

Assault

They waited until the night crew left the city, which was just after midnight. Zach, Vitor, Bera, and Naha stood at the edge of the forest. Ready for the assault. The rest were heading to the mines to take care of that part of the mission.

“I’ll keep us all in communication,” Bera said. “Though some of their powers might interfere if they notice, so be prepared for it.”

Naha nodded, she already had her True Link active linking her to Zach, they couldn’t talk over it, but they could feel each other and get impressions of their feelings. If Bera’s communication failed, at least they would have something else to rely on.

“I’ll send the signal once everything is ready,” Naha said, she took one last look at Zach and got a smile and a nod in return. Then she pulled shadows around herself and rushed across the clearing to the city walls. She wore all of her gear. Robes that gave made her shadow powers better, that made her harder to detect. With her **Circlet of True Mirrors** all of her attunements twice as effective. Her shadow powers were so powerful that she doubted there was anyone who could detect her.

Still, she took her time, she climbed the wall, remembering an area where two sentries had low visibility, she slipped by them and entered the city. Then, she made her way down the streets until she reached the first gate guardhouse. She entered through open windows and sneaked around guards walking around or talking to one another as they prepared to go to sleep. In the corner of the guardhouse she dropped a small box. She left and did the same thing to the second guardhouse.

Once she got to the third one, she paused. The doors were closed, and she heard laughter inside. Through a window, she saw people sitting around a table, playing cards. Her target wasn’t there, but she saw the light beneath the doors across the room, and besides, she could feel the shadows inside the guardhouse. With all her boost and gear, the range she could sense the shadows was nearly the entire district. Her target was inside the room at the end. She used **Shadow Step** to enter the room,

her **|Of Measure and Shadow|** told her that the guards around the table were of no consequence to her. They didn't detect her, obviously. She moved through the shadows of the dimly lit room and she slipped beneath the doors leading into the Commander's office. He sat behind a desk, looking over papers on it. His uniform jacket was folded on a nearby chair, leaving him only in a shirt. That was fortunate, it meant that she didn't need to worry that much about blood. She moved through the room as the ravzor failed to notice anything strange. She took a moment to study him, she had already surveyed him, both in the mirror world and from afar, but she had to get this exactly right. She used her skill, **|Perfect Imitation: My Skill, Mirror Image|**, and felt his mannerisms settle into her.

She moved behind him, then with her left hand she grabbed his mouth, keeping it closed even as she stabbed Illuiy into his head, using **Dark Mind Dagger** to take his memories. They filtered into her mind as he died, his most recent ones the most clear. Slowly, she took him out of the chair and laid him on the ground behind the table. She cut off a piece of his ear, then put it in her mouth and swallowed, adding his form to her repertoire.

Next, she disrobed him and finally put his body into her storage. Once she was done, she assumed his appearance with **Greater Form Shift**. Her ring of **Ring of True Shapeshifter Identity** changed her screens to those of her form and she felt his persona settle over it. Her sense of self change as he became someone else. The change was always fluid for him when he changed genders, he was always himself, always comfortable in his skin.

He changed into the other ravzor's clothes and put all of his gear on. He walked over to the door, then knelt and placed a small box near the doorframe, then walked out of the room.

"Commander!" One of the guards at the table startled and made to stand, but he waved his hand.

"Continue on," Naha said in a deep voice. "I have some business to take care of in the second district."

“We’ll gather an escort right away—”

“—What? You don’t think that I can take care of myself?” Naha said with a scowl, keeping in character.

“Of course not, sir,” one of the guards said, looking unsure.

Naha locked the door behind him, then started walking. “I’ll be back soon.”

He walked out of the guardhouse and made his way across the district to the large building blocks where the slaves were being held. He talked with the guards, made small talk and implied that he was there for an unannounced inspection. It was easy to find the areas that he had scouted out earlier, with the commander’s keys he entered and then placed larger boxes in hard to notice places. Once he was done with all six building blocks, he made his way to the abandoned area of the city. Once there, he took his clothes off and shifted back into her prime form.

She put all her gear back on, then reached out to Bera over the link she placed on her.

“First phase complete,” Naha just said, and then dropped into the shadows. Silently, she changed her inner flesh, partial shifting her arms, legs, and skin, stacking her **Primal Strength** buff, +45% to strength. Quickly, she moved across the first district to the walls of the second. She moved toward the first of the three gatehouses. One of the taken was inside, her skill told her that he was powerful, but power was relative. He was looking over papers in his office, and just like the traitor in the first district, she moved through the shadows. Once she was behind him, she attacked in the same way. No need to change what worked.

Attacking from shadows gave her a boost to damage of 200% via her **Shadow Stab** skill perk, she attacked a weak point, a flaw, the spine, and that made it a **Critical Strike**, increasing the damage by another 150%. Her attunements with her circlet made her shadow powers 240% more effective, and another 15% with her **Shadow Paragon’s Affinity**. With [**Paragon’s Blow**] and **Dark Heart Dagger**, she struck the taken in the head. She felt his stats drain into her as he died, and she pulled his body in her storage.

She moved out of the guardhouse and made her way to the next one. One of the taken was asleep, a human woman. Naha killed her quickly and moved on to the last guardhouse. The taken commander wasn't in there, so she expanded her search, and found him in the bathhouse nearby. She reached into the pool and pulled him out of the water before **Shadow Step**-ing away along with him. She killed him behind the building. She didn't want to leave blood in the water.

With the three guardhouses down, she made her way to the barracks. Taken soldiers slept, and a score of them kept guard. Naha slipped past them and moved through the building. She found three commanders standing together around a table. Immediately, she realized that this would require a bit more effort.

"The Grand Commander took too many," one of them said as Naha lurked through the shadows.

"It was needed, the sect army is a big threat."

So they did know about it, they had assumed so when they emptied the city of monsters and taken.

"We've left the city dangerously empty," the third one added.

"It was necessary," the first one said. "Besides, what do you think? That the nearby kingdoms will decide to attack as well? It is unlikely, that they will break the agreements, we are paying them too much."

Naha paused as she was about to make her move. That was... interesting. The taken were paying the surrounding kingdoms not to attack them. That would make sense why some had been so against going to war. And she could even see it. Aside from the black veins beneath their skin, the taken were... as they had been before. Zach had told her that the black was not a corrupting influence, but actually a well of power, the Essence of Hastur, granted to the taken to increase their power.

"They are going along with it because they benefit, if they think that they have a chance to just take..."

Another of the taken waved his hand. "The Sect army is probably already dead, you heard the plan, they'll get demolished."

“Yeah, probably,” the other taken shook his head. “Okay, what are we doing about tomorrow’s shipment, we lack the...”

Naha waited for a bit to see if they would start talking about important things again, but they changed the topic to slaves and their quotas. Once she was sure they wouldn’t say anything, she acted.

She moved behind one of them, while she used her **Paragon’s Shadow** to instruct her shadow to move behind another. She had to take them out at the same moment, to minimize the chance of them somehow raising an alarm. She didn’t know what kind of arrays, formations, or abilities, they had. Her sense narrowed down to the third taken as she and her shadow took positions. Then she attacked. Illuiy stabbed her target through the head, just as her shadow mirrored her attack on the second. The third was impaled by a shadow through the throat, with her **|Of Stabs and Shadow|**.

She moved quickly and finished the third one off as his eyes widened and his hand went up to his throat. A stab through the temple killed him too.

With those three dead, she stored their bodies, locked their room, then moved through the barracks and placed boxes in key locations, all unseen. Then she left the barrack. She made her way to the third district, and the sole guardhouse, she entered but couldn’t find a taken commander. She placed a box in the corner of the room while taken soldiers and guards laughed and talked in the common room. Then she found a building which housed the dog like monsters, and placed a box in there too. They didn’t know how it would affect them, but it couldn’t hurt to try. Finally, she glanced at the fort. It was defended, guards stood on balconies and on the roof, as well in front of it. She hadn’t seen the inside of it, so she didn’t try to enter, instead she moved out of the final district. A few minutes later, she found an abandoned house and entered.

“Phase two done,” she sent to Bera.

“Zacharia and Vitor are moving into the city,” Bera sent back.

Naha changed form into the ravzor commander and put on his uniform. Then he made some cuts on his body, ripped the uniform a bit

and drew blood. After that, he pulled out a small formation and triggered it. The gas that Vitor concocted released all across the city.

He started running toward the third district gate, yelling.

“Attack, attack! Assassins at the gates!”

The guards looked at him running, bleeding and yelled back, a runner hurried for the fort and entered as he reached the gate house. They questioned him, and he gave nonsensical answers, a shadow attack and killed them all. An explosion sounded from the first wall, Zach and Vitor entering the city and following the plan.

The startled guards didn't see him attack, so fast that by the time he slit the fifth throat the first one noticed that they had been attacked. He moved into the shadows and pulled his clothes off as he shifted back into his prime form. She put her gear back on as more guards reached the guardhouse where five dead taken now covered the floor.

The doors of the fort opened and a big taken walked out, carrying a large hammer on his back. He jumped high in the air, the jump taking him in an arc that would have him land near the explosion. More taken and monsters rushed out of the fort, the doors to a balcony near the top of the fort opened and a flash of blue fire shot straight across the city, too fast for her to react. The last taken followed the karura spread her wings and made to follow as an army spilled out of the third district. Naha stepped through the shadow.

She left beneath the karura in the air, and grabbed her throat with her clawed hand. The karura's eyes widened, and a blast of wind tried to push Naha away, but it couldn't match her strength. Naha pulled and started stabbing the taken in the stomach, a shadow rose and tore her wings apart and they started tumbling down. Her last strike buried Illui through the bottom of karura's mouth, the blade leaving through the top, killing the taken.

Before they hit the ground, she shadow stepped away, and then a roar shook her. A monster jumped from the fort's roof, shattering the stone. It was a mass of eyes grafted on limbs, several heads, which were all

eyeless screamed as tendrils moved it around. One look at it told her that it was a general, and all heads turned in Naha's direction.