

A Bell Beneath the Bridge

120-minute plan | 4 players | No combat

Each wagon crossing the bridge makes a bell ring underwater. The ferryman wants the bridge closed; a stranded bell diver asks for help.

Content notice: Heights and water; narration can remain on the bank.

What is really happening

Diver Noma attached a warning bell to a cracked lower brace. Heavy wagons pull its rope and sound the alarm. She is safe on a maintenance ledge but cannot haul her tools out. Bracing the bridge restores light crossings; rerouting traffic to the ferry is slower but avoids the cracked span.

Prepare and play

Use your own rules or play without dice. State the goal, choose an approach, explain a reasonable cost and let the players decide. Plausible careful actions succeed; uncertain actions can succeed with delay, spent supplies or a favour owed. Evidence is always available through its described action. Each player creates an ordinary person with a useful skill, a reason to help, and an item. No character sheet, monster statistics or proprietary rulebook is needed.

Take 10 minutes to introduce characters, read the premise and discuss the content notice. Anyone may say "pause", pass on a description, or ask to move an uncomfortable moment offstage. Agree on no combat and on treating consequences as delay or repair, not permanent harm. Give one player the route map and another the time sheet.

Time plan

120-MINUTE PLAN

0-10: Opening agreement

10-20: Arrival

20-35: Records and tools

35-50: An independent trail

50-55: Break

55-75: The immediate problem

75-95: The final choice

95-110: Home and aftermath

110-120: Closing and epilogues

Follow both investigations; take the break before the immediate problem.

At 75 minutes, settle the immediate problem using a safe approach without another roll. At 95 minutes,

finish the final method and begin the return.

With 10 minutes left, first secure the immediate goal: Use the ferry to reach the shelf and carry the tools ashore. Mark the immediate goal safe only once the people or resource are secured. Then, if no final method was used: Close the span and run the marked three-trip ferry route. Mark the fallback method and read the cost ending. Give each character an epilogue; do not bypass the safety step.

4 PLAYERS

Bring Noma and her tools up while preserving the warning.

Two pairs take observation and action tasks. Resolve them in two short alternating turns.

Make a public plan for the next crossing.

Work in two pairs, one following the method and the other preparing a fallback or record.

Arrival - 10 minutes

Place: Bridge approach

Read aloud

A cart rolls one wheel onto the bridge. A low bell answers from the water, and the driver stops breathing for a moment.

Run this scene

The sound is an intentional structural warning. Traffic can be rerouted without fixing the bridge today. Begin with the concrete request in the premise. Ask each character why they care and give them one ordinary useful item. Read both public observations without requiring a roll. Explain that the marked routes are safe to investigate, and offer a choice of the records or the visible trail. Let the group appoint a map reader; do not use hidden travel rolls to block the first lead.

Choices

1. Visit Carpenter shed
2. Follow the trail to Riverbank

If the group gets stuck

If conversation or a test fails, give the public card anyway. A clear sign points to Maintenance ledge. A missing method can be found again at Upper brace; no character skill is required.

People and evidence

Vale: Get produce to the far market Offers directions and ordinary transport for news of the outcome.

Voice: Patient, concrete sentences; ask one practical question.

Timeline record: The bell rings only when weight reaches the cracked span. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: The sound is an intentional structural warning.

Fallback instruction: Ferry chalkboard: light wagons can cross in three trips. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Traffic can be rerouted without fixing the bridge today.

Records and tools - 15 minutes

Place: Carpenter shed

Read aloud

Eli taps a spare beam with a wooden mallet. On the table lies a drawing of the bridge's underside.

Run this scene

A temporary brace supports limited safe crossings. Noma is on the ledge. Put the method card and destination note on the table. Ask what the two objects suggest, then answer direct practical questions from their wording. The maker can trade tools for help carrying or recording them, but refusal never removes these public documents. The trail remains another route. A check, if your rules use one, changes the time or tidiness of the work rather than whether this evidence exists.

Choices

1. Proceed to Maintenance ledge
2. Compare evidence at Riverbank

If the group gets stuck

If conversation or a test fails, give the public card anyway. A clear sign points to Maintenance ledge. A missing method can be found again at Upper brace; no character skill is required.

People and evidence

Eli: Prevent another wagon from cracking the brace Lends supplies if a character helps carry or catalogue them. Public instructions remain available. Voice: Quick, exact words; point at tools while speaking.

Method diagram: Fit the spare beam into the upper sockets; admit one light cart at a time. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: A temporary brace supports limited safe crossings.

Destination note: Diver's marker: dry maintenance ledge below the third post. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Noma is on the ledge.

An independent trail - 15 minutes

Place: Riverbank

Read aloud

Sef's ferry knocks softly against the bank. A rope runs down beneath the bridge, rather than into the river.

Run this scene

Follow the rope to reach her. A witness confirms the destination. Describe the physical trail before asking for a decision. The witness tells what they actually observed and admits what they did not see. If the group refuses conversation, the physical route supplies the destination. Let a character compare the timeline and another trace the map. For a divided group, take one short turn per side, then reunite at the meeting; do not add another travel encounter.

Choices

1. Proceed to Maintenance ledge
2. Compare evidence at Carpenter shed

If the group gets stuck

If conversation or a test fails, give the public card anyway. A clear sign points to Maintenance ledge. A missing method can be found again at Upper brace; no character skill is required.

People and evidence

Sef: Keep the ferry available without exploiting the closure Guides the party if they share a plan. If refused, points to the visible trail. Voice: Cautious, distinguish observation from assumption.

Physical trail: The tool rope runs from the riverbank to the third-post ledge. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Follow the rope to reach her.

Witness statement: Sef saw Noma climb onto the third-post shelf before the bell started. Give it: Ask any direct question, or read the witness's signed statement if conversation is refused. GM inference: A witness confirms the destination.

The immediate problem - 20 minutes

Place: Maintenance ledge

Read aloud

Noma stands dry on a narrow maintenance shelf. Her tools hang below it, pulling the warning line taut.

Run this scene

Diver Noma attached a warning bell to a cracked lower brace. Heavy wagons pull its rope and sound the alarm. She is safe on a maintenance ledge but cannot haul her tools out. Bracing the bridge restores light crossings; rerouting traffic to the ferry is slower but avoids the cracked span. State the immediate stakes and offer both listed approaches. Before resolving action, ask who observes, who acts and who helps. Make any cost visible before a player accepts it. Avoid demanding a special ability or spell. When a plan fails, use the slower listed route and mark its time cost; people remain recoverable. Once the goal is safe, mark the immediate goal safe and continue. A refusal by the keeper cannot hide the marked safety instructions.

Choices

1. Support the tool line from above and haul in two stages.
2. Use the ferry to reach the shelf and carry the tools ashore.

If the group gets stuck

Use the ferry to reach the shelf and carry the tools ashore. Explain a five-minute delay before they accept it; mark the immediate goal safe when the people or resource are secured.

People and evidence

Noma: Retrieve tools and make her warning understood Explains both solutions when the party agrees to protect the immediate goal; the marked instructions are available regardless. Voice: Calm under pressure; admit the decision and its cost.

Safety marks: Tool line and bell line share a knot. Support the tools before loosening it. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Recover the tools without dropping them or silencing the warning too early.

Encounter and party adaptation

Bring Noma and her tools up while preserving the warning.

A delay leaves less time for the final repair or decision. Explain costs before resolving an action.

Support the tool line from above and haul in two stages.

Use the ferry to reach the shelf and carry the tools ashore.

Two pairs take observation and action tasks. Resolve them in two short alternating turns.

Mark the immediate goal safe after either safe approach; a setback costs time, not access to the next scene.

The final choice - 20 minutes

Place: Upper brace

Read aloud

The lower crack shows daylight through wood. The upper brace has sockets cut for a spare beam.

Run this scene

A temporary brace supports limited safe crossings. Recover the tools without dropping them or silencing the warning too early. Reveal the method and fallback together. Ask the group which tradeoff it accepts and give every character a small contribution. Mark the complete method for the first choice or the fallback method for the second. A risky improvisation should inherit one of these outcomes after its cost is explained, rather than create a third unprepared lock. Keep the immediate goal safe. Return by the known marked route; no new location needs to be invented.

Choices

1. Fit Eli's spare beam and limit the bridge to one light cart at a time.
2. Close the span and run the marked three-trip ferry route.

If the group gets stuck

Close the span and run the marked three-trip ferry route. Mark the fallback method, keep the immediate goal safe and read the cost ending. Do not repeat a failed test.

People and evidence

Eli: Prevent another wagon from cracking the brace Lends supplies if a character helps carry or catalogue them. Public instructions remain available. Voice: Quick, exact words; point at tools while speaking.

Noma: Retrieve tools and make her warning understood Explains both solutions when the party agrees to protect the immediate goal; the marked instructions are available regardless. Voice: Calm under pressure; admit the decision and its cost.

Method diagram: Fit the spare beam into the upper sockets; admit one light cart at a time. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: A temporary brace supports limited safe crossings.

Fallback instruction: Ferry chalkboard: light wagons can cross in three trips. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Traffic can be rerouted without fixing the bridge today.

Encounter and party adaptation

Make a public plan for the next crossing.

The complete method preserves the planned service; the fallback preserves the immediate goal at a visible cost.

Fit Eli's spare beam and limit the bridge to one light cart at a time.

Close the span and run the marked three-trip ferry route.

Work in two pairs, one following the method and the other preparing a fallback or record.

Mark the complete method for the first approach or the fallback method for the second. Both allow return and an ending.

Home and aftermath - 15 minutes

Place: Bridge approach

Read aloud

The next wagon waits for a hand signal. Across the river, market awnings rise in the morning wind.

Run this scene

Choose a complete resolution or a resolution with a cost, then ask the group what happens next. Read the ending matching the selected outcome. Invite each character to add one ordinary detail to the aftermath, then ask the keeper for a concrete next action. Record who accepted the cost and which clues went unused. Spend the last few minutes on one enjoyable moment and one thing to change next time. Characters need not solve every optional inference to earn a resolved ending.

Choices

1. Describe who follows up tomorrow
2. Ask who helped whom and what it cost

If the group gets stuck

If no method was chosen, first confirm the immediate goal is safe, use the final fallback method and then read the cost ending. Record the unresolved work and give every character an epilogue.

People and evidence

Vale: Get produce to the far market Offers directions and ordinary transport for news of the outcome.

Voice: Patient, concrete sentences; ask one practical question.

Noma: Retrieve tools and make her warning understood Explains both solutions when the party agrees to protect the immediate goal; the marked instructions are available regardless. Voice: Calm under pressure; admit the decision and its cost.

Endings

Complete resolution

The brace seats firmly. Noma hangs the bell beside the approach as a visible warning, and the first light cart crosses slowly.

First secure the immediate goal at Maintenance ledge. Use final method A at Upper brace before choosing this ending.

Resolution with a cost

The bridge stays closed. The ferry carries the produce in three trips, and the town posts a repair date rather than pretending the crack is gone.

First secure the immediate goal at Maintenance ledge. Use final method B at Upper brace before choosing this ending.

Fit Eli's spare beam and limit the bridge to one light cart at a time remains for a later visit.

Handout answers

h-order: The sound is an intentional structural warning.

h-fallback: Traffic can be rerouted without fixing the bridge today.

h-method: A temporary brace supports limited safe crossings.

h-note: Noma is on the ledge.

h-trail: Follow the rope to reach her.

h-witness: A witness confirms the destination.

h-safe: Recover the tools without dropping them or silencing the warning too early.

Clue reasoning

The sound is an intentional structural warning.: c-order

Proceed to Maintenance ledge: c-note OR c-trail OR c-witness

Recover the tools without dropping them or silencing the warning too early.: c-safe / marked safety fallback

Make a public plan for the next crossing.: c-method OR c-fallback

Map descriptions

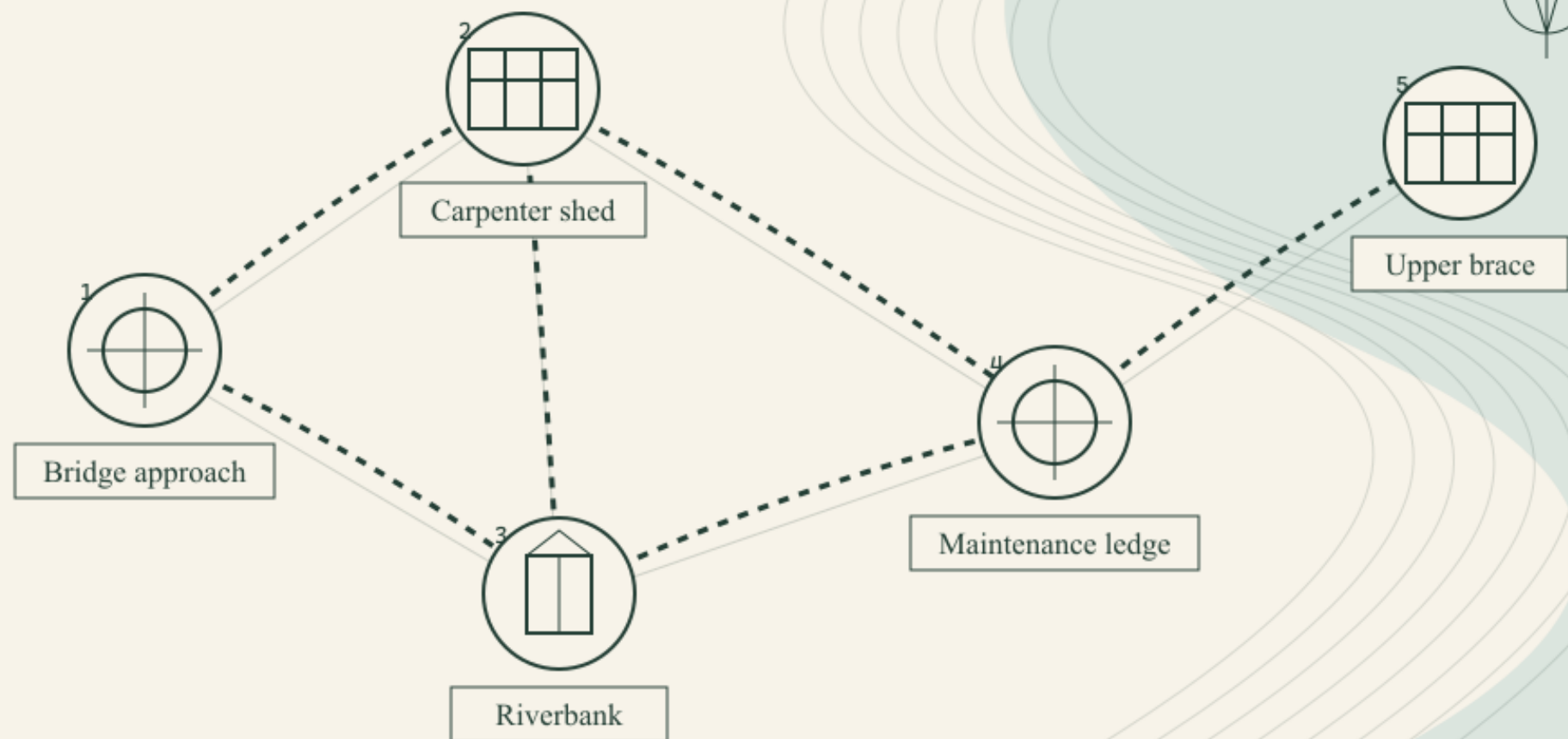
GM route atlas: Start at Bridge approach. Carpenter shed and Riverbank are independent investigation routes; both connect to Maintenance ledge, which leads to Upper brace. All marked connections are bidirectional. Return uses the known route to Bridge approach.

Maintenance ledge - approach plan: At Maintenance ledge, the marked entrance reaches the immediate problem. Approach A: Support the tool line from above and haul in two stages. Approach B: Use the

ferry to reach the shelf and carry the tools ashore. Both reach the onward route. Layout is schematic, with no combat grid or movement scale.

Player route map: Public route map: Bridge approach connects to Carpenter shed and Riverbank; either reaches Maintenance ledge, then Upper brace. Routes work in both directions. Retrace the route to return. No hidden information is marked.

GM route atlas

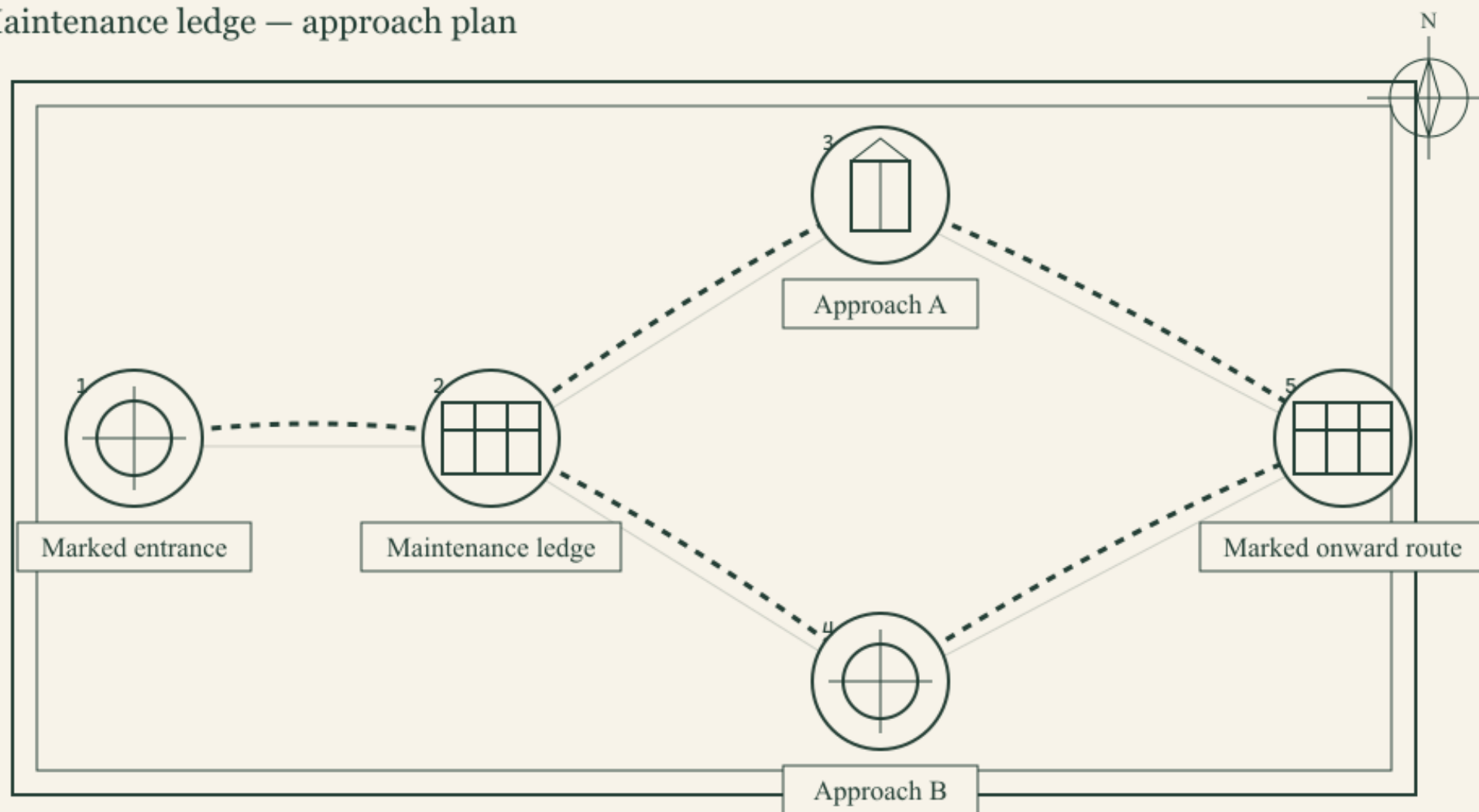


C-SAFE / immediate problem

C-METHOD or C-FALLBACK

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Maintenance ledge — approach plan



Support the tool line from above and haul in two stages.

Use the ferry to reach the shelf and carry the tools ashore.

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