An Understated Dominance

Chapter 2699

Dustin walked toward the altar, ignoring the intense dark energy emanating from it. He bent down to pick up the bronze waist token. His fingers traced the strange pattern etched into its surface, his eyes glinting with cold detachment

“This wasn’t done by a single group,” he said. “Judging from the age of the bloodstains and the style of the items left behind, at least three different factions have performed blood rituals here over the past few decades.”

He then moved to a relatively intact corpse. After examining the bones, he noticed the man’s sternum had turned an unnatural dark gold, covered in fine cracks.

“This individual’s cultivation was not weak. He was at least in the Grandmaster realm when he was alive. But the cause of death... It seems like some force violently drained all his essence and soul. Even the spiritual essence in his bones was stripped away.”

“Were the blood rituals meant to communicate with the Void-Tyrant Dragon? Or to weaken it?” Grace asked with a frown.

She recalled what Cyran had said about the binding seal weakening over time and its malevolent energy leaking out. If someone deliberately used a blood ritual to contact the Void-Tyrant Dragon or to draw on the ritual’s negative energy to weaken the seal, the situation was far more dire than it seemed.

“It’s possible,” Dustin said, rising to his feet.

His gaze swept across the entire altar before settling on a recessed stone trough at the center that seemed designed to hold offerings. The inner walls of the trough were smooth, carrying the strongest scent of blood and a trace of an extremely faint yet profane and destructive energy fluctuation.

“This kind of blood ritual could not only weaken the binding seal, but might even provide the Void-Tyrant Dragon with the nourishment it needs to break free, drawn from the essence and dark energy of living beings.”

The revelation hit everyone hard. The crisis on Elysium Isle wasn’t just the result of a weakening seal or the evil creatures spawning on the island. It also resulted from deliberate sabotage by certain ill-intentioned people from outside the world.

“Who could’ve done this? And what are they after?” Grace asked, feeling a chill run through her.

Whoever had managed to locate Elysium Isle and set up a blood altar for such a twisted ritual had to be part of a powerful faction.

Dustin replied, “Their motive’s unclear. But maybe they’re trying to harness the Void-Tyrant Dragon’s malevolent energy.

“It would explain why the beasts on this island have become so aggressive and violent, as well as why the binding seal keeps weakening. The ongoing blood rituals are like pounding on a dam that’s already covered in cracks.”

His gaze deepened as he stared toward the heart of the Vitalis Pool.

He went on, “It seems we need to move faster. Our mission is no longer just to find the Vitalis Pool but also to figure out who was behind all this. The disagreement that Mr. Xalvador mentioned earlier is probably connected to these blood rituals too.”

Just then, Cyprian, who had been silently observing, pointed toward a large, dark rock near the water’s edge behind the altar.

“There’s something written there...” he rasped.

They all looked in that direction and saw that the side of the reef facing the altar appeared to have some hastily carved letters scratched into it with a sharp weapon. The writing was dark red, as if it had been written in blood.

“Blood as the guide, souls as the sacrifice, I beseech the Dragon Lord to grant me great power... Black Wraith shall never die...”

The message ended abruptly, as if the writer had met with misfortune or been forced to stop.

“Black Wraith?”

Grace and Rhydian exchanged glances, both seeing confusion in each other’s eyes. Neither had ever heard of that name before. Dustin silently memorized it, along with the strange symbol carved beside it.

Something told him the Black Wraith, the blood altar, and whoever was seeking the Void-Tyrant Dragon’s malevolent energy were all connected.

The discovery of the altar hung over the group like a dark cloud, adding yet another layer of dread and urgency to an already perilous journey.

“Let’s go. Keep looking for the stone path, “Dustin said, shoving his swirling thoughts aside. He turned and led the way out of that blood-soaked place of death and dark energy.

The group followed behind him in grim silence. The atmosphere grew even heavier. Everyone knew time was running out.

They continued searching along the lakeshore. After traveling more than a mile, they finally found a narrow, half-concealed path paved with white stones. It was hidden behind a cluster of strange, foul -smelling water plants.

The stone path lay half-submerged in the crimson lake water, like a fragile thread leading toward unknown hope. As everyone stepped on it, they could clearly feel faint spiritual energy fluctuations transmitting from beneath their feet.

It was this force that resisted the sinking and dissolving power of the Featheredge Deep. However, the path was narrow and slippery, barely wide enough for one person to pass carefully.

The crimson lake water on both sides, emanating blood and dark energy, was like the jaws of a ravenous beast ready to devour people. Everyone moved with absolute focus, afraid to slip for even a moment.

Grace followed closely behind Dustin, taking each step with extreme caution. But her thoughts churned turbulently. The discovery of the blood ritual altar loomed over her like a massive dark cloud.

Besides the island's natural dangers, a hidden evil faction lurked in the shadows, stirring restlessly. This added several more layers of weight and unease to her already faint hope for her father.

Rhydian and the two guards walked behind them, their spirits highly tense. Not only did they need to steady their footing, but they also had to remain constantly vigilant against any disturbances that might emerge from the lake water on either side.

Judith supported the one-armed Cyprian as they walked in the middle. Under the erosion of the surrounding dense malevolent energy, his complexion grew increasingly worse, and his breathing became labored.

Just as the group reached the middle section of the path, with neither end visible and completely immersed in this eerie body of water, a sudden change occurred.

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The crimson lake, which had been stirring faintly, suddenly began to churn violently as if some colossal creature were awakening beneath the surface.

In the next moment, monstrous tentacles, each as thick as a water barrel, emerged from the lake. They were formed from viscous blood and foul malevolent energy.

With a sickening screech and a gale of coppery stench, the tendrils lashed out like a nest of giant serpents. They whipped and coiled from all directions, aiming to crush and entangle the group on the narrow path.

“Watch out!” Rhydian roared. He swung his blade at the crimson tentacle lunging for Grace. The blade collided with the tentacle, producing the sound of metal clashing against metal as sparks flew.

The tentacle was incredibly resilient and contained powerful corrosive energy. The impact numbed his arm, and his blade was instantly covered with a layer of crimson filth, dimming its spiritual light.

The two other guards also swung their blades to defend, but their attacks had little effect on the endless stream of crimson tentacles. They were quickly forced onto the defensive, struggling to hold their ground.

Judith’s dagger repeatedly struck the tentacles. However, she could only leave shallow pits on them and couldn’t inflict any damage.

“Get behind me!” Dustin commanded in a low voice.

As a tide of crimson tentacles surged toward them, his eyes narrowed with lethal focus. Without drawing his sword, he formed a series of hand seals. The mystical, pure energy around him erupted, coalescing into a massive, swirling apparition-a cyan disk of light that shielded the entire party.

“Mystical Protection. No evil shall pass!” he roared. The crimson tentacles lashed viciously against the disk of light, producing deep, thunderous booming sounds.

The corrupted malevolent energy violently collided with the pure mystical energy, mutually annihilating each other. Thick plumes of black smoke rose into the air

The disk of light rippled intensely, but ultimately held firm against this first wave of savage attacks. However, the assault from the lake did not cease.

More crimson tentacles surged forth from the depths. Instead of ramming against the disk of light, they moved as if alive, coiling around and corroding the edges of the diagram, attempting to break it down.

At the same time, thick crimson mist rose from the lake’s surface. The mist carried intense mental pollution that penetrated protective energy barriers and invaded everyone’s minds, manifesting terrifying visions and seductive whispers to disturb their consciousness.

“Focus your mind!”

Dustin’s voice rang out like a clear spring, washing away the distracting thoughts in everyone’s head. While maintaining the disk of light, his gaze remained coldly fixed on a point deep within the mist.

“Stop hiding! Come out,” he shouted. “Hmph! Your perception is indeed sharp.” A cold, venomous voice cut through the crimson mist.

The churning lake water parted to both sides as a figure radiating dazzling white light slowly rose from the lake bottom, hovering above the crimson water.

It was Thymaleon.

But compared to before, his appearance had changed drastically. He still wore the same white robes, yet they remained spotlessly clean, as if the filth in the lake couldn’t stain them at all.

His originally pale complexion had regained a healthy flush. The pressure radiating from his body was more than twice as strong as before. The cold indifference once in his eyes had been replaced by burning hatred and the twisted thrill of revenge.

Suspended above the crimson lake, his white radiance contrasted sharply with the surrounding gloom, making him look like some unholy god rising out of a pit of corruption.

“Dragonblood Renewal Pill...” Dustin murmured, narrowing his eyes.

He immediately sensed the surging, restless vitality within Thymaleon’s body. The dragonblood malevolent energy inside him carried the same origin as the lake and the blood-soaked altar, but it was far more refined and concentrated.

Obviously, Thymaleon had consumed the pill given by Malthor. Not only had his injuries fully healed, but his strength had surged dramatically.

“Dustin, you didn’t expect this, huh?”

Thymaleon said, his lips twisting into a cruel grin.

“Thanks to you. I’ve not only reconstructed my body, but my elder brother has also bestowed upon me the Dragonblood Renewal Pill. It has greatly enhanced my cultivation. Today marks your death, and the rest of you miserable insects will pay for disturbing my slumber.

He thrust out a finger.

A beam of condensed white light-its edges threaded with crimson bloodlines-tore through space itself. It crossed dozens of yards in an instant and shot toward Dustin's disk of light.

The power behind this single strike dwarfed anything Thymaleon had mustered before. As it screamed through the air, space itself warped, forming faint ripples. The lake water below was split asunder by the sheer pressure, carving a deep, temporary trench in its surface.

With a loud explosion, the white beam slammed into the heart of the disk of light. This time, the barrier couldn't fully dissipate the force. It shuddered violently, and a spiderweb of hairline fractures spread across its luminous surface.

Dustin swayed slightly, his expression hardening as he struggled to maintain the barrier.

"See? This is true power!" Thymaleon said, laughing maniacally. His hands moved continuously as white beams wrapped with crimson bloodlines poured down like a violent storm, madly bombarding Dustin's barrier.

At the same time, the crimson tentacles in the lake became even more ferocious. They coordinated their attacks with Thymaleon's to continually slam against and corrode the barrier.

Under this combined assault from within and without, the disk of light rapidly dimmed. Cracks spread wider and deeper, and it was clear it wouldn't hold much longer.