

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 6

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 : 4

Congeal Glimmer (1, Command)

See Domain (1, Perceive)

Claim Construction (2, Domain)

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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 : 4

Know Material (1, Perceive)

Form Wall (2, Shape)

Link Spellwork (3, Arcane)

Sever Command (4, War)

Tenacity : 4

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

Drain Endurance (2, War)

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Animosity : -

Amalgamate Human (3, Command)

For my whole childhood, my father told me that a good fielder felt a connection to the land, and the plants. He said it like there was a profound secret, and so, because I never felt it, I gave up trying. The crops were crops, the dirt was dirt. I could make them do what I needed, but I had long since lost hope of feeling what he felt, that connection he loved to talk about. He died, when I was a young man. Never knew him that well. And it wasn't until years on from his death

that it happened. I was up early today, weeding a field with the starrys, when the sun started to come up. Beautiful sight, always loved it. My father loved it too. And in the moment, I thought of being there, with him. Standing at the edge of a field just like this one, watching the sky light up as our day started. And I realize, suddenly, that deep secret of being connected to the land, that I'd given up on, was never about the dirt at all.

The memory doesn't fade, exactly. It just recedes, enough that I can focus again without being overwhelmed. It's still there. A part of me that is truly *myself* now, that will never look at a sunrise quite the same way again.

Not that I have seen a sunrise in this new life. The thought shakes me slightly. I have seen the sunshine and the moonlight through my bees, and **Distant Vision**. I have seen bits of the sky with the crows, before they left. But I never asked one of them to gaze at the horizon for me as I borrowed their eyes. Never asked one to look up at the stars.

The more frustrating aspect of my lack of traditional sight is, I *do* have my **Distant Vision**. But wherever I place it, whatever circle of the seemingly endless forest around us I get to view, that vision is abruptly and unquestioningly ended at the edge of the spell. I can see the golden rays of the sun shine down; I cannot see the source.

Perhaps that is for the best. I do not have eyes to burn, but I have a strange suspicion that placing my magic sight upon the face of the sun itself might be an action lacking foresight.

Right now, my magic sight isn't focused on any kind of distant celestial forces. And for now, I put the consideration of staring into the sun out of my mind, as I let the rush of memory wane and get back to looking at the trees.

One of the best parts of **Distant Vision** is that I do not need light to see. There are some scraps of starlight, as I sweep my eyes across the terrain, but mostly I rely on the spell itself which doesn't need the help. Proud trunks covered in moss, strands of vine with buds closed against the light chill of the night air, valleys and crags, flowing water and small lakes. I see quite a lot as I perfect the art of smoothly moving my sight across the land.

It requires far less of the empty fuel from the spell, to do it this way, but it is more of a mental effort. To *nudge* the magic, to make it move, rather than simply recasting it slightly farther along. I'm learning how to do it without thinking about it, which is a trick when thinking about things is the only way I engage with the world. But it is working, and I can manage three separate rings of sight at a time now. I can even properly understand what I am seeing through them, though true detail comes only with directed focus.

My sight sweeps across the land, thousands of lengths out from us. **Authority** being raised to six is a statement that I can instinctively understand, but don't know the true nature of. However, what I do know is that it pushes out how far **Distant Vision** can, and in fact must, see. At this point, reaching where our old camp was, a tenday of travel away, is within my reach.

Though I cannot remember exactly where it was, and simple physics means that the farther out I go, the more ground there is to cover.

The likelihood that anyone else made it this far from the human's empire or the demon's kingdom is... low. But there is always a chance. And, more importantly, there are other directions leading into the Green that I can begin checking as well. This supposedly endless wood on the edge of the world borders multiple different cities and nations, according to Seraha, which means the more **Authority** I accrue, the more likely I will find a place where people are surviving.

So far, I have not found much of anything, though. I've seen a single campsite, with the remains of a firepit and some cleared ground, maybe from two or three people. But those people were long gone. I've seen a number of deer, auks, foxes, and birds. Even a few wolves. But the wildlife of this place has been losing ground to the monsters of the other apparatus.

And I've seen those monsters, too. I would not say they're getting stronger, exactly. But they are becoming more numerous. No one else is awake, save for Dipan on watch right now, so I have no one to share this with for some time, but I am making a map again. Using the distances that my magic returns to me to etch out rough estimates of territories and positions of the enemy.

I don't want to think of them as the enemy. Even now. I want to be kind, I want to share the world with those like me; my siblings, in a way. Are they like me, I wonder? Do they also want to look at the stars and build homes?

There is no way to tell. All I can see from them is the warped creatures that spill out across the trees of the Green. Some of them familiar foes that I have seen try to kill my friends before. Strange bugs and animate dirt and shelled things with human hands.

I wonder why. Every spare moment I have, when I am not sleeping or spinning my spellcraft, I wonder why. Why do they do this? Why do they cause such harm? I thought I had an answer when I stole a memory and a spell from the apparatus we killed here. It seemed so obvious, for a flickering candle of time. They were a *killer* in their life, so of course, they'd carry that forward.

But I was a killer too, wasn't I? Six lives, their old souls crushed together into something new, and while the knowledge is somewhat distant to me, I *know* that they've taken lives. And not just the soldier either; the merchant's claws are stained just as red, and the singer knew elegies as well as less somber music. The cleric worshiped an ideal of peace, not pacifism. The scholar... might actually have been innocent in all this, actually. Unless you counted academic murder of a rival's career, which I didn't.

And yet for all that, for all those lives of struggle and violence, *I was not who I was*. I was *me*, as well as them! I *chose*. And in choosing, I made for myself a new life, unbound by anything I once was. Empowered by those shared experiences, not held back by them, or tethered to

some old wants or needs. So... why was I different? Why did none of the others simply reach out and talk? I had found a way, why didn't they try anything that wasn't constant violence?

I still hadn't told the others about **Amalgamate Human**, or my newfound soul of **Animosity**. Because it wasn't my soul, of course, I lied to myself. But even past that foolish, childish lie, there was a deeper and more powerful truth. That even though it was a part of me now, even though I now knew a part of the life of a true killer in painful detail, I... hadn't changed. At least, I didn't think I had. I was still me.

The thought half-distracts me as I continue sweeping my sight across grass and moss and trees. It's not the only thing distracting me, either. I'm still practicing at this, but while I watch with half a mind for signs of life, I am also testing my magic.

Bind Crop will have to wait for tomorrow, of course. There are no crops here to bind. Though I admit, I did try it on a tree to see what would happen. And the answer was nothing; a tree is not a crop, of course. The language of my arcana is specific and meaningful, even when it seems to be almost deliberately obtuse and obfuscated.

What I'm working on now is something more utilitarian than simple experimentation, though. I've mentioned before that **Link Spellwork** is strange in how it streamlines my spells together, and now, I've put it to work on something that needs to be done before a certain point. The deal I've made with Kalip is that he acts as my hand in the world, a scout, recruiter, and champion all in one. But I cannot be sending him out alone into the Green without support, and outfitting him properly is the least I can do.

Make Low Blade and **Congeval Glimmer** together have let me make glimmer-loaded arrowheads for Kalip for some time. But now, I am discovering, if I **Link Spellwork** those two spells together instead of simply adding **Congeval Glimmer** into the creation spell like a key into a slot, it changes the process somewhat.

I am not making arrowheads with a piece of glimmer inside of them. I am making glimmer arrowheads. I do not do the same with my mantra, instead simply producing several of those on their own to be carried by the survivors to test how they change over time. But these at least should fix some of the balance problems the Bowman complained about.

It's not the only thing I'm preparing for him. Trail rations infused with **Bolster Nourishment**, armor and boots treated with **Imbue Mending**, everything I can do to give him an edge against the world. Because we both know he'll need it.

A lot of my magic work is, at this point, close to routine. I claim more of the fort every time **Claim Construction** or **Fortify Space** have the strength to let me do so, I continue using **Form Wall** to seal the breach in the wall, I draw from the well for the survivors with **Move Water**. Normal things that cost me nothing, but make their lives safer and more comfortable. Every

spell in my arcane armory is at their disposal, used to try to rapidly turn this place from a ramshackle and damaged fort, into a home for us to share.

Well, every spell except one. The one that turns like a black seed inside my mind, writhing like it wants to be used. But my magic doesn't function on its own, it only works with my consent and will. And I have enough to distract myself that I don't even need to worry about that right now.

I should tell them. I know I can trust them. It's not a question anymore. Even Muelly, who still flinches when I write too close to her, is someone who I would trust with my life if it were required. And I have, I suppose; she held a spear with everyone else, protecting my form along with hers when we took this fort.

I should tell them. Eventually.

For now, though, I have bigger concerns. Because in my sweep of the land, I have actually accomplished what I didn't expect to within the first night. I've *found someone*.

There's six of them. Six whole people. The first people I've seen in a long time that aren't around me right now. And they do *not* look to be doing good. Torn or missing clothing, filthy faces and hands. There's three humans, and three gobs, and... I realize as I watch their shared fire, where they tear strips of meat off the charred corpse of an unidentifiable monster, that they are allies of convenience, not anything else. They sit opposite each other, staring with suspicious and sometimes angry eyes across the flames at each other. I cannot hear through the spell, but that doesn't matter, because they aren't speaking anyway. Just silently and resentfully sharing their space and food.

It doesn't matter. Any attitude can be improved, any hatred can be purified. Though I will admit, it is easier to do so with a proper nourishment and a warm bed. Losing the majority of my physical needs has certainly made it easier for me to take the risk of showing compassion, after all.

For now, I pull my **Distant Visions** in toward their pitiful camp, wedged in a clearing between several trees, their badly made firepit threatening to catch the fallen leaves and dry grass nearby alight. Then I begin to spread two of them out, moving in increasing circles around the camp. Regularly I will pass by the trail they must have made on the way there; a track that even one of the children sleeping in our fort could follow without trying too hard. But I'm not looking for that.

I'm looking for the threat. I'm looking for the problem. Because they are twenty eight hundred lengths distant from me, back across that stupid river, and before I dispatch Kalip on his first quest, I demand of myself that I know what I am sending him into. And I can feel, in my crystalline structure, the absolute truth of the fact that there *is a problem*.

There's always a problem.

I find the problem sleeping four hundred lengths from them, a pack of those black furred silkspinner creatures. Yuea, to my horror, was right. This is no longer a scouting party, this is thirty of the things, all of them sleeping folded up on the forest floor like black mushroom caps waiting for morning to arise and spread more death and pain.

I cannot prove they are headed the direction of the camp. But I can't risk it either.

I send a beetle and write a message to Dipan, causing a start of surprise from the man on the wall as he hums to himself while watching the dark trees beyond the reach of the fort's magetorches. He reads it and sighs deeply before offering a counter to my writing. "Kalip won't safely leave until morning anyway." He says. "Let the man sleep. If you leave one of the little guys up here to keep an ear out, I'll go collect his gear for the morning, hey?"

Oh. Yes. I write back. I apologize, I forgot the dark is a problem.

"Eh, it's fine. I forget lots of things are a problem." Dipan says as he carefully takes the stairs down to the fort's yard, favoring one of his legs. His easy humor has a tension underneath it, and I don't blame him.

Tomorrow, if everything is still as it is now, I'll be sending one of their protectors off to bring back a new upheaval to their lives. It would be reasonably scary to anyone, and small jokes keep the man shielded from the situation. They help me, too, I admit.

I try to forget fewer things as I continue waiting, moving on with my sweeps with **Distant Vision**, keeping two of my three sight rings fixed on the important pieces of information. Watching the other group of survivors, though, a gnawing feeling crawls through me. Something like an old instinct, one I've felt over and over in my old lives. A kind of apprehension, worry that the path I'm staking out is going to hurt somehow, no matter how right or important I know it to be. And it leaves me with a sad question.

I've found what I was looking for. So why am I not feeling excited?