

THE KERLA, DAYSIDE.

A detailed illustration of a desert landscape. The foreground is dominated by rolling sand dunes with soft, undulating lines. In the middle ground, several tall, jagged rock formations rise from the dunes, some resembling spires or pillars. The background shows more distant rock formations under a bright, clear sky with a few wispy clouds. The overall color palette is warm, with shades of tan, beige, and light blue.

YOU'RE
INEPT ENOUGH
TO MAKE THE
HUNDRED IDIOTS
LOOK
BRILLIANT--

WIND CARESSES THE STARK
DUNES WITH A WHISPERING
TOUCH, CATCHING FINE, WHITE
GRAINS OF SAND BETWEEN
ITS FINGERS AND BEARING
THEM FORTH LIKE THOUSANDS
OF TINY CHARIOTEERS.

ABOVE, THE MOTIONLESS SUN
GLARES DOWN ON THE DUNES
LIKE A JEALOUS MONARCH, ITS
STARE FIXED--

--RELENTLESS.



--DON'T TELL ME YOU INTEND TO GO THROUGH WITH THIS FOOLISHNESS, KENTON?!

LOOK, BOY-- I HAVE SUFFERED YOUR INSOLENCE AND GAMES FOR **EIGHT YEARS!** THE SAND LORD ALMIGHTY ONLY KNOWS HOW MUCH TROUBLE YOU'VE CAUSED!

WHY MUST YOU CONSTANTLY DEFY ME?

PAH! MY OWN SON, DETERMINED TO EMBARRASS ME! YOU HAVE REFUSED ADVANCEMENT FOUR TIMES NOW.

FOUR TIMES!

BECAUSE I'M **GOOD** AT IT?

THERE ARE ACOLENTS FOUR YEARS YOUNGER THAN YOU WHO ARE NOW FULL-FLEDGED MASTRELLS! ARE YOU **DETERMINED** TO BE THE OLDEST TRAINEE IN THE DIEM? IS THAT IT?!

SO...?

SIGH ALL RIGHT, BOY, ALL RIGHT.

LORD MASTRELL, I HAVE REFUSED BECAUSE ONCE A SAND MASTER HAS ACCEPTED A RANK HE'S FOREVER FROZEN IN THAT PLACE.

DESPITE THE PAIN--
DESPITE THE SHAME--
I WILL ADMIT THAT YOU'VE
WORKED HARD. THE SAND
LORD KNOWS YOU HAVEN'T
ANY TALENT TO SPEAK OF
BUT AT LEAST YOU DID
SOMETHING WITH
THE SMALL AMOUNT
YOU HAVE.

GIVE UP THIS
STUPID **DREAM**
TO RUN THE MASTRELL'S
PATH AND TOMORROW
I'LL OFFER YOU THE
RANK OF **FEN**.

FEN, THE NEXT TO
LOWEST OF THE SEVEN
PERMANENT SAND
MASTER RANKS.

ONLY **UNDERFEN**
SITS BENEATH IT, AND
I HAVE REFUSED THAT
FOUR TIMES NOW.

NO.

BEING MY SON
WON'T CHANGE
ANYTHING, YOU KNOW?
I **WON'T** MAKE YOU
A MASTRELL, KENTON.
YOU'RE NOT GOOD
ENOUGH. EVEN IF YOU
FIND **ALL FIVE**
SPHERES, I
WON'T DO IT.

YOU'LL NEVER BE A
MASTRELL--YOU AREN'T
EVEN WORTHY TO BE A
SAND MASTER. ALL
YOU ARE--ALL YOU WILL
EVER BE--IS A
DISAPPOINTMENT!

AISHA!!!
RUNNING THE
MASTRELL'S
PATH WON'T
PROVE ANYTHING!
IT'S MEANT FOR
MASTRELLS,
NOT FOR...

THE LAW DOESN'T SAY
A STUDENT
CANNOT RUN
IT.

THEN
I'LL BE AN
ACOLET UNTIL
THE DAY I
DIE, LORD
MASTRELL.



YOU CAN'T BE A MASTRELL. YOU DON'T HAVE THE POWER.

I DON'T BELIEVE IN POWER, FATHER. I BELIEVE IN ABILITY. I CAN DO ANYTHING A MASTRELL CAN, I JUST HAVE DIFFERENT METHODS.

"DIFFERENT METHODS"? A SWORD? NO SAND MASTER IN ALL OF HISTORY EVER NEEDED A WEAPON! IT'S A BRUTE'S TOOL FIT ONLY FOR THAT VULGAR PROFESSION-- SOLDIERS!

I CAN DO ANYTHING A MASTRELL CAN.



CAN YOU SLATRIFY?



SLATRIFICATION-- THE ABILITY TO CHANGE SAND INTO WATER. WILDLY DIFFERENT FROM SAND MASTERY'S OTHER ABILITIES AND SOMETHING NO AMOUNT OF INGENUITY CAN REPLICATE--NOT EVEN MY INGENUITY.

WELL, BOY?



THERE HAVE BEEN MASTRELLS WHO COULDN'T--

ONLY TWO! AND BOTH WERE ABLE TO CONTROL OVER TWO DOZEN RIBBONS OF SAND AT ONCE.



HOW MANY RIBBONS CAN YOU CONTROL, BOY?

AFTER EIGHT YEARS TRAINING, HOW MANY?

ONE.



ONE!

I'VE NEVER KNOWN A MASTRELL WHO COULDN'T CONTROL AT LEAST FIFTEEN. YOU'RE TELLING ME YOU CAN DO AS MUCH WITH ONE AS THEY CAN WITH FIFTEEN?!

CAN'T YOU HEAR HOW PREPOSTEROUS THAT SOUNDS?!



YOU'RE RIGHT. I'LL JUST HAVE TO PROVE IT TO YOU, LORD MASTRELL.

WHAT--?!

NOW, YOU LISTEN TO ME, BOY!



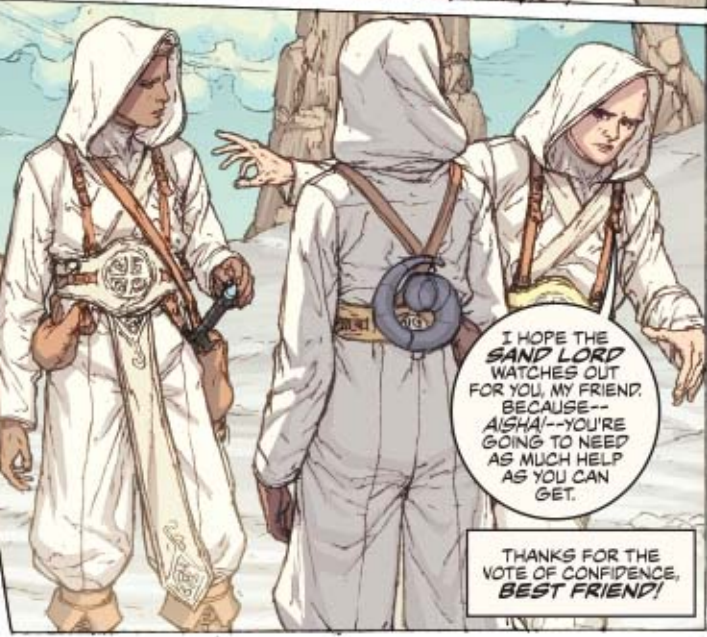
YOU'RE A FOOL!

EVEN MANY OF THE MOST ACCOMPLISHED SAND MASTERS CHOOSE NEVER TO RUN THE PATH--IT'S TOO DANGEROUS!



UNDER-MASTRELL ELORIN, MY LORD. I PETITION YOU FOR SPONSORSHIP IN MY REQUEST.

ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DO THIS, KENTON?



THERE ARE FIVE OF THESE SPHERES HIDDEN ON THE PATH. YOUR **GOAL**, ACOLENT KENTON, IS TO FIND ALL FIVE BEFORE THE MOON PASSES BEHIND THE MOUNTAIN AND REAPPEARS ON THE OTHER SIDE.

SELECTED MASTRELLS WILL EVALUATE YOUR PROGRESS AND ENSURE YOU **DO NOT CHEAT**. BUT WE CANNOT HELP YOU UNLESS YOU **ASK**--AND IF WE DO, OUR INTERVENTION WILL END YOUR RUN.

COME. THE RUN MAY LAST BUT A FULL HOUR--NO LONGER THAN 100 MINUTES. YOU MAY NOT TAKE YOUR QIDO* WITH YOU.

I UNDERSTAND.

* WATER BOTTLE

IF HE MUST DO THIS THEN YOU WILL TAKE HIS SWORD, TOO.

NO, THAT'S NOT IN THE RULES.

RULES? A TRUE SAND MASTER HAS NO NEED OF A CLUMSY WEAPON, BOY!

BUT THAT'S NOT IN THE RULES. I'M KEEPING IT.

...I'M AFRAID THAT HE IS RIGHT, LORD MASTRELL.

TSK

THE MOON IS ALMOST HIDDEN--YOUR TIME DRAWS NEAR. REMEMBER **ALL FIVE SPHERES** IN JUST **ONE HUNDRED MINUTES**.

MAY THE SAND LORD PROTECT YOU, YOUNG KENTON.

SURE, WHY NOT? BY TRADITION, THE SAND MASTERS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ATHEISTS-- BUT EVEN THEY TURN TO THE SAND LORD WHEN IT COMES TO A LOST CAUSE LIKE ME.



SO...

...THE MASTRELL'S PATH. REMIND ME AGAIN WHY I THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE A SMART IDEA?



I GUESS I'VE ALWAYS BEEN TRYING TO PROVE SOMETHING TO MY FATHER, THE LORD MASTRELL.

"AND THIS ONE, SENIOR MASTRELL TENDEL? DOES HE SHOW PROMISE?"

"YES, LORD MASTRELL. HE'S ONE IN A VERY STRONG GROUP THIS YEAR."



WELL, CHILD? TELL THE LORD MASTRELL YOUR NAME.

TRAIBEN, SIR.

NOW SHOW US YOUR MASTERY SO FAR.



...
YOU ARE AWARE THAT YOU MAY BEGIN, TRAIBEN?



~NNGHFF!~



A GOOD START.

THE LORD MASTRELL WILL FIND A PLACE FOR YOU IN THE DIEM WHERE YOU WILL LEARN PROPER MASTERY OF SAND.



AND SO IT WENT, EACH WOULD-BE ACOLENT PROVING HIS RAW ABILITIES BEFORE BEING INDUCTED.

SOME WEAK.



SOME STRONG.

VOOM



A REMARKABLE DISPLAY. I HAVEN'T SEEN ONE SO POWERFUL IN YEARS. WHO IS THAT?

DRILE, SON OF REENST RILE.

HMMM. A PROFITABLE CATCH THEN, IN MORE THAN ONE WAY.

AND THEN IT WAS MY TURN.

AND THE LAST WOULD-BE ACOLENT IS YOUR SON-- KENTON.

MY FATHER SAID NOTHING, OF COURSE. AS HIS YOUNGEST SON, I WAS THE LAST IN A LONG LINE OF **DISAPPOINTMENTS**, NOT A SINGLE ONE OF US EXHIBITING ANY TALENT FOR SAND MASTERY.

MY FATHER, THE LORD MASTRELL, UNABLE TO PRODUCE A **SINGLE SAND MASTER CHILD**--IT WAS UNHEARD OF, **SCANDALOUS!**

RUMORS HAD IT THAT IT WAS BECAUSE OUR MOTHER WAS FROM **DARKSIDE**, AND THAT SHE HAD **POLLUTED** THE FAMILY LINE FOREVER, POISONING THE FAMILY TREE AT ITS ROOTS.

I WAS THERE TO **PROVE THEM WRONG**. TO PROVE ALL OF THEM WRONG.

THE TROUBLE WITH ALL THAT PENT-UP **DETERMINATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS**--

--IS IT'S **NO SUBSTITUTE** FOR ACTUAL ABILITY.

SHUFF
SHUFF
SHUFF

I'M... **SORRY**, LORD MASTRELL.

IT IS NOTHING. NOT **EVERY** BOY IS MEANT TO BE A SAND MASTER.

BUT... THIS WAS--

YES.



TAKE THEM AWAY. THOSE WHO HAVE **ANY SKILL** MAY ENTER THE DIEM; THE REST WILL CHOOSE ANOTHER PROFESSION.



I WILL BE A SAND MASTER! AS IS MY RIGHT!

YOU HAVE **NO TALENT** FOR SAND MASTERY, BOY! GO HOME.



YOU SAW.

THE LAW SAYS I HAVE ENOUGH!

YOU'VE STUDIED THE LAW, HAVE YOU, BOY? THEN YOU KNOW THAT, AS LORD MASTRELL, I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN GRANT ADVANCEMENT IN THE DIEM--

YOU WOULD NOT FIND IT EASY IN THE DIEM, BOY.




--AND THAT IT IS I WHO MUST GIVE HIS APPROVAL BEFORE **ANY** SAND MASTER CAN BE ASSIGNED A RANK.

FOR EVERY RANK BUT THE FIRST!




BUT YOU MAY JOIN IF THAT IS YOUR DESIRE.

JOIN AND FAIL-- THAT'S WHAT HE MEANT.



JOIN, FAIL AND **WASH OUT**. THAT'S WHAT HE REALLY WANTED TO SAY. SO HERE I AM, A **FAILURE** IN MY FATHER'S EYES, WASHING OUT IN THE MOST **SUICIDAL MANNER** I COULD ENVISION.

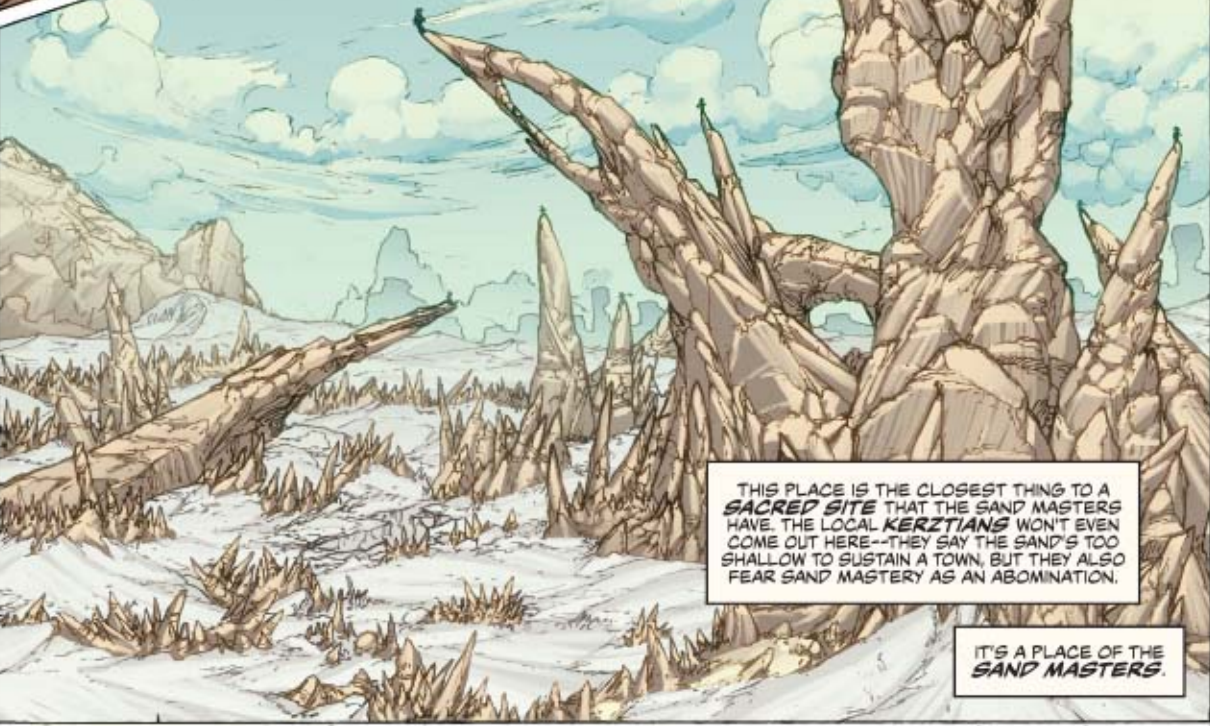


HEY, IF YOU WANT **HUMILIATION**, YOU MAY JUST AS WELL RIDE HIGH ON THE TONK RATHER THAN COWER BEHIND IT!



BUT I'VE FOUND **TWO SPHERES**, AT LEAST, AND TO THINK TRAIBEN SAID THIS WOULD BE **HARD!**

BUT IF I'M GOING TO COMPLETE THE CIRCUIT I'LL HAVE TO PICK UP MY PACE. THERE WON'T BE TIME TO RETRACE MY STEPS--JUST HAVE TO HOPE I DON'T MISS **ANYTHING!**



THIS PLACE IS THE CLOSEST THING TO A **SACRED SITE** THAT THE SAND MASTERS HAVE. THE LOCAL **KERZTIANS** WON'T EVEN COME OUT HERE--THEY SAY THE SAND'S TOO SHALLOW TO SUSTAIN A TOWN, BUT THEY ALSO FEAR SAND MASTERY AS AN ABOMINATION.

IT'S A PLACE OF THE **SAND MASTERS**.