

CREDITS

For Anyone Who Ever Feared That Magic Was Real.

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INTRODUCTION

This mini-scenario is part of a series of short, open-ended mini-scenarios that Dark Trapezohedron Productions refers to as "The Miskatonic Files". These short scenes and events can be applied to any scenario the Keeper so chooses. They are similar to "Seeds of Doom" in that they are meant to be open-ended and not fully realized campaigns. There is no SAN reward at the end and there is no big reveal, there is only the event for the Investigators to live through and the Keeper to use however they like.

FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY

"And where Nyarlathotep went, rest vanished, for the small hours were rent with the screams of nightmare."

-- H.P. Lovecraft, Nyarlathotep

The Crawling Chaos. The Mighty Messenger. The Strange Dark One. Many names, many faces, all of them inclined to appear anywhere at any time. They can be big, they can be small, or they can appear human, but they are all the same entity and all share the same goal — to relay information and upset the established order of things.

Does this mean the entity is evil? Certainly not. Malevolent in deed and dangerous to trust, but not something so banal and human as evil. In fact, perhaps there is some truth behind the phrase, "don't shoot the messenger". Perhaps his goal in some circumstances is not to destroy, but rather to inform. Maybe he appears as an omen in times of turmoil as a warning or harbinger, and is blamed for the ensuing chaos. What happens when Nyarlathotep is merely in town on business, with no further plans of his own?

What if he has something to tell the Investigators, and intends nothing more sinister than to relay information and simply frighten them?

Of course, that doesn't mean Nyarlathotep has to be kind to the Investigators about whatever information he has to give. He's a fickle god, capricious, and above all, eternally bored with his immortality. The Investigators are novel, almost like ants running around in an ant farm to him. After all, it's fun to toy with small things, and what are humans but the smallest of things in the universe?

This short interlude is a nasty trick to play on a party when some players are gone or when the Investigators have been hit hard recently. It's a good way to get information across, reveal plot details that may have been missed, or even just to torment the Investigators and give them a good scare. It's important for the Keeper to note that Nyarlathotep himself has no plan here other than to put on a magic show and poke the Investigators with a stick. He's just bored, and as anyone with sense can tell you, a bored Nyarlathotep is very frightening indeed.

A Note About Nyarlathotep

Because Nyarlathotep is a vastly powerful cosmic entity that can't be described by human morality, he should not be portrayed as a stock villain – more of a trickster. However, his behavior is always devious and cryptic, and sometimes even openly malevolent, so the Keeper should apply such when using him in any game. Ultimately, the reason why Nyarlathotep is doing this show in the first place, seeking the Investigators out, and bothering to show his hand at all is up to the Keeper to decide. In other words, portray the Crawling Chaos however *you* understand the character, without worrying about whether or not he's evil, neutral, or any other human-created morality term.

A Mysterious Letter

One morning, the Investigators (or one in particular if you've got someone with some prestige) mysteriously receive a letter. The letters are sealed with an old-timey black wax seal, with the imprint of an ankh or Eye of Horus-like symbol. Inside the envelope is a letter and a ticket to some sort of show going on that evening.



The letter itself is an invitation to see the performance of Thoth the Magnificent, a famous illusionist who will be coming to town for one night only. The letter is written by Thoth himself, who is apparently a fan of the Investigators' work and has been following their adventures. As a gesture of good will and a means of helping them out, he's giving everyone in the group a free ticket to his show, happening for one night only in the town the Investigators are currently situated in. The letter also promises to reveal secrets and be filled with spectacle, as well as be a nice little vacation from all the lunacy they've been dealing with so far.

A History or Archaeology roll can connect Thoth to Ancient Egyptian myth as the god of knowledge, the moon, and writing. He was the scribe of the gods and his symbolic animal is the ibis. If Occult is rolled, connections to Hermes and similar messenger gods in antiquity can be uncovered. It was also believed that Thoth had connections to magic and illusion, which is possibly why this magician chose it as his stage name. On a more sinister note, if anyone rolls Cthulhu Mythos, they may be able to note that Nyarlathotep holds some parallels to Thoth – both of them are associated with the moon and communication, and both of course have Egyptian connections.

Little does the group know (or perhaps does, depending on what they may have experienced before), this particular illusionist is a Mask of Nyarlathotep, up to one of his many favorite means of spreading chaos and madness through the world... and he has just invited the Investigators to get up close and personal with him.

If the Investigators have had prior experience with the Crawling Chaos, the letter might even be enough to convince them that the illusionist has something sinister to hide and needs to be investigated. This is exactly what Nyarlathotep is betting on in order to draw the Investigators in and keep them curious. However, he has a plan even if the players do not accept the invitation – they will run into this same Mask in the future as a travelling street performer, possibly several times in increasingly odd locations if they keep ignoring him. Come hell or high water, the Investigators will get whatever message or information Nyarlathotep has for them, much to their likely dismay. Should the players accept the invitation however, the following sequence will occur.

The 1920's and Egyptomania

After the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in the early 1920's, Ancient Egyptian theming and the "mystery" surrounding that ancient culture experienced a boom in popularity, often to the point of being over the top spectacle. In fact, the art deco style so often associated with this time period is based on Egyptian design! Harry Houdini was also practicing his famous illusory escape tricks at the time, making sleight of hand shows a popular pastime. Therefore, a magic or illusion show themed after Ancient Egypt would therefore be almost irresistible to the public at the time – a fact Nyarlathotep knows all too well and uses to his advantage here.



On With the Show!

On the date the letter indicates, the players will attend the illusionist's performance, located at a local small performance hall, community center, or some other small and intimate venue with a stage. In a pinch, a speakeasy might even do! Before the show, the group will arrive at the ticket booth. If asked, the man in the booth has no idea exactly where Thoth the Magnificent comes from – "Someplace foreign I think? He looks like he's Arabic." Yes, he has seen the show, and it's outstanding. Aside from that, he cannot offer much information about the mysterious illusionist.

In the lobby of the performance hall, the Investigators find a small crowd of people, from which they can overhear discussion from other patrons about Thoth the Magnificent. During this time, the players might talk to other attendees, learning that some have seen this illusionist's shows many times. There are rumors his illusions aren't just illusions, and that he invents most of the apparatuses involved in his tricks all by himself. There's even whisperings he might be better than Houdini! The Keeper is encouraged to spread rumors of how good Thoth is – he's gotten wild animals to behave like household pets, he's a genius inventor in his spare time, he's shown people visions of the future at his shows, etc. It certainly seems like the man has an almost cultish following of fans, which might be disturbing enough for the Investigators to start becoming suspicious. Let them. The suspicion breeds tension for later, and Nyarlathotep thrives on that tension as a catalyst.

At approximately 45 minutes before the show begins, the Investigators will encounter said illusionist, who appears as a tall, lithe, dark-haired man in a red suit and stereotypical "Egyptian" looking stage makeup. He will arrive to personally greet guests and guide them into the performance area, since the venue has no ushers. He does not give or respond to a name other than his stage name of Thoth, but will greet anyone who approaches him with great cordiality and formality, and is open to answering questions. The only thing he won't answer is how he does any of his tricks, since "a magician never reveals his secrets". He should come off as quirky, a little eerie and mysterious, and charming if not slightly suspicious.

When the investigators approach him, he will seem to know them well. If the Investigators pry, he'll tell them that both he and they have a mutual friend – whether this is a lie or not is the Keeper's choice. As such, he's got a vested interest in helping the Investigators. Asking for further details or rolling Psychology just clarifies this relationship; he's apparently being truthful. Then again, trying to analyze the thought processes of a god is a fool's errand; the Investigators could not figure out this enigma of a man if they tried.

While talking to the group, Thoth will at some point ask if they got his letter. Upon confirmation of this, he'll express delight, particularly towards those who are of a scientific or archaeological bent. He will explain that he's heard that the group has experience in dealing with the unusual (or that their mutual friend recommended them to him), and he was hoping to obtain their help with something unusual he's uncovered recently if they are willing to stay after the show. This invitation should seem like a nice, safe hook into a scenario, and should put the Investigators at ease – all the better for when the truth comes out later.

At some point in the discussion, Thoth will ask the characters if they like butterscotch candies, a seemingly random question that appears to be small talk. If they say yes, he uses Sleight of Hand to make a small handful of the candies appear. This will set up something later, so make note of how the Investigators respond.

With their discussion concluded and the Investigator's assurance they will meet him after the show to talk (though he will find them even if they don't), Thoth lets them into the theater. "Enjoy the show," he calls as they sit down, "And do remember that things are not always as they seem around me."

Night is the Magician

This performance is your chance to channel your inner magician, so do it! Actual sleight of hand, if you know some, should be greatly appreciated by your players – particularly if they themselves can volunteer to be your assistant. Play up the showmanship and create as strong an air of mystery and eeriness as you can – this is, after all, one of the Messenger's rarely-seen and widely famed performances, isn't it?

The room is dark as the Investigators file in and take their seats. The stage lights go down and the curtains draw open, and Thoth the Magnificent begins his performance. He stands in a sarcophagus-like object which seems to open on its own as eerie lighting and droning music fill the stage. His presence is captivating and his voice so powerfully entrancing, he needs no microphone or spotlight to draw attention to him (in actuality, Nyarlathotep is using Voice of Ra to captivate the audience and keep them observant). He gives a speech concerning the nature of reality, the thinness of veils, and how things are not what they seem, then his demonstration begins.

The performance itself can best be described as similar to that of any famous magician (think Harry Houdini with a strong dash of creepiness, mysticism, and esotericism mixed in), is themed strongly around Ancient Egypt, and features such tricks as the classic "sawing in half", cold-reading, and escape from bindings a la Harry Houdini.

Thoth will at one point do a cold-reading/mind-reading segment, wherein he indicates that a certain group of individuals in the audience is seeking his aid for something... whether or not they realize it. It should be made obvious through details that the group he is speaking of is the players... and he may perhaps even look directly at them.

During the show, subtle hints occur that Thoth is more than just an illusionist. Some of the tricks should seem to be impossible to pull off, yet are done with ease. The show is a bit frightening, particularly after a segment involving hypnosis causes people to see "visions of the future" and another segment accurately predicts peoples' deaths. Hecklers are quickly brought on stage as volunteers, and generally leave very sobered after volunteering. The audience seems a bit too stunned, as if held in thrall by some powerful force. It's all a bit eerie... Noticing these little unnerving hints that something is wrong are good for a O/1 SAN loss if the Investigators seem particularly concerned.

"Pick Me! Pick Me!"

Thoth often calls volunteers for his tricks from the audience, meaning that the Investigators may end up participating firsthand. This is doubly true if the person expressed skepticism, heckles him, or otherwise insists he's all smoke and mirrors. Should an investigator participate in this, regardless of the reason they are called upom, Thoth will take full advantage of the situation by showing them visions related to their adventures, the Mythos, or something else unnerving perhaps a glimpse of what he truly is. These visions are terrifying but brief, causing 1/1d4 SAN loss. If the vision is of strong significance to the investigator, raise the SAN cost, but do not allow the player's character to see anything TOO Sanityruining (yet). In addition, the Investigator will find they cannot adequately describe what they were shown. They are too stunned speechless to say anything, an effect of Nyarlathotep's magic keeping their attention on him.

Too Cool to Fool

Rolls too high for Interpersonal skills to work? Try having Thoth use Dominate or another spell aimed at commanding an individual's will. With Nyarlathotep's incredibly high POW, these spells are much harder for the Investigators to break free of. They may not even know they have had the spell cast on them at all should the Keeper choose to make a secret POW test for everyone. In addition, using spells has the added bonus of allowing you to spook the players who aren't targeted. Nyarlathotep can target any or all of the Investigators with his magic, and thus lead them where he wants. This also serves as a way to shock the Sanity of their characters when they get their senses back (o/1d3 to 1/1d4 SAN)!

A Man of Many Masks

Once the performance ends and the group is filing out with the rest of the audience, they will suddenly be stopped by the illusionist, possibly startling them for o/1 SAN if he appeared suddenly and the Keeper feels mean. He greets them again, asking how they felt about the show and if they enjoyed themselves. He also points out he knows that the investigators have seen the unexplainable and are skilled with the occult. He claims he has something to show them that they might be able to identify for him, as he has no actual experience with the supernatural – "Gentlemen, I am a performer, not a ghost-hunter!". Thoth will then invite the Investigators backstage to speak a bit before he cleans up for travel again – he can answer any questions they might have in more detail then.

This offer and the encounter in general should be made to seem creepy, but not so creepy that the Investigators don't want to do it. They should be filled with enough awe and spectacle from the previous show that they're still a little dazed from it, and prone to follow Thoth's suggestion. If this isn't enough, consider having the illusionist use Interpersonal skills on them. If he tries this, have the Investigators roll against the skill. Failing or rolling worse than Thoth indicates that the character is suitably convinced to follow him backstage. Ditto if the Investigator's INT is below 50.

Once backstage, Thoth leads them to a small green room area and invites them to sit at a table. The room is quite sparsely furnished, but there are cabinets and a tin of butterscotch candy on the table, as well as something to drink. He may well offer the group rum or gin if the Investigators seem amenable – sort of an "I won't tell if you won't" thing. The Keeper is free to detail and discuss as much as they like concerning whatever fictitious hook, object, or artifact Thoth wants to tell them about. He still keeps up the pretense of humanity as he does this, though a Psychology roll here can determine something is off.

As he lets the group get comfortable, Thoth will go shut the door. Rolling Listen here can reveal the sound of the door being locked, though if asked Thoth claims this is so they "won't be interrupted" during their discussion. A paranoid Investigator might believe that he's locking them in the room with him so they can't leave. Such an Investigator would be correct – Nyarlathotep has cast a spell on the door so that only he can unlock it, all the better to keep the Investigators right where he wants them.

The Mask Falls

During the discussion and after the locked door is noticed, all pretense of the familiar jovial illusionist previously encountered begins to vanish. "Thoth" suddenly becomes a little too knowledgeable about the characters' quest and the characters themselves. His voice becomes more deadpan and less human, he becomes more sarcastic and darkly humorous as if hinting at some secret, hidden knowledge, and he gets much too uncomfortably close for the Investigators' comfort.

Anyone who has POW of 65 or greater, or SAN lower than 45, feels that they must leave the room – *now*. There's something evil in the room with them, and while they cannot define what it is, they know that the green room isn't safe and they must leave. Ideally, this will culminate in the Investigators checking the door and finding it locked, only to turn back and find Thoth right behind them instead of over at the table.

This all comes to a head as "Thoth" finishes talking and gloating about how easily he tricked the Investigators. As he speaks, his eyes seem to glaze over as if looking past the players into a truth they are blissfully unaware of, his pupils blow wide until his eyes go pitch black, and his teeth acquire a feral and sharp look (2/1d8 SAN to see this and realize Thoth is not human). In a word, he goes from friendly if a little off-putting to flat-out creepy as his true identity begins to creep out from under the mask and his glamour begins to fail.

This should be a *wham* moment for the players, the moment they realize they have been tricked. Asking for a Cthulhu Mythos roll might cause the character to recall that some depictions of Nyarlathotep are human, but that is likely the only hint they'll get unless Nyarlathotep deigns to tell them himself. Of course if he does, the Investigators get a single point of Cthulhu Mythos for learning this. They're free to ask whatever they wish, and Nyarlathotep might even answer. He will use that opportunity to twist the knife about what he is and the nature of how insignificant the Investigators are, perhaps even mocking anyone who seems particularly afraid of him. Precisely how sardonic and mean he is to the Investigators depends on the Keeper, and requires a substantial bit of improvisational roleplay.

It should be mentioned that trying to attack Nyarlathotep at this point is not only very foolish and a good way to lose a good weapon, but pretty much a guaranteed trip to the asylum or morgue for those who try. If attacked, Nyarlathotep will shrug the blows off, bend or break the weapon effortlessly, and politely but sarcastically ask the Investigators to stop trying. If they foolishly decide to continue this avenue of interaction, Nyarlathotep will use his vast powers to either instantly kill or drive gibbering mad any Investigator that tries to harm him and that's if they even manage to get a hit on him in the first place, let alone wound him. If he is wounded, he bleeds a black ichor briefly, then the flesh begins to merge back and mold like clay until fully healed regardless of how severe the injury is. And of course, if they do somehow manage to kill him, he becomes a more monstrous version of himself (Keeper's choice of which Mask) and vanishes into space, causing 1d10/1d100 SAN loss.

It's much better for everyone concerned to simply have a nice chat with the Crawling Chaos. Once the Investigators are subdued, Nyarlathotep proceeds to tell the investigators that he knows their identities and their recent adventures, and has something to tell them or offers in his own uniquely twisted and ensnaring way to "help". He's been observing their actions and finds the Investigators too amusing to kill just yet.

During this chat, Nyarlathotep uses mind games to confound and torment the Investigators. He peers into their backgrounds and shuffles through their memories and fears, quipping ironically about them the whole time. He might try to manipulate the Investigators somehow and turn them against each other, even as he gives them the information they seek. He casually discusses the treacherous nature of reality and illusion and that the entire universe is chaos masquerading as reason and order as easily as someone explaining things to a small child. He occasionally shows notes of his inhuman nature – his skin seems to slip slightly, he stares for far too long at someone without blinking, and he bends his knuckles the wrong way with a sickening crackle noise when moving his hands. He may even show them visions of their violent deaths or loss of all sanity, the dreadful future that follows when the Old Ones wake up, etc. Anything to get under the Investigators' skin and force them to listen to him.

One option for this interaction, if your players are comfortable with it, is to get up and walk around the table, murmuring into the players' ears and touching their shoulders or playing with their hair to unnerve them. These little intrusions can take anywhere from 1 to 1d4 SAN, depending on how mean the Keeper feels, otherwise they serve as creepy garnish to increase the tension of the scene. The more the Investigator or their player react to this, the more Nyarlathotep picks on them until he tires of it.

The feeling of Nyarlathotep rifling through the Investigators' minds is extremely unpleasant. It feels as if something sinuous and slimy-sandy is slithering through their brains, and leaves the victim feeling deeply violated and unclean. Call for SAN rolls if and when Nyarlathotep does this, for 1d3/1d4+1 SAN loss. A failed roll here causes the character to realize what Nyarlathotep is doing, and a successful Idea roll at any point reveals that he's actually inserting his consciousness into the Investigators' to directly mold and manipulate their minds. From then on the character who noticed this will always feel as if the Crawling Chaos is still inside their head somehow, as if he's infected their brain and is still slithering through their consciousness... The effect of this vivid delusion is up to the Keeper, but one option is to bring back the awful sensation of having one's memories directly manipulated just before some awful vision, dream, or event occurs for that Investigator. Is Nyarlathotep haunting them? Did he cause the misfortune they're witnessing, or is the Investigator just losing their mind?

"Why yes, of course you're losing your mind," Nyarlathotep will respond coolly. "It's only natural for you silly little creatures to do so when confronted with the truth."

A Tempting Offer

Nyarlathotep may, at the Keeper's option, offer the group or certain members of it a deal since he is willing to help. The offer is simple - one favor, benefit, or desired thing per Investigator who agrees, to which he claims there is no catch.

There is a catch, of course – by accepting this deal, the player has unwittingly placed control over their Investigator into the hands of the Keeper. If there is some desperate thing that the player must successfully do later on, then the Keeper can override the player's roll or make the task nearly impossible to do. As soon as this failure occurs, the character will feel and hear Thoth in their head, taunting and thanking them for their cooperation. As the character realizes they have been tricked, they will lose 1d4/1d6 SAN, possibly more depending on how crucial or massive the failure was, or how personal the event in question was.

The other option here is that some sort of awful curse is paired with the new boon. For example, the player can never have restful sleep again or regenerate Health/Magic, their SAN slowly drains at a given rate each day, or they gain some percentiles in Cthulhu Mythos and possibly go mad. A more drastic means of showing this is to give the character some form of instantaneous or cumulative disfigurement/deformity, such as a wound that never heals and permanently damages APP/CON/STR or a slowly spreading corruption of some kind that also damages SAN to witness. As with the player losing control over the character, the character loses 1d4/1d6 SAN upon Thoth speaking to them and their realization they have been tricked. There is no cure for such a curse, unfortunately, leaving the Investigator permanently handicapped by the Messenger's dubious "gift".

The Curtain Falls

Eventually, Nyarlathotep will cut to the chase, becoming bored with taunting the Investigators, and will outright state his intent in drawing the Investigators here, whatever the Keeper deigns that to be. He will give the characters some information about the future, however all of his hints are purposefully cryptic and seem like half-truths. These are not lies, although the players may well expect them to be by now. They're right not to trust him, but in this case, he's being serious. Nyarlathotep is a fickle Outer God and a trickster by nature, a fact that the Investigators may or may not realize, and the reason why he is even "helping" them at all is left up to the Keeper to decide – that is, if they even choose to explain his alien, insane motivations at all.

Once he has given the information he deems fit to give, he will suddenly and darkly tell the Investigators to leave, slowly starting to mutate into some horrible creature as he does so. The door unlocks with a click, allowing any wise Investigators to leave now. If he successfully mutates all the way without anyone leaving, take 1d10/1d100 SAN for seeing an aspect of Crawling Chaos up close; if he does not, take 1d6/1d8+1 SAN instead. Again, trying to kill him at this point is more harm than help, especially when escape is so nearby. The Keeper is free to make the shadowy transformation he undergoes look as painful and horrific as possible, filled with visceral noises of bones cracking and flesh melting. However you get them to do it, the Investigators should want to run very fast and very far.

If the Investigators have survived thus far, insane or otherwise, they somehow find their way home and collapse into bed, afraid and exhausted as they drift into an uneasy and dreamless sleep. On awakening, they have a nasty surprise in store – they have awoken on the same day as the day they got the letter from Thoth! It's as if no time has passed at all, they are somehow missing an entire day and possibly more. This realization should shock them for o/1 SAN.

This is not all the Investigators find when they look around the room. There is a single window open in their bedroom, just enough for the curtains to billow in a slight breeze. On their bedside table or somewhere else in the room is another surprise – a small tin of butterscotch candies, and a note within sealed with the same black wax seal and written in the same hand as before. The Note is a final cosmic joke from Nyarlathotep, reading only a single message when they do dare to open it:

One hell of a show, wasn't it? – N

Realizing the unnerving truth – that Nyarlathotep was in their room as they slept and knows where they live – is good for another 0/1 SAN shock.

No matter where the Investigators look, they will not be able to find any information on Thoth the Magnificent as a performer. It's as if he has vanished, or never existed at all. However, this might not be the end of Nyarlathotep's interaction with the Investigators if he found them amusing enough. He could always show up again to spook them, appear in their dreams, or become some sort of shared delusion for the group. After all, everyone likes to have new toys, and Investigators do make such wonderful toys...

KEEPER UTILITIES

Nyarlathotep's Stat Block as a monstrous being can be found in the *Call of Cthulhu* 7th Edition Rulebook. However, should the Keeper particularly desire Thoth the Magnificent to appear and cause further trouble in their games again, his stats are below.

Thoth the Magnificent, Illusionist Mask of Nvarlathotep

Thoth the Magnificent appears as a tall, thin man commonly dressed in a red suit and black tie. He has dark hair, darker eyes, and vaguely Middle-Eastern looks, and speaks in a sonorously deep voice that calls to mind a demagogue or powerful leader. He is charming, clever, and very dangerous to be alone with, dealing in gossip and rumors. Much like other Masks of Nyarlathotep, he is always up to something, and definitely should not be trusted.

Thoth has no other name aside from his stage name, and as far as Nyarlathotep's Masks go, he's a fairly tame one. He most often appears as a harbinger of disaster or danger, but whether his presence actually causes the disaster is up for debate. Thoth also is used as a way to convey messages between humans and the Outer Gods, usually when such information must be kept secret.

STR 60	CON 95	SIZ 55	DEX 95	INT 430
APP 90	POW 500	EDU N/A	SAN N/A	HP 15
DB: o	Build: o	Move: 12	MP: 12	Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1.

Brawl 100% (50/20), damage 1D3 Cane 100% (50/20), damage 1d6

Armor: None, but if slain, he will become a more monstrous form that causes 1D10/1D100 SAN loss.

Skills: Knows any and all skills at 100%.

Spells: Knows all spells.



a phantasmagoria of Illusion and deception

Ladies and Gentlemen, take your seats and witness the show of the one and only Thoth the Magnificent! A feast of impossible feats awaits you, a spectacle the likes of which few have seen and lived to tell the tale of. And that final reveal at the end? It'll really make it a night you won't soon forget...

For One Night Only is a short interlude to terrify Investigators and hook into other scenarios. It is presented as part of The Miskatonic Files, a set of short scenes and utilities for Keepers in need of a little extra sparkle for their games.

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