

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 14

Authority : 6

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Fortify Space (2, Domain)

Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

Collect Plant (3, Shape)

See Commands (5, Perceive)

Bind Crop (4, Command)

Nobility : 6

Congeal Glimmer (1, Command)

See Domain (1, Perceive)

Claim Construction (2, Domain)

Stone Pylon (2, Shape)

Drain Health (4, War)

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Empathy : 4

Shift Water (1, Shape)

Imbue Mending (3, Civic)

Bind Willing Avian (1, Command)

Move Water (4, Shape)

Spirituality : 5

Shift Wood (1, Shape)

Small Promise (2, Domain)

Make Low Blade (2, War)

Congeal Mantra (1, Command)

Form Party (3, Civic)

Ingenuity : 5

Know Material (1, Perceive)

Form Wall (2, Shape)

Link Spellwork (3, Arcane)

Sever Command (4, War)

Collect Material (1, Shape)

Tenacity : 5

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

Drain Endurance (2, War)

Pressure Trigger (2, War)

Blinding Trap (5, War)

Animosity : -

Amalgamate Human (3, Command)

Trepidation : -

Follow Prey (2, Perceive)

As tempting as it is to think about simply slamming our force through the silkspinner apparatus' road like some kind of vengeful mallet, Yuea manages to bring an amount of sense to our plan. Along with a planning session where we work out a doctrine for my use of **Fortify Space**, a spell which is hugely useful, but paradoxically vulnerable.

Every length of ground I anoint with **Fortify Space** is a piece of territory that I must either defend, or allow my enemies to feed on. The protective power, which appears for all purposes to deflect hostile spellworkings, is still in no way defended from enemy bound walking in and shattering it.

It is a liability, as much as an asset. If I can't hold my domain, then it is just food for the opposition.

So I am being smarter, and our striking force is being cunning.

Thirty lengths out, a silkspinner steps over one of my resin creatures. It is alone, except for the distressingly long snake that trails behind it, connected by a gossamer line of hypnotic web. The snake is not, as far as anyone can tell, a bound. Yuea says snakes in the Green simply get that large sometimes. I don't believe her.

This is not the first silkspinner we have seen so far. The towering spike-legged creatures seem scattered throughout this part of the forest, striding in aimless straight lines until they spot anything living. **See Commands** and **Follow Prey** make it trivially easy to track what they are doing, though.

Coordinate a grid with each other. Capture anything alive. Gather once you have all captured something, and return to me.

It is an old command. Or rather, it is a command that has not updated since we have been watching from afar. There is good reason to suspect these creations are out of range of their apparatus.

The silkspinner clears the scout line, and I signal the others. **Follow Prey** is tracking it, and as I push more of the void liquid through my stolen soul, I start to see the shape of the terrain around our target. We wait for a claw of a candle, until I get the impression of a pack or herd near where the one I am tracking is. I signal again, and we begin to move.

It is strange to be able to see thin leafy branches press into my body as Mela carries me through the trees on her hip. The sensation reaches me as a phantom of a feeling; I know I don't have skin, I can't feel the pressure of the wood bending or the tickle of the greenery. But I would have, once. Six times I lived lives that know this feeling, and I see it, but it is distant.

The thought is a nervous cascade of impressions as we approach our prey. I find myself waiting. I have nothing to do, really, for the time it takes us to approach as stealthily as possible.

It is not very stealthy. Kalip was not much of a woodsman before, and the process he underwent with me has both added to his height, and taken away from his ability to watch where he is stepping. But it doesn't matter. In fact, it will be to our advantage.

The silkspinnners are gathering in a packed cluster, standing amid the trees with no regard to the way the roots and uneven ground leave them looking like lopsided towers. There are seven of them, with the newest returning arrival making eight. All of them have some living creature following them with their webbing tied to it. Many of the creatures are *small*, which is worrying.

What purpose would this thing have for a branchmouse, or a racoon? The snake is the largest thing here, and while *yes*, an apparatus can make a tool of anything, I question why this one has sent so many silkspinnners so far away from itself for *this* collection of lives.

I have theories. But I don't have much time to think on it before an arrow zips over the silkspinnners, clips a branch, and drops to the ground without aplomb.

My emotionally maturing bees inform me with excitement that they have identified the emotion Kalip is displaying, and that it is *embarrassment*. I give them a smiling congratulation, and tell them they are correct, as the man says something impolite to Yuea and nocks his bow again.

His second shot is on target, and takes one of the silkspinnners in its oval body. It doesn't die, but it wasn't meant to. The group reacts instantly, starting to scatter out in a loose ring, before stopping. They haven't spotted us, but we have their attention.

Kalip shoots again, and again, hitting two different silkspinnners, and the group of enemies starts to triangulate our position. Which is when he takes a heavy breath, stands and strides out from behind his tree and into view, shooting once more.

Then I detonate the glimmer in the arrowheads.

I don't let the resource go to waste entirely, I also apply thin touches of **Drain Health** to the silkspinnners as I kill them from the inside. But not enough to be noticed compared to the rupturing of organs and the piercing of shrapnel from the inside out.

Kalip shouts something, running an angled path away from the rest of the group, still firing on the silkspinnners who are now scrambling with their long bladed legs to close with him. They drag their prisoners behind them like cargo forgotten behind a cart, and while I have been a hunter many times in my life, it still hurts to see the life of this place battered in this way.

But that is not really what I am watching. What I am watching is the silkspinnners, and I am looking for something specific now that we have their attention.

And as I induce a **Congea! Glimmer** error and detonate another arrow, I see the change occur. **See Commands** lets me read the words coming in as if I have been handed the missive myself.

He is alone, but dangerous. Chase him, do not close. Dodge those arrows. Link with the others when they near, surround, and kill.

Perfect.

Nudge Material taps Kalip twice on the back, letting him know, and he grins as he launches one last arrow through the middle of the pack, turns, and sprints away. The silkspinnors stand in what looks like confusion before they suddenly burst into motion, scampering forward with their legs shifting heights but their bodies remaining level, a forest of dark bladed limbs as they give chase.

With a touch of my mind, **Shift Wood** draws rapid lines on the tablet of bark Mela is carrying. She holds it out to one of the bees so I can see what I am doing and not just go on blind trust that I know how to write. *There are more of them, they are moving to surround Kalip, but the apparatus has only seen him. Confirm that it does not have **Distant Vision**.*

“Fuckin’ relief.” Yuea breathes out. “How many others?”

*Unknown. Kalip is too close for my own vision, keep in touch with him through your **Form Party**.*

“Aye.” Yuea nods. “Okay kids. Let’s get... Fisher the fuck are you doing?”

The gob has moved out from our cover, now that the silkspinnors are dead, and is trying to approach where the oversized snake is laying motionless on the ground, its eyes staring straight ahead as the dead silkspinnor’s web is still wrapped around it.

“Helping.” The gob says, finding a stick and starting to use it to scrape the web off the serpent.

“Help fast. We need to move.” Yuea tries to sound stern, but personally, I can see through our bond that she has a soft spot for snakes, and she doesn’t complain as Mela and Fisher take some time to knock the webbing off the Green resident.

The snake is not appreciative, and tries to eat Fisher as it comes back to its senses, but the gob has reflexes that rival the hissing brown and green beast. After a short period, an unspoken truce is called, and we go our way while the snake and the other surviving animals go theirs.

While this has been going on, I have not been idle. **Distant Vision** has shown me the route ahead of us. And while we have a few natural obstacles to clear, one thing is becoming increasingly obvious. The apparatus ahead of us has been sending a *lot* of silkspinnors out to

collect life for it, and Kalip is making himself into a serious problem, as I track at least three different clusters of them scurrying at high speed across points of my vision in the direction that he is leading them.

Our path forward is clear. And while **Follow Prey** on the enemy apparatus splashes against the outer edge of its **Fortify Space** just as **Distant Vision** does, we can at least confirm that it is in there. Inside a slowly growing bubble of space right where I first saw it.

It's going to be over a day of travel, and Kalip is going to have a hard night, but even as I watch I see another pair of silkspinnners sliding out of the shielded territory and heading out toward Kalip. I trust him. I trust him to survive, and I especially trust him to be able to keep moving. I can see his drain on **Amalgamate Human**, and I can tell that even with him pulling more heavily on it, the spell has enough strength to supply him indefinitely at this rate of his chase.

And for the rest of us, we're left free to slip in toward the enemy, hopefully unseen by either its magic or its troops on the forest floor.

The sun filters through the leaves, casting webs of shadows across our path as the group presses on. We're moving at speed now; not running, but not sneaking either. I've pushed the resin constructs to their limit asking them to scurry along ahead of us, and stealth is now out of the question. But there is nothing to spot us.

Yuea gives small chuckles in time with pulses of communication I see traveling between her and Kalip in their **Form Party** bond, and I can guess without being told that she is not-so-silently cheering for his growing list of kills. He might be outside of the range limit of **Distant Vision** by now, but I refrain from trying to watch him, instead keeping my arcane eyes forward.

Hours pass in a blur of forest scenery as we press onward. Trees, some as thin as spears, others wider than homes I've lived in, become an endless sea of pylons to navigate between. Small ridges are traversed in a buzzing flood by the bees that then turn to help pull the others up with their newfound strength and size. Streams that I think might feed back into or come from the larger river we crossed yesterday are nothing more than stopping points for the bees to drink from before we move on.

And I find myself eating my words. At no point does Mela complain about the weight of her pack. Nor does Fisher, though perhaps I have a bias to thinking that young gobs simply do not complain much.

We make camp in a hollow in the ground, partly natural, partly encouraged by **Collect Material** and **Form Wall**. **Collect Plant** is attempted to cut the roots out of the way, but the spell is rather literal and I stop after the first entire tree is added to my inner world, to avoid notice. If there was some way to connect the things that I have collected, at some point I might be able to make a garden of my own, which is an amusing thought.

It is one of many thoughts that play through my mind as the others sleep. Kalip is still out there, running, fighting, and drawing the enemy further away from us. A simple suggested plan has turned into our whole strategy; and as the enemy is making the mistake of devoting a large amount of its resources to hunting him down, I see no reason to stop it from continuing to make the mistake.

I keep watch. I will wake the others in four hours, before dawn. The supply of Vim we brought will let them manage the lack of sleep. And then, if we keep up this pace, we will be closing in on the silkspinner apparatus just as the sun begins to rise.

My bees sleep easily. Yuea sleeps like a soldier. The other two are restless, but still manage to settle down. Fisher has a quiet conversation with me through one of my resin scouts on their tablet, asking about snakes I have seen in my lives, before they doze off when twilight fades and reading becomes impossible.

Several of my resin scouts turn their eyes skyward on my command, and through them I watch the shattered moon glitter like stars overhead.

I am terrified of tomorrow.