



## Approaching Night

*Ilana Waters*

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"Almost everyone is convinced I'm mad. But I'm not sure I believe them."

Seventeen-year-old Seluna doesn't know why she was admitted to an all-female insane asylum called Silver Hill. She doesn't know exactly how she makes inanimate objects come to life. And she can't figure out the reason for the sadistic and brutal experiments on girls here—many of whom are never heard from again.

When Seluna sneaks out to the moonlit, forbidden garden behind Silver Hill, she meets a mysterious boy swimming in a pond. She senses there's a connection between him and what's happening at the asylum, but he's not telling what. Then there are the screams from down long halls and the constant absence of light. No doubt they're all part of the scheme concocted by the merciless head of the facility, Dr. Catron. He's growing more and more frantic and violent in an attempt to find the person—or thing—he's looking for.

Yes, there's a lot Seluna doesn't know about Silver Hill. About why moonlight, madness, and murder are following her. But she needs to find out fast . . . before she becomes the next victim.

(Set in the nineteenth century of an alternate world called Hartlandia, APPROACHING NIGHT is a gothic paranormal romance).

## Approaching Night Details

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## From Reader Review Approaching Night for online ebook

### Damian Southam says

The vines are remembered as being there perhaps as long as Silver Hall, choking off walls, trees and other aspects of life, snatching at the feet of travellers, to name but a few of the inconveniences lived with. As hard and unforgiving as the doctors, the vines unnaturally surrounded everything around the insane asylum. There black corrosive energy put off by the place experimenting wrongly on people no longer considered human, is a rather fitting analogy of what goes on within the walls and grounds that they cover. Only two places were bare, and they both related to water; the apparent only known barrier to their unrelenting growth and the trouble caused.

The moat separating entry by it's drawbridge, and the fountain pond where the vines traveled over but not through, and which strategically connects with the channel dug for the mote, are the only places where harassment by the vines ceasal to exist. Only the one medium halting their unnatural inhabitance. Whether by flame or blade nothing was effective at removing the hinderance they pose, either too blunt or not hot enough. Unhappy about encountering places they couldn't grow they sought harder to prevent others from entering those places too. Some of the characteristics of the vines are purely literal, whilst others include the metaphorical as well.

Three years is all that separates Seluna and her two closest friends, Rose and Laura, with Seluna being the oldest at just seventeen. Strictly speaking Seluna wasn't certain they'd known one another well or long enough to be friends. Laura is the youngest at sweetest at just fourteen, Rose being the most outwardly cynical at sixteen. All three girls were baptised in a conflagration of fire within just a few days of each other, enduring at their age a disgraceful reflection of the aspects of their choked life. The younger girls first referred to her as the new girl, when in actual fact they'd been there a mere few days longer. Able to animate objects so they could move in ways that are mimicry to their live counterparts, but without a known pattern or method, Seluna just knew that it happens mostly when it wanted to, and that she appeared to be the cause. Given none of the girls imprisoned inside Silver's walls are allowed sentimental or 'overstimulating' objects, it wasn't easy to practice enough to make it so that it was anything more than every now and then. There is a few other things that separated Seluna from her friends, such as her ability to see better in the dark than the average person could.

None of that seemed to matter overly much, not when at the end of the day her windows still had bars over them too. Her age difference also graced her with a few more inches in height, enough to allow her to see over the bottom lip of the window frames to see things of interest or import. But that was only when inhabiting her friends' room. The attic garret she's sequestered in isolation from any other rooms, many absent of occupants where she could've been housed instead, didn't have anything interesting to take notice of, not when she's the only person up there. Privacy can only go so far in ameliorating the harsh coldness, exacerbated by having a chimney run through the room, where no fire would ever be allowed and it instead just let in the cold air. Repairs are a thing that evidently the budget couldn't handle, no one could tell where the funds from admissions and treatment actually went. Anything that might enrich their time but cost money (or not), in however small quantities didn't matter, the proposed expenditure became just another of the longest list in existence that detailed what is too stimulating for the inmates alleged fragility of mind.

The girls might be seen by some as nihilistic or overly concerned with conspiracies, but it is a very real possibility that simply being at Silver Hall was sufficient enough to prematurely end your life. After all, who'd there be to initiate investigations into their deaths when nobody saw their families anymore, not once

you made it to the nastiest side of Silver's walls. Not even the birds or squirrels that frequented isolated buildings were willing to run the risks of being perched on and in its roof space. Between the nurses who were never wrong and the doctors who liked to consider patients as live guinea pigs for untested and often dangerous 'treatments', the risks that were greater than the unending list of objects that pose a risk, were the ones you had to be warriest of, and were never found to be written down whilst still in the experimental stages they were here; lest there be actual proof of the abuses metted out within it's walls. Inside Silver's walls it was decidedly more dangerous than without.

When doctors said that a patient would be feeling better soon, what they neglected to say was that those patients might not be feeling much of anything at all. How this translated to feeling better is only ever the thoughts of those who'd never been treated in the same ways. Inmates in prison didn't have the worry of being test subjects in some crazed doctor's motivations to make a name for themselves. They also experienced socialising in timeframes that considered thirty-minutes a day as too much stimulation for lunatics, as nurse Cutter continually liked to remind them of. Nurse Cutter's opinions could be summed up by the comment Seluna recalls her making on the first day she'd been escorted inside during her admission. On seeing the glass from one of the many broken windows, she'd noted: "Bad enough patients try to get out. But them big shards of glass on the floor is just an invitation to slice themselves open... Miserable mess to clean up it is, too." It took little time to realise it wasn't the glass she was talking about, many a patient sunk to the lowest of lows, to places where they'd do anything to escape these walls.

It was the walk through the halls and places on their way to her room that first day that'd prompted her to query the vines finding a way inside through the broken glass of yet another broken window when she learnt all she was ever likely to know about the choking vines. The enormous and overbearing nurse Cutter, who'd taken no time to allow Seluna the opportunity to think she might've cared, had described them as forbidden and none of her concern. Seluna supposed nothing more than the name of the place need be said when said signs read: "Silver Hill: Lunatic Asylum for Unmanageable Females". She's also pretty much certain that none of the flyers or brochures to prospective buyers included anywhere in the fine print that their ticket is likely a one-way trip. What Silver had that was likely missing from almost any other place for unmanageable girls, is a bigot fascist doctor heading up the entire asylum with the propensity to manufacture symptoms and diagnoses to suit the paying clientele's views about the girls in their family who won't curtail their dreams to live only the lives those families set out for them. Add in prophetic nonsense from a fortune teller regularly consulted by a superstitious head doctor and you have the recipe for experiences that will ninety-nine out of a hundred times, irreparably destroy the lives subjected to it.

With few exceptions the majority of girls considered unmanageable, in the pretense of the institute's names, are only so because they fought against a family who pursued lives for them that they did not want. For example, young Laura protested being married off to a cruel and abusive man. At fourteen every other girl understood her views, unfortunately her family would not. Some patients come in on beds and go out on them too. The key difference being that the outbound beds were better described as gurneys. They also carried bodybags instead of sheets, a threadbare blanket and a pillow long forgotten what it was like to have enough stuffing to be called comfortable. Regardless of the correct mental states of the girls sentenced to Silver when they arrive, the same isn't likely if they depart. Failure to listen to so-called reason can result in solitary confinement: a pitch black room with padded walls and chains to restrain movement about the blackness, with no more than a single meal with sparse fluids when they're 'remembered' and no sanitation at all. Yes you heard it right, none. You can hold it in or make a mess of yourself, but there's no place for you to go. The despotic ways that most girls made it inside in the first place, plus the ways it is run for all the girls, ensures the minds of Silver's patrons of broken regardless of whether they were to begin with.

As Seluna begins her motions within the asylum certain aspects of her life begin appearing. Forming a

tentative pattern, one where it's necessary to seek further confirmation, it's apparent that she's a child of the night. Better able to function as the drowsiness of the day sets with the sun, aspects are heightened and further differences between her and those around her come to light as intonated above. But the benefits afforded by her 'condition' become mired like the other girls receiving Silver's standard treatment program. With her returning memories of her first introduction to the doctors methods the usage of Sodium Pentathol comes to mind. Awakening in a recovery hold with numerous other beds and girls ranging in ages as low as twelve, and possibly lower should she be given the time to check in with some of the other girls younger than herself, Seluna has the distinct impression that whatever makes her different has also afforded a better recovery. Be that as it may, Seluna could not fathom and girls sentenced within could ever know enough to warrant the usage of such a tactic.

That is not to suggest that she fares well, it's just that she fares better. The pattern of the questions whilst still vague did form a picture of what they were looking for. If at the time Seluna understood herself better she might've made the connections quicker; it's hard to not imagine that they were looking for one such as her, one with links to the night that differentiate them from other people. Talks overheard that are as vague as the things she knows about herself, do make a scary picture that is 'The One' the doctor is looking for.

Treatments that weren't with the good doctor were no more than brainless think-tanks looking to brainwash the girls into believing that their doctor was a god, and what was the ideal social picture of a good female.

Bored from a bout of isolation enforced by the staff for being wilful and nearly getting caught whilst trying to hatch a plan for the rescue of her youngest friend, Seluna finds her way into places the staff does not know of. Exploration leads to blackened plants, gardens and vines, a tranquil paradise amongst a place bathed in the practices of creating crazy where it was not before. Seluna produces reactions from the vines that seek to hurt all others, save perhaps the boy found inexplicably swimming in a fountain pond in waters that should barely be above freezing. Dym asks her things and reacts in ways never before encountered to the things she says, speaking mystically about upcoming events and for an age of his people having lost someone, that when spoken of by the staff of Silver it sounds like disaster instead of saviour.

Queens, goddesses, mysterious creatures, the one, blackened life stealing vines, and final procedures worse than the electro-shock therapy, among other adverse procedures, become the words of rumours, whispers, prophecy and doom. Something is coming that was suspected to have begun seventeen-years ago. One side of the equation sees it as something to be heralded, whilst the other sees it as something that must be stopped. In between them is a torturous place mired in practices of crazed experimentation on a bunch of so-called unmanageable girls who've not long received an admitted inmate (for lack of a better word) who sees it as her responsibility to save as many of them that she can, before the doctor's and nurses' practices kill or irreparably damage them.

Outside the actuality of the plot and storyline there's a significant metaphor of the disenfranchisement and subjugation of the socially ideal image which produces the correct functioning of the female brain and the behaviours it permits. There's a pseudo-scientific analogy of the ancient psychological adherence to the humors which were once said to control women's behaviours. Hysteria and melancholy were among the greatest go to explanations of the respective times. Independent free-thinking women have long been harried and persecuted for their ideas and desire to control their lives. From burning at the stake to exorcism and the plethora of other ways society has tried to maintain control, its millennia old practices by people seeking to control women's lives. Despite the so-called enlightenment that most cultures have said to undergone, their archaic and dangerous practices still live on today. The system provided in an analogous way herein is likely from around a century ago, not that this means it isn't still happening now.

There's also the issue of adversity and friendship, how the latter forms the bonds and bridges of the former,

between people who might not otherwise be little more than acquaintances. The trials that the girls face, or more accurately the inmates are subjected to, are like glue in the ways they are capable of bonding together those who'd otherwise never give the time of day to each other. Friendships are formed in the two most broadly summarised ways of choice and adversity. Choice is the most frequent method and involves the conscious decision by two parties to like who they meet enough to form a link, what is voluntarily formed by each of those involved but tends to be fleeting more often than it is lasting. That is, we make so many more friends than we actually keep. If choice is the measuring stick that is used in making and maintaining friendships then it can be very fluid, moving toward or away as the parties change and grow. If change is sufficient enough to alter the way we look at and approach life, these changes can bring about the end of some friendships that no longer stand the tests of time and change.

Adversity on the other hand tends toward stronger bonds that are largely unchosen. Friendships form without active choices to like others based on interests and similarities. When these are subjected to changes in either party, whether it be one or both, then the friendships often morph with that change. Perhaps because choice wasn't involved in the making of said friendships it doesn't come into the reasons of keeping those friendship. Whether conscious, subconscious or no active part at all, the friends made in adversity have an enduring nature not as frequently seen as those made by choices. That is, friendships formed by hardships endure and are much more resistant to the tests of time and change. Of course these observations are generalities, in both cases there are the exceptions to the rule, as there is for anything relating to the complexities of behaviours. There are the bests of friends chosen that endure any boundary encountered, as there are those friendships formed in hardship that fail once either party returns to the more normal characteristics of the self, which are too incongruous to permit friendship once the adversity is removed.

In other more meaningful components to the storylines there is the very well illustrated expose, come memorial, for the horrifying and blackest of stains on medicine's capacities to create harm and death when their doctors, nurses, other personnel, and the discipline itself reduce human beings to nothing more than so-called conditions and test subjects to further skills and or knowledge. Labelling a patient with a diagnosis might work in offering greater chances that doctors and medicine remain objective, but they do also introduce an artificial identification of a person who is anything but artificial. Whilst the atrocious events herein might be fictitious in their current usage, it is not to say that it hasn't happened historically, and in much more covert ways, still happens today. Cadavers aren't the only types of human bodies used by medicine in learning about the human body. Hartlandia, the alternate universe where the story takes place, could just as easily have been Earth from the time of the first collaboration of physicians as doctors with authority over the human condition back in the dark ages, winding throughout time to the last century conclusively; and maybe even the current century in locations around the world where transparency of operations within the industry are absent.

Priests hear the sins and mistakes of the religiously inclined, judges and lawyers defend or enact punishments for the people who make mistakes of the legal kind, but all too often do doctors bury there mistakes, coronial inquests left behind in hidden handshakes. Culpability between those three examples of mistakes differs significantly, and more greatly the moment you start winding the clock back through recorded history. When people speak of asylum they're more speaking of what goes on there than they are who goes there. Given society has prejudices toward those defined by their current times as insane or lunatics, or both, it isn't any wonder why they construct isolates the examples of human condition that doesn't meet their flowery perceptions of normal versus those defined as sick. Yet when those same people think of the savagery of war-torn countries with refugees that are in need of political asylum, the word carries much less harder perceptions regarding its meaning and a great deal more charity than sanction. The hypocrisy is that in both cases the asylum people are seeking alternatives to places they can no longer safely live, but one is voluntarily made whilst the other is rarely voluntary. Changing operation words like asylum to institute fools

very few, the latter carrying as many connotations as the former.

Approaching Night on the surface is an entertaining read about a young girl sent to the direst place to learn who she was, and thus who she is now. In a time when unmanageable is a diagnosis seeking to affect changes that make these people more malleable to the expectations of others we're treated to some of the ways the sane come to believe they might be insane. The plot is both captivating and eye opening. Easy to get lost in the journey it gets harder to put the book down the further you read. With important concepts and hidden analyses in the words you can read between the lines, introspective embarrassment begins to set in over what humans as a species are capable of. Broad fantasy themes and supernatural characters make for an enjoyable read, whilst your conscience ponders the very real fiction contained within the book. Ilana has written a masterful book and series opener in an environment where savagery occurs, and yet the resilience of human nature up to and before the period when it becomes broken is testament to the wrongly accused. Five stars without doubt or hesitation, the duality of the book is sufficient alone to warrant the highest rating there is.

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### **Gypsy Madden says**

Beautifully atmospheric with creepy hallways of a gothic asylum with a garden with blackened vines trailing everywhere, not to mention remotely stuck in the middle of the moors at wintertime. But rather than committing to Victorian England, the author gave her country the preposterous name of Hartlandia. (Honestly, I found myself smothering a laugh each time the name popped up.) But even though it's supposed to be set in a fantasy world, it is still home to Earth's Roman and Greek myths. The largest complaint I had with this was just how dense the heroine was. I mean, things were practically screaming at her in bright lights, but she dismissed things each and every time (ie. She couldn't possibly be the moon goddess mentioned in the beginning and that everyone seems to be searching for, especially when she can see in darkness and is stronger at night, and the lurker that the doctor was talking about couldn't possibly be her new friend randomly lurking in the pond out back and obviously doesn't belong at a girl's asylum). And the poetry at odd points was corny, too. The romance interest was practically a cameo role with him stuck in a pond and beyond clichéd talking cryptically. In fact, I really wondered why the author bothered to put him in at all other than to be eye candy. And it also suffered from slow, leisurely pacing. I was all the way up to the 3/4th point waiting for the pacing to pick up. The last two chapters felt totally tacked on just to wrap things up and introduce the rest of the series, setting up new characters and new information for it (making it feel really scripted rather than letting the story flow to a natural ending).

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### **Robyn Gaye-Murphy says**

Poor Seluna has no idea why she has been taken to this horrific asylum named Silver Hill. She becomes friends with two girls Rose and Launa who are no more insane than she is. The doctor is scary to me, he is insane himself and his main nurse Nurse Cutter is scary in her sheer size and brutality. In one way Seluna doesn't mind being isolated in her room at the top of the house as she prefers to be alone. None of this makes sense to her and girls keep disappearing. Oh please read this as I can't do it justice as Ilana Waters wrote a novel that got me so involved I was unable to put it down til I finished it. At one stage Seluna tells her new friends what she calls a ghost story. That was very good and I felt like going back to it when things became too scary for me. I'm so glad I read this otherworldly novel which unsettled me right until the end. Well done Ilana Waters!

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### **Dominique Kyle says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Which was a bit of a surprise as I don't tend to read 'fantasy other worlds' ones. But it wasn't so much as another world, just Victorian times in our own world re-invented as a classic gothic horror story. So basically – how to describe it? Take the school days section of Jane Eyre, The Little Princess by Frances Hodgeson Burnett, The Yellow Wallpaper (and if you've never read that short story by Charlotte Perkins Hillman your education is sadly lacking) mix it all up with One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and a dose of 'Carry On Screaming' and you've pretty much got it. Sprinkle on some poetry of Keats and some Greek and Roman mythology and what's not to love? Unless you're of a nervous disposition and then maybe better skip it!

The author helpfully explains in an afterword, that if you have a mental illness, it's all very modern now and nothing in this book is going to happen to you! Though sadly it wasn't as long ago as Victorian times that a lot of this would have. When I started my first psychiatric placement in the mid 1980's the hospital still had 'insane asylum' written on every item including the laundry baskets. There was still a patient there whose mother had been admitted 70 years before for 'moral insanity' (having a baby out of wedlock folks!) and the baby had stayed on and grown up there and was still there in her old age.

When I did my first learning disability placement the same year, I was told that only 10 years before, the inmates were kept 20 to a room, left naked all day, and taken out into a courtyard to be hosed down with cold water once a day. Now they had individual houses and key nurses. I asked how long it had taken to adjust. Apparently it took 5 years before anyone could leave an ornament out, as the occupants of the houses had been deprived of personal possessions for so long that they'd take everything that wasn't nailed down and hide it under their mattresses for fear it would be taken away.

In my first professional job in a psychiatric hospital that had been in existence since 1750, someone I worked with told me that her mother used to work there too in the 1960s, I guess before all the effective medication was developed. Her mother came home black and blue, day after day from all the violent assaults on her, and the patients were managed, basically just by wearing them out. They had to put their boots on and go out in the courtyard and were made to walk round in circles continuously until lunch, and then the same again in the afternoon.

A friend of ours was given a lobotomy in the 1950's to cure epilepsy. It left her simple.

A Canadian friend of mine had a slightly deformed hand, two fingers missing. She told me that until the 1970's she would have been forcibly sterilised by the health service as not being suitable to reproduce (a government policy).

So be glad you live now, folks, if you live in a country with an advanced health system... You can enjoy this book safe in the knowledge that it can't happen to you.

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### **Angala Fox says**

I received a free copy of this book and voluntarily chose to review.

This was a great YA fantasy. The story pulled me in right away with its page turning mystery, spine tingling suspense, and edge of your seat action. I didn't want to put this down. Definitely a must read.

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### **MJ says**

1?? The ideas good, but I'm afraid she lost me when she stated it's a similar but different world called... 'Hartlandia'... with equally inventive 'Northernlands' and 'Easternlands'. Plus, the only real reasons that for 'this alternate reality' style seems to be to explain why it would be ok for 'troubled', aka independent, girls to be shipped off to an abusive madhouse and forgotten by the world, to explain why the moon was full all the time, and to have a reason for modern thoughts and speech could be used in a 'similar to 1800's' world. There were gaps aplenty and lots of pretty ribbons to conveniently tie those gaping holes up in an imitation of not being TSTL.

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### **Jojo says**

This was a really dark story but still engaging. I appreciated the perspective the author took with the main character. One could identify with the wayward thinking of people who were ignorant to the supernatural.

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### **Kimberly C. Winslow says**

#### **Good Read!**

Nice twist on Greek mythology. Loved the creativity and tragic depths the author went to; to express the depravity the other characters were capable of. 4 stars because the time period and place were so murky.

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### **Heather Rizkallah says**

#### **Wonderful Read**

What would you do if you learned you are a goddess reincarnated. But your family locked you up in an insane asylum to help you get control of your powers. Seluna must defeat the head doctor and save herself from his evil plans to end her

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### **Tonja Drecker says**

This is a darker story set in a place screaming with creepy possibilities--an asylum, and one with tons of secrets and eerie characters.

The main character is a seventeen year old girl named Seluna, who isn't quite sure why she got stuck in the dismal institute. She's an easy character to sympathize with, not only because of her situation, but despite everything, she's pretty level-headed. She has 'talents' but isn't stupid enough to let the world know about it, and she's not the type to believe everything anyone tells her. Of course, she makes a few bad decisions and

has a couple of quirks, but it's exactly this type of thing which makes her more realistic.

The setting in this book sent chills down my spine. The descriptions picked out the right amount of detail to let me sink into Seluna's world and feel the icy shadows. The deeper one gets into the book, the more unsettling the world becomes. And that's perfect.

I really enjoyed the other characters as well. Each has their very own personality and ticks. Even with their oddities, they grew on me. This made the story that much more heart-wrenching when the plot starts to thicken.

This isn't only about creepiness, though. Like a sprinkle of fairy dust, fantasy dances around the edges adding a touch of brightness and hope to off-set the weight of the rest of the plot. As things blacken over into evil pure, this tiny touch is what I found makes the story so alluring, especially since there were times that the layers of dark secrets really piled up. It's not clear who Seluna should trust and the tension of whether or not she'll make it safely through, mounts with every page.

I recommend this to fans of slightly darker stories, ones who still love a bit of fairies, magic and other pieces of fantasy. And although this does work as a stand alone, I can't wait to see where all of this takes Seluna next.

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### **Donna says**

I discovered Approaching Night by Ilana Waters when I read the Myths and Magic boxset, and it was my favourite story - it had horror, mystery, a touch of romance (but clean!), a strong female lead and a great ending: all the elements needed for an awesome story, and the author combined them perfectly. I'm definitely going to keep reading the series to find out what happens to Seluna next!

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### **Jennifer Baysinger says**

Labeled as a love story, this is not. Not badly written almost afraid of the unhappiness book 2 might bring.

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### **Nancy Phy says**

#### **Fascinating**

This is a fascinating fantasy with some wonderful characters and some very evil characters. I can't wait to read book 2 to find out what happens next.

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**Natasha says****Best story ever**

I really loved this story the characters were amazing . I could hardly stop reading until the end and can't wait to read more of islands stories

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**Kevin says**

Wonderful re-mix of mythology and new story-telling.

Recommended.

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