



# Down Among the Sticks and Bones

*Seanan McGuire*

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Seanan McGuire

## Down Among the Sticks and Bones Seanan McGuire

Twin sisters Jack and Jill were seventeen when they found their way home and were packed off to Eleanor West's Home for Wayward Children.

This is the story of what happened first...

Jacqueline was her mother's perfect daughter—polite and quiet, always dressed as a princess. If her mother was sometimes a little strict, it's because crafting the perfect daughter takes discipline.

Jillian was her father's perfect daughter—adventurous, thrill-seeking, and a bit of a tom-boy. He really would have preferred a son, but you work with what you've got.

They were five when they learned that grown-ups can't be trusted.

They were twelve when they walked down the impossible staircase and discovered that the pretense of love can never be enough to prepare you a life filled with magic in a land filled with mad scientists and death and *choices*.

## Down Among the Sticks and Bones Details

Date : Published June 13th 2017 by Tor.com

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Author : Seanan McGuire

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# From Reader Review Down Among the Sticks and Bones for online ebook

destiny ? howling libraries says

#1 Every Heart a Doorway ★★★★★

#2 Down Among the Sticks and Bones ★★★★★

#3 Beneath the Sugar Sky ★★★★★

#4 In An Absent Dream ???

I genuinely did not think that anything could top *Every Heart a Doorway* for me, and then this book came in and blew my expectations out of the water. Seanan's writing is always masterful and poetic, but the underlying messages she wove into this novella made it even more meaningful to me.

*This, you see, is the true danger of children: they are ambushes, each and every one of them.*

If you've read the first book in this series, you'll recall the disastrous, eventful time we spent with the twins, Jack and Jill. In this entry, we get to revisit what happened before Nancy met them, starting before their births and leading all the way up to their exit from the Moors. Jacqueline and Jillian are the uncherished children of two busy, haughty adults who wanted dolls, not human beings. Through their upbringings and the effects their parents' choices have upon them as teens, it feels as though the entire story's innermost purpose is to remind the reader that children are humans, deserving of respect and love, and that forcing any child into an unsuited mold is a recipe for bleakness and tragedy.

*The thought that babies would become children, and children would become people, never occurred to them. The concept that perhaps biology was not destiny, and that not all little girls would be pretty princesses, and not all little boys would be brave soldiers, also never occurred to them.*

My favorite aspect of *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*, besides the poetic scenery Seanan creates with apparent ease, is the level of importance it places upon doing away with gender roles and expectations. As twins who are pushed into the most opposite directions possible, we see how each girl is taken so far from who she wants to be, that she will give anything to become her own, autonomous person—even at great cost.

*She had tried to make sure they knew that there were a hundred, a thousand, a million different ways to be a girl, and that all of them were valid, and that neither of them was doing anything wrong.*

There are some real gems in the cast of this story, though, and I'm not ashamed to admit that the sweeter moments made me cry more than once. There's the twins' doting grandmother, who sees the error of their parents' ways and does everything in her power to reverse the damage. There's Alexis, a delightful love interest who is a perfect little queer, plus size cinnamon roll. And, of course, there's Dr. Bleak, the eccentric scientist who raises little Jack into his assistant, and who is one of the only genuinely sensible, caring beings in her world (both on Earth, and in the Moors). These novellas are full of so many complex, intricate

characters with their own backstories and motives, and I constantly find myself wanting to spend more time with them. (Like, can I please get a whole novella on the feud between the Master and Dr. Bleak?)

*The Moors exist in eternal twilight, in the pause between the lightning strike and the resurrection.*

Lastly (but certainly not least), we get the root of the story: we learn what has happened to create the monsters within Jack and Jill, and what their motives are for the actions that conspire at the end of *Every Heart a Doorway*. Learning about their upbringings and the things they had done and been put through made me so much more understanding, and put the most shocking and fascinating spin on everything I thought I knew about them from the first book.

*The trouble with denying children the freedom to be themselves—with forcing them into an idea of what they should be, not allowing them to choose their own paths—is that all too often, the one drawing the design knows nothing of the desires of their model. Children are not formless clay, to be shaped according to the sculptor’s whim, nor are they blank but identical dolls, waiting to be slipping into the mode that suits them best.*

I know I say this about all of Seanan’s stories, but I truly cannot recommend this series highly enough. It is such a beautiful, dark, haunting, whimsical world full of paradoxes, curses and blessings, and nothing is ever exactly as it seems. I’m already dying to move on to the third installment, and so utterly delighted that she’s been signed for more books in the series, because I truly wish it would never end.

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Buddy read with Julie! ♥

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## **Emily May says**

*Some adventures require nothing more than a willing heart and the ability to trip over the cracks in the world.*

## **I love McGuire's dark little fairy tales so so much.**

I was captivated by *Every Heart a Doorway* last year, and couldn't wait to get into more of the author's weirdness with *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*. It doesn't disappoint. This second in the series is a completely new story, so it can be easily read as a standalone. But also has all the unsettling atmosphere of its predecessor.

In this book, Jacqueline and Jillian (or Jack and Jill) have been brought up to fit a mold created by their parents. Jacqueline-- her mother's pretty princess, who wears pink dresses and never plays outside where she might get \*gasp\* *dirty*. And Jillian-- the short-haired tomboy to replace the boy her father wanted but never got.

This is how they've always known it. But as they get older they start to wonder a single, old question: *why?* That's when they find the impossible staircase with the door that disappears behind them. That's when they enter a different world - one of magic and death and different paths.

*She had tried to make sure they knew that there were a hundred, a thousand, a million different ways to be a girl, and that all of them were valid, and that neither of them was doing anything wrong.*

It's both an **eerie, dark fairy tale** and a takedown of ideas about what it means to be a girl. Because, of course, in the end, **there is no one way to be a girl**. And you can make a girl wear a dress, just as you can make a girl wear jeans and cut her hair, but that doesn't change anything. Not really. Not where it counts.

It's a short, fast read, full of beautiful writing. The impression left by it should just about see me through until the next book - Beneath the Sugar Sky. But if the author wants to write faster, then that's good with me too.

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### **Lala BooksandLala says**

I just adore this series.

Booktube review: <https://youtu.be/g9L-nGlu2Ic?t=6m53s>

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### **Chelsea (chelseadolling reads) says**

Re-read 1/19/18: Re-read this to prepare for Beneath the Sugar Sky and it was still SO DAMN GOOD. I stg, I like live and breathe for this series. I'm obsessed. Can't believe I have something new in the series to pick up now! Shshshhebehshsj

Re-read 8/1/17: YES, I did re-read this two days after my original read. I loved it THAT much. Also I was in line for the audiobook to listen to during BTAT but didn't get approved until just today so I decided to re-listen while tidying up my house. This was just as, if not more, fantastic the second time around. Pardon me while I read everything Seanan McGuire has ever written.

Original read 7/29/17: BooktubeATHon Challenge #6: Read 7 books (okay I know this is only my 6th book but this doesn't apply to a challenge for me. Leave me alone!!!!) - COMPLETE!

This book was utter perfection. Holy fuck. I loved this SO MUCH. SOOOOOOOOO much. I might have even liked this more than Every Heart a Doorway???? Omg

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### **Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says**

4.5 stars. Review first posted on Fantasy Literature:

Since *Down Among the Sticks and Bones* is a prequel to *Every Heart a Doorway* and I was going into it already knowing where the story of Jack and Jill ends in this fantasy portal story, I was actually rather reluctant to pick it up. But Seanan McGuire tells this story so engagingly that I couldn't help but savor it, despite some horrifying and heartbreaking aspects of it. I actually liked it better than *Doorway* ... the story here made much more sense than the bizarre murder mystery in *Doorway*, and has a less timeworn plot.

Seanan McGuire spends the first quarter of the book relating how Jacqueline and Jillian are raised, or mis-raised, by their well-to-do parents, a story that could be painful and tedious if McGuire didn't tell it with such relish. Their parents, Chester and Serena Wolcott, are caught up in their own concerns, and decide to have children only because they envy all of the attention their friends' children get when their parents periodically bring them to work, dressed up and on best behavior. They have no idea what they're getting into, and once they get into it, they do it with complete incompetence.

McGuire leavens the sad tale of the twins' upbringing with her wry humor and insight, often offered up in parenthetical asides:

(The thought that babies would become children, and children would become people, never occurred to them. The concept that perhaps biology was not destiny, and that not all little girls would be pretty princesses, and not all little boys would be brave soldiers, also never occurred to them. Things might have been easier if those ideas had ever slithered into their heads, unwanted but undeniably important. Alas, their minds were made up, and left no room for such revolutionary opinions.)

Jacqueline becomes her mother's project, always dolled up in frilly princess dresses, while Jillian is encouraged by her father to be a rough-and-tumble tomboy. But the girls don't fit into these rigid molds quite as easily as their parents think.

One day, when the girls are twelve, they open an old trunk in an empty bedroom and find a long, impossible stairway that leads them to a fantastic land, where their love for each other (already strained) will be tested in terrible new ways, and they will be faced with choices that children shouldn't have to make, and events and people that will divide them.

There are worlds built on rainbows and worlds built on rain. There are worlds of pure mathematics, where every number chimes like crystal as it rolls into reality. There are worlds of light and worlds of darkness, worlds of rhyme and worlds of reason, and worlds where the only thing that matters is the goodness in a hero's heart. The Moors are none of those things. The Moors exist in eternal twilight, in the pause between the lightning strike and the resurrection. They are a place of endless scientific experimentation, of monstrous beauty, and of terrible consequences.

The nicknames Jack and Jill ? which their parents refused to acknowledge ? are backwards from the roles the twins are given in their youth: Jack is the princess and Jill, the tomboy. I never did get used to that, though I applaud *Down Among the Sticks and Bones* for taking the unexpected route with their names. There's a seismic shift, however, when the girls arrive in the Moors, where their characters develop in stunningly different ways than their parents had anticipated. Those unexpected developments nevertheless make sense, since McGuire has carefully laid the foundation in the way their younger personalities and characteristics were described.

The plot of *Down Among the Sticks and Bones* is intriguing, and it explores themes of parental expectations, gender roles (it may surprise you which of the girls is gay), and fraught sibling relationships with sharp

perception. But it's Seanan McGuire's resonant writing that will particularly remain with me. The frequent humor and sarcasm lightens what might otherwise be an oppressively dark story, and the omniscient narrator's insights into human motivations make for a compelling story.

Even though *Every Heart a Doorway*, to some extent, spoils the ending of this tale ? I still think it would work best to read *Sticks and Bones* before *Doorway*, if you haven't read either yet ? it's definitely worth stepping through the magic portal with Jack and Jill and tumbling down some (real and metaphorical) hills with them.

*I received a free copy of this book from the publisher through NetGalley. Thank you!!*

Content note: This novella, like the first, is engaged with gender issues and alternative sexuality. No explicit scenes, though.

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### Emily (Books with Emily Fox) says

(3.5) I'm not 100% sure how to rate this book...

I liked it but not as much as the first one. I'm definitely planning on reading the next one since I want to hear more about the other worlds!

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### Trina (Between Chapters) says

The dreamy storytelling quality of this series is amazing. Some of my favorite audiobooks for sure. Loved the exploration of gender roles and how there's no wrong way to be a girl. There is a f/f romance included.

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### Elise (TheBookishActress) says

Childhood dreams are fun to return to, aren't they? Until you remember that childhood isn't always an easy walk through the wildflowers. **Until you remember that some of those dreams can turn to nightmares quick as a flash.**

This was definitely better for me than book one. While I thought book one had the same **amazing atmosphere** and a **fantastic concept**, this book had far more solid **character work**.

If any of you remember my review of *Every Heart a Doorway*, you'll remember that Jack was by far my favorite character. While I wanted to love Nancy, I found her a fairly bland character with not much of an arc. I also felt that *Every Heart A Doorway* had no middle. But this book has both a middle section and significant character work. **Seanan McGuire has definitely ironed out the kinks in her novella-writing talent.**

*With another sigh, Alexis took it and slid off the bed. "Those 'village oafs,' as you like to call them, will have houses and trades of their own one day. You'll have a windmill."*

*"A very clean windmill," said Jack. "They'd be able to give me children. That's what Mother*

says.”

*“I could give you children,” said Jack, sounding faintly affronted. “You’d have to tell me how many heads you wanted them to have, and what species you’d like them to be, but what’s the point of having all these graveyards if I can’t give you children when you ask for them?”*

Jack is probably my favorite thing about this tiny book. She's a mad scientist and she's brave and she's hilarious. I could read eight books about her.

The relationships of this tiny book were all so intriguing. I absolutely loved the banter between Alexis and Jack. I also really enjoyed the relationship between Jack and Jill; their character clash is perfectly written.

*“Oh, I’m sorry.” Jack raised her head, reaching up to adjust her glasses as she did. “I thought it was a stray dog knocking the door open. Where I come from, people knock.”*

*“You come from the same place I do,” said Jill.*

*“Yes, and people knocked.”*

This book is a lot darker than *Every Heart A Doorway*. The Moors are not on the same level as Nancy's odd but lovable world. Jack and Jill are in a dangerous, scary world, but they're owning it. I loved the eerie atmosphere to this story; I found this book incredibly unputdownable.

I also just really love how feminist this book is. The discussion on how forced gender roles fail is one of the best I've ever seen.

*“The concept that perhaps biology was not destiny, and that not all little girls would be pretty princesses, and not all little boys would be brave soldiers.”*

One final note before I go: I really desperately need answers on that ending. Answer my questions, Seanan McGuire. Please.

I really can't recommend this enough. Everyone should read it.

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**Raeleen Lemay says**

**Read for Popsugar's 2018 Reading Challenge #30: A Book With Characters Who Are Twins**

A great book to kick off the new year! I really enjoyed this one, even if a bit less than *Every Heart A Doorway*. I definitely hope to get to the next book sometime this year!

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**karen says**

NOW AVAILABLE!!!

this woman....

according to miranda, between her two author-personas; Seanan McGuire and Mira Grant, this woman has SIX books coming out in 2017. which is crazy. and some of them, like this one, are on the short side, but they are in no way flimsy, tossed-off sketches. the amount of thick detail and lingering emotional resonance here'll make your head spin.

'cuz while this one may be short, it sure ain't sweet.

i mean, it's sweet in the "OH MY GOD, MY HEART IS BREAKING" way that appeals to me as a reader, but it isn't a sugar and spice fairytale - this one's got teeth for miles.

it takes place before the events of *Every Heart a Doorway*, and tells of the circumstances that brought jack and jill to eleanor west's home for wayward children. fans of that book already know the basic outline of their journey, but here we get the entire story in all its blood-soaked majesty.

like most of her work, this is both an excellently-built story that entertains, but it also delivers a serious message it its focus on issues of identity - from the familial and personal to identities based in gender or sexuality; what is imposed, what is chosen, what is inherent. there's maybe a smidgen too much of a preachifying tone to this exploration here, and it's drilled in a bit too hard and often for such a short piece, but it's interesting and important enough to bear repeating for people who don't get it the first time, and repetition is a genre standard of the fairytale, so it's not wholly off-putting, even if it does obstruct the narrative flow a bit.

apart from that, it's truly masterful - the way character is shaped by the tyranny of parental expectations and how either submission to or rebellion against these expectations informs future choices and values, the bone-deep loyalty of sisters despite diverging paths, first love, loss, jealousy; everything that makes a person tick, where each of those ticks signifies the bomb's inevitable explosion.

it's a perfect follow-up to *Every Heart a Doorway*, and it's maybe a vegetable-peeling's width less awesome, but it's a welcome explanation of these characters' backstory and could absolutely work as a standalone story. however, if you haven't read *every heart*, you're really missing out on something special.

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OH MY GOD COVER REVEAL IS SPECTACULAR!!!

come to my blog!

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## **Catriona (LittleBookOwl) says**

Rating: 4.75 stars

Really enjoyed learning more about some of the fascinating characters we met in book #1, and exploring a new world!

So dark and heartbreaking.

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## **Emma Giordano says**

4.5 Stars! This was definitely a satisfying sequel. I think I may have enjoyed book one slightly more, but nonetheless, I adore this series and would highly recommend books one and two!

I believe it is written in third person-omniscient, which I find is not the most common form of narration in YA. It's always a bit tricky to get fully immersed at first, being the prose is also quite elaborate and flowery, but I've consistently grown addicted to her writing style with both books.

I do feel *Down Among the Sticks and Bones* is a tad more complex than *Every Heart A Doorway*, which I loved! This book deals with the influence of a parent's wishes/expectations on their children, sisterly dynamics, and identity crisis/development. All themes explored came across extremely well and I believe it differs from so many fantasy YA books for this reason.

As a lover of book one, it was interesting to delve deeper into the stories of two side characters before we meet them in the first book (this is a prequel!) I was fascinated reading the development of Jack & Jill, especially since I kept confusing the two of them from their personality from the first book (An obvious, but genius addition to this novella). I was also pleased that one of the main characters is involved in a relationship with another girl in this story – I'm not sure if *Every Heart A Doorway* mentions this, and I don't believe her exact sexual identity is stated, but yay for more books with WLW protagonists!!

The only thing I feel is lacking in this novel is the plot isn't as exciting as book one. For most of the story, we examine the relationship and differences among these two girls as they explore their identity for the first time in their lives. There wasn't as severe of a looming threat like in book one, and I wish there were a few more significant events to propel the story.

In conclusion, I adored this book. I always have a soft spot for sequels that really do compare to book one because I think it's a hard feat to accomplish! I cannot wait for book three to come out this January. If you're looking for a short yet deep fantasy novel, this series is for you.

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## **Philip says**

4.25ish stars.

Creepy and concise in the vein of the most classic fairytales and with obvious comparisons to classic horror novels, this story has a timeless feel. It's both whimsical and disturbing with a healthy dose of dark humor.

It branches off from the brilliant Wayward Children novella series, separate but necessary reading (just because it's that good). It works perfectly as a standalone and although it doesn't have a direct connection to the storyline introduced in Every Heart a Doorway (for which reason I don't love it quite as much), it really deepened my affection for that book, which was already one of my favorites from last year.

There's not much else to say except that I love this series and hope McGuire finds a way to keep it going for a good long time introducing the world to a brand new set of fairytales. Everything from the book covers to the chapter titles is a little slice of perfection.

Posted in Mr. Philip's Library

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**may 🌸 says**

Full review posted

I'm honestly surprised at how underrated this series is. It one of the most fantastical, intriguing stories I have read in a LONG time and boi they're short as heck you can finish them in less than an afternoon

### **6 Reasons why this book is the Best™**

1. Epic narration of Jack and Jill's backstory (yes the characters from the first book, who would have thought)
2. Creepy, dark, and eerie. Idk how the author came up with this world but it's absolutely riveting. Ms. Plz let me in your brain
3. A story of betrayal and forgiveness and betrayal. There's no love and happiness here kids, be warned
4. The writing is gripping, once you start there aint no stopping
5. The irony of the girl's personality is exquisite. Really adds dimension to the characters and makes you THAT much more enthralled by who they are
6. There is featured art and it is beautiful

This book has rendered me wordless, so imma leave you with that

*"Some adventures require nothing more than a willing heart and the ability to trip over the cracks in the world."*

4.5 stars!!

~~~~~

\*lowers sunglasses\*

\*squints at horizon\*

is that

is that  
is that a slump approaching at record speed???

. . .nah boi, i didn't sign up for this

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## Melanie says

*ARC provided by Tor in exchange for an honest review.*

### 1.) Every Heart a Doorway ★★★★★

This book is beyond words. No amount of word combinations I could possibly string together could do this book justice. This series is truly a gift from above, and I can't urge you enough to drop any and everything you're reading to pick up this or Every Heart a Doorway.

I didn't think it would be possible, but I actually enjoyed *Down Among the Sticks and Bones* more than Every Heart a Doorway. Once I turned that last page, I immediately ran to my bookshelves and read Every Heart a Doorway. Then, I just laid there on the ground in awe, while trying to convince myself to not reread *Down Among the Sticks and Bones* at 2 o'clock in the morning. Seriously, this series is *that* amazing.

If you've read Every Heart a Doorway then you know how Jack and Jill's story ends in that book, so I was absolutely ecstatic when I found out that the next book in this series was their back-story about their magical world.

The twin sisters' doorway is very different than Nancy's in Every Heart a Doorway. Their doorway, the Moors, is a place of neutral territory surrounded by vampires, werewolves, gargoyles, Drowned God worshipers, and more in the paranormal vein. And a few individuals in the Moors are very excited when children stumble through from portals from different worlds.

Jack and Jill stumble through when they are only twelve years old, and stay for another five years, even though they wished to stay forever. In those short five years, they discover who they are and who they want to be. They thrive in this scary world because they are able to be themselves, not what is forced upon them.

The tone of this book just feels so dark and eerie, while also being so magical and lovely. My body feels such a vast array of feelings and emotions reading Seanan McGuire's work. The writing is so atmospheric; you will feel like you stumbled upon your own doorway.

***“She had tried to make sure they knew that there were a hundred, a thousand, a million different ways to be a girl, and that all of them were valid”***

The discussion on gender roles and the impact they have when we force them on our children, sometimes knowingly and other times unknowingly, is so important. It's okay to be a tom-boy, it's okay to be a girly-girl, and, most importantly, it's okay to be both. We should never be defined by the world's gender stereotypes. This is something that I have personally struggled with a lot growing up, and I could write about

this topic until my fingers bled, but Seanan McGuire perfectly executes this point in such a perfectly crafted story that is under 200 pages! I am seriously so awestruck.

***“The concept that perhaps biology was not destiny, and that not all little girls would be pretty princesses, and not all little boys would be brave soldiers”***

There is also amazing representation and explanations on how it feels to suffer from Mysophobia/Germaphobia. I actually do not think I've ever read a book about someone dealing with their Mysophobia, and it just made me love and admire *Down Among the Sticks and Bones* even more.

If you've read *Every Heart a Doorway* you will know that there is lesbian representation in here, but the depiction of first love was something I wasn't expecting, and it was so beautiful I can't possibly put it into words.

I, too, truly loved the Moors and wasn't ready to leave. I loved the village and the feel of this magical world. I loved seeing Jack grow into what she wanted to be, while seeing Jill grow into what could happen if your needs and wants are repressed to a dangerous point. I loved the representation and all of the feelings that Seanan McGuire was able to evoke from me. I loved this book and these characters, and I will cherish this story forever, while trying to get everyone I come in contact with to read it.

~~Also, I need Kade's story like I need air in my lungs. Please, Lord, make Beneath the Sugar Sky be his book. Also, please give me and my heart the strength to wait for it to come out.~~ Beneath the Sugar Sky is about Sumi, or more so her prophesied daughter, but I am still so here for it and cannot wait! ?

***“A man who has lived his entire life in a cave does not mourn the sun until he sees it, and once he has he can never go back underground.”***

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*The quotes above were taken from an ARC and are subject to change upon publication.*

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