

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 3

Authority : 4

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Fortify Space (2, Domain)

Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

Collect Plant (3, Shape)

Nobility : 3

Congeal 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)

Congeal Mantra (1, Command)

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)

Discoveries come fast, along with the continual growth of my magic.

Collect Plant was, I thought, a rather silly spell. As my **Authority** was higher than the spell's own measure, I was able to use it a few more times to test before resting, and a few since then. It was during my scattered acquisition of flowers and roots that I made a few discoveries.

I don't have to take the whole of a plant, and it's less exhausting the more specific I am. Also, it is less exhausting if the plant is withered, still a bulb, or dead. Harder if it's alive and flourishing, which is many plants, as it has been a bountiful summer it seems. And also, if I truly push myself, I can collect a tree.

Well, a fallen log. Apparently still enough a plant that I can collect it. The array of grasses and flowers tethered to the spell now joined by several units of wood. This brings me to my second discovery.

Form Wall demands materials. And I already knew it didn't care where those materials came from; if I told it to pluck stone from deep within the ground, it would try. And fail, but try all the same.

Truly, the spell is a wonder. Capable of moving what feels like many times what either of my shift spells can, more times than that then a nudge. And it can work with any substance, even processing clay into brick. But it can only make walls. Why walls? What is a wall, really?

Well, the important thing is, I can feed it wood from what **Collect Plant** has gathered in my soul. As it turns out, I *do* have a path to return these things I pick to the world, and it is in the form of structures. Limited structures, mind; I still cannot shape rafters. But all the same, it feels good to learn this.

The packed earthworks has been extended from the clearing to the stream, the water as much a natural barrier as the low dirt wall is really. But now some of those walls are reinforced with wooded struts and a pair of braced platforms for the archers to fire down from. Well, archer. Kalip remains the only one left with an unbroken bow. Perhaps I can fix that in the future, once I figure out how to **Shift Wood** into something as flexible as I want.

I've done a lot of things in my lives, but never made a bow. No time like now to learn, I suppose.

Before that, I run through my growing list of daily rites. **Fortify Space** on the newly claimed land between here and the water. **Bolster Nourishment** on the foraged food. **Congéal Glimmer** to make another handful of the smaller versions gemstones.

Motes of power react to my passing touch. The sources from the huts I've built, the promises I've kept, the glimmer that the people keep using, they nourish me in a way I am only just starting to understand. But every moment of my day's spellwork is underlined by a fear that this is not fast enough.

I call upon one of my bound insects, and move to check what has been written to me while I worked. And I am mildly surprised when my beetle answers my call; the prideful bug had been displaying more independence the last day or two, outright refusing a request from me at one point. I knew I could have made the request a dominating command, but... that is not something I am quite willing to do, I think. So I let him do his own thing. But now, here he is again, waiting for me on the rough bark map of our area that I've been drawing, like nothing has changed.

I start looking over the clay tablet that's been written out here and left for when I could next spend my time and the nothingness that powers my spell to read. And a host of problems assault me.

The biggest issue that I have, is that I have no agents in the world, beyond a few bees and one belligerent beetle. Neither hands nor summoned monsters to work my will with. And so, if I wish to kill the other apparatus, I need to rely on the strength that I have in the form of my strengthening community.

Except that community is more on the edge than I had realized.

Forage is good, especially with my advice on some plants they had no knowledge of, but with monsters in the trees, no one can go too far or risk death or capture. So they are forced to remain near the camp, and that food supply is dwindling. Fish are an option from the stream, but catches can't be relied on, and so they regularly dip into their stockpiles. **Bolster Nourishment** helps with hunger, but not enough to reverse the cost of keeping eight adults and seven children fed.

The weather remains calm, but the nights are cool and there aren't enough blankets. Dipan was a courier in a previous life and has helped to put together some makeshift bedding and a few leaning shelters, but there's only so much that foliage can do, especially without real homes. If this keeps up, they worry about people taking ill. Mela already has, though the writer tells me she's pretending otherwise. The camp has no doctor, no healer, no priest, and no medicine.

And without decent tools, they can't find purchase to start pushing back. They're used to living in cities with merchants; even if Muelly knows how to make a net from her time in a fishing town, she doesn't know how to make *rope*. No one knows how to make rope. The loss of so many people is a breach in the specialized knowledge that they used to keep things going. And while I know a lot, I have to be strategic about what I pass on, with my limited touch on the world.

It is against this backdrop that I read the details of, that I have asked them to help me execute a war. An unreasonable thing to ask, were it not critical for our continued survival.

But I must ask. We have to move faster than this. I steady my mind, and bring **Shift Wood** forward to write on my own provided slate of bark. First, a recipe for a herb and mushroom 'tea' that helps with sore throats and keeps fevers from taking root. It's not distilled medicine or a miracle, but it should help.

Then I write at the end my own message back. *We cannot keep waiting. I will not become strong in ways to help you live if I am becoming strong in ways to fight. They are not the same. We have to secure these woods.*

I still have an ample amount of **Bind Insect** left, even though I have poured much of it into letting my bonds empower themselves, so I leave the beetle there to wait for someone to notice and respond, while I turn myself to the task of learning another of my new spells.

Congeval Mantra. It is the same complexity, and cost, as **Congeval Glimmer**. And its linked soul is the same strength as well. Which means, even without practice, I have an instinctive

knowledge that I could use this four times to a full result before I exhausted it. Or once or twice to make much larger, presumably stronger results.

For now, though, I wish to simply see what it makes. I cast it once, again using my beetle's eyes to help me aim, and let the spellwork flood out of me and onto the bark map. Rapidly, it pulls itself together, going from a skeletal impression that I can barely feel through the spell's own workings, to a shimmer in the air the beetle itself can see, to suddenly, a tiny stone, sitting on the table.

No, not a stone. I... cannot tell what it is. It doesn't seem to be a gem or a rock or metal. It's a simple circular disc, an unclean white in color, with something etched along the edge of the disc itself. And while I can read through my beetle, I cannot understand the letters written on the thing I have made. They slip from my mind, like they were never real, when I try to process them.

How utterly strange.

And yet, there is a feeling from it. Of potential, of promise. There is a strength here, it is simply one I cannot quite understand yet.

But I have an idea. An idea I have had for days, but failed to act on for a number of chaotic reasons, none of which absolve me from simply indulging my curiosity.

Through **Bind Insect**, I tug softly on the tethers to my bees. Almost twenty of them now, all of them growing strong and soft. They are smarter than bees should be, and though they are not yet *people*, I think, I still decide that I owe it to them to ask first. So I do. A simple request; would any of them like to try something with me. I will need three of them.

I'm not sure if they fully understand my question. But several of them agree anyway. I pick three of my little volunteers, directing them to find a comfortable spot within their hive. Possibly one with some extra space; I do not know if this will grow them. Actually, as I make that connection, I change to asking them to find a spot *outside* their hive. Just to be safe. The others I ask to follow, to watch the process for me.

Bind Insect is a complicated spell, with a host of different parts that are constantly in motion. It binds, it holds, it feeds back power into the bonds, it shares sense and thought. And also, somewhere in all of that, it has the shape of something familiar. Partially it is part of the tethers, and my ability to push my spell's empty source into the insects I have bound; but there is something *else* there too. An option I haven't explored.

Bind Insect and **Congee Mantra** are both indicated as command style spells. Perhaps that is why I have a feeling this will work, an instinct from a new body and a new life. But there is nothing left to do by *try*.

I cast upon the link to one of my bees. **Congee Mantra**, directed through the channel that lets me pour vitality and growth into them, that they have fed from since their binding. The spell slips in almost perfectly, like a key that has been expected in a lock. Magic pools, and then comes to life, and the bee *changes*.

The mantra I have made is not a physical thing this time. Instead, it rings the tether; an abstract impression of the same object, attached to the attachment in a way that both does and does not make sense to me. The bee, though, my loyal honeybee, has experienced a shift. Its body has expanded, lengthening and becoming more angular and strong, while its wings... its wings have grown as well, but all across them, those unreadable marks glow with a soft yellow and black light, matching the honeybee's soft fur.

It *purrs* through the link back to me. A feeling of satisfaction and acceptance of its new form. The other bees shift around it, moving to nudge and press against each other and their changed hivemate like a wave.

I repeat the process twice more, giving the other two chosen their own marked wings and stronger forms. None of us know yet, exactly what this means for them, but the bees' shared emotions tell me they like the feeling of it, and amusement rings in my crystal body as I decide to devote time to this every day until they are all changed. If they want to, of course. I *did* promise, and I will hold to that. I may not have known this would change them exactly, and I would not have forced it anyway, but now I have even less of an excuse.

Pulling my mind back, I leave my bees to their new forms, and have just enough time to scout a few more patches of land around us with **Distant Vision**, finding what I suspect is another small river moving through the forest, before I am pulled back by another tug from a different bound insect.

My beetle has drawn my attention just as the older demon woman has brought herself stiffly to a kneeling position before the spot where we write to each other. She notices that I've written something back to them, and I see her smile softly before she turns her head toward the camp.

And then, something I was not expecting happens.

"Miss Yuea!" Seraha calls out.

The words are muddled and muted, yes. But I... I can hear her. Through the beetle, who has been keeping from me the last couple days. To *work on something*, it had said.

I have been surprised by a bug. Given a gift I did not expect; a connection to those around me that I had been so painfully missing. From the beetle, I feel a rush of tiny pride.

Then, another voice. Still warbling, but understandable. Yuea, I assume. "Sarah, I told you, just Yuea."

“And I told you that’s not how my name is spoken.” The older woman says with a smile. “It seems we are both poor heartspeakers, hm?”

As amusing as the situation would be to simply sit and listen to them, I start carving with **Shift Wood** around my beetle, explaining that I can hear them. That they can simply *talk to me*, even if I cannot yet speak back. But that yet seems closer than ever now. While I do, though, and before the two women notice, their own conversation continues. “So, what’s the word from...” A trailing end to a sentence. My beetle shifts to see Yuea making a circular motion with her hand.

Seraha answers softly. “Ingredients for a brew to help Mela.” She says. “It seems to have taken an interest in our sick.”

“I suppose I’d rather know that it doesn’t want us dead that badly.” Yuea says bitterly. “How does it even know all this?” She asks idly, and I remember that I have not *told them* of my old lives. I need to do that. When there is time, time there never is. “What about... what about the other one?”

“It still wants us to kill it.” Seraha says with a pained tone. I feel like an eavesdropper, listening in on their conversation; though I do not tell my beetle to leave. Look at my words, please! “It’s worried that if we take too long to recover, the other one will overwhelm us.”

“Can’t say I blame it.” Yuea replies with a hissing sound I think is a sigh. “What are we supposed to do with one old soldier, one idiot soldier, and one angry baker though? Maybe ask our... friend... to make me a brace of pistols, and we’ll see what I can deliver.”

Seraha bleats sympathetically. “Yes, well... oh.” Her eyes meet the table under my beetle. “Oh, interesting.” She says. “It can hear us.”

“What, the...” Yuea stops herself from finishing that sentence, and I feel... I don’t know what I feel. Sad, I suppose. That her trust for me doesn’t extend into range of my hearing. I understand, but I am still sad.

“With Oob. The beetle.” Seraha says with a patient smile on her old face. “Well this will make things much easier!” I’m glad she, at least, understands.

Wait, they named my beetle? I should have named my beetle. *How do you feel about the name Oob?* I push the complex question down the link between us. I’m not sure what emotion I get back. I don’t know if Oob actually understands what names are, or why it should have one, or what I am asking. Which is exactly how confused I was at all my old names when I first got them, so this seems fair. *Oob it is.*

“Alright.” Yuea says with another I-think-sigh-noise. “Well. We need our friend stronger. I’ll talk to Kalip when he’s up, and we can start making a plan to-“

She cuts off, and the beetle focuses its sight away from the map and the written responses in time to see Yuea and Seraha's heads whip around toward the other side of the camp.

Because the beetle can hear the young voice screaming too. And through my bond, so can I.

We may be out of time again.