1506 Heart of Twilight

The Crown of Twilight was more than a Supreme Memory. It was also the symbol of power that Daeron, the Serpent King, had wielded, as well as the key to the enchantment array enveloping his city.

Therefore, the person wearing it was immune to the influence of frozen time... in a way.

'Curse it all...'

There was a cost to remaining unaffected by the frozen time. Looking around, Sunny felt his essence being devoured at a frightening rate — the Crown was using it to protect him. Usually, his reserves would have been drained in a matter of seconds, turning him into another prisoner of Twilight... but, luckily, the Crown was also helping him replenish the spent essence.

He was still losing more than he was gaining, but at least the rate of attrition was not too great. Sunny would not have been able to traverse the entire city, but now that he was most of the way to the palace, he stood a good chance.

As long as he did not waste any time.

'I should hurry.'

Their exit from Soul Stealer's mirror realm must have been a violent one, because Sunny was not on the square anymore. Instead, he found himself somehow thrown a few hundred meters away from his previous position, at the edge of the inner district they had been aiming for.

He was protected by the Crown, but his shadows were not. Therefore, Sunny had kept them tightly wrapped around his body in advance, just in case disaster struck. Now that it had, he did not dare send them to search for his companions.

Mordret had to have sent everyone into the real Twilight. Here in the true version of the lost city, Soul Stealer was just as powerless as the rest of the frozen abominations... but the rest of the cohort had become frozen in time, as well. So had the Prince of Nothing himself.

It was all up to Sunny.

'We'll find each other when I deactivate the array.'

Turning his back to the frozen battlefield, Sunny dashed forward. He ran as fast as he could, barely dodging the motionless figures of the warriors of Twilight, who all seemed to have been moving in the same direction as him.

Here in the inner districts, there were very few rampaging Nightmare Creatures. However, the signs of destruction were everywhere, as if the city had withstood a devastating bombardment — many buildings had been entirely shattered, and numerous people had perished under the rubble. Blood was flowing like a river, frozen in time like the rest of Twilight.

Sunny was an Ascended Terror, and so, his running speed was far past being superhuman. He navigated the frozen city as best he could, but it was hard to maintain that speed on the crowded streets. On more than one occasion, he failed to react in time and collided with the frozen warriors of Twilight or pieces of shattered stone hanging in the air.

Each time, he was tossed back, as if hitting an indestructible wall. The people and objects frozen in time were completely immune to outside influence — and so, he could only avoid them.

'Argh, damn it...'

Finally, he was forced to slow down. This close to the palace, there were too many people for him to run, and too many destroyed buildings to try moving across the rooftops. Using Shadow Step was only going to rob him of precious essence, so he had to continue on foot.

After struggling for several minutes, Sunny finally pushed his way through the crowd of frozen warriors and entered the heart of Twilight.

In front of him, separated from the buildings by a vast, ravaged park, stood the Serpent King's palace.

However, Sunny did not pay any attention to its magnificent grandeur and unique architecture. Raising his gaze, he looked at the grandiose dome of the palace and shuddered.

'W—what the hell...'

A harrowing, beautiful creature was perched on top of the cracked dome, its talons piercing the crumbling stone. Its glistening scales were the color of the midnight sky, appearing entirely black in the dim twilight of the early dawn. Its vast wings were open, obscuring the heavens. Its sinister eyes burned like distant, cold stars, full of malevolent will and merciless fury.

It was a dragon.

The dragon's terrifying maw was wide open, frozen in the middle of a deafening roar. Porcelain fangs glistened in the dismal darkness, each resembling a sharp mountain peak.

The tyrant of the night sky was beautiful... no, it should have been. But, instead, it somehow appeared dreadful and utterly hideous. A vile, tyrannical aura emanated from the giant creature, suffused with festering madness. Even unmoving, it instilled Sunny with cold terror.

...That dragon was the target of the countless warriors who were rushing toward the palace. They assaulted him like a sea, only to be broken, mutilated, and thrown back. Blood and mangled bodies were falling down like rain, frozen in the air by the halted time.

Sunny allowed himself to remain still for a moment, enthralled by the eeriness of this harrowing scene.

'The Dread Lord...'

So, the Dread Lord had attacked the heart of the city directly. Daeron's palace was already partially destroyed, its dome on the verge of collapsing. It was unclear if the throne room even existed anymore.

Sunny gritted his teeth and rushed forward.

'There is... something eerie about this scene.'

The hideous dragon made for an ominous and startling sight, but the warriors of Twilight were equally haunting. The way they threw themselves into the maws of death without a hint of doubt or agitation made Sunny feel uneasy. There were mundane humans among them, as well... surely, they realized that nothing they could do would harm the Defiled Saint.

Did they really know no fear?

Throwing the unnecessary thoughts out of his head, Sunny climbed over the rubble and entered the palace. He did not have a lot of essence left, so there was little time to find the throne room.

Once there, he would also have to figure out a way to use the Crown of Twilight and deactivate the defensive array. Sadly, it did not come with an instruction manual...

'Damn it, damn it, damn it all!'

Sunny followed the widest of the corridors, hoping that they would lead him to the throne room. Daeron had been a Sovereign, and brought a cohort of Saints with him into the Tomb of Ariel... surely, he would have built his palace to accommodate their Transformation Abilities.

Most of the areas within the palace were only meant for humans, but the truly important places had to be large enough for Saints. Otherwise, if an enemy suddenly attacked, they would not be able to show their strength.

The throne room would, without a doubt, be one of these important places. At least Sunny hoped so, knowing that he did not have enough time left to scour the entire palace.

Soon, a huge gate appeared in front of him — now broken and turned into a pile of debris. Behind it was an enormous hall. Stark rays of light fell through the cracks in the dome above it, plunging it into twilight.

At the center of the hall was a tall dais, with an imposing throne on top of it. The throne was cut roughly from stone...

More precisely, it was cut from a single slab of lusterless black stone. Sunny stared at it for a brief moment.

'Found it.'

Daeron's throne... all of it... had been cut from a fragment of the Estuary.

It was the lock of the defensive array of Twilight, while his crown was its key.