

## Frozen Star 91

### Chapter 91: Dust and Radiance

[POV Liselotte]

The second day of the tournament had reached its hottest point when we were called back to the arena. The Kreston sun loomed above us like an anvil of molten gold, and the air shimmered with that dry heat that distorts shadows and makes the horizon gleam. The crowd roared with a mixture of impatience and overflowing excitement, a sound as tangible as a wall. The stands were completely packed, a mosaic of colors and sweaty faces. Flags fluttered like multicolored waves in the wind, and the metallic smell of the sand mixed with sweat, sweet spices, and the ozone of burnt magic hung in the air, creating a haze of scents that clung to the throat.

We waited in the cool darkness of the stone tunnel, breathing in the thick silence that always precedes the roar. Every step we took toward the iron gate seemed to remind us of the weight of the previous day—the images of the Faceless, the motionless bodies on the sand, the white, empty masks that I couldn't erase from behind my eyelids. But today, we weren't facing them. Today was another battle. One that, though lacking their sinister aura, promised a different kind of brutality—more conventional, but no less dangerous.

“Team Crimson Tempest versus Silver Pack.”

The voice of the master of ceremonies, amplified by magic, boomed across the vastness of the coliseum, and the crowd exploded in a furious wave of cheers and screams.

“Silver Pack...” murmured Leah beside me, with a sharp trace of irony. “Sounds almost insultingly fitting for us, doesn't it?”

Chloé, who was sniffing the air anxiously, snorted softly, and her lower fangs gleamed with a pale flash under the tunnel's dim light.

"We'll see if they deserve the name—or if we're the ones who'll make it mean something."

The gate rose with its characteristic metallic screech, a sound that always made my skin crawl.

The sunlight struck us full on—blinding and scorching—as we crossed the threshold into the battlefield, golden under the blazing sky.

Across the arena, they were already there—Crimson Tempest, a compact group of four. Their hardened leather armor, dyed a dark red like aged wine, glimmered with burnished metallic reflections. At the center stood a tall woman with feline movements, wielding two curved blades that crackled with palpable electrical energy. Around her were a sharp-eyed archer with a furrowed brow, a massive warrior with a shield that covered half his body, and an earth mage clutching a stone orb glowing with a dull light.

The woman stepped forward, defiant, a smile curling her lips, brimming with confidence.

"I wish you luck," she said in a low, confident voice that cut through the crowd's murmur. "You're going to need it."

The gong resounded then—a deep tone that expanded until it filled everything—and the world compressed into the narrow space of the arena.

The battle began with immediate and unrestrained violence.

The enemy archer moved first, firing a rain of enchanted arrows that blazed through the air like incandescent comets tracing deadly arcs. I moved forward instinctively, raising my sword in a wide defensive arc—each projectile I deflected burst in a blue electric flash upon striking the steel, and every impact sent an unpleasant tingling up my arms.

“Cover yourself, Lotte!” Leah shouted from behind me.

I felt the rising heat of her magic a heartbeat before I saw it—a fierce orange blaze surged up like a wall behind me, diverting part of the aerial assault and cloaking us in a thick, acrid smoke that gave us a brief respite.

On the other side, the earth mage was not idle. He struck the ground with the base of his oak staff, and the sand responded to his call, rising in thick spirals that coalesced into a solid wall, momentarily separating us from two of our opponents.

Through the dust, the crimson warrior advanced with determination, his shield extended like a ship’s prow. He charged with concentrated brute force, making me stumble several steps back, my leather boots sinking into the hot, loose sand.

The dull vibration of the impact ran up my arms to my shoulders, leaving a numbing sensation.

“He’s strong...” I muttered through clenched teeth, adjusting my grip on the sword. “Too strong.”

“Don’t just stand there!” roared Chloé through the bond of our minds, her thought a spark of urgency.

Her silvery figure sliced through the haze like a ray of moonlight.

She leapt with feline grace onto the edge of the warrior’s shield, twisting midair with impossible agility, and sank her sharp fangs into the exposed shoulder beneath the armor. The man shouted—a mixture of surprise and pain—trying to tear her off with his free hand, but she was already slipping away, landing on the sand with predatory elegance, ready for her next strike.

The sound of air being split in two made me spin on my heels.

The crimson leader, her twin blades now wrapped in crackling electricity, was rushing straight at me with the speed of a cobra.

Our steels clashed in a series of deafening, blue-sparking collisions. Every blow she struck was fast, precise, lethally charged with voltage.

Every defense I made demanded perfect timing—an almost superhuman coordination of muscle and reflex. I couldn’t let her touch me—not just because of her blades, but because the shock would numb my limbs.

“Your reflexes aren’t bad,” she said between short, breathless laughs. “But you lack decisiveness.”

Her right leg spun downward in a perfect sweeping motion—the kick hit my abdomen with the force of a battering ram before my mind could even process it.

The air was knocked out of me in a dry, painful gasp, and I rolled across the coarse sand, my sword clattering out of reach with a discordant metallic echo.

“Lotte!” Leah’s voice pierced through the chaos, shrill and panicked. She raised both hands with visible effort and conjured a fireball the size of her head, which hissed through the air toward the enemy leader. But a wall of solid stone erupted in front of the woman, absorbing the explosion with a dull thud and scattering it into harmless embers and gray dust.

The earth mage, from behind his creation, laughed with unbearable calm.

“Fire magic against earth? How naïve, little girl.”

Leah gasped, stumbling back a step. “It’s not just magic, it’s—”

She didn’t finish.

The archer, taking advantage of her distraction, fired an arrow with terrifying precision—it sliced off a clean lock of her blonde hair, grazing her cheek. Another arrow followed. And another. And another—a relentless deluge.

I had to throw myself forward, my body aching, tackling her to the ground before the next projectile found her heart.

The crowd roared above—a sea of sound rising and falling with the fight. Dust rose in thick clouds, and for the first time in a long while, I felt with cold certainty that the ground was slipping from beneath us—that the control of the battle was tipping irrevocably toward the crimson side.

Chloé was doing her best to keep the warrior at bay with swift, evasive strikes, but he was monstrously resilient. His shield seemed to absorb the kinetic energy of each blow, growing heavier, sturdier, with every strike received.

“We can’t hold much longer like this!” Leah shouted, crawling out from under me, gasping.

“Then improvise,” I replied, with the bitter taste of sand and exhaustion in my mouth. “Like we always do.”

She nodded briefly, too breathless for words, and her green eyes lit up with that dangerous, familiar gleam I recognized instantly—the flash of a desperate idea, the final spark before the blaze.

Without another word, she raised her trembling right hand and drew a complex magic circle in the dust-charged air. The runes flared in a searing red spiral, so bright it hurt to look at, then ascended into the sky like a swarm of burning fireflies.

A single spark detached from the rest, disappearing into the blinding sunlight as if it had never existed.

“What was that?” I asked, not taking my eyes off the twin-bladed woman preparing for her next assault.

“Seeds,” Leah murmured, lowering her voice as she traced a second, smaller sigil—almost furtively. “I don’t have enough power left for a direct attack that’ll stop them... so I’m betting everything on whatever falls from above after this.”

I didn’t have time to ask what she meant.

The enemy mage, tired of games, drove his staff deep into the sand, and it responded like a raging sea beneath our feet.

A pillar of compacted earth erupted right under me, hurling me into the air in a wild somersault. I hit the ground hard, breath knocked from my lungs, my sword slipping completely from my grasp. My vision blurred with dancing black dots.

Through the haze of pain, I barely saw Chloé being slammed sideways by a brutal shield bash, collapsing with a muffled whimper, her silver fur now stained with dark sand and droplets of her own blood.

The Crimson Tempest leader approached slowly, with the confidence of someone who knows victory is within reach. Her shadow stretched over me—cold, despite the heat.

Her blades spun in a hypnotic motion, humming with blue electricity.

“It’s over,” she said softly, almost kindly, but without a trace of mercy. “Surrender now. Before someone gets seriously hurt.”

My breathing was ragged and painful. I glanced sideways at Leah, who was barely standing, leaning on her knees, her hands bloodied from the friction of the sand, her lips trembling from the superhuman effort of her spell.

“Not... not yet...” she whispered, so faint I barely heard it. “It’s not over... yet.”

The woman laughed quietly—a sound devoid of amusement. “I admire your determination, truly. But a bit of fire and a wolf won’t save you this time.”

Her blade rose, the edge aimed at me, ready to deliver the final blow that would end our fight.

And just then—in that suspended instant between life and defeat—a new sound echoed above the muffled roar of the crowd.

A whistle—sharp, clean, and rising—not from anywhere in the arena, but from above, from the clear sky itself.



Leah's pale, sweat-drenched face curved into an exhausted, triumphant, and reckless smile all at once.

"Now."

Everyone—absolutely everyone in the arena—looked up at the same time, driven by a primal survival instinct.

A bright line was descending from the sky—no, not one, many.

They were incandescent fragments, droplets of enraged sunlight, plunging from the heavens, leaving behind curved trails of white fire that seemed to scar the blue of the firmament.

The Crimson Tempest leader—her confidence shattered by the impossible—barely had time to raise an arm to shield her face when the first of those miniature meteors struck the sand just a few meters from her.

The blast was deafening—a thunder born from the ground, shaking the very foundations of the coliseum.

A shockwave of pure force and heat tore across every inch of the battlefield, lifting dust, fire, and blinding light into a chaotic column that reached the heavens.

And the entire world—the roar, the pain, the fear—seemed to stop in that instant of pure, cataclysmic beauty.

Minutes earlier, in the brief lull that Leah had bought with her smoke screen, she—hands trembling, breath ragged—had raised her arms to the sky and silently cast the most complex and delicate spell she could sustain with her nearly depleted mana reserves. It wasn't a spell of direct destruction. It was one of containment and delay. She had taken the essence of her fire, compressed it into small spheres of pure fiery energy, and sent them upward with currents of hot air—high enough that the naked eye couldn't see them, where enemy detection magic wouldn't reach.

“Let them fall back down when we need them most...” she had whispered through clenched teeth, eyes shut tight in concentration, as those spheres of devastating potential vanished into the high clouds—like burning dandelion seeds, waiting for the final mental command to come home.

And now—in that present suspended between blinding light and shattering sound—those fiery seeds Leah had planted in the sky were finally descending, one after another, with terrifying precision, as if the sky itself, moved by our endurance, had decided to intervene on our behalf with divine wrath.

Fire covered the arena in successive waves—not a fire that burned, but one that blinded and stunned with its concussive force.

The long shadows of the afternoon vanished, devoured by a light that was like the dawn of a new sun.

And amid the uncontrollable, terrified, and ecstatic roar of the crowd, only one question lingered in my mind—sharp and cold at the heart of the inferno.

Had we won this battle, or had we just unleashed and destroyed something far greater than we could ever hope to control?