

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 8

Authority : 5

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Fortify Space (2, Domain)

Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

Collect Plant (3, Shape)

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Nobility : 3

Congeal Glimmer (1, Command)

See Domain (1, Perceive)

Claim Construction (2, Domain)

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 : 3

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

Drain Endurance (2, War)

I start with the solutions that could be obvious, just in case. **Sever Command?** No. It fails to affect Yuea at all, which makes sense, because why should it. Though I do learn that it works strangely on the people near her. It doesn't stun or falter them quite like the scrambling dirt claw things; instead, it seems to simply unhook them from whatever order they were following. Even if the order was a simple request from a companion. It doesn't make them forget, it just takes away that thing that makes it important that they listen; they can still come to the same conclusion on their own afterward, and nothing stops Yuea from restating her command that they all get away from her and let her die in peace.

Bolster Nourishment is another failure. I had hoped I could simply pour it into Yuea herself, and let the magic fill the gap that her loss of magic has left. It does not do that. Instead, it seeps into her body the same way it would a pot of porridge or a cooked fish. Part of me wonders if it would even nourish her at all, or if it will simply lie dormant until something eats her before passing on its power. I make a note that the spell does not shift those white motes of power out of her, as it does with food that I bolster before it is eaten. The eating, it seems, is the key. Which is unfortunate, but all knowledge is knowledge, as the scholar I was would say.

Congea Mantra and **Congea Glimmer** do nothing. I can't move them *into* her, not like with my bound creatures. They just generate the small stones on her chest as she sits in the dry grass by the river.

The crow I have watching is getting bored. I know because it tells me so, in pointed emotions across our near exhausted bond. Not wanting to stress the magic more, I cut her loose and ask her to bring another crow to be my eyes. Oob lingers on Yuea's shoulder, the beetle far less finicky and more loyal than the crows, even if his senses aren't as sharp.

What else do I even have to try? **Imbue Mending** seems obvious, of course, but it simply does not work on living beings. If I could bind her to me I could perhaps supply that thing she is lacking, but Yuea is neither bird nor bug, so that solution lacks a tail. **Drain Endurance** can only do so much, and I must link it to another spell to even unlock half of that limited set of choices.

I center myself in my mind, and array my spells around me. Tiny bits of the arcane, windows to the solid world and the magical realm, these strange pieces of knowledge about which I know practically nothing. My mind ticks them off like fingers over a catalogue, a personal record of what I've done and what I can do.

And I am finding it incredibly, painfully, lacking.

Perhaps if I had more time, I could pick apart what it is each of my spells are doing. They are, truly, preposterously complex objects. I cannot, in truth, understand the depths of what I am doing when I cast a spell. I simply have a say in where it is aimed, and the resources I feed it to work with. My cunning can use my magic well, but it does not give me true knowledge of its inner workings. Though really, I suppose most people could say the same about their lives. A champion may have mastered a hundred weapons, know the function of his blade arm like no other, and yet, never understand why muscles pull the way they do or what makes tendons stretch. He knows his craft, but not the deeper secrets. And here and now, I am not even a champion; I am a fledgling, scrambling to find solutions to problems I cannot even properly see.

Yuea coughs, tries to stifle it, and ends up coughing more. Wet hacks of the lungs that do not make me feel like I have the time to become a philosopher on top of my other jobs.

Even if I can save her life from her addiction to her timeless realm, the infection *will* kill her if unattended, and I've been foolish to think she could push through it. Maybe she could have, when she was a makeshift magi, but *now*? No.

Here at least is a problem I can begin to tackle. I burn the few scraps of **Shift Wood** that have recovered, again, and turn the bark slate into rough diagrams and descriptions of three plants. One to help with fever, the other two technically poison, but taken together and prepared right, something that can at least keep the lungs moving. Kalip, who has not actually retreated very far from Yuea's seated form at all, gets the job of assigning people to scour the nearby trees for them. I *know* they are out there, I've seen them in the region through **Distant Vision**, these last tendays.

Now, back to the real problem.

I have two options, and I have no time to waste. Yuea says she'll be dead by sundown, and I have no reason to doubt that. First, I have **Link Spellwork**. The miracle tool, that arcane device that blends my spells like they are herbs for the draught, it lets me turn two spells into one, often quite different magic. There could be a dozen cures locked behind it, but I am *tired*, and I feel I could use it twice, perhaps three times, before I would be drained. And second, I have my crystallized segments of power. The points of them lined up within me, waiting to be exchanged. I could raise one soul, looking for a possible answer, and snatch it if it presents itself.

I will keep that in reserve. First, let me see if I can do this with what I have at my command.

Perhaps it is serendipity, or fate, or some other coincidence. But I have two ideas that I could try right away. After that, I will take my chances on fortune, and reserve my last use of **Link Spellwork**.

Imbue Mending does not work on the living. Not directly. And even if it did, it does not *heal*, in the truly magical sense. Not like the old grand devils did, or the way the myth of the turnip witch speaks of. Instead, it rearranges. Moves things around, puts them where they are most... intact, I suppose is the best way to describe it.

Yuea's problem is one of withdrawal. Something thankfully not many of my lives had to see others go through, and only one experienced themselves. The singer knows the feeling, and the damages. It is a *lack* of something. And it should not, *must not* be replaced entirely, or else this vulnerability simply reopens like a festering wound. No, as with all poisons, the leap to medicine is a matter of dosage. Yuea needs a tiny amount of what she lacks, to wean her off it safely, as with most addictions.

I cannot **Imbue Mending** on the living. But I can alter one of my spells. And, lurking nearby, maintaining his facade of grim professionalism, Kalip offers a potential source of what Yuea needs.

I ask first, of course. He says yes without thinking or considering.

Through **Form Party**, Kalip informs Jahn of what he'll be trying, before I sunder the spell. Yuea's head bobs upward, looking at me in confusion through eyes that my newest crow assistant sees as unfocused and glassy. She senses the lack instantly.

My crow caws an apology, and I reach out to settle the magic on her again. I aim visually, because **See Domain** is beginning to show Yuea as a clouded and crumbling figure, and I do not think I could manage to make the spell hook properly through it.

Form Party, Link Spellwork, Imbue Mending. Kalip and Yuea, laced together with this invisible thread. I feel the spell take hold, feel it change and shift as it is influenced by the addition. My mind focuses on the shifting pieces with clarity I could never have managed in my other lives, and I make the effort to commit to memory every line and concept that rearranges as **Link Spellwork** smooths the edges to something that *works*.

And it does work. But not at what I wanted. There is something different about the **Form Party** connection this time. I prod at it, trying to move it or manipulate it in any way. And it flexes around my intrusion, showing a kind of flexibility that it did not have before. I think, I *suspect*, that this bond would perhaps persist even after the death of one of the people bound together. Perhaps even after my own death. Though for how long, I could not say.

It does not save Yuea. I dismiss the connection again. I have little time to spare for Yuea's feelings of confusion at this point. She will live and forgive me, or she will not and it does not matter.

Form Party, Link Spellwork, Congeal Glimmer. The same people, just for expedience. There is a purpose to this beyond just my own flailing to latch onto hope. Glimmer is the magic of what could have been, what *might yet be*. They call it different things, but I can see what it does when it works. It connects what the holder wants to what is, in some way, I believe. But when I infused it into my bees, it does *more*. It doesn't just change the world, it changes *them*. Makes them bigger, stronger, livelier. And now, I am looking for a way to put that vitality into a person who is not connected to me.

Except the spell's aim slips away from me. This combined arcana does not *want* to be aimed at people. Instead, near to each of them, a glimmer forms. It drinks at the stamina of the spell like this is the first oasis it's seen in a month, and before I know it, **Congeal Glimmer** is dry. But at the end, Yuea and Kalip are both left holding a small stone of flecked grey and gold. The same stone of grey and gold, in fact. I have several bees inspect them very closely, and I am reasonably certain that these glimmer are in fact identical.

I don't know what that means. All I see is another failure.

It is time to see what elevating a soul will give me access to. I consider my options, but only briefly. It is going to be either **Nobility** or **Tenacity**, as there is the greatest likelihood that I will be able to scrounge up the power required for a second cast of the dice should this fail if I spend as little as possible. I pick **Nobility**. Because it is the first that comes to hand. I am moving too quickly, not thinking clearly. Yuea is trying to hold a conversation with the crow; not me, just the crow. She's showing a rapid descent into fever that does not bode well.

I make my exchange. See what is offered anew.

Nobility : 4

Congéal Glimmer (1, Command)

See Domain (1, Perceive)

Claim Construction (2, Domain)

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Available :

Shift Stone (1, Shape)

Lock Portal (1, War)

Know Resource (2, Perceive)

Stone Pylon (2, Shape)

Know Stone (3, Perceive)

Make Low Tool (3, Shape)

Mark Threshold (3, Domain)

Improve Tool (4, Shape)

Imbue Motion (4, Civic)

Drain Health (4, War)

Nothing. *Nothing*. Worse than nothing, this is an insult to my search. I do not need to *take* her health, I need to stabilize it! I have five points of power remaining, and I frantically cast my thoughts over the other spells I have available. But nothing comes close to what I need.

I have taken a chance, and it has come up *empty*.

Except...

Drain Health. The same word as **Drain Endurance**. Is this, perhaps, something I can use the same way? Take from local wildlife or monsters, then create a space that Yuea can sit within and receive what I have stolen? Would *health* be enough to fix her?

My thoughts over on the edge of taking the chance, when I am interrupted by a spike of alarm from the crow I have watching over her. I pivot my view back, to watch the crow as he pecks at Yuea's fingers, the woman trying to shake off the bird as he does so. The noise draws attention, and despite her earlier shouted anger that pushed everyone away, more than few of the survivors pass nearby, as if to check if there is literally anything they can do to help. The crow's

view tilts, and I notice that Seraha is actually seated nearby, the older woman sitting cross legged, idly cleaning a hoof as she leans in a comforting way against Yuea's shoulder. Not saying anything, simply being there.

The crow doesn't care about that. The crow cares that Yuea's fingertips have gone blue.

Not the blue of someone drowned or choking. The blue of someone who has dipped their hand in temple ink. A blue that glows and slides around the flesh like a living thing under the skin, a turbulent oil seeping into her from nowhere.

And suddenly, something doesn't make sense.

This isn't a *withdrawal*, the farmer's memory tells me. This is something being poured *into* her. Withdrawal doesn't add anything new, and certainly not like *this*. I feel that I can almost taste the channels of it, following similar routes as my own magic when I added it to her body.

Maybe I can taste it. I shut out the crow's eyes, and all the vision of my loyal bugs. I shut out as much as I can, and plunge myself into that empty darkness that is my true place in the world. Except it's not really dark, is it? Here, with my own real senses, I can follow the trails of motes as they move into and around me. And more than that, I can see other things as well. Things like the strange cracked magic in the shape of broken glass and worried glares that is pooling around Yuea's fingers like blood in a bruise.

She's not in withdrawal. She's having an *overdose*.

I have a hundred thoughts and an equal number of words for the empire that creates soldiers like her and tells them the exact opposite of the truth about how they die. Many of those words are profanity, which I have discovered I am quite bad at, and so, because I am running out of time, I keep them to myself.

Instead, I look at something I only briefly glanced at earlier. **See Domain**, that simple spell that gives me a mapped ledger of the things near me that are under my... not *command*, really, but within my influence. And not only mine, but that of the others like me as well.

Yuea's entry within it is a shredded, floating, dispersing list of mistakes. Perhaps it is with the increase in **Nobility** that I can see more clearly now, especially as I stop idly looking and start *focusing*, moving more and more of that empty liquid into the spell to narrow my scope of vision to Yuea and Yuea alone.

The ledger resolves into pseudo-quantified traits and concepts. Promises she is connected to, my fortified spaces she has accepted as hers in some way, the others in my domain she has connections to. Many of them are breaking down or dwindling. Because there, in one of her internal organs, *another domain* sits, angrily generating those spiked pieces of magic that are carried away by her blood and are now clumping up in her fingers and toes.

I have never truly been a doctor or a medico. I have only tangential knowledge of the body. But I can see what is causing this problem now, and while I am no true healer, I believe I can commit the form of treatment that is needed. A surgery not of flesh and knife, but of domain and magic. There is a foreign *thing* within her, tangled physically within what I believe is her liver. And one way or another, it must be contained, controlled, or excised.

If you swear to hold on for the night, I can tell you what's wrong with you tomorrow. I speak the words through **Small Promise** while I watch with **See Domain**. Yuea flinches, her upper body laid across Seraha's lap as the demoness softly pets her hair and holds back tears. The others are not bothering to hide their concern and compassion now, coming by frequently to say goodbyes or offer small assurances.

But Yuea nods. To *me*. Which is enough for the promise to take root.

I watch it hook into her profile within the domain. See my own magic move in real time, a twisting form like a familiar shade of paint as it dyes Yuea's impression in my sight. And where it touches, she becomes more stable, more real for a moment. And more than just a moment. The spell's changes stick, though I can see the intruder trying to erode it just like everything else. But it isn't instant, and it shows something important. It shows that I can *hold it back*.

And I can make a great many promises, right now. *Stick around, and I'll make sure to make you a real meal one day.* I tell her. And through her fever, she grins, and my domain leeches deeper. *I'll always listen if you want to gossip about the others.* I tell her, and she jerks her hand like she's trying to swat me away, but it doesn't matter, because the **Small Promise** sinks in regardless. *I won't let you die alone,* I swear to her. And her breathing comes easier as she accepts that one. And also, as my domain begins to overtake the poison in her.

I pivot my angle of attack, and try a new approach with a trick that didn't work well the first time. **Form Party, Link Spellwork**, and this time, **Fortify Space**. I reach out with as much strength as I can with the faltering spell's energy, and barely manage to bind Yuea to Seraha, the older woman now also glancing sharply at me in shock as the magic attaches to her. And I see through my sights as the bond of this modified **Form Party** changes, and begins to thrum with its own motivation. And both women begin to shed my own claim to the terrain, the stuff of my domain produced by their proximity and connection and pushed out into the world.

It is helping. Whatever **Form Party** is doing in this form, it is *helping*, but it is not *enough*.

I am very tired, but I am so close.

So I take everything left in **Small Promise**, and I speak words that the magic meets with a friction. Almost a rejection. It is the biggest promise in the world, but it is also something else; something foundational, a building block for everything else. The magic threatens to let it spill over to the whole camp, and I know with a certainty that if I did that, it would crumple and fail;

this is a promise that becomes bigger and bigger the more people it binds. So instead, I whisper it, in a tiny voice, to one woman, who I hope will share this value with me.

I'll be better, I say, if you are too.

And I realize it's not verging on an oath or a contract or anything else. It's the smallest promise; a *child's* promise. The small voice that says to a fading loved one *I do not want you to go.*

But I am not exactly a child. And from my magic, the promise has weight all its own.

She goes still, and for a moment, I worry that the worst has happened. But no burst of motes comes with her death; instead, a few seconds later, she hacks out a wet laugh that has Seraha desperately trying to get her to stop trying to sit up and to lay back down and focus on breathing. "Gnawing *idealist.*" I hear Yuea mutter through Oob's link from where he is perched attentively on Seraha's shoulder.

But something in her agrees with me. At least, agrees enough. No matter what she pretends, I can *see what she is*, and she cannot hide from me the fact that she is a kind of idealist too.

Small Promise takes root, deeply. The rush of the spell leaving me and emptying out coming with a wave of exhaustion. But inside her domain profile, it wraps itself deeply; a shell and a shield and a banner all at once. Pushing back the intrusion. Not *ending* it, no. Maybe I will never be able to end it. Maybe we will need to make new promises every tenday until she dies. Maybe I have simply replaced one addiction with another, and bound her to me in the only way that really matters.

Tomorrow, that thought will bother me. No one person should have that power over another. But right now, I can see the flow of that sharp magic into her blood stop. I can see her place in my domain stabilize and solidify. The sheer weight I have piled onto it plugging the flow of the poison.

Then my sight cuts out, that spell drained as well. And I follow it down into darkness as I let sleep claim me, sudden and warm.