

Frozen Star 39

Chapter 39: Copper Logbook and Frustration

[POV Liselotte]

I still remember that day.

The guild air smelled of stale coffee, damp wood, and old leather—like every morning. Naelle motioned to me from behind the counter, her expression that familiar mix of warning and challenge that always made my back tense.

“If you want to stop being a nobody with that ‘F’ on your chest,” she began, leaning her elbows on the polished wood.

“The rules don’t lie—thirty completed Rank F missions. Thirty. Only then can you take the exam for Rank E.” She slid a paper covered in empty columns toward me.

“And when you get to E, it’ll be twenty more before you can aim for D. But here’s the thing—” her finger tapped the wood with emphasis, “if you fail a mission, it doesn’t count. No pay, and whatever you spent on gear or supplies... gone.”

Beside me, Chloé let out a barely audible snort. “Translation: if we screw up, we come back empty-handed and with our pride in pieces.”

“Exactly,” Naelle confirmed with a half-smile that didn’t reach her eyes.

That day, I was full of excitement about climbing ranks quickly.

But reality had been something else...

I pulled out the paper from my leather bag. Fifty missions accepted. Thirty victories. Twenty defeats. The log I carried now was half trophy, half scar.

Missions Log – Flames of the North – Lotte & Chloé (Rank F)

Total: 50 Missions Accepted | 30 Completed | 20 Failed

Mission #1: Ratskorn Infestation – Olren Farm

Status: Completed

Notes: First job. Mud up to our knees, the smell of rotting beast clinging to our skin. Accidental discovery: I can make frost when desperate. Pay: 50 copper + warm honey bread (divine).

Mission #3: Goat Rescue – Frozen River

Status: Failed

Notes: We found the goat... or what was left of it. The fox was faster. Client refused to pay. "Could've saved myself the sign!" he yelled. Chloé nearly bit his ankle.

Mission #5: Express Courier – Pinehigh Village

Status: Completed

Notes: Easy road, treacherous snowfall. Nearly buried alive. Arrived stiff as ice statues. Pay: 10 copper (miserable, but it counted).

Mission #8: Moonleaf Harvest – Misty Hills

Status: Failed

Notes: Arrived late. Another adventurer, a smugly smiling girl, had already delivered. Naele reminded us: "Punctuality is courtesy... and business."

Mission #10: Dusksfang Hunt – Eastern Forest

Status: Completed

Notes: Fast, ugly beast with terrible breath. First time I guided ice on purpose. Slipped it. Worked. Pay: 80 copper + stew meat (tough but tasty).

Mission #14: Night Watch – Northern Walls

Status: Failed

Notes: Quiet night. Too quiet. Employer: "I'd pay to see action, not to watch you yawn!" Not a single copper. Chloé snored the whole watch. I swear.

Mission #17: Moonwort Root Digging – Gray Swamp

Status: Completed

Notes: Plants more stubborn than a hungover orc. Frozen hands, broken nails. Pay: 15 copper (doesn't cover the joint pain).

Mission #20: Slime Extermination – 'The Sputtering Cauldron' Basement

Status: Failed

Notes: Cleared almost all... but the Matriarch Slime, a green blob the size of a dog, slipped down the drain. Tavernkeeper: "I want results, not half-measures!" No pay, reeked of rotten algae for days.

Mission #23: Cargo Escort – Winter Market

Status: Completed

Notes: Boring trip with a merchant who talked more than a parrot. No incidents. Pay: 15 copper + bag of nuts (saved morale).

Mission #25: Cargo Recovery – Crow's Pass

Status: Failed

Notes: Found the overturned wagon... and empty. Professional looters. Client devastated. "At least they didn't kill you," he said. Small comfort. Zero copper.

Mission #28: Pest Control – Old Marta's Henhouse

Status: Completed

Notes: Night ambush among nervous chickens. Captured two foxes alive (Marta wanted the pelts). Pay: 40 copper + fresh eggs (Chloé ate three raw).

Mission #32: Manual Labor – Slow River Dock

Status: Completed

Notes: Unloading crates of salted fish all day. Smelled like cod for a week. Chloé hid upriver. Pay: 25 copper (doesn't cover the stench).

Mission #35: Winged Vermin Removal – Hull Brothers' Barn

Status: Failed

Notes: Bats. Lots of them. Drove off most... but the main colony fled to the forest. Hull Brothers: "This isn't a complete solution!" Goodbye, payment.

Mission #40: Urgent Delivery – Council Message

Status: Completed

Notes: Mountain path, treacherous snow. Made it on time, frozen but triumphant. Pay: 15 copper (urgency should be worth more).

Mission #43: Canine Search – Shepherd Dog from the Valleys

Status: Failed

Notes: Found 'Dain'... on the third day, under a tree. Frozen. Farmer heartbroken. "It's not your fault... but I can't pay for this." Painful.

Mission #47: Bear Deterrence – Remote Farm

Status: Completed

Notes: Young, hungry bear. Torches, shouting, and Chloé flashing fangs worked. Drove it off without blood. Pay: 60 copper (and farmer's relief).

Mission #50: Forced Carpentry – Storm-Damaged Fence

Status: Completed

Notes: Repaired a broken fence... during a snowstorm. Numb fingers, slippery wood. Grateful farmer gave us warm rye bread. Better than copper.

I reviewed the list, my fingers tracing the red ink marks of failures and the firm black of successes. Thirty victories. A number that rang with pride. But the twenty defeats stung like thorns.

"I still remember you insisting on that goat mission," Chloé said, her growl laced with dry humor. "Told you it smelled like wolf from the start."

I shot her a look. "And I remember you trying to eat the 'healing herbs' from mission eight. If you hadn't been vomiting, maybe we'd have made it on time."

A snort that almost sounded like laughter escaped her. “They tasted good! Spicy. Like that girl who stole our job.” We laughed—a short, warm sound in the stillness of the guild—drowning, for a moment, the weight of what was coming: the Rank E exam. It wasn’t enough to have thirty marks on paper. You had to prove your worth under the guild’s critical eye.

That night, as I sharpened my sword and checked my armor straps under the flickering light of a candle, the thought returned. Every failed mission had been lost time, spent supplies, bruised pride. But every success—no matter how small, filthy, or poorly paid—was a brick.

A brick I had laid on the path toward Whirikai, toward mastering the frost within me, toward answers. No one could take those thirty bricks from me.

Bricks that had taken over nine months to lay, little by little.

Soon I would be fifteen—it had been five years since I’d seen my family—but...

The bronze badge, the humble “F,” hung heavy on my chest. Soon, if luck and skill favored me, it would change. In color, in shape, in meaning. Outside, the snow kept falling—silent and relentless. But inside me, where the tally of copper and scars mixed with determination, winter wasn’t just brute force. I was learning to be patient. To build.