

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change
Available Power : 3

Authority : 4

Bind Insect (1, Command)
Fortify Space (2, Domain)
Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

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Nobility : 3

Congeval 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)

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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)

Share this water, and we can get along. I tell the bear through my casting of **Small Promise**.

It's a pretty big one, too. A single cub following along as they stop at the stream near the clearing. I watch through the eyes of some bees as the bear perks its head up and looks around, as though curious. It spots the human spearfisher downstream closer to my bee sentinels, and the two of them observe each other for a little bit before getting back to their business.

I think that Mela may have heard the promise too, even though she wasn't where I aimed it. But that's okay. I really don't mind if everyone knows what I'm doing.

The bear drinks for a while, watching as its cub does the same, before both of them lumber off back into the trees. Mela watches the treeline for a little while before returning to her fishing. I hope they'll be okay, but I can't deny that the small burst of soft white motes moving from the

world into me as the promise is held to is gratifying. The point of power that finishes forming is even nicer.

The last day has been small nervous conversations, whenever I have regained enough of the nothingness that I use to work my magic to write. And in those times, I have traded information as freely as I can with the survivors camped around me.

I don't have the time to explain every magic I have, but I do explain one thing early. Using my magic seems to make more magic. Especially, for a reason I do not grasp fully, **Small Promise**. The making and keeping of promises unearths amounts of the substance that will become my points of power unlike almost anything else.

Kalip is the one to pose the question that I hadn't fully sorted out myself yet. What *e/se* generates that power?

As I think, I list things to them. Using my spells, in general. But less and less if I keep using them in the same place. The destruction of the glimmer, though I don't know why that happened. And...

And when the monsters died near me. Or through the hands of those under my domain.

Every small thing about me only seems to put them more on edge. Well, some of them. Kalip is so twitchy now that I see him snapping his gaze to every bee that floats within a length of him; but at least the human fighter has stopped being quite so uncomfortable around the demons in the camp. Yuea honestly does not seem to care, and the woman's blunt apathy for what I am is a beautiful feeling. Everyone else falls on a scale somewhere between those two, even the children.

And I can't even blame them for it. The notion of a creature that only becomes stronger the more it kills is horrifying. And for all roles in the performance, I seem to be that creature.

All I can do is keep acting how I want, though. Which is to help where I can, and to grow without violence.

And that means **Small Promise**, and the keeping of those little oaths. Because I know that thanks to that spell alone, I have accrued two of the three points over the last day. The other seems to have come mostly from **Claim Construction**, the buildings that I have added to my domain leaking a continual thin line of notes. And, of course, everything else continues to give bits and pieces here and there that do add up.

We talk more, back and forth written messages. Not everyone has time throughout the day to actually sit down and have a conversation, but Seraha has become something of a translator for me. I appreciate her; I know the older woman is scared of me, but whether she knows it or not, I will do anything I can to keep her safe. She writes to me with the stylus I carved her, making

marks in the river clay that is being carted to the camp to build a third hut. It's easier than dirt, she says.

I learn about the township of Oukhome that the demons come from. Large enough to be a trade center on the border of two different polities. I don't actually understand the words Seraha uses for their governments, but I think that they are both like small nested kingdoms. She reminds me that she actually was a teacher, and her mate was a glassblower, though he died long before this began. Jahn, shockingly, wasn't a fighter at all; they were a *baker*, and no one actually knows where the axe came from.

Seraha ends the essay she's been writing with a question for me, which I can then think on and answer in my own time when my spell is ready. What have *I* been doing, since I woke up?

When I write back, I do it in think markings on the smooth pieces of bark the children are still finding for me out in the woods. Some of my bees go with them, but they are expressly forbidden from ranging too far from the camp right now, and my little friends are good at keeping them in line.

I write back about bees. **Shift Wood** is not as easy as **Nudge Material** when it comes to writing, but I can make cleaner lines in bark than dirt, and it is stronger and faster to return to me now with its stronger soul.

Nothing much of note occurred to me when I woke up until I bound my first bee. But after that, I have been immersed again in the world, and so it is important. Before these survivors found me, I was learning, and much of that learning was from the unassuming hive on the single tree in the middle of this clearing.

I write about how they organize themselves, how they build with both precision and also a kind of organic adaptation to variances. How they care for each other, the tiny instincts of tiny insect minds still having room to aid their injured or share important knowledge. I also talk about the spell, how it feeds something into them, how they are changing, and about my promises to the hive.

I actually have a *lot* to write about bees. So much so that I do not realize I have used all of the bark available, drained half of **Shift Wood**, and lost a fair amount of time to the process of trying to explain the anatomical differences between a standard greenwood honeybee and the growing magically modified versions that are bound to me.

Before I can get myself too lost in the work, I stop 'rambling' and append my own question. Why does Yuea find the glimmer so important? If I am to keep making them, and I will be anyway, I feel I should know what exactly it is I am passing on to my allies.

I leave the mark that means that I am shifting my focus away for a time, and let my bee take off. Though the memories of the scholar cannot help but interpret the look on Seraha's face as the

bee flies by as something like a bemused master scribe who is *very impressed* with the effort you applied, but would you please actually do the work assigned? The scholar, and myself by association, has been both the junior and senior in that arrangement, and I find myself in agreement. Whatever answer the elderly demon was expecting, I do not think that a small dissertation on bees was it.

Later, I will check in to see what they have to say about glimmer. It stings, but they are being less open than I would like. I *know* they know some things they won't tell me, like what the magetouched are. I have a deep suspicion that Yuea and Kalip fall under that category, though the other humans I am certain do not. I cannot find the creativity to imagine Malpa and Dipan as heroic soldiers, when I am watching them pull a sled full of wet clay they spent half the morning digging up back into the camp. But they won't tell me everything, yet.

And that's okay, I reinforce the thought in my mind. I don't need to know their secrets. I just don't want them to leave. I don't want to be alone.

Admitting it to myself makes it more real, but no less true.

For now, though, I turn to my **Distant Vision**. My far away sight that I have been using to keep an ethereal eye on the space between here and the other apparatus.

It hasn't reacted to the loss of its creatures, yet. At least, not that I can see. I don't know how it will when it finds out, or if it even could notice. I don't think I would know if one of my bees left my range, and then perished. I would eventually become suspicious, and it's possible the tether would vanish from my arcane self, which would alert me. But it hasn't happened, and I hope it never does.

The forest here is still as lush as it ever was, and even through the tense feeling of watching for something hostile, I cannot help but feel a slim sense of peace at the silent view of the trees in the sun. It's also a calming feeling to know that I can maintain this vision indefinitely with my strengthened soul.

But this is not the only place I wish to see. And with my new form's ability to split my focus, to draw information from all my magics at once, I think that I have a new idea as to what to try next.

Distant Vision is focused here. I can 'see' and 'hear' and 'feel' the spellwork in my mental space, turning and converting that empty liquid it uses into the true visual sight that my mind then shows me. I could recast it, move it somewhere else. But... but I know the spell, do I not? I have an understanding of it, placed in my thoughts by some unknown hand, whispered knowledge given in trade for my power.

I could recast it. Or, perhaps, I could cast it *again*.

What is a spell? I don't know, really. But it is a pattern that flows and moves in my thoughts. And if all it takes is to think the pattern...

The first try does not work, and I learn the valuable lesson that I can in fact feel pain. The second try works for a brief blink of an eye, and then I lose focus, and the flicker of green and brown is cut away from me.

The third try, I am ready for it to work. And I keep my focus strong as the spell manifests itself, showing me an overgrown game trail, somewhere in the direction that the humans originally came from. The opposite direction from the enemy apparatus.

As soon as I manage to hold the makeshift spell steady, the formation of it slides into its partner, the original construct and the new creation merging like soap bubbles slipping together and wobbling slightly as the last barrier between them collapses into a single object. And as soon as it does, my sight stabilizes and clears in the second vision, the growing headache easing as the magic becomes closer to the second nature imbued in me by my power.

I step back from everything, taking a mental pause, letting everything relax for a brief moment. My bees show the sun has moved since I was last looking through them; and as strangely easy as this effort was, it seems to have taken me unnoticed hours.

It's so easy to become distracted by my overfocusing, when my body does not need me to eat, or sleep, or shed, or even breathe.

Okay. Back to it. I have a second set of eyes now, and while **Distant Vision** is now slowly draining of its empty stamina, I have ample time to prowl the woods far around us while still watching the known threat.

There is a list of things I am looking for. Fruit trees, a couple simple medical flowers, anything that could be used to make rope, any above ground ore deposits. Natural resources that the survivors could put to use along with my magic. And then, also, any other survivors. Any roaming monster bands. Anything that might add to our number, or take away from it, they need to know about as soon as I can spy it.

I compare the time to the pull of the spell's liquid, and guess that I have some hours of this before I will need to drop the second cast. And easily split focus or not, this will take a fair bit of my willpower. So I push the stored power through the **Bind Insect** link to grow my bonds further, empty the **Bolster Nourishment** that is available into the porridge pot over the campfire, make a throwing dagger out of **Congeval Glimmer** and **Make Low Blade**, and then turn my thoughts entirely to scouting.

My spells will refill while I work. And later, I will get an idea of what glimmer is from what the survivors collectively decide to write to me. Perhaps they will ask me more about my bees next.

I doubt it, but for the first time in a few days, I am feeling hopeful. So I allow myself a small dose of joy, even as I begin my scout for what will next try to kill us all.