

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change
Available Power : 7

Authority : 4

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

-

Nobility : 3

Congel Glimmer (1, Command)
See Domain (1, Perceive)
Claim Construction (2, Domain)

Empathy : 3

Shift Water (1, Shape)
Imbue Mending (3, Civic)

-

Spirituality : 4

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 : 3

Nudge Material (1, Shape)
Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)
Drain Endurance (2, War)

They killed another monster.

I couldn't very well ignore it to begin with, but now, I certainly can't. Death fuels me. Death on my territory, or by the hands of those in my domain, I don't know. There's a very real chance it's because I used **Claim Construction** on the concealed pit outside the camp, just to see if I could.

Claim Construction is strange. When I try to look closely at the spell, I see so many small similarities to **Bind Insect**. But the meaning of these connections is beyond me. All I can say is that adding these small constructions to my domain might have more depth to it than I expected.

The monster, though. More important right now.

It was another of those black furred ovaloid walkers. Legs like dead trees, too many hands. Not that I should be the one judging people on the number of their hands, really, but it *does* have too many hands and you can't convince me otherwise. More worrying than how many digits it has, though, is that this one came at the camp from an odd angle, and I did *not* see it leave the enemy territory with **Distant Vision**. Which means this was, most likely, the thirds scout that wasn't set to come near us.

It had a pair of humans, both silently plodding along behind it. Wearing tatters, more blisters than feet they walked on. The younger one, barely old enough to be more than a child, was half dead already. And without a real doctor in the camp, and no medicine, it's not good odds she'll survive the night. My anger grows ever steadily.

When Yuea and Jahn fought the one afield, they had to deal with it dazing them. Sapping away their will to keep fighting. I hadn't heard the story really, it was only when I asked that I got to know how close they'd come to death. I gave them a recipe for making pan bread out of yaorr root as my reply. The silk the things carry is what does it, draining away the victim's desires and fears all at once, making them... well, harvestable, I suppose.

I do not like that thought. But I must look at everything about these beasts through the singular lens of the fact that they are made by something that functions as my new form does, but has never read triesties on ethics, never lived with a family, never paused for a moment to think that maybe it should refrain from killing.

And through that lens, I can see only one use for these things. To collect things to bring back, so they can die closer to the apparatus. So it can grow faster.

The silk and its magic does not work within the bounds of what I have touched with **Fortify Space**. I can't even feel it, it just loses its alchemic trait when the creatures try it on my ground.

It made killing the one that found us much easier, especially after Mala and Muelly lured it into the pit, the two survivors putting themselves in far more danger than they should have given they were armed with nothing more than sharp sticks and a kitchen knife.

I've spent the day trying to focus on making better arrows for Kalip to refresh his stock. **Make Low Blade** and **Shape Wood** don't actually need the benefit of **Link Spellwork** to do what I want them to do, and so, I don't use it. I just compress sticks down to more solid cores, then build tiny blades out of bone or loose rocks, already embedded within the notches I have left open. The camp's votes shifted after yesterday to let me experiment with **Congea! Glimmer**, and so, I am trying to add that to the creation as well. Arrows with a little luck in them.

That is what they think glimmer are. Luck. Saraha called it hopestone when she realized what I was talking about and answered me. The humans call it chanceing, apparently. I'm not going to call it either of those things.

I don't think it's either of those things, exactly. But I think I'm starting to understand what it is. They say that it makes swords hit that shouldn't, puts your feet in the right spot to not get hit. But I've seen it do a little more than that. When my bees draw from it, they always seem to find the flowers a little brighter. And the camp has taken to using the hut that I formed a glimmer in the wall of as a storage space for food, since it never seems to have vermin within.

I think, I *suspect*, that glimmer are the magic of what could be. What would be. The knives I make with it cannot cut through mountains or capture the essence of the moon or any of the other grand tales that empowered heroes in stories always seem able to. Instead, they hit blade-first when they are thrown. Usually.

And, someone drawing deeply on one without realizing it, for example a heavily scarred human woman, could sprint at full speed through a dark forest, and only encounter obstacles that she could brute force her way through. And also shatter the glimmer. But that's no one's fault at all.

What I want to do is understand the glimmer's colors. Why it usually comes out green and brown, sometimes grey and gold, and only once slightly azure. But for now, as always these last couple days, I have work to accomplish and less and less light in the day that is free for me to simply experiment.

What I also want to know, then, is what aspects of magic are represented by mantra, or sin? I can congeal those as well, should I so choose. Is mantra the magic of the divine? Proof positive that the eternal eye actually is real, and watching? Or perhaps it is one of the old spirits of the blood, or some other divinity entirely that has been lost to time. Only one way to find out, really.

I miss experimenting. It seems I only do it now as a distraction from emotional turmoil. I want to go back to being alone in the dirt, trying to understand how to see the world when it was just a set of material stockpile numbers, and a single bee.

Oh, that is a lie. But I do want more time. Always I want more time. It's just like being alive again.

The last arrowhead finishes forming, an awkwardly shaped piece of sharpened bone with a gleaming gem mounted inside it for weight and sorcery. I let **Shift Wood** go, and drop the six new arrows I have made point down into the dirt. Arrows that, I hope, will not miss. Or will at least be resistant to missing.

I want to make a home here. But I am making weapons and walls instead. I want to teach children, but I am draining the spell I use to write to make arrows.

I wish I could sigh.

But I have chosen my path. I am committed to this, at least, and all of my old lives would agree that I am pursuing the right path.

The right thing is often very hard to recognize. The world is muddled and can be quite cruel at times. Knowing what is truly right is an impossible task, which is why we even have clerics and scholars in the first place; so we have someone to ask the hard questions of, and someone to blame when we don't like the answered. But the *wrong* thing, well, that's always been a simple thing to spot. And I know beyond a doubt that letting these people walk past unaided, to die as food for something that looks like me, would have been wrong.

Something changes. **Know Material** tells me that there is more bone and meat in the area than a second prior. And a flood of dancing soft notes find their way around me; many of them flowing by, a few sliding into my crystal body. This is different, than when the monsters die. When my bees died. I think I could grab those notes if I so chose.

But through the eyes of my bees, I am seeing Jahn rock back onto his hooves from where he was knelt over one of the people they liberated. Wide eyes staring up at the sky, up at my hovering bee perhaps, as if to ask the wordless question of hurt that all mortals ask when a life ends.

I choose to let the notes go. I will take the power I can, but *not like this*. Not from this young woman, who deserved so much more than the world that has been given to us.

If there is one blessing to this body that cannot sigh, it is that I also cannot vomit when the eighth and ninth points of power solidify within me. Hot white, they sit exactly as any of the others; they won't judge me, or care what I do with them. They're just neutral power, uninterested in how they are used.

But I know where they came from. And I will never be able to forget.

I want to believe that we can make a home here. But I fear we are running out of time. And I need more tools, *now*.

My power I spend like a bowlady passing arrows to the enemy.

From **Authority**, I had wanted **Bind Crop**, but now that I know truly that **Bind Insect** has been altering the bees I am bound to, I am... hesitant. And not only that, but a crop, *now*, would be foolish. We do not need agriculture, not when we may need to abandon this position as soon as we are noticed. So I take **Collect Plant** instead, assuming that at the very least, I can aid with foraging efforts and let everyone remain safe behind the walls while there are monsters nearby.

From **Spirituality**, I can see a clear need for exactly one of the offered options. Well, two. But I don't want to actually find out what a sin is when given physical form. And no matter how much I wish to know what **Form Party** does, or how I want to live in a world where **Small Trade** is the

clear path to prosperity, that is not what is needed. What is needed is more strength for my companions. And so I take **Congea Mantra** instead, the spell that has been available from the start filling my soul, looking ever so familiar to me, but possessed of a far different style from **Congea Glimmer**.

I move to test them both out, quickly asking my beetle to focus on a nearby flowering vine so I might collect it. And for the first time, I get a strange reply. A *denial*. Not a rude one, no, but my beetle is... busy? Working on something?

What?! What is it working on? It is a beetle!

It is only the impression I get, so I may be reading too far into it. But also... I am inclined to simply listen to it. There are other eyes for me to use. I ask a bee instead, conveniently already with some of its hive fellows in amongst the purple petals of a tree a couple lengths away. They pivot to show me the forest floor, and I aim **Collect Plant** at a single spout of wild grass. It will be a basic first test, to pluck this and perhaps toss it into the campfire in the center of camp. My first set of my own hands.

The spell spins and burns within my mind, taking far more of its empty liquid stamina than I had expected. And then... the grass is gone from my bee's sight.

And in my own.

Tethered to the spell. It is *nowhere*, and yet, it is *here*. The magic hasn't simply *picked* the plant, it has *collected* it. And where has it collected it to, but nowhere else except inside my own arcane shell. **Collect Plant** reads back to me a ledger, like that of **Know Material**, only slightly more detailed. An eight of a unit of wild harras grass, collected and stored.

I try casting again, and find, of course, that the magic will not simply deposit the grass where I tell it to.

I consider if I am going to ask my bees to scream for me. But no. I am sure, like all my esoteric and overly specific spells, there is a meaning to this. There *must* be. **Collect Material** is also on my list, and I do not believe that would be something that could be taken so early in an apparatus' life if it simply didn't do anything.

I will try more later. Until then, I need to write a message to my companions. They need to know what happened when that girl died. Even... even if it makes them more afraid of me. I need to tell them. If we are going to have a chance against our enemy, there is no room for secrets and mistrust.

And then I will make my first mantra, and hope that it will give us the power to fight back. Because I refuse to believe this is going to be the last monster we see.

