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# Evaluation of carbonate apatite as a bone substitute in rat extraction sockets from the perspective of mesenchymal stem cells

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Carbonate apatite (CO<sub>3</sub>Ap) is a major inorganic bone component and an effective bone substitute. To clarify the function of CO<sub>3</sub>Ap, we compared differences among CO<sub>3</sub>Ap, hydroxyapatite (HAp), and  $\beta$ -tricalcium phosphate ( $\beta$ -TCP) by focusing on mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs) that have a role in wound healing. For *in vivo* experiments, maxillary molars were removed and the bone substitute was inserted. MSC accumulation around extraction sockets was significantly promoted in CO<sub>3</sub>Ap and  $\beta$ -TCP groups. For *in vitro* experiments, MSCs were cultured with bone substitutes. The differentiation potential and amount of calcium deposition were significantly lower in CO<sub>3</sub>Ap and HAp groups than in the  $\beta$ -TCP group. Increases in insulin-like growth factor-I and vascular endothelial growth factor were found only in the CO<sub>3</sub>Ap group. CO<sub>3</sub>Ap-filled extraction sockets suggest that CO<sub>3</sub>Ap promotes healing of tooth extraction sockets.

Keywords: Carbonate apatite, Mesenchymal stem cells, Accumulation, Bone substitutes

#### INTRODUCTION

A bone substitute is used to fill a bone defect to provide options in terms of the implant depth and direction, and expand treatment possibilities. The rate of bone replacement is critical for the choice of bone substitute, because it is necessary to maintain space for bone formation<sup>1.3</sup>. Although many materials have been used to date<sup>4</sup>, autologous bone is the first choice<sup>5.6</sup>. However, artificial bone is often used because of the limited amount of autologous bone that can be collected and the highly invasive nature of the procedure<sup>7.8</sup>.

Artificial bone has been developed since the 1970s, and hydroxyapatite (HAp) and  $\beta$ -tricalcium phosphate ( $\beta$ -TCP) are used in the dental field. HAp is inorganic and similar to natural bone with high biocompatibility<sup>9-11)</sup>. Because HAp bone substitutes are fabricated by sintering that eliminates carbonate groups<sup>12)</sup>, its resorption by osteoclasts is difficult, and HAp remains in the body for a long time. Conversely,  $\beta$ -TCP is highly soluble<sup>13,14)</sup>. While early bone formation is expected in the area of resorption, soft tissue often invades before new bone formation. Ishikawa *et al.* developed carbonate apatite (CO<sub>3</sub>Ap) as a bone substitute, which is the inorganic main component of bone<sup>12,15)</sup>. CO<sub>3</sub>Ap bone substitute has significantly higher solubility in a low acid environment than HAp and lower solubility than  $\beta$ -TCP<sup>13,16-19)</sup>.

However, it remains unclear how  $CO_3Ap$  differs from other materials in replacing bone. Therefore, in this study, we focused on elucidating the mechanism by which mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs) are involved in wound healing of the extraction socket. MSCs are present in almost all tissues of the body (*e.g.*, bone marrow<sup>20</sup>), fat<sup>21</sup>), and gingiva<sup>22</sup>) and are easily isolated and cultured, facilitating their application in the field of regenerative medicine. In wound healing, endogenous MSCs play an important role by their multipotency to differentiate into bone cells, cartilage cells, adipocytes, cardiomyocytes, nerve cells, and vascular endothelial cells<sup>23-27</sup>). Additionally, MSCs stimulate tissue repair by controlling the activity of immune cells and eliciting anti-inflammatory and anti-immune effects<sup>28</sup>).

In this study, on the basis of the hypothesis that  $CO_3Ap$  promotes the function of MSCs for hard and soft tissue repair compared with other bone substitute materials, we investigated the involvement and role of MSCs in the restoration of tooth extraction sockets with  $CO_3Ap$  bone substitutes. Furthermore, we compared localization of endogenous MSCs in three bone substitutes ( $CO_3Ap$ , HAp, and  $\beta$ -TCP) in animal experiments, and investigated the differentiation, proliferation, and growth factors of MSCs in culture experiments.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Materials** 

Cytrans<sup>®</sup> (GC, Tokyo, Japan) was used as CO<sub>3</sub>Ap. The granules were 300–600  $\mu$ m in diameter (pore diameter: <0.5  $\mu$ m; porosity: 26%<sup>16</sup>)<sup>19,29,30</sup>. BONETITE (HOYA, Tokyo, Japan) was used as HAp. The granules were

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500–1,000  $\mu$ m in diameter (pore diameter: 200  $\mu$ m; porosity: 70%<sup>31)</sup>). CERASORB M<sup>®</sup> (Curasa, Kleinostheim, Germany) was used as a representative  $\beta$ -TCP. This product is a porous granule with a particle size of 1,000–2,000  $\mu$ m (pore diameter: 5–500  $\mu$ m; porosity: ~65%<sup>16</sup>)).

 $CO_3Ap$ , HAp, and  $\beta$ -TCP plates (diameter: 10.0 mm; thickness: 0.8 mm), which had a similar composition to the granules except for strength and shape, were kindly provided by GC.

#### Animals

Wistar rats received care following the guidelines established by Kyushu University (approval number: A29-222-0). The experimental model was established as reported previously<sup>19)</sup>. Briefly, 6-week-old Wistar rats (30 males; 120–150 g) had maxillary first and second molars (80 teeth) extracted under systemic anesthesia. The extraction socket was enlarged to eliminate the alveolar septum with a dental round bur, and CO<sub>3</sub>Ap, HAp, or  $\beta$ -TCP bone substitute was implanted. After each experimental period, the rats were deeply anesthetized and perfused intracardially with heparinized phosphatebuffered saline (PBS) followed by 4% paraformaldehyde (PFA) (pH 7.4).

#### Tissue preparation

Tissues were prepared in accordance with the methods described in our previous studies<sup>19,32)</sup>. Briefly, the oral mucosa surrounding the extraction socket was immersed in 4% PFA for 48 h at 4°C. The samples were snap frozen after decalcification with Kalkitox<sup>TM</sup> solution (Wako, Osaka, Japan) and cut into 10-µm-thick buccopalatal sections using a cryostat. The sections were stained with Ladewig's fibrin stain<sup>32)</sup> and then observed under an optical microscope. Furthermore, the length of distance between the edge of the epithelial surface was calculated. All measurements were done three times and their averages were calculated.

#### Immunohistochemistry

The sections were stained immunohistochemically using mouse anti-rat CD90 (1:100, Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) and CD105 antibodies (1:100, Sigma-Aldrich) overnight at 4°C. Samples were then incubated with a fluorescein isothiocyanate (FITC)-conjugated secondary antibody (1:200, Jackson Immuno Research, West Grove, PA, USA) for 1 h at room temperature and mounted with 4'-6-diamidino-2-phenylindole (DAPI; Vector Laboratories, Burlingame, CA, USA) as described previously<sup>33</sup>.

#### MSC isolation and culture

MSCs were isolated from bone marrow of rats with or without GFP expression as described previously<sup>34</sup>). Briefly, bone marrow cells were flushed out from femoral and tibial bone cavities. The cells were passed through a 40-µm cell strainer to obtain a single cell suspension. The single cell suspension was seeded in 100-mm culture dishes at  $1\times10^6$  cells/dish. At 1 day after seeding, the cells were washed with PBS and cultured in growth medium consisting of alpha-minimum essential medium (Invitrogen, Grand Island, NY, USA) supplemented with 20% fetal bovine serum (Equitech-Bio, Kerrville, TX, USA), 2 mM L-glutamine (Invitrogen), 100 U/mL penicillin (Invitrogen), and 100  $\mu$ g/mL streptomycin (Invitrogen). After 1 week of culture, colony-forming unit-fibroblasts had formed colonies. Adherent MSCs in these colonies were detached with trypsin/EDTA (Invitrogen), reseeded as new cultures, and expanded for experiments. For *in vitro* assessment, MSCs were seeded in 35-mm dishes at 2×10<sup>4</sup> cells/dish and incubated with or without bone substitutes for 12 h at 37°C with 5% CO<sub>2</sub>.

#### Scanning electron microscopy

At 3 and 7 days after MSCs were seeded on CO<sub>3</sub>Ap, HAp, or  $\beta$ -TCP plates at 5×10<sup>3</sup> cells/mL, cell morphology was evaluated by scanning electron microscopy. Samples were fixed with 2.5% glutaraldehyde, dehydrated in graded ethanol solutions, and then freeze-dried. The samples were mounted on stubs, coated with an Au/Pd alloy, and evaluated microscopically<sup>32</sup>. The number of cells on materials was counted in a field of view.

#### Fluorescence staining

MSCs expressing GFP were seeded on  $CO_3Ap$ , HAp, or  $\beta$ -TCP in 35-mm dishes at  $5 \times 10^3$  cells/mL and incubated for 12 h at 37°C with 5% CO<sub>2</sub>. Then, the cells were fixed in 4% PFA for 5 min and incubated with TRITC-conjugated phalloidin (1:100; Sigma-Aldrich) and a mouse anti-rat GFP antibody (1:100, Sigma-Aldrich) overnight at 4°C. The cells were then incubated with a FITC-conjugated secondary antibody (1:200, Jackson Immuno Research) for 1 h at room temperature and mounted using VECTASHIELD<sup>®</sup> mounting medium containing DAPI (Vector Laboratories)<sup>34,35</sup>.

#### Proliferation assay

MSCs were indirectly cultured in the bottom chamber of Transwells at 1×10<sup>4</sup> cells/mL for 3 days with or without bone substitutes in the upper chamber. A Transwell<sup>®</sup> with a 0.4-µm insert was used as a separator (upper chamber: blank, CO<sub>3</sub>Ap, HAp, or β-TCP; bottom chamber: MSCs) to evaluate the indirect effects of MSCs with or without each bone substitute mediated through calcium ions and growth factors<sup>36</sup>. In this experiment, the number of cells on days 1 and 3 after culturing was counted, and the rate of increase was calculated.

#### Osteogenic differentiation assay

MSCs were indirectly cultured in the bottom chamber of Transwells at  $1 \times 10^4$  cells/well in osteogenic culture medium containing 1.8 mM KH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub> and 10 nM dexamethasone (Sigma-Aldrich) with or without bone substitutes in the upper chamber. After 28 days of osteogenic induction, the cultures were stained with a 1% Alizarin Red S solution (Sigma-Aldrich)<sup>33</sup>).

#### Adipogenic differentiation assay

MSCs were indirectly cultured in adipogenic culture

medium containing 0.5 mM isobutylmethylxanthine, 60  $\mu$ M indomethacin, 0.5  $\mu$ M hydrocortisone, and 10  $\mu$ g/mL insulin (all from Sigma-Aldrich) with or without bone substitutes using Transwells. After 14 days of adipogenic induction, the cultures were stained with Oil Red O. Oil Red O-positive lipid droplets were observed under an inverted microscope (BZ-9000, Keyence, Osaka, Japan)<sup>33)</sup>.

#### Calcium measurement

CO<sub>3</sub>Ap, HAp, or β-TCP was immersed in a 150-ppm calcium solution (0.04% CaCl<sub>2</sub> and 0.75% KCl), distilled water, or MSC medium (α-MEM with 20% FBS, 2 mM L-glutamine,  $1 \times 10^{-8}$  M dexamethasone, 55  $\mu$ M 2-mercaptoethanol, 100 U/mL penicillin and 100  $\mu$ g/mL streptomycin; 48 ppm calcium) at 37°C (*n*=8 each). After 7 days, each solution was evaluated using a calcium ion meter (LAQUAtwin Ca-11, Horiba, Kyoto, Japan) in accordance with the methods described in a previous study<sup>37</sup>.

## Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays (ELISAs) of growth factors

MSCs were indirectly cultured with or without bone substitutes using Transwells with a 0.4-µm pore size, and culture supernatants were collected at 3 and 7 days. The samples were concentrated to a 5× concentration using an Apollo<sup>TM</sup> (Orbital Biosciences, Topsfield, MA, USA), and ELISAs were performed to measure endothelial growth factor (EGF), vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), and IGF-I (Invitrogen)<sup>38)</sup>.

#### Statistical analysis

Five samples in each group were used in experiments.

An *a priori* Shapiro–Wilk test was performed to test for normality. One-way analysis of variance with Bonferroni's correction was performed. p<0.05 was considered statistically significant. Data are indicated as the mean±standard deviation.

#### RESULTS

#### Histology of early extraction socket healing

Figure 1 shows extraction socket healing on days 3 and 7 in models (HAp,  $\beta$ -TCP and CO<sub>3</sub>Ap groups) with the bone substitute inserted into the socket compared with the extraction socket healing model (control group) without a bone substitute. There was almost no difference in the healing degree at 3 days. However, at 7 days, we observed promotion of epithelial tissue closure on the extraction socket in the CO<sub>3</sub>Ap group compared with the other groups.

#### MSC accumulation around bone substitutes

Figure 2 shows MSC accumulation in experimental groups (control , HAp,  $\beta$ -TCP, and CO<sub>3</sub>Ap). When endogenous MSC localization was observed by immunohistochemical staining of CD90 and CD105, the number of double immune-positive cells was significantly higher in  $\beta$ -TCP and CO<sub>3</sub>Ap groups than the other groups (Figs. 2B, C). The MSCs were localized in soft tissues slightly distant from the extraction socket. However, in the HAp group, negligible MSC accumulation was observed, which was similar to the control group.

#### Effect of bone substitutes on MSC adhesion

MSCs were directly seeded on each bone substitute, and cell dynamics were compared after 3 and 7 days (Fig. 3A).



Fig. 1 Wound healing after tooth extraction.

(A) Experimental protocol of the animal experiments. (B) Ladewig's fibrin staining of the extraction socket with or without materials after 3 and 7 days. OE: oral epithelial tissue, CT: connective tissue. The black asterisk indicates the bone substitute. Bar=300  $\mu$ m. (C) The distance between the epithelial edge of the extraction socket. The red double arrow indicates the distance measured (*n*=6, \**p*<0.05). HAp: hydroxyapatite, β-TCP: β-tricalcium phosphate, CO<sub>3</sub>Ap: carbonate apatite



Fig. 2 MSC accumulation around extraction sockets with bone substitutes. (A) Experimental protocol of the animal experiments. The red square indicates the following observation sites. This panel shows the control group. OE: oral epithelial tissue, CT: connective tissue. (B) Localization of endogenous MSCs observed by immunohistochemistry of CD90 and CD105 after 3 and 7 days. The white square indicates the following magnified view. White arrows indicate double positive cells. Bar=100  $\mu$ m. (C) Number of accumulated cells around the extraction socket with or without bone substitutes (*n*=5, \**p*<0.05). HAp: hydroxyapatite, β-TCP: β-tricalcium phosphate, CO<sub>3</sub>Ap: carbonate apatite

Morphology was observed at 3 and 7 days after seeding by fluorescence staining of actin and scanning electron microscopy (Figs. 3B, C) MSCs in the CO<sub>3</sub>Ap group were more extended than those in the HAp group and the cells were in close contact with each other. Round cells were observed in the  $\beta$ -TCP group (Fig. 3C). The number of adherent cells was similar in CO<sub>3</sub>Ap and HAp groups, and clearly higher than that in the  $\beta$ -TCP group (Fig. 3D). This difference did not change even after 7 days.

# Effect of bone substitutes on MSC proliferation and differentiation potential

MSCs were cultured in a differentiation medium in accordance with each condition. Indirect effects of the bone substitute were evaluated (Fig. 4A). The control contained no bone substitute. Proliferation was similar among the CO<sub>3</sub>Ap, HAp, and  $\beta$ -TCP groups, and significantly lower than in the control group (Fig. 4B). Although the bone substitute groups had lower values than the control, calcification was observed only in the



Fig. 3 Effect of bone substitutes on MSC adhesion.
(A) Experimental protocol of the *in vitro* experiments. (B) Scanning electron microscopy of MSCs on the materials. Expansion rate: ×300. (C) Immunofluorescence (actin and GFP) of MSCs on the materials. Bar=100 μm (D) Number of adhesive MSCs on the materials (n=4, \*p<0.05). HAp: hydroxyapatite plate, β-TCP: β-tricalcium phosphate plate, CO<sub>3</sub>Ap: carbonate apatite plate

 $\beta$ -TCP group (Fig. 4C). Conversely, there was no clear difference in the ability to differentiate into adipocytes among all groups (Fig. 4D).

### Changes in the calcium concentration in culture medium

Bone substitutes immersed in high Ca ion concentrations were evaluated (Fig. 5A). The Ca ion level was decreased in CO<sub>3</sub>Ap and HAp groups, although the Ca ion levels in  $\beta$ -TCP and control groups were similar. Conversely, in the absence of Ca ions, Ca ions were eluted from the materials in all groups, but the level was highest in the  $\beta$ -TCP group. When culture medium was used, only the CO<sub>3</sub>Ap group showed a decrease compared with the control (Fig. 5B).

### Effect of bone substitutes on MSC growth factor expression

The culture supernatants of MSCs cultured on bone substitutes for 3 or 7 days were collected and growth factors were measured by ELISAs (Fig. 6A). After 3 days, VEGF and IGF-I production in the CO<sub>3</sub>Ap group was significantly higher than that in the other groups. After 7 days, VEGF tended to decrease in the CO<sub>3</sub>Ap group, but the IGF-I level was similar to the HAp group and significantly higher than in control and  $\beta$ -TCP groups (Fig. 6B).

#### DISCUSSION

Healing of hard and soft tissues in extraction sockets filled with bone substitutes is greatly affected by the characteristics of the material, individual differences of patients, and the treatment site and size. In this study, we focused on the function of MSCs and considered the differences between three typical bone substitutes. MSCs are involved in many wound healing processes, including those in bone<sup>38,39)</sup>, and it has been predicted that their function would be influenced by bone substitutes. In previous studies, the conventional method to investigate bone substitutes was to insert them into the tibia or the top of the head and observe bone replacement over time.



Fig. 4 Effect of bone substitutes on MSC proliferative and differentiation potential.
(A) Experimental protocol of the *in vitro* experiments. (B) Number of proliferated MSCs on the materials (n=6, \*p<0.05). (C) Calcified deposits stained by Alizarin Red. (D) Oil Red O staining of adipocytes on the materials. Control: culture dish, HAp: hydroxyapatite, β-TCP: β-tricalcium phosphate, CO<sub>3</sub>Ap: carbonate apatite



Fig. 5 Changes in the calcium concentration in the culture medium.
 (A) Experimental protocol of the *in vitro* experiments. (B) Bone substitutes in (a) the presence of Ca ions, (b) the absence of Ca ions, and (c) culture medium. Control: culture dish, HAp: hydroxyapatite, β-TCP: β-tricalcium phosphate, CO<sub>3</sub>Ap: carbonate apatite

However, cortical bones are thick in these areas and blood supply is poor<sup>40</sup>. Previous studies have reported that MSCs are abundant in the jawbone region<sup>41</sup>.

Therefore, in this study, we established a model to insert a bone substitute into the extraction socket of a rat and evaluated the effects of the bone substitutes<sup>19</sup>.



Fig. 6 Effect of bone substitutes on growth factor expression in MSCs.
 (A) Experimental protocol of the *in vitro* experiments. (B) Measurement of growth factors (EGF, VEGF, and IGF-I) from MSCs cultured on each material by ELISAs (n=6, \*p<0.05). Control: culture dish, HAp: hydroxyapatite, β-TCP: β-tricalcium phosphate, CO<sub>3</sub>Ap: carbonate apatite

Our findings indicate that the use of this model may have important implications for the clinical use of bone substitutes.

There appeared to be no difference in the healing degree at 3 days as shown in Fig. 1B, but the  $CO_3Ap$  group exhibited promotion of epithelial tissue covering the extraction socket from the edges at 7 days. The immunohistology of MSC markers showed that endogenous MSCs in soft tissues surrounding  $CO_3Ap$  and  $\beta$ -TCP in the extraction socket had accumulated in large numbers. This tendency continued on day 7 (Fig. 2B), but disappeared at approximately day 14 (data not shown). In control and HAp groups, the number of accumulated MSCs was small, but the number of endogenous MSCs may trigger extraction socket healing<sup>28</sup>.

When tissue is severely damaged by tooth extraction, which is similar to our model, the damaged cells attract lineage cells by releasing stromal cell-derived factor and high mobility group box 1 into  $blood^{42,43}$ . MSCs also accumulate at the injured site through the action of these protein, and induce regeneration of the injured tissue by anti-inflammatory, fibrosis inhibitory, and tissue regeneration effects<sup>41.46</sup>. However, it was unclear which reaction affected MSCs among the materials. Therefore, we confirmed the characteristics of each material using *in vitro* experiments. As shown in Fig. 3, rat bone marrow-derived MSCs were directly cultured on the materials to confirm MSC adhesion on the bone substitutes. MSCs are greatly influenced by the surrounding environment and change their properties accordingly<sup>47,48</sup>. Therefore, we evaluated what kind of the bone substitutes affected MSCs. In the  $\beta$ -TCP group, cells were round, and contact was lost between cells. Conversely, when MSCs had cell activity, they extended processes and their adhesion ability was promoted. In the CO<sub>3</sub>Ap group, the cells had stretched and maintained contact with each other to the extent that they adhered to the culture dish.

However, as shown in Fig. 4, MSCs on HAp and  $CO_3Ap$ , which should have a strong adhesive ability, also had little ability to proliferate and differentiate. Conversely,  $\beta$ -TCP has a strong bone-forming ability, although not to the same extent as the control as shown by the Alizarin Red staining. In general, cells with strong adhesion have high proliferation and differentiation potentials<sup>49</sup>. However, *in vitro* experiments using MSCs, various culture media were used for proliferation, adhesion, or differentiation. Therefore, we were able to compare materials, but could not compare the correlation between MSC properties such as adhesiveness, differentiation, and proliferation. MSCs on  $\beta$ -TCP showed a strong bone formation ability. The number of adhesive cells was observed on day 7,

but Alizarin Red staining, which indicates the ability to form bone, revealed differences after 28 days of culture. Therefore, some material changes may have occurred over this long period.

The most probable factor is the elution of calcium ions. Previous studies have recorded the amount of calcium eluted from each material<sup>13)</sup>. In this study, it was thought that the difference in culture conditions affected the elution of calcium ions from each material, and the calcium amount was confirmed in the solutions with different calcium concentrations in Fig. 5. These results suggest that  $CO_3Ap$  had adsorbed calcium in the calcium-rich cultures and eluted them in the absence of ions. The culture conditions in this study were related to the culture medium, and it was thought that calcium was absorbed from the culture solution (Fig. 5B). Therefore, under the culture conditions shown in Fig. 4, calcium ions may have been adsorbed and bone formation may have been suppressed.

Kondo et al. showed that systemically administered GFP-expressing rat bone marrow-derived MSCs had accumulated around tooth extraction and implant placement sockets, and promoted their healing33). However, the accumulated GFP-positive MSCs had disappeared by approximately 2 weeks, and it was believed that exogenous MSCs did not directly differentiate into the tissue to be repaired, but acted on the surrounding tissue. Therefore, in the animal experiments of this study, we focused on the growth factors released by MSCs as the reason why MSCs that accumulated around CO<sub>3</sub>Ap promoted healing of the extraction socket. This was because MSCs release many growth factors depending on the surrounding environment<sup>50</sup>, which were EGF, IGF-I, and VEGF as growth factors involved in wound healing in this study. In fact, IGF-1 is strongly involved in healing of the oral mucosa, and our previous study demonstrated that IGF-1 enhances epithelial formation around implants<sup>33)</sup>. Additionally, VEGF promotes angiogenesis that is critical for bone formation 51,52, highlighting its importance in the study of bone substitutes.

#### CONCLUSION

 $CO_3Ap$  accelerates epithelial tissue closure when placed in an extraction socket. MSCs tend to accumulate around extraction sockets filled with  $CO_3Ap$ , and MSCs cultured in the presence of  $CO_3Ap$  have increased expression of growth factors such as VEGF and IGF-1. These results suggest that MSCs around  $CO_3Ap$  *in vivo* promote hard and soft tissue healing by releasing growth factors.

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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