

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 4

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 : 6

Congeal Glimmer (1, Command)

See Domain (1, Perceive)

Claim Construction (2, Domain)

Stone Pylon (2, Shape)

Drain Health (4, War)

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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 : 5

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

Drain Endurance (2, War)

Pressure Trigger (2, War)

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Animosity : -

Amalgamate Human (3, Command)

Trepidation : -

Follow Prey (2, Perceive)

The important thing to know about domains is that they interact poorly with something in the creations or bound of another apparatus. Perhaps it is the connection between us and our allies - or slaves, I cannot discount that possibility - perhaps it is something about how their forms are changed, or perhaps it is something else altogether.

All I know is that domains crack and crumble, leaving behind sprays of those soft motes that my body draws in and uses.

The soldier knew, you must strike when your enemy is weak. The *singer* knew that if you strike, and your enemy doesn't know, so much the better. I plan to do both at once.

The largest of my bees are the size of particularly well fed cats by now. Their stingers, which they can use repeatedly without injury, are practically small daggers. And with their glimmer enhanced wings, they can move faster than most demons can run. But they are quite... noticeable. Especially when it was pointed out to me that they actually do glow softly in the dark. I think the children love them for this; they make sure they are never truly alone with the shadows, never have to be afraid of the night. But this does somewhat spoil their ability for stealth.

My newest bound bees are the size of honeybees. They have a tiny curiosity, and are slowly taking in more life from my spell, but they are small things. Practically invisible, really.

Two hundred honeybees may sound like quite an impressive number, and it *is* in many ways. I have grown immensely from the time when I struggled to manage a bond with *two*. But I think, were a normal person in an open field with two hundred bees, they would think to themselves that it was practically empty.

The sun has begun to rise into the sky over the horizon when the silkspINNers approach, leaving a trail of destruction and secured enemy domain behind them. I can see them advancing through the eyes of my bees, using a touch of **Link Spellwork** to pull images from them and give last minute reassurances as they watch from the trees while a marching column of those monsters begin to approach. Not too much though. I must conserve resources for the day. And the day promises to be a warm one, which my bees find to be a good omen, insofar as they understand omens and fate. The first hundred honeybees cross behind their path.

This is a test of my opponent. Not just their abilities, but their attention. Even if they don't have the same senses as myself, they should notice *something*. React in some way. And from this, I will learn. Or, if they don't, I will learn something that way as well.

See Domain does not let me peer through the protected space to see what is happening. But I don't need to. As the bees follow their limited instructions - to enter the ruined space and find calcified roots or flattened grass to hide under - I get my first indication that it is working.

It comes in as a trickle at first. A mote or two, not enough that it could be distinguished from the gradual intake I have from **Claim Construction** or **Small Promise**. But then, from somewhere I can almost feel as *far away*, or maybe only imagine it because I know what I am doing, comes more. Bit after bit of power, beginning to flow at a steady pace, evening off at a stream that I drink from like I've been thirsty my whole life.

A point of power completes forming. Then another, not even a half candle later.

Using my long range trick with **See Domain**, I can confirm what is happening. I can't see the domain, or the **Fortify Space** like effect layered upon it, but I *can* see the holes my bees are leaving. Perfectly clear of any outside influence.

I see now why the other apparatus were all so eager to seek out and kill my own domains. The influx of power from them is immense compared to most other things I have done save killing one of my 'siblings'. And this one has erred in equal magnitude, having left a perfect trail through the Green and back to its lair for me to consume as I go.

The silkspinnners have not reacted. It hasn't noticed my probing attack. And I know neither the silkspinnners themselves nor the pylons they carry are protected directly. So, as I don't countermand my strategy, the bees begin the second step of the assault.

Another hundred normal honeybees drift across the path of the oncoming silkspinner army, moving out as I watch the blank space in my vision creep toward where I have built my **Stone Pylons**. A score of connections go dark as something abruptly kills many of my bees at the edge of the marching column, and I feel a spike of fear and guilt. But then, as the enemy pulling fortifies the space, the presence of my surviving bees begins to fill it with holes.

I see them as tiny flickers of sight through the **Distant Vision** half-overlapping their territory at first. Visible, then not, then back and forth again. It causes that strange mental nausea that I cannot shake or find relief from. But after a handful of repetitions of this, suddenly, the holes stick. And begin to grow.

Motes of power rush back to me, now. From so far away, and yet, the distance doesn't matter. All that matters is that they find me. And that the gaps in the enemy domain widen.

The silkspinnners don't pause, and I know this because they keep going even after the pylon that is repeating the **Fortify Space** spell is depleted. And I can see *them* as they cross out into the open.

I double check positions, then give a distant command, and order my own set of seven **Stone Pylons** to cast their spells.

The pylons are very stupid. It takes careful monitoring, or now a **Pressure Trigger**, to get them to even being to aim properly. And I did not have time to set true traps. So I don't bother;

instead, I make sure my bees aren't near enough, and the only thing in range of **Drain Health** are the first row of silkspinnners.

The pylons give a due and dispassionate casting. They don't care that they're tearing the life away from my foes, they simply do their assigned task. I don't tell them to stop, even as the first rank of those furred oblong bodies and their too-long spike legs turn grey, wither, and collapse. Even as they *díe*, and the bursts of motes from them are stolen back to me. Another point of power, then another, death and broken domain mixing together.

The silkspinnners *do* react to the deaths, slowing their march even as the bodies are calcified and crushed down by the other pylons they carry. Several of them split off, skittering across the forest floor in search of what has befallen them. They move... oddly. Out, then back, then out, then back. Like they're in a set pattern.

Perhaps they *are* in a set patter.

I didn't know if I should use my resources on this, but I think now it is worth trying. **Link Spellwork** gives me a far ranging cast of **Sever Command**, and I layer it across as many of the silkspinnners as I can.

And they stop moving. Not entirely. But they stop searching. The ones with the pylons stop walking forward, instead twitching like they're trying to throw off their harnesses. The ones that are caught in the overlapping fields of **Drain Health** *panic*, rearing back on their long legs, fur going flat as they break and try to run into the trees.

And the rest of them just go still. Standing and idling on the white chalky ground they've left behind as a trail of devastation, occasionally poking at something with a knife point limb.

The other apparatus isn't in contact with them. And, more importantly, didn't give them the intelligence or trust to carry out orders independently.

My bees are, unfortunately for my enemy, far smarter than their massive walking killers.

I give a distant pulse of confirmation as **Drain Health** runs out on the pylons. It didn't take long; they can't store too much magic it seems, and I don't actually know where the health they took has gone. But it *also* took the lives of at least six silkspinnners, the creatures reduced to crumpled piles of grey fur and shattered limbs.

The small bees just drift through the domain, continuing to apply pressure to the recovery rate of the enemy pylon. While the larger bees begin the next phase of the ambush.

Their flight path is high overhead, as high as they can reasonably manage with their weight and their burdens. They carry with them the small glimmer that I had a pylon make for them at this forward location; each of them will need to make three trips to deplete the stockpile.

I *know*, in my crystalline heart, that this is not what **Congeval Glimmer** is 'supposed' to be doing. Though I know not what it is actually meant for, my suspicions are meaningless right now, because I have found so far that the ability to make a stone explode on command to be a very useful form of gun.

The bees go unnoticed on their first pass. But as I force unrestrained magic down the pathways to the individual glimmer that I am tracking from them, causing the small enchanted stones to burst into bubbles of force and shrapnel as they land on the bodies of the silkspinnners, the creatures take notice.

Well, they panic further, I should say. *Notice* implies they are spotting my bees, or are smart enough to care. I don't think they are either of those things. I think these are callous and stupid weapons, that have lost the hand wielding them.

Glimmer after glimmer falls from the sky. Some of them missing, many not. I watch through **Distant Vision**, cross referencing what I see in the shredded domain with the tethers from **Congeval Glimmer**, overloading each stone that is on target with a wounding blast. A silkspinner falls, a hole in its combination body and head. Then another. One I clip on the leg as a glimmer bounces off it, sending it crashing down as I sever the limb with an explosion.

The pack of these monsters thins. The noise and the injuries are causing them to flee, scattering into the Green as they leave their dead behind. And by the time I am out of glimmer to use as my own personal weapons, there are *many* dead, and I have harvested another two points of power from their bodies. But I am unsatisfied with letting them go.

I have hardly had to use **Link Spellwork** at all; this was so *easy*, so much so than I expected. So I use it now, using the light touch of **Drain Endurance** to slow and then collapse each straggler, letting my larger bees kill them at their leisure as the bodies crash into the forest floor. **Follow Prey** shows its worth here, the stolen magic giving me tendrils of paths that the silkspinnners are taking. Easy to overlay onto other perceptions, easy to find them where they try to slink through the trees, easy to pick them off.

And that's it. One invasion force, eliminated. It was so easy. And so profitable, too. A brief flurry of violence and killing, and I find myself both stronger and more confident. And no small amount horrified, as well.

As a final act, I reach out with **Claim Construction**, and pluck away control of the three pylons. They are spires of warped bone, woven together, and all of them have toppled over onto the flattened off-white ground. Surrounded by silkspinner corpses, the spot of their fall marks the end of a line of death through the Green, and now, they are mine.

If the enemy apparatus didn't know about this attack before, it surely does now.

They contain two spells. **Fortify Space** in one, which does not surprise me, and **Convert Environment** in the other two. Obviously what has been turning the ground to ash, the plants to dead shells, and the trees to calcified husks that have been easily toppled by even the thin muscles of the silkspinner army.

I am not sure *what* it is converting the environment to. I am not sure I can even give it a command, since the spell is not my own. But I tell them to stop, while leaving the **Fortify Space** pylon to do its job still, securing this space against having my prizes snatched back before I can retrieve them, or turn them against their maker properly.

The bone pylons are so much stronger than my own of stone. Or... no, stronger is wrong. Steadier. They recover faster, but have almost no depth to their reserves.

I am sure I can find a use for these.

For now, while I doubt I can carry a war all the way to my true enemy, I *do* know that I have a source of power waiting for me. So I give a quick command to my bees. Rest, and then, follow this 'road'. At the first sign of real trouble, we'll reevaluate. This can't be the only trick this foe has, can't be the whole plan of this attack. But until then, until it shows itself, turn this domain into fuel for our home.