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THE WORLD'S MOST WIDELY READ MAGAZINE ABOUT CATS AND KITTENS

**Itchy Skin
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**Give an Indoor
Cat a Taste
Of Freedom—
Go Camping and
Take Him Along**

**A Cat Owner's
Guide to First
Aid for Wounds
And Bleeding**

**Life Is Hard
For Domestic
Cats in the
African Bush**

**Why Americans
Are Happy With
Russian Blues**



America's Russian Blue

These special green-eyed beauties have come a long way in a short time.

by Ingeborg Urcia

BRITISH cat breeder, Mrs. Carew-Cox, who kept a careful diary about her cats, wrote in 1890 that she had just acquired a little gray-blue cat with thick, plush fur and green eyes. The cat, named Yula, belonged to a breed that had just recently become known in Europe under the name of Archangel Blue, and it is interesting to note that Mrs. Carew-Cox had obtained her from the Russian port of Archangel.

Yula must have been a success, because during the following years, Mrs. Carew-Cox added several similar cats to her cattery, all originating from Archangel and the adjoining Kola Peninsula. It is not known whether she purchased her cats from the same person, but of one she mentions that she traded a sailor a leg of lamb for her. All the cats were blue, except for one, named Kola, who seems to have been a blue and white. Today, we know this breed as the Russian Blue, one of the oldest shorthaired breeds in the cat fancy.

However, Mrs. Carew-Cox was not the first person in England to own a Russian Blue. Fifteen years earlier, a London newspaper account about a cat show held at the Crystal Palace in London speaks of "a very handsome cat, coming from Archangel, the bristle port. They should be par-

ticularly furry, and give traces of their semi-polar origin, but they do not; they resemble mostly the common grey wild rabbit." (Magazine of the Cat Protection League, Oct. 1981.) Obviously, the blue cat from the north had already established a place in the cat fancy.

But did the Russian Blue really originate in Russia? Its appearance certainly suggests a northern origin with the thick, protective fur and the blue skin, a feature it shares with the northern Siberian Husky. Also, the bony ridges above the Russian Blue's eyes are supposed to keep the snow out. On the other hand, many older people fondly remember a blue cat called a Maltese. Does that mean that the Russian Blue has a Mediterranean origin? Or is the term "Maltese" merely a name for a blue alley cat? Like many of the old, established breeds, the Russian Blue keeps the mystery of its origin.

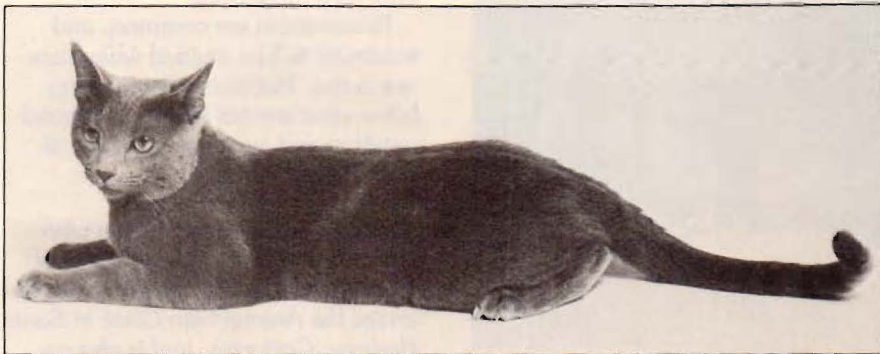
The breed's early history in England, however, is well known. It soon acquired a devoted following, but never reached the popularity of the Siamese or the Persian. Most likely, these cats were too refined and reserved to gain sudden popularity; they appealed mainly to people who could appreciate something special. Even today, the breed is sometimes known in England as the "Victorian"

cat, perhaps because Queen Victoria is said to have owned a pair, but perhaps also because of their refined and reticent manner.

With the outbreak of World War II, the story of the Russian Blue in England almost came to a sad end. During the ensuing shortages, many breeders were no longer able to feed and maintain their cats, and very few of the original Russian Blues were still around in 1945 when the war ended. From these and some Siamese outcrosses, the breed was slowly rebuilt. But the use of Siamese in the breeding program was taking its toll, and by 1950, the Russian Blue in England frequently resembled a solid blue cat with Siamese characteristics. It was then that devoted breeders decided to bring back the original Russian Blue with its marvelous coat and elegant, but not extreme, body type. One of these pioneers was Mrs. Rocheford of the famous Dunloe Cattery. In the meantime, breeders in Sweden and Denmark had also begun to work with the Russian Blue, and the breed slowly regained the characteristic coat and appearance we know today.

There is some controversy about when the first Russian Blue appeared in America. Apparently, in 1907, a Mr. Locke of Chicago imported a Russian Blue from England, but nothing further was heard of the breed until 1947 when a cat magazine announced that the "first" Russian Blues had been imported to Texas. The "first" they may not have been, but Dunloe Jan and Dunloe Bluesocks were the first to gain official recognition in this country. Later Mr. Buda, their owner, imported additional Russian Blues, this time from Scandinavia, and the Russian Blue breed in America was on its way.

Today's Russian Blues are mostly a combination of the old British Dunloe line, to whom they owe their plush coat, pale silvery color and sweet disposition, and the Swedish lines which introduced the intensely green eyes and the classic flat profile. The early Russian Blues in this country were slow to gain recognition in the show ring, but without them, today's grand champions would not be possible. One of the first Russian Blues to grand in 1966 was Grand Champion Felinest Silver Dollar, and by 1968, seven Russian Blues had achieved the coveted title. In 1972, a Russian Blue became second best all-American cat in CFA. →



Grand Champion Katzenburg's Gandalf of J-Sun, owned by Joan Searles, exhibits the plush coat, wide-set ears and brilliant eye color strived for in this breed.

But even if you are showing an all-American Russian Blue with a pedigree a mile long, there will always be people at cat shows who say: "He looks just like my Felix." Those are words Russian Blue breeders do not like to hear. After all, not every blue cat is a Russian Blue. Yet sometimes it is easier to point out what a Russian Blue is not than what it is. It is not, like the Chartreux and the British Blue, a heavy-boned cat. The Russian is fine boned and slender, appearing heavy only because of its dense fur. Yet it is stockier and less rangy than the long, slender blue Oriental. And no other blue breed, except the Korat, has the brilliant green eyes of the Russian Blue. But the Korat has a heart-shaped face, and a slick coat. In fact, it is the thick, wonderfully luxuriant double coat of the Russian that is the breed's most outstanding characteristic. Each hair stands away from the body at a 45 degree angle, and each is silver tipped, giving a sheen to every movement of the cat. The coat is so deep that it is possible to draw a design with one's finger into the coat. To achieve such depth, the fur must be rather short and very resilient.

Eye color is also characteristic of the breed, but it can actually vary with every mood of the cat. If the cat is frightened, the eyes will appear yellowish. Kittens are, of course, born with blue eyes which gradually change to yellow and finally to green, a process which may take up to two years to complete. Once in awhile, a kitten's eyes change directly from blue to green. Such cats will develop the most marvelous blue-green eyes.

The head is sometimes described as snake-like, which in spite of the unpleasant associations, is a very accurate description of a medium wedge with a flat profile. A unique feature of the Russian head is the ear placement. Ears should be set into the sides of the head rather than on top. An imaginary line drawn from the corner of the eye should correspond to the corner of the ear.

But what attracts most people to the breed is the gentle, affectionate temperament and the love the Russian Blue gives to its chosen people. Yes, a Russian Blue will choose you, not vice versa. Don't expect him to jump indiscriminately into the lap of every visitor. In fact,

some of your visitors will not even get to see your Russian Blue. He prefers to observe from a safe distance before he decides to be seen. An elderly lady who owns two of my Blues tells me that some of her friends do not believe she has two cats since they have yet to lay eyes on her boys. This may be an extreme case, since her "boys" also lead very sheltered lives, but generally a Russian Blue is reserved with strangers. With his own family, however, he is relaxed, and often a clown at heart. He will endlessly "fetch" a sock, will jump after "pretend" flies, and attack a catnip mouse, peeking from a corner of its eye to see if you are amused. If you are, do not laugh too loudly; your Russian may be sensitive and can be as offended as a proper Victorian lady or gentleman.

The Russian Blue is very intelligent and has a long memory. My Inky wakes me every morning at 7:00, except for Sundays when I get to sleep till 8:00. How he knows when Sunday comes around is a mystery, but he has never made a mistake. And when I come home from work, he greets me by the door. He may not wag his tail like a dog, but he is obviously very pleased to have his "person" back. Those are the kind of stories every Russian owner will tell about the "dog-like" devotion of this beautiful cat to his family.

With children, the Russian Blue is very gentle and patient, and again shows his good sense. A Russian Blue kitten was raised with a 2-year-old and apparently considered himself an equal playmate. Every morning, the kitten and the baby would run to the toy chest and select toys. Sometimes both wanted the same toy, and there would be a mild difference of opinion, but the cat never clawed the baby even though the child was clumsy and would unintentionally hurt the cat. All our Russian Blues learn at an early age to have "velvet" paws and are so gentle by nature that they keep their claws in even during play.

One trick every Russian worth his name masters quickly is a game of hide and seek. Even a Russian Blue mother has been known to search all over the house for her kittens, only to have them suddenly appear with innocent expressions that seem to say they have "been here all the time!"


With his quiet, stable temperament, the Russian Blue is an excellent pet for the urban apartment

dweller. He seldom miaows, and his voice is soft and chirpy. His habits are fastidiously clean. In fact, the Russian Blue is a cleanliness fanatic. He will let you know in no uncertain terms if he thinks his litter pan needs changing by noisily rearranging the contents even, or especially, at night. After all, why wasn't his pan cleaned earlier? But while he is fussy about his litter, he is not a fussy eater. He likes his food and has a good appetite. Perhaps his sanitary and dietary habits are the reasons he is such a healthy cat with no special medical problems.

Russian mothers are also easy breeders who raise sturdy litters of three, four or five kittens sensibly and with a minimum of fuss. Yet Russian Blue kittens are well mannered. A Rex may talk back to his mother: Russian kittens never do.

Clean, quiet and affectionate—don't these cats have any drawbacks? Of course they do. No breed is perfect, and Russian Blues who are not properly socialized tend to be shy. It is extremely important with this breed that they be raised as part of the family and handled at a very early age. They must be introduced to people, cats and household monsters such as the vacuum cleaner at an early age. Russians raised exclusively in cattery cages do not make good pets. Those that are raised as family members, however, will be fine companions who are elegant, loving and sensitive.

To be owned by a Russian Blue is an honor, but it won't break your budget. A pet kitten may be had for \$150 to \$250. You may even wonder what sets him apart from his more expensive show-quality brother or sister who costs from \$350 to \$500. That isn't always easy to tell, even for the experienced breeder. Sure, he can point to such obvious features as ear set, shade (lighter shades preferred), plushiness of coat or early development of eye color. But none of these features alone will make a good show cat. What really counts is a pleasing balance of all these traits. A Russian Blue isn't—or shouldn't be—a cat of extremes. Often a lanky "teenager" has all the good qualities, but doesn't set the show world on fire. Then, suddenly, everything seems to pull together and you have a top show winner.

Yet at his home, every Russian Blue is a star and a winner every day. As one proud owner once told me: "If you have ever been owned by a Russian Blue, no other cat will do." 

ON OVERLEAF: *Champion Midnight-sun Pyx and Andromeda, both of Star-cameon Cattery, owned by Gerald and Teresa Petersen, investigate some lovely Russian antiques.*



Russian Blue kittens, like this one from Killala Cattery, can be delightful little clowns. These cats become quite reserved, however, around any but their owners.



Photo: Kathy Dischler

When Lud, a pet-quality Russian died recently, owner Kathy Dischler wrote a poem for him that ended: If someone asks if cats are blessed/ my answer would surely be yes/ And if they ask for more good news/ I'll tell them God loves Russian Blues!

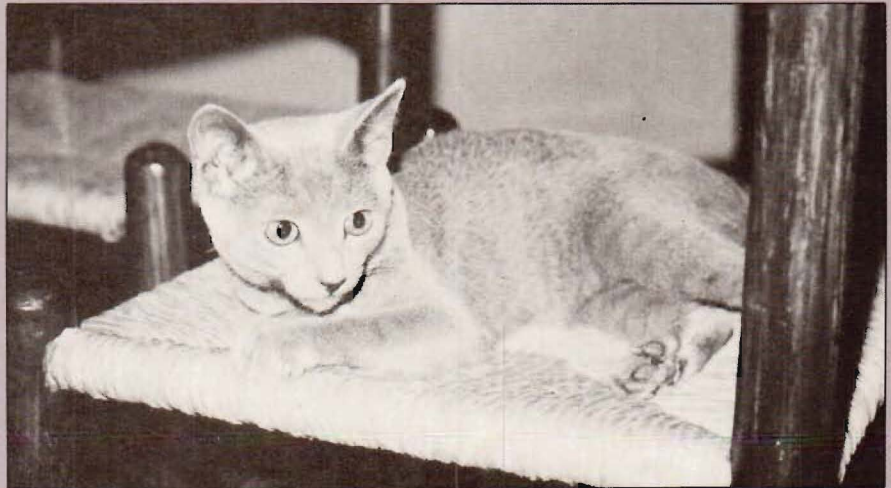


Photo: Kathy Davison

Russian Blue kittens, like all cats, are born with blue eyes and may take as much as two years to develop the deep green eyes characteristic of the breed.



Photo: Robert Pearcy

Russian kittens not properly socialized can be too shy to make good pets.

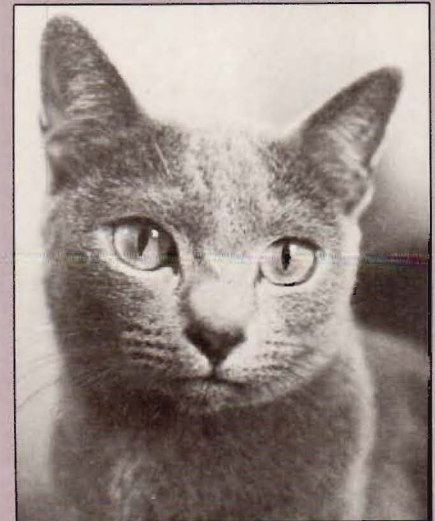
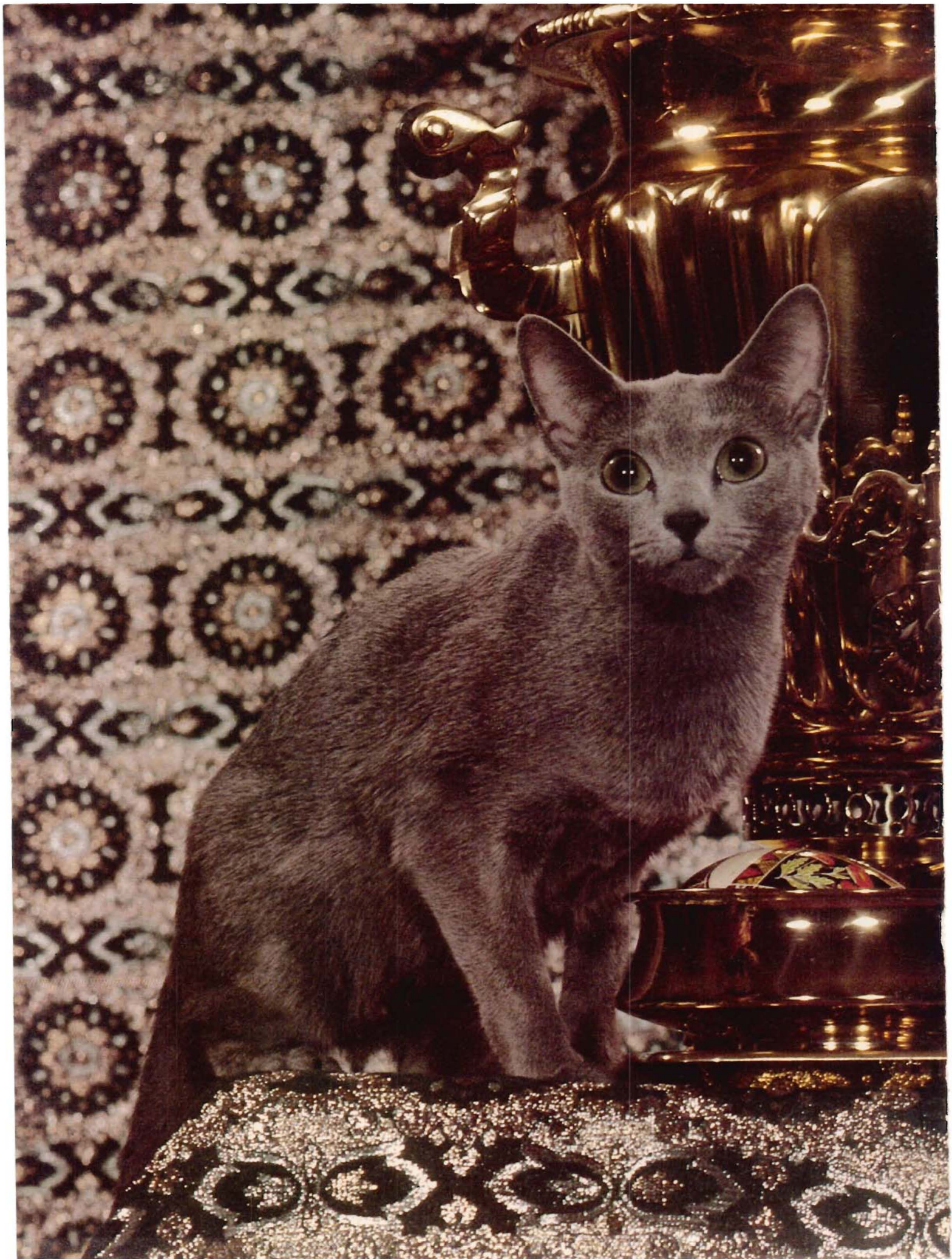


Photo: M. Nagel

The Russian's sweet, but reserved, temperament has endeared him to those that are looking for something special in a pet.



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Photo by Robert Percy

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