

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change
Available Power : 7

Authority : 4

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Fortify Space (2, Domain)

Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

Collect Plant (3, Shape)

Nobility : 3

Congeal Glimmer (1, Command)

See Domain (1, Perceive)

Claim Construction (2, Domain)

Empathy : 3

Shift Water (1, Shape)

Imbue Mending (3, Civic)

Bind Willing Avian (1, Command)

Spirituality : 5

Shift Wood (1, Shape)

Small Promise (2, Domain)

Make Low Blade (2, War)

Congeal Mantra (1, Command)

Form Party (3, Civic)

Ingenuity : 4

Know Material (1, Perceive)

Form Wall (2, Shape)

Link Spellwork (3, Arcane)

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Tenacity : 3

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

Drain Endurance (2, War)

No more dawdling. It is past time that we leave this place behind.

In part of my conglomerate soul, I feel a pang of uncertainty. Of fear. But not the rightly earned fear that something is going to kill my friends and crush my new form. Instead, it is the fear of the unknown; something that no life of mine was ever able shake, and that now creeps into my new reawakened self as well.

Who knows, it whispers to me, what is out there? Who knows what could go wrong?

I don't. But I know what is here, and I know what could go wrong now. We are increasingly surrounded, down to one fighter who lacks lingering wounds, and in the middle of an expansive forest far distant from any kind of help.

Another part of me feels a painful melancholy. This is where I was born, truly. Where I have forged myself into who I want to be. I know, in my depths, that all children must eventually leave home. But I was expecting to have more than a single page of the calendar to settle myself and grow.

But, as one of the great philosophers of the scholar's school once wisely said, we cannot always have what we desire.

Before we go, though, we need preparations.

"We can't just... keep running nowhere." Jahn rumbles. "There's nothing on the maps to the west but trees for a thousand leagues. And nothing *after* that on the maps at all! Where will we *go*?"

"Anywhere." Muelly answers. "Maybe there's fewer monsters farther away. Maybe they... hunt people. Hunt cities."

"There's not nothing out there." Yuea says quietly, and I watch through my honeybee representatives at the table as Kalip snaps his head toward her. "There's..." she shifts as she tries to pivot around my rough bark map, trying to orient herself. Jahn laid a steadying hand on her shoulder as the wounded woman moved, ignoring that she was pulling at the only barely healed gash on her chest. "Here." She circled a rough area. "Somewhere around here is a fort. For resupply, of frontier expeditions."

Jahn pulled back, giving her a suspicious look, while Seraha spoke up in an overtly angry voice. "The treaty between our people..." She started to say.

"Has been violated. Flagrantly. Yes." Yuea confirmed. "I think. I'm actually not clear on the wording. It doesn't matter. If the fort is still standing, it'll be something. Even if it's not, we can resupply from the rubble, and keep moving."

"If it's still standing, they will not be happy about your choice of company." Jahn says quietly. He doesn't seem angry, which is good.

Yuea seems angry, though. "It doesn't matter." She snarls. "Kalip and I outclass every soldier they'll have stationed there."

"I don't think they'll care about your rank, if you're bringing us with you." Jahn presses, the demon motioning with a free hand to where one of his people's children is trying to get Muelly's attention.

At the same time that the soldier's memories offer me a passing thought, Kalip speaks the thought aloud and makes it real. "She didn't say outrank." He mutters, idly running a finger down the haft of his bow, possibly without even thinking about it.

There's more conversation, a little more arguing. At one point, most of the kids catch wind of what's going on and a couple of them start crying. One silent, one loudly. I ask my bees down to comfort them, which works only somewhat.

They don't have a lot, right now. And even that's being taken from them.

But soon enough, the decision is made. The group will strike out to the west tomorrow morning. All that is left now is to prepare.

There's a dozen problems with the plan. Not the least of which is that they have no map, nor an actual scout or woodswalker. Finding the fort will almost be a matter of chance, given that Yuea has never been there before. For all I know, she's made it up just to get them to move.

And the singer's memories have several strong reminders of times when lies like that were what it took to force an issue.

They're also going to need food. I've been helping, quite a lot too I think. **Bolster Nourishment** wouldn't be as effective if spread over too many people, but here? For just the sixteen of them, and half of that number children? They eat only two moderate meals a day, and don't seem to go hungry at all. But even with that, stocking up on forage before leaving is prudent.

We're leaving a lot behind. Extra tools, most of the salvaged tents, anything too heavy. Not the shovel though. The only one they have, and capable of doing more than any of my spells in some ways. This will be a long trek, and even the kids are going to have to carry something. At least they can use the scrap material to put together makeshift travel packs, enough that everyone can make use of one.

The humans and demons get to work, making preparations. And I join them.

No more dawdling. I have become too comfortable sitting on stockpiles of power, and now is not the time for it. Especially with the challenges that will face us.

I invest four of my points, and elevate **Authority**.

Authority : 5

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Fortify Space (2, Domain)

Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

Collect Plant (3, Shape)

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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)

Bind Crop (4, Command)

Know Weather (4, Perceive)

Mark Home (4, Domain)

Verdant Pylon (5, Shape)

Shape Metal (5, Shape)

See Commands (5, Perceive)

I have many thoughts around this new information. Shift and shape are different; I assume in terms of scale and power. That's useful to know on its own, it means if I pass on something like shift stone, I may eventually find a stronger option without losing out. Also, another pylon spell; I *think* this is what I have seen the other apparatuses making near their territory. But I know it does more than simply shape a pylon; those constructs were moving power through themselves, though for what purpose I can't tell yet. And now I have not one, but two different ways to replicate that.

I don't have what is needed to fill my newest spell slot, but I don't care. I chose **Authority** for three reasons. One is scouting with **Distant Vision**; I will have a much wider range to sweep now, but I will be able to spot that fort well before we get close, and point the survivors in the right direction. I'm giving up my closer range, and losing sight of the other apparatus' territory. But we're leaving tomorrow, and I'm willing to take the risk to get a head start on the third reason.

The second reason is **Fortify Space**. Being able to secure anywhere we are against the arcane measures of the monsters that now roam these woods could save lives. It has before, and it certainly will again, especially if I can consecrate a wide area all at once.

And finally, the third reason. What I am doing now, in preparation to leave.

Bind Insect. One of my first magics, and I think the one that I care the most about. As through it, I have learned so much of the world, and the honeybees that by chance nested above me.

I pull on the vastly enlarged reserve of arcane effort that the spell has access to now, and reach out to the hive. And bind as many of the bees as I can.

There are, by my estimation, perhaps eleven hundred bees in the hive. And I've had some time and close observation experience in order to get a good count. **Bind Insect** with my **Authority** at four was enough to catch perhaps sixty or seventy, if I had pushed it. Now, with **Authority** at five, I *do* push it, extending the arcane machinery to the limit, where it strains against the motions of the world and the stars.

I think I have bound a third of the hive. I know, somehow, that I have bound exactly four hundred and sixteen bees. I do not need to count, the information is simply there, in my mind. Some of the bees are different than what I am used to; male drones and a single queen. I have seen them in the hive, of course, as I watched and learned from my bees. But now they are tethered to me, the same as all the others.

It is an interesting thing, to confirm what I suspected. That they are not exactly in command positions. My old lives would have used the word 'queen', and taken implications from that. That she ruled, that she commanded, that the hive was *hers*. And in a way, it is hers. The other honeybees are hers, and she is theirs, and all of them together are a community.

Their community is different than what I would be used to, far less complex, far less real thought going into it. But it is still there, a web of effort and emotion.

And now much of it is under my control.

If any would like to be let loose, tell me. I push the thought to them. I cannot make **Bind Insect** optional, to my targets. But I can ask now, at least.

The bees are simple creatures. They do not care. And the ones already bonded to me are far smarter than they perhaps should be, and they *like* it that way. How strange; bees with opinions.

Before we leave tomorrow, I plan to raise **Authority** again and bind the rest of the hive. For now, though, I have one more thing to do before our exodus.

Claim Construction. Link Spellwork. Imbue Mending.

After all, what is a hive, if not a construction?

And now it is *my* construction. And one that will, for days and days to come, repair itself so long as it is able.

Which is good, because I have a job for the first person who notices that I am trying to get their attention.

It is Malpa who answers me first, his conversation with Dipan cut short as the two of them finish tying off a rolled up oiled leather tarp. He follows my bee, and reads as best he can my instructions, and I watch his face getting progressively more concerned.

After all, it's not often someone asks you to cut a beehive off a tree.

Shift Wood lets me make some footholds and a platform for him. **Make Low Blade, Congeal Glimmer, Link Spellwork**, and **Shift Wood** come together in a flurry of magic as I pull and push on the world with arcane fingers like I am molding clay. And what comes from that creation is a simple knife, but it is the first of a new kind of tool. Made by using **Link Spellwork** to put some simple remnant of one of my own spells into the product. Not like **Congeal Glimmer**, which is meant to be added and becomes simply another component, this changes something deeper, adds something more mystical.

He handles the knife with caution, and seems like he has nothing but trepidation as he climbs the tree and leans forward to press the blade against the back of the hive.

The unbound bees are nervous, but the ones that are mine now act as guides and caretakers; calming the hive, keeping them from turning to a furious swarm.

And Malpa becomes far less concerned as he sees the bees patiently waiting for him to finish, and watches as the knife *pushes* the wood away from its blade. Cutting without cutting.

Carefully, he saws the hive away from where it hangs. I catch it with **Shift Wood**, and supports of false branches. Over the next half a candle, I will build for the hive a carrying box, complete with holes for straps, to be worn as a backpack.

A child asked, some days ago, *what about the bees?* And I answer that now simply that they will come with us.

There is still more to do. I find Yuea, where she thinks she is alone on the wall, no longer pretending she isn't injured. And I find Kalip and Jahn, the two of them piling wood on the fire, working quickly to smoke the two dozen fish that have been brought to them before they leave.

And I ask them for permission, before I do something to them. I think the spell itself will ask for permission, but this way is more polite.

Form Party. A spell I purchased because I had few other options that appealed, and because it struck a chord with the memories of the singer. Though strangely not the merchant so much, even though it was her soul the spell came from.

I aim the spell through **See Domain**, sure to catch upon the three of them, and let the magic flow out of me.

It moves quickly. Quicker than I expected, draining to three points so rapidly that it is emptied before I know it. A wave of exhaustion crashes against me, and I worry that, like the first time I cast **Congel Glimmer**, this is a magic I should have started days ago.

But no, it is complete. I have gotten lucky. Three people is the limit of the *whole* of the spell's stamina, and that is with my **Spirituality** grown beyond where I could have first acquired it.

And yet, it is working. There is a formation, three dots of minds and bodies, linked to each other through tethers that are unfamiliar to me. I cannot touch those lines, and I can only barely perceive the dots. But it is a product of my spell, and I can tell that it is working.

I don't know what this has accomplished, but outside, the three of them hiss in breaths in unison as the magic takes hold. Yuea says something, and then stops talking, staring off into space with a look of concentration. Some beats later, Kalip says something in answer, before his eyes go wide and he, too, stops talking.

I watch as their connections light up, light like water flowing from one dot to the other. And then, off to the third. The third, Jahn, across the camp, nods and reaches down to write something on the ground, before waiting. And when Kalip jogs over to him shortly afterward and looks at what was marked in the dirt, they have their confirmation.

They can speak to each other. Without words, at distance; silent, strategic communication.

This was not what I thought this spell would do. But then, I was imagining old stories of leviathan slaying heroes. And yet they seem excited by it. And as my mind races, soon, I am as well.

Silent communication. That takes no breath or effort. Probably quite useful on the battlefield, or from ambush. But more than that, I realize something else.

They are talking. To each other. Without words.

And if I can **Form Party** between others... why not, then, with myself?

Excitement shoots through me. Eagerness for the next day, for the refilling of my magic. A sudden desire for things to *move faster*, so that I can *talk* to my people, to maybe be more than an abstract protector. To maybe be their *friend*.

And then that excitement turns to ash, as the newest human in the camp stumbles out of the hut he was sleeping in after I used **Drain Endurance** to stop his suicide attempt. And I am reminded that no amount of preparation I can do will be enough to fix the damage wrought upon these people.

But at least I am gathering more tools to make the attempt.