

**The Tales of Trymyll
Book One**

**Thomas,
Wizard's Son.**

Joseph R. Mason

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Dedication

Dedicated to my parents.

Joseph Walter Mason

24th January 1908 - 24th March 1985

Alethea Ann Mason

29th February 1916 - 16th February 1952

who died when I was 4 days old.

To my wife Julia.

....and all who said: "He'll never do it."

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.

John Wesley

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Prologue - Introduction to the Land of Trymyll.

This is an introduction to the Land of Trymyll, it is only a short read and if you do not wish to continue, just skip onto the first chapter, but by reading, you will gain some useful insight that may be of use whilst reading the rest of the book.

Trymyll is where much of this story is set, it is a mystical, magical, and mythical land in a slightly different dimension to ours. But that does not make it any less real.

To help you enjoy this book, here are a few details about this fantastic place.

Trymyll is a land of seven cities. Each city has a castle, chateaux or large fortified house at its centre, and the city and surrounding lands are overseen by a High Elder, each High Elder has seven elders working for and reporting to them and each of the seven elders has seven senior wizards working for and with them.

At the centre of the land is Castell y Blaenoraïd, the biggest castle, where the Elder of Elders holds domain. His name is, not only unpronounceable, but no one seems to know what it is, so he is just referred to as, the Elder. No one knows how old he is, they just assume he is an old and wise wizard, he wears a huge dark cloak that has a deep hood, so no one can see his face. He is surrounded by mystery and magic. His voice is exceptionally soft, and people must strain to hear him. But as he seldom speaks, this is not a great problem. His attitude is always one of 'don't speak unless what you have to say is of the utmost importance'. So, on the rare occasions he does speak, everyone listens. The High Elders of the six cities beneath him are usually the only wizards who ever hear him speak anyway. The Elder, plus the six High Elders form what is known as the High Council of Blaenoraïd or the Council of Elders.

Each city has a name, each name has a meaning.

Castell y Blaenoraïd is the capital of Trymyll, its name simply means 'The Capital.' It is set right in the centre of the land, high on a hill and overlooking all around. The countryside is lush, green, well-wooded and populated with deer and wild boar, both of which are good for eating. Being set high on the hill the view stretches to all the mountains which surround the Land of Trymyll, it is a most beautiful and magical city. There are rules and a few enchantments which control the city. You cannot apparate within the city walls. The council chamber, which is at the centre of the castle and inside the bailey, is encased in enchantments so that no magic can be performed inside of it. The council chamber is also the courtroom and deep beneath it are the dungeons of Blaenoraïd. A place which would be feared in any other castle, but the dungeons of Blaenoraïd, were quite comfortable, clean, and well lit. There is so little crime in Trymyll, so the jailers spend all their time cleaning and redecorating to pass the time.

Wrth y Môr, or castle on the sea. It is a bit of a misnomer as there is no sea in Trymyll. It stands in or rather on a vast saltwater lake. So big that you cannot see from shore to shore.

When the wind is up, there are large waves and storm conditions, it looks like a sea because of its size, but it is, in fact, a lake. The castle setting is quite secure as it is built on an island about half a mile out into the lake. There is only one way in is along a long and narrow causeway which could be magically sunk if the castle is ever under attack and the drawbridge is raised. Around the castle swim sea monsters, multiple Kraken and a Manticore who also defend the castle if required, though in over four hundred years, the drawbridge had never been raised and the causeway had never been sunk. Along the shoreline around the causeway entrance is the town of Wrth where the inhabitants live a happy life, eating drinking and fishing for the saltwater fish from the lake and freshwater fish from the many rivers that feed into the lake and run through the town. At this moment, its High Elder is Llewel. His whole and unspoken name is Llewel Mathias Gaynor.

Goleuedigaeth was an interesting city. All the residents are female, all incredibly wise and all very magical. Although they have a High Elder, one High Elder Aneta Stepanek, from Eastern Europe, and the normal seven elders who oversee the forty-nine senior wizards, the city of Goleuedigaeth is run by consensus rather than by an authoritarian leader. Men are allowed in the city, but none live there. The city is beautiful in every way with fragrant flowers adorning each road, alley, balcony, windowsill, and doorway, in fact, every nook and cranny. At the centre there stands a most elegant seven towered castle, well when I say castle, it looks more like an eighteenth-century French Chateaux. The scent of the city can be picked up for miles around, so sweet, it seems to draw you in, once in the city, you were overcome with a sense of peace and tranquillity. It is the city of Enlightenment.

Fourth on the list is Gwir. High Elder Traveon Baughan is their leader. The castle itself looks very ordinary, the city that surrounded the castle is plain and grey. The opposite of Goleuedigaeth, Gwir looks harsh, severe, and serious. This is the Castle of the Truth. Set right in the north of the country and near to the Dragonlands this city and castle is a stronghold of battle wizards. All trained in the art of attack magic and defensive arts, but also fearsome knights with heavy armour, broadswords, mace, and shields. They ride destriers, large, fearless warhorses, bred for battle. This ferocious band of wizards are disciplined, it is ruled over by a strict and severe High Elder who thinks truthfulness, loyalty, honour, and bravery were the marks of a good wizard. Although a very grumpy sort of wizard High Elder Traveon Baughan is just the sort you need on your side if you ever go into a battle.

Next was Mynydd and the accompanying castle. Set high on a mountain to the very south of the land of Trymyll, Mynydd sits above the snow line, it is cold and snowy even in the hottest of summers, a particularly hardy breed of wizards lives there, they are few, High Elder, Govannon Staley of the Elven community, seven Elven elders and forty-nine Elven wizards. Unlike most of the other High Elders, Govannon Staley was not elected, his title was hereditary and passed from father to eldest son or daughter on death. Apart from a few bakers, cooks, and tradespeople, no one else lives in Mynydd, less than one hundred souls in all. The rest of the Elven Community live in the valleys below, bathed in the sun and lush with vegetation. They too are great soldiers, archers, horsemen and horsewomen, yes, men and

women. They hold equal sway in the elven community and the women are the finest archers in the land and always fight alongside the men. No one wants to live in the actual castle, no one even wishes to visit. It was a terribly dark, cold, damp, wretched existence. Why anyone lived there anyway, no one could remember. They knew it was important to keep the castle occupied and active but could not remember why.

At another extreme, Dolydd. The Castle in the meadows. A sun-drenched pleasant and well-populated city set in the vast pasture lands of Trymyll. Dolydd is the breadbasket of Trymyll, most of the grain, meat, vegetables, and fruit comes from the area surrounding Dolydd, where there are warm summers and mild winters. Who wouldn't want to live there? The High Elder, Brangwen Binning, or Bangers as most call her, is as much a farmer as a wizard and High Elder, she is a happy, congenial, and fun lady, enjoys her ale, wine, and song. She does not enjoy or respect the formalities of the council, so rarely attends, instead, she attends in person while at the same time being at home in her farmhouse castle. She is, as they say in Trymyll, in the neither here nor there.

One city was different from the others, called Castell yr Tywyll, it is where Asmodeus the Dark Elder is in charge, previously banished from the council, he has seven dark elders and forty-nine dark wizards running the show. Set apart from the other cities, from the distance it looks dark, there is always a black cloud shrouding the city, dense poisonous and even flesh-eating plants climb the walls all woven by the magic of the dark elders to keep snoopers out.

But there are problems in Trymyll, big problems, in fact, problems so big that even Asmodeus has been allowed back to attend the Council of Elders, to show unity in the hope that it may solve the problems.

The magic was leaching out of Trymyll, and the Wizards were losing their powers. Sometimes bringing disaster, as a flying wizard might suddenly lose the power of flight whist high in the air and come crashing down to land. Someone might transform either themselves or someone else into an animal and not be able to change back, they could apparate, but instead of arriving where they envisaged, they would find half their body in a wall or buried up to their waist and be unable to escape. All sorts of terrible things were happening because the magic was disappearing.

Back in Tom's world, certain parts used to be very magical. Magic now is as rare as hen's teeth, even in Wales, previously one of the most magical places on earth and the birthplace of dragons. Modernity and technology drove it out, and slowly people stopped believing in magic, so it disappeared, almost. In the modern-day, most so-called witches and wizards are fakes and phonies, possessing little if any actual magic or power. But even now some powerful wizards are living hidden amongst us. You never know who, you never know where. But they are here, it may be your neighbour, your mother or father, it may even be your best friend or your worst enemy. Nobody knows for they are hidden.

Not so in Trymyll, here magic rules, it is a way of life, everyone has magical powers of some sort to a greater or lesser degree. Some are very magical and become wizards, some less so,

they are called phobls and are found living as farmers or carpenters or bakers as an example, but even they have some magic. A farmer can enchant a plough to make a straight furrow without the need of a horse, a carpenter can straighten warped wood or drive out woodworm and a baker sift his flour and knead his dough on a magic kneading table without even rising from his bed. They all seem fine, it is the higher wizards who were losing their powers, not the ordinary people, not the phobls.

Trymyll is an equal opportunity wizardly kingdom and both elders and wizards can be ethnically diverse, male, female, or binary. But as in our world, the males were usually in any positions of real power.

Chapter 1 - The Hidden Cave.

In the village where Tom lived, not much happened. In fact, in the whole of the country of Wales, in Tom's eyes at least, nothing ever happened. As he walked out towards the small mountain at the back of his village, he pondered that thought. Life was dull. But that was about to change.

Tom was thirteen. He came from a small rural community in Wales, it doesn't matter which one, for that is neither important nor relevant. For those who do not know, Wales is a principality of the United Kingdom.

Now Wales is a great place to be. But in Tom's eyes, as a country, it stank, in reality, it wowed. It had mountains, forests, rapid streams, gold, caves, and caverns to explore and snow in winter. It was a land of magic and mystery, dragons and wizardry, adventure, and even great danger; at least it is like that in the eyes of the storyteller.

However, Tom lived in an ex-mining village, "ex" because the coal mine closed in 1985 after the miners' strike. Now, many very odd years later, I would like to say what a prosperous area it is now, with industry all around, and everyone happy in their jobs. But of course, that's not true, only four out of ten adults had proper jobs, the rest had little. Somehow, despite having so little to live on, most of the adults still smoked and the men still went to the so-called "Working Men's Club" and got drunk on a Friday night, got even worse on a Saturday night... and then went to chapel on Sunday, for the forgiveness of their sins! '*Working Men's Club,*' thought Tom as he strode by, '*more like a dosser's paradise!*' Even at his age, he could not understand why. Not his thoughts, of course, he had heard his foster parents, the Hadley-Smythes, say it many times before.

The Hadley-Smythes had moved to South Wales from Oxfordshire a couple of years ago to retire 'near their roots' with some vague claim on Welshness. Apart from the fact that neither of them was Welsh, had no relatives in Wales, neither had a Welsh name nor could they speak a word of the Welsh language, they were indeed very Welsh, well at least they lived there anyway. Tom didn't know anyone who did speak Welsh in South Wales, but that was not the point.

They had both been university professors at one of the universities in Oxford. They were never clear about which one nor did they ever manage to say what they lectured on. All Tom knew was that they spoke in a very funny manner, pronouncing every letter and syllable. They couldn't pronounce some simple words, to them a house was 'a hise', they would never say bike, always bicycle. They drank only the best red wine, or red wane as they called it and referred to fizzy wine as champers, always followed by a "haw, haw, haw," which was their version of a laugh. Anyway, Tom was stuck with them, despite what he thought about them and adults in general, they had always been kind to him and only lived a few doors down from

his mum's house in an end-terrace with quite a nice garden. Why people so grand lived in a miner's cottage was a mystery to Tom, but somehow their cottage seemed much bigger on the inside, they had a grand piano in the front room and a huge candelabra hung in the centre. They had always welcomed his friends and seemed to be able to produce fantastic cakes and sweets for him and his mates out of thin air. He had been with them for a couple of years. They arrived just after Howl, a small Jack Russell terrier, which had sort of adopted Tom but then moved into his mother's house.

Tom went to the local comprehensive school; it was a small affair with less than four hundred pupils. Every few years, the council would try to close it and merge with a couple of other schools in neighbouring villages, but they kept protesting and marching on the council offices, so the council would back down and let it lie for another couple of years. Tom didn't really like school, not helped by Mrs Glynn, his form tutor, who was, in Tom's eyes, a tyrant and a bully. Tom could not see that she was hard on some of them because she cared for them and wanted them to succeed. In many ways, Tom could only see the worst in grown-ups, he judged them all the same as his father, who had left him, deserted him, and didn't care at all.

The only good thing about school was his mates and rugby. He loved rugby, he didn't exactly have the build of a prop forward, but Tom was a good scrum-half, he was quick and almost seemed to run between the legs of the opposition. His long red hair looked like a human torch as he ran, his bright blue eyes flashing left and right, looking for an opening. Tom was a popular youth and was always picked for the school under fifteens rugby team.

When he was younger, Tom and his mates used to love the countryside, and at weekends they would explore the small mountains that surrounded the village. They used to pretend to be spies, sent to find out about a secret hideout somewhere in the village, they would run across the fields, hide behind the dry-stone walls shooting pretend rifles, build bases inside the mouths of the many caves, watching the village below through old loo rolls which they pretended were binoculars. But those days were past now, they were teenagers, full of anxiety and torment, rebelling against an unjust world and of course playing computer games instead.

Tom was no worse off than some but far worse off than many. In fact, Tom was remarkably close to the bottom of the heap. He only had a Mum and didn't know where his dad was; he had left when Tom was a couple of weeks old and took his only brother with him. His brother Jon would be about fifteen now; he had never seen him, if he had, he couldn't remember him, and his mother never spoke much of either of them. So, neither did he. All he knew was that his brother had the same flame-red hair and piercing blue eyes that he did. All he had to remember his dad by was a small gold signet ring. The ring was made of pure Welsh gold with a black onyx stone with the emblem of a dragon carved into the face. It just fitted onto his right-hand ring finger, he had never thought much about it, he had worn it for as long as he could remember. It was small and difficult to come over his knuckle, otherwise, he was sure his mum would have taken it away and pawned it by now. His mum was ill, in a wheelchair, crippled by life she used to say, she had trouble breathing and had an oxygen bottle strapped

to the wheelchair. The only visitor his mum ever had was Father Seamus O'Reilly, a Roman Catholic priest, strange though, they weren't even catholic.

However, some days he preferred his own company, sometimes he liked to walk out onto the mountain at the back of the village to a cave about halfway up, sit in the entrance and look out over the valley to the village below with its tiny little people all rushing about in their uninteresting lives, Tom didn't know why they hurried so, most had nothing to do and nowhere to go.

Tom believed in his own mind that he was the only person who knew of the cave, none of his friends ever mentioned it, he never saw anyone else near it and there were none of the normal signs of human activity, cigarette ends, empty beer cans, discarded bottles of cheap cider, and used instant bar-b-ques. There were several caves around here; all had the signs of human detritus and waste, but not this one. It was named Dragon's Hole, Tom didn't know why; no one believed in dragons, this was the twenty-first century after all. But Dragons Hole it was, always had been and probably always would be. The fact it had a name meant that others knew it was there, it was on the maps and everything, you could even see the entrance on Google Earth, but no one ever came up here, except Tom.

Tom had now reached the edge of the village and proceeded up the road to the stile which bridged the dry-stone wall. He crossed the field of sheep, climbed another wall, and started up the steep path to the cave. He never wondered why, if no one ever came here, why was there was a path? He never worked out the reason none of the local youth came here for their illicit smoking, underage drinking, and stuff...

He had come up the rough path to the cave many times and sat at the cave entrance to look and think but had never ventured any further in than the few feet or so that the entrance light allowed. Inside it was dark, very dark, very, very dark! Today he felt adventurous and had brought a torch. He had thought about this quite hard; did he want to go further in than the light allowed? What if there was someone in there? A mass murderer escaped from prison hiding there, bats, ghosts, witches, or a huge snake. But no, he was Tom, he feared nothing, and did not believe in ghosts, or witches or anything scary, in Britain we did not have poisonous cave snakes. Bats could do you no harm at all, and if there was a mass murderer on the loose, he would have seen it on the TV.

He gingerly ventured in, scrambling across rocks until the light was just behind him. He could hear dripping water as it seeped through the rocks and from the ceiling. He could feel his heart pounding inside his chest. "*Torch time*," he thought, the light penetrated the darkness so quickly it seemed the darkness retreated into the rocks. Tom climbed across a couple more boulders and to his surprise found that, once he was a few feet in, the scattered rocks were behind him and there was quite a flat path ahead. The small torch threw up huge shadows as he moved, shapes formed and dissolved on the walls of the cave like ever-changing fast-moving clouds. He could make out a huge spire in the distance, but soon realised it was the shadow of a rather small stalagmite, or was it a stalactite? Never could remember which was up and which was down.

"Now, what was the memory jogger?" he said to himself, "stalactites have to hold on tight!"

So, he was right. He saw the shapes of monsters, dinosaurs, trees, towers, all for a fleeting moment before their form dissolved to another shape. Tom ventured on, deep into the cave. Then he saw two green orbs floating just in front of him, and a good eighteen inches apart, it gave him quite a start and he stopped in his tracks. For some reason, he did not turn and run, for an even less explicable reason he was not even that scared. As his eyes focused, he could see they were eyes, big eyes, several inches across, pearlescent green with long vertical slits to let the light in. In front of them, he could make out a couple of nostrils at the end of an exceedingly long nose. What on earth was a cow doing this far back in the cave he thought, albeit a big cow he thought, he even verbalised his thought.

"What are you doing here then cow?" Tom said in his best Welsh accent.

"Cow?" a voice came back, but this time with a perfect, crisp and clipped Oxford accent, "who in the Makers name are you referring to as a cow?"

Beads of sweat instantly formed on Tom's brow and the blood drained from his face. Tom dropped the torch, which of course went out...

"Hadley-Smiff! What are you doing here?"

"Hadley-Smythe is the correct pronunciation, however, I am not he."

"Mass murderer then?"

"No, no, my dear boy, it is I Howel," the voice replied.

"Howl the talking cow?"

"NO! Not Howel the talking cow for crying out loud! Oh alright," there was a small 'pop' and the eyes and nose joined up to what appeared to be an enormous purple dragon. He must have been forty, fifty, maybe sixty feet long, scales, long neck, and huge teeth, in fact, all the normal mythical creature features! But purple? He just looked so the wrong colour! More caricature than reality.

"Don't be stupid!" Tom said, "dragons don't exist, especially not purple ones."

"Well," said the dragon, "if I had a penny for every time someone said that to me, I'd have enough money now for a cup of tea and a small Welsh cake."

"How can I see you in the dark?" Tom said.

"Simple, it's called dragon light," the dragon said in a matter of fact sort of way.

"Not going to eat me, are you?" Tom didn't quite know where that question came from but was somehow glad he had gotten it in early.

"No dear boy, I am not going to eat you.....unless of course... no, no, dragon humour, take no notice."

"Are you magic then?" Tom asked.

"Of course," Howel said, "otherwise you would not be able to see me, it is after all pitch black in here."

"Don't believe in magic," Tom said.

"Oh super, now I have enough money for a cucumber sandwich as well," he replied irritably.

"I've got a dog at home; his name is Howl. We call him that because that's what he does when we don't take notice of him. He howls."

"Enchanting, and what sort of dog is this Howl?" Howel asked, even though he knew the answer.

"He's a Jack Russell we think. We've had him a couple of years. He is quite cute, though rather bad-tempered. Dunno where he came from, just turned up and stayed one day. Anyway, how come you speak English then?" Tom didn't know why he was telling a dragon about his dog, nerves he suspected.

"Because dear boy, if I spoke Welsh, you wouldn't understand a word I said!" There was now an even bigger hint of irritation in his voice.

"So, you can speak Welsh then?"

"I can, I speak over one hundred languages, fluently!"

"Latin?" Tom asked.

"Yes, Latin as well, we speak it more and more nowadays to sound authentic," he said, more for effect than anything else, and with more than a hint of sarcasm.

"Okay," Tom replied, "and there's no need for sarcasm."

"Whatever!" said the dragon with a wearisome sigh, sounding more like a post-pubescent teenager than a sixty-foot dragon.

"So then, why are you here? In this cave like?" Tom said, again in his best Welsh accent.

"I am the keeper of the gate to the Land of Trymyll," he replied with a certain amount of pride.

"So, you have to stay in this old cave all the time then?" asked Tom.

"No, every Tuesday, Thursday and alternate Saturdays," he replied, again sarcastically, "Of course I don't but it is a full-time job, have you never seen the advert in the corner shop, a part time keeper of the gate required, enquire within'?" The dragon calmed, "Sorry about that, life can be a little tiresome, I have been the gatekeeper for a little under five hundred years and you are only the thirteenth different person who has come through the gate."

"Five hundred years don't be daft, no one lives that long," Tom said.

Howel ignored the interruption and continued, "I am the gatekeeper, but the cave is locked and invisible to all unless I or my master opens it up, only then do I need to be here in this horrid, damp little hole."

Then in reply to Tom's earlier statement, Howel continued without drawing breath...

"Maybe humans do not live for five hundred years but dragons do, anything up to two or three thousand years for most of us, some, red dragons, even longer. Anyway," he continued, "my time here is almost ended, I will be gone quite soon."

"You going to die or something then?"

"No dear boy, contract runs out in five years, then I'm off to the Himalayas for a holiday before returning to Trymyll," he then said as an afterthought, "Are you saying I look old? I'll have you know I am barely six hundred years old and in my prime, at least another millennium and a half left in me if not two! Even more, if I eat well!"

"Sorry," Tom said semi-apologetically, "lights not too good in here."

"Anyway," Howel continued, "Tom?" almost as a question, "may I call you Tom?"

"Well yes," Tom replied warily, "How do you know my name?"

"Because, my dear boy, I have been watching you since the day of your birth and calling you for the last two months."

"Calling me?"

"Yes, calling you. Why else do you think you are here?"

"But I am always here, I come here all the time."

"You don't, you have only been coming here for the last eight weeks, you only think you have been coming here forever. Have you never wondered why you always come here alone?" Howel did not wait for an answer but continued, "It is because this place only exists for you. No one else can see it or find it."

"But I can see it on maps and Google Earth and stuff."

"Yes, I know you can, but no one else can."

"But I've shown it to my mates on the computer."

"Yes, I know that as well, but as soon as they turn away, they forget what they have seen, children have such short spans of concentration."

"What about the path?"

"Only you."

"The stile?"

"Only you."

"The mountain?"

"Now we are being silly. Of course, the mountain is there. But people can only see what I let them see. Now we must get on, there is much to do."

"Sorry mate, you might have lots to do, but I have to get back for my tea."

"Oh contraire," Howel replied, "we have lots to do, and you dear boy are going nowhere."

"But the Hadley-Smiffs are expecting me."

"No, we're not. Not tonight anyway," Howel replied.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oops, slip of the tongue dear boy, forgot to mention, the Hadley-Smythes are just a figment of our imaginations, and other people's imaginations as well. Now, they are as if they never existed, which of course they didn't. So, as I said, we must push on."

"Hang on, hang on, you don't get away with it that easily, I've been stuck with those two phoney Welsh people for two years, I get one sentence of a very bad explanation and you say, we must push on?"

"Well," Howel said, "there were at least three sentences in my explanation, but there's not that much to say, they did exist, sort of, but they were sort of magicked up by Llewellyn the Brave and me in the imaginations of all who met them. Oh, and you only think you've been with them for two years, actually it was only two months, it just seemed longer," he paused, "for both of us."

"But they were real, solid, there," Tom said frustrated, "I saw them with my own eyes, not with my imagination," he stopped short, "what do you mean only two months? I was with them for two long years!" Tom said, his voice lifting to a slight screech.

"It is so difficult to explain to a non-magical person, yes they were there, without a doubt, but then again, they weren't there at all. If that makes sense. Anyway, they're gone now and no one in the village will remember them. And it was definitely just two months."

They started to go along the cave's path further and further from the entrance, further and further into the darkness.

"I still remember them."

"Well of course you do," Howel continued, "that is because without knowing, you helped form both the illusion and the reality, their images were woven into your thought patterns in a far more intricate way which one day soon you will hopefully understand."

"What about my mum?"

"Oh no, she is real, very real."

"That's not what I meant, and you know it," Tom said irritably.

"She remains on the other side. She knows you are here; she knows you are in safe hands."

"I wish I did."

"Oh! Dear boy. You can be so hurtful, of course you are in safe hands, if you were not, I would have probably eaten you by now," he said with a chuckle, "and not only are children so tasty,

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