

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 12

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 : 5

Know Material (1, Perceive)

Form Wall (2, Shape)

Link Spellwork (3, Arcane)

Sever Command (4, War)

Collect Material (1, Shape)

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)

My promise to return has created another point of power in me. I didn't realize it would be... I suppose 'worth' is a strange way to think of things, but yes, worth that much. **Small Promise** is a strange spell; it seems that, in a functionalism view, it would be most useful for creating more and more sources of power for myself. But I hesitate to do so. Each promise made, however small, is a tie that I don't know if I can break.

I've come close before, and I could *feel* the pain waiting on the other side of the line. Nothing stops me from breaking them, but doing so would have consequences. Possibly deadly ones. It seems unwise to make 'simple' promises, without knowing when they might be self laid traps.

"But you aren't using the tool." Fisher says as I exchange written messages with the growing gob. She's been learning how to read rapidly; the scraps of knowledge they were born with quickly filled in by Seraha's second taught class every day. They're practicing reading, I'm practicing writing multiple conversations at once. "Feels wrong."

Not every tool is for every situation. I explain, using the memories of the scholar to draw on what it feels like to live as a gob for my answer. *I do use it, but in my own way. The magic makes no value judgment, I think. It does not mind that I use it to communicate, and not to harvest. It works all the same.*

Fisher clicks as they rearrange the stack of pails they are gathering from the dusty storeroom. "But not as much as it could."

Things do not need to be optimized to be valuable. I share old wisdom. *Because optimization of a living person always takes sacrifice of the things that make life itself valuable.*

"I cannot read these all." Fisher clicks at me again, following with a long huff through their flat nostrils. "I am *two*."

They mean two months. Manifested right as the world was ending. I'm sarcastically sure it's a coincidence. But still, I switch to simpler language for them. *If all everyone did was try to be a better tool, then who are those tools for? We can be useful to each other, but we also have to be useful to ourselves. Take care of ourselves.*

"Or else we'd never need tools." Fisher sounds halfway between smug that they've arrived at a philosophical point, and terrified at the implication of a world where no one needed them. "Thank you." They say with a flourish of their arm, rough orange skin catching in the lamplight of the storeroom. I think Seraha taught them that, some kind of demon gesture of gratitude that wasn't around when I was alive and was old by the time I was born.

And then they're running off with a pile of buckets, the bee following after them. Young gobs are delightfully objective-oriented a lot of the time. I'm honestly impressed Seraha got Fisher to do any kind of superfluous gestures at all.

While I was devoting perhaps half of my mind to that conversation, the other half was working with Jahn. First, reversing **Drain Health** into him to repair the damage he somehow suffered while I was away. Second, to talk about that damage.

"I don't want to talk about it." He tells the attending medico assistant bee. I should make the bee a tiny blue and white hat, to give it the universal symbol of a healer. I put that on my list of things to do once all threats are defeated and all problems are managed.

"He fell off the wall." Malpa says from where he's leaning against the barracks door. Well, the room used to be a barracks. Now it is a larger than normal sleeping room. Almost like a small home, really. A table stacked with scavenged books and papers, another with what looks like wood carving tools and shavings on it. A pair of beds pushed against each other against the wall, with half the surviving blankets in the fort seemingly piled on them to form some kind of nest. That's where Jahn sits as I make my magic bend to my will, shirtless save for a frayed cotton binding across his upper chest. "It was hilarious, once we knew he wasn't dead."

"*I didn't want to talk about it.*" Jahn reiterates, running a thick hand across the fur of his flank as **Drain Health** finishes working. "And thank you. But won't this be a problem, if people need to come in here to get to the place of healing?"

No, I- I start to write with **Shift Wood** in the end of the bedpost, and see Jahn wince through my bee. Quickly smoothing that over, I look for something I can work with, and am surprised when Malpa casually tosses Jahn a smoothed piece of bark. *No, I have had a revelation about my magic.* I tell him. *The spells that drain can go both ways, and do not need to be added to a space to work. Though doing so has its uses.*

"Oh. I thought it was something special with how you mix your magics like some kind of peak brewer." Jahn sounds surprised, but not *too* surprised. I suppose at a certain point, constant new additions to the knowledge of my life cease being overly alarming.

It has to do with what Link Spellwork is actually doing. I explain. *I had thought... and I do not think I was wrong to believe this... that it was making new spells. But I don't believe that is what it does at all. It will take some time for me to truly try every combination and see if this is the case, but it seems it simply lets me change the target of a spell, to another spell. Even if that simply should not work. I will be saving it for the journey today, but soon... if nothing happens...*

I don't bother explaining. Of course something will happen. Jahn gives a puff of breath, almost a laugh, and hands the now inscribed tablet over to Malpa. "Well, it feels better. So thank you." He says. "Thank you for a lot of things. We don't say that enough."

You don't have to. I write, and Malpa slowly reads off. Now. Fisher and Yuea are waiting outside. Shall we join them?

“Yeah.” Malpa looks up at my bee before setting the tablet back on one of the tables. “I’ll be right down. Can we have some distance?”

Of course! I write, unseen. *I will see you again in the courtyard.* I add before calling my helpful bee out of the room, letting the small portal to the world outside my world of souls and magical machinery move elsewhere. I tell the bee that I don’t need anything from them right now, and they happily buzz off to find someone to elicit pets from.

Across the fort, scores of those small windows sit in my mind. **Bind Insect** offering me small peaks into what my insects can see, hear, smell, and feel. But there’s one larger window, too. **Amalgamate Human**, connected to Yuea; the bond having strengthened and solidified, like how a **Bind Insect** bond does actually take a few heartbeats to finalize, but moving through sap at first.

She is impatient, trying to poke at the bond in her mind seemingly just to hurry me along, and I am doing my best to ignore her. Though it does draw my attention to **Amalgamate Human**, and the use of its empty liquid supply. As with **Bind Insect**, or the underused **Bind Willing Avian**, Yuea seems to have reserved a portion of the vial for her tether. I *believe* that **Amalgamate Human** is acting as if the **Animosity** soul were at the third rank, but Yuea is taking... almost a third of the magic.

The math that is surprisingly easy for my clear mind to do in this life paints a strange picture. Did the apparatus that had killed this fort have an **Animosity** in the sixth or seventh rank just to manage how many of its own creations it had? I don’t know how much older than myself it was, but with how many other tricks it displayed, that seems unlikely.

But then I remember how **Sever Command** didn’t do much against them, and **See Commands** similarly gave minimal useful information. And I wonder... did it make monsters out of people, and then simply cut its connection? Wandering the area as a ravenous form of uncontrolled security? Or were they perhaps never meant to be soldiers, and instead this was just how the apparatus killed its enemies, before having no desire to keep their new forms.

I’m glad I will never know. But it does raise the problem that after I alter Kalip, I do not think I will be able to safely do this again. Not without cutting them loose from the magic. And I cannot do that yet to Yuea; she still moves incorrectly and injures herself in a way that requires the magic of the bond to heal.

I am reminded that soon, I need to work out the details of Kalip’s change with the man. I think I will need to focus more than half my attention on him. For all that I can split my attention, I still need to think to make decisions.

Yuea and her group assemble in the courtyard, and I task ten bees to go with them. The growing honeybees no longer fit in the walking sticks I made for the group on the way here, but they also don't need to be carried, which is good, because the collection of survivors are taking quite a lot of weight in buckets with them, along with their pilfered backpacks. I listen in as Yuea says something about Malpa being late, ignore most of what she says, and instead write my own message in the dirt around them all.

I'll be watching, but I have much to do here. Yuea, call across our bond if you need something and I have not noticed. The bees will guide you where you need to be. And thank you.

"Of course!" Mela is grinning, even as she worriedly looks around for any sign of Kalip. "We'll be back before you know it."

Be careful. I add.

But they're already out the gate. Only Jahn watches them go, the demon standing with folded arms and a strange expression on his face before he sighs and looks up at the smaller bound bees perched over the door. "I would like to talk about our farm, before Seraha's class is out, and she takes your ear, little spirit."

I invite Jahn back to the room I was previously using to experiment with glimmer, and is technically the fort capitan's office. He eyes the holes in the desk suspiciously, but does not comment.

We spend some time with him picking the memories of the farmer from me. An attempt from both of us to preserve the knowledge of crop rotation, irrigation, pest control, and a thousand thousand small things that perhaps do not matter anymore. We discuss how my magic changes farming, and how I might start to change the plants to be *better*.

I'm hesitant. I admit to the demon, who has taken up a seated position with his hooves folded inward on the floor, watching the board that Yuea had tried to turn into a map and I have repurposed for this conversation. A handful of bees and beetles scurry around the office, playing with each other and exploring the room that was closed off while I was 'gone'. *I think it would be very easy to make plants that are more mobile, or more dangerous, like the thorn vine that tried to kill Seraha when we came here. I am certain I could make a poisonous food, if only by accident. I do not know how I would guide my magic to make something good for us.*

"You improved the yams, though. You could do it for other things. Before we are murderous at the thought of yams."

It's been a tenday, you'll live with yams. I jokingly retort, while Jahn lets a bee crawl into his lap. I take a small pause as I do not have any bound looking at the board that I can aim through, but resume writing as the bee with Jahn looks up at the wood panel and lets me continue. *All I did with that was make them better at what they already did. And I do not think my magic is a*

replacement for proper crop patterning. It might slow down how needed it is, but they are still growing in the soil, and that soil needs to be cared for.

Jahn rumbles out a concerned noise. “We don’t have any crop seeds here. Not truly. I had hoped... you could make some. From whatever is around us.”

Perhaps I could. But I don’t want to poison you all while I try.

“I had... may I ask something?”

Jahn, we’re having a conversation.

The demon tilts his horns up at me, arms folding indignantly. The bee protests the sudden absence of pets, while I protest my loss of focus on the board. “I *know* you are a person, no matter what you seem to be. I know you are not a living dream, or a small god. But you may as well be, so forgive me for being *somewhat polite*.”

Are you sure you were a baker, and not a stage performer? Ask your question you dramatic man.

I don’t know if Jahn knows that their muzzle twitches in a smile whenever they see or hear those words. But I know. And I’ve noticed just how much they’ve opened up, even in just these few days that I was away. “Well.” The demon says, voice even, no sign of their reaction. “Did you know that, sometimes, I can feel your magic?”

I did not. I also don’t know what he means by that. Is it causing everyone discomfort?

“I didn’t know what I was feeling, at first. Yuea said something recently that made me think though.” Jahn tilts his head back and stares upward. “Your small magic, that creates a promise. Some of *us* have used it before, haven’t we?” This was not where I thought this was going. But it’s true, **Small Promise** has been... almost pulled out of me, I suppose. I answer Jahn, and he nods. “I think I can feel that same thing, sometimes. Not for promising, but for the crops. When I’m working with them, it’s like there’s something there. Waiting for me to ask.” He looks like he’s trying to work toward something.

I preempt his question. *Would you like to try? I ask. If you can ask, you should! I would share with you without question.*

“...what happened, when Yuea used your oath magic?” He asks.

*I can only remember one time, though I think there were others. She was busy trying to kill a large bug, and she told it she was going to kill it. I realize something. Hm. That was dangerous, wasn’t it? If she’d failed... if she’d died, she might have taken me with her. Because the **Small Promise** Yuea used might have come from her, but the power it created*

went to *me*. And I'm sure the consequences would have as well. *But there is no such worry here. What could possibly happen, you make a cultivate of rhubarb that is alive and experiences dread?* I stop as Jahn's shoulders start to shake, the outwardly stoic demon desperately trying to conceal laughter. *I don't know what I'm doing.* I write it in large letters, at the top of the board. A header to my entire side of the conversation. *You and I, we are exactly as qualified to toy with the nature of growing plants as each other. And every new spell is a new thing I must manage, that I have a responsibility to put to use keeping us all alive. I want you to share in this, for purely selfish reasons. And because I think it would be wonderous if you could feel the world as I do.*

"Deep apologies, but I am still caught upon the rhubarb that feels fear." Jahn says, holding up a hand to the board.

The next time you think you feel the magic, reach for it. I sum up, laughing myself on the inside. *Maybe... maybe we can work together to shape something.* Jahn's mouth twists into a smile, like he's worried that if he shows off being happy for too long someone will take it away.

The conversation turns back to irrigation, and setting up a system that actually makes the best use of my magic, while still being functional if I am forced to use **Move Water** on something else. I talk about how **Link Spellwork** allows me to target spells themselves with **Imbue Mending**, and how I can keep an irrigation channel going for at least a few days without my direct attention. We start to plan out what needs doing, and perhaps how to incorporate **Stone Pylons** into the system.

Neither of us are or have ever been engineers. Only one of us has ever been a farmer, really. So our ideas are fumbling and will need constant adjustment when they meet the world outside. But it is an engaging conversation, and I teach Jahn as much as I can.

The afternoon passes peacefully, my **Distant Vision** keeping an eye on the party venturing out, while I adjust to the feeling of home.

Multiple candles later, Jahn looks up at a noise at the same time I see the pack of human and demon children spill out into the halls of the fort from the classroom where Seraha is teaching them reading and writing. Laughing at their hours of freedom for the evening, followed or ridden by their own companion honeybees, they run off to amuse themselves with small adventures under my bonded creatures' watchful gazes.

Seraha steps out of the classroom with a placid smile on her face, and looks up to meet the eyes of one of the large bees hanging in the corner of where the wall and ceiling meet. She makes a small hum, the smile on her face fading to a thin line, and then turns and begins striding toward my 'office'.

Ah. It would seem that we might need to cut our work today short. I write.

Jahn looks back from the window at the sound of my writing, before tilting his head. “Why would-“

The door doesn't exactly burst open, but Seraha strides in as if all her years have prepared her to make a dramatic entrance. “What in the name of the sea did you do to my classroom?” She demands in a stern tone that makes me feel like I am ten winters old again six times over.

“Ah.” Jahn says. “I should... go.”

The demon abandons me to my fate, as I begin trying to figure out what it is I should even begin to be explaining.