

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change
Available Power : 7

Authority : 3

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Fortify Space (2, Domain)

Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

Nobility : 2

Congeal Glimmer (1, Command)

See Domain (1, Perceive)

Empathy : 2

Shift Water (1, Shape)

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Spirituality : 3

Shift Wood (1, Shape)

Small Promise (2, Domain)

Make Low Blade (2, War)

Ingenuity : 2

Know Material (1, Perceive)

Form Wall (2, Shape)

Tenacity : 2

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

Day by day, my power grows. Only two days since I began my routine, and of course, it has not stuck. Routines require stability, and while the lives of the cleric and the farmer found solace in that concept, stability is simply not something that we have on offer here in this community.

I have shifted away from building huts for the last two nights, instead working with packed dirt that simply will not last long to create earthwork lines around the clearing. Something has the humans spooked; I can see it through the eyes of the bees, as they whip their heads toward distant sources at random times. They have doubled their night watch, and the children are not allowed to stray from the clearing, even as they regain their strength and curiosity.

There was some of what I assume was yelling, in regards to that. One of the young ones that strayed slightly into the trees on the other side of the stream, even though they brought back a shirtfull of dull green berries, still drew the ire of the adults who noticed. Something has them all on edge.

I ask, through our writing, and they tell me. There's something out there. Maybe not specifically after them, but there's things in the woods nearby, and they all know they might not be so lucky this time to meet few enough that they can survive the encounter.

So many of their companions didn't. I am reminded again that they are the last nine, out of *hundreds* of fleeing refugees.

Yesterday, there was an argument over where the glimmers I make should be going. And, for the first time in some days, I saw fit to intervene with something more like my own voice than rough words scrawled in dirt, bringing **Small Promise** to bear on the grassy clearing. But when it came time to lay down what I was promising, I had to stop to think on what I truly wanted.

I wasn't in command of these people. They weren't on my land anymore than I was within the territory of a particularly adept hive of bees. We were working together, even if that meant putting myself at risk; after all, I could simply... let them die. The monsters almost certainly wouldn't dig me up, and if they tried, I could tunnel deeper. Build myself a network of tunnels to tumble my new body down. Never see the light of day again, through bees or otherwise.

The thought doesn't appeal.

But as I prod at my old lives for ideas, one comes to me from these humans, and this life. A recent thing, that has stuck with me. When I chose to throw in with them, for good or ill, they were in the middle of making a choice. And I was in the middle of changing it, simply by asking.

So with this **Small Promise**, I make a choice, to make repeating choices open to everyone.

If it is decided, in a vote I find fair, then I will make glimmer as is chosen.

I tell the clearing. The world. Not the people; the people might change, I'm not promising them. I'm promising myself. I will abide by a vote for the use of this power of mine.

The humans were confused at first, but then it set in. That I was offering this, and *meant it*, because there was a sort of understanding that this was a promise that *would* be kept.

Perhaps I could break it later if I needed to. But right now, I just needed them to focus, inform me that the glimmer should go into the fighting knives I was creating, and let me get to work on the walls. And yet, despite that, the **Small Promise** resonates with those soft notes, shaking loose scores of them from the air itself as I accept the communal vote and set my spells to their tasks. A whole point of power comes easily, and another begins to form the next day from a single **Congea! Glimmer** use. My promises, it seem, have a weight to them that is *useful*, in a way I know in my core I must be careful to not exploit with intent.

And my power has grown. Nothing pressing has arrived to challenge me, so I simply continue working, but I am reluctant to advance myself just yet. It would be both easy and useful, to advance one of my souls, or fill that nagging empty slot within **Empathy**, yes. But I remember the last time that I awoke in the dead of night to fire and blood, and the importance of being able to react with fluidity to what I needed in the moment.

I can plan and prepare all I wish. I have lifetimes of memories of planning and preparing. But when the claws come out, I have decided I would rather be ready for the moment than helpless except to watch and hope I had already done enough.

So I keep working. **Bolster Nourishment** keeps the humans alive while they struggle to forage under the condition of gnawing fear. **Shift Wood** repairs tools and helps with **Make Low Blade** to put together simple spears. **Distant Vision** picks spots around us to scout out, though I still know not how far it is I am looking.

I know now there is game in this forest. Deer and krayu and boars. I know where there are mushrooms and berries and roots that are, or may be, edible, or useful. The cleric remembers one flower in particular that makes an excellent tea to help with dysentery. If only I knew more than what direction to point the people in who will not stray more than a hundred lengths from their camp.

Already I feel helpless again. I *am helping*, and yet, it never feels like enough. I have a guilt-ridden suspicion that if only I had hands I could do more than I could with my inflexible magics.

I should advance one of my souls, I think. If I do, I could plan better, for what monstrosities bear down on us in the coming nights.

There are, within me, so many memories of anxieties. The terse quiet before a battle, the hateful silence before chastisement for failure, the soft concern that what I tell them won't be enough, the *loud* concern that no amount of bluff will get me out of this without a beating. I have been afraid before, quite often it seems, in that way where I have ample time to see the fear coming.

But those are memories. They are not the same as feeling it now, fresh. Of making new memories, that are much brighter and sharper, and that I cannot close my eyes on.

I don't like it. And even as the calm clarity that I think with now tells me that I am making a hasty decision, my fresh instincts telling me to shepard my strength for later, I am already spending my power.

It is between **Ingenuity** and **Tenacity**. Not for what they might open up with their next advancement, nor really for what spells I already possess within them, though that is part of it. Mostly, it is that each of them have a spell that I *would* take, if what I find is not enough. If it is **Ingenuity**, then my prepared walls will be tougher, and if all else fails I have **Make Spike** or even **Collect Material** should I not need an immediate way to fight. If it is **Tenacity**, then **Bolster Nourishment** becomes stronger, keeping the humans alive and recovering, while I can take **Drain Endurance** to fight if needed, or... well, I admit, I do not have a backup plan for **Tenacity** in time of peace.

No, the walls are too important. **Ingenuity** it is. I still have five points of power left over, even.

Ingenuity : 3
Know Material (1, Perceive)
Form Wall (2, Shape)

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Available :
Collect Material (1, Shape)
Invite Low Mammal (1, Command)
Make Spike (1, War)
Collect Focus (2, Civic)
See Lineage (2, Perceive)
Know Ingredient (3, Perceive)
Create Fire (3, War)
Link Spellwork (3, Arcane)

The good news is, my anxiety recedes as I have something new to turn my focus to. And I *do* want to focus on it. Though I take the time to sweep the lengthened area around me for any materials I can make use of now that **Know Material** has expanded. There are *several* units of metal below the surface that I can reach now, and my ledger sight stretches well into the trees around the clearing, allowing me to feel through the unpoetic accounting a small fraction of the shade of the trees and the babble of the stream. It is interesting, to feel the exact quantity of water blur within my spell, as the flow brings and takes with every heartbeat.

I also take the time to use the increased supply I have in my reserve for **Form Wall**, adding to the incomplete ring of earthworks around the camp. I can feel more of the strength that bolsters the spell, pulling just a little harder, shaping just a little faster. I think now that I could add more to the wall, wood or stone if it were available, to shore it up. I don't, though. I have dirt. The wood near me is all part of trees, the stone all deep under the dirt, and no increased pull will help. I could make use of some of the rocks in the bed of the stream, but aiming at specific rocks is a challenge I cannot rise to yet, even with my bees hovering over the surface and trying to show me the depths.

While some of my focus continues chores and preparations, and some of me distracts the children with small games of chase with the bees, the rest of me attends to my new choices.

Know Ingredient, as with many spells, offers more questions than solutions. Already I can **Know Material**, and I have the choice to **Know Resource** within **Nobility** as well. What, then, makes an ingredient different? Would this bring deeper insights into the component pieces of a meal? Would I be able, perhaps, to see how **Bolster Nourishment** makes its improvements? That is tempting, in a way. Depending on how much it taught me, there could be a whole host of useful plants within this forest, that I could guide and share with my humans.

Create Fire, by contrast, seems to be the closest I have been offered a spell that would let me play at being a hero of legend. One of the archmagi of the old histories, or a saber from the storybooks. The power to make flame from nothing, to fight my enemies. That it reveals itself as part of the set of war only lends credibility to this idea. But... I am loathe to select it, without need. Fire, and war, are not things I wish to seek out. If pressed, and a defense must be mounted, I will seize the spellcraft and regret nothing. But I will not limit myself to being a weapon without need. I have already lived more than one life of violence, and I do not wish to repeat the process without resisting.

Which leaves, then, **Link Spellwork**. A new categorization of magic, and an exciting look at what the future might hold. But I wonder, can I not connect my spells already? I have been already feeding **Congea! Glimmer** into the gaps in the workings of my other shaping spells. What does this offer, I then must ask. And as I ask, and think, an old memory from the life of the cleric drifts to the fore. Perhaps what this spell links is not my *own* magic. Perhaps it is a way to join hands with others.

Others. Others like me. If I am, strange as this life is, then perhaps others are as well.

Perhaps I am less alone than I thought.

I make no selections. Instead, I simply pull myself back to my calm center, and let myself refocus. Enjoying the ideas of how the seasons may turn in the future.

The calm does not last. As evening slips in with a sunset that colors the world in tones of light through my bee's eyes, something *changes*. The humans in the clearing drop what they are doing, grab for weapons. They are rushing, looking, trying to make sense of what is going on. But I see no attackers, no crisis. The woods stand calm around us, and I am watching *very* closely through **Know Material**. I would see even a hundredth of a unit of dirt disturbed.

They assemble on one side of the camp, where a half complete wall offers some shelter. The spearfisher girl points into the distance; I think she is telling something to the others.

Here, at least, I can try to help. I land a clawful of bees upon the earthwork, getting their attention, and **Nudge Material** with some of my reminding empty liquid for that spell the word for *wait* into the dirt.

Then I reach out with **Distant Vision**, and throw my eyes into the woods ahead.