

**Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change**

**Available Power : 12**

**Authority : 7**

***Bind Insect (1, Command)***

***Fortify Space (2, Domain)***

***Distant Vision (2, Perceive)***

***Collect Plant (3, Shape)***

***See Commands (5, Perceive)***

***Bind Crop (4, Command)***

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**Nobility : 6**

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

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

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

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

***Drain Health (4, War)***

***Spawn Golem (5, Command)***

**Empathy : 5 ><**

***Shift Water (1, Shape)***

***Imbue Mending (3, Civic)***

***Bind Willing Avian (1, Command)***

***Move Water (4, Shape)***

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**Spirituality : 6 ><**

***Shift Wood (1, Shape)***

***Small Promise (2, Domain)***

***Make Low Blade (2, War)***

***Congeal Mantra (1, Command)***

***Form Party (3, Civic)***

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**Ingenuity : 5**

***Know Material (1, Perceive)***

***Form Wall (2, Shape)***

***Link Spellwork (3, Arcane)***

***Sever Command (4, War)***

***Collect Material (1, Shape)***

**Tenacity : 6 ><**

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

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

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

***Pressure Trigger (2, War)***

***Blinding Trap (5, War)***

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**Animosity : - - ><**  
**Amalgamate Human (3, Command)**  
**Congea! Burn (2, Command)**  
**Trepidation : -**  
**Follow Prey (2, Perceive)**

“Put me down.” The emaciated human woman rasps out as Yuea tries to settle her onto the sled of tied off boughs. “M-monster. Put me-“

Yuea drops her. Not hard, but perhaps less politely than one should handle a broken person. The woman whimpers as her leg twists on the hard ground, and Mela is there in an instant, the young heroic woman appearing like she was waiting for a situation. She starts to speak, but Yuea just snorts and turns away imperiously. “I’m not wasting my time helping someone like her.” She states flatly, stalking off.

Behind her, Mela crouches and tries to soothe the dropped woman’s worries, but the victim is having none of it, and weakly bats away Mela’s hands too. She’s trying to shout at the nearest bee, too, but the words are a barely audible croak.

I’ve been seeing a lot of this. These people don’t trust the honeybees. They don’t trust Yuea, or Fisher. A lot of them don’t trust Mela either, but many of those are the demons, and specifically the group of them that seem to be survivors of a shared military group. Though, Fisher has a very easy time with the other gobs; they’re still so young that information *is* their ideology, and simply telling them what’s going on is easy enough.

Mela and Yuea have fallen into a pattern of the older woman being called a monster, bluntly refusing to help someone, then Mela coming in and coaxing them out of their fear long enough to get them set up to start moving. It’s worked eighteen times so far, and while it’s not perfect, it’s a strange back and forth that I wasn’t expecting from them.

And yet. No matter how much Yuea puts up a shell around herself, no matter how perfectly noble she looks stalking away from the people who refuse her, no matter what she says...

I know that I’m a child, really. Sort of. But so many of my old lives were *old* lives. They lived well into their adulthoods, and maybe that influences me somewhat. But when I send a pair of bees after Yuea as she stomps away from the site of the battle with steps that crack the calcified ground beneath her, when I see her standing on the opposite side of the building, staring up at the sky while the corpses of a pile of silkspinnners block her from sight from the others...

She looks so young.

The bees don’t know why they should be comforting her. They don’t *really* understand yet, for all that their learning has accelerated greatly. But they do it anyway. Both of them pressing in on her sides, while I wonder if I should pull back and let this be a private moment.

“You know,” Yuea says suddenly, laying a hand gently on my crystal form, “I’m still trying to figure the spider things out.” Ah, deflection. Of course.

Personally, I don’t think it’s very surprising. The apparatus made one of them that did what it wanted, then repeated that several times. And when it hit the limit for what the spell could contain, it simply started recycling the shadows; pouring empty liquid magic into force-growing an random arachnid that it could find into a copy of one of its custom made soldiers. That explains the finite number, and the rapid replenishing. Including how it snuck one in far ahead of the others in the last fight. Also, they must have been *very* unstable, which would further limit numbers as they had to be constantly repaired by **Bind Insect**, and covers why they all rapidly died with their maker. I don’t know how they got the silk to be a pacification effect, but I also don’t care as it won’t matter anymore.

I don’t bother to communicate this, or even try. Instead I just sit there with my bees, trying to offer what comfort I can. And pretending I don’t notice Yuea clenching her fists so hard she’s almost certainly damaging her hands.

Her whisper takes away a lot of the doubt about how she’s feeling. “This would have been so much easier if they’d all just fucking died.” She says. Maybe to me, maybe to no one.

And that may be true. Cruel as it sounds, easy and hard are rarely moral judgements on their own. It would have been *simpler* if we didn’t have these people-as-problems. But they didn’t die, and we do have to deal with it.

What fascinates me is that Yuea gives another noise that’s half-sigh half-snort as she tugs at a loose feather that’s poking one of her ears, and talks like she’s answering me. “Yeah, I know.” She says, despite being unable to hear me at all. “Whatever. Let’s go figure out how to get these tarfuckers back to camp.” Yuea adjusts the chainmail she’s still wearing, and starts to step back around the pile of corpses. “Oh, and don’t panic.” She says casually.

I’m still processing that when a white furred demon who would have blended into the landscape if not for the tatters of clothing he was wearing lunges from his crouched position and strikes at her.

No, that’s not right. The bees feed me their interpretation of the dance of combat faster than I can think myself, and they have a clear view. He has a broken bar of false stone as a weapon, and he is aiming at *me*.

Yuea intercepts him without even pivoting. She offers up the pack with my body in it as a target, and then grabs his shoulder with her nearest hand. The man might be light from starvation, but it’s still a strange sight to watch Yuea hoist him over herself in an arc and slam him back-first into the terrain. His weapon spins away with a rattle as he starts shouting as loud as he can, either in pain or trying to call for help, it doesn’t really matter. Because Yuea has already drawn

one of her spare pistols, pressed the muzzle to his temple, and is halfway through lighting off the trigger.

Part of me knows what I am about to do will hurt. But I do it anyway. Pushing through the pain, I snap open our connection through **Amalgamate Human**. It is like fire in blood that I do not have, like something valuable toppling off the shelf across the room, like watching the needle approach your eye very slowly. It makes it hard to focus on anything but a one word command.

*Yuea, stop!*

She freezes, the man's face staring up at her like he's abruptly realized he is about to die. My bees arrive a second later, one tackling him, the other pushing Yuea back. She looks down at me from the corner of her eye, even as she replaces her pistol in its place. "Really?" She asks. "Even this guy?"

*Even him.* The words are glass rammed into fingertips. I cannot take it anymore. I snap the spell closed, drifting in the chaotic mess that my mind has started to slide back into.

I barely register Yuea going over and laying a hand on the bee that's keeping the demon pinned down. "You have no idea how lucky you are." She says to him, the words bouncing around my mind as I fail to find the source of my own magic and take back control of it. "If it were just me, I'd shoot you. But Shiny thinks you're worth keeping alive. So cut this shit out now, got it?"

The demon's strained reply, though, surprises even Yuea. "We won't... be... slaves again." He gasps out, trying to find something to hit the bee with. The honeybee is aware of this, and has already maneuvered to part of the ground where there isn't even anything sharp to collide with. "You can't... have..."

Yuea holds up a hand. "I'm gonna stop you there. That's not what's happening here. We're gonna take you back to a place with actual beds, get you some hot food, and then hunker down to let everyone recover. The slavery thing isn't on the map. Though, I suppose if you're trying to kill Sparkles, I get why you'd think that."

"You... you... just a tool to it..." The demon gasps. And I can see, legitimately, that there's pity in his tired eyes under the anger and exhaustion. "You can't..."

"I should get Mela over here for this." Yuea grumbles. "Look, he promised it's fine, okay? And I mean, like, some kind of chrysanthemum oath, like from the stories, sorta shit. I only look like this because I *asked*," Yuea uses the wrong word. I would have gone with 'demanded'. Perhaps 'coerced'. "not that it's any of your fucking business, opening with murder on the people who just saved you. Anyway, you'll get your own promises when Pretty here heals from the *miserable amount of damage* he took to get you out of there and kill your torturer." She flicks a hand, and the honeybee on the man gives Yuea what I can only assume is an

incredulous look, before slowly shaking themselves and moving their growing bulk off the pinned man.

She reaches down and offers him a hand, and a raised eyebrow. The demon searches her face, watching the bees as they trot off to help Fisher bring back another bundle of saplings from the far edge of the calcified ring we're in the middle of. He winces as he takes her hand, and lets Yuea haul him up. Yuea hides her own wince, but the two of them both rub their shoulders in almost the exact same motion when they're standing. "If this is a trick..." He starts to say.

"Oh, if it's a trick, it doesn't matter." Yuea cheerfully informs him. "I'm a monster, remember? Every one of you could band at me, and it wouldn't make a difference. And you won't, cause half of you are still too bigoted. Makes my job easier for now."

"The humans-"

"Don't give a shit." Yuea cuts him off. "You'll get along, or you'll all die. Just like we had to."

As my bees get out of range of her, I consider that *perhaps* I should leave at least one sentinel to keep an eye on Yuea personally, and not just trust that she'll be coming back with my body perfectly intact. The thought is appealing, but complicated by the way that we need every hale form we have in our group to finish this project and set out before nightfall. And before the problem of mortal logistics becomes a *much* larger problem.

These people need to eat. And they need a real sanctuary.

A lot of the demons, especially the soldiers, flinch when they see Yuea return. But their expressions soften into confusion when they see the demon soldier behind her, both alive and seemingly unfettered. I wish I could *talk* to these people. At least to offer them a **Small Promise** of reassurance. But even thinking the spell's *name* stings me.

There's only so much preparation that can be done, and only so many candles worth of day. I **Spawn Golem** another construct to haul the makeshift passenger sleds, and pretend I can't see the drained and hopeless tears from the people who watch it come together. It will be okay. We can prove it to them, that things will be okay.

Those that can walk and either decide to believe my friends or won't abandon their families rise to their feet. The others are loaded onto the sleds, stacked in uncomfortable piles. But we *manage it*, getting over thirty people ready to move.

I send four bees racing ahead down the road, to make their way back to the fort and alert the others. Have them meet us there.

I feel... tense. Foolish. Like there is more I could be doing, but I don't know what it is. Or more I *should* be doing, even if the best option is to simply trust that the others can handle it with what help I do have to offer. I start sweeping the territories I know the other apparatus operate in with **Distant Vision**, seeking any acceptable targets for a combination of **Link Spellwork** and **Drain Health**. I try to find Kalip as well, wondering when he will be rejoining us. But everything is blurred and under that strange false cover.

And then we set off. Toward home again. And I wait to be useful once more.