

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 0

Authority : 6

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Fortify Space (2, Domain)

Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

Collect Plant (3, Shape)

See Commands (5, Perceive)

Bind Crop (4, Command)

Nobility : 5

Congeal Glimmer (1, Command)

See Domain (1, Perceive)

Claim Construction (2, Domain)

Stone Pylon (2, Shape)

Drain Health (4, War)

Empathy : 4

Shift Water (1, Shape)

Imbue Mending (3, Civic)

Bind Willing Avian (1, Command)

Move Water (4, Shape)

Spirituality : 5

Shift Wood (1, Shape)

Small Promise (2, Domain)

Make Low Blade (2, War)

Congeal Mantra (1, Command)

Form Party (3, Civic)

Ingenuity : 4

Know Material (1, Perceive)

Form Wall (2, Shape)

Link Spellwork (3, Arcane)

Sever Command (4, War)

Tenacity : 5

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

Drain Endurance (2, War)

Pressure Trigger (2, War)

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Animosity : -

Amalgamate Human (3, Command)

They have no idea what a wolf is. The word is unrecognized, even though three of my old lives distinctly remember these beasts being an apex danger in their part of the world. Perhaps that

is why I never heard of the Green until this life. Perhaps that is where I am now; home again, so long away.

It doesn't matter. There is no time for strategy or explanation. They know that it is large, and cursed, and they arm themselves to fight.

Seraha moves with a limping run through the meal hall as she tips my body into a sling to carry at her side. Kalip doesn't bother throwing armor on, just pours an armful of glimmer arrows into a sack and starts running out of the fort. The others not near us move slower, the split use of **Shift Wood** serving as an imperfect warning system.

Normally, honeybees can roam almost fifty lengths away from their hives in search of their inscrutable goals. My enhanced bees, playful wanderers that they are, are less interested in flowers that aren't quite up to their size anymore. They are also more likely to move up to a couple hundred lengths out from the fort, and the transplanted hive near our new makeshift farm. I do not know exact distances, and I have not found a way to cleanly measure to the lake, but I guess the wolf is maybe a hundred lengths away, and moving fast.

Not as fast as it could. The bees I have following in its tracks are barely keeping up. But they cannot get close, or they lose their tether to me briefly. And from what I can see, the wolf is simply loping, not in an all out full-limbed hunting sprint.

Time crawls by as we mobilize. I watch through another party of bees as Dipan, who has only just noticed the jagged arrows directing them back to for that I have carved in every tree near him, calmly directs a group of children to start running. Sivs is one of them, only technically a child; he, at least, is armed. One of the salvaged sidearms strapped to his back, though I *know* it won't be enough. The too-thin human girl, Ruuet, and Zhoy, the demon of the same age, are the others. They had been out playing. *Playing*.

I let myself, and these people, believe we were safe. I have been a fool.

Where. I write in the wall next to Seraha as she cuts around the central building. *Are.* She is moving at a speed where I cannot aim my spell properly and am performing magic like a puppeteer moving a quill in the dark.

"To the..." Seraha pants breaths as she answers my unfinished question, "...walls."

No! I draw arrows around us, guiding her to the fort's gate. Distance or no, the wolf is going to reach Dipan's group before they reach our door. Which means we need to go to *them*.

Seraha either does not see, or does not pay attention to me. She is still moving. Which leaves me with one option that I do not much like.

Yuea! Muster at the gate! I send the command, then **Sever Command** it. I don't *want* to be Yuea's owner, but I lack the deft control of our tether that I have with **Bind Insect**. And with my inability to pour power into **Animosity** as I have with **Authority**, it seems that this will be the state of things for a while. I can sense her irritation with me though, *that* comes through fine.

I think it is irritation that I am not committing to my orders, though.

Through the bees escorting Seraha, I see a door ahead of us smash outward as Yuea, shirtless and still stumbling as she adapts to her new limbs, staggers out. "Gate!" She snaps at Seraha, who reluctantly adjusts to help the other woman run at a staggered pace.

Jahn is already waiting for us in the courtyard by the time we arrive; fresh chainmail and an old flat axe. The gobs stand in a close group around him and Malpa, who still has the original spear I made for him when we took this place. "Where's Mela?" He asks. "Or Muelly?"

"Getting guns. They'll take the wall." Kalip says as he stalks past. "Commander." He addresses Yuea with brief respect as he does a double take to see her up.

"Enough." Yuea's words are a croaking squawk. "What's the problem now?"

I write in the hard dirt as fast as I can, ruining the packed ground for the first rain as I keep my explanation short. *Wolv. Large, deadly, enemy apparatus. One creature. Silence around it, other magic likely, it is closing on Dipan.*

"No time for traps. Let's go kill it." Kalip nods. "You need to be close to drain it?" He doesn't wait for me to answer, we've already talked about my tactical placement in a fight like this, and Seraha offers him the sling with me in it. "Seraha, on the walls, just in case. Close the gate after us, leave a gap but be ready to seal it. Let's go. Commander, can you run?"

"Who put you in charge?" Yuea makes a sound like a laugh, her feathers rippling with a flash of dark colors that draws the eye of everyone who *wants* to ask questions but doesn't have the time. "I'll figure it out. It's my fucking body, it'll do what I say."

"Move, then." Kalip sounds unamused, and gives Yuea a head start out the gate as she finds the pattern to walk, then jog, with newly built legs. "You three. Will you fight?"

The gobs stare up at him, one of them, Vestment I think, clutching a nervous claw into Jahn's arm. I understand how Kalip can ask this. But they're *children*. That's all I can see them as. And yet, Fisher, who has run there with them, gives a rapid nod, and Sharpen answers with a simple "Yes."

"Okay. Shiny, arm them. Vest, get back in the fort, collect the kids, get them to a cellar and seal the door. Can you do that?" The last gob gives a terrified nod, but, given a task with an achievable goal, lets go of Jahn and tears of, wrapped clawed feet carving lines in the dirt.

Arm them. Just like that, Kalip assumes I have powers I have never used before. But I think I can, actually. **Make Low Blade**; the image of a long and dangerously sharp needle kept cleanly in my mind as I offer it the wood from my stockpile of **Collect Plant** trees. I focus it into reality and let it weave itself together in front of them. Then, **Make Low Blade** again, forming a spear point out of a chunk of rock, and **Nudge Material** to bind it all together. I do this twice, in ten seconds, and lament how skilled I am becoming at making poor quality weapons.

While I've been making spears, Kalip has opened a sack at his waist and had everyone grab handfuls of glimmer and something else. Small waxy bars of resin, the vim produced by this fort. He's told them something about being careful when they take it, and I think everyone's ignored him.

They begin moving at Kalip's direction, and I begin working more magics in preparation. **Link Spellwork** ties **Move Water** to **Bind Insect** again, and bees from within the fort drag a swarm of liquid filled arrowheads to the group to be split among the airborne fighters. **Form Party** links the combatants together, and I push the spell's strength into it to reinforce the tether to the point that it will be useful before they need it. The last of my supply of **Link Spellwork** to tie **Fortify Space** into the spell will let them bring a trail of safety with them if they're close enough.

The group clears the farm plots, catching up to Yuea, who is still struggling to move. Kalip tells her to catch up when she can, and leads the others onward as she swears after us. I don't leave a bee with her.

Trees being to whip through my vision as my bees flow into the teeming Green around us. Below, human, demon, and gob forms run and hop over roots, some of them using spears to keep their balance, Kalip keeping his speed steady even though he could shoot ahead if needed. I'll tell him if it gets bad.

They're on track to meet up with Dipan soon. But the bees I have tailing the wolf show me trees that I am beginning to find familiar. We're close now, too close to contact. There's not time for a plan, no time for strategy. Just the vague hope that we can make it to them in time, and that we'll be enough.

More magic. Preemptive **Imbue Mending** on anything that might need it. **Shift Wood** to snap branches out of the way. Anything to speed us along.

See Domain is the one sight spell I can manage while *moving* like this without that sense of ethereal nausea. And I see it as soon as we're within the relatively short range of the spell. It's not exactly a hole; not like when trying to peer at that first apparatus' protected space. But it's deeply similar.

There's my domain, the texture of the ground spreading out from the list for the fortifying party bond. Everyone who is bound to me with **Small Promise** showing up as a noted dot on a

landscape of ledger entries, letting me place them in space. Now that I can peer closer, I can see the magetouched 'domain' within Kalip, such a strangely innocuous piece of information for something so dangerous. And then, there is something *e/se*. Something that does not touch on my claimed territory, but is within my spell's reach.

It is a set of stacked notations. A singular entity as a header with a listing of domain meanings under it. I understand less than half of them, but there is something that reads as similar to my own **Fortify Space**, which might offer a rough explanation for why it cuts my bees away from me if we are too close.

My bees. Of course. With little time to spare, I send out a set of orders to them. *Don't panic when our bond is hidden. Engage alongside us, distract the beast when possible but do not risk yourselves meaninglessly.* I pause briefly, knowing that too much emotional complexity doesn't work properly across the tether, and so choose to add a **Small Promise**. *I will be here for you afterward.*

There is a sudden silence around us. And around the bees in Dipan's group. The quiet reaches out before the stifling effect, and I realize I am about to have a serious problem if I cannot *aim* properly through my bee's eyes. But wait! I can still target through **See Domain**, which does not care that the wolv is partially protected.

Drain Endurance and **Drain Health** require no better reason for their use than that I can see my target. I begin casting them together, throwing out the spiked connections toward the wolv through my arcane perception. And both of them fail to find purchase, dissipating as the spell fails to function.

I scream inside my mind, my grip on the twin memories from my old souls threatening to slip. And then, my bees start to vanish from my magic. Small portals of light and warmth vanishing one by one in a rapid wave as the dangerously augmented wolv closes in.

Closes in on Dipan's group. They can't be far from us now, but that feels almost completely irrelevant now. Even as the bees flanking our group among the tangled branches overhead start to vanish from my sight, and I know we are getting closer. It is a small mercy that they keep their small spears with them; **Link Spellwork** somehow not faltering along with **Bind Insect**. I don't know why. I don't care. I order one bee from our party *up*. To get as high as possible, so I might see the field at least somewhat.

My world is reduced to that singular view. Flickering in and out as the bee climbs over what must be a dome of silence and suppression. A cluster of small birds whip past my watcher as they flee from something they can't understand. Below, I can see an empty clearing ahead, but Dipan has already been herding the kids toward us. There are flashes of them under the wall of green.

And a flash of black fur, no longer moving slowly. A tree topples in utter silence as the wolv ceases maneuvering and crashes through anything between it and its prey. The bee spots a plume of smoke from below, and another tree is crushed downward in a slightly slanted direction. Another plume of smoke, another shot taken. And then, with an abrupt and nightmarish lack of ceremony, Sivs vanishes from the ledger of **See Domain**.

It'd gone so fast I barely notice.

Below, flickers of metal shoot through the trees as Kalip kicks himself into a high branch and starts firing arrows at a steady pace into the figure I can only barely see. I trace the tethers of my glimmer as they fly, then deflect. The arrows clattering to the dirt and moss as they fail to penetrate.

A cluster of armed honeybees lead the way underneath his feet, and I lose track of the skirmish that erupts. I need a way to follow individual bees, and they're only barely touched on within my domain. I focus, burning the supply of **See Domain** that I won't need for anything else, to focus deeper and deeper until I can track them as individual points. I can't do anything until I can know what is happening.

I'm still not sure what is happening. A constellation of bees swarm around the object of a hostile domain. I can't track strikes, but I can trace where they close then separate, and I can see flickers of dull metal. Kalip hasn't stopped shooting.

I see Dipan slam through a tangle of thorns, leaving behind some of his own blood as he carries one of the kids over his shoulder, the other hoisted under his arm. I don't know where he's found the strength, but he does it, just as the rest of our group races past him, forming a thin line of spears between them and the wolv.

There's a gap in the trees where they stand. Which gives me an excellent view of when it explodes into motion, racing forward into the barrage of arrows Kalip is putting down, and swings on of its forescythes in a short arc toward Malpa's head. The man gets his spear haft up in time to clip the attack, but the weapon I've made is just slapped out of his hands and sent tumbling away, even if it does keep him from a killing blow. He's not even gripping it tightly enough for it to get chopped, it's just thrown aside like his guard doesn't matter. The wolv just pivots, a rear leg thrashing Jahn in the stomach and sending him rolling out of sight, and brings the limb back for a second swing with almost no loss of speed.

Kalip catches it. Falling out of the tree and ditching his bow, he catches the non-bladed part of the wolv's anatomy, his own frame braced on the ground and bending under the force. Scraps of fur and dirt from the strike puffing into the air in a cloud. His other hand whips up to jam a loose arrow into the wolv's hide, though I can't tell if it penetrates.

The wolv certainly acts like it, jerking back and opening its maw like it's howling, even though there is *utter silence*.

Malpa punishes it for the inaction, the man shaking off his daze and lurching forward unarmed. He wraps his arms around one of the wolv's more dangerous limbs, planting his feet and tugging it backward. The wolv reacts instantly, focusing in on him, but he's pulled himself around its side, and with its bulk, it can't reach him with its other scythe. It snaps with massive fangs, but Kalip exploits the moment to jam forward with his arrow again. Then the honeybees descend again, a storm of puppeted metal raining down toward the monster's head.

The wolv gets tired of playing with its food the instant one of the arrowheads finds an eye. With a violent thrash, it lifts Malpa off his feet, and flings its limb so hard that Malpa is sent flying through the underbrush to slam into a tree trunk. One of the gobs, with shaking hands, tries to jam a spear into the wolv's flank, but the creature just twists and lashes out with a side leg, sending the gob off in a different direction.

Kalip gets its attention again somehow that I can't see, and it brings both freed forescythes back around in a hard downward strike. I don't know what he's thinking, especially since I'm right there with him, but I can see from overhead that it looks like he's *caught* one of the blades.

And the other has sunk into his shoulder.

He doesn't stop struggling though, and the other gob frantically tries to plunge their spear into the wolv's semi-stuck limb as Kalip holds on tight to it. And then, something happens. Sharpen's spear digs into the wolv's limb, and finds purchase. As the wolv slices at one of the bees trying to make another strafing run on its face, Sharpen draws blood on the creature.

And I know this because I can see *it*. A crack in its skin, and a crack in the shell of its domain. Tiny. Nothing. But a point onto which I can find purchase.

Drain Health and **Drain Endurance** slide across the wolv until I drag the web of those spells into the minute hole in its guard. And then they begin to *take*. Not much, not anything really. Not yet. **Sever Command** latches on as well, but if it does anything, I don't notice.

The wolv doesn't even notice. It yanks a scythe out of Kalip, and the man stumbles back as Malpa comes charging back, a recovered gun in his hands. I can see his mouth open, something being yelled that no one will ever hear, as he rushes the wolv from behind. But that's a bad move, as I think the *wolv* can hear just fine, and it spins as he closes on it, snapping out with its jaws. I see another plume of smoke before Malpa's body is obscured by the wolv over him, and then an object I think is him is flung aside, blood trailing it. But he's not dead.

The wolv snarls as a bee slams a stinger into it without effect, jaws snapping as the distraction pulls away. My bonded aren't *hurting it*. And we don't have a whole three candles to wait while **Drain Endurance** knocks it down.

The wolv slinks forward, cautions as it moves toward where I think Kalip is - and where I am too I remember - the beast learning that it isn't immortal. I estimate where Kalip's most working hand is based on his position in my domain, and **Make Low Blade** a wooden needle. Sharp as I can, aided by **Shift Wood**. It'll work once, I hope.

I can see when Kalip's hand wraps around the spike, and when he lunges forward off his knees, a spray of two flavors of sharp magic bursting into the air around my body as he does so.

The next several moments are a blur of motion I can't track, either from above or through my connection to Kalip's weapon. I see a half dozen of my glimmer shatter as he and the wolv start to fight, at a speed beyond what anything I've ever been could hope to achieve. The gobs try to interfere in the fight at one point, and get away with a lucky line of blood across Fisher's throat instead of their head being removed. My bees try to distract, but they're tiring, and I can't even tell them to pull back. Two of them fall to a snap of powerful jaws; though they're mercifully large enough now that they aren't outright dead from the attack, and I might be able to replace the missing wings.

Kalip pushes himself farther, and I **Make Low Blade** another spike as he loses his first one. I see his hand fumble for it, then grab the emerging object; I'm at more risk of running out of spell than I am stored wood. My view abruptly gets better when the wolv overcommits to a charge and Kalip slams its head into a tree, stunning it and letting him implae a paw with his makeshift weapon even as the wolv just topples the tree and lashes back to catch Kalip's arm with a scythe.

I feel myself *hurt* as the hit sends Kalip sprawling. His body rolling across roots and plants, taking my body with it. The wolv doesn't hesitate this time to press the advantage, exploding forward to finish him off. Sharpen tries to get in the way, and is simply trampled under, the gob vanishing beneath the sets of claws.

Then a fist hits it on the snout, with a fountain of blood and a tumbling smash through the brush from the monster. The crunch of the impact is almost audible to *me*, though maybe I'm imagining the vibration.

I *think*, when Yuea made a rapid plan to intercede, she had been expecting to say something dramatic. I can't really tell, and can't even get a flash of irritation that I know exists through our bond as she's within the wolv's radius. I see her shaking out her fist like that was a casually overturned strike on her part, but through **See Domain** and the thinly repaired connection of **Amalgamate Human**, I can trace angry flares of empty color across her new body that show far too much damage. She nearly crippled herself doing that.

She can't even walk properly. Much less throw a punch without hurting herself.

But as the wolv stumbles to its feet, I see its domain too. Breaking ever so much more. *Hurt*.

I start to grasp at small pieces of my bonds with the bees. With Yuea. I focus my war magic as much as I can onto the wolv. All we have to do is weaken it *enough*.

The thing slams Kalip's body aside as it faces Yuea. One black furred nightmare up against a woman with limbs she can't use who didn't even think to bring a shirt, much less armor. At least Kalip had chainmail to stop the last scythe from killing him.

Yuea says something. Probably taunting. And then doesn't wait for the wolv to move, instead dipping into a crouch and throwing herself at it like a human arrow. Apparently having decided that if she can't *run*, she'll just work around it. The wolv scythes her out of the air, slamming her to the ground, but she's more durable than ever, and stupid enough that I think this might have been her plan. A fist she has no restraint on snaps the wolv's scythe in half, chitin and bone shattering along with a rent in the domain.

And now, *now*, I hear the thing howl. A scream of pain and terror as it jams the other scythe down onto Yuea, pinning her leg down as she screams back at it. My bees come back to me, but they're exhausted, and I have no more weapons left. Nothing I can do but wish **Drain Endurance** would work *faster* as the wolv snaps down at Yuea, her unsteady arms only barely holding its slavering fangs away from her through the help of the dozens of glimmer she has on her.

Glimmer. *Glimmer*.

Yuea! The order is an act of last ditch trust. *Feed it your glimmer!*

She doesn't hesitate. Jamming one arm up to take the bite, the wolv's fangs severing the limb halfway to her shoulder as it tears back and opens its maw again, Yuea's other hand grabs the whole pouch of glimmer she has, and flings the bag into the wolv's maw. It snaps it up, only barely pausing as she rolls away with a heavy kick.

It's too hurt for its domain to stop me from finding the glimmer near it through my magic. Too hurt to stop me from finding the specific stones it's just eaten.

I know that **Congel Glimmer** is supposed to do something else. Or at least, I suspect it is. I've seen the possibility of it, in making some kind of living thing under my command. I don't care right now.

Because when I fail to make that work properly, glimmer *explodes*.

And I can fail incredibly quickly when I need to.

The wolv has coiled itself for another leaping strike when the first glimmer detonates. The other twenty follow in close order. By the time the last ones are being overloaded by the spell, the

explosions of force and stone shards are punching holes out of its stomach, leaving fur matted with blood and rent flesh.

Whatever protective effect it had on its domain, I am more than capable of overwhelming it now. **Drain Endurance** and **Drain Health** drill parasitic tendrils into the wolv, and I *take and take and take* and I do not stop until it has *nothing* left to give.

Sharpen, looking like an absolute mess of dirt and bloody marks, plants a clawed foot on the wolv's back as it sprawls on the ground. I'm *still* taking endurance from it, and it can't even breathe properly now. Soon enough, I think, it will die just from that. But there's no reason not to speed it along.

The gob's spear comes down with nothing to stop it this time. They plunge it through one of the blasted rents in the wolv's stomach, spearing into delicate internal organs. Lungs, heart, anything important, Sharpen seeks to shred it.

I think we're both surprised when the spear hits the wolv's real heart. And it shatters, with a sound of breaking crystal.

This time, I don't stop myself from taking. I take the shadow of the wolv's form. I take the torrent of soft motes. I take the pattern from the apparatus that wore this beast like armor, that sought to kill us all. And yet even as I feel my weakened body crack further from the new addition, I know that no matter how much I steal back, I cannot replace what it has stolen.

I am dragged into black unconscious and the grip of so many memories, as I fight and claw to stay alert. I don't have time...

Trepidation : -
Follow Prey (2, Perceive)