

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 2

Authority : 3

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Fortify Space (2, Domain)

Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

Nobility : 3

Congea! 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)

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Tenacity : 2

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

The fort walls rise over our heads, lashed logs and sorcereried stones letting us build to a height twice that of any of the cottages in our home village. The work has been hard, but seeing it come together like this, on the frontlines of the territory between the Empire of Smoke and our own kingdom's borders, it makes all the training seem much more sensible. Nearby, the sorcerer-commander gives a grudgingly approving nod. This fort will, she says, keep us alive for at *least* an hour longer than otherwise. The words draw a laugh from some of the others near me, but I know it isn't a joke. And yet. I cannot help it. I find the same pride as my sisters in this construction. This isn't a training fortification, or something we'll leave behind for another brigade. This one is *ours*.

I awaken. Slowly.

The dream pulls away from me like tongues of mist in the morning, insubstantial even as it is still there and coiling around me.

A piece of the soldier's memory. Vibrant and alive, like it were *mine*. I have been, with intent, placing the memories and lives I have within me to the side. Treating them as scrolls to be perused as I need them. They are not alive, they are *archives*, and I am not them anymore than I am the bees I learn from or the humans I watch over. Just knowing something does not make that you.

This was different. This is the third fragment of a life I have seen like this, first from the merchant, then from the farmer, and now from a soldier. And they were *real*. Not just an abstract thought of what they used to know, or something they had learned or seen. This was a *memory*. As if I were the one remembering.

A scared part of my mind asks me, in a voice I cannot ignore, if perhaps I am not so individual as I thought. If it may come to be that I am more them than I am me. If, possibly, just possibly, there is no *I*, and there is only *us*, and I am spinning myself a comfortable illusion about my autonomy.

I would silence that part of my mind, but I find the simple fact that I am thinking of a part of my mind as separate from myself to be so deeply ironic that amusement drives it out all on its own. If the scholar were alive and not simply the record of his own life, then I do believe he would be laughing along with me.

For the first time in a while, my day passes without incident. I wish I could keep a better eye on everyone; my bees still let me see, but they are quite small, and everything is so large, I paradoxically miss all the details. But I trust that Yuea will get my attention if anything is actually needed of me.

I should set up a way for people to get my attention. I should set up a lot of things, I think. I have grown by leaps and bounds alongside these people, and I do not wish to abandon them now. But a ragged camp in the middle of a forest of monsters is no place for anyone to live, much less children.

I think on the future while I scout with **Distant Vision**. I tell myself I am scouting, and that is true, but I am also thinking to myself while I am surrounded by the afternoon beauty of the natural world. Green leaves, yellow dots of a riot of flowers that cling to life anywhere they can on the forest floor, the slinking red and brown form of a fox moving past. I can tell the day is slightly overcast, even though I cannot see the sky. Nothing in particular is wrong, but I linger just to enjoy the scenery while I muse to myself.

I do not know what disaster has befallen this territory, that two separate peoples would be forced into flight, numbers whittled down to almost nothing. Monsters, they have written. But that explains nothing. What would cause the wildlife, strange as it is here, to go so berserk as to destroy whole cities?

What I do know is that they have found some small safety with me. Or at least the illusion of it. And I wish to make that safety reliable.

So I begin to make my own list of things we need. What will it take to turn base survival into a hopeful future?

We need more than bedrolls and reliance on good weather. We need structures, and a real wall. We need to be able to rely on eating tomorrow. More directly, I need a way to communicate that isn't simply emptying a spell that was not meant for it into the dirt and hoping that I did not mangle my letters too egregiously. Past that, we need more people, and more skilled hands. I need more magics, and more reach.

I still don't know really what the glimmer I am making are good for. In none of my other lives have I seen their like, and no one knows the words to write to tell me beyond that they let them fight, or make them stronger. But I do not think that is the entire story.

I feel myself beginning to get lost as I try to look farther ahead. What happens when we have a safe settlement? A safe *city*? What does the future look like when a lord or baron arrives and orders my fealty? Or if more people than we can help stumble out of the woods? Or if I can no longer do enough with my magic to make a difference? Or if another true disaster strikes?

No. I need to think smaller.

Right now, there is today. And here is the rule, hard learned from those before me; if today does not go well, there will never be a tomorrow.

I let **Distant Vision** end, and let my focus go back to the growing collection of magics within my mind.

From **Know Material**, I can see the leather, oil, and metal brought in from the other camp. From **See Domain** I can tell my people are alive and safe for now, and I can almost place them within the outlines of buildings and the blanket over the ground in my clearing.

I run through my arcane self-assigned chores for the day in rapid time. Improve the food, prepare the campfire, repair some tattered clothing, secure the territory, help with fishing. I find myself able to let out more than one magic at once as I fall into a comfortable routine that I draw from multiple memories at once to plan and stabilize.

The highlight of my day is sending my bees on small journeys with the children of the camp. *They* do not care for whether their number have skin or fur or scales. And while the demon children are still emotionally wracked by their experience, the young humans have only further shaken their fear as they learned of Yuea slaying distant monsters.

Nevermind that the monsters were barely two thousand lengths away from their camp, by my estimation.

Between them and my bees, we develop our own small language. These woods are a bounty of forage, and fully half of it is, to my knowledge, *comically* poisonous. They soon come to understand and trust my bee's motions as the small insects guide them away from the worst of the berries and mushrooms they should not eat, and toward the trees they make a game of climbing to reach the low hanging fruits upon.

As the sun begins to set, I count votes in the fading light, and manifest two glimmer as their own stones. **Congea! Glimmer** would let me make one larger stone, with my newly reinforced soul and the expansion of the spell. But I wish them to share.

The strangest thing is that they form from nothing not green or brown or coarse grey, as the previous ones have, but a pleasing oaken color, tinged with a line of gold, as they fall into the voting box to be found later.

At night, they eat, the humans grudgingly sharing with the demons who have joined them. And it strikes me with a sudden revelation that I do not need magic to help them with this at least. I have seen, while following the children, a simple wild grain in the area that I know can be made into a porridge with some of their fruit. Filling, at least, and something that would prevent their supplies from being drawn down farther. I do, after all, know the extent of their limits, and they are shorter than anyone should like.

We have another language lesson in the firelight. And to my delight, I learn that the older demon was a schoolmother before forced into flight. I cannot tell how the adult humans react to my obvious favor of her, even as she and the other demon who is still awake with her shy away from my words written in the dirt. But the I am learning very well how to read the children that my bees are tethered to through day, like an extension of my magic, and I can tell with no uncertainty that they laugh as their alphabet lessons slide through the dirt to form a semicircle at the older woman's hooves.

And then I am still awake, while everyone else finds themselves a bed, or a shift on guard duty. I lose sight of them as I release my bees back to their hive, able to watch only through tiny indications in my ledgers that tell me nothing of the true nature of what is happening around me.

But I don't sleep yet. Instead, I watch the motes that drift into my buried body from the disturbances that my magic has left today. Or perhaps that is not what is happening. There is a continual string from the **Small Promise** that binds me to abide by a fair vote, but there is nothing left to gain from **Know Material** touching upon the substances near me. Is this manifestation of power in the world finite, then? I have seen it before in different colors, from the glimmer that the armored woman - that *Yuea* - used. It could be like the earth itself; the soil may go barren, but that does not mean it is dead all the way down, or that it cannot be restored. Or that there are not more riches buried deep below.

Small Promise is not the only steady string of motes. **Claim Construction** has also opened its gate now, and the two small huts and half a wall that I have arcanelly designated as my own now add to my growth. The motes are the same pale nothing-white color as most of the others, but they shake from material that I know I have observed with **Know Material**, or touched with **Nudge Material**. I cannot afford to trust guesses now, but I am becoming more confident that the stronger spell 'digs deeper' into the world.

More motes move into me from the connection to my glimmer. Not the new ones, though; the people have yet to make use of those yet, it would seem. The motes from the walls are a deep and rough grey. The ones from the blades are a dirtier white. Both are mixed with green. And yet, all of them pool together in my body to form together into the points of true power that I use to fuel further magic.

It is taking more, though, with each night. Or perhaps with each new spell. When I was awoken into this world, moving some dirt and observing a tree was enough to make a one of those points of light in my inner world. Now, it takes dedicated and clever use of half my magics to accomplish the same.

But I will not be bothered. If there is one thing I can say about the people I have taken under my many gossamer wings, it is that they bring me a steady supply of challenges to push myself with. There will be time and room for more magic.

When the next point forms, sometime in the dead of night, I think I shall reinforce my **Authority**. Or perhaps... no, no. Before I continue to present myself with difficult choices, I must make the ones already on offer. I shall choose a new spell for **Ingenuity**. So much of that fascinates me, and it will wound me deeply to leave behind what I do not select. But it must be done.

Also, I will remember to ask about birds, before the empty slot in **Empathy** drives me to madness.

But that is for tomorrow. Tonight, I let myself settle into a quiet waking reprieve. Only occasionally throwing **Distant Vision** to the reaches of its limit, and looking for eyes in the dark.