

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 4

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)

Link Spellwork (3, Arcane)

Tenacity : 2

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

Birds are real, and do gloriously populate the lush forests we are in. I have learned this through awkward attempts to ask people who do not know the written vocabulary for bird, flight, wing, or sky, if they could catch me *any* avian companion.

They show a great deal of trepidation. Or, at least, I think they do. The singer's memories speak to me of suspicion and unknown motivations, the cleric's of a people with fears confirmed. But I don't understand where these impulses are coming from, especially when all I have to base my worries on are glimpses of faces that appear colossal in the compound eyes of my bound bees.

All I can hope is that they will, impossibly, find a way to bring me a bird. Or even simply point me at one close enough. I feel the part of my thoughts that commands my magic perched over the one idea that will construct **Bind Willing Avian** within my freshly lacquered soul. A hawk of its own, waiting for the moment to drop.

I have also, finally, seen fit to add a bug that is not a honeybee to my **Bind Insect** tethers, as well. It is a beetle so large that it takes the child that brings it into camp two hands to carry it. A thickly plated beetle, with a proud little horn and a diet of anything leafy that gets in its way. I have given it the simple order to stay within a certain number of lengths of me, and while I do not think the beetle itself understands, the magic translates my command to it and I leave it to its business.

The tether through **Bind Insect** brings me the sensations of the beetle's eyes and antenna. A feeling I find hard to decypher, even with my growing experience guiding my bees. The vague physical impulse of what is behind or around the beetle's body is both abrupt, and insistent, and while I have left my tether as open as possible so I might become used to this new method of experiencing the world, I find it altogether different from how all my old lives saw things, and certainly new to my own life.

But the beetle is larger than my bees, can see a little better in scale, and will be useful for all manner of things where actually seeing what I am doing will be important. Or at least for getting the attention of the people around me.

I have been trying to communicate that I want to build a more permanent structure for them, with minimal success. The old expertise of the scholar and the farmer guide my ideas here, pushing me toward where the clearing runs against the nearby stream, just after where the water rolls down a rocky drop, in the flat patch of ground before it slopes more downhill again. It would be an excellent place, to put a common house. Something more permanent than a few thin brick huts. Something they can actually live in, for a time.

But it's a challenge to get people to bring me fresh timber to work with, when those people are living a constant daily struggle to simply get by. It is much like the language lessons I have kept up each night around the fire. I know from borrowed experiences that hunger and exhaustion make the process of learning leaps and bounds harder.

If I could procure my own materials, the project would be simple. I, after all, have no needs that I know of, save the need to satisfy my own curiosity. And the much more complex desire to see the people I now view as friends thrive. If only **Shift Wood** reached farther, or had a more potent bite, I could simply bring the logs I require myself. **Form Wall** to raise them, mundane knowledge to arrange them as befits a true common house, **Nudge Material** to place some personal touches...

I have it all planned out in my mind. And like every time any of my lives have had a big idea, I know for certain that I will make errors in the construction that will require fixing. Nothing is ever perfect the first time. But I could at least start.

The thing that gnaws at me is that **Shift Wood** *could* have a greater reach and stronger touch. All it would take would be reinforcing the soul of **Spirituality** one more time, something that the last two days of simple assisting around the camp has more than allowed. But, as has so often

been the case lately, I am reluctant to not save them for an emergency. *Even knowing* that to use my power is to invite yet more power to take root within me. Adaptability becomes harder and harder to hold onto as I grow, but I am determined to never be caught so off guard that I have no way to react.

Mayhaps if I end the day with no fresh crisis, and a completed point or two more, I will consider it.

For now, I try to push the limits of **Bolster Nourishment** over the perishable fruits that the camp has been eating through, while I wait to watch with **Distant Vision** as a group of my people make their way back to the demolished camp the demons first came from.

The camp itself has already been salvaged. The broken pieces of tents, surviving tools, and the thin bags of dried meats and personal effects all brought back to my clearing. But this time, the party moving to take stock of it is two of the humans, and two of the demons who came from this camp. Their fighter, and the injured woman who is back on her hooves, even if she does seem unsteady as they come into view.

I had been worried that they were taking a long time to arrive at the edge of where I could see. But now I understand. They had to take breaks; this was not one sustained sprint by a determined fiend slayer through any obstacle in her way, this was a day's hike with someone hurting who needed closer from their old home.

I see them emerge from the breach in the trees with my own sight, **Distant Vision** showing me clearly the four people. I've seen my own champion, and the two demons before, during the recent night of violence. But I had not actually seen the other human. Malpa is his name, with broad shoulders of a farmer or maybe a smith and a tangled mess of a burn scar across his upper body and neck. He holds back from the others, still warily casting glares at the demons who walk in front of them.

But his glares soften as he sees the remains of the camp. When the camp was looted for what was immediately useful, they didn't touch the dead. Even for their armor. Ground that had been churned into mud made of the blood of the dead having set under the sun, slightly encasing fallen limbs. A black cloud swarm of flies and gnats taking what is left of the dead. Their own small attempts at an outer wall crushed in three places, the trail of corpses leading to where their own fighters made a last stand in a line of demon and monster fallen.

The human's foot hits the rusting iron head of a shovel, the haft broken when the makeshift weapon was flung to the edge of the camp. He takes a step back. I can see nausea, and horror, painted on his face. On all of them.

It is the demon woman who moves first. Her mouth moves in a silently uttered wail as she lurches forward, almost coming unbalanced and falling onto the baked earth as she does. The

others come to alert as they move in as well, eyes sweeping the treeline for anything that might try to kill them in response to the sound.

Then the woman drops to her knees next to one of the bodies, a cloud of bugs fleeing her sudden arrival as she tugs them out of the mud and pulls them close into a last embrace, unheeding of the old blood and dirt staining her frock.

The human who has spent the day's march presumably shooting dirty looks at this woman now starts to reach out, out of sight behind her, watching with a face warped in pain. He stops himself, drops his hand to his side. He doesn't know how to help any more than I do.

The demon's fighter, Jahn, says something to Yuea, and the two of them start the brutal work of pulling the corpses from the dirt and lining up the dead, stripping them of leather and chainmail, of shoes from those that wear them. There is still more to be scoured from this battlefield, and the two of them... well. They do not stay professional for long. It doesn't take more than a few hundred beats before Yuea looks over to find her counterpart frozen in a kneel, holding in their arms the small body of a demon kid.

She doesn't hesitate. Instead moving slightly to kneel nearby, and say something. Slowly reaching out and jolting as what was meant to be a hand on the shoulder turns into a makeshift hug, as the demon falters against her, openly weeping.

The other human looks out of place. But he regains his animation fast enough, and walks back to grab the broken shovel he stumbled across originally. Sighing at the shattered wooden haft, he moves toward the growing ranks of the dead with a purposeful gait regardless.

There is something about shared horror that can bring enlightenment. The sudden and painful realization that these things that have been happening have not been to people much different than yourself. That it could have been you, face down in the mud, and someone else wondering if you deserved the time for a proper burial. Ultimately, I hope my human learns something from this, but more than that, I hope that he will return to me even less willing to see this scene repeat.

I do not let him dig entirely alone. **Link Spellwork** and **Shift Wood** through the far casting of my sight is intensely draining, but I make my work quick, snapping up a loose tentpole, and quickly smoothing the break in the shovel with the similar wood. I do not have time for detail work if I want to continue watching at all, but I make something serviceable at least.

They work together for some time to bury the dead. I cannot watch the entire span of the day, but after I give **Distant Vision** the time it needs to recover, I check back in to see them off back to our camp.

What has formed here is not exactly friendship, I do not think. But it is a start of something more than animosity or suspicion.

They bring back everything they could, the salvaged scraps carried on the insides of the butchered monster's shells like curved sleds, and return to our camp with a quiet melancholy that I can almost feel come along with them when I track them arriving through **See Domain** and **Know Material**.

I do not know what to do, or how to help. Every life I ever was remembers loss and sorrow, and as I am now I know that I would want to go to them and offer them warmth and comfort and understanding. But I cannot do that. Even through my growing list of tools, I do not simply have a spell to share a moment of true empathy and reassurance. Even **Small Promise** is not, and I do not think ever will be, up to the task of saying simply that *I regret this is how it is*.

That night, around a closer campfire than the last few days, I do not push them into learning the written word. Instead, I watch through nocturnal beetle eyes while I let my bees rest, using small applications of **Nudge Material** and **Shift Water** to play a simple ruleless game with the children. The summer night is warm, their meal will be filling enough, and the young members of both species need, more than my education, a distraction.

So I watch them as they start to learn the rules to dodge the small orbs of water I flick through the air, to stand in the circles I draw in the dirt. I see in small snippets the way some of the adults notice them play, and blink away tears or hide sad smiles. I cannot see *far*, and much of my understanding of what I see is guesswork, but no detail that crosses my beetle's sight goes missed by me.

They will not be okay today. They may not be okay tomorrow. But there is a future, and no matter what everyone here has lost, whether it was my own old lives or absent friends and kin, we can still make something of it.