

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 14

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)

Some time ago, I used **Form Party** on a man name Kakoa, to create the shared bond between him, and myself.

Form Party is an exceptional spell. It allows me to connect people, or those bound to me, together with each other. Through it, they can know how everyone in the group is doing, physically and mentally. Get a sense for their relative location. Even communicate, if they focus.

Though, if I use it to pair myself to a living thing, it will rapidly kill them.

There is an implicit requirement of consent for the magic; I *could* forcibly hold a bond in place, but it would drain the spell at an immense rate, I think. However, when the man you have **Form Partied** with wishes only for death, and is under no incentive to tell you that it is killing him, or to break the cord of magic, then it has a miserable and predictable ending.

The only, *only* reason that I try it again now, is that knowledge that it can be broken if it is dangerous.

Slowly, as the spell comes together and latches on, digging its comforting wrap into both of us, I begin to get an impression.

Part accountant's ledger, part artist's canvas. A mix of notes about their body, issues they are facing, and slowly growing bubbles that can be filled with words to pass between the two of us. They don't have a name that I know, but there is, oddly, a space for it once I *do* know. It is strange to have a space devoid of information set aside like that in my conscious thoughts.

They are experiencing moderate depression, severe rest deprivation, and something called acute agoraphobia. I do not actually recognize that, which is interesting, as it means that the magic is not only interpreting my potential thoughts, but truly generating information. The other apparatus is also cracked, with a condition that is listed as 'surface break, inoperable soul'.

As with everyone I have met in this world since my reintroduction to it, they have ample reason to have been screaming out for help.

And as with everyone I have met, I reach out.

"Can you hear me?" I push the impression of words, spoken in my own voice, through the connection. And then I wait, patiently, for the time it takes for them to respond.

It takes some time. The **Link Spellwork** and **Distant Vision** trick lets me establish a party from range, but **Form Party** seems to make its own pace when those connected are this far apart. But despite that, a reply *does* come.

“Hello?” Trepidation, caution, fear. A small voice, but, an understandable one. Even if they are speaking in a dead language that the scholar only read about in books. And... that the merchant spoke fluently. I had not noticed that connection, before. Strange. “What are you?” The question should be normal, but **Form Party** lets me see their terror undisguised, as it begins to impact their thinking.

I wonder what I look like to them.

It doesn't matter, really, as I intend nothing less than complete honesty.

“Hello. My name is...” I forgot, briefly, that I do not *have a name yet*. In all the rush of life, it hasn't seemed to matter much. “Well, I don't know my name. But as for what I am, I am like you. My magic tells me I am an apparatus of change, but my species is not what I am, really. I am a friend. Or I will be, if you would like.”

It will take a little time for the message to reach them, but that is fine. Mela and Fisher are still trying to coax a batch of eels into buckets filled with river water, while Yuea keeps a sharp avian eye on the apparatus that is now settled on their muddy bank. She scratches at her plumage, tough fingers digging into the roots of her head feathers, even though I *know for a fact* that they don't itch the way she complains they do.

And after some time, their reply comes back. “You're like me. You're trapped in here too?” Their voice has the tone of a feminine elf, I think. But I don't know if that's enough to form a judgment of them. I might just be hearing their anxiety. “The human moved me. And she's trying to catch my fish. They can't eat them. They can't. They're mine. Please don't. They can't have them.”

The use of the word 'trapped' is an immediate cause for worry. “They are not trying to eat the eels.” I reassure the other apparatus. “The people around you are my friends. They have a tool that I lack, which is *hands*, and we thought that we might bring you and your fish friends somewhere safer. If you consent to it.”

It is another quarter of a candle before I hear a response, though I find that it is relaxing watching Mela try and fail to catch eels. I know that she will dry rapidly when out of the river and into the hot sun, but perhaps she would be more maneuverable in the water if she weren't wearing traveler's pants. The pockets cannot be streamlined.

“I can't touch them.” The other apparatus says. “What have you put around me? What do you want? Can you help me escape? Please help me. Get them away from me.”

If the small bits of information I have gleaned through **Form Party** weren't enough to make it clear, I think this would push me to acknowledge that my new potential friend has some problems with their mental stability. Not that I can blame them, I suppose.

“You’re in a **Fortify Space**.” I say with as much calm as I can muster. “Your eels would break it down if they were put in it, though... perhaps that could be avoided? I do not know, I’ve never worked *with* another of our kind. I put it there to prevent a misunderstanding. I didn’t want you to hurt my friends.”

“I wouldn’t!” The reply is snapped back, even if it takes some time to get to me. “I’m not bad! I’m not!”

“I didn’t think you were. It is for accidents, not malice.” While I speak with them, I let the others know through my arcane methods what is going on, and while Dipan takes the downtime as an opportunity for a nap, the others settle in to wait. “I don’t know if I can help you escape, we’d need to talk more. I don’t know if you can tell, but it is taking some time for our words to reach each other, because I am rather far away from you. And as for what I want, I really would like to be your friend, and to help you. I... I can tell that you are hurting. I don’t know how to help yet. But there is a lake near us that your eels could stay in, and we can find a place for you as well. But to get here, my friends will need to carry you. Would that be acceptable for you?”

I wait, and amuse myself by using the upper drops of the filled **Link Spellwork** to add mantra to various points around the fort’s kitchen. I also spend some effort to leave a note for Seraha, who is standing with her hands on her hips, staring at the slight raised portion of her counter.

“Why?” The word through **Form Party** can’t actually catch me off guard, but I have a strange memory surface from the singer, of climbing a set of stairs and taking one step too many. An awkward stumble, made worse by the fact that the stairs were in someone else’s secure keep.

Again, I opt for honesty. “Because I want to. I want to be kind, and so I will. And, also, because the world is terrifying, and there are those who would rather kill us both for their own power. And I believe together, we will be stronger. And with that strength, I will be better able to protect those we both care about. My friends. My bees. Your eels. You. All of us.”

More waiting. I don’t think I have the time to make another glimmer creature. Instead, I use **Distant Vision** to sweep over the thin sliver of area that the silkspinnings were using as a road. It is still empty, and unfortified, up to the point where my last fight with them was. Repeat checks are needed to ensure there is no attack coming, though I know that bloodying the other apparatus is not the end of this fight.

I know there are words coming, and what the answer is, before they actually arrive. Because I watch as, giving it another possibly futile try, Mela actually manages to get an eel into a bucket.

“I’m sorry. Take me with you. Don’t leave me here. Please don’t leave me here. I’m sorry.”

I remember knowing people who apologized like that. I remember *being* someone who once apologized like that. Telling them there is nothing to apologize for is meaningless. Instead, I

focus on the task at hand. “Thank you. We’ll get you back, though it’s a bit of a walk. Your eels will be okay in the buckets for a day or so, I hope? Otherwise we will need to arrange something. Also, as they walk, please do not do anything to my friends.” I worry that repeating it might cause them stress, but better to establish the boundaries now.

By the time the reply comes, the eels are all coiled rings of fish flesh within their temporary pail homes. “Nothing. I will do nothing. But the water. I can move it. Can’t feel it, but I can move it. Keep it where they need it. I will do nothing. Thank you. Thank you. Please stop talking. I’m sorry. Thank you.” Frantic words and fading terror. Their mind is still crumbling, I can almost see them losing track of their own thoughts amid their fear. But I don’t think they are malicious, and I *certainly* do not think there is room for subterfuge across **Form Party**. Not unless there are very specific magics that allow for it.

I do decide to oblige the other apparatus of the request for quiet. Sending only one last message of “I will let you be in peace, now. Tell me if you need anything.”

I reach across a wide distance with **Shift Material**, and carve a message into the dirt. *They are calm enough to move.* I tell Yuea. *I think Dipan was right, they do care about the eels. Keep the buckets steady.*

Yuea says something, and then has to look around for one of the bees that are lurking around the riverbank with the others when she realizes I can’t hear her. I can almost see her face screwing up in concentration, and I want to sigh. I *could* connect to her with **Amalgamate Human**, but the cost to **Link Spellwork** for that is unreasonably higher than simply moving some dirt or speaking to a bee. In short order, though, she shrugs and just kneels down to drag a toughened finger through the mud.

Not gonna stab us, right? She has written, and then looks up at the sky as she points over at the other apparatus.

I *want* to spend a great deal of time explaining that I am not looking down on her from above, but I did just complain about unneeded waste of my magics. So instead, I spend a tiny drop of my spells to add a simple *No* under my last message.

She pulls a face, but stands anyway, itching at her feathers. Yuea says some more words to no one, probably something vulgar, before she turns and calls to the others on the bank.

I keep an eye on them as they begin to head back, everyone rapidly realizing how heavy a bucket full of water is as their return trip starts. I keep an eye on the approach path of the enemy apparatus. I keep more eyes slowly sweeping through a massive arc of the Green, searching for anything threatening or friendly. I keep a number of eyes on the fort, and the people in it, especially the children.

It is a beautiful sunny late summer day. And while I have many things I need to do, I can do them quickly and without too much focus. My focus, aside from half-watching **Distant Visions** and being alert for any notice through my **Form Party** link, I think, would best be served by being spent on helping a group of human and demon children, and two new gobs, play a game of water tag.

And, to my surprise, some of the adults, once the fun starts. I had not thought of Malpa as an especially playful man, but the children shriek in delight when he catches them and uses them as squirming shields against the orbs of water I move across the courtyard. Muelly and Jahn watch from the sidelines, until Sharpen dodges past one of them and the orb trailing them splashes against Jahn's back, and suddenly, he is part of the proceedings as well. Though Muelly stoically ducks when I try to include her.

The second time I try to 'accidentally' add Muelly to the game, though, something shifts in me. She has a hand up, like she's trying to slap the water out of the air, but it's more than that. I feel a *pull* from her; a request of sorts. I wasn't expecting it already, not here or now, but I say yes, just to see.

And she catches the ball of water.

And then, with a massive flat toothed grin, flings it into Malpa's staring open-mouthed face.

It has been a good day.