

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change
Available Power : 8

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)

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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)

When held in contrast to his conversation and fight with the human men, Kalip's interaction with the gobs goes almost hilariously well. Once he catches up to them, that is.

Kalip is an incredibly dangerous person. And I don't think it's good to pretend otherwise any longer. If he wanted to crown himself king of our little home, no one could really *stop* him,

except maybe me. But he doesn't. I don't really know what he wants, except to continue to act as Yuea's right hand, but I have no doubt that whatever he sets himself to, he could accomplish easily.

Except navigating the Green, that is. Kalip hasn't improved in that regard.

In the old broad strategy games that the soldier learned as part of her leadership training, the imaginary fighters on the board would live through fights, and with each survival, become slightly more effective. I wish I had the magic to pass this power on to Kalip, because if all it took was getting shot at to make him an expert in woodcraft, that would truly be a boon more useful than **Form Wall** or **Amalgamate Human**.

Still, with my bees guiding him, it doesn't take Kalip long to catch up to the gobs, and introduce himself. He does so with all the grace you would expect from someone who was hit in the back with a rock during an ambush from a group of frightened survivors, but still, the fight is one sided in the sense that Kalip doesn't actually fight back. He just waits for them to tire out and give up, and then starts talking.

Talking as much as Kalip ever does. I think he says maybe twenty words to them in total. I don't switch spells to listen in, instead hanging onto the third of my remaining **Link Spellwork** supply, just in case. Besides, it doesn't look like he needs me.

I want to write something to them. To welcome them in the traditional way. Several of my lives remember the old ways, that seem to have been lost. Only a couple of them remember the end of the age of the toolborn. Really, if I'd had a whole season to myself before everything in this new life turned frantic, I could have realized that I had fallen out of eras simply by comparing memories and lives, instead of picking it up as incidentally knowledge while fleeing and fighting for my life, and the lives of my companions.

A small expenditure of magic, **Link Spellwork** with **Distant Vision** and **Shift Wood** to give Kalip and his new friends a bearing back to the fort, and I pull my attention back.

He'll be fine, now. Especially as I keep one **Distant Vision** circle in a lazy orbit around his position. It's a good thing I cannot become dizzy in this body, because if I could, this would surely be a rather destabilizing way to keep watch. Loop after loop of trees and grasses, the edge of my awareness directing the spell in circles as I watch for anything moving and hostile.

I don't see a lot of movement. There's less life on that side of the river than there was a tenday ago. Far less than when I woke up there.

The reason why isn't exactly surprising. There are other apparatus out there. Others like me. Others that have learned that they can harvest the soft stuff that spins itself into points of power through the deaths they cause. Oh, it's not the only way, but I think it is beyond a doubt now

that it's the *fastest*. And in this world, where violence seems so close at hand, moving fast must seem like quite the appealing option.

I pull my attention back to the fort, sweeping over it with the eyes and ears of my bound insects, as well as my other magical senses. **Distant Vision** is a miracle, but the torus shape of its effective range leaves me feeling half blind as I need to give up all the sensations I've become used to relying on when using it heavily.

Here, I can easily watch the children help Jahn with preparing the second garden plot, almost directly hear Yuea's voice as she organizes a sweep of one of the cellars, check the material composition of the area for abrupt changes, sense the positions and use of dozens of glimmer and mantra and blades, and through all of it, feel the reassuring solidity of my domain layered onto the world.

It's a strange thought that enters my mind as I watch over the little fort, and my people within it. I'm still not on perfect terms with all of them, but I find that my collected senses feel... *whole*, in a way that I was not expecting. Not complete, really, but becoming more connected, more full. Like each new perceiving spell I collect makes me more and more a full participant.

I consider what is needed of me today. So many small chores I have already handled, or offloaded onto eager honeybees that find a strange delight in setting tables or transporting vegetables from the cellar to the kitchen. But there are always, *always* more places I can help.

Shift Wood is a rough tool to work with, but it regenerates itself so quickly now with my growing **Spirituality** that I can make use of that rough tool for quite some time even at a larger scale. I use it now, through the eyes of a pair of bees and the knowledge granted to me by **Claim Construction** placed on the fort, to smooth out and piece back together the doors to various rooms that were splintered by the enemy apparatus. Not all of them, yet; only the ones in the rooms that have been searched.

Doors are not a tricky thing to rebuild. The important part is getting the gaps underneath correct, and making the edges smooth to the touch. Some of them have ruined hinges, and that I cannot yet repair. I have no spells to move metal. *Yet*. Beds, however, require much more focus.

Many of the rooms are bedrooms. Or they were. Now they are rooms with the remains of beds in them. Military cots in ranks and stacks, mostly. Even the soldier I was finds them distastefully barren; no bounce to them, no softness, all hard edges. But if things go well, we will have need of more of this furniture. And so I set to fixing, and *improving*, what I can. Smoother frames and no more splinters is easy; a proper support is more of a trick. The bedding itself is beyond me; I can **Imbue Mending** to turn old and worn blankets into fresh versions of themselves, but I can't make those renewed versions any better than they were to start with. And it doesn't take much for me to see how poor they were; I'm starting to think this fort posting might have been a punishment of sorts. Two candles of my time are eaten away by

my focus on this as I convert uncomfortable stacked bunks into slightly less uncomfortable beds.

I am in the middle of elevating some of the bees with infusions of **Congea! Mantra** when Mela finds me. We are trying something different, this quartet of bees and me are. They still steadily fuel and refine themselves off the constantly fed power of **Bind Insect**, and in doing so, these oldest of my honeybee protectors have begun to do something truly wondrous. They have started to ask questions. And one of those questions, essentially, amounted to asking me if they could have a second mantra.

I wasn't sure if there was an answer. So, we are trying. And to my surprise, it is working. Their bodies elongate as **Congea! Mantra** weaves into **Bind Insect**, the two spells always linking each other much more naturally than **Link Spellwork** does with some of my other magics. Their wings split as they grow, lengthening and strengthening as they form another set of elytra. Their eyes, already filled with a growing intelligence, now practically sparkle as they look out at the world through sharpened senses.

And inside of them, both physically and visible through the entwined tethers to my spells, a new blank mantra waits. Shifting and unreadable runes and letters stirring as the practice magic waits to be shown what these growing creatures are good at.

Mela has been waiting patiently near one of the interior doors to the eating hall, but I stopped being able to see her as my sense helpers in the area underwent their change. Now, though, as the four bees rise on strengthened legs and shake their newly expanded bodies, I get a good look at the young human woman with her hands pressed up to her mouth and her eyes wide as she watches the insects find their bearing around me.

I have a brief moment of worry. Fear that I've frightened her, an anxiety that I've shown off something unpleasant. Reflexively, I reach for **Shift Wood** to say something, but the young woman shatters my worries in a moment as she scurries forward and gently scoops up one of the grown bees into her arms, the uncovered and unrestrained smile on her face similar to my own memories of adopting a young bel or being gifted a puppy by a determined husband.

And then, another surprise, as through my grown honeybees, I start to properly make out *words*. "Aren't you the cutest!" Mela's voice sounds like it is far away, and a little underwater, but I can hear her all the same. "Look at you! Yes you are!" Not to be deterred by not being the closest, the other three bees crawl forward on the table, determined to be involved with the larger human and her gentle scratching along furred heads and bobbing antenna.

They seem to like you. I write into the end of the long table nearest her. I'm grateful, constantly, that I have learned to write quicker and quicker, but I do wish sometimes that the joy in my heart that feels impossible to contain perhaps *did* have a way to slip its bond and express itself in my words. Though perhaps it does, in a way. I add a small flourish to the text, carefully drawn flowers in bloom around the serifs of the letters, as I wait for Mela to spot the words.

“They do!” She says when she reads my written message. “Why are they so *big*?” She asks.

We are trying something new. They are the first of their kind. But I don't think they will be the last. They grow quickly, when I give them mantra or glimmer, and I intend to do so more and more as my magic strengthens.

Mela nods, the bee climbing across her head bobbing with her. “Well that makes sense.” She says. “Especially the glimmer. It looks like it does so much more for them than it would for me.”

*Well, that is of course if it is voted upon. I muse. I do still have a **Small Promise** to keep. I want to wince as my compulsion to speak my spells in that strange tone, no matter the medium, carves a deep groove into the table. *Regardless, what brings you here this midday?* Not that I don't appreciate the company. The casual interaction, with someone for no other reason than because you could have a casual interaction, is a form of ambient friendship that I have missed for some time. Not just since my new birth, but through the ends of many of my previous lives as well.*

And then Mela surprises me again, by offering almost exactly that. Though I don't know that she sees it that way. “I actually just wanted to ask you a thing?” She says cautiously. “A few days ago, in the basement, you showed me something. And I wanted to know... well, what you were, if that's okay?”

*I remember. I write eagerly, pulling back my magic to something more central to the wooden tabletop that I am working with. I recreate a similar diagram; a six pointed crystal in the center, with six lines leading to six figures. *I was many things. Human, twice. Demon twice as well. Once a lamia, and once even a gob.**

“Like the people Kalip is bringing back?”

*Just so. I write, wishing I could nod. I have one of my bees nod instead; the motion tickles Mela's cheek as the creature's fur brushes her, which wasn't really my intent. *It was a strange life. Living at the end of my people, really. Gobs are not born, you see. They come from lost or abandoned tools, and they only grow in certain eras.* I reach into the scholar's memories, a thousand scrolls and ten times as many fierce arguments among students and historians coming to the surface. *There is... an amount of debate on what defines those periods of time. Magic, perhaps. Or a certain planetary alignment. Or perhaps the species simply goes dormant from time to time. Regardless, as you seem to be unfamiliar with them, it would seem their time has come once again.**

“Are they...” Mela looks at me with a worried look in her eyes, like she's afraid of the answer. “I mean, what were you like? When you were one?”

I was a scholar. I tell her, proudly. Well, not me. None of my past lives are really me. But that life, he was. He specialized in the history of cultural artisanship. The ebb and flow of knowledge across kingdoms, and the finding of lost techniques for everything from throwing a pot to building an aqueduct.

“What about... what about her?” Mela reaches over the table to run a finger across the small carving I have made of the lamia I once was. “What was she like?”

Vicious. I answer, spinning the words out from the image like a master smoketeller. But never violent. She fought with coin and bargain. A merchant, married into a role she didn't want, but too damn stubborn to back down.

“This one? The... farmer?” She taps another one.

Just a farmer. I say. Not that anyone is just anything. He lived a full life, he had a family. He had... a son. Women and men he loved, and shared his life with. I... I wonder if any of them are still alive, sometimes.

Mela brings her head up to stare at my crystal form, a curious blend of emotion in her eyes. The mix of a novice's curiosity, and a young adult's absolute certainty. “We'll find them, then.” She says like she has the power to make that declaration. “I'm sure they're still alive, if they're out there.” The earnestness of it almost catches me off guard. It's been too long, I suppose, since any of me has lived through the opening beats of a Hero. I should have known this era would create at least one. This time, though, it is not with academic interest that I watch; it is with a new sense as something stirs in the canvas of the ethereal world around her. Just a tiny bit. Not enough to mean anything, yet. “What about this one?” Mela brings my attention back, pointing to another life. “What was she?”

They. The last princess of the Amgannoien Court. The last hope for their people. Oh, they were so, so very unhappy with their life. Everything they were, everything they had, they gave it up. Fled across what felt like half the world. Made their way as a singer, and, when they could, a spy of sorts. It was easier in their time; humans and demons and elves all mixed together back then. It doesn't seem like that is the case in many of my lives. Or now.

“It wouldn't be...” Mela mutters, just barely clear enough for my bees to hear her. “A princess? But not... a girl? Wait, no, what's an elves? Wait, no, the princess thing first.”

The faith many demons practiced held that one's gender was sacred. I write. If you abandoned what it required of you, or wished to be something else, then the sacred right to it was stripped from you. I do not know if the faith itself has lasted, but it seems some of the cultural elements have, at least.

“Are you... you mean Jahn? Wait, is that why...” Mela jerks back in shock. “That's stupid!” She declares. “Why would you do something like that?”

I almost write out a laugh to her. I'm sure her people have a great many foolish habits themselves. I know that her tiny border village of a sprawling human ethnostate empire *surely* is not the perfect judge of moral character. But here, now, in this distant new life so separate from my old ones, I can see as she does. A bit of perspective on an old foolish idea, that is easier to question because it is no longer my own idea. My own culture.

I am something new.

Maybe it was foolish. I admit. *They certainly would have said so, I think. They lived an angry life. Though they were not always unhappy.* Memories creep in. Smiles shared around a campfire. People who accepted them as they were. Friends. Loves. All gone now.

I am something new, but my memory is a graveyard.

"Are you alright?" Mela asks me suddenly, and I refocus on the present with a start. "You slowed down." She is watching my new form, my crystal body that spins lazily without any input from my active thoughts. Though apparently, a body that reacts to my feelings.

I will be okay. I tell her. And I think, this time, I do not need to lie when I say the words. *Though I should resume my work. I have trees to collect, and perhaps a new magic to explore.* It has been some time, and I have become more than acclimated to my new pattern of chores with **Bind Crop** involved. It is well past time that **Stone Pylon** was added to my grimoire, and the slow accumulation of new power will still leave me with my options open. *And what of you? Do you have anything that you must be about?*

"Oh, I'm hiding from Yuea. She wants me to help her move chests of drawers, like I have the arms for that." Mela makes a motion with her eyes that I believe means sarcasm. "But I can find work to do. Probably go help Jahn dig out the new farm plot. *He* could use a hand, I bet."

She says it with that narrow eyed defiance, like she's looking to see how I respond to it. *I'm sure he could.* I write back. *Don't forget this evening to gather the children together for a written lesson. You all need to improve your language!*

"What, this doesn't count?!" Mela demands, setting a disappointed series of honeybees back onto my table as I start to smooth out my written conversation. "Wait." She says suddenly, placing her hand over my diagram of myself and my old lives. "Maybe... maybe leave that one?" She asks tentatively.

I'm not sure why it resonates with her. It's not exactly high art. But, with the exception of making it harder to slide dishes across the smoothed table surface, it costs nothing to leave it behind. I stop my **Shift Wood** from wiping it away, and Mela gives me a smile that seems to be a thousand lengths away.

We go our separate ways for the day, then. Ever so much more connected than we were before.