

## Frozen Star 24

### Chapter 24: Fire and Blood

[POV Liselotte]

The first contact was a brutal slaughter, a clash of worlds that burst into a crescendo of instant violence.

It wasn't a tactical approach, but a bestial avalanche.

From the depths of the forest lit by torches, they emerged like living projectiles—deformed creatures, horrors the mind could barely register.

Some ran on all fours, their backs hunched, claws as long as short swords gleaming in the firelight, raking the earth with fury.

Others stood on disproportionate hind legs, monstrous arms dangling, mouths torn up to their ears showing rows of jagged, razor-sharp teeth.

Their eyes, when visible through matted fur or layers of calloused skin, were bloodshot, glowing with animal madness, devoid of intelligence—only hunger and blind rage.

Some drooled black, thick foam that hit the ground with a sinister hiss.

Behind this first wave of nightmare, more organized yet no less terrifying, came the bandits.

Men and women whose bodies seemed made of old leather and scars, armed with notched axes, rusted swords, and crude bows.

But the worst was the corruption that surrounded them.

Small green or purple flames danced between their fingers, sparks of dark magic that lit up their faces, twisted by cruelty and perversion.

Some shouted guttural orders—unintelligible commands to the beasts—others laughed with a chilling, blood-freezing cackle.

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The traps, our desperate first line of defense, sprang to life.

With a dry crack and a burst of earth and leaves, hidden trapdoors opened beneath the paws of the creatures leading the charge.

Sharpened spears, fire-hardened and smeared with dung to cause infection, sprang from the ground with lethal force, piercing soft bellies, exposed throats, muscular limbs.

Howls of agony, distinct from the roars of battle, tore through the air.

Creatures fell, impaled, writhing, dragging others with them into the pits where the stakes waited hungrily.

On the eastern flank, where the slope was gentler, the curtain of oil and resin ignited with a roar that drowned all other sounds.

A wall of fire several meters high rose suddenly, devouring the air eagerly, engulfing a dozen attackers who became human and beastly torches in an instant.

Their screams were the sound of hell itself.

The flames roared and crackled, hurling sparks into the dark sky like curses.

The remaining creatures retreated momentarily, howling in pain and confusion.

Chaos—the beautiful and terrible chaos of our defense—had been unleashed.

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But the wave did not stop.

It was like a flood of mud and teeth that found new channels.

The bandits, more cunning, used the initial carnage to their advantage.

They climbed the thick ropes that some had thrown with grappling hooks over the palisade, their calloused hands gripping the rope with desperate strength.

Others shoved the smoldering corpses of fallen beasts, piling them up with brutal efficiency to form bridges of flesh and bone over the stake pits or the fire trenches that were beginning to die down.

I saw one of them—a tall man with a scar across his face like a white lightning bolt—use the still-convulsing body of a wounded beast as a living shield, pushing it forward while advancing protected behind the agonizing mass.

The ferocity and disregard for life, even that of their own beasts, were terrifying.

"Defend the wall!" I shouted again, my voice hoarse from the smoke beginning to envelop us, as I dodged a grappling hook that whistled past my head

"DON'T FALL BACK! PUSH THEM BACK!"

My sword came from its sheath with a cold metallic sound, a silver flash in the firelight.

A bandit, more agile than he looked, had managed to lift his head above the parapet right in front of me.

His eyes, bloodshot and crazed, met mine.

He brandished a short, serrated knife.

I ducked instinctively, feeling the blade slice the air over my head, and countered with a horizontal slash aimed at his exposed neck.

The blade met flesh and bone with a wet crack.

A gurgling choke, a dark jet, and the body fell backward, disappearing into the darkness on the other side.

I had no time to think.

To my right, the young archer Elara—the one who always had a smile for the children and nimble hands for braiding flowers—fired with terrifying calm.

Her face, streaked with soot, was serene, focused.

Each arrow was a deadly sigh released from her simple bow, finding its target in the shadows: an eye going dark, a throat closing, a hand dropping a rope.

Beside her, old Heron, the blacksmith, whose back was bent from years over the anvil, wielded his forging hammer as if it weighed nothing.

He struck not metal, but skulls and shoulders that rose above the wall.

Each blow resounded with a dull, definitive crunch.

A little farther down, the teenage boy Finn—he couldn't have seen more than fourteen summers—used his mother's massive iron skillet as an improvised shield, deflecting blows and projectiles with clumsy movements full of desperate courage.

I saw Chloé, a whirlwind of teeth and claws, leap from a platform directly onto the back of a beast trying to claw at the wood.

Her fangs found the furry neck, tore through veins.

The beast reared back with a pitiful howl, and Chloé had already leapt to another, disappearing into the confusion of shadows, blood, and fire.

Her roar of defiance blended with those of the monsters.

This was only the beginning.