

THE KERLA, DAYSIDE.

A detailed illustration of a desert landscape. In the foreground, there are rolling sand dunes with soft, undulating lines. In the middle ground, several tall, jagged rock formations rise from the dunes. The sky is a pale blue with wispy white clouds. A speech bubble originates from a small figure on the dunes, pointing towards the rock formations.

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
DEFEY 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
ACOLENT 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.





YES, ELORIN--
I DO.

YOUR FATHER'S--
THE LORD
MASTRELL'S--
OBJECTIONS ARE
WELL-FOUNDED,
YOU KNOW?

THE MASTRELL'S PATH
WAS CREATED BY A GROUP OF
MEN WITH INFLATED EGOS WHO
WANTED VERY DESPERATELY TO
PROVE THEMSELVES **BETTER**
THAN THEIR PEERS. IT WAS
DESIGNED FOR THOSE WITH
MASSIVE POWER--



--POWER **FAR** IN
EXCESS OF YOUR
ABILITIES.

I
UNDER-
STAND. I
KNOW WHAT
I'M DOING.

...I THINK.



KENTON, A
MOMENT? WE'VE
BEEN FRIENDS
SINCE WE WERE
BOTH ACCEPTED
INTO THE DIEM AS
CHILDREN...

TRAIBEN,
PLEASE
DON'T TRY
TO TALK
ME--

NO ONE WHO'S
RUN THE PATH HAS
EVER REVEALED ITS
SECRETS. **NO ONE!**
YOU CAN'T KNOW
WHAT IT IS YOU'RE
GETTING YOURSELF
INTO OUT
THERE.

IT'S JUST A
RACE THROUGH
THE KERLA.
HOW BAD CAN
THAT BE?

LACK OF
WATER? STEEP
CLIFFS? THAT'S
NOT SO MUCH OF A
CHALLENGE,
IS IT?



NOT TO AN
ACCOMPLISHED
MASTRELL
MAYBE--BUT
YOU...?



IF I DON'T
DO THIS, TRAIBEN,
MY FATHER WILL
NEVER SEE ME
AS ANYTHING
OTHER THAN A
FAILURE.

AND
WHEN YOU GET
YOURSELF
KILLED,
YOU'LL CONFIRM
HE'S RIGHT!

THEN BETTER
DEAD THAN
A COWARD!



I HOPE THE
SAND LORD
WATCHES OUT
FOR YOU, MY FRIEND.
BECAUSE--
AISHA!--YOU'RE
GOING TO NEED
AS MUCH HELP
AS YOU CAN
GET.

THANKS FOR THE
VOTE OF CONFIDENCE,
BEST FRIEND!

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 UNDER-
STAND.

* 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 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.