

**Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change**  
**Available Power : 10**

**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 : 4**

***Congeal Glimmer (1, Command)***

***See Domain (1, Perceive)***

***Claim Construction (2, Domain)***

***Stone Pylon (2, Shape)***

**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 : 4**

***Nudge Material (1, Shape)***

***Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)***

***Drain Endurance (2, War)***

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**Animosity : -**

***Amalgamate Human (3, Command)***

“The courtly fountain is a nice touch.” Dipan says over breakfast. His voice, to the ears of my beetles, does a poor job of hiding his anger and bitterness. But I don’t hold it against him.

There's a buried hurt in the hearts of everyone here. A string of shallow graves stretching back from where they met me to where their lives and families were torn apart. Most of them have done an adequate job keeping it from boiling over all this time. But now, here, without the pressure and fear, there's nothing left to do but face what they lost. *Who* they lost.

I would say it's not my place to intrude, but I can remember so many times my old lives thought that same thing, and then failed to help, and fell into regret as a result. A part of me considers excusing myself from the task by saying that there is a more pressing issue, but...

My soul of **Spirituality** is almost as strong as **Authority**, and within *that* soul, I am capable of holding up three different iterations of **Distant Vision** at the same time. **Shift Wood**, while it seems to take more of my focus to actually work with in detail, is a lower ranked spell than **Distant Vision**, and so I am positive I can make it do what I now want.

It takes me three tries, and it would have taken me far more if I hadn't had practice doing exactly this already, but as it stands the answer slips almost effortlessly into my magic. It feels akin to trying to write two scrolls with a quill in each hand, which the scholar only tried once to try to impress a boy he liked, and which I personally am clearly not going to be very good at. The letters come out slightly warped and I think I may have pushed the table itself a little too hard as a whole object, but I do somehow manage to start two conversations at once.

*Thank you.* I write near Dipan, who is rapidly and mechanically chewing through a bowl of berries and oats. *Also, if you would like to talk, I am here.*

"What's there to talk about? Unless you want me to tell you where to put more fountains. Because let me tell you, my arms appreciate not having to haul that rotting bucket up over and over." Dipan's voice has a smile to it, though I'm not watching him to see his face, and Oop's sharing of the words includes an impression of what seems like a breakdown of potential emotions.

It occurs to me, suddenly, that they have no expectation of human behavior from me. That I can act as bluntly as I like, and that subtlety is challenging enough already. So the next words I write are more direct. *Your pain. I won't make you share, but I can tell that you hurt, and I am here to listen when you need to talk of it.*

There's a clatter of a wooden bowl being dropped to the tabletop, and the scraping of a bench being pushed back. "Thanks, but the fountain's enough help with the pain for me." Dipan keeps his cheerful demeanor up as he leans back. "Though if you could get one of those in the *kitchen...*"

I listen to the man from a rural fishing village reinvent the concept of indoor plumbing, occasionally offering small words of advice or commentary, but only with half my focus. The rest of me is putting thought into the other conversation that I began at the same time.

*We need to talk about a problem.* I write in awkwardly lettering to Yuea and a Kalip who is coming off three hours sleep and seems entirely unphased by it. *I need more sleep than him, and that's a little bit aggravating.*

"Yeah, the problem is that you still haven't made me into a bestial warform yet." Yuea says messily around the slice of fruit she's crammed into her mouth.

"What?" Kalip's head snaps over to her. He was watching the gobs, all three of whom are sitting with cautious tension at one of the other tables, like they're still not certain about this place. "What did you..." He looks down at my writing. "Oh. A new one. What is it?"

*Well, Yuea is one of them.* I write, and ignore her childish outburst. Honestly, some of the children have better manners than her. Though the soldier's memories make it clear that I shouldn't really find this uncommon. *And I did promise her we would talk about this. But no. One of the apparatus that was hunting us is building a road to our location.*

"...next time lead with that." Yuea says in an angry tone.

*I was trying to. You interrupted me. I can only write so fast.* I reply, carving around her plate of fruit slices. *I count twenty eight silkspinnners, and one pylon. They are killing the trees and plants, and the magic is... turning what is left to some kind of chalk. I could not tell you what it is, though I suspect it is something specific and frustrating, as that is how our magic simply is.*

"How fast are they moving?" Kalip asks. "And do you have watch on them now?"

"Also how do you know they're after us?" Yuea adds. Both of them pitch their voices low; the meal hall is not exactly filled with people at this early hour, but they clearly don't want to alarm anyone else. Jahn and Malpa have just come in, the two men stealing from the platter in the fort's kitchen before they sat to discuss their plans for further plantings today, and the two soldiers have clearly decided that's something they don't need to upset.

*The line I can see is a direct path between where I believe I saw the apparatus, and us. There are only so many options there, though I do not know how they have found us specifically. And they are moving slowly. It will be a tenday at least until they are here, though they might speed that up with reinforcements.*

"Okay." Yuea nods, and I can see the military mind behind her eyes sharpening on this new task. "I'm going to need a map, and a list of what we have. But first. Rough options." She glances at Kalip. "How many do you think you could kill?"

"Two." He says. "Before I run out of arrows. They take too much damage before they die." Ah, of course, he put one down before. Though it was trapped at the time.

Yuea jabs a fist into his ribs; a weak strike, but in just the right place to make Kalip flinch. "With a gun you fucking moron." She says. "We're *armed* now. There's even an emplacement cannon in the armory here."

Kalip leans in slightly, his eyes betraying nothing. "Two." He says. "I have no dragoon training, commander."

"Well you've got a tenday to practice." Yuea snaps at him. "Go check our powder stocks, and take Sivs with you. Kid needs to learn to shoot *something*." She waves him off.

Kalip stands, and I see him resist the urge to salute. "Yes commander." He says with a tiny grin.

*I have some ideas, myself. I add. Which fortunately do not require the man you just banished.*

"I didn't *banish* him." Yuea takes a moment to cough; she's still not used to having to breathe properly again. Not that I can blame her. I'd probably take a little while to adjust if you made me do it, at this point. "Also are you drunk or something today? Your handwriting got worse."

*I am also having a conversation with Dipan, and I cannot become...* I don't finish my sentence. Could I become drunk? There are certainly a number of new sensations in this body of mine, but I don't think I've felt anything like inebriation. Even the rush of a point of power coalescing doesn't quite feel intoxicating, it simply elicits a kind of content.

"Thinking about it now, aren't you?" Yuea asks.

*Yes. I say flatly. But now is not the time. I would like to be moved out to a good spot to intercept the approaching monsters. Sooner rather than later. I believe I can dig out a large hollow space to use as a pit trap for them. It worked once, after all. It should work again.*

Yuea coughs once, then makes an appreciative noise. "That's something." She says. "But not what we should hinge our hopes on. How about more of your pylons?"

*To do what? I inquire. And then, a follow up question, And with what stone?*

"Plenty of exposed rock out there, even if the ground around the fort isn't helpful." She shrugs, toppling the bee on her shoulder off with a buzzing flare of its wings. "Use your nudge to carve out what you need, then use that. Should be easy if we get you close, right?"

*Yes, but it has to use my own spells. And none of them are exactly calling down storms or shattering armies, however small the army is.*

"Just... drain." Yuea says. "They're moving in a line, so set up a line of them, and bleed them dry. Should make it easier for Kalip and I to pick them off." The bees I have watching her stare

up at her palid face in unison. “Kalip and Sivs to pick them off.” She lies. And then instantly backtracks on what she was saying. “Listen, I think now’s the time to talk about amalgaming me. I’m going fucking crazy like this, and we both know I’m useless, and the stupid promises you made *itch* in me, okay?”

*The word would be ‘amalgaming’, if anything.* I tell her.

Yuea slides her plate to cover what I just wrote. “Tonight.” She says. “Figure it out. I’ll have Kalip watch. If I die, fuck it. If I end up as some slavebound monster thing... eh. Give me claws, I guess.”

She stands on wobbling feet, and walks out, calling out a thanks to Muelly who is boiling water for the day, and leaving me with an apprehensive feeling.

I don’t *want* to use the spell that was left for me in the death of the apparatus that held this fort before us. I don’t want to see what it does, I don’t want to experiment on my friend. Well, my ally. Many of the survivors are friends, but I do not think that is what Yuea wants with me. I think she wants us to be professional, and distant from each other. I see it in her with the others, too.

She cares quite a lot about very specific things, that I don’t think she realizes she gives away when she talks. There are times when she mocks me for speaking like a noble’s history tutor, and I do not think she realizes that means that she knows what that would sound like. Too, she was the first one to refer to Jahn with the demon’s traditional faith’s gendering, long before I ever realized something was strange there.

I don’t know who or what Yuea is, aside from what I have seen. Determined, violent, profane, angry, secretly compassionate and rather protective of that secret, she is all of these things. And I know her history is likely quite interesting. But she holds herself apart from everyone. There is a reason the children never ask her to play with them, or that Kalip won’t stop calling her commander. She wants to help, but she doesn’t want to get close.

For a moment, I can see a world that might have been, where I followed that path. I don’t like it. It seems lonely.

The moment passes when Seraha shepherds a flock of half asleep children into the meal hall to eat before they scatter to play in the hours they have to themselves prior to my lessons. My bees excitedly launch themselves off tables and walls to pair off with the kids that they’ve chosen, getting sleepy smiles from their human and demon friends. I remind them to tell me if there’s anything that requires my attention today, and the bees give me back a chorus of affirmatives across our link.

I realize the gobs, who finished eating some time ago, are simply sitting and waiting. For what, I can safely assume; they want work to do. Which... well. I was a gob once. I remember the

feeling of being young. I can empathize with feeling restless, and it certainly doesn't help that they were being used by the first humans that found them. They must feel like quite the outsiders here.

A trio of my larger glimmer infused bees crawl to them, the table already cleared as the gobs have efficiently stacked their bowls already, and get the attention of the three new members of our fort. It takes some coaxing, but I get them moving to where I want them to be.

Meanwhile, I interrupt Malpa and Jahn's conversation. *Excuse me.* I write between them. *Would you do me a favor today?*

"Yes." They both say instantly, in similar curt tones. It's almost comical, and I wait for them to grin at each other, but they don't. Not out of malice, I think, but simply because they are waiting at the same speed. It's fascinating to watch, but not what I need to be focusing on

*The gobs need something to do so as not to become restless and anxious. Would you mind allowing them to help you today? And perhaps we can teach them something while we do so.*

"We... can, yes." Jahn says slowly. "You do know that we are not farmers, yes? We dig, we plant, but we have little to teach."

*I actually had been wondering. You are a baker, yes? Why are you not more active in the kitchen? My curiosity gets the better of me.*

"It wasn't what was needed." Jahn shrugs. "The others can do that, while I dig."

"You could trade with Dipan." Malpa suggests. "Bastard could use some hard work in his life."

*He does have more free time now.* I offer, throwing Dipan to the wolves, just as the trio of gobs arrive at the table, standing in a nervous line on the other side as the bees guiding them land and start trying to steal a slice of something red and juicy off Malpa's plate.

He pushes it toward the insects as an offering as he looks up at the new lives. "We hear you want to help us learn how to be farmers." He says. One of the gobs - Sharpen is their name; it's easy to remember new gob names, since they keep their birth tool close - nods in reply. "Excellent. We need the help." Malpa seems to know exactly what to say, somehow; the gobs all perk up at the implication that they might not just be *allowed* to stay, but in fact be *helpful*. Malpa glances at Fisher, the smaller gob hanging back, and down to the broken fishing pole at their side. "If we get it done fast enough, maybe we can see about going on a hike to the lake. Get some fish for tonight." Malpa casually offers.

"You humans and your meat." Jahn snorts, scratching at one of his horns.

"Fish isn't meat." Malpa draws the word out curiously. "It's fish! There's a difference."

“Really? What is it?” Jahn folds his arms.

There is a pause, before Malpa turns back to the gobs. “Help me clear the table. We’ve got work to do.”

It occurs to me that I haven’t been keeping a close eye on these two. It also occurs to me that a month ago, when they first met, Malpa was one of the people who wanted to keep Jahn disarmed and held captive in a clay hut. I don’t exactly know what to make of this. Perhaps it is simply that chaos and pressure makes any friend seem like a worthwhile one.

Perhaps chaos and pressure are things I should look into causing myself, when it becomes needed. I’m an apparatus of *change* after all. And this... this is certainly a form of change. If ever anyone alive had a purpose to their existence, this would be mine.

For now, though, I leave them to attempt to fill the fenced off plot of farmland with tilled rows and planted crops. New potential targets for **Bind Crop**.

They deserve one more day of relative quiet before we mobilize again.

And I need to meet Yuea now that she’s finally dragged herself up the steps to where I keep my map, since the fool woman refuses help at every turn.

Together, we start to plot how to ambush a horde of monsters, and how to weaponize the magic I have available. And this time, with so much space between us and so many new tricks on our side, I feel something strange. I feel *confident*.

I’m not sure how we’ll do it, exactly. But that apparatus had best count the days it has left. Because before this is done, we are going to kill it, too.