

**Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change**

**Available Power : 10**

**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**

***Congeval 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)***

***Congeval 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)***

The evening comes with a sense of a sigh. A half dozen survivors of an impossible situation finally reaching the point where they can stop their hard work, sit, eat, talk to each other, and actually enjoy the life they have snatched back from the brink. The children are especially excitable, having been freed from the language lesson that I have been holding for them with

Mela's help as a voice. All of them different ages, with different needs and styles of learning, and I can accommodate them only so well. It stings the part of me that was once a scholar, but once literacy is achieved, I can help each of them learn so much better, as well as have one extra tool to help keep them safe.

Dinner is an arrangement of foraged vegetables with a sauce that abuses the fort's limited supply of spices, and a half a fried yam for each person. The first produce from our farm, scant days after its creation. There weren't as many yams as there should have been, but all of the ones that were there had grown faster and larger than anyone had seen. The effect of **Bind Crop** in its element; food, now, for everyone who needs it.

I don't eat, but I experience through my shared eyes and senses the warmth of the shared meal. The sound of conversation forming a background to my mind as I let myself drift without focus.

The gobs are more alert and active than when they arrived. It is, as so many things are, strange to me, to have multiple sets of memories that conflict in what they would have *believed*. For the scholar, it is a simple fact of life that self actualization can only be achieved through valuable action; through useful work. But for the singer, the thought of anyone being put to work because it is 'good for them' screams of a vile justification. They would have railed against it, exactly the same as Mela had at first. Though for all the exploitable problems with the gob life cycle, it took so little to bring them to life. Even now, Fisher sits now learning new and innovative profanity from Dipan, while the others help carry platters of cooked food and sliced fruit for the bees out from the kitchen.

It feels good. This is a scene of life that I have had a hand in creating. And not just through **Bolster Nourishment** and **Bind Crop** either. Though also through those spells, both still working dutifully as I offer a rite to the meal.

I stay quiet as the night passes, though. The meal hall is a friendly noise in the back of my mind as I prod at my spells, especially **Congea! Glimmer**, testing new ideas, attempting to work the way the scholar and merchant would have wanted; with deliberate record keeping. Now that I finally have a study of my own again, and wood to carve into that can be safely stored and referenced by my assistant honeybees, keeping track of what things I have tried and what ideas I have is finally possible.

Not that my own mind is faulty, or my memory broken. But there is, shall we say, *an amount of chaos* that seems to occur around me on a regular basis. To actually have this opportunity is something new.

**Congea! Glimmer** can be used to make the smallest possible stone ten times each candle. A far leap forward from when I could only manage barely one a day. And it is with the smallest stones that I begin my experiments.

There is something strange about creating glimmer. I've always known that they take on flecks of color when I make them; greens, browns, sometimes gold or grey even. But the pattern has never seemed important enough to focus on.

Now, though, I take notes. I create glimmer one by one across the wooden table that I have long since smoothed the splinters off and fixed the wobbling leg of with **Shift Wood**, and I mark down what my bee sees in them as they come into being. And something strange happens.

The first one is the usual opalescent color, with glowing flecks of grey and brown. The colors feeling like the perfect tones of a sturdy wall; brick and mortar, or maybe treated wood. The next one is similar. But by the time I am directing the spell into forming the third stone, it comes out with traces of an inky black. I dutifully note it on my board, and move on.

The next one has even more of the black lines shot through it. By the time I am up to the seventh stone, the lines coil around the surface, wrapping around the bits of textured brown. The rest don't change much, but that alteration to their coloring stays the same as I record the attempts.

I am not so much of a fool that I cannot imagine why the glimmer have changed to the color of ink and wood as I make more of them here in my study, a place of ink and wood. The theory coalesces in my thoughts like a spell all its own, and I make notes to try the process over the next few hours in other places. The farm, perhaps, or the meal hall, or the armory. Spaces where I can observe what outer forms the glimmer takes, even if I do not know yet why it would matter.

Now, for the challenging part. **Congea! Glimmer** is told to me as a command style spell. I do not know, exactly, why the force behind my magic categorizes things the way that it does, or even if there *is* a force there. Perhaps the cleric was right, and there *is* an old god watching out for us when we need it. Even now, I still can't say. But regardless, glimmer on their own are about as commandable as a rock. So either there is something that I am missing, or the magic is wrong. And so far, the magic has yet to be *wrong*. Obtuse, yes. Infuriating, absolutely. But not inaccurate.

Each of the ten glimmer are tethered to me, the same as my bound insects are. All my glimmer are, and being able to follow those tethers allows me another alternate method to find the survivors as well as any of the bees who are enhanced. Which is all of the bound bees, at this point. Some of which are approaching the size of cats. I will need to build them their own new hive soon, I think, but that is me becoming distracted again.

The simplest test is to simply push some of the available stamina of the spell down one of the tethers. There is still some left, and so, I do what I do with the bees or beetles that request it, and drip power through the connection.

The glimmer shatters. It doesn't even leave behind a dusting of motes for me to absorb. It simply breaks into pieces, one of which my assistant bee dodges with a rapid launch into the air of my study, their wings buzzing in terror at the abrupt danger.

Once I get my bee settled down again, I try to understand what happened. I put the magic there, and as soon as I felt something like a block, I tried to push past without even thinking. And the stone shattered. Even the bee can tell the pieces of it are devoid of magic, and I try it on the next glimmer with my helper at a safe distance to confirm through **Know Material** that yes, whatever has happened has added a tiny amount of stone to the area, and nothing else.

I do it one more time, feeling at the sensation of the block, and becoming used to the instinct of breaking through it. For the next two glimmer, I try to suppress that instinct. I fail, and destroy two more glimmer, but I believe I am beginning to understand.

The sixth attempt, after letting my **Nobility** call back a supply of empty liquid to the spell, I hit the block, and try to guide the infusion around it. It feels deeply strange, like a writhing eel in my souls, fighting my attempts to move it, and yet, moving with purpose and pattern. This one, too, fails, and I destroy my attempt, but I believe I am making progress.

Seventh try, also a failure. Eight, I get farther; knowing where the spell will move and twist, I guide it with purpose, pushing past the block in the tether, feeding what feels like tiny drips of nothing into the stone. One, two, three, agonizingly slowly, and all the while, it fights me. My mind slips for an instant, and the stone breaks.

By this point, my helper bees are watching from the corner of the room, safely away from the stones I continually detonate.

Ninth try, something changes. I make it as far as before, but hold it for slightly longer. Slightly more of my magic flowing into the stone. Enough, it seems, to affect a change. From where I am borrowing my bee's eyes, I see something around the glimmer on the table *unfold*. A ghostly shape, indistinct and twisting, but *something*. It is small, maybe the size of a mouse, texture like a blob of watery ink. Another singular drop of emptiness falls through the tether and into the stone, and from the convoluted and confusing blob, a thin line emerges.

A tail. A rat's tail, made of incorporeal ink, but recognizable.

My confusion gets the best of me, and I slip again, and the glimmer becomes a broken rock.

I look at the final test subject, and want to sigh. I do not have it in me to attempt that again this night, my mind already pushed to the limit. There is only so much that the comfort of a community around myself can do to keep me alert.

The tenth glimmer is spared from its fate, and my bees are released to their own devices, while I refocus on the evening meal that is just now wrapping up. The children, including the gobs

though their development is less structured, have been tucked to bed, Mela taking increasing delight in telling stories to them in her role as an 'elder sister'. The adults, having reconvened in the meal hall at Kalip and Yuea's request, have dipped into the fort's stock of ale, and are quietly sharing a drink together.

And I arrive to ruin the perfect night.

It takes very little time for me to fill everyone in on what is going on. Yuea and Kalip already know, but the rest of them don't, and while it won't be a problem for a tenday, it's still *a very real problem*. I stretch my thoughts and magic in a different way than my experiments, and **Shift Wood** to write across three spots so all of them can read it at the same time. It is almost amusing that it is far easier for me to repeat the same actions with multiple casts of the spell, than to attempt to perform different tasks, but my joy at learning more about my own limits fades as I write.

*One of the others like me has found us. Or never lost our trail, more likely.* I start with. Quickly, I check and count through **Distant Vision**, the dark of the night doing nothing to impede my ability to see. *There are thirty three of the large silkspinner creatures that we have fought before. With them, they carry two different objects that resemble my own pylons, and I believe have a similar effect. They are carving a road through the Green, directly here.*

"Well that's just stupid." Malpa says abruptly, looking around at the human and demon faces in the room. "That's stupid, right?" He asks. "The Green kills anyone that tries to build roads in it."

*I say 'road', but what I mean is that they are changing the landscape itself. It may actually be scarring whatever natural ritual the Green itself is. Regardless, they are reinforced by two or three new silkspinnners each day, and the second pylon is also a new addition. It will be five to ten days before they arrive here, assuming we do nothing. We have options, but I wished to tell you all now, so we may plan and understand together.*

There is quiet in the meal hall. And then, a single choked sob. Muelly looks up from the table where she has lowered her head and folded her arms into a linked position under her horns. "It's never going to stop. Is it?" Her hourglass pupils are wet with tears, her body trembling. "We'll be running forever. Until we die. Until something like you..." She lurches backward on the bench, kicking her hooves out to take a wobbling stand and a few steps backward, before turning and bolting out of one of the doors deeper into the fort.

"Muelly!" Malpa reaches for her as she rushes away. "Wait!" He only barely glances at the others with a look of wide eyed concern that seems unpracticed on his big face, before he sprints after his partner.

"Well that went well." Yuea says dryly.

“Silence you petulant child.” Seraha hisses at her, and Yuea jerks backward from the older demoness looking almost surprised. “So eager to fix the world’s woes until someone makes it personal, are you? Let her hurt, do not *mock her*.”

“Hey, I’m only-“

“Yuea.” Jahn cuts her off with one hand raised, palm out. “Stop. Now is not the time.” The baker turns his eyes back toward me. “What do you need of us? You will have it. Will we run again? Flee so deep into the Green they cannot hope to catch us? Or perhaps become nomads in truth this time? I could I think live that way, if there was... if... if...” He trails off, the solid face that Jahn puts on cracking against some personal thought that the demon cannot pull himself from.

“I could do the nomad thing.” Dipan says, reaching over to grab Jahn’s mug and taking a quick drink from it before replacing it. The casual display of antagonistic friendship shaking the demon from his thoughts with a scowl as he shifts his ale farther from the human. “But you know me. I’ll follow your lead.”

“Thank you.” Yuea says with a tip of her head. “We’ll be-“

“Hold on.” Dipan cuts her off. “Yuea, you kept us alive this long, I’ll give you that. And I respect you to the line and back. But I wasn’t talking to you.” The man turns, and fixes me with a stare. My form, not any of my insect representatives. His gaze so intense I can almost feel it. “I’ll follow *your* lead.” He says flatly.

“As will I.” Seraha says, as Jahn nods along. Kalip doesn’t flinch, but I can sense the anxiety rolling off him, of whether or not he’ll have to choose in the near future.

“You’re all insubordinate.” Yuea grumbles. And yet, that is it. She looks at them, her people, but not *her people*, with the exception maybe of Kalip who I think will be loyal to his commander until well after they are both dead. And she makes a choice. I cannot see her thoughts, or know her sincerity, but I can hear what she says. “I’m not much of a follower.” She says, a defensive dismissal. And then, like it’s an afterthought, “But I’ll try it your way.”

*Thank you. I write to them. All of you. But you should hear my way before you agree to it. Because I want us to kill them all, and take their power, and stop this before it goes any farther. I pause, only briefly, for them to read it. Muelly is **not wrong**. This is never going to stop, until we make it stop. Until I make it stop. And I can do so much on my own, but I ask for your help with this. I wish for us to make war, against everything like me, that is a threat to this world, and to you. The people worth protecting.*

There is quiet again. And then, Dipan and Jahn start to speak at the same time, a quick “I-ah...” before trailing off and looking at each other like they’re waiting. Jahn goes first, turning his horned head toward me. “I wanted a path that ended with a proper pastry kitchen.” He says.

*I'll see what I can do.*

He nods. "Then I will kill for you." Next to him, Dipan chokes on his own laughter. "But perhaps, I think, I would have done so regardless. You mean to burn down the world, little dream, but our world is already gone. And when I said I would follow you, it was not with a requirement. Tell us what you need. And we will make it happen."

"Except me." Yuea adds, raising her arm into the air. The others turn to look at her. "Because I'm still dying, you fucking idiots. Or did you forget that? And the floating royal jewel over there won't get on with fixing me because he's afraid of turning me into a monster or some shit."

"Oh, commander." Kalip shakes his head, speaking up for the first time. "They're far too late to worry about that with you."

The silence this time is more disbelieving than anything else. Yuea's face, though, is a priceless image that I drink in through the eyes of my many bees and beetles in the room, as she slowly turns herself to face Kalip. "You fucker!" She barks at him. "I still outrank you! I can have you flogged!" But the smile she's hiding says she might not mean it.

*Well.* I add to the words already marred into the wood of the tables, which I will need to spend time smoothing out before the next meal. *We should check on Muelly and Malpa. Someone should find Mela if she is still awake. And, I believe, it is time to make good on my promise to you, Yuea.* I hesitate, but only for a moment. *If you trust me, and believe I trust you, then I will see this through, and we will see what new body we can build for you.*

"Excellent-!" She starts to exclaim, but stops as I continue writing.

*Though I should warn you that all of this evening's tests resulted in explosions, and not defenses. So perhaps consider that as I prepare to change you into something new and dangerous.*

She clears her throat as she looks at the words. And then, holding out one hand, slowly opening and closing her weakened fingers, she glances over at me. "Fuck it." She says. "What's the worst that could happen?"

I suppose we will find out.