

Far away from Ahsira, far from Wynveria, far from the Lurion Isles there is a land few have visited. The Sessara, who hail ancestrally from this land carry tales of it, from a time before they left it. The land's name was lost to them, but the land itself is still alive and well.

This is a tale of that land, and a golem, one of the Orewrought, who has become a legend to them.

They say there is a life force. One that thrives and flows between us all. It is unique to each being, yet it is all a part of a great system a great oneness that seeks to be reunited someday, when this world has met its end.

There was a sculptor who believed this philosophy, a man named Hui. Hui spent his lifetime, trying to create a perfect statue in the form of human likeness. He was inspired by an old tale about the creation of the Orewrought and wished to see one spring to life before him.

For fifty years he toiled, day after day. In that time, it was said he made over one thousand statues. Images of men, women, children, of different shapes and sizes were soon made. While most thought him a fool, his artistic renown was respected. People clamored to buy his creations, seeking to own such lifelike beauty for themselves.

When Hui was eighty, with his now balding head losing the last of its silver locks, he finished what would be the last of his statues.

The statue was made with great pains taken, but it was considered his masterpiece. Made in the image of a female soldier he had once loved, this statue was fierce, yet beautiful. The body was crafted of rich, sepia brown earth. Her hair was designed to appear in a neat bun, while small, stylized round eyebrows were above her serious, deeply gazing eyes. Her lips appeared to be forming something between a smile and a snarl, further pronouncing her ferocity.

The armor on the statue was based heavily on the style soldiers wore whenever they visited the village, called Xa'Ani. It was replicated faithfully after years of study, completing the statue's overall look. The image of a female warrior was made by Hui, standing as his last and greatest work.

With all his years behind him, and the end of his days before him, Hui decided he could at least die happily if his last work had a name.

After a few moments thought, he named the statue Qi, engraving it on the base below the figure he had sculpted. The statue had been named for the life force he had believed in, but never saw within his creations.

After that, the old man, Hui, passed. Months after his funeral, when all of his works, except the last, had been sold, it began to move. It had been given motion and voice, having become a golem... So began the story of Qi.

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Ba'Lao was a village on a mountain path, having sat in the shadow of the monastery mountain for as long as there had been humans in the land. Rumor had it that one of the first dragons, the Primordials, called the mountain home, and held a great treasure within the monastery.

Qi, however, had no interest in the monastery, but instead wished to find a good place to rest.

The Orewrought golem was sitting down beneath a shady tree, humming to herself as she tried to find composure. The fact that she did not need to breathe or eat made things easier, quieting her mind was still difficult. Ever since she had become aware, she had nothing but, thoughts, feelings, and worries...Ones she sought to rid herself of.

She tried to feel nothing, to cease to be and regain a oneness with existence...Yet it eluded her. Especially since there was a loud cry coming from outside.

“Hm?”

“The Kobolds are coming! Quickly, to the cellars!”

Qi saw villagers quickly running to their homes in a panic, while a few with arms came outside, facing a threat of several, lizard-like beings.

Vaguely human in form, with some barely bigger than a child and others as tall as grown men, the scaled beings approached. On their bodies they wore rags and scraps of armor, whilst wielding blades ranging from kitchenware to swords.

Qi had never seen kobolds so close, let alone so many. "The lesser heirs to the dragons...Of course they would disturb my peace," she said, almost exasperated. Thinking to herself, she wondered if spirits as wild as theirs could ever find balance, too.

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"This is your only warning, leave here or die!" A warrior shouted to the kobolds, his voice wavering towards the end. Qi could see his hand that wielded an old spear was trembling.

The kobolds stared at one another shiftily, hissing in a language none of those around them could understand. Before long, the Kobolds began to approach, slowly as they stared at the fighters and Qi.

Qi stood still, being made of stone made it very easy for her to be perfectly still. A few of the others held composure, but most were fearful of the foes from the south.

That fear was the only weakness that the kobolds needed to justify their pouncing.

At last, they struck, the attempt of the twenty dragon-borns to overrun their opposition. Their attack was met with the stone soldier's blade. Two kobolds were immediately slashed across their chest, the gleaming blade rending their exposed scales.

Their anguished yells were a big enough distraction to their cohorts that she could land two more quick attacks in succession, slashing one kobold's arm and another's tail. Engaging all four, she could see now that they were fearful.

The conflict wasn't long, though blood was shed. The kobold's hot, blackish-red blood spilled to the ground, as did that of the many men who had been there, now felled. Most of them fought valiantly, but the combination of fangs, claws, and blades the kobolds bore made them too much for some of the men to bear.

By the same token, some were too talented for the kobolds to prevail against. Using their weapons, the warriors used precise, critical strikes to defeat their opponents, sending several running and slaying those who persisted.

In the end, a dozen Kobold had fled, while eight perished, with the bodies of four townspeople on the ground as well.

Qi looked them over, seeing the blood on her own blade and spattered across her stony body. With a sigh, she sheathed her blade, resolving to clean it soon.

As she departed, one of the survivors walked up to her. "Wait, aren't you going to stay and help move the bodies?"

"I turned four of your enemies into corpses. I believe I've already done more than I needed." Qi continued to walk ahead, leaving the townsmen behind to deal with the problem before she went her own way.

Heading deeper into town, she looked for a small shop where she could purchase a cloth and possibly a whetstone. Before she could, though, a young man spoke to her, startled.

"Lei Shuang?"

"Hm?" Qi turned to him, seeing that he was staring directly at her. "Who?"

"Lei Shuang, of the Righteous Legion. Is that you?"

"No. I am Qi." The Orewrought being walked closer to the boy. "Who is Lei Shuang?"

"She was this town's hero. I've only seen paintings of her, but you look almost exactly like her...Except made of stone."

"I see. More than likely she's the woman who served as my crafter's muse."

"Hm?"

"Nothing, though does she still live here?"

"More than likely not, but her family does, in a house near the mountain trail."

"I see...Thank you." Qi wished the boy farewell before continuing along her path.

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The Shuang Family home was humble, but picturesque. The dwelling was based near the mountain path.

The house was neither big nor small, but somehow it struck Qi as...Sufficient. As she approached, using the stone path that led to the door, she wondered who would greet her. Once she arrived at the door she knocked, and then waited.

After some time, a woman in her forties arrived. "Hm? Another statue of mother? Who left this one?"

"None. I am no statue," Qi stated.

"An Orewrought? Why are you shaped like Lei Shuang?"

"I was molded after her. I came here because I would like to meet her."

"Oh...I'm sorry. My mother passed nearly a decade ago."

"Ah. My condolences," Qi said softly. "How did she die?"

"Peacefully, in her sleep."

"That is a relief," Qi said, managing a sympathetic smile.

"It was. She had asked us years before not to hold a large funeral, so we gave her a simple ceremony."

"I understand. I apologize for dredging up bad memories."

"No, you haven't. However, I'd still like to invite you in. Perhaps I can answer a question or two for you."

"Thank you." Smiling, Qi walked into the house, led in by her guest. "By the way, I am Qi."

"And I am Lin Shuang. Your name is very inspiring...Named for the life force, yes?"

"Yes." Qi surveyed the house, noting how clean and well-furnished it was. There were also a few intricate portraits, including those of Lei Shuang. "Your home is lovely."

"Thank you. Would you like anything to eat or drink?"

"No. I require neither food nor drink."

"I understand. Still, may I offer you a seat, then?"

"Of course." Qi smiled. In truth, sitting would make her no more comfortable than standing, but she appreciated the gesture. As she sat, she noticed a strange, decorated scabbard on the wall, with a single, glistening stone embedded at its tip. "That scabbard looks intriguing. Did it belong to your mother?"

"Yes, actually. She claimed to have gained it on the mountain top, although I am not sure about the blade that belonged to it."

"Interesting. May I hold it?" Qi asked.

"Of course." Lin gestured for her to take it. She watched as Qi took it carefully from the wall and looked it over. "Mother said that she needed to return it someday, but she passed."

"I see. I am sure she had her reasons."

Lin smiled. "I do agree. I considered taking it up the mountain myself, but I simply lack the strength to do so. I know it mattered to my mother, so I feel guilty leaving her last request unfulfilled."

Qi was quiet for a time. "Perhaps I could perform the duty for you. As the woman who inspired my appearance, I feel I owe your mother a small degree of gratitude, and it is obvious you cared about her desires."

"Thank you, but I do not wish to burden you."

"It is no burden at all. It is a purpose, in fact, something I am glad to have now." Qi took the scabbard before placing it at her side, opposite of the one that held her blade. "Humbly, I ask that I be allowed to take the scabbard to the mountain top, as your mother desired."

"If you would I would be honored." Lin rose. "Still, will you rest for the night? I would hate for you to embark on such a quest just after arriving."

Qi looked at the woman, seeing a certain kindness in her eyes. Qi felt as if Lin had already grown attached to her, possibly due to Qi's resemblance to Lin's mother. It was strange to the Orewrought, but it was the first time she had felt truly appreciated by another person.

"I will stay the night, if that is allowed."

"Of course. Thank you, Qi. Shall I prepare a space for you?"

"No need. I will be fine wherever I am least obtrusive."

"Very well, Then I will make the necessary preparations. Feel free to explore the house until then." Lin then left the room, seemingly happier.

Qi was pleased as well, but did wonder what was within the house. Exploring it more, she soon came across a room where there were a number of scrolls and illustrations. Looking them over, she saw that most of them contained Lei Shuang in them, and that a great many of the scrolls were chronicles of her adventures by various writers.

Qi was impressed by the legacy left behind by the muse. Even though Qi would never truly know her, she felt as if she at least had a glimpse of the woman who had inspired her creator. Lin's own behavior further impressed the golem, who felt quite welcomed by her hostess.

The night passed quickly, though Qi enjoyed Lin's presence. Qi asked a few things about Lin's life and desires, having heard that Lin was something of an artist, though she held it more as a hobby. She was instead content to live humbly on her inheritance, enjoying a comfortable and modest life.

Qi was glad to to know Lin would be fine, and she was more than happy to do her new acquaintance a favor. After dawn finally broke, while Lin still slept peacefully, Qi decided to take her leave. All that was left behind when Qi departed was a simple note, expressing her thanks.

Soon, Qi was on the mountain trail, making her way steadily upwards. It would take her some days to reach the top, but that was fine. She was looking forward to the trek and seeing what awaited her above.

The journey up wasn't difficult for her, considering she felt no pain or fatigue, but the path was winding and long. Striding briskly, Qi observed much about the mountain, the well defined path making it clear where she was to go. She could see the patches of long grass on the mountainside, growing tall and wild. Still, she had much further to go. Even if Qi did not sleep, it would take days and she had only been at it for hours.

Carrying the sheath on her back, Qi hoped that she would learn something from the trek, but that remained to be seen. Instead, she continued to tread the path, enjoying the quietness of it all. As she continued she saw violet flowers growing from the sides of the stone and a few birds flying to their nests. Some of them were large with bronze feathers and long tails. Seeing them made Qi wonder about moving through the sky. Dragons and birds aside, she had heard tales of humans from afar who soared through the air with wings of their own, but she could not imagine doing so herself.

Instead, Qi was comfortable to enjoy life attached to the soil and the firm ground, even if it was a little higher than she was used to at the moment. As she walked on, Qi eventually noticed that it was beginning to rain. The precipitation began slowly at first, but slowly began to build, becoming heavier



and more intense. The previously clear sky began to turn gray with clouds as the birds began to perch themselves somewhere dry.

Qi wasn't particularly fond of rain. The erosion effect water had upon stone was something she secretly feared, even though she could only continue her walk for a time, until she came to a small cavern. It seemed to be nice and dry within, keeping the rain out.

Taking a moment, she entered into the cavern and sat before beginning to meditate once more. Qi let her sense of self fade, her connection to the stone beneath her surface. She began to slip away, leaving only the barest feelings of her consciousness expand outward until she felt...More.

Time lost meaning, vision became limitation, Qi could only feel the energies within herself and then within the earth.

The ground below her felt more potent than usual, surging with a power she couldn't describe, one she couldn't begin to comprehend. It was there, but it was dormant, inaccessible, indiscernible. She wondered what it was before letting it pass from her mind. Soon, she found peace again, enjoying her new awareness.

Qi was only awoken by the sound of hooves, beating against the sides of the mountain. It grew more intense, as did the sound of screaming. Coming back to herself, Qi looked outside the cavern, seeing the rain had become far gentler than the earlier downpour, and that there was the sight of yet another kobold, this one riding on the back of a struggling goat.

"What is this?" Qi asked herself, halfway stuck in disbelief at the sight.

The ram continued to bound up the mountain, its bleating heard as the kobold held on to its horns. Eventually, it drew near to Qi, still bucking.

"Whoa! Calm down!" a voice rang out.

"Be still!" Qi said as she placed a hand down on the ram. She could feel it struggling, but she held it in place before using her other hand to pick up the kobold by the tail. She could feel the reptilian being struggle for a bit before she stared at it. "That goes for you as well!"

The ram's rampage seemed to stop, however, when the kobold was removed from its back. It then began to walk ahead, paying no more attention to Qi or the kobold.

"That beast was my easy way up the mountain!" The kobold whined

Qi looked and saw that the voice from before had come from the kobold. She still held it aloft by its tail, surprised by the revelation. "You can speak?"

"Of course I can speak, all of my kind can speak!" the Kobold glared at Qi. "Let me go already!"

"Very well." Just then, Qi let the kobold go. She saw it narrowly landed on all fours before rising. "You are the first of your kind to have spoken to me."

"Well, you're a big moving statue and we usually only talk to other dragons."

Qi was puzzled; if kobolds could talk, why not speak with other races more frequently? Did they just not want to? Either way, she put the question aside. "I see. Either way, I wish you luck. Perhaps it would be best to avoid trying to tame wild beasts on such a dangerous mountain."

"But I need to make it to the top," the kobold insisted. "I just thought that goat would give me a bit of a head start."

"It seems it did, though I would not try my luck twice if I were you. Why do you need to climb the mountain, anyhow?"

"To ascend," the kobold said simply.

"Yes...I believe one typically does ascend when they climb something."

"No, I mean to become more than I am! You wouldn't get it." The kobold folded its arms before turning. "I just need to reach the mountain's top."

"As do I."

"Oh?" The small creature walked to Qi. Even though it barely came to her waist, it stood proudly, swishing its sapphire blue tail. "Then we should travel together."

Qi began staring down at the kobold, noting its cerulean scales and fiery orange eyes, while still surprised by its offer. "You want to come with me?"

"Yes. It may be good to have someone tag along with me and you'll do nicely."

"If you wish, then I have no objections. My name is Qi, and yours is?"

"I don't have one. We don't get names until we do something important, like making it to this mountain's top."

"Hmm...Well, for now I suppose I will call you Little One." Qi then began to walk. "Come, Little One."

"Fine, coming..." The kobold followed behind Qi obediently.

The walk up the mountain was trying for Qi, not due to difficulty, but the new ally she had found in the strange kobold.

"You know, it may be best to give you a true name, Little One."

"I told you I haven't earned it, yet," The kobold was doing its best to keep up with Qi, but its short legs made it difficult. "That's why I'm in this trial..."

"To gain a name?"

"And more..." The kobold's tone had become more serious, determined. "I need to ascend."

"You said that before as well. I take it that it is different from simply climbing higher."

"Very...If I do this, I get to become a true dragon..." The kobold tried to run faster, only to fall down, stumbling.

Qi noticed this and picked up the small, blue creature. She carried it gently, despite its struggles against the treatment.

"H-hey, I can do this by myself!"

"And not even a few hours ago you were using a goat to climb," Qi reminded the kobold.

"I was trying to work smarter, not harder."

"Well I will stop until you are ready, then." Qi merely stood, holding the kobold who grumbled. "Rest as long as you need, Little One."

"...Alright, if you say so." Relenting, the kobold rested as best as it could.

Qi began to wonder about the creature, curious as to whether or not it was fully rested, given how quickly it had started to tire from its trek, but as a orewrought, she never truly knew fatigue. Instead, she knew that their journey to the mountain's top was far from over, and part of Qi was glad to have a companion of some kind.