

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 9

Authority : 3

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Fortify Space (2, Domain)

Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

Nobility : 2

Congea! Glimmer (1, Command)

See Domain (1, Perceive)

Empathy : 2

Shift Water (1, Shape)

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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)

I wake up and throw myself into taking stock of the situation. I do not know what the situation will be, but so far, there has been nothing *but* situations since I determined that I would try to work with the humans that stumbled into this particular clearing.

The first thing I notice is that I have nine points of power contained within me, the raw potential of their magic producing a comfortable and enticing boil within my crystal form. I know, instinctively, that one of them is *different* somehow. Almost entirely formed from the destruction of the glimmer that my guardian human burned up as she fought, there is a... flavor to it, is the only way I can think to describe it.

There is another thing that I waver between accepting and being uncertain of. All of my memories, all of my old lives and experiences, are irreparably colored with the constant presence of feelings such as the flavor of food, drink, even the air itself. And now, I have none of that. And I think it *should* itch and bother, but instead, I am complacent with this change. Partially it makes sense, as I have lived this entire life with no sense of taste at all, but also, the way that my thoughts seem to adapt to the shift makes me wonder as to my own nature.

But now, I have a new thing to wonder about. And that is the reason that magic itself might have a flavor. One that I, with no spell-senses or outside help, can taste within my souls.

It is interesting. I perhaps should be concerned or worried or anxious, but I cannot bring myself to experience those things. Instead, I am simply excited for another mystery, added to my growing horde of questions.

The second thing I notice, as my various spells wake up along with me and I send my winged squadron of bees to show me what has changed in the interim of my sleep, is that there have been some changes around me.

Know Material shows up with a portion of a unit of shell now, which is different. **See Domain** shows me everyone safely accounted for within the fortified spaces of my domain, though... there is one of the fighters in the middle of the camp, which is odd for this time of morning. Normally they are either rotating who is keeping watch, or out helping to forage food and material.

I bring my spells back to life as I start some of my growingly familiar chores. But while I use my bees to guild me, I cannot help but spot something that draws all of my arcane workings to a halt as I attempt to process what I have noticed.

One of the huts I built with **Form Wall** is occupied. But not by a supply stockpile or my own sleeping refugees. Which is odd, as the triumphant fighter *is* still asleep, her form curled in a thin blanket on a bedroll under the open sky not even a length away. Instead, it contains, in incredibly tight quarters, the five survivors I sent my fighter to rescue last night.

Their wrists tied together with what length of rope the camp had in their supply, being watched by a human who has what remains of the outside fighter's axe sitting stabbed into the dirt next to him.

Nudge Material. Writing in the dirt, snapping the human to attention. *What is happening here.* I demand to know.

This is not what I wanted.

I can see through the handful of bees I have brought into a ring around the area that the man says something, before remembering that I cannot hear. He calls someone else over; one of the adults I recognize as having a firmer grasp of written language from our limited fireside lessons so far. Points at the words.

I bring my bees closer to read the written reply. *They are...* and then a word I do not recognize right away. No, that is not true, I do. The scholar's memories do, in a way. A lifetime of struggling to compare languages and the myriad ways that they change from year to year has already taught me to identify this word. *Demons*, it says. *They are demons.*

As if that is an explanation for what is happening here.

In the connected system of souls that makes up my new self, the old lives of the cleric, farmer, and singer stir, shaking loose in me a low fury as I remember them. Here was a life where humans were property, here was a life where demons could be legally killed without repercussion, here was a life where half the people met were subject to some hidden hatred for their bodies, a life that was ended for pushing back. And the other lives, who saw it, but could not find the strength or empathy to do anything about it.

For the first time, I feel a greater disconnect between who I was, and who I am. Not just that those people are gone, and I have arrived. But the feeling that I may not have *liked* all of the souls that make up who I now am.

Release them now. I write. The motions and flight of my bees becoming a harsher and faster buzz as my anger seeps through **Bind Insect**.

The humans argue with each other. My patience begins to run thin, which is impressive, as I have found a greatly increased tolerance for the slow pace of the beat of the world since I have awoken here. Impressive, and yet, not something I wish to experience further.

Another of the adults comes over and joins the growing argument, and I decide that I am no longer interested in wasting time with them. I would try to talk to my champion, were she awake, but short of pouring a portion of the stream onto her, I have no way to alert her to this. And I feel I should let her rest regardless.

I find where the human children are, watching the commotion from behind one of the huts. I have seen their curiosity grow, as the effects of hunger and exhaustion have begun to be pushed back, and now, I decide to capitalize on it.

My bees descend on them as a small swarm, but rather than flinching, the children who have learned to notice the representatives of my attention instead hold out hands for them to land on. I move some of my bees, small wings and soft bodies drawing their attention to the clay of the wall they are ducked behind as the adults continue to try to decide if I am serious or not.

Even the oldest of these children is still growing, and none of them have mastered more than the basics of an alphabet, so I do not try to write to them. Instead, I guide **Nudge Material**, draining fast as I push at the brick, to draw a small scene.

A small figure, one of them. A taller figure, hands tied. How to represent a demon? Horns? I did not actually check if any of them had horns. But it is the standard of scrawled figures in the margins of bored scholar's texts since the dawn of the world, so I use that shorthand. And then, a second iteration. The small figure cuts the rope, freeing the larger one.

The children stir, uncertain. But the boy who has taken a liking to my watching bees, who has been more eagerly exploring the woods around the clearing even when the adults tried to keep everyone in, nods solemnly to my representative.

Make Low Blade pulls at some of the nearby firewood. I guide where I want it to manifest, and hope no one spots the moving sticks as I shape a knife in the middle of the pack of children. This is not a weapon, and even knowing that the blades are of low quality, I know even more that this one will last for only a few cuts. Wood is not known for holding an edge, after all.

Then, I add something else. **Small Promise** lets me speak words to the boy that I truly do mean. *Help me here, and I'll take the blame.*

It's a good promise. The kind spoken between young collaborators all my lives. That sort of thing you said when you knew your father would perhaps not approve of your antics.

I cannot see perfectly through my bees, but I can tell easily that the smile on his face is a very, very sad one.

He takes the blade, and slips around the building, creeping in a way that is obvious even to my half-blind bees that flit into the air and give me a view of the clearing. But less obvious to the adults who are still engaged in a yelling match over whether or not to listen to me. Fortunately, I have the option to take the decision out of their hands, as they are clearly fools.

My newly chosen, younger, champion, ducks into the hut, getting out of sight and almost stepping on a tail as he does so. I send a bee in with him, and see as the demons shrink back from him and his knife. And then, see as he realizes they are afraid of him.

He kneels, silently holding out his wrists, miming the rope they are tied with. And, slowly, one of them does. She is older, her fur turned a pale red that is almost pink in her age. The boy looks at the rope for a second, before sticking the knife in the dirt and awkwardly fumbling with his fingers to peel away the knot and pull the intact length free.

The others shift slightly, uncertain, but growing confident. I watch closely as he removes another binding, then cuts away a third that was tied too tightly. One of them, one of the other younger children, clings to him side in a way that makes my human tense up, before slowly getting back to his silent task. The freed demons help with their companions, the woman who was injured last night still unconscious, and their own fighter far too injured to do much more than groan as they are let go.

The boy steps out of the hut in obvious sight of the adults, one of whom turns to yell at their new target for their ire. But my other champion has chosen this moment to wake up; I find her by following the eyes and reactions of the adults. The woman rolls to a sitting position, rubbing at her eyes with a roughly bandaged hand. She is asking them something.

She does not seem to like the answer. Staggering to her feet with a wobbling motion, she stalks over as best she can, and looks at what I've written in the dirt. Then over at the boy, behind whom some of the demons look like they are prepared to either make a run out of the camp, or fight everyone in front of them.

I can't hear what she says, but she ruffles the boy's filthy hair as she walks by, declining the offer of the knife he moves to hand her. From how he pointed at the ground, I think he told her that this was all my idea, and I'm happy to take the blame, but it seems she has a different idea.

Through my bees, I watch as she reaches down to offer a hand to the wounded fighter in the hut, who stares at her with suspicious compound eyes. Slowly, though, they reach out and clasp a black furred hand into her own, and she hauls them to their feet.

Then she says something, and I get another surprise. As within me, through the connection of my unseen domain, I feel a spell stir slightly. Not cast, exactly, but let me know it *could* be cast. Someone else, drawing on my own magic.

Small Promise echos her words to me, and offers me the choice to make them real. I do not know why now, and not previously. Perhaps no one has made a promise to each other since arriving. Or it may be that they need to be bound to me in some way, through my own promises, before this would work. But regardless, I feel the intent of what she says, even if I cannot hear her speak exactly.

I push the magic forward, draining the spell completely for the day. And now, both she and the demon she is speaking to know that what she says, she truly means.

If you want to linger around for a while, I'll keep that asshole from doing anything like this again.

The old soldier in me is embarrassed at the absolute lack of creativity in her choice of profanity. Personally, I find it endearing. But this is the first spoken thing I've actually translated from her, and the farmer's memories push me to compare it to hearing my own child's first words.

In the clearing, the demon cracks their maw open in what I recognize as a laugh. Behind them, the others creep out of the hut, the children among them being rapidly assimilated into the pack of human children who are already attempting to sneak away to avoid morning chores. There, at least, I anticipate no problems for some time.

The others are less accepting. This was not a good meeting. And obviously there is history here I am not privy to. But for now, the woman who can kick people in twain vouches for the newcomers, and that will hold until I can find more ways to address the problem.

I need to find myself a voice, and true eyes. There is so much that needs doing, so quickly. I am like a child, fumbling in the dark. But, unlike the children that have escaped along with an escort of watcher bees, I am *not* dodging my responsibilities.

I set my other spells to work for the day, and begin to help with the camp's chores. Once I am done with that, I can set myself to searching for a way to communicate.

I don't even know their names. If I am going to be their friend and ally, I should know their names.