILSIE HOPE

Compatible with the Swords & Wizardry rules

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#### INTRODUCTION

Welcome, brave adventurers! The world is constantly beset by great evils and dangers, and grand stories of PCs driving back the tides of destruction make for thrilling campfire stories, deliciously entertaining songs for wandering bards and wonderful books.

But what about the smaller adventures, the moments where PCs face an evil on their travels, or defeat chaos that threatens the small village, hamlet or caravan? Such small stories may not involve casting down wizards from their mountains or saving a city, but they are worthy of poems to remind the people that everyone in the world can make a difference to someone somewhere, no matter how small.

This mini adventure can be played in a single session, perhaps two, and is designed as a small 'side quest' to run alongside larger campaigns, or to simply be used as a one-shot for an evening's entertainment. It is designed for the 'White Box - Fantastic Medieval Adventure Game', but can be used for most other OSR games.

IF YOU INTEND TO BE A PLAYER IN THIS ADVENTURE, STOP READING NOW!

#### REFEREE'S INFORMATION

This adventure can be set anywhere the Referee wishes. The Inn of False Hope is an average inn in an average place in any land, so feel free to adjust the names to suit your chosen location.

The story behind this adventure is a dark tale; many generations ago, this inn was the place where adventurers would spend their time resting and recuperating, but the owners of the inn were greedy and murderous; any gravely wounded hero who stayed here would always succumb to their injuries, and their treasure would go missing. The innkeeper and his family – his son and his brother - would make sure they died, using a local healer who was in on the scheme, and then pilfer their belongings.

One day, a magic user on the edge of death realized their evilness, and with her last breath uttered a dreadful curse; the innkeeper, his family and the healer would forever be haunted by all those they murdered. In time, the inn was shunned and the village near it was abandoned. All that stands now is the inn, creaking in the moaning wind.

Most people stay away, but there is a rumour that the treasure of the murdered patrons is still within the walls, although the murderers lay in wait for any foolish enough to enter...



#### THE ADVENTURE

### Finding the Inn

How the PCs end up staggering towards the inn depends on how you want to start the adventure. Whether by accident or intention the approach to the inn should be fraught with gloom, all the while being highlighted by the violent storm raging around them in the bleak early evening. Every good tale of terror needs a good storm!

They could discover the inn by chance on their travels, walking through the storm and coming across the inn as they get to a point where they're so desperate for shelter they'll sleep anywhere.

Alternatively, they could hear about the inn during a stay in a town or village, perhaps their regular place of rest between adventures. The story goes that the abandoned inn contains the treasures of many lost adventurers. However, it's haunted and nobody who goes there comes back alive! Which begs the question, if nobody comes back how do they know it's filled with gold and haunted? The inn can be treated as something of a folk tale or a joke by the locals, but there should be enough to the tale to intrigue the players.

However the players come across the inn it's early evening, getting dark, they've been rained on all day and all they want is a roof and a bite to eat.

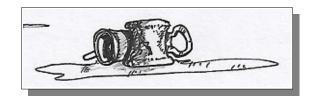
Read this aloud to the players:

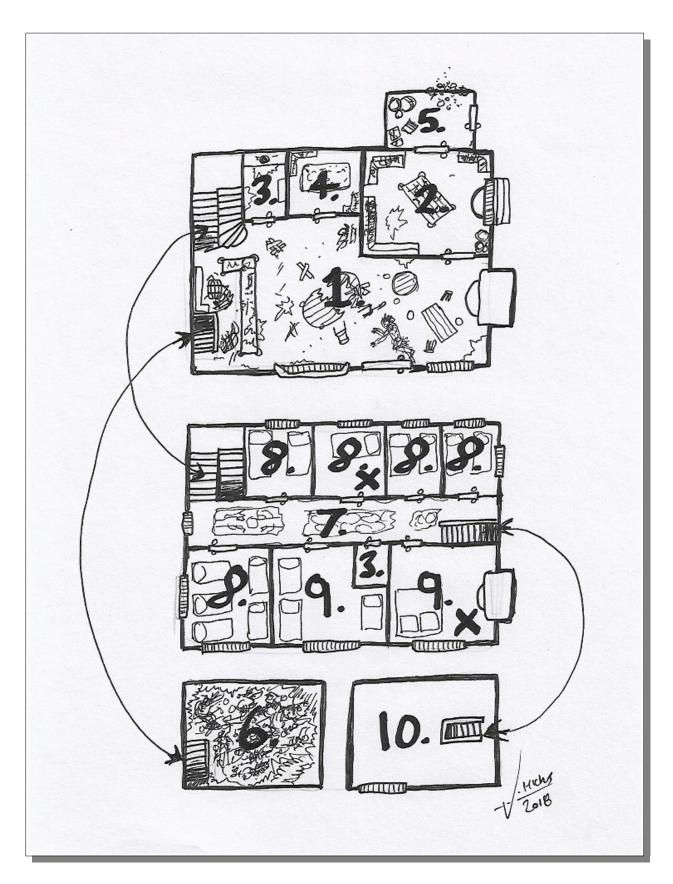
'It's a miserable day; the gusting wind seemed to herald a slowly approaching bought of bad weather but, without warning, a storm suddenly came down like a falling anvil. The wind roars, the rain is so torrential it's difficult to see more than a few yards ahead and everything is soaked. The road is featureless, boring, and every corner you turn to see that there is only even more road ahead is soul destroying.

Then, out of the darkness, a faint light. As you approach, you see that it is a single candle in a rusty old lantern hanging in front of an old, dilapidated inn. It swings from the old inn sign, which may have had a painting on it at some time but it has now faded with age and someone has scrawled 'False Hope' over the dead image.

The inn is old, collapsing and rotten. The windows have been boarded over or smashed and the wind whistles and moans through the cracks between the wood and the holes in the roof. Only the main door hasn't been barred to the outside world and is very slightly ajar; a boot can be seen just inside. If it is attached to anything is anyone's guess.

The building looks like it has been abandoned for years and it reeks of death and decay. Still, it is shelter from this violent storm... but who lit the lantern?'





## THE INN

The inn itself is run down, dilapidated and looks ready to collapse at any moment. There used to be a stable at the rear but it has collapsed into rubble, mounds of stone and wood. The main entrance is the way in, but the PCs may wish to explore the area a little more before entering. At the rear of the building is the collapsed wall and door that leads into the storeroom (Room 5) and the HOBGOBLINS within. If the PCs wish to enter this way, or even through any of the boarded windows around the building, then they can do so and you will have to begin their adventure from there.

Each room is numbered on the map so once the PCs enter each room simply refer to the entry below.

#### 1 - The Common Room

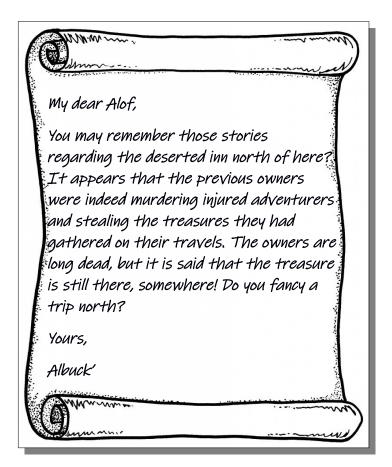
Read this aloud to the players:

'This is the main room, the bar and common room of the inn. It has seen better days; a huge fireplace sits dead against the wall, the bar is bare, the barrels behind smashed or empty, and the tables and chairs are scattered, overturned, or broken. The ceiling has a huge chain hanging down and the remnants of what may have been a spectacular iron chandelier hanging from it.

Water falls from the ceiling as the storm outside seeps through the cracked and collapsing building. The thing that stands out, however, is the body by the door.

It is the body of a poor traveller. He has been dead a long time, perhaps days, and the rotten corpse seems to be screaming at the rafters. Dressed in travelling clothes, he has been stripped of anything of value, including weapons, but a letter is poking from his pocket.'

Make sure that the letter poking from the pocket is obvious as it will help shed some light on what is happening here. If the players open the letter, read the below aloud:



If the players investigate, the body appears to have been skewered all the way through with a spear-like weapon from behind.

Searching the room reveals nothing. Broken furniture, smashed clay pots and plates, cracked tankards. There is a haze across everything, as if a thin fog is rising from the floor. The whole building creaks in the wind,

and it sounds as if the weather is pounding against the walls in an attempt to destroy this abomination of a building. Make sure to communicate this to your players, and keep the atmosphere going.

## 2 - The Kitchen

Read this aloud to the players:

'This was once the kitchen. It was large with it's own fireplace, and the sheer number of cupboards, crates and barrels tells you that it was no doubt once well-stocked.

In the corner by the cold fire, however, is a figure with their back turned to you. There is no mistake; it's not clothes on a stand, or a human-shaped shadow. There is someone standing there.

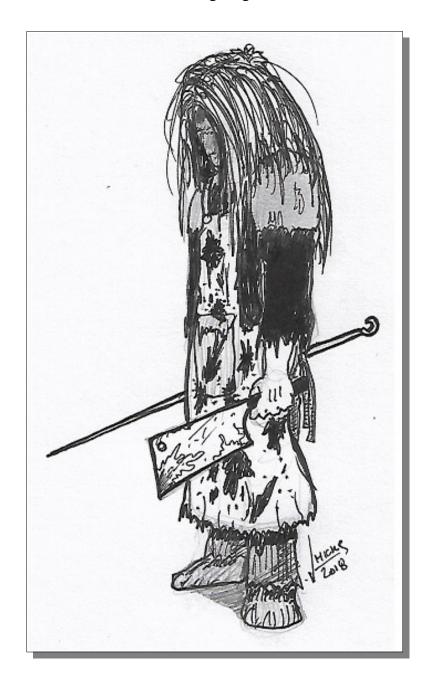
Slowly the figure turns, their long matted hair casting their face into darkness. In one hand is a butcher's cleaver, and in the other is long roasting skewer. His clothes are tattered, the apron he wears is rotten and covered in bloody stains.

He doesn't look friendly.'

This is the COOK, the innkeeper's brother who helped dispose of the bodies of murdered adventurers. As the PCs enter, he slowly turns. The curse has given him long life, but the dead will haunt him for evermore. His hair is long and lank, his apron splattered with blood, and he holds a cleaver in one hand and a thick, spear-like skewer in the other.

As he shuffles forward he moans and cries, "Are you of the dead? Will you taunt me, too?"

He will answer no questions. Once attacked or close enough he becomes much more animated and fights. As he does so, a rack of pots and pans become animated as if wielded by unseen foes, and these also attack, one for each of the adventurers fighting the COOK.



#### THE COOK

Armour Class: 5 [14]

Hit Dice: 3

Attacks: Cleaver (1d6+1) Skewer (1d6)

Special: See 'Pots & Pans' below

*Move*: 12 *HDE/XP*: 3/60

#### POTS & PANS

*Armour Class*: 9 [10] *Hit Dice*: 2 HP each

Attacks: As item, 1d6-2 (min. 1)

*Special*: Will become inactive if COOK

killed *Move*: 12 *HDE/XP*: 1/10

If defeated, the COOK falls dead - forever. If he is killed first, the frying pans fall lifelessly to the floor. If searched, a pouch at his belt contains what appears to be half a key, split length-ways.

## 3 – The Privy

Nothing of interest in here. It's a bit smelly.

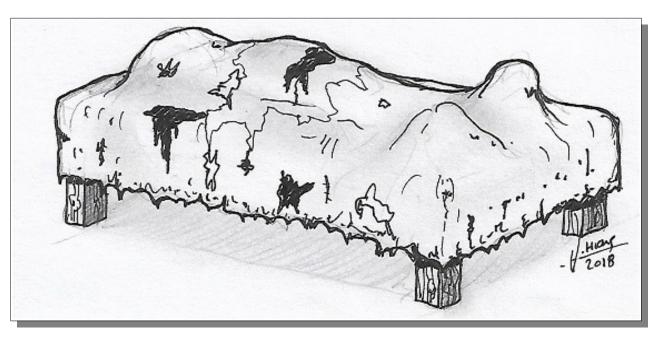
#### 4 – The Private Room

Read this aloud to the players:

'This appears to have been used as a makeshift surgery. The table in the center and the array of healer's tools on tables and hanging from the walls give a sense of crawling realization; for good or ill, there were some gruesome surgeries performed here. On the table is a figure covered head to toe in a bloodied, stained sheet.'

This is the HEALER, another accomplice in the innkeeper's murderous scheme. He will not move until touched or attacked. If the players pull the sheet back, he will stare as if dead at the ceiling and then, without warning, he will attack with a surgeon's knife in each hand, all the while screaming,

"You'll not take it! We killed them! It's all ours!"



#### THE HEALER

Armour Class: 5 [14]

Hit Dice: 3

Attacks: 2 (two daggers, 1d6-1)

*Special*: Regenerates 1 HP per round unless

killed *Move*: 12 *HDE/XP*: 3/60

There is nothing else of use in this room.

#### 5 - The Store Room

The door to this room has been boarded up from the other side. The PCs will have to smash it down if they want to gain entry. It will take two successful STR (roll equal to less than the STR score on a D20) rolls from two PCs working together, and rolled at the same time, to get the door open. If they do, they see that the door had been nailed shut intentionally. The reason for that becomes obvious straight away.

#### Read this aloud to the players:

'The wall at the back of this room has been smashed in and a group of HOBGOBLIN bandits have taken up residence here, using the unused room as a small hideout. They obviously nailed the door shut to make sure that the inn's denizens didn't bother them too much.

There are four HOBGOLBINS in total, all with shortswords and shields, and one is armed with a shortbow which he has already nocked an arrow to and is readying with a shaking hand.'

The nature of the building has made them wary and they are ready for any intrusion. They have set up a barricade at the end of the room as they gather their ill-gotten gains.

If the PCs smash their way in they will be ready.

The HOBGOBLINS will only fight if attacked, so there are two ways to handle this situation – the PCs can either fight or bargain.

If the PCs bargain with them – The HOBGOBLINS just want to be away from here, with their loot. If the players don't attack immediately then they will tell them that very thing;

'We ain't interested in fightin' and we just want away from this place.'

If the PCs try to make them stay for whatever reason, they will offer them a small bag of gold to be let go worth 10 gold pieces. If the players agree they will toss the bag over and then leave.

If they are pressed for any information they only know the following:



'We 'ear screamin' upstairs every night, like someone 'avin a terrible dream, an' the body under the sheet in the room that looks like a surgery is a man who will kill, and you should hit 'im first or just leave 'im alone.'

They refer to the man in Room 4.

If the PCs attack them – The archer will fire a single shot at the closest PC before drawing their own weapon.

#### **HOBGOBLIN**

Armour Class: 5 [14], 4 [15] w/shield

*Hit Dice*: 1+1

*Attacks*: Shortsword or shortbow (1d6-1)

Move: 9

*HDE/XP*: 1/15

If they are defeated, they have 50 gold pieces and jewelry worth 20 gold pieces between them.

#### 6 – The Basement

The basement is dark and unlit, so if the PCs wish to go down there they will have to light a torch, if they have one. If not, it is so dark and disgusting that they are at -1 to attack rolls.

#### Read this aloud to the players:

'This disgusting room stinks of rotting meat and cloying, stale air and the damp on the walls is thick and glistens in what little light makes it down here. This grisly room is filled with corpses in various states of decay, most likely recent victims of the inn. They are piled upon one another so stepping on them is unavoidable. All have been stripped of anything valuable. The stench is almost unbearable, but you see obvious signs that the bodies have been gnawed upon.'

It's then that the GIANT RATS attack from the darkness! There is one per PC.

#### **GIANT RAT**

Armour Class: 7 [12]

Hit Dice: 1-1

Attacks: 5% are diseased

*Move*: 12

HDE/XP: <1/10



## 7 – The Landing

## Read this aloud to the players:

'This is a simple long corridor with doors either side, and at the very end is a heavy-set door. Water pours from the ceiling as the heavy rain outside permeates the building, not a slow drip-drip-drip but gushing flows that splash noisily. Other than the stench of rot and damp, the faded and threadbare rugs and the shredded tapestries, there is nothing here.'

### 8 – Private Rooms

Each of these rooms is a private room for people staying at the inn, and the majority of them are empty. However, one of them (the room marked with an 'X') contains the innkeeper's SON.

If they enter room 8 marked with the 'X', read the following aloud to the players:

An emaciated, long-haired young man – at least, he was a man once – sits on the bed, clutching the dirty, sodden sheets. He sways back and forth, crying and sobbing with stories of being trapped, and being the 'next victim'.

"Oh, please," he begs. "I just want to go home. Just home. Back to the way things were. I want home."

If the PCs enter the unlocked room to help him they will see that he is disheveled and thin, and he will look at them from under long, dirty white hair with heavy eyes. He is a pitiful sight.

However, when they approach - either to help or attack - he will suddenly leap up with hands outstretched. His fingernails are cracked and split like like serrated claws and his hair is so long that it whips around with a life of it's own, attacking the PCs.



One attack is the SON and the other one is the hair as it flails around with a life of it's own. Striking the hair does not do any damage, only hits directly on the young man reduces his hit points, so fighting the hair is purely a defensive action. Once the SON is defeated the hair will fall lifeless.

If they search the SON, they will find nothing but half a key, split length-ways. It fits the other half found on the COOK to make a complete key. Once the keys are complete, this will allow them access to Room 10 – The Attic.

#### THE SON

Armour Class: 7 [12]

*Hit Dice*: 1+1

Attacks: 2 - Hands (1d6-1) Hair (1d6)

Move: 9

HDE/XP: 3/60

### 9 - The Master Rooms

These are the private rooms of the innkeeper and his family. There are two rooms marked with 9, and there is one marked with an 'X'. In here the innkeeper resides.

The first room 9 is empty and has little in there. There are three dirty, unkempt beds and plates of rotten food lying around the place.

However, should the PCs enter the room 9 marked with 'X', read the following aloud to the players:

'The door creaks open and, standing in the middle of the once plush and richly-decorated room, stands a man with a dead, downcast face, standing as if waiting for visitors.

His head is bald, a wicked wound covers the right side of the scalp and face, running over an empty eye socket. The cloak around his shoulders was once fine and glorious, with a fur-lined collar and patterned trimming, but now it is rotted, covered in stains and tears. A wicked longsword is held in his left hand, slowly rising from under the cloak. He glares at you.

"I knew you'd come," he says in a voice so deep it threatens to shake your teeth loose, so dark it is as if he is speaking from the grave. "I hope you have released my friend and my family from their torment. However, you will not find me so easy to send to the abyss!"

With that, he lunges forward, the sword held high!'



This is Smiling Gruss, the innkeeper and the ringleader of the murderous gang that slew honest adventurers and PCs when they were at their weakest.

Upon seeing Gruss the PCs might take for granted that he's a threat and attack straight away. If that's the case, Gruss won't have a chance for any speeches or last words, and will just fight to the death. He will give no quarter and his skill with the longsword is quite high.

#### SMILING GRUSS

Armour Class: 3 [16]

Hit Dice: 5+1

Attacks: Longsword of Slaying (+1 to attack

rolls and damage)

Move: 9

*HDE/XP*: 7/600

If he is defeated then read the following aloud to the players:

'Defeated, the man slumps to the floor with a cry of anguish. Then the storm suddenly intensifies; the lightning becomes more frequent, one flash after another, and the thunder is one long roar. The rain pounds the roof and what is left of the windows crash open, letting the violence of the weather crash through the room.

Then you feel it; at first it feels like vibrations from the storm but it isn't; the whole room, perhaps the entire inn, is shaking violently! The floor bucks and throbs, the walls crack and the ceiling splits asunder. The sound of breaking wood, shattering tiles and tearing plaster join the cacophony of sound and it is all you can do to stand upright.

Then the gaps in the beams and the wall glow with a white light, and through the gaps come the ghostly faces old and young, men and women, elf, dwarf, human, all races, all crying out, swirling around the body on the floor, pointing at it, their voices rising. Then you realise they are laughing, not in cruelty but in pure happiness and relief and you feel that joy passing through you. They swirl, faster and faster, until the body is covered and, with one final blast of light, they fly up and through the ceiling, blowing a hole through the wood and the thatch, screaming into the night.

The shaking stops, the violence of the storm abates suddenly and a clap of thunder signals the end. The ghosts, and the body of the man you defeated, are gone, and for the first time since you entered this cursed inn you feel safe.'

The ghosts of the victims are now avenged, and they have left this plane of existence. If the PCs do not know the whole story or who the man was, then have the ghost of the wizard Arfus appear to tell them the story, using the speech from **Room 10 – The**Attic. This will explain everything the PCs need to know. If the players go into the attic after this, then the ghosts will not appear and the chest of riches will already be there.



#### 10 – The Attic

The attic is a solid iron-wrought door that has been locked. If the PCs have the two halves of the key from the COOK and the SON, they can combine the two to unlock the door. If not, the room is firmly sealed and they will find it difficult to enter. Any special skills or spells will help, but the door will be very difficult to get through.

If they gain access, read the following aloud to the players:

'The door creaks open and the cloying smell of damp assaults your nose. The roof has been partially torn away, exposing the attic to the elements and allowing the storm in. The rain is heavy and the lightning briefly illuminates the empty room.

At first it seems to be mist, but very quickly it begins to glow and then coalesce into shapes; humanoid shapes. Slowly, a dozen or more ghostly images appear in front of you but they do not appear threatening. They all seem downcast and sad, and a mood of bleakness settles upon your souls.

The lead ghost drifts forwards, dressed in the long robes and the drooping hat of what you think was wizard's garb. Her face appears translucent so that you can see the skull and tongue moving within the shimmering apparition and she sighs deeply and begins to speak.

"Do not fear us, travellers. Our spirits are of no threat. You have wandered into this place and you must know what it was that happened here. I am the mage Arfus.

Generations ago this inn was a place of refuge for the adventurers, PCs and

explorers, who travelled the lands. Here we could rest and recuperate and share stories of our adventures. Many who came here were injured from their endevours and the innkeeper of this place, a man whose face was always sour and who we jokingly called Smiling Gruss, took care of us with his family and a local healer. His brother the cook would feed us, his son would take care of our rooms and horses and the healer would aid us.

However, their hospitality was a lie. The son would scout which adventurers were worst injured and distract any of their fellows as the healer worked on them. The healer would kill us on the table, the innkeeper would take our riches, and the cook would dispose of the bodies. I would hate to think how a cook would do that.

I was on that table, suffering from a grievous poisoned wound, and as I came to consciousness I saw the healer over me telling the innkeeper that he would dispose of me soon, and the innkeeper ransacked my belongings for treasures from my travels. I had my suspicions, but now I knew what they were and what they were doing. Murderers. Thieves. Monsters.

I had little strength left but I had the energy of rage and vengeance on my side as well as an artifact that enhanced my power. In my confusion and anger I cast upon them a terrible curse; they would live long lives — something I said to prolong their torment - but they would be forever haunted by the screaming ghosts of their victims who would whisper cruelties in their dreams at night and wail in their ears during the day. Over time the travellers stopped coming, the inn became a shell of it's former glory and the

innkeeper, his son, his brother and the healer were driven mad by the haunting.

It was selfish of me to cast such a curse. In my haste and fury I did not consider the consequences. Now the spirits of their victims are doomed to haunt them until their deaths, and the curse has also gifted them with long life, making the inn a trap to those who come across it."

If the PCs have already defeated Smiling Gruss then the spirit of Arfus will appear to them in his room, so once you have read her speech above then read aloud the following:

"You have freed us, and we are forever in your debt. In the attic you will find a reward for your endeavours.

Thank you."

With that, the ghost fades away and the storm reclaims the room.'

If the PCs have not yet faced Smiling Gruss, read the following:

"I beseech you; end the lives of those responsible, especially Smiling Gruss, and free us all. If you do this, I will reveal to you the treasure that was taken from us as payment to you.

Return here once you have rid the world of this evil and you will be rewarded."

With that, the ghosts fade away and the storm reclaims the room.'

Once the PCs have fulfilled their quest and enter the attic they will find a small chest of treasure that will materialise in the centre of the room.

#### **AFTERWORD**

Upon opening the chest the adventurers will find 1000 gold pieces, assorted jewellry and items equalling another 1D10x50 gold pieces.

What of the inn? It can be restored to it's former glory but the reputation it has garnered over the decades will result in anyone taking over innkeeping duties struggling to make even the tiniest bit of profit for many years to come.

The PCs are welcome to spend the night here; it's dry in some places and offers protection from the storm, and it's safer now that the evil has been defeated. Of course, if they haven't investigated every room and there's someone – or something – left in the inn, these threats will wander the rooms until they come across the PCs, so that would make for a nasty surprise when they think that all is well!

# THE INN OF FALSE HOPE

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### Written and Illustrated by Jonathan Hicks

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