

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

Congeal 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)
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)

Someone helps me get to the fort's food hall, and I appreciate them immensely. I've said before that I can move under my own power, but only as a technicality, and I hold that to be true.

Nudge Material lets me turn practically anything into a ramp, which does let me make some progress. But only as long as friction is in a good mood, and wherever I need to go is *down*.

The food hall is neither down, nor does it need a new channel carved in the stone. So my body is carried in, and I am given a spot on one of the benches.

There are two things about this that I find bizarre. The first is that I still have not gotten used to being moved. The reach of each of my spells is, for the most part, centered around *me*. When my body changes position, so too does the edges of some of my magic. And it is a reminder that while I cannot actually feel nausea in this form, I am still capable of experiencing a kind of unsettling wobble as **Know Material** sees fluctuations of tiny amounts as I am shifted.

The second thing I find bizarre is that I am here at all.

Not that I do not appreciate the gesture, but I could participate through my bees from across the fort. From across the *valley*, really. Though perhaps with less accuracy doing that. But I don't need to be here for this at all. And yet, I accepted the invitation without hesitating. I've already decided to trust these people with my defenseless body. And it *is* defenseless, I saw how little it took an aging woman to shatter something very much like myself. But I don't know what the point is.

Still, there is something achingly familiar about the theater of it. To sit in a warm room as the companions that have become unto family share a meal around me... it sings against my souls, the memories of the people I once was seeming to come to life in a pale echo of when I write a new spell against one of them.

The humans and demons have some kind of vegetable stew, with a hard crust bread that Jahn spent the last few hours making in the fort's oven. Some of the humans have bits of sausage with theirs, and I watch through my bees as the little demon girl tries nibbling on a piece that Dipan shares with her off the tip of his knife. She scrunches her face up like she's just eaten a rather sour bug. It's adorable.

My bees, meanwhile, eat from a pair of bowls set aside for them filled with sliced fresh fruit. They've modified themselves enough now to make that eating possible, though I am certain that if needed, I could sustain them entirely through the magic of **Bind Insect**. They deserve the treat, I believe. They've been with me through a lot. Survived what a lot of their sisters didn't. And yet, never lost that effortlessly communal feeling that I see every time I looked into their hive.

Dinner is finished rapidly, the survivors still relishing having something approaching good food again. The conversation during the meal is light and short, and I mostly just listen through my beetles, rather than participate. Part of me flickers out bits of attention to long range **Distant Visions**, or uses of **Claim Construction** to continue adding more and more of the fort itself to my domain. But most of me just sits, and relaxes with these people who have become central to my new life.

As the food is done and the empty bowls stacked in the middle of the table, though, the conversation turns more serious. Not dire, or unhappy, but it is the kind of thing the kids rapidly get bored of. Even Sivs, the boy on the cusp of being a young man, isn't really *focused*. Not after a meal like that. Which is probably why Seraha puts him in charge of the others, and sends them out to run around the courtyard. I send a couple bees with them, the black-runed wings providing a strange glow in the fading sunset.

Inside, Malpa helped Seraha set a number of panes of wood on the table's surface. Or, more accurately, the big man took them out of the older woman's hands and did the heavy lifting himself. I noticed with some sadness a flinch from the demon as Malpa first reached down, but she seemed to recover and thanked him after.

"Alright." Yuea said, her voice actually sounding almost healthy after the hearty meal. "Let's get to it. Sparkly, what are you up to now?"

I think you have a different name for me every time we speak. I write, coyly refusing to go straight to business without at least some amount of a personal touch. Everyone, in fact, has different names for me. It is very confusing, for a young mind such as myself.

"I said I was sorry for calling you a kid!" Yuea bursts out before smothering a cough.

A few of the others start to laugh, but it's Jahn that speaks next, the demon actually seeming to have a worried tone to their voice. "We do not have a proper name to call you." They say. "Is there one? We finally have time for the important questions..."

"The important questions are..." Yuea is cut off by Dipan, the still healing man rapping his good hand on the unpolished wooden tabletop.

"We've got *time*." He says, his voice soft and slow. More than anyone else, even more than the kids, Dipan has seemed to have relaxed in the time we've been here. His scars are mounting more than even Yuea, but he's rapidly shedding the fear that he held when we first met. "I don't think it's a coincidence that no one's died since... well..." he motions his bandaged hand at me. "It's okay to take some time to maybe ask our friend if they've got a *name*, captain." He smiles at her with a grin that the merchant's memories identify as *an absolute weasel*, but it feels comforting to have pointed away from me.

I start shifting around the wood panels before Yuea can launch into her next overexertion. *I don't have a name, actually. I say to them. I know, of course, that who I was would have possessed names. But they're the one thing I cannot remember in any way. Well, the one thing that I have noticed. And every time I have the knowledge of my magic shown to me, it tells me my name, and my... title, I suppose. But while Apparatus Of Change seems rather dramatic, my name remains undecided.*

"So, you could name yourself anything?" Mela asks.

“Or you could be named anything.” Malpa hums to himself.

These seem to be true, yes. I tell them. Though. The magic of my life has not acknowledge Yuea continuing to call me Shiny, Sparkles, Kid, Spinny, or whichever other names she uses when I am not listening.

Jahn, positioned to read this particular piece before the others, snorts a single amused laugh. I watch the rest of them catch up with a wave of grins and chuckles, with Mela trying to hide bell-like laughter behind her hands.

Yuea says something defensive, and Kalip casually asks her something that derails her focus on my mild joking. But while they are distracted, Mela asks the question that I had already suspected I would be subject to, but do not have an answer for. “What do *you* want us to call you?” She asks.

I think my bound insects sense my nervousness, because they all seem to shift from side to side in near unison. *I do not know. I say. I don't know... who I am, do I? How can I name myself, if I have no way of knowing even that?*

Malpa laughs, suddenly. A big, booming noise that takes over the hall. “Aahhhhh.” The man slaps the table, heedless of how many splinters it probably has. I take that thought and start using **Shift Wood's** excess magic to smooth out the surface of the table in some small places. “You know, it's damn good to know you're as lost as the rest of us. Makes you feel more hum-more person.” He interrupts himself, getting a thankful nod from Muelly for the correction, the demoness sitting by his side.

That brings me to a question of my own. I write. Perhaps I am a fool to ask. But after everything... why, or perhaps how, do you accept me so easily?

Quiet falls around me. And I worry for a beat that I may have said exactly the wrong thing. A few people start to talk, but Malpa waves a hand, and they pause to defer to him. “Before we even...” he stops. Takes a deep breath, wipes something out of his eye. “Before we fled the town, my wife died. Our bed stabbed her to death.” There is silence now in the room, save for the crackling of the fire. “The army made a path for us. A week into the march to the closest fortress, the half-dead cut our numbers in half. While we scattered to escape, my daughter vanished. So we took to the trees. Headed into the Green. Took a stupid risk.” He breathes again, unsteady, but still going. I see nods around the table, this story is familiar to many of them. “Took a risk, but we needed to do something. Every day, something took someone. But not all at once, not as *bad*. But still, everyone was dying. My brother went the day before we met you.” His eyes burrow into me; I can't meet his gaze directly, but my bound bees sit in rapt silence. “Or I suppose, before you saw us. And you know what happened?” He doesn't really wait for an answer. “What happened was we stopped dying.” Malpa says simply. “I wasn't ready to die, or some poet's lie like that. But I figured... I figured I'd go out maybe keeping one

of the kids alive for a day or two longer. Make my life worth something. But we stopped dying. That's why. It's simple, honest. We were all *dead*, whether we wanted to say it out loud or not. And then we weren't. And it's your fault." Malpa shrugs, his wide shoulders shaking as he does so. "Maybe you're not the only one who got a new life. Might as well try something different this time, right?" He trails off, somber quiet following in the wake of his words. Through one of the beetles, I hear the tiny sound of him drawing a shaking breath, and then he pushes back from the table, standing up. "I'm going to go get some air." He says. "When you talk about magic, you can have my vote." The big man walks away a few paces before Muelly shoots an apologetic glance around the table and rises to follow him with rapid clops of her hooves on the stone.

I hardly know what to say. I don't think anyone else does, either. What Malpa described, it wasn't *his* experience alone. All of them lived that, in some way or another. And none of them have had time to confront those feelings. I pull my spell forward, and start to write again. *If anyone would like to take some time, we can speak tomorrow of spells and plans.*

"No!" Mela shakes her head rapidly, sniffing away tears. "I'd like a distraction, please!"

"I'm with her." Jahn says, head bowed, one hand fidgeting with their chipped horn. "I would appreciate... thinking of something else, now."

Then I can do that, as well. I write. And then, I take the time to check my souls and my magic, and transcribe my options for the group to study and debate. I also offer reminders, in response to some of the questions, because not everyone here has spent their literal entire life relying on this strange sorcery that I possess to survive. Each rank in a soul offers a place to draw a new spell, and more options for spells besides. Improving my souls improves every spell they hold, but costs power equal to the soul's rank. Each spell, no matter what its own rank, costs power equal to the which spell it will be for a soul.

It's very strange, but it's working out so far. Though, I am finding, the higher ranked a spell happens to be, the more... *something*... it has to it. Strength doesn't seem to be the right word. Power, perhaps, or maybe *weight*? It would fit, as it seems the higher a spell's rank, the faster it consumes the empty liquid that fuels it.

Currently **Authority**, **Nobility**, and **Tenacity** are waiting to be added to with new powers. And so I list those, both for myself, as I have not actually checked since waking, and to the people watching.

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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Available :

See Rank (1, Perceive)
Shift Dirt (1, Shape)
Drop Trigger (1, War)
Shift Metal (2, Shape)
Make Clothing (3, Shape)
Know Abstract (3, Perceive)
Bind Crop (4, Command)
Know Weather (4, Perceive)
Mark Home (4, Domain)
Verdant Pylon (5, Shape)
Shape Metal (5, Shape)
Bind Relationship (6, Command)
Make Meal (6, Shape)

Nobility : 4

Congeval 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)

Tenacity : 4

Nudge Material (1, Shape)
Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)
Drain Endurance (1, War)

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Available :
Domain Map (1, Perceive)
Subvert Low Summon (1, Command)
Separate Material (2, Shape)
Pressure Trigger (2, War)
Learn Stability (3, Perceive)
Congel Memory (3, Command)
Drain Trust (3, War)
Hear Plots (4, Perceive)
Subvert Low Glimmer (4, Command)
Share Abstract (4, Civic)

And that's all of it. I write to them. And it's mostly true; it is all of what is available to me. For now I have omitted my... new acquisition. I promise to myself, though, that I will tell them soon. But it would be a distraction, right now, and an unwelcome one I think. *I have eleven finished points of power within me now; a new one has formed from claiming the fort as we ate, I believe. Which means I can manifest a magic from two of these souls. Or, of course, simply continue to save my potential for when a new emergency occurs.*

"I hate that I know that's a valid strategy." Yuea grumbles.

"I hate that you're being angry about the little dream that keeps saving our lives." Dipan counters in an easy voice. "So. Does anyone see a reason she shouldn't take cook meal and solve our starvation problems forever?"

Kalip shakes his head. "Probably not how that works." He utters in his eternally calm voice.

It almost certainly is not. I tell them. **Make Low Blade** is a good example; I can do the work of hours in a moment, but I need the materials to work with.

"Bind crop is still my vote for anything." Jahn says with a tap on their chin. "We can clear some ground around the fort, and set up some small farm acreage. If it can make things grow like your little honey friends here," they run a hand along the furred back of one of the bees, eliciting a shiver of contentment from the creature, "then we could sustain ourselves, and anyone who comes to join us."

"It's guided by this soul, though." Seraha protests. "Authority? I believe the word is? It is a very old glyph-text. But regardless, it would make the spell for predicting the weather inaccessible."

One moment. Predicting? I write the simple message in front of Seraha so she can most easily read it.

“Is that not what the word means?” She asks. “It seems to be a form of the term ‘to know’, but in old Aldrish, and in the future tense, which implies seerdom.” The demoness gives me a reminder that she used to be a schoolteacher, and I suspect not an unskilled one at that. The memories of the scholar stir within me, recognizing patterns of speech and small ways of thinking that Seraha uses that point to her being quite likely far more educated than she often lets on.

Interesting. I had not considered it would let me see into the future. To me, the word simply means ‘know’. I say. But... why would we need that, more than food, regardless?

“Because summer’s gonna end soon enough. And stormfall’s next.” Dipan sighs, shaking his head.

Yuea snorts. “The fort will hold. It’s built for it, not like we’re going to be trapped out in the open. Which is good, because as Malpa decided to remind everyone, none of us really want to die.” Dipan and Seraha wince at her words, and even Kalip gives the woman an incredulous look. “But before we keep going on this, I remembered something. You get stronger when you keep promises, right?” She asks me. I’m about to try to explain it, but I know she already knows, and Yuea plows forward regardless. “Promise to take our advice on this.” She says. “You were gonna do it anyway. But if you promise now, you’ll get a little close to the next... next whatever it is you keep saying. These things.” She taps the term I use for a point of power.

Part of me still finds it strange to use **Small Promise** in this way, to build my personal power. I would have taken their advice, regardless. This feels *empty* in a way. And yet, the spell takes hold as I cast it, and the magic doesn’t seem to mind that I am using it in such a way.

While I am doing that, Dipan is studying the lists more closely. “Can I just say?” He says as the **Small Promise** settles in, “That it’s kind of worrying that you have a spell that can drain trust? That seems kind of bad, for a lot of reasons.”

Well, I don’t have it. I counter. That’s sort of the point. These are things I could learn. Though if you want to advise me not to select that one in particular, I will find it quite effortless to keep my promise to listen.

He gives a small grunt in acknowledgement. “Well, I’m with Jahnnny over there about crops, I think. Though there’s so many of these I can’t even ken. What happens when you subvert a summon?”

“Subvert’s a soldier word.” Kalip cocks his head to the side. “Well, for some of us. Mostly it means to take over, but stealthily.” He hums. “You told me you saw one of the other apparatus making those moving dirt things. You think those would be summons?” The bowman wonders aloud.

Seraha runs her weathered fingers across the marks on the wooden panes that I've made. "That soul has quite a lot of... ah, hah, apologies, I just realized how easily we are speaking of souls and magic." She gives a quiet smile. "This one has so many things that could serve to be reactionary, as Yuea so dislikes. Subversion, traps, very well suited to last minute efforts, isn't it?"

That soul belonged to a rather talented but ostracized singer. They had... a hard life. It required quite a lot of improvisation.

"I would love to hear their story, sometime." Seraha's smile infects her voice, and my beetles stir at the peaceful tone. "For now, though, can we agree that none of these are perhaps needed, and we should focus on the lists for authority, and rulership?"

Everyone present agrees, even Mela, though the younger woman seems slightly disappointed. I split my attention, pushing my new mind to a limit I didn't know was as far out as this. One of the two beetles scuttles over to her, and I write a private message to her, while the other beetle tracks the rest of the conversation.

As I listen to the others bat around options for **Authority** that all eventually circle back to '**Bind Crop** is simply too valuable to pass up', I also listen to Mela mutter to me privately. "I think they're skipping the memory one too easily." She tells me. "Hopestone and the mantra things you make? They make us into fledgling titans! And they make Kalip and Yu- well, Kalip, anyway, into a full one! Why wouldn't we want more?"

I wouldn't know what it would do. I tell her as Jahn and Kalip try to work out how much food a farm can produce. We need to find and recruit some actual farmers, with experience in this. *I had no idea what glimmer did when I took it, and I still don't fully grasp it. Mantra... well, I'll have to ask after that soon. And yes, it would probably be powerful, but I do feel safer having the option to react to things.*

"I'm... sorry." Mela bows her head in a bob. "I didn't think. It must be scary, huh?"

What must be? I ask.

"Being that." She shoots a look at my body. "Being so... helpless, I guess." Her eyes flick away, and a shadow passes over her face. "I know. I'd hate it too." It doesn't sound, as she whispers the words, like she's guessing at that potential feeling. Then she pushes it away, rapidly reverting to her previous mood. "Thanks for talking to me about it. You should answer Jahn's question, though." Mela tells me.

It's a nice sentiment, but I already have. *It is a fourth rank spell.* I've said of **Bind Crop**. *If it follows the same rules as **Bind Insect** did, then I believe, with the soul as it is, I could easily grow at least one plant to maturity in a day. Perhaps more? I would need to take it to truly*

know. But also, adding glimmer and mantra to the plants would enhance them, although I could not say how exactly yet.

“That reminds me.” Seraha says. “What should we do with the stones from the fallen?”

The what?

“The honeybees that fell against the creature guarding the apparatus. They had stones in them, we noticed when we were burying their bodies. We weren’t sure... but we removed them, just in case...” The elderly demon seems uncomfortable admitting to it.

I didn’t know. I write slowly. I had thought... no, of course. I added those spells to them through the bond, it only makes sense. Regardless, I do not begrudge you them. We are part of the same hive, they would not have wanted you to leave a tool behind that could keep you safe.

“...Thank you.” Seraha says solemnly. “It will be strange, learning to use the mantra from them.”

Ah. Perhaps, perhaps now *is* a good time to ask after what mantra does, exactly.

The explanation is surprisingly straightforward and rapid, when I ask them. The mantra from the bees makes them better at stabbing. Spears, mostly, but daggers as well in a small way. Thrusting stabs specifically. Just a little faster, a little sharper, a little more on target. Kalip says it doesn’t make him better at shooting, but that’s fine. *His* mantra does. Or at least, it does for anyone else. When Kalip holds it, he feels perfectly normal. But when he passes it off to Jahn as he walks the demon through some training drills, suddenly they can draw the bow just a little smoother, plant their feet a little more evenly.

The scholar and the cleric meet in the middle of my shared memories. *Mantra*. A repetition of something, part prayer, part meditation, an attempt to understand the self and the world. Glimmer is an ambiguous word, but *here*, the term seems almost uniquely fitted to the strange magic and my understanding of it.

They repeat the actions, and the mantra remembers. Their understanding of themselves turns into the magic of the world understanding how to change to fit what they need.

I wonder what a mantra passed through a hundred hands would look like. I wonder...

I think I would like the mantra back. I say. I think... I think I can pass them on.

“Of course.” Seraha says easily, and though Yuea looks mildly annoyed at it, the commander agrees as well. “Now. Do *you* have any thoughts on what your rulership soul should learn?”

*I do. I write, bringing my full focus back to the conversation. **Know Resource** would help me understand some small nuances in my magic. **Improve Tool** would be invaluable to helping us continue to develop into the future. **Drain Health** would keep us safe. Or, at the very least, it would let me take small bits of good health from volunteers during the safe months, and create a place of healing when it is needed. But in truth, I wish to take this calm time where we have a surplus to experiment. And I believe that **Stone Pylon** is what I would most like to know more about.*

“But... you can already make walls?” Dipan isn’t really asking if I can make walls. He is asking why I would want something that replicates a spell I already have. “Besides that, your idea for drain health seems... baaaaad? What if you kill someone by accident?”

“She wouldn’t do that!” Mela jumps to my defense.

Jahn folds their arms. “You cannot know that.” They say with a grumble. “The idea seems sound, but the risk that something goes wrong is very real. Perhaps, as the words are the same, you could test your percision with your magic that drains stamina first, but even then, there is no way to know for sure.”

*Jahn’s correct. I jump in before Mela can say anything else. I would not have guessed that she would be this empathic toward me, but then, I am learning quite a lot about the survivors that I did not fully internalize before now. *There is no way to know, and my idea would be a risk. If it is not needed, then I would not want to take that risk. But it is something to bear in mind. Regardless, to Dipan’s question, yes, I can make walls. Which is why I wonder, exactly, why this spell does not say **Form** within its name. The language of my magic is often obtuse, but it seems to be consistent in many ways, and I would explore that. However, I understand if it would be prefered that I take something more set to the group’s survival.**

At the end of the long table, Yuea laughs. She keeps the laugh going for a good while, too, before her weakened lungs turn it into a wheeze and she gasps her way back to speaking. “Ah, sorry.” She pushes Kalip off before he can get close to try to help her. “That got me!” The soldier gives a snort. “Kid, do you know what I’ve learned about you in the last few tendays together?” Yuea asks me. I don’t protest the use of the term, we’ve been over this already. “You’re a *survivor*.” She snarls the word, not in an unkind way, but like she’s imprinting it on the world. “You poke and you prod and you try new things, and when it really matters, you drag an answer out of the mud and you hit things with it until there’s space for the next problem.” Dipan raises a finger and opens his mouth like he’s about to protest Yuea’s horrible metaphor, but she keeps speaking, heedless of him. “If you tell me that you wanna make pillars, then make some pillars. We can live without the other tricks for a while.”

“I agree!” Mela chimes in. “Also, you can still use the pylons, if you take that, right? We’ll need walls for the farm, and for any new things we want to build if people gather here. So... it would help, right?”

“You’re getting a little ahead of things.” Jahn says, but they’re wearing a kind smile as they do so. “Also... other people... other humans?” They ask. “Because... well...”

“If they want to join up, they do it on our terms.” Yuea’s snarl this time is much less friendly. “And if they fuck around about it, I’ll handle it. I probably look broken enough none of them will expect me to slit their-“

Bind Crop and Stone Pylon it is then! I write rapidly, as Yuea keeps talking anyway, describing the highly effective ways she still has to commit violence. I do not select both of them now, instead settling on **Bind Crop** for the time being. I do not wish to be overwhelmed with the living memories that new spellwork brings. One memory, I can keep back for a little while. Two, slightly more challenging.

Six of my points vanish, and I am left with five. Five that becomes six, as the **Small Promise** considers itself somewhat filled, and rewards me with a rush of soft motes. Mixed with the other flows of power I have coming in, I am already pushed to a new point. Though the next one, as always, seems farther away than ever.

Thank you all. For your advice, and your friendship. I write.

“Anytime.” Dipan says, standing with a yawn. “Now, I’m gonna go grab some sleep, on a bed that isn’t made of dirt and sticks.”

“You’re on watch tonight.” Kalip flatly reminds him.

“Then I am gonna go be on watch, on a wall that isn’t made of dirt and sticks.” Dipan seamlessly corrects. “And *then* the other thing I said.”

There is some more chatter, but the survivors disperse rather quickly as the night winds down. The setting sun bringing darkness to the fort and the patch of the Green we are in that is oppressive. My bees help to fetch the children, who are mostly exhausted and ready to sleep without complaint. They are less good on watch at night, though. I should perhaps ask if any of them want to develop in that direction.

Or, perhaps, I should be more active in replenishing our ranks.

I reach out across the link of **Bind Insect** to the queen in the hive that we have not yet brought back from where it rests, one hill away. I need to use **Link Spellwork** and **Distant Vision** to do so, but I have plenty of both spells to make it work, and **Distant Vision** will be fully recovered before I spend the night casting my gaze far afield in search of anyone living.

Emanating off of the queen bee, there are echos of others. Her offspring, who I could easily pull into my spell without trying. But still, I feel that it is important, when I can, to ask. Especially when what I wish to do is a test of sorts, though my strange arcane instincts are guiding me

forward. So I do. And in answer to my call, the queen brings forward in my mind ten of the bees who have hatched from her since she was bound to me and bolstered by the glimmer.

The tethers to them form almost instantly, and I find them stronger and healthier than any of the honeybees the hive contained when I first found it.

To five of them, I give a simple task, and a request. *Stay with the hive for now. But if you can, it would help if you were suited to the dark.*

To the other five, I offer something else. And all of them accept instantly. I know, really, that simple bees are not quite capable of understanding what it is that I am asking. But I feel across our bond a kind of implicit trust in me. And I hope that what I am about to do does not betray that.

Hiding within **Bind Insect**, there are shadows. Echos, perhaps. Imprints of the loyal bees that previously trusted me, and fought for us, and died for us. And now, I reach out to five of those shadows, and I pull them forward. Touch them to the bonds with these new and eager bees.

Bind Insect's reserve of nothing-colored liquid empties like water splashed into thirsty soil. Each of the five chosen drink deeply of my magic, growing and reshaping into copies of those who came before them. Their minds remain unchanged; these are *not* the bees they once were, they are the new minds. But given forms that their predecessors had carefully built, a legacy for their hive to carry on.

The shadows have an empty space in them, though. And to this, I reach out with the last dregs of the spell, and touch on five of the salvaged mantra that the survivors left on the table in the meal hall with me. And one by one, those innocuous stone discs vanish from the world, dragged into the space where my magic resides, and imprinted once again on the bees who have offered their loyalty and trust to us.

Before the spell completely runs dry, I reach out to push thoughts of comfort to them. Of thanks, and of compassion. Tomorrow, they can join us here, and perhaps we can bring the hive itself along. But for now, I believe, it is time for everyone to rest.

Everyone except me, of course.

I have work to do.

And I begin it eagerly.