

## STAGE FRIGHT

Nervously, Alonzo smoothed the silver shirt that clung tightly to his torso, the shiny material emphasizing his muscular body. The shirt, and the black leather pants he wore, were a perfect fit -- though it'd cost him an arm and a leg to get the Grendler to part with the clothes. He peeked through the curtain. Nearly a thousand colonists had gathered and were milling about in front of the stage -- actually an elevation in the ground -- in eager anticipation of the things to come.

Alonzo looked around. Four Grendlers were fidgeting in a small group to his left, at least as nervous as he was. Not being able to stand still for a second they were constantly shuffling their feet. They rattled their maracas, creating a racket that was nearly loud enough to drown out the voices of the humans on the other side of the curtain.

Where were they? Alonzo glanced up at the Moons -- it was nearly time. They had promised him to be here and they usually kept their promises. Except they should've been here already. Alonzo closed his eyes and lowered his head, trying to contact them. However, he received no reply. Most likely, his nervousness rubbed off on them, scaring them away, he thought glumly.

On Alonzo's right, Morgan was practicing the rhythms one last time, using his VR Gear to keep the beat, his eyes closed. Finishing the routine with a flourish, Morgan took off the Gear. Meeting Alonzo's eyes, he nodded, once. It was time.

Swallowing down on his nerves, Alonzo motioned at Uly to draw the curtain. As the boy pulled on the cord and the curtains parted, the colonists in front of the stage hushed for a moment. Then they realized the time was near and a loud, encouraging roar rose from the crowd.

The Grendlers moved forward to take their positions at the four corners of the stage. Morgan stepped up to take his seat behind the drums -- empty food containers covered with tarp left over from the Eden Advance tents. He tapped the drumsticks together, "One, two, three, four," then started the rhythm. The Grendlers quickly followed his example, adding their rattle to the beat.

Alonzo looked around one last time. They weren't there. "Well, here goes..." he thought to himself and joined the others on the stage. A bright patch of moonlight illuminated the center of the stage and this was where Alonzo went to stand.

He took a deep breath, opened his mouth and... With a loud crackle, lightning streaked across the sky, drowning out the music and Alonzo's first words. The earth rumbled. At the back of the stage, nearly toppling Morgan and his drums, three Terrians swam up

from beneath the stage. A surprised gasp rippled through the audience.

The largest of the three Terrians nodded at Alonzo. "We're here," he trilled. "Let's do it."

Again Morgan tapped his sticks together. The Grendlers shook their maracas and the Terrians' low trilling created the melody. Alonzo's voice rang out, a clear, warm baritone. "Living La Vida Koba..."

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