

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change
Available Power : 1

Authority : 2

Bind Insect (1, Command)

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Nobility : 1

Congea! Glimmer (1, Command)

Empathy : 1

Shift Water (1, Shape)

Spirituality : 2

Shift Wood (1, Shape)

Small Promise (2, Domain)

Ingenuity : 1

Know Material (1, Perceive)

Tenacity : 1

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

I wake up, and the humans are still here.

Their camp isn't organized, their numbers are still separate and mostly asleep. I suspect one of the armored ones did not sleep, and stayed up all night on guard. What they're guarding against, I don't know. I've seen nothing more dangerous than a bee around here, though it's not as though I have any particularly strong insight. There could have been a den of wolves just behind the tree and I would never know if I didn't point a bee at it.

I have twelve bees now. I bound more, just to be safe, and have reserved three quarters of my **Bind Insect** supply for it. My other spells all sit ready to use, refilled by my blank unconscious rest.

I could experiment more. But I find myself wondering if that is wise with so many people standing right above me.

I do not want to be afraid. This is a core belief. Fear will not control me, and fear will not occupy my mind if I can help it. But I will not be foolish, and I will not risk myself simply to entertain myself when the safety of patiently waiting will eventually lead to this group leaving, and me being left in peace with my bees.

So I wait. I wait, barely exercising what I have. There is a tension to watching these people as they go about their day, preparing megar meals, trying to remake a fire and boil water, resting obviously blistered feet, making attempts to repair damaged clothing or tools. The tension is not that I am afraid they will find me, though. Not as I watch them more. The tension is that I am worried that they are so... so broken.

There is something wrong here. This group must be refugees, but from what I do not know. They came from beyond what I know, and they don't appear to be going anywhere in particular. From honeybee eyes, I watch some of the adults discuss what direction to go next, I think. They are not going anywhere, they are just going.

The armored woman does not want to leave. I can read her body language easily, the memories of everyone from the merchant to the singer telling me that she is firm on this. And I suspect I know why; because there is no reason to think this space is useful save one. Barely any natural resources, beyond a nearby thin source of water. There are trees around, and vegetation, but nothing that's near here is anything I would call easily edible to humans. No, there is one thing that might have made her want to stay.

And it's the small gem I made with **Congea Glimmer**, rolling in her hand.

Over and over she rolls it on her palm, constantly glancing down at it. I don't fully understand. I know that the glimmer *does* something, something magical too, I just do not fully grasp the consequences of what it means. But she wants their whole group of nine people to stop, here, when they are obviously low on supplies and trying to move away from something that seems like it necessitated a hasty flight.

Another human approaches her, and the argument restarts. I sigh to myself. This will be a long day. And even though I want to help them, I know I do not have the tools to do anything of value. And without the ability to truly communicate... if I did reveal myself, would they be afraid of *me*? Would I be nothing but a tool to them?

There is the fear again. I am trying not to listen to it, but it is becoming harder.

They will be here for some time. I do not think another point of power is forthcoming. Not if the only sources I am drawing in from are the materials I am observing - next to nothing from that, now, as the motes have become less as I observe the same materials over and over - and my bees, which is still quite slow.

I make a decision, and attempt to put my point into **Authority** so at least I can bind more bees, and expand myself in that direction. And it does not work. It will take two points again to advance. So then. What can I improve to bolster my range to the song of 'somewhere outside of this small camp'?

I consider **Tenacity**. **Nudge Material** is potentially quite useful, and I would like to be able to use it away from prying eyes. But ultimately, I decide to take **Ingenuity** instead. If for no other reason than I will, assuredly, gain more power from simply existing while **Know Material** runs its arcane mechanisms. And if it is happening at a larger range, perhaps that will be of use to me. Also, I admit, I am simply more curious to see what **Ingenuity** holds for me next.

Know Material (1, Perceive)

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Available :

Collect Material (1, Shape)

Invite Low Mammal (1, Command)

Make Spike (1, War)

Form Wall (2, Shape)

Collect Focus (2, Civic)

See Lineage (2, Perceive)

...Civic? That is an option? I begin now to wonder. What am I meant, truly, to be? Or am I as aimless as I was when I walked upon two legs and sometimes one tail? Is there some destiny of my species for me? Or is this simply the continuation of what I have been doing so far?

Perhaps any living thing that is, like me, a thinking body of rotating crystal points, would see these exact same spells open to them. Or perhaps only one that had spent days learning to love the organization and society of bees would have found themselves offered a civic-spell. That may even be where the wall formation comes from as well.

By this point, the fact that my range on **Know Material** has raised is of no surprise. Though, as I focus and feel what it brings back to me beyond the ledger of matter, I do notice that I am pulling in more of that heavy nothingness from the materials that are farther from me. Is it more because they are new to my magical vision? I suspect that to be the truth, but I have no one to ask.

I have no one to ask. The thought strikes me suddenly. I haven't thought about it for days, but all six of the people I once was were *people*. They had friends, lovers, family, even rivals or enemies. They talked to people. And I find myself now suddenly missing the experience. Especially when there are people directly above me to talk to, who I lack the voice to contact. *Especially* when I have so many questions about everything that I am doing within the layered panes of my foundational souls.

I sigh to myself again. Eventually, more power will come to me. But in the meantime...

I must conquer my fear, and make contact. I have solved puzzles in pure darkness. I have died a score and one deaths. What is one more puzzle and one more death?

The tools I have at hand are simple, and I take the chance that the humans cannot see magic, to start using **Congéal Glimmer** in the space opposite the beehive's tree, nestled in the roots. It will be some time before it is finished, but the magic begins, and no one reacts, so I believe my stealth to be intact.

And now, I think, it is time for something quite risky.

Small Promise is not *quite* a simple trade. It is transactional, in a way, but it uses as a currency trust, and is backed by nothing more than intent. It simply pushes out my intent, true, and backed by the nest of my soul, onto someone else. And the resolution, the fulfillment of that trust, generates... something. Something strong, some of that weight that I draw into myself without thinking, as naturally as I used to breathe.

I orient myself through the eyes of some of my bees, and target the woman in torn leather armor. She is standing, staring at the stream with her arms folded, her stance one of a trained soldier, but an exhausted one.

And I trigger my spell.

Write why you want to stay, and I will make you another stone.

I take a risk. A leap of faith. A roll of the dice.

The woman jolts, leaning forward and looking around. The events of last night were chaotic, they were all tired, the feeling and the words could have been explained as a dream or a mistaken memory, or any number of other things. I knew well enough that I had done the same in my old lives at least once. People on the edge of panic and pain would find any excuses to reject things they could not easily deal with.

Now, though, she is awake. The suns shine down, the water is clear, the air is lightly moving, and someone has just spoken to her. Or perhaps she does not hear it so much as she feels it.

She glances toward the others, toward her armored partner who has collapsed into sleep on an open bedroll now that the others are awake. I can almost feel her making a decision.

She lets out a small breath, brushes a clump of matted hair off her forehead, and kneels by the bank of the stream to draw in the dirt with hands that will probably become cleaner from the action.

The woman seems to think, and then erases a word she has written. Starts again. I cannot see what she writes, so I guide my bees closer, bringing on to a small flowering vine near her feet. She starts and stops a few times, before finally settling on a final pair of sentences and sliding back onto the balls of her feet. Her boots are so worn the leather is crumbling apart, and I realize as the bee gets closer that she might only be armored because there aren't enough actual tunics to go around.

Two quick flybys, without alerting her that the bees are mine I hope, and I have the image of the written words in my mind. They are poorly scrawled in an unsteady hand, but I recognize the text enough to read them anyway.

“Can’t keep running forever. Shards are a chance to...”

She had scratched out and rewritten the last word so many times I can’t tell what she meant it to be. Live? Fight? Something else I’m missing the meaning of? Language has changed, slightly, since any of my last lives were around. Perhaps I am missing something.

Oh, why do I say it that way. I am almost certainly missing something. Such as why they are running, what they are running from, why they don’t seem to be running *to* anywhere. And also, why the small gems I can make with **Congea Glimmer** seem to be of such value. It can’t be economic, merchant informs me. They are a *chance*. You don’t get that from something you can sell to a trader, assuming one even exists within a thousand spans.

It’s not really an answer. But then, it wasn’t really much of a question. I’m not sure what I was expecting. An essay on contextual social pressures, scrawled in the riverbank soil, perhaps. I have been saying perhaps a lot today.

Through the eyes of one of the bees, I see the woman watching the children as they sit and eat what little food the group has made. I make a decision again. If they want to stop running here, I think I can help. And if she’s going to accept my **Small Promises** at the color they show, then I will do the same for them.

A hour or two later, when she is closer to where I am buried and within my reach, I spin the mental machinery that moves **Shift Water**, and pull another string of water from a cooking pot. The glimmer is not done forming yet, but they’ll know where to find it when it is.

I wish I could hear their conversation around the fire that night. But despite being a construct that appears to be made out of nothing *but* wishes, I cannot seem to grant my own. So instead, I **Shift Wood** and **Nudge Material** to keep the fire burning and the embers from escaping, until my **Bind Insect** finally runs out and my watching bees find their own places to sleep.

And I slip down to join them. Looking forward to tomorrow, when I will look for yet more options. More power. Only this time, not just exploring my limits, but actively looking for more ways to help.

I will keep hiding, for now, in my small way. But I will not sit by while these people suffer. I will not waste time on hypothetical defenses when real good can be done now.

Well, not right now. Right now I am actually quite tired. Strange, that a chunk of crystal can become tired. But strange that I am thinking at all in the first place, then.

Sleep takes me, dreamless and warm.