

Muerte, one Jacob Jenkins of Arizona, has a very bad idea.  
TITLE: America Is The Dark Souls of Things You Can Hike Across  
EPISODE ART: how.jpg  
Song? Doug Moreland -- Die In The Desert

BLACK LIVES MATTER.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jTIMERf0Ohhgy08ZgfyxGQWuoTulorKcweXrppoxTR0>

Get in touch: [ephemeraTHEpodcast@gmail.com](mailto:ephemeraTHEpodcast@gmail.com)

<http://storiesfromtheinter.net/about>

<http://storiesfromtheinter.net/zine> (zine 2 is out!)

<https://www.patreon.com/ephemerapodcast>

Audio engineering is generously provided by Miguel Tanhi of Much Different NY, a live podcast recording venue in Brooklyn, NY.

I was on vacation, so please forgive the slightly worse audio on my part this episode. Next episode will sound as warm and gentle as you've become used to.

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Muerte's first thread, soliciting a name for his project:

<https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3712401>

Muerte's thread:

<https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3714480>

The FYAD thread making fun of Muerte:

<https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3720872>

Muerte's Fundrazr:

[https://fundrazr.com/2yYS4?ref=sh\\_54ho83\\_ab\\_06Di176j3jx06Di176j3jx](https://fundrazr.com/2yYS4?ref=sh_54ho83_ab_06Di176j3jx06Di176j3jx)

Hobo Nick's lessons learned video, in which he describes the very unrealistic circumstances that let him keep going:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2Pw521AYB0&feature=youtu.be>

Hobo Nick's blog (written by his mom):

<http://worldinstrides.blogspot.com/>

Some of Muerte's - and SA goons' - photos:

<https://storiesfromtheinter.net/post/628457004882624512>

Goon 'atomicthumbs' goes looking for the cart (lots of nice photos of the park):

<https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3714480&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=77#post446000686>

Please note: I have consolidated a couple of muerte's exchanges with goons into single quotes from Muerte. The meaning has been preserved, and I've experimented more with doing this lately (see also 'Cain' 's text). If you want the original and full text, I've linked to it. Does this seem fair?

[sound bed underneath this]

I recently decided that I was unhappy at my job, so like any sane person I put a 30 day notice and decided I would walk across America from LA to Daytona Beach Florida. Part of my trip is for personal reasons, I want to find who I am as a person and what truly makes me happy in life. Another big reason of doing this trip is that I want to raise awareness for mental health illness, something I've struggled with my entire life. I assumed everyone would think that I was crazy, but the reaction has been the complete opposite, I've received support from my entire family and friends and even strangers that just happened to see my page shared on Facebook and donated to my cause. So far I've raised \$2300 in a little over 4 days. My end goal besides surviving is to write a book about my travels, that nobody will read. I've received very interesting questions from some people so far so I figured I would open it up to SA. I'm departing for LA on the 14th of May. **[BUNNYBREAD]**

That's our focus for this episode, a Something Awful goon called 'Muerte'. This is another infamous goon story, and it's a pretty good one. Muerte's big idea is to raise awareness for mental illness, in particular bipolar, but also just a gestalt sense of the mentally ill, and , which I don't like! We'll get into that more soon. I'm Stephanie Bee, and this is Ephemera.  
[intro sting]

For now, Muerte takes some questions from SA goons.

This seems really interesting to me, though I'm not sure how feasible it is.

Have you ever hiked for more than a week straight? How much gear will you be carrying?

Are you planning on camping outside or would you be sleeping in motels etc?  
**[SHAM BAM BAMINA]**

It is absolutely feasible, I'm following a similar route that Hobo Nick took from Florida to California. I have a 75L pack and all of my gear is extra light weight. I'll also be pushing a cart for at least the desert portion of the trip to carry water and extra food when I need it. I'll be stealth camping most of the trip as I want to get the full experience.

That looks like a pack you'd take for a camping excursion lasting a couple of days maybe a week.

Also, there is literally no way the OP is physically capable of doing this. I knew someone who planned to hike the Americas Trail and he spent 6 months getting in shape, talking to people who've done it, working out where he'd stop and when etc. [...]

It's less a personal quest than someone who's gone manic and is making a ton of impulse decisions. **[SHELL GAME]**

THERE IS A SUBSTANTIAL CHANCE THAT YOU WILL DIE IF YOU TRY AND DO THIS, BECAUSE YOU ARE PLANNING AROUND BEST CASE SCENARIOS, NOT WORST. [ALEX]

Sorry, but you have no idea what you are talking about. I'm not looking for people to talk me out of it, it is happening no matter what. I thought people would be interested in this. I have planned for every scenario, and you would know that if you asked questions rather than just assume.

I don't know, man. At least consider doing this on a bicycle. [GANYMEDE]

I do not wish to do this on a bicycle, that is still moving to fast. I want to give people who may be passing by an opportunity to meet me and get to know what I'm doing. [...] If I get splattered by a car I guess that is the chance I take. I want to believe in human kindness again and I hope that if I am seriously injured I'll receive the assistance I need.

Muerte's packing isn't the only disaster here. His 'cart' is just a bicycle trailer, he has no idea how much water he needs, and his planned route takes him through the Texas and Arizona desert in August, which might literally be suicide to walk in? Goons finally talk him into taking a more sensible route, repeatedly suggesting that he try walking the American Discovery Trail or the Pacific Crest Trail, two established and well-regarded cross-country hiking paths that cut all the way across Turtle Island. Muerte relents, for the first time in the thread:

I am taking the American Discovery Trail to St. Louis and then planning a route down to Florida. It will take longer but be much less hassle. If I don't attempt it then I will be homeless, as my lease ends on the 15th and my last day of work is the 14th. Either way I guess you will get an interesting story.

Muerte's packing continues to be a disaster, though; he insists on not bringing a camping stove, a decision that's so absurd, that so many goons pile on about, that he feels he has to defend himself:

I've survived until the age of 26 and I've never cooked a single thing on a stove, actually I have cooked macaroni before. Its not about not knowing how to cook, its about I'm a very picky eater and have literally lived on pizza, hamburgers, hotwings and chips my entire life. I'm sure you think I'm exaggerating but the people who know me would attest to this statement. Stop acting like a dipshit. I can pick up a stove at any point if I decide I want one.

Goons make fun of him, again, because of course they do. Muerte ignores them and talks about how he has a spot on his hometown's radio station to promote his walk, which he's pretty excited about.

[I]t's time to try something new. Each day I'm on that trail no matter how bad will be better than sitting in a cubicle answering emails wasting my life away behind a desk.

He then proceeds to discuss a violent fantasy of 'escalating the situation' if someone breaks into his tent to attack him, and insults a goon for not being as good at going outdoors as he is. Things are not going well, and Muerte soon abandons his thread for a private facebook group of friends and family. This group, for the rest of the story, will remain absolutely 100% positive and encouraging. Just remember that.

Well this certainly blew up, I'm closing the thread feel free to make a new one to watch me fail.

Fortunately, a couple of goons have infiltrated his facebook group. It's through them that we have the rest of this story, and personally I'm quite glad for that, because this, dear listeners, is where it starts getting *really* good.

Despite saying that he would leave on Friday the 15th, Muerte up and goes two days earlier, on the 13th of May, 2015. He starts by driving to San Francisco, where he has family, who are going to see him off on his trip. He stays the night, and the next, and in fact leaves on the 16th, a Saturday, when he begins his hike across America on the Coast Trail, north of San Fran.

About ten kilometres into the hike, Muerte's little bicycle cart breaks. He posts an image to facebook, captioned '6 miles in RIP cart', but the break is actually in - uh, okay, you folks know the kind of bicycle cart I mean, right? For kids, or dogs, and it has two big wheels and a bar that it's towed with, and there's a little wheel underneath the bar so it doesn't drag on the street. Muerte broke *that* wheel, and even though his 'cart' would still work if he lifted one end, and pulled it, like he's supposed to, but since he insists on pushing it and bearing all the weight down on the tiny wheel, he abandons it on the trail, along with his water, for some unsuspecting park ranger to find. Littering is an extreme no-no in this kind of hiking context, and what Muerte has done is so much worse.

Muerte posts a photo of a handwritten note on his own facebook page. He explains the cart situation in his own words and writes up his day:

5/16/15.

Some of the trails are uneven and it's making it difficult with the cart. The front wheel cracked while ascending a difficult hill and it has made the last 5 miles or so extremely difficult. I about 1.5 miles from the camp at Glen where I plan to ditch my cart. It feels as though the cart has slowed me greatly. I feel ill be able to cover more ground without it.

I've met some fantastic people on the trail already and have had much interest in what I'm doing. The landscape is wonderful, and I'm in great spirits. I'm going to have some dinner and call it a night. Although it is only 5:48 I'm exhausted from pushing a cart with a broken wheel. Total miles today 10.

He does the same photo of Sharpie scrawl upload thing the next day, too:

5/17/15.

I woke up today knowing the cart was no longer a viable option. I tried to reach a road where I could signal a ranger to pick it up but the cart became immovable. I saved as much as I could but will need to lighten my load again tomorrow. I was able to hike through some amazing woods and prairie. Total miles today 15.5.

On the 18th, he returns to making regular ass text posts on his facebook.

Quite exhausted. I'm somewhere on the Bolinas ridge trail and it has been nothing but up hill. The topography map shows it should be a level elevation but it is not. I just stopped to chat with some bikers and they informed me it's still nothing but up hill for some time. My left knee is aching quite a bit but I'm trying to rest when I need it and staying positive. It's about 45 degrees up here which feels great while hiking. Still in good spirits even with the struggles.

Listeners: Muerte does not have a topographical map. He believes he does, and that's why he assumed a mountain bike trail, with a thousand feet of climb, would be flat. But he doesn't have the right kind of map. It's a fundamental failure to prepare for the cross country hike he's allegedly trying to do.

Muerte keeps posting photos and status updates on the 18th; he eventually reaches a ranger station he's been headed to.

I burst into tears when I reached the ranger station it was a very long up hill hike through blinding fog."

He walks another 10.5 miles, making his total 36 miles in three days. He intends to take another 'rest day', like he did with his San Francisco relatives, at the ranger station, and his journal entry for the 19th reflects that:

5/19/15.

Took a rest day at the Pantoll ranger station. Filled up on food and I found an outlet to charge my phone. Campers stared at me probably wondering why some guy was wrapped in a blanket atop the hill staring down on them. The station also has garbage cans making it easier to lighten my pack even more. It also has clean water to refill my pack. The wind doesn't stop blowing, here at the elevation of 1600 feet. Can't wait to hit the trail tomorrow and hopefully reach the golden gate bridge. Total miles today 0.

Despite taking an extra rest day at the ranger station - oh, those poor rangers - Muerte is still planning to walk 20 miles a day, something he's maybe *literally* never done before. His actual pace works out to 12 miles a day, and ten to fifteen might be a more doable target. It's certainly the pace goons *wanted* him to shoot for. But that doesn't really matter, for reasons that will become clear in Muerte's next, and final, letter. Unlike the other letters, written in marker on a notebook, photographed and uploaded to facebook, this one is a facebook text post. It's also his longest dispatch.

[sound bed?]

"Please Read: Well, today is possibly one of the most disappointing days of my life. I woke up at 7 a.m. Ready to hit the trail and make an 8 mile trek to the Golden Gate Bridge. I walked down to the bathroom to freshen up and I just felt off balance I figured I had a bad night sleep or something and the next thing I know my entire left side of my body went limp and I fainted on the steps. Some hikers nearby saw me and said I looked awful and helped get me an Uber ride back to my aunts. For the first time in 4 days I was able to look at my body and it isn't good. My hips are literally black and blue and I'm constantly light headed. I have other issues that aren't pg as well. Then to top my day off I went to get some food in my stomach and my car overheated and popped coolest and smoke all over the place. I'm so disappointed in myself and the fact I let everyone down. I know people were counting on me and backed me with donations and support. After having time to think about it once I lost my cart my mission was kind of lost. No longer would people stop to talk to me or take interest in what I was doing to them I was just another hiker. Maybe it is best to take a more direct approach to helping people. I don't plan to stop hiking or in my goal of raising awareness and money for mental health. What the last 5 days have taught me is invaluable and I'm going to start treating my body right and I really want to take a little time off every year to do section hikes. I wanted this badly enough I quit my job and left everything behind. I own just the clothes on my back, some camping supplies and a broken car. Words can't describe how awful I feel right now. I'm going to start my own foundation that shows people who struggle the joys of camping and how it can refresh the human spirit.[...] Please do not leave negative comments I've had a very emotional and exhausting day as it is. Once again I'm sorry for letting you all down. I'm not giving up though."

And with this, Muerte ends his fateful walk across the country.

he's admitting to crying after walking up a hill in the bay area fog that a hiking trail site called "a moderate trail" and "one of the best trails around San Francisco to walk your dog". **[FRANK]**

"I'm not giving up though", Says Man In The Literal Process Of Giving Up At That Exact Moment **[JORDAN]**

Four fucking days, everyone. I hope this thread is a lesson to the devastation that is bipolar and helps with some awareness at least. God damn what a horrible thing. **[JULIA]**

Obviously, we can all laugh at the stubborn fool with the impossible goal. Let's do that now. [Nelson Muntz 'ha ha!'] But it wouldn't be an Ephemera if I just pointed and moved on. The show has talked previously, a couple times, about mentally unwell people deciding to uproot their lives and make grand dramatic gestures. It's something I recognize, but it's not something I recognize fondly. The anonymous wizardchan poster I decided to call 'Cain' only walked for two days before breaking down and buying a 'mamachari', or cheap bicycle. Muerte's need to talk to other people on the trail, while hiking, is such a pathetically transparent need to justify himself and his decisions, and I think it doomed him from the start. He fancies himself, I think, as some kind of adventurer, but, again, is totally unaware that he needs to eat food if he's been exercising. All he eats, one day, is just some raisins and peanuts, which I guess is a tolerable

mid-hike snack, but experienced hikers on the same trail are loading up with gas station honey buns, mac and cheese, and other calorically dense foods.

When he collapses at the ranger station, it's because he's absolutely uninformed about how to feed his body, and he sticks around for a 'rest day' rather than eating the calories he needs to recover.

So I have to call it like I see it, and say that this really sounds like a manic episode to me, just like Cain's decision to fly to Japan did. Muerte seems to have spent more energy, pre-departure, on tweeting at the Ellen Show hoping they'll cover him, begging Burger King to sponsor his continent-spanning hike, and smugly ignoring all the goons giving him advice. This confirms to me that it's about optics, about being *perceived* to do something meaningful, heroic. I hate that, by the way. Just hate it.

Muerte's hero is a guy called Hobo Nick, who allegedly made a similar cross-country hike. Hobo Nick was exactly the kind of guy you're thinking of when you hear the name 'hobo nick', and the rumours are that his parents tried very hard to keep him alive while he was doing it. Hobo Nick describes lots of instances of 'trail magic', a real hiking term for random and unsolicited acts of kindness to long-distance hikers. "It seriously feels like my mom called a bunch of people along my route and hired them to help me,"[SHOGS] he told an interviewer, explaining that multiple cars stopped along the road to talk to him and give him hundred dollar bills. Trail magic is real, but, man, some of Hobo Nick's anecdotes sound just a little too convenient for me to trust. But Hobo Nick, who set out with no equipment, lived an arduous life for the half a year he was on the trail. He dumpster dived for food, and went hungry for days. I don't think Muerte could pull that off.

I think what appeals to me most, storytelling wise, about this sort of physical personal journey, motivated by mental illness, is the absolute unwavering determination it takes. Cain wanted to watch the world end from a little boat. Muerte wanted to 'raise awareness' for nebulously-defined 'mental health'. In all of his posts on something awful, one of them stands out to me, finally helps me understand his motivation.

I've never had time to think about what I want to do or what kind of job I want. I've always taken the highest paying job I can find and worked it to support the lifestyle I wanted at the time. I want to slow my life down for a bit, stop working 60-70 hour weeks and enjoy life for a bit.

None of Muerte's motivation means he has to do this hike. He works 70 hour weeks at jobs he doesn't care about; of course he's fucking depressed. But he see-saws all the way in the opposite direction, ending his lease and quitting his job to walk to Florida. If he found a hobby, pursued his passions, surely that would be better for him than this four day death march. He doesn't even know how to cook! When he collapses on the trail, two hikers see him and help him hire a taxi to go home. But this human connection, the thing this has all been for, this moment of kindness and common spirit, seems to totally pass him by, and it only rates half a

sentence in his journal. I can't tell if I feel contempt or pity.

By the way, Muerte keeps the 3500 bucks he raised. I think that says it all.

[ending music]

Audio engineering for ephemera is provided by the generous and wonderful Miguel Tanhi. If you like ephemera and want it to thrive, consider supporting the show on patreon. Patronage comes with a few hours of bonus content, the right to perform a voice for the show, and PDF versions of my two zines. There's more details in the show notes. This month, I'm sending Hiking Boot emoji out to Giulio P, Robyn H, Heather T, Bernard S, Aidan D, Ben M, Al O, Erik, Homo Vulgaris, Siberian Pine Hard Wood, Meredith H, Discourse Stu, Matthew B, Drew K, Brady B, Alice, Kevin W, Tankiefactory, and my good friend Franklin West. My sincere thanks to all of my patrons - without you, I wouldn't be able to do the amount of research that makes ephemera as good as it is. And, of course, my thanks to **you**, for listening.

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#### STRUCTURE:

Intro

Sting

First section

Muerte's goes to the park

Muerte's death march through the park

Muerte falls apart and calls it off

Muerte's constant self promo before he leaves; tweeting at the ellen show, wishing burger king would sponsor him,

Discuss 'hobo nick' and 'trail magic'

Segue to / close with a discussion of what intrigues me about people who want to walk long distances. 'Cain' refused to walk after a day or two, getting a 'mamachari', but muerte's fantasies of a captive, friendly audience doomed him from the start.

OR do I instead talk about bipolar? Think on this.....

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MUERTE: [kecske posted:](#)

Would you expand on this a little? Are you expecting to have some kind of heatstroke epiphany about yourself and return home to a suddenly more fulfilling existence?

I've never had time to think about what I want to do or what kind of job I want. I've always taken the highest paying job I can find and worked it to support the lifestyle I wanted at the time. I want to slow my life down for a bit, stop working 60-70 hour weeks and enjoy life for a bit. If I don't figure everything out over the next few months so be it, I'll still have experienced something very few people have and I'll have a story to tell my children. I would much rather have a story to tell than saying I worked in a cubicle for 40 years.

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GOON 'surc': Seriously though, it's like you made this thread for people to talk you out of it, but you don't like that they're being mean when telling you how totally retarded an idea this is. Discarding the information people are providing you about an area that they live in that you do not live in, because that information is "No, this is not a good idea in any way" is not a good idea in any way.

Do you know how to forage for food? How to find water when your water runs out/gets a hole in it/gets stolen? If an emergency situation comes up outside of those, how are you going to deal with it? Why in the world did you think posting an AMA thread for a thing you haven't done, where you are basically soliciting advice instead of having advice or information to give out yourself, would result in people not being jerks?

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GOON 'rabbit hill' asks:

I don't know, man. At least consider doing this on a bicycle. You'll cover more ground in a day, you'll have the means of escaping quickly if you run into any bad situations (vicious animals, vicious people), and if your bike breaks irreparably, you can ditch it and continue on foot as originally planned.

-->MUERTE REPLIES:

I do not wish to do this on a bicycle, that is still moving too fast. I want to give people who may be passing by an opportunity to meet me and get to know what I'm doing. I have family that will mail me supplies that I may not be able to find along my trip. For example if my shoes disintegrate, I'll inform my family of what town I'll be in next and I can have a pair waiting for me. Getting injured is a high possibility, if there wasn't risks in doing this then everyone would do it. I do have a great first aid kit for minor injuries. If I get splattered by a car I guess that is the chance I take. I want to believe in human kindness again and I hope that if I am seriously injured I'll receive the assistance I need.

My brother and father are also investing in <http://www.findmespot.com/en/index.php?cid=100> which is a gps tracking device, that will allow people to follow my trip on google maps as well as alert the police to my exact gps coordinates if I need help.

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MUERTE POSTS HIS GEAR.

GOON 'slo-tek': Taking a fake gun while being a fake hobo is a spectacularly stupid and dangerous idea.

Being a fake hobo is also a miserable idea, go hike/camp somewhere actually nice, with other people tramping around and the infrastructure to support people tramping around. You mentioned wanting to talk to people who were interested in discussing your bold discovery of putting one foot in front of the other. These people are called hikers, and you find them on hiking trails.

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GOON 'tuyop':

75l pack, 35 pounds dry and no camping stove? Hahaha

-->MUERTE REPLIES:

I've survived until the age of 26 and I've never cooked a single thing on a stove, actually I have cooked macaroni before. Stop acting like a dipshit. I can pick up a stove at any point if I decide I want one.

GOON 'scald':

ahahahahahahahahaha, ahahahahahahahahahahahahaha

It is you who are the dipshit, sir. Now I don't mean to be threadshitting but if that is how far your level of personal development has come in 26 years then I'm sure you could think of a few ways to better yourself before you jump to the nuclear option.

-->MUERTE REPLIES:

Its not about not knowing how to cook, its about I'm a very picky eater and have literally lived on pizza, hamburgers, hotwings and chips my entire life. I'm sure you think I'm exaggerating but the people who know me would attest to this statement.

[...]

It seems everyone seems to have the impression that I think this is going to be a stroll in the park and I'm going to just have a smile on my face the entire time. I'm not doing this for the "views" although I will be taking pictures and things of that nature for the people following me. I'm doing this for a cause I believe in and am really motivated about. Will I get discouraged and want to quit? I'm sure I will but I'm challenging myself. If other people can do it so can I. I have a spot on my hometowns radio next week, pretty amped about that. Some of you are happy doing your daily grind of life, I've been there done that and its time to try something new. Each day I'm on that trail no matter how bad will be better than sitting in a cubicle answering emails wasting my life away behind a desk.

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GOON 'serrath':

I'm interested in why you're doing this. You said above that you're interested in contributing to a cause you believe in, could you go into more detail about that?

--->MUERTE REPLIES:

I have many, many reasons for doing this trip. My entire life I've never known what I wanted to do, I've never been passionate about anything. After working numerous jobs and quitting after a year or two of being bored or not satisfied with the work I was doing I've come to a point in my life where I want to do something meaningful. I don't want to sell shoes, put doors on cars, move freight around the world, or sort through donations. I want to do something with my life that has a direct impact on people. There isn't a particular message I want to spread but I want to encourage people who have struggled with any form of mental illness or attempted suicide to feel comfortable talking about it, something it took me 7 years to do.

[...] I feel I need to get more coverage of my trip to attract the attention of organizations, and I'm just now starting to make a little headway into that field. I have a radio spot next Saturday on a radio station in the town I grew up, so I'm really amped for that. I liken this process to applying for a job, I have to prove that I'm worthy of a mutual support.

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GOON 'pentyne':

So this is the journey so far

- Starts his trek by eating at Denny's
- Cart breaks down after 6 miles
- OP is eating trail mix and raisins because he refuses to cook his own food
- Makes it to a ranger station and collapses, having made 24 miles in 3 days
- Spends day 4 sitting around the ranger station thinking everyone is interested in why he's wrapped in a blanket just hanging out
- Is using a map that does not reflect topography
- Still following his '20 Miles a Day' plan
- Is getting nothing but attaboys and praise from his social network and they're all cheering him on despite the red flags
- Tweets about how much he misses IHOP and Waffle House and desperately wants to go there

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GOON 'CJacobs':

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