

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 3

Authority : 4

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Fortify Space (2, Domain)

Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

Collect Plant (3, Shape)

Nobility : 3

Congeal 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 : 4

Shift Wood (1, Shape)

Small Promise (2, Domain)

Make Low Blade (2, War)

Congeal Mantra (1, Command)

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)

A child screams, and the world slows down. A righteous rage crystallizes within my slowly turning body, the kind of feeling I was worried might have been lost to me with my new life. But no, here it is in full. Anger. Real anger. The kind of anger that is more than just an uncontrolled moment of irritation, more than a simmering grudge, more even still than a point of confusing momentary madness.

Anger at the world. For being the way it is. For being cruel, for being mean, for being unfair, for being *wrong*. The kind of impotent anger that made a person want to beat everything and everyone into the shape that suited them. To scream inside their head that things *cannot go on this way*.

It touches on something deeply familiar to me. Not just touches. It excavates veins of memory like they were raw ore to be smelted, small pieces of six lives torn to the surface like a canyon

charge had been set off in my souls. Bits of who I once was thrown into the furnace of my fury, adding the fuel of nostalgia to it.

I don't think I have ever not been angry at the world.

And no one is ever really powerless. Even if the best you can hope for is a futile death, the very least anyone can do is send a message. And I, now, can do a little more than that.

The creature climbs the wall with a little too much ease for my comfort, I see through the eyes of a high hovering bee. The first style of these beasts I witnessed, what feels like yet another lifetime ago. A set of legs with knees up over their bodies. A tube of sharply furred chitin and mandibles that spit dripping liquid fire.

The small girl on the wall tumbles backward as she screams, pulled by the demon kid who has made it to her first. She hits the ground hard and rolls away, as the bright red insect crests the camp's earthworks. The wall does slow it down, and it moves somewhat awkwardly, but it still rankles to see all that work amount to only a few seconds of delay.

The monster spits flames that sputter out just in front of its maw, leaving only a spray of liquid as its magic hits my **Fortify Space** domain and fails to break through. Then, a blur of motion as an arrow cuts through the air toward it. Missing, but signaling our archer's arrival.

Through the beetle, I hear shouts. Through **See Domain**, I track the mobilization of my people. Yuea arrives first, my freshly enchanted bees trailing after her like a pair of stars in my vision. Around the camp, the survivors move, collecting children, grabbing tools as makeshift weapons, preparing themselves as best they can.

I almost miss it, as I become absorbed in the fight. But there is something wrong with **See Domain**. Something wrong with the list of information it gives me.

It takes a mix of a merchant's training and the singer's time spent reading pilfered documents to realize what has changed. The space the monster is standing, does not list *me* as the sole owner any longer. My domain is cracking, even if only slightly.

Yuea is almost at the wall, preparing to bound up and assault the creature, knowing at least that the flames can't hurt her. But I have eyes above, and what I can see that she cannot is that there are three more lurking on the other side. Pressed up to the wall, they haven't intentionally laid a trap, but it will be a trap all the same.

Nudge Material flows from me, using every drop of its empty oil. I slam a message into the wall Yuea is rushing toward, large enough to be obvious, directly in her sight. Her, the wall, the monster, and three more. Then the spell cuts out.

Then I do not have time to hope that warning got through. Aiming the spell through the eyes of my overhead bee, I turn on a new spell for the first time. **Drain Endurance** begins to sap away at one of the stamina of one of the firebugs, the machinery of the new magic grinding harshly in my soul, feeling like a solid day of toil under the hot sun as it renders the enemy down. A small bubble of something begins to form in my soul, tied to the spell, and it occurs to me it didn't say *destroy* endurance. It said **Drain Endurance**, and like collecting a plant, that pilfered vitality has to go somewhere.

An arrow hits the bug on the wall, urging it to pounce forward, claws outstretched. Yuea waits below, and a pulse from one of the glimmer I have tethered to her pushes motes of power into me from the outside world as she dodges the strike, and digs a knife into a joint.

There are two human fighters on this one. I will weaken the others. My enchanted bees fly past the developing skirmish with a singing buzz, and I watch through them directly as they crest the wall. The rest of my bees are on the way, their growing stingers far easier to justify risking when the monsters cannot incinerate them with a single twitch of their mandibles this time. But these three arrive first to find one of the monsters latching its claws around the wooden supports, digging channels in the material as it begins to haul itself up.

They are hundreds of times the size of my bees, even grown as they are. But their size is a weapon all its own, and my bees descend without the need for any commands from me. The creature pauses as the trio of winged soldiers alight on its furred neck, before it starts thrashing as sharpened stingers pierce into its flesh.

It is struggling too much, and it is drawing the attention of the other monster that I am not actively rendering lethargic. I check my spell source, and find **Drain Endurance** is missing a quarter of its stamina already. But I have no choice except to try something else now.

When I split **Distant Vision**, I recreated the spell entirely in my mind, before feeling it be pulled back to the machinery and structure of the empowered soul. Now, I take a gamble, and do something very similar again. Except this time, I build the important parts on top of the first cast. Here is the glyph chain that targets, here is the wheel of arcana that steals. I put together a slapdash version of the magic, send a borrowed prayer to whatever is left to listen, and activate it again.

My old cleric's faith gets a bump up in my estimation as either the prayer works, or I prove that I can work exceptionally well under pressure. **Drain Endurance** duplicates the theft, pulling now from the second monstrous insect, its stamina plummeting fast, but the effects taking hold, causing the other firebug to slip and collapse back to the ground instead of helping its companion.

And my bees do not relent. Taking to the air when needed, crawling along the body when they can get away with it, they dodge attempts to crush them and set their stingers to work over and

over. Their stings are not venomous or particularly deep, but they are plentiful and *very* motivated.

Something pulls on my magic. Something from inside my domain, calling on a spell that hasn't been shared this way more than once before. I cannot afford the distraction of resisting, so I simply let **Small Promise** be taken on by my fighter. *I am going to kill you.* Yuea roars at her opponent. An oath I did not realize would count as small, nor one that I thought would be suitable. But no, no distraction.

Then the rest of my bees descend, and I set them on the two that are too exhausted to do more than flail gently in retaliation. They aim for eyes, then flit away, while the original three continue their harassment. Through the beetle, I can hear the distant shouts and yells of the fight, but the screaming has stopped. Through my body, I feel a double rush of vigor as Yuea executes the creature she is fighting. And through **See Domain**, I know that this is not a panicked last second defense. This is something else.

Then Kalip crests the wall on one of the walkways a couple lengths away from where I have stalled the second wave of beasts. My bees scatter, and I get a multiplied vision of him drawing his bow, and unleashing an arrow like a shot into one of the weakly twitching creatures. Then he repeats the process three more times, leaving all of them bleeding out. The one that had been trying to climb tried to dodge, and Kalip's arrow simply hit it anyway, being somewhere it wasn't originally, a pulse of the glimmer tied to my soul giving me some satisfaction as to how that had played out.

One by one, the monsters die, and I drink their magic like a woman stumbling out of the desert.

It started with a child screaming. But it ended with something else. The soldier I was provides the word. *Rout.* Not so easy, now, is it? When your soft target of fishers and farmers has a wall and a knife and a fiercely protective hive backing them up.

My bees return to the camp, their strengthening eyes taking in more and more details for me. Kalip and Jahn pair off with two of the less militant survivors, each of them grabbing a simple spear I prepared days ago, the two groups moving out to scout the immediate surroundings and, if possible, make sure no enemy scouts escape. Kalip directs them with confident motions, and the human and demons move to carry out his commands with a resolve, even through their adrenaline and fear. Meanwhile, two of the children hold bowls of boiled water for Mela and Seraha as they see to the injuries. The little girl, Ji, is bleeding from a cut on her head, but she holds her tears in admirably. More so when one of my bees lands in front of her, and crawls up an offered arm to snuggle into her neck.

Yuea is less well off. The woman who seems so solid every time I see her looks like she's been through a grain thresher and come out the other side impossibly victorious. A dotted line of blood drops are formed along her left leg where a claw didn't quite get her, and the older demoness is pressing their last makeshift bandages into the bleeding from where a mandible

dug into her from shoulder down to a breast. Yuea is still panting heavily, broken knife clutched in her hand that no one has taken from her yet, but she does not make a sound as her wounds are tended to.

Her blood, I realize suddenly, is not the normal human red. Not really. It is too vibrant, too shockingly stark. But no one seems to care, and so, I will not either. Though I do now *very much* want to know what it means to be magetouched.

But she's alive, and in no danger. She sucks in a painfully deep breath as one of my champion bees alights on her knee, reflex almost causing her to strike out before she stills herself and finally drops the poorly made knife hilt. She stares down at my bound insect for a while, a dozen emotions passing across her face.

Then she makes a motion. Two fingers held pointed toward the sky, fingers pressed up against her temple. A salute I do not recognize, but a salute all the same. Though, whether it is to the bee, or me, I do not know. And really, I don't mind my guardian creatures getting a little of the recognition they earned anyway.

An old memory from the scribe comes in, from his time as a conscript. An old memory even by his standards, from before a life of books and ink. When the battle is lost, their justicar had told the slave-soldiers, it is the error of the commander. When the battle is won, the man had continued, it is the success of the soldier.

The scribe thought that was foolish. The soldier would have disagreed. I land somewhere in the middle, I think; but then, I am both of them after all. Still, the camp is safe for another day, and that is all that matters.

Well, that, and that my souls have drunk deep from the wellspring of arcana. Nine points of power, and that before any harvest from the simple act of resting and pulling from the world. And more than that, I can see the newly formed mantra ringing the tethers to my enchanted bees changing. No longer unidentifiable scraps of language, the words begin to form something more understandable. Not *readable*, but understandable all the same.

Sting, they circle with that patient glowing font. And I imagine the runes on the growing honeybee's wings match. *Sting*, the mantra repeats. The power pulses against the tether, sleepy and dormant now, but waiting patiently to be used again.

Good. It should be used. We will need all the protectors we can muster, I think.

But I do not think for too long. Spells sit unused. Mending, building, harvesting, these are things I can do. And leaving power unused, now, is the greatest wrong I could commit.

I leave the survivors to their healing, leave my bees to their growing, and get back to work.