



## Sidetracked

*Henning Mankell, Steven T. Murray (Translator)*

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Fourth in the Kurt Wallander series.

In the award-winning **Sidetracked**, Kurt Wallander is called to a nearby rapeseed field where a teenage girl has been loitering all day long. He arrives just in time to watch her douse herself in gasoline and set herself aflame. The next day he is called to a beach where Sweden's former Minister of Justice has been axed to death and scalped. The murder has the obvious markings of a demented serial killer, and Wallander is frantic to find him before he strikes again. But his investigation is beset with a handful of obstacles—a department distracted by the threat of impending cutbacks and the frivolity of World Cup soccer, a tenuous long-distance relationship with a murdered policeman's widow, and the unshakably haunting preoccupation with the young girl who set herself on fire. Fascinating and astute, **Sidetracked** is a compelling mystery enhanced by keen social awareness.

## **Sidetracked Details**

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Author : Henning Mankell , Steven T. Murray (Translator)

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## From Reader Review Sidetracked for online ebook

### Mr. Gottshalk says

Deceptively long at 350 pages with a small font, the terrific detective saga took longer than I thought, but satisfied throughout. What I like the most about Wallander is that he is very human, and not just another cop on a case. We can relate to the complexities of his personal life, while at the same time follow his brilliant and sometimes hard-luck scramble to find a psychopath. I am now officially a fan of the Kurt Wallander series. Although the Swedish characters and settings are a mouthful, there is a great story behind it all!

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### Lobstergirl says

This one felt a little phoned-in, plot and character-wise. Also, it was summer in Ystad, and I missed the cold, windy, dreary, dark Skånean winters of earlier books. Third, I'm not a fan of introducing the killer at the outset (though his identity isn't revealed until halfway through). It dissipates rather than enhances the drama. The only mystery was whether the killer would come after Kurt and Linda.

The third star is because I enjoy reading about Wallander's laundry dilemmas.

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### Morana Mazor says

Odli?na! MOžda ?ak i najbolja od ovih koje sam ?itala.

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### Agnieszka says

This has been my first book by Mankell and there is going to be more. Not only because I love crime novels, but also because the book was simlpy a great page-turner, one-day read. I could not stop: eating, drinking, sleeping were not the part of my daily routine any more.

Inspector Wallander makes mistakes, gets sidetracked and so what? This only adds excitement to the story even more so as there is a mad serial killer at large. As I believe telling a plot of a detective story spoils the whole fun, I am not going to say a single word more about it.

I admit I decided to read the book because I have seen one or two episodes of the TV series based on Mankell's books, but even though I was really more interested in listening to the beauty of Swedish language (which I can't understand) than in what was actually going on, still I could not help being attracted to the story and the characters. And so I got my first book by Mankell, which in fact happens to be the fourth or so of the series. So much more to read. Is it not great?

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## **James Thane says**

As the fifth entry in this series opens, Swedish police detective Kurt Wallander is looking forward to his upcoming vacation, but then he answers a call to a farmer's field where a young girl has been standing all day in what appears to be a catatonic state. Just as Wallander arrives, the girl douses herself in gasoline and burns herself to death. Wallander is naturally horrified and cannot imagine why the girl would have chosen to end her life, especially in such a painful manner. His task now is to identify the young woman and notify her family of her fate. This will prove to be a difficult process.

Shortly after the girl's death a retired Swedish Minister of Justice is murdered by someone who smashes his head with an ax and then takes his scalp. Wallander and his team are on the case, but have no obvious suspects. For the remainder of the book, the P.O.V. switches back and forth between Wallander and the killer who is on a mission that becomes clearer as the book progresses. As it does, a couple more men will be murdered and scalped and it becomes pretty clear that neither Wallander nor anyone else on his team will be going on vacation anytime soon.

This is another very intriguing and entertaining entry in the series and, as always, it allows Mankell to make observations about a number of social issues. There are a number of troubled families in this book, for example, including Wallander's own. His difficult relationship with his daughter, Linda, has significantly improved, but his father is slowly sinking into dementia and Wallander realizes that they will have little time to repair their fragile relationship.

The plot is compelling and moves along swiftly; as always the characters are very interesting, and all in all, this is a book that should appeal to large numbers of crime fiction fans.

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## **Harry says**

### **Book Review**

We all get *sidetracked*, it's a human condition and a decidedly reactive one. The looming question, of course, is: sidetracked from what? Mankell asks this question in this, his 5th in the Wallander series. The subject is Kurt Wallander. Kurt's goal is to capture a heinous serial killer on the loose in Ystad, Sweden. This is his job as a police officer. For most writers this is enough to confidently concoct a plot that would satisfy most crime readers, but not for Mankell. In the tradition of Per and Maj, the godfathers of police procedurals in this neck of the woods, Henning Mankell adheres to the realism evangelized by this duo of authors. Yes. The killings are the carrot leading Kurt by the nose: but the reality, Mankell tells us, is that life interrupts. It gets you sidetracked.

Go to any review of these Wallander books and you're likely to run into the following: "Wallander is my favorite detective and this novel didn't let me down when it came to him and his character development." Or, "[...] a protagonist you don't love or hate, he's just a real guy." It is this realism, this portrayal of a flawed but very decent policeman: a man with a troubled family, a daughter, a sister, his father the aging artist; a man with insufferable insomnia; a very lonely middle-aged man afraid of love; a policeman who still misses his dead colleague; a man who mourns a Sweden swiftly on the decline; a human being with a unbridled passion for natural landscapes and opera. It is this realism surrounding the characterization of Kurt Wallander that has as one reviewer puts it: made Henning Mankell the greatest export from Sweden aside from IKEA.

Mankell's mastery lies in pitting Kurt's character traits against real-time events that involve his profession as a policeman. A simple example of this might be found near the beginning of the novel. Enjoying the onset of a lovely and warm Swedish summer day Kurt receives an unusual call: a woman was standing in the middle of yellow fields, like a single teardrop on nature's flawless skin, and had been standing there for hours on end. Could someone please remove her from the farmer's land? On the drive over, Kurt is invigorated by the beautiful day. Contentment does not come often to Wallander but it is present on this fine day.

*He rolled down the window. The yellow rapeseed fields billowed on both sides of the road. He couldn't remember the last time he'd felt this good. In the distance he caught a glimpse of the sea. [...] Wallander got out of the car and looked around. Everywhere he looked were yellow rapeseed fields.*

*The woman was about fifty meters away out in the rapeseed field. The woman was standing completely still, watching him. When he got closer he saw that not only did she have long black hair, but her skin was dark too. It stood out sharply against the yellow field. He stopped when he reached the edge of the field. He raised one hand and tried to wave her over. She continued to stand utterly motionless. Even though she was still quite far from him and the billowing rapeseed hid her face every so often, he had the impression that she was quite beautiful.*

*He started walking towards her. Then he stopped short. And everything happened very fast. She raised a plastic jug over her head and started pouring a colorless liquid over her hair, her face, and her body. He had a fleeting thought that she must have been carrying it the whole time. And now he could tell she was terrified. Her eyes were wide open and she was staring straight at him. At the same moment a smell of gasoline wafted toward him. Suddenly she had a flickering cigarette lighter in one hand, which she touched to her hair. Wallander cried out as she burst into flame like a torch. Paralyzed, he watched her lurch around the field as the fire sizzled and blazed over her body. Wallander could hear himself screaming.*

As we can see, here Mankell pits Kurt's love of the Swedish landscape - a rare point of contentment for Wallander - against his job as a policeman. Numerous examples of this occur throughout the novel, and we might even say that the entire novel is a stitching of character traits against horrific events. In this novel, the horror comes to Ystad via a serial killer (the first in Sweden's criminal history), a powerful monster who favors splitting open skulls with an ax and taking the victim's scalp.

Mankell pits Kurt's distaste for violence against the need for it. We might find Kurt enjoying a moment of pure happiness as he closes the bedroom door on the sleeping form of his daughter who has come to visit him. This, while unknown to Kurt our killer in possession of keys to the apartment waits for them to go to sleep. Here Mankell takes Wallander's troubled family, if not Wallander's forgetfulness, his protective attitude towards children in general and makes it a distraction to resolving the case.

Yes, Kurt is a man who makes mistakes. We all get distracted by life. But that is precisely what makes him human, what makes Wallander so attractive as our hero. This novel falls into the category of a police procedural. And, as we know is often the case with procedurals the antagonist is known to the reader before

he or she is known to Wallander. In fact, the novel opens with a chapter where we enter the mind of our killer. *Distracted* is a story about how a crime is solved, with numerous convergences and yes, distractions. It is not a mystery that eludes the reader. That it nevertheless is a veritable page turner second-to-none speaks to the artistry of Henning Mankell.

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### **Series Review**

Henning Mankell is an internationally known Swedish crime writer known mostly for this fictional character Kurt Wallander. He is married to Eva Bergman.

Henning Mankell - Author

It might be said that the fall of communism and the consequent increase in Swedish immigration and asylum seekers has been the engine that drives much of Swedish crime fiction. Mankell's social conscience, his cool attitude towards nationalism and intolerance is largely a result of the writer's commitment to helping the disadvantaged (see his theater work in Africa). In this vein, readers might be interested in his stand-alone novel *Kennedy's Brain* a thriller set in Africa and inspired by the AIDS epidemic (Mankell often traveled to Africa to help third world populations); or read his *The Eye of the Leopard*, a haunting novel juxtaposing a man's coming of age in Sweden and his life in Zambia.

Mankell's love of Africa, his theater work on that continent, and his exploits in helping the disadvantaged is not generally known by his American readers. In fact, an international news story that has largely gone unnoticed is that while the world watched as Israeli soldiers captured ships attempting to break the Gaza blockade, few people are aware that among the prisoners of the Israelis was one of the world's most successful and acclaimed writers: Henning Mankell.

It is no exaggeration when I say that Henning Mankell is by far one of the most successful writers in Scandinavia, especially in his own country of Sweden. The Nordic weather, cold to the bones, drives its populace indoors for much of the year where cuddling up to read the latest in crime fiction is a national pastime.

For many GR readers who have been introduced to Kurt Wallander it is interesting to note that ultimately the success of bringing Mankell to English speaking audiences only came after bringing in the same production company responsible for Steig Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy for the wildly popular BBC version starring Kenneth Branagh. Viewers had no problem with an anglicized version of Mankell's work, an English speaking cast set down in a genuine Swedish countryside. Of course, to those fans thoroughly familiar with Mankell's work, it is the Swedish televised version that is found to be a more accurately portrayal of Mankell's novels...not the British, sensationalized version. And there's a reason for that.

Henning's prose is straightforward, organized, written mostly in linear fashion, a straightforward contract with the reader. It is largely quantified as police procedural work. The work of men who are dogged and patient to a fault. Kurt Wallander, the hero in Mankell's novels, is the alter ego of his creator: a lonely man, a dogged policeman, a flawed hero, out of shape, suffering from headaches and diabetes, and possessing a scarred soul. Understandably so and if some of the GR reviews are an indication; like his famous father-in-law Ingmar Bergman, Mankell is from a country noted for its Nordic gloom. But before you make the assumption that this is yet another addition to the somberness and darkness that characterizes Nordic writing Mankell often confounds this cliche with guarded optimism and passages crammed with humanity (for

Mankell, this is true both personally and professionally as a writer).

As Americans we often think of Sweden as possessing an very open attitude towards sex and that this is in marked contrast (or perhaps reprieve) to the somber attitudes of its populace. But this is a view that often confounds Swedish people. The idea of Nordic carnality is notably absent in Mankell's work, as much a statement of its erroneous perception (Swedes do not see themselves as part of any sexual revolution at all) and in the case of Mankell ironic because the film director most responsible for advancing these explicit sexual parameters (for his time) was his own father-in-law the great Ingmar Bergman. In a world where Bergman moves in a universe where characters are dark, violent, extreme and aggressive - take note that the ultimate root of this bloody death and ennui lies in the Norse and Icelandic Viking sagas of Scandinavian history - that dark, somber view ascribed to both Mankell and Bergman's work was often a topic of intense jovial interest between these two artists.

For any reader of Nordic crime fiction, Henning Mankell is an immensely popular and staple read.

Enjoy!

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### **Ελ?νη Αθανασ?ου says**

Ενα 5?ρι στον μεγ?λο, τον τερ?στιο, στον τ?σο αγαπημ?νο μου Μανκ?λ. Ενα βιβλ?ο για το π?ς πρ?πει να γρ?φονται τα αστυνομικ? μυθιστορ?ματα, π?ς να σκιαγραφ?νται οι ρωες και π?ς να εξελ?σσεται η ρευνα. Ο?τε μια λ?ξη περιττ?, ο?τε μια σκην? αδι?φορη. Ο Κουρτ Βαλ?ντερ ρεμος και μοναχικ?ς παλε?ει με μια ηθικ? αξιοθα?μαστη, αλλ? τ?σο μελαγχολικ?.

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### **Barbara Valotto says**

4stelle e 1/2 per un grande Wallander!!

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### **Vela says**

Very good plot with excellent sleuth of Wallander

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### **Briana says**

This was the very first Wallander book I ever read. While it started out rather gripping (any time a person lights themselves on fire in the middle of an open field, you have my attention) but I felt that it got a tiny bit slow, just as all the Wallander books do. I mean, most of them are pretty straight forward police procedurals. To be quite honest, the only reason that I keep coming back to Henning Mankell's stories is because I like Kurt Wallander so much. The stories themselves don't seem to be anything overly special, but the main character is oddly likeable inspite of being a grump and borderline slob. I find myself reading just because I like Kurt. I'd say that *Sidetracked* was one of the better Wallander novels that I've read. I mean, who doesn't love self-immolation, hatchet murders, and scalpings? If you are already into mysteries, why not give this

one a shot?

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### **Brad says**

Sometimes when you discover a new author -- even when your first exposure to their books doesn't blow your mind -- you see the promise of something fantastic, and you keep reading.

I've been reading many authors with that goal in mind: Ian Rankin (for the last few months) and Stephen King (for most of my life, with perpetual disappointment) and Nick Hornby (for a decade and a half) and Philip Palmer (for a couple of years) and Miriam Toews (since last summer). Only one of those authors has delivered the fantastic, but my love for Arsenal keeps Hornby on the "potential list" because I was predisposed to loving Fever Pitch, and it hardly seems fair to give his writing credit for such an easy victory.

Henning Mankell was on that list until today. I've enjoyed his books, some of them quite a bit, and I have become a big fan of Kurt Wallander (played brilliantly on the BBC by Kenneth Branagh\*), Mankell's brooding, anti-social, middle aged, tenacious, Ystad cop. But Mankell finally delivered on the promise he made me in his first Wallander book, Faceless Killers.

*Sidetracked* is the first fantastic Wallander I've read. It does everything Mankell always does, only better. It's a perfect mixture of Wallander's personal life (his always complicated relationships with his daughter, Linda, his Father, his long-distance, Latvian lover, Baiba, and his partner, Ann-Britt Hoglund), his professional life (this time he's searching for a serial killer who scalps and kills his victims with an axe), and his interior life (full of nostalgia, anxiety, pain, guilt and doubt). Wallander feels, this time, like he's not just a character on the page, but a real cop, a real person, living somewhere out there in the world at this very moment. It's rare for me to find a character I believe in so thoroughly, and it's exciting when it happens.

I had a hard time putting this book down. Honestly. And if it hadn't been for life, I would have read it in one bleary-eyed sitting. Even so, I stayed up late every night for three nights so that I could finish. I loved this book. I wonder if any of those remaining in the series will deliver the same satisfaction. No matter. One book in my personal fantastic range is enough. Mankell has solidified me as his fan.

Long live Wallander.

\*Sorry. I had to shamelessly plug old Ken, as I do in every Wallander book review.

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### **Leslie says**

Much better than the first Wallander book, imo! I read and listened to this and prefer the translation in this Kindle edition. Not only because of some of the word choices but it also had many little details that the audiobook translation omitted. None of them were crucial to the plot but they added to the overall feeling of the book. Maybe the fact that it had a different cover was a hint about the different translation! (see below for the cover I had from Amazon for this ASIN)

Mankell wrote this in a manner that makes the culprit clear to the reader long before Wallander and his team figure it out. Normally I don't care much for that style of mystery, as it removes the puzzle aspect of the book

and turns it into more of a thriller, but it worked very well in this case.

The cover my Kindle edition from Amazon had:

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## **Dorothy says**

Reading this book, I found myself really wishing that Inspector Kurt Wallander would get some professional help. The man is so depressed that it makes me depressed just to read about him.

Not that he doesn't have plenty of reason to be depressed. His personal life is a mess. He's still grieving for and missing his friend and mentor who died years before. He feels inadequate in his work and there are other stresses in his job as his department faces a budget crunch and possible staff reductions. There is a woman in his life and he wants to marry her, but she is the widow of a Latvian policeman who was killed in the line of duty and she's not so sure she wants to commit to a life with a *Swedish* policeman. (I can't say that I blame her.) His father has just been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and he seems to be deteriorating rapidly. The one bright spot in his life is his daughter with whom he finally seems able to build a positive relationship.

Wallander's depression is made worse by the images he has to deal with in his work. For example, at the beginning of this book, he is called out to a farm where a young girl is hanging about for no apparent reason in a rape field. As he moves in and tries to talk to her, the young girl seems to panic and brings out a petrol can, dousing herself in fuel and then striking a match. Before Wallander's horrified eyes, the girl burns to death in the grain field.

And then, of course, there are the serial murders.

Someone is killing men, some of them very powerful men, by various horrific means. Not only is the killer taking their lives, he (she?) is also taking their scalps. Are these simply random killings or is there an unknown link between the victims? Wallander, who is a very instinctual detective, instinctively intuits that there is a connection, but what is it? It certainly is not obvious. And what possible motive could the killer have for scalping the victims?

The Ystad murder squad is on the case, led by Wallander, and, painstakingly, they work through the few clues they have, hoping for a break. When the break comes, Wallander, naturally, berates himself because he did not see the solution sooner.

The Wallander series is mesmerizing in an odd way, a bit like a train wreck. The reader can't turn away, even if she would wish to. Henning Mankell spins a good yarn and he's cornered the market for tales of dour, sad-sack Swedish policemen.

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## **Vichy says**

Τι κοιν? μπορε? να ?χει ο Γκ?στοφ Β?τερστεντ, ?νας πρ?ην υπουργ?ς Δικαιοσ?νης, ο ?ρνε Κ?ρλμαν,

?νας ?μπορος ?ργων τ?χνης, ο Μπγερν Φρ?ντμαν, ?νας κλεπταποδ?χος και ο ?κε Λ?λιεγκρεν, ?νας οικονομικ?ς απατε?νας; Π?ρων του γεγον?τος ?τι βρ?σκονται δολοφονημ?νοι απ? τσεκο?ρι και χωρ?ς σκαλπ... Το αστυνομικ? τμ?μα του ?σταντ, με επικεφαλ?ς τον Κουρτ Βαλ?ντερ ?ρχεται να δ?σει απαντ?σεις. Η πορε?α των ερευν?ν δε βαδ?ζει ?πως θα ?πρεπε καθ?ς το ?να χτ?πημα ακολουθε? το ?λλο. ?χουν να κ?νουν με ?νων serial killer που δρα τυχ?α? με κ?ποιο κ?νητρο; Την αυτοπυρπ?ληση μιας 17χρονης στο χωρ?φι του ηλικιωμ?νου Σαλομ?νσον, την ταυτ?τητα της οπ?ας δεν ξ?ρουν, (view spoiler)ο Βαλ?ντερ θα αρχ?σει να συνδ?ει μ?νο ?ταν βγα?νουν στη φ?ρα τα ?πλυτα του τ?ταρτου θ?ματος και με τη βο?θεια του επιθεωρητ? του Χ?λσινμπορι, Β?λντεμαρ Σγ?στεν...

(view spoiler)

Η ιστορ?α παρ?λληλα ασχολε?ται και με τον τριπλ? ρ?λο του Βαλ?ντερ ως γονιο?, ως παιδιο? και ως συντρ?φου. Η σχ?ση του με την κ?ρη του Λ?ντα, με το πατ?ρα του που ε?ναι στα πρ?θυρα ?λτσαχα?μερ και ετοιμ?ζονται για το ταξ?δι στην Ιταλ?α και τη σχ?ση του με την Μπ?ιμπα απ? τη Ρ?γα και το προγραμματισμ?νο ταξ?δι διακοπ?ν τους που απειλε?ται να αναβληθε? λ?γω της υπ?θεσης που καθυστερε? να λυθε?. Το ταξ?δι τους θα γ?νει αφο? η υπ?θεση τελει?νει (view spoiler)

Το Βαλ?ντερ ε?ναι γεγον?ς ?τι δε τον συγκαταλ?γω στους αγαπημ?νους μου ντετ?κτιβ. Δεν ?χει τ?ποτα το ιδια?τερο πλην της αυστηρ?τητας που τον χαρακτηρ?ζει και της καταθλιπτικ?τητας που αποπν?ει. Ο συγγραφ?ας, ?μως, τον εμπλ?κει σε ενδιαφ?ρουσες ιστορ?ες που σε προκαλο?ν να τις διαβ?σεις...

## Hilary G says

Having recently said that I didn't like Harry Hole as much as Kurt Wallander, I thought it was only fair to do a closer comparison, so having just read a Jo Nesbo, I read a Henning Mankell. I thought this was necessary because I have watched so much Wallander on TV (the British series with Kenneth Branagh and the even better original series with Krister Henriksson), I could have been influenced and made an unfair comparison. Having read Sidetracked, I am happy to confirm my impression that Wallander is a more rounded, more complex character than Harry Hole, but must add that this is based on reading only one Harry Hole story. That said, there was a lot of similarity. The same taste for really brutal crimes, for a start. I've also rated both 3 stars as there wasn't THAT much difference between as a good read.

Sidetracked is a good story. It isn't perfect and contains a lot of loose ends and things that aren't followed through, but this reflects the investigation, and indeed life, in which some of the answers will forever remain obscure. I think this is one of the best detective novels for giving the message that there is really no satisfaction in solving the case because the victims are still dead and the damage done cannot be undone. Wallander and his colleagues identify the murderer, but never really get to the bottom of what caused his aberrant behaviour. The psychologist attached to the crime team offered vague suggestions based on previous experience or written research, but we never really know, and I think this is better than explanations that are really just theories.

Wallander is an interesting character. We see a little, but not too much of his family relationships. Some are only hinted at (the ex-wife, and the daughter, to some extent) and some approached more closely (the father). There is a new-ish love interest, that isn't intrusive but illuminates Wallander's character. There are interesting work relationships - the mentor (past boss), the colleagues (Nyborg is especially interesting),

counterparts from other police stations, and even the witnesses and victims. The overall impression is of someone who is fundamentally decent, who makes mistakes, but honestly tries to do his best. I really like Kurt Wallander and can see why he is a character interesting enough to meet in novel after novel.

I wasn't really sure about the end of the story, whether it was a whimper rather than a bang, but on reflection, I thought it was appropriate because this was a story about the detective not about the murderer.

I have read a lot of crime fiction and think that, if I ranked them, this would be in the top half of the list. It was a satisfying read and I look forward to reading more by Henning Mankell next time I feel like reading some crime fiction.

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