

Frozen Star 85

Chapter 85: Calls to the Field

[POV Liselotte]

The dust stirred up during the first battle had not yet fully settled when the master of ceremonies once again raised his arm with a solemnity that seemed to cut through the very air.

His voice thundered across the arena, announcing with pomp the next scheduled match. Two new teams made their entrance from opposite sides of the field, and the atmosphere shifted perceptibly at once.

From the eastern end appeared a group of five adventurers clad in light, practical outfits. They looked more like seasoned mercenaries than disciplined soldiers.

They carried varied weapons and radiated an overflowing confidence that bordered dangerously on pure arrogance.

Their leader, a man with striking red hair and a permanently mocking grin, greeted the stands with broad gestures, moving with the studied swagger of an actor on stage. The crowd responded with enthusiastic cheers, clearly caught by his insolent charisma and defiant attitude.

From the opposite side entered a group that made me instinctively hold my breath.

There were only three of them, dressed entirely in black robes embroidered with complex runes that glowed with a faint yet unsettling violet shimmer.

They bore no shields or visible armor, only long staffs of dark wood and intricate amulets hanging from their chests.

Their advance was slow, deliberate, disciplined—without unnecessary gestures, without acknowledging the crowd.

The spectators received them in expectant silence, as though they intuitively knew this would not be a display of muscle and steel, but of pure, dangerous magic.

The bronze gong rang, marking the start of the battle.

What happened next froze my blood.

The mercenaries immediately charged forward, attempting to use their clear numerical advantage from the very first moment.

The red-haired leader leapt ahead with feline agility, brandishing twin daggers that gleamed under the sun. His four companions spread out to flank from the sides, creating a coordinated whirlwind of steel and movement.

But the three hooded figures did not take a single step from their starting positions.

Their lips began to move in synchronized whispers—low chants blending into an eerie harmony.

The air itself vibrated visibly around them, heavy with the release of a dense, arcane power.

Suddenly, without warning, a surge of liquid shadows burst from the ground, slithering like living tentacles and wrapping tightly around the legs of the unsuspecting attackers.

One mercenary fell face-first to the hardened earth, screaming in genuine terror as the animated darkness dragged him back like a living swamp swallowing him whole.

The crowd roared in a mixture of awe and collective fear, torn between fascination and horror at what they were witnessing.

Leah gripped my arm with surprising strength, her nails digging unconsciously through the fabric of my tunic.

“Advanced field-control magic... and in group coordination. This is—” She broke off abruptly, unable to tear her blue eyes away from the scene, completely hypnotized by the display of power.

The red-haired leader, showing remarkable reflexes and true combat experience, managed to slice through the shadows threatening him with his daggers, which were imbued with some disruptive energy.

He freed himself and one nearby companion, trying to reorganize quickly into a defensive formation.

But the three mages advanced just a few steps in unison, and from the tips of their staffs a blazing purple light surged, forming an ethereal, translucent wall.

The remaining mercenaries slammed into this magical barrier, unable to pass or bypass it, bouncing off the invisible surface like disoriented insects against unbreakable glass.

Every movement of the hooded mages was measured, calculated, almost ritualistic in its precision.

One focused solely on conjuring more shifting shadows to immobilize anyone who approached. Another maintained and reinforced the impenetrable barriers.

The third hurled silent bolts of darkness with surgical precision, each strike dropping stragglers unconscious to the ground in a single blow.

In less than three minutes—minutes that felt stretched into slow motion—four of the five mercenaries were already defeated, trapped in an invisible labyrinth of cursed energy from which they could neither escape nor defend themselves.

Only the red-haired leader remained standing.

He was visibly gasping for breath, daggers trembling in his hands, desperation painted across his sweaty face.

The crowd, who had cheered for him enthusiastically at first, now held a tense, expectant silence, captivated by the hypnotic, deadly dance of the hooded mages.

Finally, with a simple, almost disinterested gesture, the lead mage raised his staff.

A thin ray of dark energy shot out, striking the mercenary square in the chest and hurling him to the ground like a rag doll.

The arena exploded in cheers mixed with cries of disbelief.

But in my ears, the loudest sound was silence—the silence of fearful respect before a power we clearly did not understand.

The three hooded figures exchanged a brief glance, inclining their heads slightly in mutual acknowledgment, before leaving the arena with the same calm with which they had entered.

No celebration. No triumph. Only cold, methodical, terrifying precision.

A violent shiver ran down my spine, raising the hairs beneath my armor.

They weren't just strong and disciplined.

They were genuinely frightening in their silent coordination, moving like a single three-headed entity bound by one will.

A deep part of me desperately hoped never to face them in combat.

But I knew, with unsettling certainty, that in a single-elimination tournament like this, sooner or later, paths would inevitably cross.

The master of ceremonies returned to the center of the arena, his voice booming like artificial thunder, dragging the crowd back into immediate reality.

“And now, ladies and gentlemen, prepare for the next battle! Entering the field of honor, making their debut in this tournament—Liselotte, Leah, and the silver wolf Chloé—against the fearsome Shadow Hunters!”

My stomach clenched hard, as if I'd been struck by an invisible fist.

The deafening roar of the crowd rose like a tidal wave, drowning my thoughts in a sea of sound.

Leah swallowed audibly beside me, her blue eyes gleaming with a complex mixture of visceral fear and unbreakable resolve.

Chloé let out a low, prolonged growl, baring her white fangs in open defiance.

Her mental voice cut sharp and steady into my mind.

“It’s our turn now. And we cannot afford to show even the slightest weakness or doubt before this audience—or our opponents.”

I rose to my feet, my sword feeling heavier than usual in my sweaty grip, and took the first determined step toward the battlefield.

The dust hanging in the air, the constant roar of the crowd, and the vibrating tension filling every corner of the arena all fused into a single, pounding heartbeat that shook me from head to toe.

It was our moment.