1797 Last Refuge

Sunny would have loved to be wrong. He would have liked to believe that he had lost his sanity from solitude and hopelessness. Or even that he had fallen under the effect of a strange mind hex.

That he was looking at an illusion conjured by some harrowing abomination.

But in his heart, he knew that his eyes weren't lying to him. Out there in front of him, buried in snow and ice, was indeed Lunar Observatory Forty-Nine - the research settlement where he had met Beth and Professor Obel once, during the Chain of Nightmares. Where Dusk of Fallen Grace killed everyone except for a handful of people that Sunny had taken away in time.

The dome of the old observatory was the same. The alloy wall was the same, even if its turrets had turned into ice sculptures. The empty buildings where the scientists, soldiers, and assisting personnel had once lived and worked were the same, too.

The research installation stood lonesomely under the starlit sky, drowning in snow. Sunny shivered,

"H-how..."

But he knew how, Wind Flower had warned him... she had told him that his world would be consumed by the Dream Realm one day, Just like hers. He had known that it was Inevitable for a long time.

However, Sunny had never thought that the process would have started so soon.

‘I thought... we still... had time.’

He remained motionless for a while, taking in the eerle sight of the empty facility with an expression that went beyond despair.

It felt so wrong, to see alloy walls and prefab structures in the Dream Realm.

Appalling.

Sunny had no words to describe what he was feeling. He had left the waking world behind... and yet, witnessing the root of its future destruction had rattled him to the very core.

The dilapidated streets of the outskirts. The beautiful terrace district in the inner city. The fortress-like Awakened Academy. The prestigious school where Rain had studied. Everything he knew... would be swallowed by the Dream Realm soon.

Worse than that. All the places that formed the background of his memories would not just be transported to another world. They would become forgotten ruins - just the kind Sunny was fond of exploring. Weathered, forlorn, and teeming with revolting abominations.

That was the grim future of the world infected by the Nightmare Spell.

Only... there would be no one to explore the ruins of the waking world and wonder about the people who had populated them once. Because Sunny's realm was the last to be consumed. There would be no explorers left to remember their lives and struggles.

The waking world would cease to exist. Maybe not in a year, or even a decade...

But the process had already started.

Sunny did not know how long he had spent kneeling in the snow in front of the silent research station. Eventually, though, he shakily rose to his feet and walked toward the crumbled wall.

He spent some time wandering LO49 in a daze.

Back then, Sunny had left in a hurry. After delivering his cohort and the two civilians to safety, he mounted Nightmare and returned - but he did not enter the facility again, only looking at it from afar. Everyone was gone, taken by Dusk of Fallen Grace.

Even though Sunny killed the Terror later with the help of Naeve and Saint Bloodwave, the memory of the empty settlement was still connected to a feeling of powerlessness and deep, chilling fear in his heart.

Funnily enough, he felt the same way now. Nothing seemed to have changed in LO49. There was some damage caused by the harsh environment, and the exteriors of the alloy buildings were covered in ice and snow, However, the interiors were in surprisingly good condition.

All the tech had stopped working, of course. But the material legacy was all there.

There were clothes, furniture, and decorations. Kitchen utensils, writing Implements, and synthetic paper. The Important data had been stored digitally, but many scientists had been in the habit of writing notes by hand or drawing complicated formulas on the boards.

There were also useless items people accumulated throughout their lives. Toys, trinkets, and sentimental mementoes. Posters, musical instruments, and handicrafts.

Some of it would decay with the passage of time. But actually, most of the things created by modern humans were quite lasting.

If someone unfamiliar with the civilization of the waking world visited this place in the future... what would they think about the people who had perished at LO49?

Would they think that the ancient people had been ingenious and worthy of admiration, excelling in craft and architecture? That they created enchanting art, pursued enlightenment, and were quite knowledgeable about the arcane principles that governed the world?

Or that the ancient people had been warlike and austere, living in harsh conditions and surrounding their utilitarian homes by tall metal walls? After all there were weapons and military uniforms everywhere in LO49, as well.

However, there were no corpses. No bones, no signs of a vicious battle. Nobody would know what had happened here, and at best, they would feel idle curiosity about the fate of the missing inhabitants.

About as much of it as Sunny had felt in the ruins of the overgrown city where the Cursed Tyrant, Condemnation, dwelled.

There was a bitter taste in his mouth.

It was because Sunny knew better than most what it meant to be forgotten.

Sometimes, not being remembered was worse than death.

'Ah. I hate it'

Still unable to come to terms with the dreadful revelation, he remained motionless for a while, and then left the settlement to wander around.

It was strange.

The research facility was how it had been. Some of its surroundings were familiar, too...

But the rest was not.

The ocean shore might have been hidden under the ice, but the mountains were definitely missing. After exploring the area more thoroughly, Sunny made sure that he wasn't mistaken.

He had almost expected to find the entire Antarctica here, but somehow, it was nowhere to be found. There were no mountains, no highways, no underground base that he had used as shelter after meeting Gere and his small convoy of refugees.

Instead, there was just an endless plain of ice.

It was as if a small chunk had been torn out of the waking world and transported here, then stitched to the patchwork realm of nightmares.

No matter how long Sunny looked, he did not find another.

Still... the Dream Realm was vast.

There could be more pieces of Antarctica lost somewhere in the ice. Other areas could be elsewhere... Sunny would not be surprised if it turned out that a piece of America was now drifting somewhere in Stormsea, or that parts of Europe could be found west of the Forgotten Shore.

There was no point in continuing the search anymore. Nothing would change if he found another fragment of the waking world here.

Sunny looked south, where LO49 was hidden in the darkness.

Then, he looked north, at the endless expanse of ice.

The desire to explore the unknown that had pushed him forward so far... was inexplicably gone, doused by the grim discovery.

Letting out a sigh, he summoned the Marvellous Mimic, commanded it to turn into a hut, and went inside.

His mind was numb, and his heat was cold.

So, Sunny decided to sleep.