

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change
Available Power : 5

Authority : 2
Bind Insect (1, Command)
Fortify Space (2, Domain)
Nobility : 2
Congeal Glimmer (1, Command)
See Domain (1, Perceive)
Empathy : 1
Shift Water (1, Shape)
Spirituality : 2
Shift Wood (1, Shape)
Small Promise (2, Domain)
Ingenuity : 2
Know Material (1, Perceive)
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Tenacity : 1
Nudge Material (1, Shape)

I wake up, and something is wrong. The feeling is near instant, much like my return to the thinking of thoughts like a living person. One instant I am at rest, the next I am on edge.

I was a soldier once, in a life that feels less distant now than it did yesterday. I know the feeling of nerves before a battle, of sweaty hands and twitching muscles and every tiny bit of wind causing a furious itch. I experience none of those particular sensations, but all the same, this sense of dread is identical to what that life knew so well.

It is the dread of onrushing violence, of blood and struggle, and the barest edge of survival.

But around me is silence. I live in a world of quiet, determined action. I am not a soldier, and while an old life of mine was, I never have been. So while the feeling clawing its way out of my memory, this deep instinct born of a life on the battlefield, yells that I must draw my bow and brace myself for battle, I do not do that.

I have no bow, nor any longer do I have claws or fires. I barely have eyes. That soldier is gone, and I am left in her place. My tools are not her tools. But her instincts have woken me all the same, and I will not forget this.

Congeal Glimmer is feeding me a small series of pulses from each of the three stones that I know to be linked to it, but I cannot say what that translates to in the world above my buried form. **See Domain** reads to me a list of the small patches of ground and the people bound to me. Nothing here seems particularly amiss, but that means very little to me. **Know Material** also looks rather stable; the reflection of my little forest home's makeup still the same list as

before. Some soil, more dirt, even more rock that I can see farther into with my expanded range. Small amounts of things like wax or leather from the survivors. Meat, fish, and fruit making up most of their foodstuffs. Bone and pelt that...

I actually do not recall pelt being a material at all, on this list. They haven't been hunting, and their spare materials were already processed when they arrived. This is something new.

As I try to make sense of what my spell is telling me, the numbers jump. Abruptly, there is now more meat, more bone, more pelt.

I *want* to tell myself that a hunter has gotten lucky, and brought back a boar or something of equal size. But I do not believe that to be the case, because as I have now truly learned, I do not need any particular magic added to the construct of my soul in order to feel fear.

I need to see. Bees. My bees. I should have started with my true eyes to the world. A touch of my thoughts on the mental apparatus of the spell, and I focus directly on the small senses they share with me. All eleven honeybees, confused and disoriented, snap to my direct control in a pulse of my inorganic heart.

Some of them are just gone. Not even the remnants of tethers in the empty space of my mind where the spells live. Just gone. And their disorientation is perfectly normal for a honeybee; smoke chokes out the air around several of them, the bright sunlight of late morning summer cut through with plumes of dark air, dots of burning orange flames mixed in among the splashes of color from flowering plants on the ground.

It is too difficult to tell anything like this. I need more clarity. With a reflex I did not know I possessed, I twitch the spell and spill a small quantity of the outsider liquid that powers it, and my bees move to my command. I point them through **See Domain**, not to a person, which hasn't worked so far, but to one of the spots of ground **Fortify Space** has blessed previously. The insects obey without question, some sluggish from the smoke, but all of them making their way on buzzing wings to where I want them.

And then, something else I did not fully realize I could do, I look through all their eyes together. Something I could never have done in my lives wearing bodies of flesh and bone, something I had not thought to try until now. The scholar that I was would have a thousand ideas to discuss about this, about holding onto the vestiges of what I was without thinking, about unconscious fear of change. But the scholar is not me, and I am busy becoming something new and terrifying.

Vision becomes sharper as my mind filters out the tiny differences in the overlapping views of the bees. Eleven sets of small eyes turning into something approximating how I could have once seen the world, even if the colors are off and the edges fuzzy. And what I see is a battle.

The two armored humans, either pushed back to the middle of the small camp or caught off guard there, stand between the others and three creatures that I have never seen the like of. They stand on three legs, a body suspended in the middle of the limbs that rise up into the air over their own heads at the peak of their joints. The bodies are tubes bristling with red fur, a quartet of mandibles on the end dripping with liquid that burns as it touches the ground. Their limbs, bulging with muscles like roughly arms, end in a trio of geometric spiked claws. Two more of the things are dead nearby, but the humans are looking exhausted already, and the man is unarmed.

I begin trying everything I can.

Bind Insect does nothing. I cannot tell if it fails to catch because they are not insects, because they are too large, because they are resisting, or because of any number of other factors I do not have time to enjoy the puzzle of. The woman ducks back as one of them probes forward with claws that slice the sweet summer air, while another one circles to the side, aiming for the children who are pressed back behind the other adults. I cannot tell if they are screaming, but they need to run.

Or they need me to fight. **Shift Wood**, grab a piece of set aside firewood, sharpen it as best I can, and guide it up into the exposed flesh of the beast's underside. My plan almost works; I accomplish the first two steps to perfection under pressure, but when it comes time to plant the spear into the creature's flank, I cannot do it. I do not falter mentally, the spell simply *stops* at the point of contact. I *cannot* cut into this monster. I cannot even position the spear to catch it as it moves. Something about the magic simply will not *let* me. So I throw the spear to the man instead, giving him a small option, and make another weapon for one of the adults standing between the children and the creature. **Shift Wood** goes dark, then, drained to nothing.

What else? What else do I have? My thoughts run frantic, instincts and impressions from all my old lives colliding together and spitting embers of ideas out as I stretch my focus as far as it will go. Which is shockingly far compared to what I was used to. But it is not *fast*. I watch through my swarm as the man I threw a spear to rolls and lunges, agile beyond what I used to be able to do in most of my bodies, and plunges the wood into the beast trying to sneak past. What he pulls back is not coated in blood or ichor, but is instead crumbling to ash. But the thing is weakened, and as the other human musters his courage and stabs as well, the creature starts to die all the same.

As I see through **Know Material** the exact moment the monster changes from a living threat to a collection of meat and bone, the second of the things scuttles forward to take advantage of the opportunity and spikes a claw through the man's face.

No. No no no! I know he is not dead but he has fallen, dragged back to the others. Only the woman still stands between the last two and the weakened unarmored remains of the camp. Why aren't they running? Why do they just cower there? Run, you fools! I will live, you do not need me!

The second beast cocks itself back, tilting on its rear limb to angle its mouth, and with a flickering of those motes that gather around my glimmer, only patterned orange instead of green and brown, it belches a streamer of fire at the woman. Liquid orange flames lick the ground, and her arm as she rolls to the side, and arc toward the survivors.

Shift Water. I grab what I can from the cook pots and waterskins, and I drag it across the clearing at great cost. I must stop the fires. I must keep them safe. I *promised*. But I am not fast enough, I will not make it in time. My spell is weak. I shove a point of power into **Empathy**, feel my range and strength double, and start pulling more fresh water from the nearby creek, hoping at least I can extinguish the damage before it becomes too severe. I am still not fast *enough*.

But when the fires get close to the huddling children, the flames *die*. They don't sputter or peter out, they simply *leave*.

And I realize, through **See Domain**, now that the other armored human has been pulled back with them, that his location overlaps one of my **Fortify Space** sites. Fair is fair, monsters. If I cannot stab you, you cannot burn me.

Still holding onto a whole unit of water, spell rapidly draining even with its improvement, I haul it into the air over the surviving creature that isn't engaged with the woman, and I let the spell go entirely. The natural pull of the ground takes over, and it splashes down, eliciting a writing dance from the thing as its flames sputter and it starts to smoke.

The woman capitalizes on this, slipping past the one trying to kill her with a step that goes farther than it actually should. Through my own senses, the ones that seem intrinsic to this body, I can see the tiny flecks of green light that shake free from her as she does so, and tracing through my spells, I follow the source back to one of the glimmer she is holding. By the time my mind has processed this information, seemingly on reflex, she has plunged her dagger into the leg of the monster, toppling it sideways before slitting it open and spilling liquid fire onto the dirt.

Her weapon does not survive the ordeal. And the last one takes advantage, just as she took advantage of her opponent's moment of weakness. It spits fire, but I slam **Fortify Space** down in a crescent of territory around the woman, the flame splashing against it like waves on the Orien Cliffs. It does not hesitate or relent, one muscled leg lifts instantly, the monster tilting forward as it executes an amateur fencer's lunge.

I refuse. **Bind Insect** allows me to issue a command, and my eyes in the afternoon air descend like tiny spots of fury.

This *thing* is unlike anything I have seen before. I do not know what brought it and its dead siblings here, or what provoked it to attack, but that does not matter. There is no life on this

world that any of my old lives ever met that would be happy with having a handful of irate bees seek out their eyes. And this is no exception.

The monster topples backward, vibrations coming through the bees' senses that indicate some form of scream. I do not relent. This close, I can see many details of its coarse fur, its unpleasant texture, the heat radiating from its body. I do not turn away as my bees plunge their stingers into the soft, almost liquid material of the monster's eyes. It thrashes, my view of the world spinning and whirling as it slams its own face into the ground. My linked view is disrupted, and many of my tethers wink out, points of light going dark as my bees perish.

Then my bees are gone, and I am alone in the dark once more. A moment passes, and then another. I feel like I am vibrating with anxiety and adrenaline, despite knowing that cannot be true. I do not understand what this feeling is, but it persists; the raw sensation that there is something vile nearby.

I check on **Know Material**, waiting for the shift in our stockpile as the woman kills the downed creature. But it does not come. Seconds tick by, until I remember. Her weapons; anything that stabbed these creatures came away damaged, often beyond repair.

A memory rapidly comes to me, and a command to the soul structure that guides my spells puts two of my points into increasing **Spirituality**, and shows me options. During this fight, at the fastest rate I've ever felt, I have earned another point of power, and I intend to spend it now.

Spirituality : 3
Shift Wood (1, Shape)
Small Promise (2, Domain)

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Available :
See Worship (1, Perceive)
Congea! Mantra (1, Command)
Confusion Trap (1, War)
Drain Purpose (2, War)
Make Low Blade (2, War)
Form Party (3, Civic)
Congea! Sin (3, Command)
Small Trade (3, Domain)

I do not have time to worry about what **Congea! Sin** implies about either myself or the world around me, or even about the magics or fates or gods that have stitched together these six souls of mine. It is a terrifying term, and I am again reminded that I do not need the constructed spell of **Feel Fear** to feel fear.

I pour my remaining three points into adding **Make Low Blade** to my list. I would *like* anything else. I would like nothing more than to use my lived lives of knowledge to develop a thriving farming and trading community. But that is not the world that has been placed before me, and not the reality I must confront if I wish to keep my new community alive.

The spell's machinery is complex, slightly more so than the other tier two workings I have taken. There are loops and whorls in it that I do not quite understand the purpose of yet. But there is no time for introspection now. I activate it, aiming like a blindfolded arbalest at the still-standing woman who I can see is still listed within my domain. But the spell asks for something else; much like **Shift Wood** or **Shift Water**, it needs something to work with, even if the mechanisms of that working are opaque to me.

I try to offer it some of the metal **Know Material** tells me is underground around us, but while I can feel the spell straining, the metal does not budge. But I need *something*.

Steadying my thoughts as best I can, I push down my frantic panic, and think, and let the instincts of the merchant and farmer come forward. Do not waste a single resource you don't have to, turn everything to your advantage. I do not need to question *why these* instincts, I already have my impulsive plan.

With a test of willpower, I try to remember exactly where I saw through my bees the first creature fall. Then I aim the spell there, and I tell it, *you may use this bone and pelt*.

Make Low Blade agrees eagerly, and it takes no time at all for the weapon to form. I know it is a weapon, though I do not know what style or form, only that it has completed its task, and there is now the tiniest tether of nothingness from the spellwork to a source of information from my newly made blade.

It tells me even less than **Congea! Glimmer**. But it tells me when the woman plucks it from the air where I made it, and cuts the throat of the last monster. Or at least, I assume she does. A fresh influx of meat, bone, and pelt are added to my magical ledger. A few seconds later, the connection to my new weapon dies as well, as the burning blood melts the simple bone blade down to nothing useful.

My instincts recede to a low hush, the roar of conflict and anger vanishing with the last of the attackers. Exhaustion washes over me, magical and emotional. My bees are gone; loyal soldiers to the end. I know it was my command, but they still traded their lives for the safety of the humans, and I will not forget that. Rest well, and a better life next cycle.

There are still fires burning, occasional flickers from **Know Material** show plants or wood converting to ash. But that stops shortly as they are stamped out. No further changes. Though **Know Material** itself goes dark next, the liquid nothing running out at last.

Sleep pulls at me, harder than ever before. I am so, so, exhausted. But as I see my spells close like a sequence of magical eyes, my physical senses expand in the dark. Motes and flecks of white, more than ever before, pour into me and my magical reservoirs. Orange and green dots mixed in with them, with more and more green and brown flowing through the apparatus of **Congea! Glimmer's** tethers.

A point of power crystallizes in my soul. Then another, then a third. I am asleep before I know if more are coming, but the rush of reward for my attempts sings me to sleep like the sweetest of ballads in all my memories.