

# THE SECRET OF SHAOLIN'S BUDDHA WARRIOR

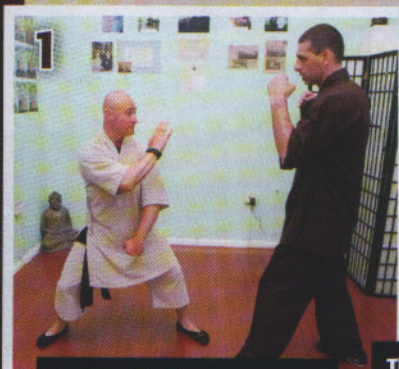
## Understanding the Shaolin Temple's fighting forms

STORY BY MASTER SHIFU BRETT RUSSELL | IMAGES BY CLIVE GIRDHAM

The Shaolin Temple in China's Hunan mountains is renowned worldwide as a stronghold of China's indigenous fighting systems or *wu yi* and, it's said, was once home to some 728 different martial arts. Many of these have disappeared over the 1500-year-old temple's tumultuous history – during which it's been destroyed and rebuilt several times – but today the temple's famous 'warrior monks' and its numerous connected martial arts schools still teach more than 200 combat forms. In this final instalment of our series exploring Shaolin Temple's famous fighting forms, master of Shaolin kung fu Shifu Brett Russell outlines the principles and training methods of *Jin Gang Chuan* or 'Buddha Warrior Attendant's Fist'.



## BUDDHA'S WARRIOR ATTENDANT VS PUNCH



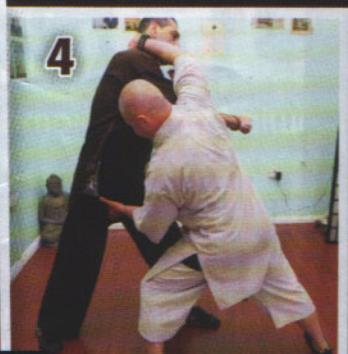
**1** As his attacker steps up, Shifu Russell covers high and low.



**2** The attacker launches a rear-hand punch so Russell steps forward to the outside, parrying the blow...



**3** ...and continues moving forward to grab the attacker's groin and his ear or hair simultaneously...



**4** ...(shown from opposite side) squeezing and ripping at his targets...

**U**pon entering the first gate at the Shaolin Temple, you will see the Shanmen Hall, which houses the statue of the Meitrey Buddha.

Outside the hall are two statues depicting *Vajra* (Buddha Warrior Attendants) standing either side of the entrance. Once inside, there are four more, depicting the Four Heavenly Kings. In Chan Buddhist mythology, these *Vajra* are to help people in need, control people's behaviour and to bless them. *Vajra* is a Sanskrit word that translates to 'thunderbolt' or 'diamond' — essentially, it is an unbreakable force. This is the description of the *wuseng* (martial monk), the Buddha Warrior Attendant.

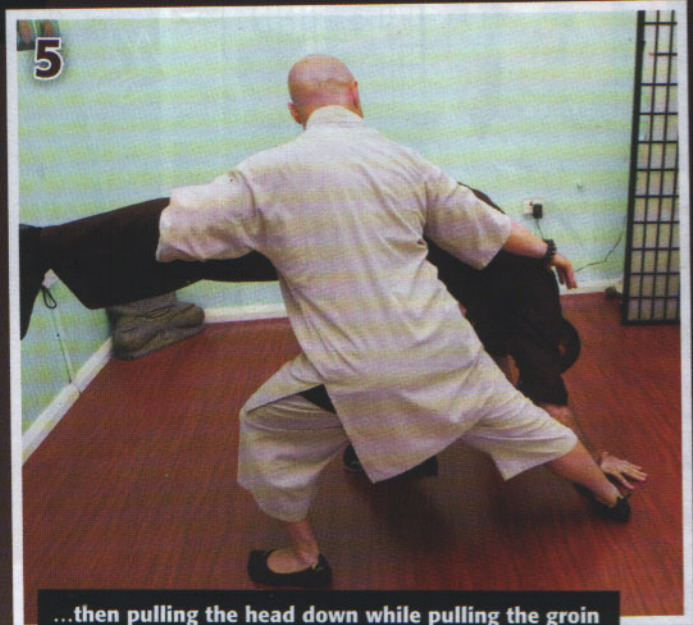
According to the legends passed down through the ages, the history of the Shaolin Temple's martial monks all started with the beginning of Chan (or Zen, in Japanese) Buddhism.

Bodhidharma travelled to China in the Liang Dynasty (502–557AD). After a three-year journey, he arrived at Emperor Wu's palace. The Emperor was unhappy with Bodhidharma's honest opinions on how to become enlightened (no wonder, with a tenet of Buddhism being letting go

of attachment to material possessions) so after only one day, Emperor Wu asked Bodhidharma to leave.

Bodhidharma or Da Mo, travelled north and came to rest at the *Shaolin Si* (Little Forest Temple). Observing the temple's monks, he noticed they were very weak and lethargic. Da Mo decided to stay in a cave, a one-hour walk above the temple on Songshan Mountain, where he proceeded to meditate and write. Over a period of nine years he wrote two books: *Yi Jin Jing* (*Muscle Tendon Changing Classic*) and *Shi Sui Jing*, a common translation of which is *Marrow Washing Classic*, but *Marrow and Brain Washing Classic* is a more accurate title. *Shi* means to wash, and *sui* includes *gu sui*, meaning bone marrow, and *nao sui*, meaning the brain. *Jing* means classic. Although in the West, brain-washing has a different and negative meaning, in this case 'purifying' might be a better translation of *shi*, as it means to become enlightened via Buddhism or Chan.

During his years of meditation, Da Mo also taught all aspects of Chan to a monk by the name of Hui Ku. This involved the young monk learning martial arts, chi kung



**5** ...then pulling the head down while pulling the groin up, to up-end his attacker and put him down.

(or qigong) and Buddhist meditation. Da Mo then instructed all of the monks at the Shaolin Temple in the practices of Chan Buddhism.

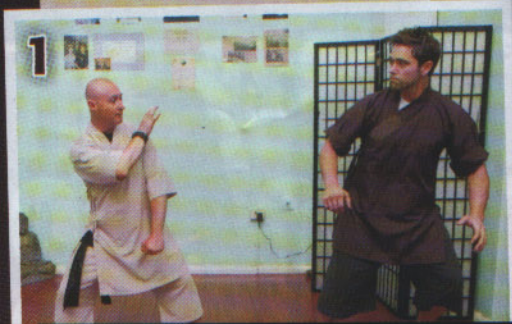
According to the legend, Hui Ku cut off his left arm as a show of devotion, in order to become Da Mo's disciple, and became the 'Second Patriarch' of Chan. He became the Abbott of the Shaolin Temple and started the *wuseng* lineage that is now in its 36th generation, with each new generation of martial monks taught Chan 'to guard and protect all that is good'.

One of the many advanced systems of Shaolin Temple

martial arts developed since this era is *Jin Gang Chuan* or 'Buddha Warrior Attendant's Fist'. Known for its ferocious fighting techniques and its extreme body conditioning via hard chi kung, it's said to turn anyone who masters the method into a *Vajra* — one who strikes like lightning and whose defence is impenetrable like a diamond.

In the *Jin Gang Chuan* system there is a fast form and a slower form. The fast set has 52 movements and 20 combinations, including variations, while the slow set has 64 movements and 24 combinations.

**BUDDHA'S WARRIOR  
ATTENDANT VS SIDE-KICK**

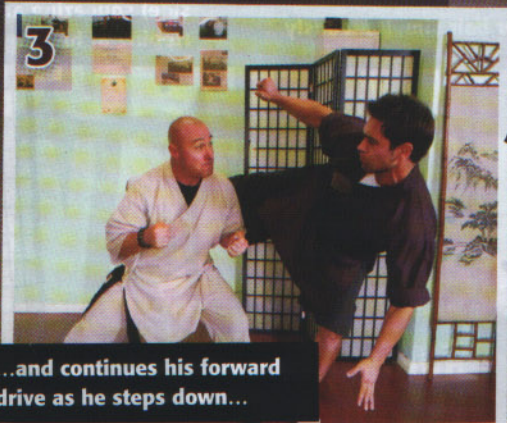


1

As his attacker steps in to launch a side-kick, Shifu Russell covers high and low...

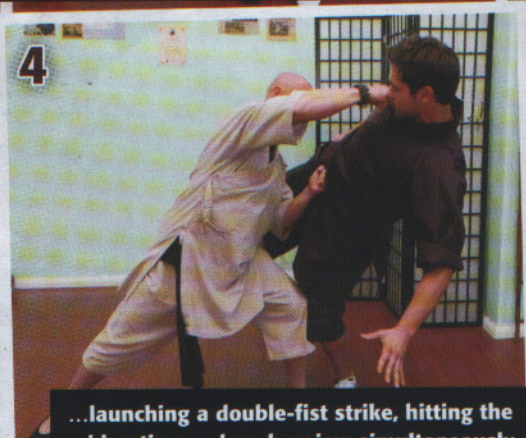
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...and steps inside the high kick to block the leg as he counters with a low side-kick to the groin...



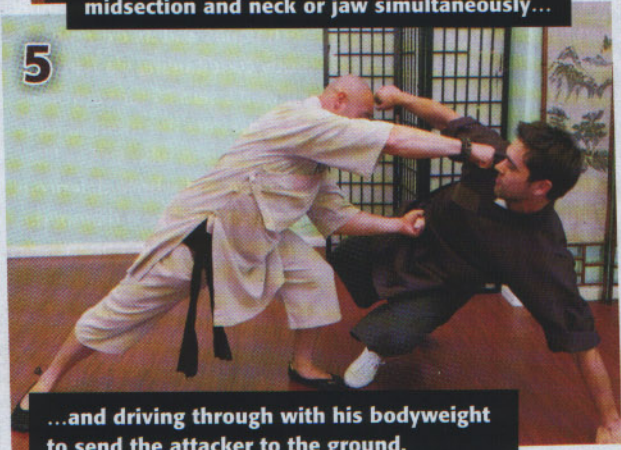
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...and continues his forward drive as he steps down...



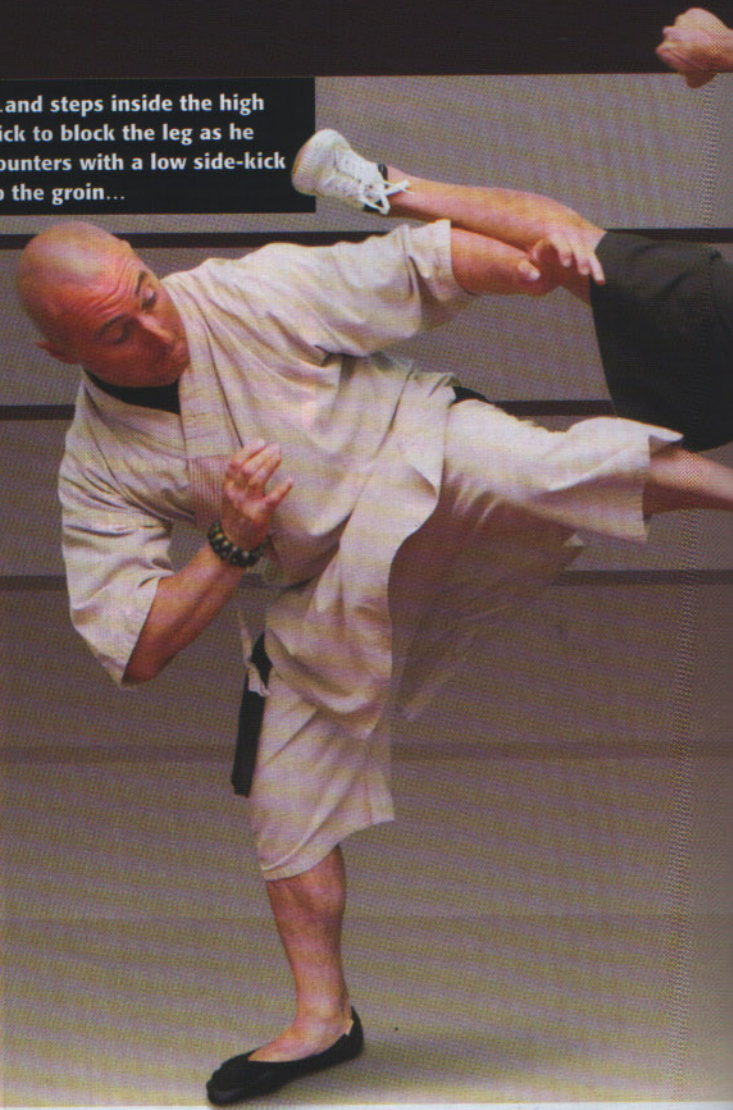
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...launching a double-fist strike, hitting the midsection and neck or jaw simultaneously...



5

...and driving through with his bodyweight to send the attacker to the ground.



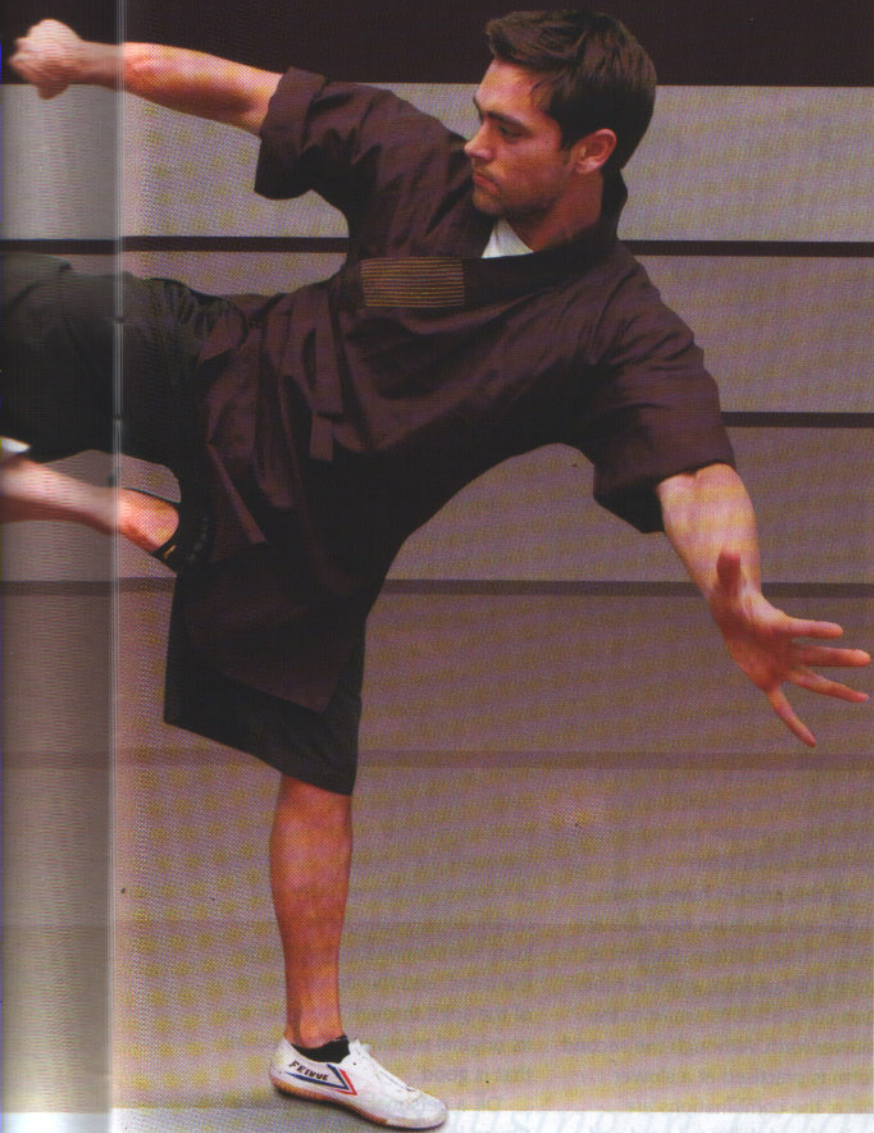
The fast set is studied first, and consists of strong foot and hand techniques, sometimes aimed at two vital areas simultaneously.

The slow set is considered more advanced and is practised (as a form) more slowly due to the older age the practitioner would be when learning this form (over 25). This may seem too young to be 'slowing down', but at the Shaolin Temple, most monks start training very young, often between five years old and masters by 25. Their training is gruelling and constant, but they also learn to 'train for a lifetime'. So, from the age of 25 they start preserving their bodies — training 'smarter, not harder' as the Western saying goes — so

they can practise until they are in their 80s. They still train hard, but the methodology changes to suit.

By the time he starts learning Jin Gang Chuan, a monk must have already mastered the Iron Shirt training, which includes the iron elbow, fist, foot and leg techniques to condition against heavy impact. Jin Gang Chuan is a strong system and the body, hands and fingers (grip) are strengthened through fingertip and knuckle push-ups, as well as pull-ups using shoulder-width, narrow, reverse and wide grips, with sets of each grip completed over four days.

The main chi kung syllabus



taught during this set is Sing Sui Jing – the famous 'Brain/Marrow Cleansing Skill' or *Yin chi kung*. The three 'internal' forms (that is, those with a focus on internal health and strength through developing improved chi flow) are:

1. Mind intent
2. Intent/chi
3. Chi/power.

Learning to fight is one thing; learning to control your mind and knowing yourself is the beginning of truly understanding and mastering martial arts, and this is the key to this system. Emotion clouds judgement and affects our martial arts skill, but in mastering Sing Sui Jing students learn how to control

their emotions in dangerous or challenging situations, allowing them to think clearer and act decisively. Once learnt, you can go from zero to 100 per cent power and intention in three movements, then back to zero again, with no emotion – you can 'flick the switch', as it were.

This ability is achieved through a series of breath-control sequences in conjunction with body movements. When you control your breathing inward and outward, you become calmer, regardless of the stressful nature of your situation.

With all Shaolin training, you learn the form first and then the combinations, which are then practised on focus-mitts,

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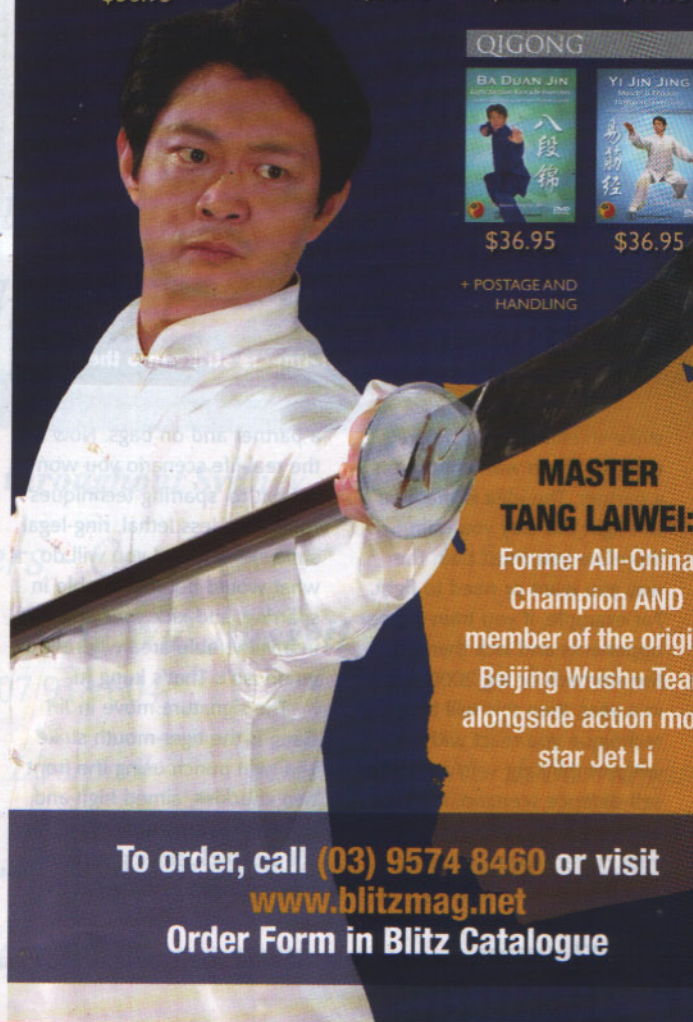


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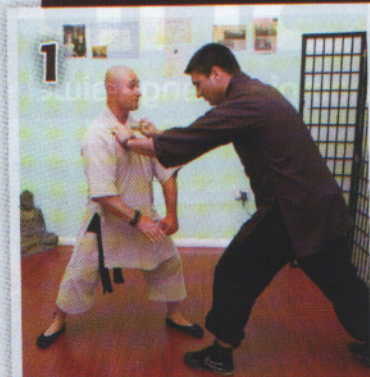
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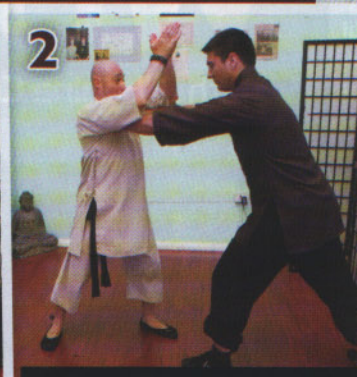
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## BUDDHA'S WARRIOR ATTENDANT VS GRAB



1 As the aggressor moves to grab his lapels, Shifu Russell's hands are already in motion...



2 ...to bring his hands together over the aggressor's arms, guarding his centre...



3 ...then drop his bodyweight onto the arms to bring his aggressor forward and off balance.



4 Russell then drives a front-kick (striking with the ball of the foot) into the aggressor's groin...



5 ...and finishes with a double spear-fingers strike into the neck.

strike-shields or bags before applying them with control on a partner. The idea is that you will fight the way you train, therefore you must train the way you want or need to fight. For example, if you train to spar opponents and kick them in the stomach or leg 2000 times in a year, then this will be the technique you react with – without thinking – in a real-life self-defence scenario. Imagine instead doing 2000 groin-kicks with correct speed, distance and timing while training with

a partner and on bags. Now in the real-life scenario you won't default to 'sparring techniques' (meaning, less lethal, ring-legal strikes) – instead you will do what would be unthinkable in sparring, and kick your attacker in a vulnerable area where their guard isn't. That's kung fu.

The signature move in Jin Gang is the tiger-mouth strike – a twin punch using the front two knuckles, aimed high and low at the same time. The other is a side-kick, striking with the heel and always aimed at the

groin, or lower body. As with any effective martial art, it is not only the conditioning that is important, but also learning where and how to strike and grab, for example, the vulnerable groin, neck and ear.

In this article I have shown three combinations from the Jin Gang Chuan system; the first is from the fast form and the other two combinations are from the slower form. Although the second form is practised at a slower pace, the combinations are trained and delivered hard and fast for self-defence.

In the first sequence I block with a high side-kick and counter with a side-kick to the groin, followed by a double-fist strike into the midsection and neck/jaw simultaneously.

The second shows a defence against someone grabbing with two hands: I clasp my hands together ('the praying Buddha' technique), then pull down on the attacker's arms and front-kick his groin with the ball of my foot, before striking his neck with double spear-fingers.

In the third sequence I demonstrate a defence against a standard punch: block and immediately grab the groin, grab an ear or hair, then squeeze and rip, yanking the ear or hair down

while pulling the groin up.

These techniques can be brutal in application, but are only a part of the Jin Gang Chuan method. As one of the ancient combat systems of the Shaolin Temple, it incorporates all aspects of Chan, teaching mastery and conditioning of the body, chi kung techniques for controlling the mind, and the development of the spirit through the focus on its original mission: 'to protect all that is good'.

On a personal note, Jin Gang Chuan is my signature system. I was blessed to have been taught this system and as the 32nd-generation inheritor, it is my responsibility to uphold the tradition of the Buddha Warrior Attendant. That is, to be a Vajra – an unbreakable force – and help people through the teaching of traditional Shaolin Temple wuyi. *Amitofo* (Buddha bless you).

*About the author: Master Shifu Brett Russell (Shi Xing Wu) is a 32nd-generation disciple of Shaolin kung fu. He is the chief instructor of Shaolin Monk Martial Arts Centres, based in Coogee, Sydney. Russell's contributions to Blitz are sponsored by athletic shoe company www.fivefingers.com.au*

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