

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 5

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 : 3

Know Material (1, Perceive)

Form Wall (2, Shape)

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Tenacity : 2

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

It is a mistake to say that **Distant Vision** sends me away to where I have cast it. Instead, like all of my spells, what it gives me is a small window to the outside. And whether those spells bring me knowledge, sight, or simply a low humming feeling of *something*, all of them ring the space of my core thoughts, letting me peer out into the world.

Though they do something else, as well. They *ring* the space. They are not without a place; and though it does not yet make sense to me, because it is not the same as walking on two legs and handling tools directly, I *can* say that **Bind Insect** is somehow near to **Congeal Glimmer**. And that I am beginning to circumscribe the shape of my own magic.

All this is to say, in simpler terms, that when I cast **Distant Vision** and attempt to aim myself toward the source of the disturbance, I do not vanish from the clearing and appear somewhere else. I simply open the spell like an eye, and add what it shows me to the growing tableau of my abilities.

The spell's connected vial is mostly full of nothing, as opposed to being empty of anything. But all the same, I have an unknown amount of ground to cover, and no way of knowing how long it will take, or even if my scouting expedition will bear fruit. So, I take only a brief minute to examine where I have landed.

Trees, dense but not crowded. A few smaller plants fight for the remaining soil, and lose to simple attrition. The evening sun low enough that the shade here has left the forest floor dark, thought that doesn't stop me from seeing. It is quiet, and still, and it is not what I am looking for.

I do not linger. I cast **Distant Vision** again. I wish I could see the sun, or the stars, and use them to track direction. As is, I have only my own reckoning. And while my mind is sharper, I am still moving quickly and cannot draw myself a map. But I must keep looking.

I find nothing on the next cast, or the next. Only trees and grass. I cast again, my spell's strength beginning to falter, costing me more to initiate than to sustain.

This time, I do not find nothing. I find a clearing. My vision lands half on the edge of where the line of trees, choked by an explosion of grasses and thin flowering plants, ends and turns to cleared dirt.

I say cleared, because of what I find on that dirt. The remains of three carefully built campfires, the embers still glowing in the rings of stones they were made in. One of them looks like it was swatted out by a careless hand, a trail of burning matter scorching the dirt in a line away from it.

There are crude tents as well, or what remains of them. Their frameworks are shattered, the barely treated leather that made them up torn and scattered. The rest of the camp is in a similar state.

And there are dead here.

I recast. Center myself in the camp. And, listening to the old memories of the cleric, pull upon a lifetime of tracing violence.

The dead are thickest on one side of the camp, and from what I can examine without being able to turn the bodies or see underneath where they are pressed into the dirt, the ones who fell here were not watchguards or fighters. They are of mixed ages, unarmed, and some of them are children.

As I walk the focus of my sight through the camp, there is a clear line where a stand was made. Here, the bodies are brutalized, the kind of people who had to be hurt repeatedly before they stayed down. And they are not alone. There are joined by a trio of things that seem almost like the drawings the scholar had seen before of deep sea turtles. A dome of a shell covering a leathery body. Only these ones have a set of five long limbs that propel that shelled body forward like spiders, the strangely human arms ending in very uncomfortably clawed human hands.

The ground is turned to mud here with the blood of the fallen. Which makes the trail easy to follow. I cast again.

By the far treeline, there is another dead monster, and another dead refugee. He is slumped against a tree, clutching something tight in one of his claws. For the first time, I regret the detail with which I can see the pain on his face.

A rearguard. There is a trail of broken brush leading out of here. He was protecting someone. I cast again, and then again, following the trail. I am not aiming for the edges, I am jumping forward in chunks, throwing myself distances I am only barely feeling out with my spells.

Nothing. **Distant Vision** is running low on strength. I cast again anyway, wondering if I will have enough strength to sustain this for much longer.

Then, my sight lands on a patch of forest that is far less dark. A single person stands with a torch, and a rusted old war axe, standing between three more of the creatures and the handful of people cowering behind them. They are clearly tired, beyond exhausted, much like my humans when they found me. The trees end here in a semicircle, and my sight is just barely enough to glimpse the edges of the rocky wall they have run up against. A protrusion of a hill out of the ground, covered in growing ivy and host to the small cracks and tunnels that serve as dens to snakes and voles. Those small creatures hide now, waiting for the night, and the violence, to end.

Almost without consideration, I attempt to intervene. So far in my life, intervention with the lives my own refugee group has done nothing but push me to be stronger and more cunning, while helping them stay alive and growing. And I see no reason why I should stop meddling simply because I already have people under my care.

I aim my arcane workings through the perfect ring of sight **Distant Vision** gives me, and begin to try to accomplish anything that I could to help. But **Shift Wood** does nothing. **Make Low Blade**, barely recovered enough to have a single weapon's worth of use, does nothing. **Bind Insect** does nothing, though that could simply be due to a lack of insects to bind.

I try a score of times in the space of one human breath, relying on repetition to let me pinpoint the feeling of failure and its cause. And rapidly, I come to understand what I am missing.

It is the same feeling as trying to use **Distant Vision** too close to myself, only inverted. The frozen and regretful whirl of the spell's orrery instead replaced by a blazing and eager grinding that fails utterly to catch the magics on the world around me.

They are too far away.

But I am no fool. The memories of the soldier and the cleric guide me, and I know. The magic is not my only tool. Though I decide *now* to clamp down on the thought, in this life, that they are tools.

I once more direct **Nudge Material** at the earthwork wall, and I draw. A simple pictogram. Three monsters, five people, only one of them armed. I make an image of fire; look for the light. And then, orienting myself from the wall to where I threw my spell of sight, I draw an arrow, precise as I can make it.

Go this way, I write, the spell, like everything I have available, running dangerously low. *Help them.*

Some of them see. It has not been too long, and I know that they are alert to my words. There is a ripple of motion through the camp, and I regret again that my bees cannot hear properly. I need to find an insect that can be spoken to, even if I value bees more highly.

They are hesitating. They do not want to run into the woods. And... I understand. How could I not? The sun is setting, and soon the woods will be dark and threatening. More threatening with what I must imagine are the sounds of combat happening in the distance. And I do not know how far I am asking them to go; only that it is close enough they could hear the commotion, however softly.

But I am asking. I stare at them expectantly, through the eyes of my bees. And I can see the moment the half-armored woman slumps slightly. Says something to another of them, hands off her spear, and motions for the other man to give her the glimmered dagger I made yesterday.

There is an argument, I think. Body language is still hard to read, especially without words to cue me in. But I do not think anyone wants her to go.

And yet, the dagger is passed to her. Well, thrown in the ground at her feet. But she has it, and she turns and vaults the low wall. I see her pause, briefly, through **See Domain**, and I see the people in the camp grip their weapons tighter, the spearfisher girl stepping forward like she plans to follow. But then, the half-armored woman vanishes from my domain's roster, moving out of my range.

There does not appear to be any such restriction on how far I can sense the results of **Congea! Glimmer**, however. And as several of the small channels of motes that they bring me open up and begin to flow, it occurs to me that the woman is holding several of them, either in their stone form, or wrapped in the blades she carries, and that she has been somewhat holding back this whole time on making use of them.

I watch through the **Distant Vision**, seeing the monsters scuttle and probe at the last standing fighter, content to take their time and patiently exhaust their prey that certainly cannot escape. The axe wielder tries to strike a creature that strays too close, but it darts back, faster than seems reasonable for its turtle form; the feint just a way to tire their enemy faster. I do not know how much time they have, or how far they are.

Most of my world is empty darkness. I can see nothing, hear nothing, feel nothing. There is an ocean of obfuscation between my tiny camp that I can only perceive in patchwork spots, and the scene of brutal violence I am watching in full relief. I hate this; I have decided to help, and it has made me helpless.

Then, a flare in my inner world. One of the connections to my glimmer burns, and cracks. Then it is gone. A point of power, almost fully formed, manifests in my patchwork soul, but the glimmer is destroyed; I know this with finality.

Through **Distant Vision**, I see the defender sweep their torch, but to no effect. One of the turtle things scuttles forward on its human hands, and one of those hands latches onto a leg. They are pulled off balance, before their axe can strike back. And the monsters close in.

One tries to tear at the fighter, while the other darts past, hands reaching for the terrified people behind their last protector. Some of them cower, but one lunges, unarmed, for the monster. A last resort that gets her slapped sideways into the rock to slump, blood trickling from a head wound I can see in perfect and nightmarish detail.

The monster reaches again. There are children here. My human was not fast enough. They are going to die.

I do not end my spell. Holding on, with the last dregs of life it has. I will watch until the end. It is all I can do.

And then, through the edge of my sight, a figure explodes into sight with teeth and weapons bared. I had not truly *seen* this woman before. Bees have eyes, yes, but they are not the same as the detail and clarity that this new spell offers me. She enters the fray with the remnants of her old armor barely tied to her body, the bracers I made for her strapped to bronze skinned arms painted with scores of white scars. Her sharp face and muscular columns of legs are covered in bleeding scratches from the brambles she must have simply run straight through to get here.

She does not stop as she crosses the gap from the trees to the rock, eyes *glittering* in the twilight. She flings one of her knives overhead at the monster that has only started to turn in reaction to her, the blade... sinking into the shell? I do not understand. But then, I see the ebb and flow from the mixed spellwork of the glimmer infused blade in my mind, and I start to think, perhaps, that I did not truly know what I was giving these people.

It screams, and grabs for her, but she shoulder checks it, the leather plate of her armor crunching against her body as her face contorts into a bellow, and she lifts the hundred weight monster into the air to slam it against the rock. Something *snaps*, and she flattens herself into the pulp of flesh and blood as she breaks the shell with her body.

In my mind, another connection to a glimmer flares and shatters, while outside, I see the stone she has tied to her thigh with a cord undergo a similar process, the light drawing the attention of one of the other creatures as it sends shards of gem into her flesh.

This is no longer an slaughter. This is now a fight. Memories from the soldier and singer echo defiance, that all we need is a chance to turn the tide. Panting great heaving breaths, my human plucks the dagger from the shell of the dead monster, and twirls the blades in her hands, facing down the one that has turned for her.

Back at the camp, I fumble a spell that I should have used the instant I had her in my sight. **Nudge Material** comes to life, and I mark the wall again. Add one human figure to the site of the battle, and carve a gash through one of the monsters. The humans see. Some of them tense up, one laughs. I cannot tell them what is happening, but I can share what information I have.

The turtle monster facing my human circles her, wary, but its reach makes it a problem. I want to yell advice to her, but I doubt I could tell her anything she does not know. I don't understand. I don't know why she is so strong. But she is, and that is all that matters.

A rock bounces off the turtle's shell, and it cranes its odd neck to eye the child that has flung a makeshift projectile at it. The kid wavers, but even as the monster eyes him, steels his glare and cocks back his arm to throw another rock. The monster starts to turn, too close to the refugees, and in that moment, my human darts in, the glimmer on her body and in her knives lighting to life. One dagger goes in the wrist of the hand that tries to grab her, the other goes in its throat, and just like that, there is one less.

I gouge out another figure on the wall.

The last monster drops the weakly struggling form of the fighter it had grabbed, and tries to rush to help its companions, but it is too late. The others are dead, and the human is upon it. She throws her blade again, and while it is deflected, it opens up a space for the other fighter to slide their axe along the creature's softer underside. Blood spills, the monster thrashes, and then, it is over.

It was so fast and brutal, I am not sure I saw it at all. Perhaps this was a dream. But I know it was not. This is the world, now; in the course of a week, more fighting than the soldier would sometimes see in a whole campaign. This is the forest I find myself within.

Distant Vision snaps off, and I am once again in the emptiness of my mind. I make one last adjustment with **Nudge Material**, and scratch out the last monster. I have overexerted myself again, and even though I push to stay awake, bargaining that *some* of my spells still have nothingness liquid in their tethered vials, I find true unconsciousness coming for me.

I do hope the human woman and the new ones can find their way back. Because I have no way to guide them right now.

Ah, but there is a bright dawn awaiting. I have openings for spells now, that do not need to be frantically wasted on a hasty defense. Perhaps I will find a way to heal away those cuts, by way of apology. I shall check when I awaken.