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Taking Long Strides

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 Limited Information
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It's taken me a long time to get used to drafting *Lorwyn*. It has been one of those formats that just takes getting used to. Somehow, just like triple *Champions of Kamigawa* felt, it's very hard to place your finger on exactly what makes decks win and when your draft picks are actually correct and insightful and not just what you think is best. My win ratio for the first forty or so drafts was way worse than normal and I was losing rating points like a split rice packet.

One of the main problems though is that I still find it hard to pinpoint exactly what changed that has ensured my recent success (I've won around 85% of my last twenty drafts). As someone who prides himself on his analytical skills, especially as I need them to bring my insights to this column, it has been frustrating. The biggest change has been that I think my pick evaluation is finally as close to correct as it can be. My pick orders have slotted and meshed together to produce a cohesive draft strategy, so that I can now identify cross-tribal picks well. This means that the key commons for each tribe need to be taken when you get passed them because they represent the strongest signal. What I mean is that if you get passed a *Stinkdrinker Daredevil* or a *Lys Alana Huntmaster* fourth, take it and go.

Another big step forward, although I made this one a while ago, was when to take the *Vivid lands* and *Springleaf Drum*. I now pick these over any average card, meaning almost all of my decks splash one or two colours if I get passed *Lash Outs*, *Nameless Inversions* and *Oblivion Rings*. On top of all of this, there is simply individual card evaluation—knowing exactly where each rare and uncommon falls into place and when to abandon one strategy for another because of some subtle signal that you would have previously missed.



The internet connection in my new house is shockingly bad meaning it's really a pain to successfully draft and not miss around seven picks on average. This is fine when it comes to winning and losing, but the program I use to record the drafts ceases to function under these conditions. This means that it's been a while since an interesting draft was successfully recorded. I can bring you guys countless drafts of Faerie and Merfolk decks but almost none of these involve difficult picks or topics worth discussing. To all the blue critics out there, I probably end up blue in *Lorwyn* in about 70% of the time, both because it gets passed to me and because it has two of the best tribes. This week, I end up drafting one of the tribes that doesn't get as much limelight as it should; especially as it is one of the best. So let's see.

Pack 1, Pick 1

Stonybrook Angler, Dreamspoiler Witches, Tarfire, Kinsbaile Balloonist, Streambed Aquitects, Axegrinder Giant, Kithkin Greatheart, Wellgabber Apothecary, Gilt-Leaf Seer, Boggart Birth Rite, Zephyr Net, Faerie Tauntings, Thorntooth Witch, Flamekin Harbinger, Wild Ricochet

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No real strength here. A couple of Merfolk and a good Faerie card, but for now I am happy to take the strongest, most flexible card and keep my options open.

Pick: **Tarfire**

Pack 1, Pick 2

Tarfire, Herbal Poultice, Kithkin Greatheart, Oakgnarl Warrior, Hornet Harasser, Elvish Branchbender, Amoeboid Changeling, Kinsbaile Skirmisher, Lace with Moonglove, Kithkin Harbinger, Sylvan Echoes, Seedguide Ash, Secluded Glen, Forest

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Nothing else falls into the same category as the *Tarfire* and it's very easy to follow a first pick with a duplicate. Interestingly, if it wasn't here, I would pick the *Secluded Glen* over the *Seedguide Ash* and the *Kithkin Harbinger* as it leaves me with more options.

Pick: **Tarfire**

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Pack 1, Pick 3

Fistful of Force, Quill-Slinger Boggart, Surge of Thoughtweft, Cloudcrown Oak, Tarfire, Zephyr Net, Scarred Vinebreeder, Gilt-Leaf Seer, Protective Bubble, Ingot Chewer, Hoarder's Greed, Lammastide Weave, Ethereal Whiskergill

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The two four-drops here are great cards but they're both inferior to the removal, and three of a kind is always fun.

Pick: Tarfire



Pack 1, Pick 4

Leaf Gilder, Boggart Sprite-Chaser, Thieving Sprite, Kinsbaile Balloonist, Whirlpool Whelm, Adder-Staff Boggart, Goldmeadow Dodger, Faerie Trickery, Nightshade Stinger, Blades of Velis Vel, Flamekin Spitfire, Vivid Crag

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Looking back at this draft, I make a mistake here. The options are **Kinsbaile Balloonist**, **Flamekin Spitfire**, and **Vivid Crag**. I used to think the Balloonist was a solid card, but I've been pretty disappointed with it recently as it is seldom that there's a good enough guy to lift with it and it's a bit fragile. I've still not had enough experience with the Spitfire but, apart from having a great name, it really is a solid card and better than the Balloonist. At this point though, I've three **Tarfires** so in order to both maximize the chances of the Taxfires making my final deck and increasing the chances of any other splash I might wind up with, I should pick the Vivid land. However, when I did this draft, I thought that the white creature was pretty good.

Pick: Kinsbaile Balloonist

Pack 1, Pick 5

Axegrinder Giant, Lignify, Quill-Slinger Boggart, Bog-Strider Ash, Amoeboid Changeling, Kinsbaile Skirmisher, Lace with Moonglove, Scarred Vinebreeder, Springjack Knight, Elvish Promenade, Crush Underfoot

Pick: Axegrinder Giant

Pack 1, Pick 6

Battlewand Oak, Hurly-Burly, Plover Knights, Paperfin Rascal, Runed Stalacite, Triclopean Sight, Nightshade Stinger, Faultgrinder, Faerie Trickery, Arbiter of Knollridge

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With the simple **Axegrinder Giant** last pick, I'm already beginning to think Giants. **Battlewand Oak** is the card to signal going Treefolk but I don't like them and there are two better cards. **Plover Knights** are amazing but I have a soft spot for the **Arbiter of Knollridge**. Jelger Wieggersma first turned me onto it. It doesn't cost too much if you have some **Stinkdrinker Daredevils**, but even without, it's a massive body that will turn the game around and often, if you were losing, gain you a lot of life. When you have it in your hand early, it allows you to sculpt almost the perfect game plan where you are in no hurry to race. It's better in Merfolk or splashed in Faeries as they tend to be further behind, but it's no slouch in red-white.

Pick: Arbiter of Knollridge



Pack 1, Pick 7

Hillcomber Giant, Stinkdrinker Daredevil, Warren-Scourge Elf, Blades of Velis Vel, Cenn's Heir, Ringskipper, Black Poplar Shaman, Rebellion of the Flamekin, Spinnerock Knoll

An easy and welcome pick here, cementing us within Giants.

Pick: Stinkdrinker Daredevil

Pack 1, Pick 8

Oaken Brawler, Moonglove Winnower, Tideshaper Mystic, Elvish Handservant, Cenn's Heir, Boggart Forager, Sentry Oak, Thorn of Amethyst

Pick: Oaken Brawler

Pack 1, Pick 9

Axegrinder Giant, Kithkin Greatheart, Wellgabber Apothecary, Gilt-Leaf Seer, Boggart Birth Rite, Zephyr Net, Faerie Tauntings

The three cards that aren't first-pick removal that you cannot afford to pass up in Giants are **Stinkdrinker Daredevil**, **Avian Changeling**, and **Kithkin Greatheart**. If all three are in the same pack then, depending on deck

composition, that is also the pick order.

Pick: [Kithkin Greatheart](#)

Pack 1, Pick 10

[Herbal Poultice](#), [Oakgnarl Warrior](#), [Kinsbaile Skirmisher](#), [Lace with Moonglove](#), [Sylvan Echoes](#), [Forest](#)

Pick: [Kinsbaile Skirmisher](#)

Pack 1, Pick 11

[Zephyr Net](#), [Scarred Vinebreeder](#), [Protective Bubble](#), [Ingot Chewer](#), [Lammastide Weave](#)

Pick: [Ingot Chewer](#)

Pack 1, Pick 12

[Boggart Sprite-Chaser](#), [Adder-Staff Boggart](#), [Goldmeadow Dodger](#), [Nightshade Stinger](#)

Pick: [Adder-Staff Boggart](#)

Pack 1, Pick 13

[Lace with Moonglove](#), [Scarred Vinebreeder](#), [Springjack Knight](#)

Pick: [Springjack Knight](#)

Pack 1, Pick 14

[Paperfin Rascal](#), [Triclopean Sight](#)

Pick: [Triclopean Sight](#)

Pack 1, Pick 15

Pick: [Cenn's Heir](#)

This draft got off to a great start with the triple [Tarfire](#). Most people seem to think this means that you should wind up Goblins, but there really are few cards that actually interact with [Tarfire](#). The most compelling of these is [Wort](#), [Boggart Auntie](#) and if you have her, then you don't really care. The only really difficult decision was [Arbiter](#) over [Plover Knights](#). After that, a couple of blank packs forced [Axegrinder Giants](#) and the [Stinkdrinker](#) on me, Giants became the easy way to go.

Pack 2, Pick 1

[Mulldrifter](#), [Lowland Oaf](#), [Lignify](#), [Weed Strangle](#), [Kithkin Healer](#), [Bog Hoodlums](#), [Judge of Currents](#), [Inkfathom Divers](#), [Needle Drop](#), [Soaring Hope](#), [Turtleshell Changeling](#), [Elvish Harbinger](#), [Thundercloud Shaman](#), [Surgespanner](#), [Militia's Pride](#)

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Exactly the card I wanted to open. [Militia's Pride](#) is very powerful, and [Mulldrifter](#) can almost always be splashed, but neither are as powerful as [Thundercloud Shaman](#).

Pick: [Thundercloud Shaman](#)

Pack 2, Pick 2

[Whirlpool Whelm](#), [Leaf Gilder](#), [Adder-Staff Boggart](#), [Wispmare](#), [Streambed Aquitects](#), [Consuming Bonfire](#), [Nightshade Stinger](#), [Faultgrinder](#), [Faerie Trickery](#), [Warren-Scourge Elf](#), [Lairwatch Giant](#), [Vivid Marsh](#), [Shriekmaw](#), [Familiar's Ruse](#)

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I always find it hard to believe people can pass a [Shriekmaw](#), but it is often correct do so—when you're not in black and you have no fixers and there's first-pick removal in your colours. I snap it up here and hope to get the fixers to play it, but I only sacrificed a [Consuming Bonfire](#) to give this very powerful option. Note that it would have been even better had I correctly picked the [Vivid Crag](#) in the first pack.

Pick: [Shriekmaw](#)

Pack 2, Pick 3

[Nath's Elite](#), [Sentinels of Glen Elendra](#), [Smokebraider](#), [Gilt-Leaf Ambush](#), [Moonglove Winnower](#), [Warren-Scourge Elf](#), [Lairwatch Giant](#), [Boggart Forager](#), [Ringskipper](#), [Drowner of Secrets](#), [Pollen Lullaby](#), [Giant Harbinger](#), [Mountain](#)



Pick: Giant Harbinger

Pack 2, Pick 4

Glimmerdust Nap, Warren Pilferers, Soulbright Flamekin, Kithkin Daggerdare, Surge of Thoughtweft, Lace with Moonglove, Blind-Spot Giant, Exiled Boggart, Heal the Scars, Kithkin Harbinger, Sylvan Echoes, Guardian of Cloverdell

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When you go Giants there are two routes that you can take. One is the more aggressive route where **Blind-Spot Giants**, **Avian Changelings** and **Kithkin Greathearts** comprise most of your team. With three tempo-generating **Tarfires** in my pile, this was the route I wanted to take. It seldom comes together, though, and you normally end up with several Daredevil and big giants, but this is not really a problem. **Giant's Ire** is also very powerful in the aggressive version, especially when it only costs two mana. **Warren Pilferers** is often a pick to consider once you have a **Shriekmaw**, but I'm already chockablock with five drops, as is the nature of this format, and the three-mana giant is what I need.

Pick: Blind-Spot Giant

Pack 2, Pick 5

Wanderer's Twig, Avian Changeling, Bog-Strider Ash, Mudbutton Torchrunner, Springleaf Drum, Amoeboid Changeling, Spring Cleaning, Exiled Boggart, Shields of Velis Vel, Glen Elendra Pranksters, Incandescent Soulstoke

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If your Giant draft heads towards the slower version, then **Mudbutton Torchrunner** is exactly what you want. He's a great card anyway and would get picked here if it weren't for the phenomenal **Avian Changeling**. The **Wanderer's Twig** doesn't even get considered here, because as great as **Shriekmaw** is, it's not worth sacrificing a good pick to squeeze him into the deck as a splash. I have a feeling the deck is going to pan out well regardless, as a solid two-colour deck with a plethora of late drops, so it will hardly be missed.

Pick: Avian Changeling

Pack 2, Pick 6

Oblivion Ring, Herbal Poultice, Oakgnarl Warrior, Hornet Harasser, Ponder, Bog Hoodlums, Protective Bubble, Fire-Belly Changeling, Summon the School, Harpoon Sniper

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Well this is a pleasant surprise. I passed a late **Plover Knights** in the first pack but that was about the only good white card that made it through me. I guess there must have been a foil one in the pack or just a lot of great picks for it to make it to me this late.

Pick: Oblivion Ring

Pack 2, Pick 7

Plover Knights, Adder-Staff Boggart, Wispmare, Consuming Bonfire, Hunt Down, Giant's Ire, Dawnfluke, Ceaseless Searblades, Kinsbaile Skirmisher

Pick: Plover Knights

Pack 2, Pick 8

Hurly-Burly, Consuming Bonfire, Shimmering Grotto, Elvish Eulogist, Giant's Ire, Lairwatch Giant, Vivid Marsh, Burrenton Forge-Tender

At this point, I'm not really willing to sacrifice too much to play the **Shriekmaw**, especially not another five-mana removal.

Pick: Consuming Bonfire

Pack 2, Pick 9

Lowland Oaf, Kithkin Healer, Bog Hoodlums, Judge of Currents, Inkfathom Divers, Needle Drop, Soaring Hope

Pick: Lowland Oaf

Pack 2, Pick 10

Adder-Staff Boggart, Streambed Aquitects, Faultgrinder, Warren-Scourge Elf, Lairwatch Giant, Familiar's Ruse

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No real reason to favour the Giant to the Goblin in this pack. I have plenty of both early and late game, but I feel I am more likely to board in the six-drop in a slow or mirror match.



Pick: Lairwatch Giant

Pack 2, Pick 11

Warren-Scourge Elf, Lairwatch Giant, Boggart Forager, Ringskipper, Mountain

Pick: Lairwatch Giant

Pack 2, Pick 12

Lace with Moonglove, Exiled Boggart, Heal the Scars, Sylvan Echoes

Pick: Exiled Boggart

Pack 2, Pick 13

Mudbutton Torchrunner, Exiled Boggart, Shields of Velis Vel

Pick: Mudbutton Torchrunner

Pack 2, Pick 14

Herbal Poultice, Bog Hoodlums

Pick: Herbal Poultice

Pack 2, Pick 15

Pick: Hunt Down

Another great pack. Busting open the Shaman was a treat but after that I just got passed solid cards, particularly towards the end of the pack with a ridiculously late **Mudbutton Torchrunner**. **Shriekmaw** was the interesting pick this time around and the subsequent decisions I was faced with. Had I picked the **Vivid Crag** in pack one, I probably would have taken the **Shimmering Grotto** over the late **Consuming Bonfire** and hoped to pick up another land in the last pack, but as I didn't, I didn't. It is very unlikely the **Shriekmaw** will make it to the final deck. Going into the last pack, I'm looking for the three key Giant cards and any removal that will go with them. The deck's curve is already very solid so I will pretty much just pick the best card.

Pack 3, Pick 1

Axegrinder Giant, Lignify, Silvergill Douser, Oblivion Ring, Quill-Slinger Boggart, Bog-Strider Ash, Ponder, Heal the Scars, Skeletal Changeling, Shields of Velis Vel, Goldmeadow Stalwart, Flamekin Harbinger, Harpoon Sniper, Fathom Trawl, Plains

Pick: Oblivion Ring

Pack 3, Pick 2

Deeptread Merrow, Kithkin Daggerdare, Herbal Poultice, Avian Changeling, Warren Pilferers, Elvish Branchbender, Wellgabber Apothecary, Aquitect's Will, Mournwhelk, Boggart Shenanigans, Ego Erasure, Makeshift Mannequin, Secluded Glen, Forest

Pick: Avian Changeling

Pack 3, Pick 3

Stonybrook Angler, Thieving Sprite, Gilt-Leaf Ambush, Hillcomber Giant, Streambed Aquitects, Stinkdrinker Daredevil, Spellstutter Sprite, Spiderwig Boggart, Flamekin Brawler, Tideshaper Mystic, Rootgrapple, Hoarder's Greed, Primal Command

Pick: Stinkdrinker Daredevil

Pack 3, Pick 4

Weed Strangle, Woodland Changeling, Springleaf Drum, Kithkin Healer, Footbottom Feast, Skeletal Changeling, Shields of Velis Vel, Fire-Belly Changeling, Elvish Branchbender, Prowess of the Fair, Merrow Harbinger, Harpoon Sniper

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Well, those first three picks certainly didn't require any thought. I've already mentioned how good **Springleaf Drum** is, but, despite picking it, I actually think it was a mistake in this deck. I was a little too focused on trying to still squeeze the **Shriekmaw** in, I think. I like the Drum in Giant decks as it lets your filler two drops help accelerate you to your fat giants if you don't draw the Daredevil. However, this deck's curve is so solid that I would rather curve out aggressively than accelerate. I also want to maximize the chances of getting powerful **Blind-Spot Giant** draws. To this end, I think **Fire-Belly Changeling** was the correct pick.

Pick: Springleaf Drum



Pack 3, Pick 5

Boggart Sprite-Chaser, Thieving Sprite, Kinsbaile Balloonist, Boggart Loggers, Adder-Staff Boggart, Goldmeadow Dodger, Wings of Velis Vel, Flamekin Brawler, Facevaulter, Familiar's Ruse, Rings of Brighthearth

Pick: Kinsbaile Balloonist

Pack 3, Pick 6

Boggart Loggers, Runed Stalactite, Inner-Flame Acolyte, Neck Snap, Spellstutter Sprite, Black Poplar Shaman, Elvish Eulogist, Caterwauling Boggart, Knight of Meadowgrain, Vivid Creek

Click [here](#).

Several strong card to choose from here. **Runed Stalactite** is a card that almost never makes my decks these days, but in Giants it really helps the aggressive version by powering up the Greathearts and Blind-Spots. However, the other two cards to consider are better. **Neck Snap** is a card that I find getting worse and worse. It is always completely obvious whenever my opponents have it, which means about the only time it is actually good is when it's in a deck with lots of counters and flash guys (read: splashed in a Faerie deck). The four-drop is looking very heavy so far and I have plenty of removal so I don't want it. The **Knight of Meadowgrain**, on the other hand, fits the deck perfectly. It provides me with some solid early aggression and gains me life if I'm mana-screwed to survive until my big Giants can take over.

Pick: Knight of Meadowgrain

Pack 3, Pick 7

Deeptread Merrow, Glimmerdust Nap, Skeletal Changeling, Aquitect's Will, Kinsbaile Skirmisher, Spring Cleaning, Blind-Spot Giant, Goldmeadow Stalwart, Captivating Glance

Pick: Blind-Spot Giant

Pack 3, Pick 8

Kinsbaile Balloonist, Paperfin Rascal, Boggart Sprite-Chaser, Hunt Down, Triclopean Sight, Nath's Buffoon, Caterwauling Boggart, Burrenton Forge-Tender

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This is the kind of pick which shows how I've improved as a drafter in the time since this draft. I already have too many Balloonists and four-drops and even as I picked it I knew it would be nestling in the sideboard and that I was picking it just to stop others from flying over me. But I have three **Tarfire** and plenty of other removal if this is the case. I should've picked the **Burrenton Forge-Tender** for my sideboard in case I play against a very aggressive Goblin deck.

Pick: Kinsbaile Balloonist

Pack 3, Pick 9

Axegrinder Giant, Quill-Slinger Boggart, Heal the Scars, Skeletal Changeling, Shields of Velis Vel, Flamekin Harbinger, Plains

Pick: Axegrinder Giant

Pack 3, Pick 10

Kithkin Daggerdare, Herbal Poultice, Wellgabber Apothecary, Aquitect's Will, Boggart Shenanigans, Forest

Pick: Kithkin Daggerdare

Pack 3, Pick 11

Spiderwig Boggart, Flamekin Brawler, Tideshaper Mystic, Rootgrapple, Hoarder's Greed

Pick: Rootgrapple

Pack 3, Pick 12

Kithkin Healer, Shields of Velis Vel, Fire-Belly Changeling, Prowess of the Fair

I make the same mistake a second time around. A classic example of how card evaluation changes the more you draft a set.

Pick: Kithkin Healer

Pack 3, Pick 13

Goldmeadow Dodger, Flamekin Brawler, Facevaulter



Pick: [Facevaulter](#)

Pack 3, Pick 14

[Black Poplar Shaman](#), [Elvish Eulogist](#)

Pick: [Black Poplar Shaman](#)

Pack 3, Pick 15

Pick: [Captivating Glance](#)

I guess one of the few things that can be said about this draft was that I was spoon-fed. I'd like to claim that taking the first [Stinkdrinker Daredevil](#) was inspirational, but I don't think it was a particularly difficult pick. Despite this, I felt the draft was worth focusing on because, apart from all the removal I managed to pick up, this draft looks much like any other Giant draft I've done. The cards all come late if you're in the correct seat and the hardest thing you have to do is remember to take the big three when they come: [Stinkdrinker Daredevil](#), [Avian Changeling](#), and [Kithkin Greatheart](#).

I think the reason why Giants are almost always so successful is because their good cards are not really wanted by anyone else (other than the removal), meaning you always pick up lots of playables very late. There is plenty of inherent synergy available, and about the only thing you really need to pay attention to whilst drafting is the deck's tempo and curve. Once you cater to these two needs, you have it sorted. When to splash or not is often a difficulty, but I find, much as I did in this draft, that it is easier to see what comes rather than force anything. You always have plenty of playables in the sideboard when you're Giants anyway, so it's no big loss if you can't play a splash card.

Here's the decklist:

Red-White Giants - Lorwyn Draft Deck



Main Deck
40 cards

9 Mountain	1 Arbiter of Knollridge	2 Oblivion Ring
9 Plains	2 Avian Changeling	3 Tarfire
18 lands	2 Axegrinder Giant	5 other spells
	2 Blind-Spot Giant	
	1 Giant Harbinger	
	1 Kinsballe Balloonist	
	1 Kithkin Greatheart	
	1 Knight of Meadowgrain	
	1 Lowland Oaf	
	1 Mudbutton Torchrunner	
	1 Plover Knights	
	2 Stinkdrinker Daredevil	
	1 Thundercloud Shaman	
	17 creatures	

Giants have had a higher win ratio for me than any other tribe. It's true that I don't wind up Giants too often, maybe one in six drafts, but I've almost never failed to 2-1 or 3-0. This powerhouse unsurprisingly mauled its way through all my opponents and was great fun to play. That's probably the best thing about Giants—they cater to the kid inside of all of us.

Q

*Widely considered one of the world's foremost Limited competitors, Quentin Martin has four Limited Grand Prix Top 8s and a Top 8 at Pro Tour–Prague 2006. Between his **Magic** expertise and a background in philosophy, it's no surprise Quentin is well known for his strategic insight and theories on the game.*



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