

Shadows

The dome monster roared, its six eyeless heads shaking wildly. Its body was a bulbous mass from which dozens of tendrils stuck out, each covered with eyes. It was a general, and somehow, it could follow Naha as she moved through the shadows. Her stealth, ineffective against it. Its body bulged, and then its six heads opened up and sprayed a green sludge like liquid in her direction, as if it was pushed through a hose. **|Of Shadow's Stride and Elusion|** let Naha slip away in a blur her speed increasing with her **Shadow Slip**, just enough that she got away in time. The entire wall behind Naha disappeared as stone melted. She glanced back, and saw buildings behind the wall, at least an entire block all reduced to a melted globs of what had once been buildings.

Immediately, Naha **Shadow Stepped** away and into the city. She shouldn't fight an opponent that could track her, nor was there any need. She had to join Zach and Vitor and help them. Two of the taken had already gone in their direction, she had to hurry.

She rushed through the shadows, covering half the second district in seconds, leaving the dome monster far behind. Her **|Perfect Danger Sense: My Sense, Shadow Aura|** flared, an aura of shadow entering her vision. With **Shadow Anticipate** her body dropped into her shadow and avoided the attack.

The ground where she stood exploded as something smashed into it from above. A taken stood up, wearing two thick and powerful looking knuckledusters. The human glared at her, and without a word jumped forward, moving incredibly fast. With **Shadow's Intent**, she felt the attack coming in from behind her. A band of energy headed in her direction, intent on binding her in place. Before either of the attacks arrived, Naha blurred away and through a building nearby. The human with knuckledusters followed after her, knocking down the wall as he pursued. His partner, the caster type followed above the building. Naha could feel a female demasi running over the rooftops. And she felt something else. As she reached the other side of the building, she stopped suddenly and turned. The taken

behind her was surprised for a split second as she lashed out with Illuivy and another dagger that she pulled out of her storage.

With **|Perfect Lacerate: My Strikes, Tearing Apart|** she opened two long gashes on his forearms, making him bleed. The wall and half of the room behind her disappeared as it was melted away, the dome monster had followed her—it was faster than she thought. Naha, slipped by the human taken as he stepped back to defend, and blurred through the shadow out of the building and into the street. She could feel more taken, weaker, the soldiers, coming behind. Lances of white energy harassed her as she ran down the streets, but no matter how deep the shadow she entered, they still saw her.

Her skills and intuition told her that it was the dome monster that was detecting her, and somehow the others were able to share that. *A link of some kind?* She couldn't afford the time to find out. A group of wolf-like dome monster rounded a corner and moved to cut her off. Naha jumped straight through them, her daggers blurring and shadows rising to strike as she cut them to pieces. A crack behind her alerted her to a shockwave the size of a wagon coming after her. She dodged, and the wave hit a building, pulverizing a wall. The human behind her had his fist extended, and then he flashed with light and started striking forward with his fist, sending waves of power at her and she ran down the street as buildings exploded and sent debris flying in all directions.

Naha was being herded; they were surrounding her. The monster, if it was the only thing that could see her, she had to take it down first. They were early in their plan, and already things had gone awry.

Taken soldiers ran across the floors and started throwing arrays down which activated, walls of light tried to impede her, but she crashed through them, chains rose to bind her, but she cut them off. It all slowed her down. A blast of high-pressure liquid burst from the building next to her, and she twisted activating **[Shadow Embrace]**. The edge of one of the streams hit her hand, and she felt the shadow that sheathed her tremble. The streams moved and hit her directly, after just a moment her defense faltered, but not before she managed to get away. The small amount of liquid still remained,

it fell on her clothes, and she felt the burning on her skin. Her stats were high enough to survive for a bit. She ripped her clothes off as she shifted into her shadow stalker form using **Primal Metamorphosis**. She dashed up the side of the building, faster on four legs. Her claws biting into the stone. She landed on the roof, among a group of taken preparing to attack from above. She laid into them, **[Shadow Bite]**, and she bit one's head off, she felt an ideal rearing to manifest—**[Paragon's Charge]** she smashed into the taken that had tried to use it and with **[Paragon's Strike]** rending him apart with claw and tooth. She jumped to the next roof, heading toward the second row of walls. Then chains of light caught her, one of the commanders, the demasi taken, had managed to catch up.

Naha flexed her body to try and break them but found the bindings getting stronger the more force she used. She kept struggling as the human landed next to the demasi taken. With a glare, Naha looked at the demasi and used **Shadow's Gaze**. The woman's screens filled the corner of her eyes, and with the speed of thought she scanned through until she saw what the woman used to bind her. She was a tier 9 in her class, tier 4 in skills, she was holding Naha with a passive power from her oath. The more Naha struggled, the more powerful the bindings would become. The human spread his legs, and got ready to unleash another attack at the bound Naha. She assumed that both were on the same level of power, and she saw more people running over the rooftops, monsters growling beneath her on the streets, and the thunderous sound of the general rolling down the street. She felt an ideal forming around the human, focusing on his fists.

—Strike of the Mountains—

She stopped struggling for a moment, then focused all her willpower on her skill.

I will always strive for freedom.

She felt her desire lock in, a part of her forever firm.

The world turned dark as a wave of force headed in her direction. The bindings around her slipped through her body as it turned to shadow, and

she simply stepped out of the way with **|I Turn to Shadow and Stride|**. She flashed away as the rooftop, the building and two blocks beyond it were pulverized, another four were pelted with debris that shattered buildings. Naha moved faster now, through the shadows, among the buildings, getting out of sight. Her sense told her that the monster had lost sight of her, everyone around her was confused as to where she was. She used her **Circlet of True Mirrors** and sent two illusions running in two different directions, both still in her shadow stalker form. She shifted into her prime form as she felt the monster and the taken forces detect one of her illusions and focus their attention there.

She ran away again and stopped in a small basement. The second district had filled with enemies, far faster than she had thought it would, with more than she had expected. They had immobilized most of them with the gas, but the fort had to have held more of them than they thought.

She wanted to rejoin Zach, but bringing the enemy forces to him will only make things harder for him. He had to secure the slaves. She pulled out two vials and downed them immediately. She had prepared for this, had talked with Zach and made plans. The **Eternal Elixir of Pure Willpower** and the **Eternal Elixir of Shadows** burned down her throat. Then the world changed, she felt the shadows closer than they had ever been, her sense expanded to cover the entire city and she found even more of the enemy forces moving than she had thought there were. Many were headed to the first district, where she could sense Zach and Vitor both fighting with powerful taken, more forces headed their way.

She felt the dome general destroy her illusion and the two taken commanders pause, her second one got caught a few moments later. She took a breath, and she felt the shadows around her breathe with her, almost in anticipation. Her skills trembled beneath her skin. She let her willpower out along with her ideal.

—Grasp of Shadows—

She walked, her body a shadow with no physical presence. All the shadows in the city were hers, and she moved them, focusing on the enemy forces moving. Hands reached out and grabbed hold of them, then the spikes of shadows impaled them, snuffing them out. The enemy started evading and fighting with her hands, trying to save their lives. The demasi taken took to the sky as the human punched the ground and shattered the hands, then jumped up as well. The demasi raised her hand and—

—Binding Light—

A white sun pushed on Naha's shadows, it would've probably banished them, if she hadn't downed the shadow elixir. She let her image spread through the shadows, deepening them, making herself stronger. Then Naha pushed her willpower against her own ideal, she could keep her shadows physical despite the light, but she needed more to advance against the taken's ideal.

Shadow provided shelter from the terrible and burning light.

Shadow protected from light's bindings.

Shadow gave you freedom.

Shadow was closer now, she was made of it, she could feel it. The light above might be banishing some of the shadows, but it also made the rest deeper, stronger. Light and shadow. One burned, and the other sheltered. Hands rose from the ground, woven with shadows and grabbed the two taken in the air, a mass of arms grabbed the ideal made ball of light. She snuffed the ideal out, her image trembling against the light. Then she pulled the two taken to the ground. The demsai woman turned to light and blinked away, she burned her oath's ability, the one that let her escape any binding. The human struggled, shockwaves left his body and toppled buildings all around him as Naha's hands brought him to the ground.

She walked through the shadow, almost sliding through them now and reached the struggling human. Her left hand stabbed the dagger in his chest

as spikes of shadow pierced his entire body. With Illuiy she stabbed his head, draining his stats. She leaned down and bit his ear off, then chewed and swallowed before picking up his pants and knuckledusters.

The general went mad and started spraying the city in random patterns, searching for her. Its acid was powerful, but it couldn't harm what was just a shadow. The city around her was disappearing, reduced to melting stone, and Naha walked through the shadows. Killing taken and dome monsters trying to escape. The shadow was pulsing inside of her, every pulse deepening it around her, getting stronger.

The demasi taken floated above her, sending light burning chains through the streets, dispelling Naha's shadow arms and freeing the taken.

Naha could hear the chaos, the fighting of the taken and thunderous movement of the acid monster.

She shifted, changed forms into the human she had just killed. She let the shadows falter, let them tremble and then fell back to their normal boundaries. Just simple shadows, and yet everyone still jumped at the ones that were their own.

Naha, clawed his body, opened up wounds. Then jumped through a wall of a building. He shook his head as he landed on top of a roof, breathing quickly.

The demasi woman blinked next to him.

"Are you alright? Where is it?"

In an instant, Illuiy was in his hand and the grasping shadows caught the woman's legs and held her in place. The dagger slammed through the woman's chest even as Naha's head shifted into that of a beast and then jaws closed over the demasi's throat.

There was a widening of the eyes on the woman's face, but she wasn't fast enough to do anything. Naha bit down and then twisted, tearing the head from body.

The general noticed the death and sprayed acid in her direction, but Naha shifted back to her usual form and turned to shadow again and slipped down the building. Walking blocks with each step.

Shadow trembled inside of her, and she let it out again. Hands rose from the shadows and caught the enemy. Taken were being strangled, stabbed, or just pulled against the ground.

Two dozen hands rose and Naha caught the general, wrapped him in the hands of shadows. It moved, ripping through them, but there was always more, slowing it down. With every pulse of shadow, new arms rose from the ground. Her notifications flashed, but she ignored them. Her shadow rose around her, higher, greater, a whirling mess of arms and daggers, her image manifesting itself stronger than ever.

The sky faded away, the moon and the stars. Only a black canvas was above them. View distance shrank, and shadows danced in the flickering light.

The stone cracked as the general moved, and the sounds of buildings coming down filled the city.

Shadow was her home, and she knew that it always would remain so, that it would never abandon her, for she would always have her own shadow. *That her home was where she was.*

|I Walk Through All Shadows|

She stepped, and passed through a shadow, as easy as taking a step on a stone. She reached the general and it spewed acid at her immediately. Shadows rose and wrapped around her, enforced by **[Shadow's Embrace]**, and the acid splattered around her. A tendril reached out to hit her, but she stabbed it with Illuiy and with a **[Paragon's Strike]** cut it off. She pulled the general to the ground with her grasping hands, binding it on the floor and stabbing it with daggers wrought with shadow. The shadows pulsed, and she felt something... All around her were deep shadows, gazing into each she could feel the depths of the Shadow Realm beyond, connected with every shadow. Connected with her. The connection snapped into place, and her mind darkened. Her thoughts as if she was observing them through a shadow.

She opened herself more, felt the shadow seep into her very soul. The world around her trembled, and she raised a hand. **Shadow's Judgment** formed above the general, a giant fist made out of the shadows around her,

infused with her ideal and image. She smashed it down into the general, and the shadows beneath it trembled. The fist pushed the general and it fell through the darkness beneath it. Naha's mind cleared and she realized what she had done.

The taken in the district that were still alive and struggling suddenly stopped as Naha focused all of her willpower on them. Grasping hands reached out and caught every single one of the thousands from the taken forces. And then she pulled them down, into the Realm of Shadows. In an instant, the sounds of battle were gone, leaving only the silence and shadow.

Naha rose on a pillar of shadow, high above the buildings and saw that the first district was on fire, she saw fighting and destruction. She headed that way.