

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change
Available Power : 3

Authority : 4

Bind Insect (1, Command)
Fortify Space (2, Domain)
Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

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Nobility : 3

Congel Glimmer (1, Command)
See Domain (1, Perceive)
Claim Construction (2, Domain)
Empathy : 3
Shift Water (1, Shape)
Imbue Mending (3, Civic)

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Spirituality : 3

Shift Wood (1, Shape)
Small Promise (2, Domain)
Make Low Blade (2, War)

Ingenuity : 3

Know Material (1, Perceive)
Form Wall (2, Shape)
Link Spellwork (3, Arcane)

Tenacity : 2

Nudge Material (1, Shape)
Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

There is another domain. Like mine, in so many ways, but distinctly *other* in the sight of **See Domain**. It belongs to another spellcaster, and while my perception magic allows me a rather unusual look into the measurements of the things within my domain, it cannot tell me who, or even what, the other caster is.

But I think I already know.

I have a rapid conversation with **Nudge Material** and the eyes of a beetle that see a little more than they probably should. I would not have noticed before, I don't think, as my perspective expanded. But now that I am looking for it, it's happening in noticeable if tiny ways.

Yuea and Kalip watch my words, and the spoken translation of Seraha as the older demon woman translates written into spoken language faster than their unpracticed eyes could. She writes replies as well, writing at an impressively odd angle so my beetle can see them straight on. The memories of the scholar would approve.

No, they *do* approve. And isn't that frightening and exciting all at once.

"What is a domain?" Kalip wants to know. I can't hear him, but he's the one who talks before Seraha writes it out for him in a set of quick strokes with the branch held in her pink furred hand. Kalip has recovered enough that no one can effectively tell him to stop forcing himself to work, and while I want him to get back in one of the huts and heal, I know we need every set of hands and eyes available if these people are to survive.

I make a mark that we have agreed means *I don't have a full answer*. But I try to share what I can, using clipped language and trusting my translator as I conserve my spell stamina. *Mine lets me see, badly. Some of it is protected. Stopped fire from bugs. You are part of it.*

"We're part of it?" I don't know who said that, or if they meant for it to get written out for me, but it is.

Promises made did it. I tell them. *Didn't mean to. Would have asked.*

My beetle catches Yuea and Seraha glancing at each other, and I get the feeling that 'I have no idea what I am doing' is not the secret they wanted to share with their protector.

They talk some more, and I try to listen. I can hear more with this beetle than with one of my bees, but it's all at once too sharp and too muddled for me to make out words. Perhaps I can improve that, as well. It remains to be seen.

They ask their next question. "This is where the monsters went?" Is written in the dirt.

Yes. I say. *Through the edge of my scouting.*

"How far can you scout?" Yuea asks, and I can *almost, achingly*, hear the words themselves. Once they're written down, it makes perfect sense.

It also makes sense she'd want to know about my ability, if she is to rely on me at all. *Fifteen hundred lengths out.* I say. And then I make the dreaded symbol of the unknown as I add that I do not know how far exactly it can reach at most.

They do not know how long a length is. I also, unfortunately, do not have the spell power to keep writing. **Nudge Material** is powerful in how flexible it is, I assume, even if all I use it for is dirt. But it seems to buy this flexibility through a complete lack of focused force, and my ability to continue using it has almost run dry.

I use my beetle to signal that to my allies, and they go back to talking among themselves as I am mostly excluded from the conversation now by virtue of inability. I can still hear their voices, though it is as from a great distance, like I'm underwater, and the individual words escape me.

For now.

I turn to **Bind Insect**, the spell having started to recover its own reserve, and start to focus more of it into my bound beetle. This time, paying attention to improving hearing. I do not know if my desire will change the outcome. And the power slips through my spell so fast, like the bug is an arid plain thirsty for rain. So I have no illusions as to getting what I want right away. But if I can continue to make small changes, maybe soon enough, my conversations will be a little more dynamic.

Distant Vision is still out there. A damaged circle of sight just on the edge of the monstrous domain. I realized, as soon as I moved to the fourth step of **Authority**, that at a certain point, the spell refills itself from its own use faster than it consumes that empty substance with which its casting is reliant upon. So it costs me nothing to keep watch.

I am concerned that this particular spell does not seem to be shaking loose those motes that make up my power, as it sits awaiting enemy motion. But I cannot possibly know what that means, except to assume it is something equally horrible to the monsters that live within the domain I cannot breach.

And I need that power. It continues to come to me, in bits and pieces. From my glimmer, from my **Small Promise** casts that still stand active, from the buildings I have claimed, simple as they are, and of course from the calm acts of helping around the camp. If I was left with a hundred moons of calm life here, if I had all the time needed, then I could build from just this a foundation of magic and life that I would be content with. There is already so much to explore; I don't want to need more magic. I want to have more time.

But I don't have time. I have three sparkling points of power, and I need a fourth to solidify a new spell, and I suspect I am going to need every edge I can manifest. I could simply spend what I have to improve **Tenacity**, and from there **Nudge Material**. But while more strength to that spell would be a true boon for communication, it is not going to save us should the worst occur.

So I focus on **Authority**, and what has been newly revealed to me.

Authority : 4

Bind Insect (1, Command)

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Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

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Available :

See Rank (1, Perceive)

Shift Dirt (1, Shape)

Drop Trigger (1, War)

Shift Metal (2, Shape)
Make Clothing (3, Shape)
Know Abstract (3, Perceive)
Collect Plant (3, Shape)
Bind Crop (4, Command)
Know Weather (4, Perceive)
Mark Home (4, Domain)

Marvels and wonders, and none of the new ones will help me kill our enemies. **Drop Trigger** is the only warspell even available here, and while lining the woods with traps for the ever present beasts sounds appealing, it also sounds like it would take an awful amount of time and resources that I would rather spend on something else.

Make Clothing continues to look useful to the camp, but I have a thought toward **Shift Metal**. I dismissed it previous, as the metal is buried within the ground, but if I could find a way to unearth it, perhaps with dedicated **Nudge Material** uses, then I could make for my people weapons and armor beyond the crude tools they have now.

But I need **Nudge Material** for other things. And of course, there is the matter of how much time it would take, how much power it would need to supplement the plan. No, that will not do, yet.

Know Weather would be useful if it were not midsummer right now and free from the horrors of sudden high winds, flash floods, or thunder killers. **Mark Home** similarly seems useless. Useless to us right now, that is. I am sure I could find something to do with it, but so far, many of my domain spells have failed to have a striking impact on the world in the way that would ease real burdens.

I am going to take **Bind Crop**. Perhaps it will take some planning, but now, I can communicate with my people at least somewhat. A quick planting within my range, which is not inconsiderable now, and I can bind myself to what root vegetables or berry bushes they find most useful.

Because I know now, that what I bind to, I can *change*. I can make it grow better, or faster. I am sure of it. With this, I will be able to make of a small garden enough food to take away at least some fear of starvation. Or that is my hope, at least. We will see if reality bears it out when I have the final point I need. And even then, I am now more than ever considering investing in another soul, simply to widen my options.

A moment later, something changes, and when I make sense of what has given me this wave of trepidation, I begin to think even more that what is needed now is not the long term solution of **Bind Crop**.

My **Distant Vision** is missing another chunk of its radius.

As I turn my attention back to it, another chunk vanishes, overlapping the other. I am down to seeing a crescent of space now, around a growing domain that is occluded from my sight. My brief panic is lessened slightly as nothing happens afterward; my worry that this was an attack of some kind, or that my observation had been noticed, fades as the expansion simply stops.

I recast **Distant Vision**, pulling back so I can see more of the area, noting that the occluded section has now spilled out to encompass one of the pillars on the edge of the zone.

I hate this. Time and focus are slipping from me as I warily observe the edge of a territory over two thousand lengths from us. This is not what I wanted this day to be. I wanted to teach children what berries are safe to forage, fix tools for the camp, start **Form Wall** construction on a longhouse, and hope that the votes for **Congeval Glimmer** would give me free reign to experiment with forming them linked to my bound bees. I wanted to vicariously experience the warm sun and the smell of flowers, not feel myself freeze in fear every time a branch moves in my all too new sight.

A branch moves in my sight, and I cannot help my thoughts from grasping onto it. But before I can curse myself with all the inventive words the old soldier's memories provide me, I see what *made* the branch move.

One of those vile long legged creatures has emerged from the protected territory. Its furred oval body brushing against the trees as it passes, tiny hands trailing lines of gossamer webbing.

And another one shortly behind it. And another.

They move toward the other edge of my **Distant Vision**, and I recast farther away to continue tracking them, the small dip in my spell's stamina barely noticeable. But then, they do something I had not expected. They *split up*. Each of them with no seeming communication peeling away from each other, heading out in three different directions.

I attempt to remember which way our own camp is, based on what direction I have been casting in. I *think* it is the one on the left that might have a chance of nearing us.

Nudge Material and the buzzing of a beetle's wings informs the camp of what I suspect, before that spell runs dry once more. I take a roll of the dice, and **Distant Vision** onto the one that is headed what I suspect is our way. If it closes within fifteen hundred lengths, then I will know, and we can react. But until then, as the day crawls by, I watch the monster take halting, angular steps over fallen logs and across fertile soil.

I hate that **Form Wall** needs to go to reinforcing and building earthwork defenses, and not a home. I hate that **Congeval Glimmer** goes into crude blades of war and not my own excited experiments. I hate that the people of the camp must rely on **Bolster Nourishment** and not actual whole meals.

I hate that my first real labor cooperation with my people is arranging sharpened wooden stakes in the bottoms of the pits they dig. **Shift Wood** should not *be* for this.

I hate that I am too drained to share small adventures with the children of the camp.

But if that is what it takes to see tomorrow, then that is what we will do.

I only hope that our lives do not become an endless set of empty promises for tomorrow. And I will find a magic to slaughter every monster in these woods if that is what it takes to realize that hope.