

Sweat pouring, slogging through calf deep sand, Dan remembers not so fond memories of football camp back home in Georgia where he had to push through similar punishment, with the difference being this lacked the oppressive humidity. Asking himself why he thought leaving the comfort of the little shack he started in was a good idea, he pushes forward along the expansive desolate sands. What is particularly confusing to him is how the school managed to create a genuine sweltering desert in Montana during April. Remembering his combat final, he can only guess that there are some people's powers, or some of the crazy technology that the school employs at work. He had dressed in layers and now was regretting it. How had it been a crisp 58° when he arrived at the Combat Complex South, yet now the sun felt as if it had a personal vendetta against him? He had been at this slow pace for what felt like hours. When he checked the time, he noticed it was only just before 2pm. What was more surprising was the large numbers on his Vizer that noted there were 69 of 71 students remaining. He was not sure if this was good or bad, as he only had his combat class as a reference, in which things were on a much smaller scale relative to the number of people who were involved. He sighed a breath of relief that he had not embarrassed himself by being the first person eliminated, but what that change in the number told him was that things had officially begun.

People had come across one another and someone had won, and another had lost, twice already in fact. He began to wonder if it would be late into the night when this event would be over considering in an hour only two people had been eliminated. Thankful that he had recently shaved his head so he didn't have the mop of lose curls trapping heat, he peers up as he sees a number of small birds hovering in oddly spaced patterns. It wasn't until he noticed that said birds were not flapping their wings, did he realize that those were not birds, but drones. They had made a point to emphasize just how well covered the event would be, not missing even a single moment. He never stopped to think exactly how that would be possible in the wide-open desert, but he could see now that their claims were not false. Still sweating profusely, wishing he had a canteen, or some kind of water source, he takes another big step, lifting his leg out of the deep sand trying to cover as much ground as possible.

Never guessing that with his abilities, he would actually be praying for water, he notices that there is another shack coming up, and in the far distance, he can surely see buildings. Happy at the prospect of civilization, he turns to head toward the shack when he notices a tree line even further off. Realizing that everyone would be likely heading toward the buildings he thought he might fare better in the woods. At least he would have cover there. Mind set, he is sure there is likely to be water in the shack, something that he took for granted when he first became aware of his surroundings and moved to set out. As he tries to pull his leg up to turn toward the shack and the trees he can see in the distance, he realizes that he can't seem to get his leg out of the sand, and everything he does only seems to make him sink deeper. As he struggles, he remembers something he read back in high school about there being something called quicksand, and that when people get stuck in it they struggle to get out. For the briefest moments he panics, because as embarrassing as it would have been to be eliminated first, it would be even more embarrassing to be eliminated by the terrain. The first thing that comes to his mind is that he doesn't even realize when he vocalizes, "What would Anaar do?" Kicking himself internally for relying on Anaar so much, he has a swift moment of self-deprecation, questioning how could he expect Anaar to ever take him seriously and be his boyfriend, if he continues to play the sad boy constantly needing to be saved by him.

With instinct he did not know he possessed, he looses a ream of paper, one end wrapping around his waist, and the other end zooming ten feet in the distance, beginning to drill into the sand, anchoring itself. He pulls himself out with the apparatus he has fashioned and gasps in relief as his plan worked. As his paper is recollecting itself, he hears something that sounds like a spout, and the sand that he just pulled himself from, comes racing toward him fashioned into what appears to be a mallet. Once again moving instinctually, he forms a barrier to block the incoming blow, hearing it crash against the paper and then disperse to the ground. "What da fuck..." Bringing down his wall, he sees a sphere

of swirling sand rising not far from where he had just pulled himself out. The grains explode forth and race toward him revealing a girl of medium height with dark hair walking toward him with the sands swirling all around her.

“Just give up! You got unlucky. I never thought sand would be such a good weapon, but this is awesome! There is no escaping me now!”

He realizes that the sand around his ankles are starting to swirl and he panics. Legs trapped again, he struggles to get out and topples backward, ankles still anchored in the sand.

With a sneer, the girl begins bringing the sand up to bind his arms.

Minding racing, he can't focus on anything and he just reacts. The paper strewn on the ground formulates itself into a large sheet resembling a blanket, slicing through the sand as it binds him, and catches him as he is falling. Wrapping some paper around his arms to secure him to the sheet, he pushes the paper blanket with all his might, ripping him from the grasping sands. Pulling the remaining paper around him into a swirl, he manages to deflect two sand projectiles that fly directly at him. Flipping himself over on construct, he scrambles to a standing position, and similarly to how he did his arms before, strap his feet into the sheet. Sand swirling behind him, he darts away atop the paper surfboard, shakily steering it away from the girl, as he hovers just above the surface of the sand. Realizing now that this could work to keep him away from the snares of the Terrakinetic girl, he pushes with all his might, zooming across the sands on his makeshift hoverboard. Though he would occasionally dip back into the sands slightly, it was still enough momentum to prevent the girl from capturing him. Hearing gunshots ring out behind him, he sways with the vehicle to try to avoid being hit by a bullet. Unfortunately, one just slightly grazes him, making him realize that he should have brought a gun himself. He had never been the greatest shot, but it would have at least leveled the playing field.

Having the slightest of moments to breathe and think, he realizes that he is at a serious disadvantage, as when it comes to Elementals, the one with the greater resource often wins. Standing on a never ending resource for his enemy gave a bad feeling, as he begins to realize that running would only draw things out, and reduce his own limited resources. Though he still had plenty of paper, he didn't want to find himself running out on a later opponent because he played a war of attrition.

He turns sharply, catching himself off balance as he is not used to supporting weight in this manner, nevertheless moving with it. He wasn't even sure how he was managing it, but he wasn't one to complain when things worked out. A massive wave of sand comes rushing toward him as he races toward the girl. Not confident he could manage to get to the crest of the wave of sand, he takes a different approach, shielding himself in a wedge, and pushes his papercraft as fast as he can muster. Panting from the exertion, he grits his teeth as he impacts the massive wave, coming out on the opposite side. The girl who is looking equally as taxed, presumably from manipulating such a massive force of earth is caught by surprise as Dan bursts through, and catches her directly across her chest with a vicious slash from his uchigatana. The girl, not dressed in any sort of armor is only saved from mortal injury by the inherent durability her Earth attunement gave her. Dan, having not expected to score a blow on the girl at all coming through the sand, and definitely not one so severe, shudders in shock as he sees the crimson stained blade in his hands and the girl convulsing on the ground. At the sight of what he has done he loses all control of his paper, then comes crashing to the ground. Crawling his way toward the girl, he tries to scream out, but finds only sand in his throat. Before he reaches her, a portal opens and a team quickly collects her and disappears. Stunned, confused, he realizes that he never expected things to be so brutal in true combat, and even then, this couldn't be considered true combat as they weren't trying to kill one another, only incapacitate them.

He flings himself to the side, vomiting at the reality of what this competition holds, and takes a moment to compose himself. Looking at his watch he is surprised to see the entire fight only lasted just over five minutes. Even more confusing to him he notices it says that there are only 67/71 students remaining. Who in the world went down before his fight? Or maybe just after? Noticing the pace of

the Melee was quickening, he slaps himself a few times, steeling himself, realizing that people aren't waiting around for him to recover. Resolved, he knows he has no choice but to move. He crawls over to his sword, cleans and sheathes it. Standing, he begins to trudge toward the shack he saw again. Realizing he is an idiot, he binds his paperboard again, attempting to step on it to make his journey faster but it just falls apart. "Well fuck. This shit ain't right..." He gathers his paper, and sets back on foot to get some water, then make his way to the trees he saw in the distance, now wondering if the reason he couldn't perform was that he was just tired, or if it was the adrenaline that fashioned the vehicle which secured his first victory.