

Tyrant 25

Chapter 25: The Price of Peace

A tall, elegant elf woman stood. Though clearly one of the elders, her face betrayed no signs of age, only authority.

"The one-hundred and forty-second Council Gathering is now in session," she declared. "Our topic today concerns the mana crystal mine discovered on the border of House Morgain and House Zar'khael. This dispute must be resolved today."

Her gaze shifted toward one of the seats.

"Patriarch Valttair du Morgain, you've avoided the last convocations. We understand there have been difficulties, but this matter can no longer be postponed."

Valttair sat in silence for a moment. His arms were crossed over his thick black robes, his platinum blond hair tied back in a low tail. Those sharp grey eyes swept across the room.

"I apologize," he said at last. "There were attacks on my territories. My attention was required elsewhere."

The elf nodded. "Understood. Then let us begin. Patriarch Malakar du Zar'khael, as the one who called this Council, you may present your case first."

The demon lord rose to his feet. Malakar was tall and lean, his skin pale grey with faint markings that curled around the base of his horns. His crimson eyes burned beneath silver-black hair.

"Thank you for your time, esteemed members," he began, voice low and composed. "Approximately six months ago, our scouts discovered a mine rich in high-quality mana crystals. The vein runs directly through the border of our two territories — half of it lies within Morgain land, the other within our own."

He paced slowly as he spoke, hands folded behind his back.

"When we attempted to access it, Lord Valtair blocked the entry. We refrained from conflict and instead sent messengers. Invitations. Proposals. All were ignored."

A beat.

"Our last measure was symbolic. We sent a group of prisoners — a warning rather than a threat. I hoped this Council would help resolve things... before matters escalate further."

Valttair leaned forward, resting one elbow on the table.

"You had the nerve to send prisoners into my land," he said flatly. "I took my heirs with me that day. If even one of them had been harmed..."

Malakar inclined his head. "I apologize, Valtair. But I had no other options. The next step would've been soldiers."

The elf elder raised her hand. "Let us hope that won't be necessary. Now that both sides have spoken, the Council may proceed with deliberation."

Roderic au Vaelion leaned back in his chair, swirling a glass of red wine with a faint smirk.

"Well," he drawled, "surely you didn't intend to disrupt the peace we've maintained for centuries, did you, Malakar? Whether you admit it or not, it was a calculated move. One that forced this meeting — and I dare say, it worked."

Valttair's eyes narrowed. "Then let's stop circling. What is it you want, Malakar?"

The demon patriarch raised his chin. "Simple. Due to the delays and lack of communication, I propose the mine be declared property of House Zar'khael in its entirety. Full rights and control."

A ripple of surprise moved through the chamber.

Valttair's tone dropped like a blade. "Don't play with fire, Malakar. That demand is beyond reason."

Malakar gave a cold smile. "Is it? Perhaps we should put it to vote, then."

The elf elder nodded. "Very well. All those in favor of awarding full mining rights to House Zar'khael, raise your hands."

Four arms lifted: Grumhald of the Dvergar, Lady Lysaria of the Nocthar, Roderic au Vaelion, and Malakar himself.

Valttair's eyes snapped to Roderic. "You too, Roderic?"

Roderic chuckled. "Let's just say... I've grown fond of that little item I lost during our sons' duel. A petty man must find his victories where he can."

The elder continued, unfazed. "Now, those in favor of negotiating a mutual agreement between Morgain and Zar'khael?"

Four hands went up: Nyssara of Myrrhvale, the Thal'Zar Patriarch, the Elven Matriarch, and Valttair himself.

"A tie," the elf said calmly. "As dictated by our charter, the Elders will deliberate to break the stalemate. Please wait while we consider a fair proposal."

The ten elders stood and exited through the side hall, robes trailing behind them.

Valttair crossed one leg over the other and glanced across the table.

"All this... over a single item? Really, Roderic?"

The mage smiled. "Your bastard humiliated my son in front of the entire nobility. Let me enjoy my salt."

Lady Lysaria leaned forward, her red eyes gleaming.

"Oh? So your bastard is finally proving useful, Valttair?"

Valttair's face darkened. "I'd ask you to speak with respect, Lady Lysaria. His name is Trafalgar, and he is the ninth heir of House Morgain."

"Oops," Lysaria said with a coy smile. "Slipped my mind."

Grumhald grunted. "So your boy beat Vaelion's? Hah. How old is he now? Fourteen? Fifteen? That means his core's awakened by the things you are saying. How's it holding up?"

Valttair exhaled. "He's nearly sixteen. And why the sudden interest in my son, Grumhald? Planning to marry off one of your dwarf daughters?"

The dwarf snorted. "As if anyone would want the spawn of Morgain."

Valttair smiled thinly. "Time will tell."

Nyssara di Myrrhvale, her voice cool and smooth, chimed in. "Are you truly implying your son — who only just awakened his core — is anything remarkable?"

Valttair said nothing. He merely leaned back, eyes closed, as the chamber fell into a taut silence.

The ten Elders re-entered the chamber with solemn expressions. Their leader — the same young-looking elven woman from before — stepped forward and placed a sealed scroll on the center of the table.

"All deliberations are complete," she announced. "Two potential resolutions have been proposed. Only the two patriarchs may choose between them."

She opened the scroll with a gentle flick of her fingers. Mana script glowed faintly in the air as she read aloud.

"Option one: a political marriage agreement between the houses of Morgain and Zar'khael."

A wave of whispers filled the chamber.

"Option two: one house may sell its claim of the mine to the other. A clean transfer of ownership."

The elf looked up. "Patriarch Valttair, Patriarch Malakar — you must now decide."

Valttair gave a low chuckle. "I assume I'm not allowed to pick first?"

Malakar crossed his arms. "Given the inconvenience you've caused, I should be the one to choose, don't you think?"

The elder interrupted smoothly. "We'll proceed to vote. Both involved parties must abstain, there is no point in you both voting."

The six remaining members raised their hands in silence.

The result was unanimous.

"All votes in favor of letting Patriarch Malakar choose the resolution," the elf said. "So be it."

Valttair muttered under his breath, "Tch..."

Malakar stood, his voice calm but tinged with pride. "For now, I have no interest in binding my heirs to the Morgains. I will buy your share."

Valttair nodded slowly. "Fine. Ten legendary-grade items."

Gasps erupted from a few seats. Even Malakar looked momentarily caught off guard.

"That price is excessive," he said. "The mine's depth and quality are still uncertain. I may never recover the cost."

Valttair smirked. "Oh no, in fact I did enter the mine, I assure you that the price should be almost double, but consider it an offer for a good friend because your daughter does seem interested in my son."

Malakar's brow twitched. "My daughter? You mean the fifth one—Zafira?"

Valttair cut in, "Yes, Zafira. If I recall, she and Trafalgar always played together during previous Councils."

Malakar clicked his tongue. "Hmph. Very well. Ten legendary items. But you won't get to choose which."

"Agreed," Valttair replied.

The elf elder gave a small nod. "Then it's settled. The matter of the mine is concluded. We may proceed to the remaining topics of today's agenda."

- Trafalgar POV -

Trafalgar stirred.

His throat burned. His chest felt tight. Every breath he took came with a strange heat that pulsed beneath his skin.

'What... happened?'

He blinked a few times before realizing he was no longer on the balcony. The walls were dark stone, polished and quiet. A single chandelier lit the private room with a soft golden glow. He was lying on a velvet-lined couch, a blanket draped over him.

A figure moved nearby.

"You're awake," came a calm, deep voice. It belonged to a tall elf, dressed in formal white robes. He set down a glowing crystal and turned to face Trafalgar with a smile.

"You collapsed an hour ago on the balcony. A bestman guest found you and immediately called for help. We brought you here to rest. Lord Valtair will be informed as soon as the Council concludes." The elf made a courteous bow. "For now, just take it easy. This young lady stayed to watch over you."

He gestured toward the side of the room, where someone had been sitting silently.

Trafalgar turned—and froze.

A girl stood beside the chair. She wore a crimson dress trimmed with gold. Her hair was golden blonde, braided in intricate loops and pins. But what caught his attention was the black blindfold that wrapped around her eyes, delicate yet strangely ominous.

On her shoulder rested a small bird—tiny, pale-feathered, with glowing red eyes. It tilted its head, watching him.

She didn't speak. Just stood there.

Trafalgar stared.

'...What now?'

The healer gave a polite nod and excused himself, leaving the room in silence.

He was now alone with a mysterious blindfolded girl. The kind of situation he'd started to hate.

He sat up slowly, still woozy.

"Uh..." he muttered. "Thanks for... keeping watch, I guess."

The girl tilted her head slightly. The bird let out a soft chirp.

"It's nothing really, you must rest for now."