

**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)***

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**Nobility : 4**

***Congeval Glimmer (1, Command)***

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

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

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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)***

***Congeval 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 world swirls as I am hit, again. The blow to the side of my head sends me sprawling to the filthy wooden floor, and I add to the mess as I retch up what's left of my drink. I try to remember why, exactly, I'm getting the smoke kicked out of me, and I'm pretty sure that I said something insulting to the big human who just picked up a chair. Yeah, that sounds about right. Still, can't let him hit me with the chair. I lash out, trip his buddy, grab his ankle, and curl myself backward*

*as the two of them tumble together into a heap. They look almost cute, tangled together like that on the floor, groaning in pain. I grin at the thought as I crush both of their throats. I needed to leave town anyway; and now they can cuddle up together forever.*

Wakefulness comes slowly.

I wish it wouldn't. As soon as I have my own agency, my own mind to myself, I *claw* my way out of the memory.

I don't know how long I've been down there. It feels like only a moment, but what a long moment it was. A memory, lived and stretched on and on as I slept. It felt... wrong. Alien. And in a way, it was; it was the last piece of the enemy that I'd taken at the end. A reminder, and the spoils of victory, and a curse, all wrapped into one unwanted package. The memory was someone else's, but it was also now a part of who I was; a piece of an old life that I, too, had lived and felt and knew intimately. Just like when I took in more complex spells from my own souls.

A single spell, that was *mine* now. **Amalgamate Human**. As always, I knew nothing about what it did, save for the name, and anything I could deduce from the way the spellwork's patterning and tone and shade felt to me. But this one, which I felt I would not be using in any capacity, was unlike any other spell I had. Even the pieces that formed tethers from **Bind Insect** or **Bind Willing Avian**, my other command spells, didn't match a single part of this... thing. This ugly, hateful magic, that now resided within me.

What did this mean, for who I was? I had tried to easily accept that I was a new and wholly unique person, but that became harder as I lived the lives of who I once was. I tried to accept that I was all of me, and that we could be something new together, and despite the unbanishable fear in my heart, I knew that was what I *wanted* to believe. But... now?

Now part of who I am is a killer.

Though I suppose I already knew that. After all, it isn't as though the other apparatus died because of a climbing accident or an unseasonable oceanstorm. They didn't need to inflict a memory on me to make me a killer. Even if it wasn't my own hand that brought them down.

Wakefulness comes slowly. But it does come back to me, my thoughts struggling and colliding with each other as I pull myself back to the daylight world. Within me, magic and will meet, and I find tiny windows out of the dark of my amalgamate soul and into the real.

**Bind Insect** comes first. Two beetles, Oop and Oob, both with ears that have become sharper than I ever had when I was in a living body. Through them, the sounds of the world echo to me. The clatter of wood, distant birdsong, the rush of wind in the trees. And the voices. Oh, the voices. Shouts of coordination and the high cries of children at play shirking chores. The voices of my friends.

A dozen honeybees are next, survivors of our fight. Larger than any bee has ever been, stronger, enhanced by the magic I've grafted to them. And... something else. One of them has *more* tethers, coming from the connection. A hundred shadow-lines that lead to nowhere, but that I feel I could make real with the slightest touch of my magic. It is the queen of the old hive, still connected to me, on that distant hill overlooking the fort we took.

**Bind Willing Avian** comes to me next. And I find it... empty. The crows are gone, perhaps no longer willing enough to count for the magic. I can still feel the distant hint of the glimmer that they had within their enhanced forms, motes of power so small as to be close to invisible feeding back to me whenever the glimmer flicker from use. I will miss them. But our parting does not need to be painful.

I can feel from **Small Promise** the words I told them. That I would give them power and make them a home. And I know the spell is... how to even feel this. It is not judging me? I did my best, and they left before we had the chance to really test if I could uphold it properly. It offers no choice to lash out at the birds, but that is fine; it wasn't a bargain or a trade, just a one sided promise. And I wish them well, regardless. I push the promise away, the magic discharging with a muted sputter of power, much of which does not flow to me.

**Congea! Glimmer** and **Congea! Mantra** show that about half of what I've made is gone. Similarly with **Make Low Blade**. A lot of the tools I produced weren't meant to last that long, and they clearly haven't. A handful of knives is all that's left.

**See Domain** shows me the patches of the ground between the breach and here where I used **Fortify Space**, the ground the same as it ever was. And also, where all those within my domain stand, the survivors mostly in the fort's courtyard, though some of them are scattered through the structures. Everyone is *alive*. Even Yuea, who's presence in my domain is still being eroded by the *thing* within her chest.

I have more ways to see, but none of them have much fidelity compared to simply using the eyes of my bees. I will, I think, truly miss the crows and their ability to look at things properly. I will have to find new birds.

**See Commands** tells me that several people have been told not to play outside of the fort, and I assume those are the children. Also that someone has been sent to fetch some sausage from the cellar, and that someone else has been told that they need to dig some holes. It is *strange* to see the world this way; I never got to use this spell myself. I can tell where the commands are, in a way. Or at least, I can see where they were given, and then track the distance between the carrier of the order and their target, if their target is a place. Lines of intent, scrawled on a map that is otherwise blank.

**Know Material** tells me that there's a good supply of wood around here. Plenty of dirt, some water, though not a lot, and the way it isn't moving makes me think it's a reservoir and not a river or stream. Lots of metal, compared to what I'm used to. And then... magic?

Odd. I'll ask about this.

And lastly, **Form Party** reports to me that the links between everyone have mostly faded, or been dropped. Though I believe that the one surviving one, between Yuea, Kalip, and Jahn, might be because I didn't put any extra stress on their connection using **Link Spellwork** to add **See Commands**.

I am awake, now. Fully.

I push my intent out to my bees and beetles. And they come to life at the touch of my mind against theirs; their small souls practically vibrating in excitement as I make myself known to them again.

Through the eyes of a swarm of bees, I see myself, my six pointed crystal body shown to me from a dozen angles in a detail that is freshly improved from what I remember the bees having when I fell into slumber. Slightly transparent, slightly glittering in the light coming through the window of the room I have been placed in, with a crack down one side that seems to be fusing back together in a dark seam. Around the room, a few crates sit, with some piles of thin blankets that the bees have been extracting themselves from, along with a couple bowls of half chewed on fruit.

I suppose my honeybees are large enough, now, that simple flower pollen isn't going to be enough for them.

Half of the bees, the ones containing mantra and somewhat sleeker than their bulky glimmer counterparts, shove themselves out the window, the low buzzing of their wings suddenly realizing into a sound I can recognize through their senses as they pass it on to me.

And something begins to change. Through **See Commands**, I spot a handful of new orders being given. *Let's go, and help me up, and drop that crap, we can get it later.* Words I hear the echos of spoken aloud through Oob and Oop as the beetles, from where they're resting on a lantern ledge outside what I think is one of the doors into the fort. Words I listen to as **See Domain** shows me movement from *everyone*, the survivors collectively making their way toward *me*, as my bees dance a pattern in the air over the courtyard.

Sivs is the first one to get there, followed hotly by every other young human and demon. The honeybees in the room buzz their wings and start to scatter as they're startled by the rush of children that burst through the hole where a door used to be with wild laughs and cheers. Gone is the dirt-covered child in a half-shredded shirt, and in his place is a growing kid who looks like he's actually been eating real meals, wearing what looks like a soldier's tunic stitched down to fit

his smaller frame. The other kids are dressed similarly; not a uniform, exactly, but the best that could be made salvaging from a stockpile of clothing that absolutely was uniforms before a seamster got ahold of them.

Mela comes next, gasping as she catches up to them, the young woman glaring at the kids for either slipping her watch, or beating her here. Her eyes soften as she sees them clustering around me, and she leans against the hallway wall to catch her breath.

The others arrive more slowly, but they do arrive. Seraha, the older woman ironically helping Dipan who still has a whole spool of bandages wrapped around his leg and arm. "It's good to see you awake." Her soft voice tells me, one of my beetles on her shoulder catching it even over the raucous noise of the kids.

Malpa tips his head, offering a gesture of respect, which is a whole novel of emotion from the otherwise reserved man. Muelly says nothing, but the fear is gone from her eyes when she looks at me. And that is, ultimately, more than enough for my tastes.

Then, a quiet comes down as everyone, adults and kids alike, move back. Some of them out of my little storeroom, some just off to the sides. The beetle hears steps down the hallway, and I can see clearly enough as two people approach.

Kalip looks the same as he ever has. He even still has the same armor on, albeit with a more complete set of leathers. I don't know how long I've been out, but I think he's even gotten a blasted *haircut*. It should be a crime for a man to look that composed, with everything that's happened.

But it's good that he can be so solid. Leaning on him, taking steps that falter every third or fourth footfall, is a woman who looks like she's seen better days. A wan face and thinning body, which does nothing to negate the sharp and ruthless intelligence in her eyes; Yuea walks like she's angry at her own limbs and willing to take it out on anyone within range. She wears sleeping pants and a cloth wrap around her breasts, which compliments the rest of the bandages strung around her various old wounds, including the cut across her chest that she has wrapped up like a sash.

Kalip helps her to the doorway, and my bees meet her eyes like a rank of soldiers awaiting inspection.

"You woke me up for a floating rock." Her voice is raspy, and the fire I can hear in it is muted and distant.

I reach for another of my spells. **Shift Wood**, one of the first, one of my favorites, hums to life inside me, and I reach for the back wall of the room, using my bee's eyes to help me target.

*It's good to see you too.* I write in slow, steady letters. Large enough that everyone can read it without coming closer.

Yuea laughs, a wheezing bark of a chuckle, as she straightens up and leans against the empty doorframe. "Yeah." She takes a deep breath, and steadies her voice. "You know, if you'd waited a few days for me to finish healing, I coulda won a bet."

*I'll pay you back.* I write. Seraha reads it aloud to the kids who don't know their letters yet, and there's a few high bouts of laughter. There's some from the other adult survivors as well.

"I know." Yuea whispers underneath the noise around us. I don't know if she meant for anyone to hear, but Oob has *very* good hearing.

That's okay, though. Her trust means more to me than I think I could ever tell her. And right now, in this moment, I find that no matter what nightmares I've been having, I am glad to be awake once again.

It's time to catch up on what I've missed, and set to doing what I am meant to. Making a change.