

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change
Available Power : 16

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 : 4

Congeal Glimmer (1, Command)

See Domain (1, Perceive)

Claim Construction (2, Domain)

Stone Pylon (2, Shape)

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 : 4

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

Drain Endurance (2, War)

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Animosity : -

Amalgamate Human (3, Command)

My efforts had already pushed me to almost a completed point of power. And now, with promises filled, a riotously successful use of a new spell for the first time, and the constant influx of smaller sources of power from a dozen sources, I sit on a comfortable horde of choices.

Yuea slept through the night, in a bed that wasn't ruined, after Kalip and Jahn hauled her there. No one else slept very well at all; there was, apparently, an *amount* of screaming that occurred. I wasn't quite paying full attention at the time, but I may have frightened the children.

While everyone else slept, or failed to, I continued to do what I have become accustomed to. Using my magic through the night, partly for small chores that simply take time to execute, partly for trying new workings that could be useful. If only so my reserves don't sit unused.

I've made a **Stone Pylon**. It was no easy feat, which is frustrating. **Know Material** tells me there is an astounding amount of stone within my range, but I cannot simply say 'use this stone', because the spell lacks the force needed to rip it from underground and bend it to my will. So instead, I have made agonizingly slow use of **Nudge Material** to carve out something that is roughly cylindrical in the side of a slope at the edge of my range, outside the fort's walls. For all that **Tenacity** allows me to use two casts of **Nudge Material** at the same time, with no pauses for rest, it is still mentally exhausting to draw the smallest of lines around what I seek.

But I did eventually do it. Even if it would have been faster to ask Malpa and Dipan to take picks to the ground. I make the pylon on site; it's close enough to the fort that I don't think it will be a problem, and I truly do not feel like spending the time to drag that much rock all the way back. Then I grant the newly ensorcelled stone **Congeval Glimmer**, show it how to make the smallest of the stones, and tell it to do that.

It will make three, maybe four of them a day, I think. But it will never stop making them.

I wonder perhaps if that is where the vim pit under the fort came from. After all, gobs existed for an age before the whole species went seemingly dormant. Perhaps there were apparatus before me, before this era, who made wonders and then left them for the future to puzzle over. I don't know, but it strikes a chord with the memories of the scholar and the singer both. A saga of cycles, waiting to be uncovered.

I've also tried something new with **Bind Crop**. I don't know how the spell is 'meant' for an apparatus to use, but for myself, with memories of past lives, I have had a strange idea that I wanted to experiment with. The new crop of yams - and isn't it so strange, that there can be a *crop* every two days - is growing now, still feeding off the spell. But I've tried to change them. Not just to grow faster, but to taste more like something I remember. Something foreign, something that would never be the flavor of a yam. But we'll see, perhaps, just how far I can stretch my control over them. It certainly is draining the spell faster, at any pace.

Other attempts yielded fewer results. I still have no birds, though I *know* they are out there. The sharpening ears of the beetles can hear the sounds of the forest panoply in full now, and there is life aplenty out there. But their songs ignore my **Small Promise** of a home and power. The crows were strange, perhaps. Most birds it seems do not want power. Wise of them.

I also attempt to fully use some of my smaller spells, just so that I can continue building new points of power off of them. **Drain Endurance** at a distance allows me to steal bits of that precious substance for later from the life of the Green. **Sever Command** I also attempt to make use of, but can find nothing currently commanded, and so while I waste the casting, I earn nothing in return that I can sense.

The sky begins to lighten as the summer sunrise threatens the horizon. The smaller bees bound to me, still growing in their hive, larger than a normal bee but yet untouched by glimmer or mantra, begin to stir. The much larger bees scattered around the fort itself continue to nap, curled up on soft places they've found, or in the beds with the kids.

I'll need to make choices today, about new magic. About what I want to take, to go to war again. **Drain Health** seems obvious, but I think that every time that I prepare to take a new spell, and often find myself abandoning plans midway through the process. At least now, my choices can be shared with others. Advice sought, council taken.

That council, though, might come sooner than I expect.

There are no bees in the dining hall where my body sits floating over a bench like I'm waiting for my breakfast. But I still perceive Muelly entering the room through **See Domain**. The demon is alone, and I get the strange impression, through how her domain impacts against the **Fortify Space** ensorceled floor of the fort, that she is plodding somewhat. Dragging herself forward, one hoofbeat at a time.

I call for one of my bees, and they wake quickly. The larger bee I ask for, one of the ones with glimmer in their body, awakens like an energetic child. Whipping themselves onto their strengthening legs, and taking off with a whirring buzz as they rapidly make their way to me. It doesn't take long, but by the time they arrive, the scene near my form has become strange enough that my mind pauses to see it through the insect's eyes.

Muelly's unhealthily thin form was kneeling on the wooden floor, back straight, arms out at her side in a hauntingly familiar prayer pose. Her black furred body nakedly on display as she sat with her head bowed, her spiraled horns with their tips pointed upward as they swept out the back of her head.

She was in the middle of saying something I didn't quite catch. But I understood a prayer when I saw one. I just had a number of concerns, mostly regarding where that prayer was directed.

What are you doing? I wrote into the floor in front of her.

Muelly didn't open her eyes, though between the noise of my moving the wooden floor, and the been entering and perching on the table between us, she reacted with a flinch that let me know that she was aware I knew she was there.

"I offer myself to you, spirit." She says. Her voice isn't steady, it wavers with fear and the tone of a woman who has spent the last night crying instead of sleeping. But she says it all the same.

No. Also people should stop asking that. Also perhaps find something to wear. Half of who I used to be is scandalized. I am not amused, but I do my best to let my words convey a casual tone. As much as I can with carvings in the floor, at any pace.

It takes her a minute to open her eyes and read what I have written. She barely moves from her position, though. I was starting to get worried I would need to ask my bee to prod at her.

"I am not asking." She says, a thin and exhausted anger dripping into her voice. "I am praying."

I noticed. Why are you doing that?

"I want... I want..." her voice trembles and cracks. "I want this to be over." The demon whispers. "I don't want to..." She stopped, and rapidly shifted what she was saying. "Everyone I was friends with is dead." Muelly says. "Everything I loved, or hated, or didn't care about, is gone. And all that is left is a basket of people who hate me, and a spirit just like the ones that took my home away." Her arms drop to her side. "I'm not supposed to be here...!" The words tear out of her throat. "I'm not supposed to be here, and I don't know what to do, but I want it to stop, and it *is never going to stop!*" The mimicked prayer pose is gone now, and all that is left is a terrified girl, openly sobbing on the floor in front of my form.

I let her cry for some time, before I catch on a reply. I'm not even sure if it's a good one; and having to go through **Shift Wood** as I do, it is rather difficult for me to let my thoughts spill out. But still, they are the words I have to offer.

No one hates you, Muelly. I write sadly.

"You do." She accuses me. "You hate me. And the humans hate me, and the kids hate me..."

Malpa is worriedly searching for you right now. I doubt he hates you.

Muelly snarls at the floor. "He does." She gives a wet sniff. "He's just using me as a replacement for who he actually loved."

You don't mean that. I inform her flatly, now really considering having the bee headbutt her. A few more tired honeybee lancers have joined us by now, just in case. I am becoming worried about the woman in front of me.

But she sees what I've written, and seems to realize what she's said, and slumps abruptly. "No, I don't." Muelly admits in a hoarse voice. A pair of bees arrive carrying a summer blanket, and I have them hold it near her as she sighs, and lets them drape it around her shoulders like a

cape. The fire burned out of her emotions, Muelly slides her hooves around, dragging herself over to the wall near me, and propping herself up haphazardly with her back to it. "Everything here is worse." She whispers, letting one of my bees crawl into her lap. "And I do think Yuea hates me."

I don't think... I stop writing, and Muelly notices as I pause to collect my thoughts. Does Yuea hate this girl? I didn't think so; no one really voices any issues with species anymore, but Yuea didn't care from the start. Did Muelly offend her? *I cannot imagine Yuea being... emotionally present... enough to hate you.* I settle on. *Epecially since I turned her into a plant.*

Muelly laughs. A thin giggle that grows into a manic burst of laughter; a floodgate opened as her laughter turns back to tears, her furred arms wrapping the bee that resists just enough to not be crushed by her. She curls in on herself, before she eventually takes a shaking breath and steadies herself. "That was mean..." she mutters into the honeybee. I don't think she processed the part about Yuea's change properly.

I give a pause for her to compose herself, sniffing and wiping at her nose with the back of her arm. Eventually, though, I write again and let her read the words at her own speed. *What can I do to help, then? To make it better?*

"I... I don't know." She says. "It's not any one thing. The beds are bad. I didn't think I was that much of a spoiled scion, but the beds are *really* bad. But... there's no one. No one to talk to. Seraha was my *tutor*, she doesn't see me as a friend, even now. Jahn... I never knew Jahn. And the humans? What am I supposed to say to anyone? There's no gossip, no stories. We're just waiting here to die, just without sleeping on the dirt."

I'm not going to let you die.

"I know. But isn't that just as bad?" She curls her knees up, the bee clutched tight to her chest. "We'll just wither away out here, alone. I'll be alone. I just thought... I thought you could... make it easier."

You thought I could kill you softly. I accuse her. Not harshly, but it's not as though I can really put anything into my words aside from their meaning. *You want me to be like the others. You want the end of your world to be complete and tidy.*

Perhaps my words are somewhat mean. Muelly takes her time reading them, and covers her face when she's done. I see her shoulders shaking, and from the bee tucked against her, I see the tears on her face soaking her fur. "I do." She whispers. "Is that wrong? To pray for the end to be convenient?"

I think on it. I'm not sure. I've never been presented with the question like that. I don't remember any of my six previous deaths. Were their endings convenient? Narratively

satisfying? Peaceful? One of them was a soldier, and the singer and cleric were hunted outcasts. I doubt very much they died calmly in their beds.

I don't want to be prayed to. I say to her. But also, I don't think your end will ever be convenient. There's always going to be someone to miss you.

"If there's anyone left." She sounds determined to be grim and depressing.

Malpa would be left. The children would be. Sivs looks up to you as a big sister, don't think I haven't noticed. And I would miss you. It would hurt, to see you go.

She looks up at me with golden eyes that shimmer from fresh tears. "Why do you care about me?" She chokes out. "I wanted to *kill you*, when you showed yourself."

That would have been an inconvenient end, yes. I think I've found the secret to writing things with a joking tone. But now you are here, talking to me. Not praying, thank you for that, but speaking. People change, Muelly. That's the one thing I know for certain, with all my lives and all my magic. People change, countries change, languages change, the world changes. It's never going to stop changing. We're all just hanging on.

"It's never going to stop..." The demoness whispers again.

No. I agree. *But think of how many chances that gives us.*

"For *what?!?*" She demands.

I'm not sure. Better beds, perhaps. I'm sure I'll find a spell eventually to create a pillow. The words do not score themselves into the floor with the depth of an angry starstrike, so I suppose that must not be a real spell. I do not share this information though. *Whatever it is, though, I would like to be there with you to see it.*

Muelly stares at me for a long while, silent, one hand slowly running circles on the furred back of the bee that is pressed against her chest. "I..." she sighs out, a rush of air as the tension floods out of her body. "I don't know if I can keep going that long." She admits, on the verge of a fresh wave of tears.

I will never, I think, know how to reply to that sentiment. But I try anyway. *That's alright. That's a long way away. How about tomorrow?*

"I...I... could do tomorrow." It is clear that Muelly knows what I will ask of her, tomorrow. I'm not precisely the stealthiest of orators. But she agrees anyway. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry for... me."

You don't need to apologize for asking for help. I decide to try to redirect the conversation to something simpler. Easier to focus on without pain. *Perhaps you could tell me what else is*

wrong with living here, so I might try to fix that? Or make Dipan fix that. He seems to have taken to the role of unattached problem solver.

Mually lets out another startled laugh as she reads my words. But this one does not become a frantic, unstoppable giggle. Instead, it is simply... a tired woman, laughing.

She starts to answer. And we speak for a while about the need for candles, and proper fur dust, and softer fabric. And this is how we are found by the others some time later.

Seraha makes sure she's had water. Malpa carries her to a bed to get real sleep. And I smooth over my half of our conversation before it can be read, and her privacy violated.

The quiet, personal moment passes. And in its place, the day starts in earnest.

Everything is always changing. Even now.

So, now, to ensure the next change is in our favor.