

The Clockmaker's Missing Hour

120-minute plan | 4 players | No combat

The town has forgotten the hour between eleven and noon. A delivery arrived without a recipient, and the clockmaker refuses to wind the tower.

Content notice: Memory loss, grief for a parent; replace the father's story with an old festival recording if preferred.

What is really happening

Clockmaker Sella fitted a memory wheel to preserve her father's last story. A cracked catch repeats its recording across town, hiding one hour of new memories. The recordings are intact in the tower; resetting the catch releases them, while disconnecting it preserves the story but loses the hour.

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: Let Sella choose HOLD for the old track while the party marks today's track RELEASE. Mark the immediate goal safe only once the people or resource are secured. Then, if no final method was used: Pull the blue cord and keep the drum untouched for later repair. Mark the fallback method and read the cost ending. Give each character an epilogue; do not bypass the safety step.

4 PLAYERS

Convince Sella that returning the town's hour need not erase her father's story.

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

Stop the recording wheel from swallowing another hour.

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

Arrival - 10 minutes

Place: Clock square

Read aloud

Every clock strikes noon twice. Bram points at a bread receipt with his own signature, which he swears he never wrote.

Run this scene

The missing hour existed and left physical records. Disconnecting is a reversible fallback, but new memories remain lost. 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 Watch shop
2. Follow the trail to Delivery yard

If the group gets stuck

If conversation or a test fails, give the public card anyway. A clear sign points to Tower landing. A missing method can be found again at Clock chamber; no character skill is required.

People and evidence

Bram: Find who signed for the noon bread Offers directions and ordinary transport for news of the outcome. Voice: Patient, concrete sentences; ask one practical question.

Timeline record: The receipt is marked 11:34, before the clocks jumped. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: The missing hour existed and left physical records.

Fallback instruction: Pulling the blue cord stops recording without damaging the story drum. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Disconnecting is a reversible fallback, but new memories remain lost.

Records and tools - 15 minutes

Place: Watch shop

Read aloud

Neri lays out two wheel teeth: one smooth, one cracked. The shop smells of brass polish and tea gone cold.

Run this scene

A physical reset releases stored memories. The tower is the destination. 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 Tower landing
2. Compare evidence at Delivery yard

If the group gets stuck

If conversation or a test fails, give the public card anyway. A clear sign points to Tower landing. A missing method can be found again at Clock chamber; no character skill is required.

People and evidence

Neri: Show that the new catch can be repaired 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: The cracked catch must align with the three etched strokes, then latch. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: A physical reset releases stored memories.

Destination note: Sella took the story drum to the tower landing this morning. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: The tower is the destination.

An independent trail - 15 minutes

Place: Delivery yard

Read aloud

Pell's cart has a floury handprint on its rail. A strip of blue clock ribbon hangs from the tower stair.

Run this scene

A second trail reaches the landing. A witness confirms the destination without requiring the note. 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 Tower landing
2. Compare evidence at Watch shop

If the group gets stuck

If conversation or a test fails, give the public card anyway. A clear sign points to Tower landing. A missing method can be found again at Clock chamber; no character skill is required.

People and evidence

Pell: Recover a missing delivery without blaming a stranger Guides the party if they share a plan. If refused, points to the visible trail. Voice: Cautious, distinguish observation from assumption.

Physical trail: Blue ribbon from a clock wheel is caught on the tower stair. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: A second trail reaches the landing.

Witness statement: Pell saw Sella carrying a glass drum upstairs at eleven. Give it: Ask any direct question, or read the witness's signed statement if conversation is refused. GM inference: A witness confirms the destination without requiring the note.

The immediate problem - 20 minutes

Place: Tower landing

Read aloud

On the landing, a voice repeats a story about a kite. Sella asks you to listen once before you touch anything.

Run this scene

Clockmaker Sella fitted a memory wheel to preserve her father's last story. A cracked catch repeats its recording across town, hiding one hour of new memories. The recordings are intact in the tower; resetting the catch releases them, while disconnecting it preserves the story but loses the hour. 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. Copy the father's story aloud with the whole table before separating its track.
2. Let Sella choose HOLD for the old track while the party marks today's track RELEASE.

If the group gets stuck

Let Sella choose HOLD for the old track while the party marks today's track RELEASE. Explain a five-minute delay before they accept it; mark the immediate goal safe when the people or resource are secured.

People and evidence

Sella: Save her father's recording and end the town's confusion 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: The drum reads PLAY / HOLD / RELEASE. HOLD keeps a story; RELEASE returns today's recordings. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Separate the old story from the new hour before releasing.

Encounter and party adaptation

Convince Sella that returning the town's hour need not erase her father's story.

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

Copy the father's story aloud with the whole table before separating its track.

Let Sella choose HOLD for the old track while the party marks today's track RELEASE.

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: Clock chamber

Read aloud

A glass drum revolves above a catch that clicks out of time. Tiny scenes of the lost hour shine within it.

Run this scene

A physical reset releases stored memories. Separate the old story from the new hour before releasing. 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. Align the cracked catch with the three strokes and release today's track.
2. Pull the blue cord and keep the drum untouched for later repair.

If the group gets stuck

Pull the blue cord and keep the drum untouched for later repair. Mark the fallback method, keep the immediate goal safe and read the cost ending. Do not repeat a failed test.

People and evidence

Neri: Show that the new catch can be repaired Lends supplies if a character helps carry or catalogue them. Public instructions remain available. Voice: Quick, exact words; point at tools while speaking.

Sella: Save her father's recording and end the town's confusion 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: The cracked catch must align with the three etched strokes, then latch. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: A physical reset releases stored memories.

Fallback instruction: Pulling the blue cord stops recording without damaging the story drum. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Disconnecting is a reversible fallback, but new memories remain lost.

Encounter and party adaptation

Stop the recording wheel from swallowing another hour.

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

Align the cracked catch with the three strokes and release today's track.

Pull the blue cord and keep the drum untouched for later repair.

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: Clock square

Read aloud

The square falls silent before its first honest chime. Bram smells his bread, as if checking that noon is finally real.

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

Bram: Find who signed for the noon bread Offers directions and ordinary transport for news of the outcome. Voice: Patient, concrete sentences; ask one practical question.

Sella: Save her father's recording and end the town's confusion 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 hour returns as a rush of small memories. Sella's father finishes his kite story, and Sella writes it down in her own hand.

First secure the immediate goal at Tower landing. Use final method A at Clock chamber before choosing this ending.

Resolution with a cost

The blue cord comes free. Tomorrow will be ordinary, but today's missing hour stays inside the drum. The town agrees to keep it safe until a repair is possible.

First secure the immediate goal at Tower landing. Use final method B at Clock chamber before choosing this ending.

Align the cracked catch with the three strokes and release today's track remains for a later visit.

Handout answers

h-order: The missing hour existed and left physical records.

h-fallback: Disconnecting is a reversible fallback, but new memories remain lost.

h-method: A physical reset releases stored memories.

h-note: The tower is the destination.

h-trail: A second trail reaches the landing.

h-witness: A witness confirms the destination without requiring the note.

h-safe: Separate the old story from the new hour before releasing.

Clue reasoning

The missing hour existed and left physical records.: c-order

Proceed to Tower landing: c-note OR c-trail OR c-witness

Separate the old story from the new hour before releasing.: c-safe / marked safety fallback

Stop the recording wheel from swallowing another hour.: c-method OR c-fallback

Map descriptions

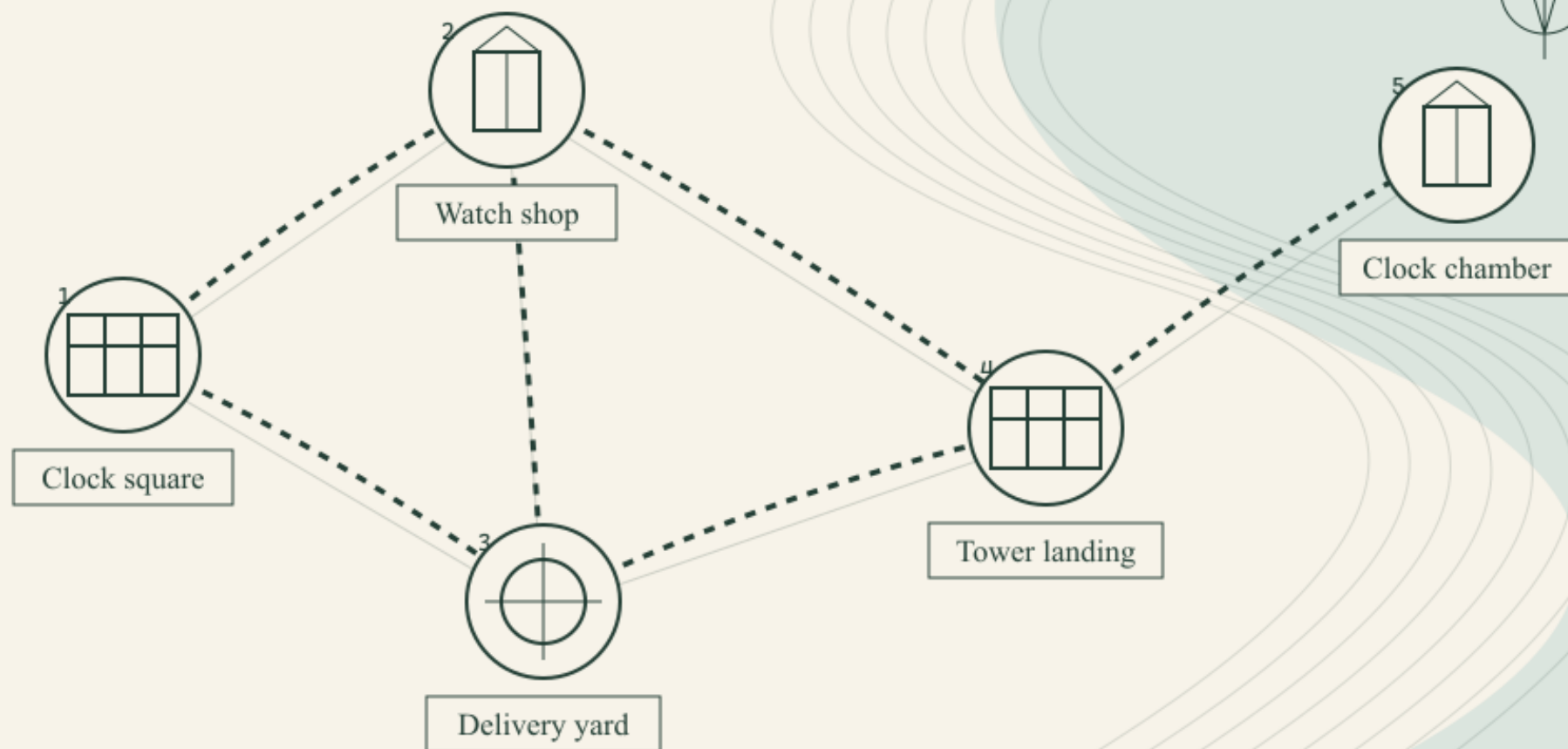
GM route atlas: Start at Clock square. Watch shop and Delivery yard are independent investigation routes; both connect to Tower landing, which leads to Clock chamber. All marked connections are bidirectional. Return uses the known route to Clock square.

Tower landing - approach plan: At Tower landing, the marked entrance reaches the immediate problem. Approach A: Copy the father's story aloud with the whole table before separating its track. Approach B: Let Sella choose HOLD for the old track while the party marks today's track RELEASE. Both reach the

onward route. Layout is schematic, with no combat grid or movement scale.

Player route map: Public route map: Clock square connects to Watch shop and Delivery yard; either reaches Tower landing, then Clock chamber. Routes work in both directions. Retrace the route to return. No hidden information is marked.

GM route atlas

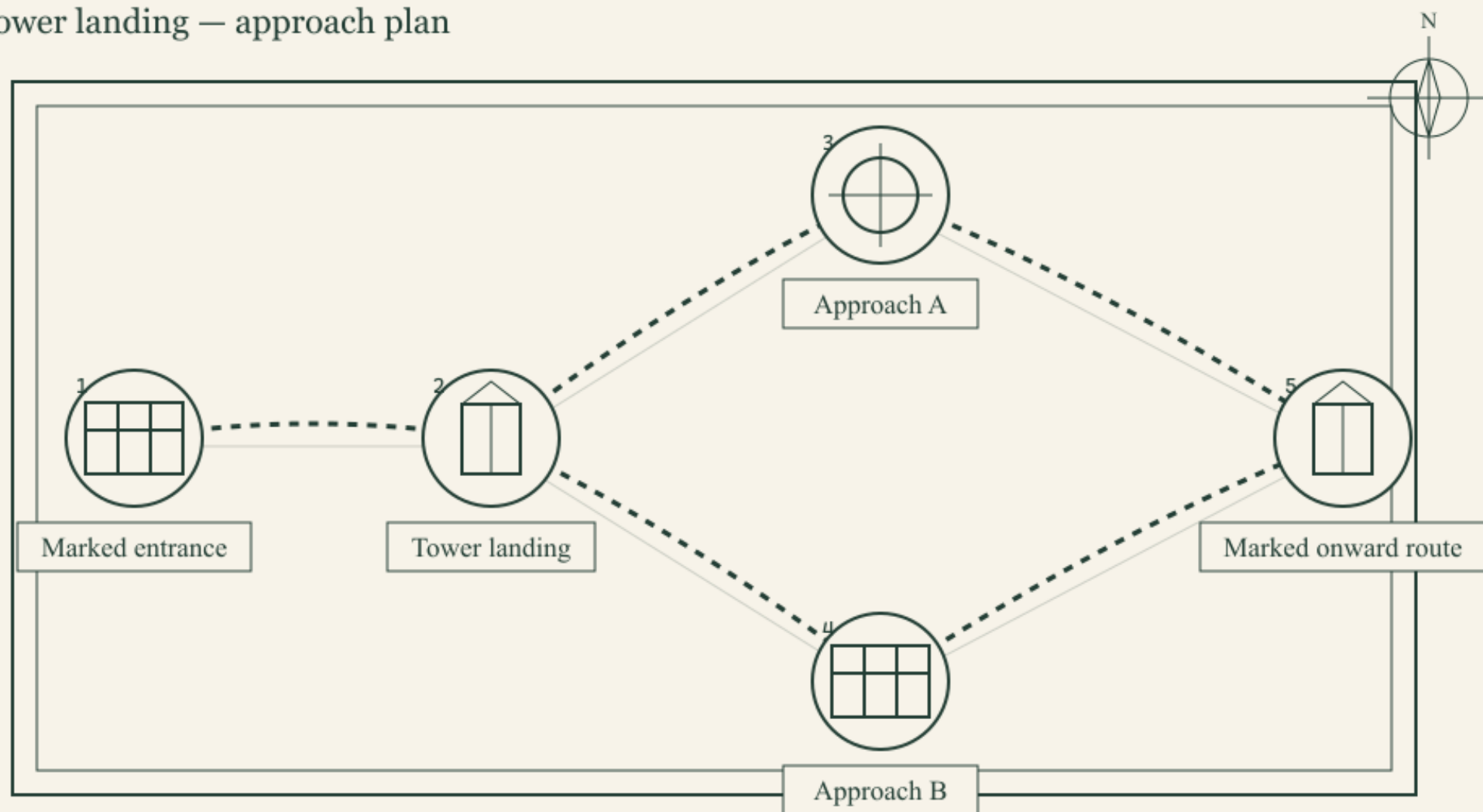


C-SAFE / immediate problem

C-METHOD or C-FALLBACK

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Tower landing — approach plan



Copy the father's story aloud with the whole table before separating its track.

Let Sella choose HOLD for the old track while the party marks today's track RELEASE.

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