1507 Twilight Throne

Sunny stared at the black throne. The grand hall of the Serpent King's palace was empty and dim, stone debris littering the floor and hanging in the air, dust particles frozen in the stark rays of light. Despite the cataclysmic battle happening outside, it was perfectly silent — except for the hoarse sounds of his breathing.

'Right. Let's do this...'

He felt a complicated mix of relief, anticipation, and dread. Relief and anticipation because he had made it in time, dread because the battle against the horde of the Defilement would resume the moment he accomplished his task.

The monstrous Soul Stealer, the harrowing Dread Lord... they were going to have to fight these beings. Sunny still remembered the terror of facing a Corrupted Titan in battle. The Winter Beast alone had been enough to wipe out the remains of the First Evacuation Army and the millions of refugees in Falcon Scott. The deathly frost of that dark day had seeped into his bones.

But today was going to be different.

All the members of the cohort were here. Mordret was here, too... and a vast army of warriors from a distant realm, all seasoned veterans of the Nightmare Spell.

Sunny had grown much stronger, as well.

'We'll kill them both.'

Shaking off the momentary hesitation, he walked toward the black throne.

As he did, Sunny noticed something behind the dais. The throne room was not entirely empty, after all... someone was standing there, frozen in the middle of looking up at the crumbling dome. A tall and elegant figure wearing ivory armor, which was tied at the waist with a burnt umber sash. Auburn hair, green eyes...

Sunny froze for a moment.

'Kai!'

So, this was where the Spell had sent his friend. Kai had been in the throne room all along, frozen in time and not even aware of what was happening around him. All the long months that had passed were like a moment to him.

Sunny did not even know whether to feel jealous or sad for his friend. Looking away, he put his foot on the first step of the dais.

'Hang in there, buddy. I'll release you really soon...'

His essence was getting dangerously low.

Climbing on the dais, Sunny stopped in front of the black throne, unsure what to do. The first idea that came to his mind was to sit on it, like Daeron must have done when he held court in the past.

But, somehow, Sunny did not like that idea. He never aspired to be a king of anything, let alone of a city whose former king he had killed. Magnificent thrones were not really his thing... he was already plenty happy with his handy Shadow Chair.

'Ah, whatever.'

Feeling a sense of urgency, Sunny took a step closer and suddenly noticed a circular groove carved into the back of the throne. Its size and depth seemed just about right...

Cassie had destroyed the time enchantment of Aletheia's island by inserting the key into a slot carved into the Estuary fragment. Following an impulse, Sunny took off the Crown of Twilight and brought it to the circular groove.

As soon as he did, an invisible force pulled the band of dark metal out of his hand. The Crown fitted the groove perfectly, merging with the black stone of the throne. Luckily, its connection to his soul had not been cut — Sunny could still make use of its enchantments.

He also felt... a different, much vaster connection being established between his soul and something immense. The city itself, perhaps.

Taking a deep breath, Sunny looked up at the cracked dome of the palace...

And pulled on that connection, giving a mental command:

'In the name of Daeron, the Serpent King... in the name of Wind Flower of the Twilight Sea... and all those who have fallen... I, Lost From Light, order time to flow once more!'

For a few moments, nothing happened. The grand hall of the palace was just as still and silent as before.

But then, a loud sound tore the silence apart. It was the sound of a shard of stone falling on the floor.

Sunny turned swiftly and saw pieces of debris scattering across the marble tiles. His eyes widened when he realized the significance of what just happened.

Then, it was as though an invisible ripple spread through the world. The dust that had been hanging in the air, motionless, moved and danced in the rays of light. The shard of stone raining from the cracked dome of the palace plummeted down one after another, breaking against the marble floor.

A muffled murmur of the disastrous battle seeped through the stone walls of the palace, sounding like the rising sea.

'I... I actually did it.'

And then, something struck the dome with a deafening noise, making the whole palace shake.

Sunny felt claws of fear grasp his heart. Yes, he had indeed done it... and now, it was time to face the consequences of what he had done.

There was an evil dragon right above his head right now, hellbent on slaughtering every human in Twilight.

There were also the members of the cohort lost somewhere on the streets of the city, a dreadful Mirror Titan, and an army of eerie warriors whose loyalty had to be won, somehow.

But first...

Tearing the Crown of Twilight from the groove cut into the black throne, Sunny put it on his head and hurriedly dashed toward the lone figure standing beneath the dais.

Kai was just now starting to move. He swayed a little and took a step back, stumbling over the first step of the dais. Before he could fall, however, Sunny caught him and started dragging him away from the throne.

The charming archer looked very confused.

"S—Sunny? What is happening? Are we in the Nightmare?"

Feeling the palace quake once again around them, Sunny cursed inwardly.

"Hey, Kai! Short version: yes, we are in the Nightmare. There is an evil version of you, who is an abominable dragon, trying to eat us right now. Don't worry, though! There is also an army of alien warriors from a destroyed world to help us kill you... him... the dragon! The rest of the cohort is also here, somewhere. We got separated when a Corrupted Titan attacked us in the mirror version of this city, which was frozen in time. But now, I... thawed it, I guess..."

Sunny glanced at Kai and smiled.

"Oh! And also, Effie is pregnant."

The archer stared at him with wide eyes for a few moments.

"I know!"

Sunny almost stumbled.

"What? You know about the Plagues, the Twilight Sea, and the defensive array?"

Kai shook his head and outstretched one arm, summoning his bow.

"No... I mean, I know about Effie. She confided in me weeks ago. I have no idea what the rest of the things you said mean!"

Sunny stared at him incredulously, feeling hurt for some reason.

'So she told Kai, but she didn't tell me? Hmph!'

He couldn't help but say vindictively:

"Actually... I knew months ago..."

Which was still later than Kai, but technically true.

Kai gave him a strange glance, then opened his mouth to say something. But at that moment, Sunny froze.

Something... something was very strange about the palace. It took him a moment to realize what had changed.

'Why is everything so quiet?'

The muffled sounds of the furious battle raging outside had disappeared at some point, plunging the world into eerie silence.

Sunny felt his hair stand on end.

He had a dreadful premonition... that they had made a terrible mistake, somewhere...