

Frozen Star 83

Chapter 83: Forging the Strategy

[POV Liselotte]

The day after the tournament announcement began early. The first rays of sun painted Kreston's walls with a warm golden glow that seemed to promise renewed possibilities. The usual bustle of the city felt more agitated and charged with purpose than normal. Groups of adventurers argued on every corner and alleyway, evaluating their odds of victory aloud, forming temporary alliances with quick handshakes, or simply boasting about past feats to intimidate potential competition.

We, on the other hand, kept a deliberate silence as we finished a frugal breakfast in the inn that had been assigned to us. Hard bread, salty cheese, and lukewarm water hardly distracted me from the whirlwind of plans and contingencies spinning in my mind. The tournament was in five days, but we instinctively knew we could not afford to waste a single moment. Serious, methodical preparation had to begin immediately, as if the first battle were today and every second mattered.

"We only have one truly useful day to refine what we already know and lay down solid strategies," I finally said, breaking the silence with a tone meant to sound firmer than I felt. "After that, we'll only have time for minor adjustments, for recovering our strength. The tournament won't leave us any room for sloppy improvisations or last-minute doubts."

Leah looked up from the piece of bread she held absently between her fingers. Her blue eyes reflected the exhaustion of weeks of travel, but also a spark of renewed determination that eased some of the tension in my chest.

"Then let's dedicate this entire day to the essentials. To fully understanding what each of us can do and, more importantly, how we combine those abilities into a cohesive team. Fighting well as three separate individuals won't be enough... we must learn to act as a single entity, a single organism of combat."

Chloé finished meticulously licking the wooden bowl that had contained her ration of meat broth, her silver fur gleaming under the rays of sunlight streaming through the inn's window. Her mental voice reached us with the severe, deeply practical tone that characterized her.

"In a tournament like this, victory doesn't come from brute strength or individual power alone. It comes from control, from precision. If our opponents discover how to break our formation or anticipate our moves, we'll lose. But if we make them underestimate our coordination and synchronization, we'll gain a decisive advantage. That must be our main weapon."

I nodded with a lump of emotion and responsibility in my throat. She was right, as almost always.

We found a wide clearing on the outskirts of Kreston, a place evidently used by other adventurers to practice without disturbing the citizens. The ground there was hard and compacted earth, deeply marked by countless sword strikes, the dark burns of misfired spells, and small trenches carved by abilities that had overflowed their targets. It was the perfect place to rehearse, free from curious eyes, what might decide our future in the coming days.

We began with the most basic and fundamental task: establishing clear and immovable roles.

"I'll be the frontline, the anchor," I said, drawing my sword and feeling the familiar, comforting weight of the metal in my hand. "My role will be to contain the initial charge, divert the main blows, and set the pace of the clash. I must be both the protective shield and the spear that breaks the way forward."

“And I’ll be the concentrated fire behind that shield,” Leah cut in almost immediately, raising her hands, which were already sparking faintly with red and orange flickers. “Pure offensive magic at mid and long range. I can’t afford to waste energy on useless or misdirected attacks. I need surgical precision, and you must give me the openings and space to seize every opportunity.”

Chloé then stepped forward, standing tall with the dignity of an ancient beast, her white fangs gleaming under the midday sun.

“I’ll move where you cannot. Through the shadows you cast, through the unguarded flanks. I’ll be the huntress, the stalker. I’ll cut through the enemy’s support lines, separate stragglers from their groups, and press from unexpected angles. Controlled chaos will be my main weapon.”

It was a plan simple in conception, but potentially devastating in execution—a trinity of functions: an unyielding, solid front, devastating fire just behind it, and a lethal shadow constantly harassing the flanks.

We then began to drill, repeating each sequence again and again until the movements became instinctive.

I charged forward, sword in hand, blocking imaginary attacks with the brute force of my arms and the solidity of my stance. Leah, keeping a precise distance behind me, launched controlled bursts of fire that passed mere inches from my body—close enough that I felt the searing heat on my skin, but never touching me thanks to her millimetric control. Meanwhile, Chloé moved in wide, elliptical circles around us, quick as a silver flash, leaping over rocks and fallen logs, suddenly appearing at my left side to

simulate a quick strike at an imaginary opponent, then vanishing a second later as if swallowed by the earth.

“Faster on the turn, Lotte,” her voice growled in my mind during a brief water break. “If you take even a second longer to open the space after my signal, Leah won’t have a clear angle to fire. And if Leah can’t fire to create a distraction, I won’t have the cover I need for my flanking strike without being exposed.”

I gritted my teeth, feeling cold sweat run down my back despite the heat of the day. She was right—a single mistake in timing could shatter our entire strategy. We repeated the sequence. Once. Twice. Five times. Ten. Until our combined movement flowed with the perfect naturalness of a deadly choreography practiced for years.

Leah, exhausted and with her fingertips blackened from constant use of elemental magic, smiled with genuine pride after releasing a fiery projectile that exploded precisely in the spot I had deliberately exposed with a precise turn of my sword.

“That was perfect! The timing, the distance... If we can keep that level of synchronization during the tournament, I doubt any team could withstand our coordinated pressure.”

Chloé didn’t smile openly; her expression remained serious and evaluative. But the satisfied silence radiating from her was more eloquent than any words.

By sunset, when the sky was dyed in deep oranges and purples, I proposed tackling one last crucial point.

“We can’t limit ourselves to showing only what our eventual opponents can anticipate from watching us the first time. We need a surprise factor, a card up our sleeve they can’t foresee.”

Leah looked at me with palpable intrigue, wiping sweat from her forehead with her forearm.

“What exactly are you proposing?”

I drew a deep breath, remembering those intense moments when, almost unintentionally, I had tapped into that glacial power dwelling deep within me.

“I still can’t control it deliberately... not fully. But if it manifests under pressure, it could be decisive. My magic... the ice. We mustn’t depend on it as a central part of the plan, but we must be mentally and strategically prepared to exploit it if it surfaces at the critical moment.”

Leah’s eyes lit with pure fascination, while Chloé narrowed hers with visible caution.

“If that power surfaces,” the wolf said mentally, “you’ll use it exclusively as a final weapon, as a last resort. Not before. We cannot risk you losing control or exhausting yourself in the middle of the opening fight, leaving us vulnerable.”

I nodded solemnly, fully understanding the warning.

“It will be our ultimate play, our final gamble. And only if the situation turns desperate or a clear chance for immediate victory appears. Not before.”

When the sun finally sank below the horizon and deep, satisfying fatigue seeped into our bones, we sat in an intimate circle on the worn, sweat-stained ground of our training field. Dust, sweat, and exhaustion clung to us like a second skin, but alongside them, a renewed, solid confidence had taken root among us.

Leah broke the twilight silence, resting her head gently on my shoulder in a gesture of trust and camaraderie.

“For the first time in a long, long while, I truly feel deep down that we can win this. That it isn’t just an empty hope.”

Chloé stretched her lupine body with a wide, audible yawn, her golden eyes shining like ancient coins in the dim twilight.

“We can win. But we must remember the crucial factor. It won’t be brute strength that decides victory. It will be the team that makes fewer tactical mistakes, the one that maintains discipline under pressure. And we... we cannot afford a single mistake.”

I looked at them both, feeling a deep, expanding warmth spread through my chest, chasing away the last trace of cold uncertainty.

“Then we won’t make any. This day of hard work was enough to fuse our individual strengths into a single weapon. Whatever happens in the tournament... we’ll enter together, fight together as one, and walk out together with our heads held high.”

The night wind blew gently through the surrounding trees, caressing our tired faces, as if nature itself sealed our silent oath with its whisper.

Because though the path to Whirikal still stretched far away on the horizon, that day, on that training field marked by sweat and effort, we had taken the first decisive step to reach it faster—and more united—than we had ever dared dream.