

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 4

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)

I am becoming worryingly proficient with **Shift Wood** as a detail tool.

There is a feeling that I remember from a few lives, of taking a tool that was meant for one thing, and through days and days of need and frustration and eventually just resignation and habit, turning it to another task. The repetition of slicing vegetables with the wrong style of knife eventually turning to habit and then preference and then a form of odd mastery.

The old cleric's disgruntled glare when, late in life, he learned that there was actually a knife made for the task, that really was easier, is all at once painfully embarrassing, and also warmly comforting. I do not need to live that memory to learn its value, though.

Shift Wood is something I can stretch to its absolute limit. The magic can smooth and blend and shape wood with an exercise of will unmatched by a mundane tool, and with my own knowledge and continuing practice, I can make use of it to do things I suspect it was never meant to. Sketching maps or forming words, making tools or wooden armor stronger than it

should be, and an old recipe from the scholar leaves me wondering if I could also make paper from it as well.

And I *refuse* to allow myself to rely on it forever. Specialized magic is not like specialized tools often found cluttering an alchemist's home and going largely unused. My spells are all apart of me, always, and the only thing I sacrifice by chasing after better ways to work my will on the world are opportunities to use other methods. And while I will miss those opportunities, the longer I live, the more chances I will have to find ways to work around my limitations.

As **Shape Wood** refills, and the survivors look over the map I have drawn on the growing pool of fused bark, adding their own notes for closer landmarks, I try to mentally balance myself.

There are monsters in the trees. And rather than cower behind the walls, the fighters have chosen to sortie out to meet them. Or at least, the ones I have tracked that will be passing within five hundred lengths of our camp.

I am continuing to find it hard to define a length. It seems like something deeper within my new mind, and the magics I am weaving, and every time I try to make comparisons that I can later use, they fail. I can say that **Distant Vision** starts fifteen hundred lengths away, and I can tell how long it took Yuea to run that distance from several nights ago. I have seen her run. Simple math, which would be easier if I had a ledger of my own to work with, could tell me roughly how long a line in the ground of one length would be.

And yet I *cannot*. I cannot look through the eyes of a bee or beetle and say how many lengths tall a tree is, or if it even is a whole length at all. The magic simply doesn't tell me. And it is maddening to not be capable of providing advanced intelligence to those who have chosen to fight.

We haven't had time for questions. I have so many questions, and now I have a way to ask them. I have been mentally putting together a list, and when this is done, I will ask them all. We can sit, and talk, as companions, for as long as we wish.

They are making preparations. Or perhaps saying goodbyes. I do not know. I watch through the eyes of my bees, an idle part of my mind continuing to seed the area around me with **Fortify Space**, gradually pushing the boundary of my influence outward slower and slower as the area I cover grows. Yuea and Kalip are arguing, and it is not a challenge to see why. She wants him to stay, and he obviously wants to go. Behind them, Jahn stands, idly flipping a broad bladed axe that they have no carrier for, trying to look innocent in the entire affair, as that they will be going along is already a forgone conclusion.

Kalip juts an accusatory finger toward the demon, and says something that sounds like a warbling hum to my nearby beetle. I have not managed to get hearing quite right yet, but I can tell a challenge when one arrives. In response, Jahn just raises one furred hand in a sheepish wave, the sudden trepidation and anxiety detracting from the image of a powerful axe-warrior.

The others notice too, and after a long glare, Kalip's face breaks into a laugh, emotions flowing like a dam cracking.

I loosen my control of my bees, letting most of them go about their business, even as they range outside of my area of influence. A few I ask to stay nearby, but beyond that, I let them be. They have work to do as well. And isn't that the strangest thing? The soldier's memories make this almost expected, but only almost. The way that the camp just... keeps going. Even as two of their number prepare to fight for their lives, there is nothing they can do but to keep living. To keep sewing tattered clothes back together, or hauling clay for when I will be able to turn back to construction once again, or foraging for food to keep everyone fed.

They can't and shouldn't be part of the fight. All they can do is make it matter.

I have done what I can to give them the advantage they need. I have a guess as to the path and the distance of the monsters, I know at least one of them is going to pass far too close to our camp unless it veers away out of my sight, and I have shared my prediction on our map, updated as recently as possible. I *dearly wish* I had a bird's eyes for this, but I suppose the world cannot be helpful all the time. Though once would be nice.

I have given them the armaments I am capable of. **Imbue Mending** for Jahn's axe and some of the mismatched leather armor scraps they have cobbled together into protection. **Congea! Glimmer** shared between the two of them, a collection of several stones pressed into pouches or in one case tied tightly to a curved horn. **Make Low Blade** to replace one of Yuea's knives. They are not good knives. I cannot make good knives, and that is honestly shameful, but at least it lets me make them from anything.

Briefly, I again consider advancing **Spirituality**. I feel worse and worse with each passing beat as the points of power wait to be used. I *know* there are more uses for them, as well, which makes the sting worse. And while I am committed to remaining flexible, to respond to unforeseen circumstances, I am tempted to do it simply to make another dagger. Perhaps a slightly better dagger that will not break in half after a few practice stabs. Perhaps it will unlock a spell to make a pistol instead.

This is a distraction. I am trying to calm my racing thoughts, as the two fighters leave the camp.

I see them off with an escort of bees, until they near the edge of my range. The others watch as well, especially the human who has strung his shortbow with one of their few remaining good strings, and is perched atop the defensive wall around their camp.

The two of them do not run. They move at a calm walking pace, out of the clearing and into the trees. A few of the children watch for a while, the small girl who is always following my young champion around especially, peeking over the wall with one of the larger bees sat upon her head for a long time after the two fighter's forms are obscured by the woods.

Have I done enough? I don't know. I don't even know what to do now. Everyone else has tasks that need doing. Even if it's just keeping watch, or digging a hole, they have lives and needs that must be attended to. Built in distractions from the fear and the worry.

I have none of that anymore, but at least I can try to pretend. The old behaviors of nervous energy seem oddly muted in the memories of my past lives, but that doesn't mean I can't at least try.

First, check what must be done. **Distant Vision** is still posted outside the enemy domain, and the reserve is low but unmoving. I would like to experiment with it more, as I do not believe it is as limited as I think it is, but I will do that when I do not need to be on watch for more foes.

Next, check on anything that could be checked on. Reread the ledgers, walk the perimeter, rehearse a song, it does not matter. Even if I think I know it back to front, reading a book again is still something to *do*. I do not have books, but I do have magics telling me things, and I turn to them.

All the blades and glimmer I have made are still out there, lines of connectivity drawn between myself and them. Well, most of the blades. As I said, they are not very good blades. I stopped making them out of bone after the second kitchen knife snapped in half. Bone can be made very sharp with that spell, but only for a few cuts. Small bits of shaken power flow from them back to me.

Other flows come from my domain; the land and the buildings and the people as well. Another point is forming within me, and I search the cleric's memory for a small prayer for luck that I might be able to make use of it in peaceful times.

My bees are growing. I can no longer deny it, and in fact, I find it delightful. I have them observe each other so I can see; they are larger than normal honeybees, their shapes beginning to shift and change. But I have only given them the power to change, and no particular command on how to do so. And what they have changed to seems to be simply better bees. Their hive seems to care for them regardless.

And now I am thinking that I could make my bees into combatants, if I wished. I could give them longer stingers, wings that screamed, eyes that could surveil a whole battlefield. Bigger, deadlier. The people of my camp would never need to fight again, if I made my own warriors. It would take time, but I could change them to suit what we need and-

I am daydreaming of making monsters.

My focus snaps, my thoughts whirling away into fragmented nothing.

I am thinking of *making monsters*.

Is this how it starts? I do not know where the enemies of the people in my camp came from. I have not had the time or the free spellcraft to ask if there was a war, or an old enmity, or something worse still. But I know there are monsters out there that are set to the task of killing, of hunting, of taking away to some clouded domain, every person that they find.

And they had to come from somewhere. Some of them even came from a domain, just like my own, but with a different owner attached.

I want to sleep. I want to let my mind stop for a time, let my spells refill, and let the world pass by for a time until I can awaken refreshed and make sense of what I am and my place among the once-and-now living.

But my bond with the growing beetle grabs my attention, a shout has rung out. Something approaches the low wall, and in the eyes of my bees the people move to make sure the children are accounted for, make sure they are ready to run.

Because what is coming back is not Yuea and Jahn. It's not even from the direction they left. Instead, it is something that moves in from forty degrees off of their path, with halting, angular steps. Something that has seen the wall, seen the archer standing on it. Something that towers above the people.

And it seems quite cruel.