

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 18

Authority : 7

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Fortify Space (2, Domain)

Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

Collect Plant (3, Shape)

See Commands (5, Perceive)

Bind Crop (4, Command)

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Nobility : 6

Congeal Glimmer (1, Command)

See Domain (1, Perceive)

Claim Construction (2, Domain)

Stone Pylon (2, Shape)

Drain Health (4, War)

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Empathy : 5 ><

Shift Water (1, Shape)

Imbue Mending (3, Civic)

Bind Willing Avian (1, Command)

Move Water (4, Shape)

-

Spirituality : 6 ><

Shift Wood (1, Shape)

Small Promise (2, Domain)

Make Low Blade (2, War)

Congeal Mantra (1, Command)

Form Party (3, Civic)

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Ingenuity : 5

Know Material (1, Perceive)

Form Wall (2, Shape)

Link Spellwork (3, Arcane)

Sever Command (4, War)

Collect Material (1, Shape)

Tenacity : 6 ><

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

Drain Endurance (2, War)

Pressure Trigger (2, War)

Blinding Trap (5, War)

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Animosity : - - ><
Amalgamate Human (3, Command)
Congea! Burn (2, Command)
Trepidation : -
Follow Prey (2, Perceive)

The next day, Mela, Yuea, Fisher, and I hold a small council away from the new survivors. And *survivor* is the word for them in truth; they have survived what should have killed them a score of times over. "Half of these people cannot walk." Fisher states with a kind of blunt appraisal. "It is not a question of if they can make it back. It is a matter of inability to stand. They lack the function at all."

"We can't just leave them here!" Mela jumps to the obvious conclusion and heads it off, though I don't think anyone was about to suggest it. "We could... we can take the line the other thing cut in the Green, right? That should make it easy!"

Yuea shakes her head, one hand scratching at a bee's back as she sits on the ruined ground. "It would help, sure." Her voice is patient, like she's already arrived at a bad decision and isn't looking forward to sharing it. "It's not even like we can't forage on the way back. But... you're all thinking short term. There's another problem."

And she's seen it. The other problem is that we have limited food supplies. Space, too. And while I can do my best to grow more and more food each day, and *hopefully* heal to the point that I can offer it **Bolster Nourishment** as well, thirty people wouldn't just tax us. It would starve us out before we could get anything in place.

I don't have an answer for it. The answer *cannot* be simply cutting these people loose. Many of them can barely sit upright, and even with my help, others still teeter on the verge of their final breaths. But I don't know what **Bind Crop** can do for us, now that my **Authority** is so expanded, and so I cannot even begin to guess at if I will be able to handle the food.

Yuea has echoed more or less these same thoughts to the others, though without the magic. I wish, perhaps perversely, that **Animosity** had not cracked and drained its vital force out into the world. The soul - or two bits of souls of the same flavor - worries me, but **Amalgamate Human** was only just beginning to strengthen to the point that Yuea and I could *communicate*, and now it is broken and quite unhelpful once again.

I yearn once again for a way to speak to my friends.

For a moment, I do consider spending some of my constellation of small points of solidified power to draw **Form Text** to the place waiting in the soul of **Nobility**. But as convenient as that would be, it is a permanent offering of a very limited choice, to solve what I still hope is a temporary problem.

I try to stop getting lost in my thoughts as the others keep talking.

“We’ve got plenty of food.” Mela is saying. “Or, we could. Look, if there’s more people, they can help make more food. It’s not like there’s a shortage of hunting in the Green, right?”

Yuea hisses in a breath and glares with her angular reshaped eyes at the younger woman. “Don’t talk like that.” She orders. “It doesn’t like it.”

“Are you sure that isn’t a myth?” Fisher asks. “We... live here. It seems impractical.”

‘Impractical’ sounds like a rude word, coming from the gob. And, being fair, I haven’t been exposed firsthand to many of the myths of the Green that everyone else seems to have. I’m not actually sure if it really is a dangerous place, or if it’s simply village legends and perhaps a convenient political excuse for a non-expansion treaty.

But also I don’t think that too loudly, because the Green might be listening.

“Myth or not,” Yuea says, “they’re all gonna need a lot of time to recover before they’re useful. Also, don’t think it’s escaped my notice that when they can move, they’re clumping up into human and demon sections. That’s gonna be a problem.”

“I have a worrying idea.” Mela says slowly. No one stops her, so she clears her throat. “What if... what she just takes a little bit of our life every day?” She motions a hand at my cracked body, still on Yuea’s hip. “Not a lot! Just enough to help them! There’s a bunch of us, and Yuea, you and Kalip heal anyway now, and...”

“I’m not.” Yuea spits. “Something’s broken.”

I want to add that I can only **Drain Health** right now, as **Drain Endurance** is locked away from me. And, regardless, I’m not... I lack a certain *finesse* with the spell. I’ve started to notice it more and more; the higher the disparity between a soul and its magics, the *more* it wants to be. Bigger, farther, with more power behind the motions. For **Shift Wood**, my constant practice using it for detail work has helped me offset it, and for other spells it either hasn’t come up, or it’s something like **Distant Vision** where the limits are impossible to ignore or mitigate.

They keep talking, but they don’t have any good ideas and the conversation starts to run in circles. Most of the ideas keep coming back to my magic, but I don’t... have it. I don’t have any answers, or any way to communicate.

I *do*, however, have open places for new spells.

Authority and **Nobility** are the only ones that matter, because the other options are all currently cracked, and if trying to cast one of my magics causes me enough pain to shatter my thoughts, then I cannot imagine that *adding a new magic* would be healthy.

I check **Authority** first, though I do preemptively filter out a few spells that I feel are most likely *never* going to be relevant, but especially aren't now.

Shift Dirt (1, Shape)
Shift Metal (2, Shape)
Make Clothing (3, Shape)
Know Weather (4, Perceive)
Mark Home (4, Domain)
Verdant Pylon (5, Shape)
Shape Metal (5, Shape)
Bind Relationship (6, Command)
Make Meal (6, Shape)
Drain Disease (7, War)
Bestow Rank (7, Civic)

At least one of these could let me write again. Others are useful ancillary tools for assisting a group of injured survivors. As always, information is lacking. I wish I knew if **Make Meal** required me to have ingredients on hand. I wish I knew why **Mark Home** stuck in my thoughts so aggressively as a powerful tool for my arsenal.

I make no choices yet. **Nobility** is next, again loosely filtered for immediate use. The future might last forever, but right now is here today, after all. The old saying comes from two memories, the singer heard it from an ancient old man they met on the road once, while the farmer knew it as a favorite phrase of his father. I don't have time to explore the coincidence, but I mark it down as something to consider.

Shift Stone (1, Shape)
Make Low Tool (3, Shape)
Improve Tool (4, Shape)
Imbue Motion (4, Civic)
Spawn Golem (5, Command)
Shape Stone (5, Shape)
Draw Text (5, Shape)
Marking Trap (6, War)
Instill Low Disease (6, War)

The last two are new, and useless. Again, multiple of these spells would let me communicate, but communication doesn't *actively solve problems*. The *problem* right now is that we have thirty three people, clinging to life and presumably wanting to stay that way, who we need to get to *real* safety before something else moves into this territory and kills them for the power of it.

Fisher just suggested that they rig up branch sleds, something well within their ability, and simply carry back as many people as they can, then return with the other residents of the fort to get the rest. But Fisher and Mela have both taken at least two vim to get through the fight, Yuea appears to have taken *ten*, though they haven't killed her yet, but I know that none of them are going to be in any shape for that kind of massive trek. The bees could maybe double up, but they aren't built for endurance trials. And while my little glimmer scouts could perhaps do the job in large numbers, I *know* that I couldn't make the right 'color' of glimmer here, in this blasted land.

But the idea is a good one. And it's a good one that I can work with.

One of my bees headbutts Yuea, another for Fisher. Mela is too far away. "What's up, sparkles?" Yuea glances down at me, voice starting to show strain as her body fails to process the vim running through her blood. "You got something?"

I direct my bees to nod, awkwardly trying to pass on a message of 'please wait a moment', combined with 'but also start doing that thing Fisher said'.

Fisher gets it almost instantly. I know that young gobs learn languages at an accelerated rate, but I find it almost worrying how quickly they picked up on bee pantomime.

And while they relay it to Mela, and they start finding the proper tools in their group's collective equipment to start cutting the distant saplings into what they need, I spend the points I need for **Spawn Golem**

The magic wobbles as it works itself into my combined soul. Like the canvas it's being layered onto is out of alignment. Which, looking at the rest of my damaged magic, damaged *souls*, is almost certainly true.

But it fits, and no unmanageable wave of pain assaults my limited senses. It stings, but I can handle that easily, and besides, it has already faded as I begin to work the spell to get used to it as quickly as possible.

My first cast of **Spawn Golem** is a fascinating exploration of the strange form of ledger-keeping that some of my magics seem to be founded upon. My old life as a merchant, truly, comes into sharp focus here as I try to balance numbers that aren't *quite* numbers, and a singular account that must zero out before the spell resolves properly.

I can invest as much of the arcana's nothingness into each cast, and so to begin with, I use the entire reserve, so I can come to grips with what it is capable of. Besides, at the sixth step, my soul replenishes it... reasonably well.

What I find, though, is worrying. Not impossible, and this *is* what I need, but almost everything costs.

The materials it can use are very limited; most expensive if they come from the environment, discounted if they are already shaped, or coming from my own reserve. I haven't had whatever a golem is preshaped, so I offer stone from my stockpile, glad that **Ingenuity** isn't one of my damaged souls.

The structures are basic; collections of limbs attached to a single point of focus for the magic. Each limb costs. Each joint also costs. No matter what the size, the cost is the same, which makes *hands* particularly expensive. Every addition beyond plain rods also adds far more than it should; spikes or hooks or even simple decoration or writing is painfully costly. Senses *also* cost. Sight points are reasonable, as are those for hearing. Touch is prohibitive. Taste, proprioception, pressure, time, smell, vibration, empathy, heat, and several things that practically *taste* magical but I do not have names for, are all far beyond what I can afford even if I were just making a stone ball with a singular sense.

And then their minds. Well, 'minds'. Unlike my bound, which have their own living thoughts, or my glimmerlings, which are constantly connected to me and act as extensions of my self, golems appear... dead. Not corpse dead, but *empty*, in a way that is harshly enforced. They *don't* bind to me, really. Not beyond the most simple connection that I do not think will take up even one hundredth of the magic if I had a hundred of them active.

Instead, they have one more thing that costs me. Commands. Sets of orders they can follow, as if they were a waterwheel mechanism or a printing press. I can insert adaptive clauses for navigating rough terrain, for who they will listen to and how, and even create long chains of dos and don'ts that add up to something akin to useful behavior. But...

But it all costs.

I lean heavily on the merchant's experience, and the cleric's as well when it comes to getting more done with less.

What do I *need*, really? Well, I need something that can pull a sled. The 'road' is a straight line of nearly flat terrain almost all the way back to our fort. From the end point, the others can take over. We simply need to go that main distance, as Fisher and Mela pointed out.

I had started to lean on the merchant *too* much, as I was trying to design a lamia's tail. That isn't going to work with this budget, though. A bipedal form, then. Two arms, two legs. But *why* have two arms? To hold a sled? Meaningless. I can replace that with a clamp on the torso. And a head is a decoration that means nothing.

A third leg for stability, because I do not know if they will fall over, and I don't want to waste my time. I will allow Yuea *one* joke about this. Then it is back to practical applications.

Orders. Simple. They will recognize my bees, through their single sight-object, and a dance-gesture the bees can make. This will trigger them to follow, to a point where they can be fitted with the carrying branches of the sleds. And then another command that will send them walking in a straight line, keeping to the convenient road that has already been flattened for us.

I have overestimated how much energy these would take to make, especially with myself providing the stone. So I use the extra that is left to create redundancies in the commands. Return trips that will explicitly avoid stepping on anyone that they just took the effort to save. Safety and backup options. I give them no way to defend themselves, but I do give them the ability to run if they are damaged by an outside source.

Specifically, to run at the source, and tackle it. It's not so much an attack as it is a mobile landslide. But it's not nothing.

And then I let the magic loose, and watch through my bees as the stone is pulled from nowhere into the air, and shaped in a flowing and pooling motion into the thing that I have designed. Grey and orange rock in whorls of mismatched geology, a simple mechanical tool that is nonetheless exactly the tool we need right now.

It is unbelievably ugly. I miss my glimmerlings already.

But it will get the job done.

By the time I'm finished, Fisher has rigged up a pair of sleds, and I consider advising Kalip to take some time to learn woodcraft from the ambitious little gob. Already, I can see their hide hardening into the tougher pebbled scales that outdoorsy gobs tend to have, and I wonder what direction Fisher's growth will take them eventually.

I'll talk to them about it when we're back, and I'm healed again. For now, we need to get the first batch of survivors moving on their uncomfortable trip to our home, as I try to decide how much I should invest into my second golem as soon as I can.

The day has plenty of time left, but through my honeybee's sensitive antenna, I can tell there is a change coming. I don't need to **Know Weather** to know that something is on the horizon.

And there's more than just monsters and apparatus-made fire that threatens us, if we dawdle too long.