

Qura Lightspell Halfling Sorcerer

Hailing from West Halvford, the tribe of Havlin that call the hills home are raised in a commune, receiving their "adult" name after education and the halfling knows their place in society. Qura was different from her peers in that Wild Magic flowed through her veins, not often encountered by any Havlin - lights would dance about her when bored and when her placid temper was pushed fires would start. Realising there was none to aid her in understanding the flow of magic, Qura left her home and travelled toward Grand Sulis searching for answers. Over the few years travelling she encountered many bands of adventurers and places of natural magic, her abilities and control growing with each passing day. Her confidence grew with each encounter and while she still makes mistakes regarding the world, her understanding and confidence in her own power stands strong.



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THE NAMING

The afternoon's quiet was disturbed by a gentle knocking at the rosewood door "come in" the communes Mother Superior answered, not pausing from the notes she was writing.

As the door opened she carefully moved the stack of paper aside and smiled at the youngling entering her study.

Young Mikail sidled in nervously. He was calm and patient but not at home to noise and excitement she remembered. Perhaps a prenticeship in clockmaking was his future?

"how may I help Mikail?" Mother gestured toward the spare chair

"its... it's happening again Mother" he looked down at his feet. "in the common room"

She tidied up her desk and got to her feet as the young boy quickly moved aside.

As she entered the common room she was met by a scene straight out of a painting.

A young havlin led on her stomach in the centre of the wooden floor, surrounded by books and colouring pencils as she worked on a bright piece in a sketchbook.

Unlike most however, lights danced and floated throughout the air – almost graceful and pretty, had Mother not known what would happen should they touch anything. After all that is why they had no carpet in the common area any more.

"Qura?" Mother said gently.

The havlin blinked and quickly got to her knees, the lights fading around her "Yes Mother?"

Mother smiled as warmly as she could "would you mind coming along to my study please?"

"Of course!" Qura began carefully returning the coloured pencils to their box and stacking the books neatly on the shelf nearby.

Mother waited for the girl to get to her feet before leading them both back to the study in silence.

As Qura settled into a chair, Mother returned to her seat and waited for Qura to settle

"As you know Qura, The Naming is coming up" Mother watched the youngling closely "and with you being ... special..." She struggled to find the right words

Qura's eyes began to fill with tears and Mother saw her hands curl into fists "I'm not allowed? I... but..." Qura's eyes screwed shut "I understand Mother. I'm too different for the ceremony"

"No!" Mother reached across the desk and took Qura's hands in her own "i will stand against any who would say that. You will have your place in the ceremony as every Havlin before you"

Seeing Qura's eyes snap open their eyes met "however, as the others begin their apprenticeships there must be a different path for you."

A month later Qura Lightspell stood, slightly out of breath at the top of Old Monk, the largest hill overlooking West Halvford. As she watched the rune she'd burnt into the rocks cool she wiped her eyes and replaced her glasses to look at the village that had been her life so far.

She knew she would have to travel to learn greater control and she'd come back better!

Turning to look out in the other direction she pulled a sammich out of her pocket and took a large bite.

All told, it could be worse...

CAMPING

Qura sighed and settled down cross-legged in the clearing.

She'd set up her bedroll and carefully built a stack of twigs for a campfire, well practised over the last month. It had been three weeks since she'd seen anyone and the loneliness was making her regret her travels.

Her tinderbox was almost empty and she had to practise making fire – something that had come naturally at the commune was proving elusive, now she needed it.

Holding her wand in both hands she closed her eyes and thought of fire – picturing the camp fire ablaze and the warmth of its heat.

As the warmth filled her, her eyes snapped open and she caught sight of the fire just long enough as the careful campfire was incinerated in a flash of light, knocking her onto her back. She led back and gazed upwards, eyes filling with tears. With a sob she climbed to her feet and began rebuilding the campfire in the small circle of embers, after the last time she had gathered extra for this eventuality. No sooner as she had the collection of wood ready a twig nearby snapped, breaking her from her self-pity

Pulling her wand out, she aimed it into the forest randomly “who... who's there?!” she managed to squeak

To her surprise and horror a metal arrow point carefully poked into the back of her head “lower it.” a voice growled behind her. “it's just a child.” the voice called out as she lowered her trembling arms

“I'm not a child!” she spun, stamping her foot in emphasis “I have a name!”

She paused at the sight of the human in front of her, a really tall woman with short brown hair and piercing green eyes who lowered her bow and knelt to examine Qura closely

“Halflings are counted as adults when they get a name” a heavily armoured dwarf strode into the clearing too, sheathing his axe on his back and loosening a large shield on his arm

“And what is your name, young Havlin?” a third voice joined in, almost a yawn in its pace.

Qura's eyes widened as a second human entered the clearing – while his towering staff, pointy hat and long white beard were indicators, Qura could sense the magic surrounding the wizard “I.. I'm Qura Lightspell” she squeaked “i'm out to learn magic!”

The wizard nodded toward his companions who began setting up their own camp in the clearing

“I am Merin the Mystic” He pulled out a pipe and began filling it from a pouch “You have met Artemis, my tracker friend and our stalwart associate Gronk Furybeard”

Qura noted the dwarf rearranging her amateur setup into something more resembling a camp Merin placed the pipe in his mouth and puffed, the tobacco lighting of its own accord

“I can tell there is magic alongside you, young Qura, but you have much to learn”

At this Qura's eyes began to fill again “i'm trying! Honest! But you're the only people i've seen in ages and there's no-one to show me!”

Merin smiled and sat by the Havlin and gestured for her to sit “Magic fills the world, us mages especially” he puffed away “you were trying to push the magic too hard – instead start small and allow it to flow naturally.” At his idly waved hand Qura readied her wand

“Instead of igniting the fire, try to create a flame – just something small and in control”

Qura closed her eyes and took a breath in, picturing a flame in front of her. As Merin's soothing voice washed over her she could see the flame clearly – barely more than an ignited match

Opening her eyes she was surprised to see the flame floating in front of her
"instead of engulfing your creation, give it a touch more power and lessen your hold on it – fire has it's own needs and will consume the wood without your help..." Merin continued as Qura followed instruction – giving a gasp as she settled the fire onto the campfire and was rewarded with it catching and growing on the wood
Merin caught each of his companions eyes, Qura spotting each nodding gently as they busied themselves in the camp
"we are headed toward Yartar." Merin sat back and gazed into the campfire while Artemis began skewering some meats from her pack "perhaps you should travel with us, see about getting you closer to civilisation?"
Qura nodded rapidly, a large smile occupying her face "i'd like that a lot, please!"

COMBAT

Qura concentrated and her eyes narrowed as a gout of fire immolated the goblin in front of her.

She turned to find another target when a foul unkempt goblin knocked her over, thrusting a rusty knife toward her – she reached to grab the wrist as she had been shown but the goblin was so fast the pair dropped to the floor, the greenskin straddling on top of her both hands trying to force the blade toward her face as she grabbed his hand in both of hers

As she began to shake under the force, the goblin was suddenly lifted bodily off her and Qura saw Gronk lift the goblin easily and slam it face first into the wall.

He looked at the prone Havlin and helped her to her feet with a smile.

"First time?" he asked casually

Shaking, Qura couldn't answer so nodded briefly

Wiping his hands he produced a waxed packet from his pack. Inspecting it carefully he grunted "Uh. Jam. Eat." he split a sandwich and passed half toward Qura.

Qura took the sammich and gave him a look "It helps." the dwarf shrugged and began eating his half.

Qura turned her attention to the other two members of the party – Artemis knocking and loosing her bow so fast three goblins dropped with arrows in their heads before Qura could see where she was aiming

Further off Merin raised his hands and a whirlwind spring up, lifting half a dozen goblins into the air before the tornado spontaneously combusted, smoking bodies dropping to the ground.

As the remaining few goblins began to flee a heavy stomp echoed throughout the cavern and the hulking form of a troll lumbered into view at the far end.

Gronk carefully wiped his hands and drew his massive axe. Qura could taste the magic as he grasped the haft tightly and the runes on the head began to glow.

"I guess," Gronk took a deep breath "it's time to..." Qura could see all his muscles tense, seeming to swell and pop from his limbs "...RAGE!"

and at a surprising turn of speed he sprinted toward the behemoth – barging past and occasionally over the top of goblins between them and his target

Qura also wiped her hands and readied her wand – she was no where near the power of these seasoned adventurers but would do her best to help...

GIRLS DAY

"did it really?!" Qura giggled as she carefully lifted the mug, massive in her hands to her lips
"a yup, true story" Artemis grinned and picked at the plate of meats between the pair
The tall ranger leant back and propped her boots up on a chair "'s nice having a girl to chat to, usually just the boys to adventure with"

"Gronk's nice and Merin's really helping me learn more magic!" Qura enthused as she slurped the ice-cream filled drink, noting Artemis' frown "what?"

"Merin's got plenty of knowledge, but has... unusual tastes. I worry he has been... inappropriate with you, you being so young"

It was Qura's turn to frown "what d'you mean? He is very hands-on but is that not how it works?"

Artemis reached across the table and took Qura's hand in hers "Promise me young Havlin, never do anything you're not comfortable with - myself or Gronk will be there should you need us"

"i... he's..." Qura couldn't tear her gaze from her mug "he's been touchy but not..."

Artemis sighed "it's difficult. After all you're no more'n a child to most people despite being old enough." Artemis waved over the waiter "just remember you can say no if you're not happy with any situation"

she smiled at the young waiter "a set of drinks please" and offered a handful of coins

"debatable tastes aside, did I ever tell you about the Bard who was my first?"

Qura's eyebrows raised and she blushed "no?"

Artemis sat upright and helped the waiter set the drinks on the table "time for some proper girly gossip!"

DRUNKER

"wheeee!" Qura couldn't stop the giggling as Artemis carried her back to the tavern
"guess we both got a little drunk!" Artemis put the halfling down by the door
"drunk?" Qura's eyes began to fill with tears "you'd not call me drunk if I were sober, would you?" Artemis paused in thought "course not" she smiled and opened the door for the pair to lurch into the warm

Eventually they made it upstairs, Artemis helping Qura into her room before staggering along the corridor to her own room. Hopping sideways, Qura struggled to pull her left boot off, falling over sideways with more giggling when a gentle knocking happened at the door
"C'min" Qura managed as she sat up to remove her other boot. Squinting she could see Merin enter the room closing the door behind him "Merin!" Qura shrugged off her jacket before noticing Merin wasn't wearing his hat "m a" Qura paused "LITTLE drunk!" she snorted at the joke

Merin smiled and stepped closer, his robe falling open showing far too much flesh underneath
"do you know what you should do with this?" he gestured

Qura's went cross-eyed before she suddenly threw up at his feet

Merin stepped back hurriedly before giving a scream and stepping back further as the bile burned a chrysanthemum on the wooden floor and ignited his slippers

Qura didn't pay the wizard much attention as he hurriedly kicked off his footwear – she carefully gathered up the flames into a single ball sat on her palm

As she extinguished the fire she saw the door slam open, several heroes from the bar and guardsmen rushing to the cry, instead seeing a drunken halfling and a partially dressed wizard
Qura hiccuped as Merin pushed through the crowd "i tideded up" she was asleep before she hit the floor

The next morning Qura stretched and found herself still clothed and tucked into the huge bed. someone had left a jug of water on the dresser and she drunk a glass full before changing to head down to breakfast.

At one of the tables she spotted Artemis and Gronk deep in conversation, going quiet as she joined them "hi!" Qura smiled, receiving a pair of frowns "what's wrong?"

Artemis sighed "we're leaving, right away"

Gronk grunted "the watch escorted Merin out of the city first thing"

"why?!" Qura's eyes widened

"Artemis clutched her head "how is it you aren't as hungover as I am?" Qura could only shrug
"He tried to take advantage of you while you were drunk" Gronk's voice dripped disgust "and I know you're a young adult but to a human you're still child-sized."

Artemis emptied the tankard of water in front of her "so we're taking him back to Baldur's Gate as our original agreement then we're going our own ways I think"

Qura frowned "i'm really sorry!"

"don't apologise!" Artemis slapped the table "he couldn't control himself, his fault" she unhooked a feather from her pack "this is for you – hopefully we'll meet again!" as she hugged Qura tightly

Gronk rested his hand on Qura's shoulder "the road is long. Stay true to yourself" he gave a rare smile and the pair headed out of the tavern.

As Qura wiped her eyes a large plate of fried food was put in front of her. She looked up at the waitress "i didn't order yet!"

"compliments of the house, we're glad you're safe now" the barman nodded toward her

Qura sighed and picked up the cutlery. She'd miss her friends but who knew what the next adventure held...

LIBRARY

As she was shuffled along the corridor, Qura regretted wandering over the small crowd of Havlin-sized figures – turns out this was a group of children being taken into a library. Qura managed to separate from the class before they were herded into a brightly coloured room.

She found herself amongst the shelves, in awe of the massive amount of books as far as she could see.

As she wandered idly along browsing the exotic titles she was stopped by a voice behind her "hello dearie, are you lost?"

Qura turned and saw an older lady stood peering down at her

"I'm sorry!" the lady gasped "I thought you were one of the children. Did you need any help?"

Qura smiled warmly "this place is amazing! I've never seen so many books!"

The librarian smiled in return "we have almost five thousand books! It's 5 copper gnuts and a gold piece as deposit to borrow any book and take it home to read"

Qura's smile faded "Take it home to read? Oh. Home is so far away."

The librarian's smile faltered and returned in understanding "You can read here, what were you looking for?"

"d'you got anything on magic?!" Qura replied "i'm learning!"

The librarian frowned "we don't have any actual magical books, but Desdemona Boddice's "the World Is Magic" is quite popular at the moment, it has a lot on magical theory?"

"Could I read that one please?!" Qura's smile returned

"Of course! It's this way" The librarian led the halfling throughout the maze-like shelves and eventually passed her a large leather-bound book

Leaning down, the lady whispered semi-conspiratorially "There are sofas at the end of the next aisle" with a wink

"Thank you very much!" Qura held the book close to her chest and wandered off along the shelves.

Finding the sofas, she carefully placed the book on one and pulled herself up onto the cushions.

Seeing how her legs barely reached the edge, she kicked off her shoes and snuggled into the corner, tucking her legs underneath herself.

Wiggling until she was comfy, she ran her fingers over the embossed cover.

Putting her glasses on, Qura took a deep breath and opened the large book before she started to read...

GIG

Qura finished the food in front of her and smiled as Simeon took the plate away and placed a tankard in front of her

She'd been at this tavern for a few days now and was enjoying the company.

She glanced around the other tables, noting how so many people were present – a mix of locals and a couple of parties of adventurers by the look.

She felt someone looking at her and turned slightly, catching the eyes of a blonde gnome sat with a group of warriors in the corner.

He smiled and then his attention was diverted by the large barbarian sat by him laughing before clapping slowly "go on! Go on! Go on!"

Soon the rest of the table had taken up the chant and clap until Qura could almost lip read the gnome's response of "fine then!"

To the cheering of the table the gnome climbed up onto the table and placed a hand on his chest, the other raised theatrically as his voice rang out across the tavern, flowing like gold as the lyrics of Rhapsody Of Sembia filled the room

Qura smiled as she joined the applause from regulars and visitors, someone handing the gnome a lute and he followed up with Free Byrd and Stairway to Celestia

Qura happily accepted another tankard from Simeon and froze as the musician launched into Pearl In the Soil in it's original Havlin

The warm music slowed the crowd and Qura spotted several members sitting closer together as the love song reverberated around. While she didn't doubt no-one else understood the lyrics the gnome's tender tones certainly got the feeling across and Qura sighed at the familiar lyrics. As the song came to it's end the gnome had a long pause before launching into Sioni Bod Da, the sudden change of pace electrifying all the patrons.

Qura cheered with the rest of the crowd and clapped as loudly as she could when the gnome bowed and clambered down from the table.

"what was that one in havlin?" the dwarf Snorri leaned toward her "sels san shee?"

Qura smiled at his attempt "nearly! It translates to Pearl in The Soil... it's about love and shared being"

"was very good, reminded me of home"

Qura reached for the tankard that was placed in front of her and a familiar voice answered the dwarf "Thanks! It's always good to put something emotional in, especially when I know someone'll understand the lyrics!"

Qura turned and found herself looking wide-eyed into the gnome's bright blue eyes

As she felt a blush working its way up her face, it was dispelled by his warm smile and proffered hand "hi! I'm Maximal, please call me Max"

Qura squeaked her reply "i.. i'm Qura!" realising he was still holding his arm out she reached forward to shake his hand and was surprised as he took it and kissed her knuckle "an absolute pleasure!" Max gestured toward the raised bench she was propped up on "may I sit?"

Qura shuffled sideways as the gnome hopped up onto the bench alongside her thanking the rest of the table as they also congratulated him on his performance

soon enough the whole table was chatting, Qura included and before she knew it she was deep in conversation with Max about their travels

"so, where are you staying?" Max asked as they both lifted fresh tankards in cheers

"here, i've been doing some work and have a room rented"

"what's it like? Any good?" Max asked casually

"oh yeah! Apparently it's a single but that's in Human so it's pretty big!"

"Humans aren't that big!" Max countered "could I see?"

"sure!" Qura replied before she knew what she was saying, her blush returning as her ears caught up

while the conversation continued, it was as they finished their drinks Max gave her a smile "how about that tour?" he slid off the bench and offered his hand out to Qura

She took his hand and tried to slide off the bench too but where he'd made it look effortless she half fell, ending up pressed against the gnome

He seemed not to be too bothered and stepped aside, waving for her to lead the way

Qura chatted aimlessly as they climbed the stairs, from the artwork on the walls to how big the stairs were for smaller races, until they were stood in front of the room she'd been renting.

Struggling with the key she opened the door and let Max into the room first, pointing out how much room there was and how even simple rooms had a ton of storage.

She carefully closed the door behind them and turned to find Max stood toe to toe with her as she took a breath his hand had already cupped her cheek and before she knew it their lips met

The kiss seemed to last a lifetime and as he pulled away she couldn't help but sigh

"was that too forward?" Max sounded worried "i'm terribly sor..."

he was interrupted by Qura grabbing him and returning with another deep kiss

there was a flurry of kisses and gasps as the pair moved toward the bed, Qura pulling at his shirt buttons as his lips caressed her neck and her top came off in his hands

She squeaked as with a kiss he lifted her bodily and placed her on the bed, her boots and leggings hitting floor in quick succession, Max clambering up to join her both sets of skin pressing together

she gasped and wrapped her legs around his midriff while the weight of him pressed against her as both moved together

Qura grabbed Max's back and pulled him as close as possible and relished his body heat against hers

"you're really hot!" Max gasped as he moved

"you're hot too!" Qura muttered, a confused look on her face as Max pushed himself up onto his arms

"you're glowing, like literally!" the worry in his voice breaking her rhythm

she held her hand up and squealed at the sight - as he had pointed out her body was glowing faintly

as Max moved away Qura rolled to the side, misjudging her position and gasped as she fell off the side of the bed, scrabbling at the covers with little effect other than to cover herself as she hit the floor

"i'm so sorry!" she gasped "i don't... That's the first... it's not..." she pulled the covers around herself protectively

She heard Max climb down with a gentle "hey! Don't panic!" and felt his arms wrap around the bundle "i was worried, but you're fine"

He carefully pulled at the cocoon and helped Qura to her feet with a smile "up you get!"

He steadied her as she climbed up onto the bed and in a single action flung the covers out and slid in behind her before the duvet had settled, spooning her gently in his arms "we both had fun and that's the important bit!"

Qura felt something poking into her back and turned to face Max, staring into his bright blue eyes

"can I help?" she gave an innocent look as she reached down

He smiled in return and repositioned her hands "well, far be it for me to argue with a beautiful woman..."

FREEFIRE

There was a contrasting cool evening breeze as Qura was jostled in the panic-fuelled crowd – alarm bells were still ringing throughout the village and she had been bundled into a pack with the children and accompanied a handful of women into the hall.

She managed to push her way clear and tugged at the old guardsman stood facing the door “what's happening?!” She tried to keep the fear from her voice

The guardsman turned and looked puzzled at her “You're a halfling! Can you fight?”

“Fight who?” Qura's brows furrowed in worry – she'd accompanied parties of adventurers but rarely was an active participant

“Orcs are raiding.” the guard's grip tightened on his sword “We should be safe he.... URK!”

Qura's eyes widened as the door shattered and a sword pierced the guard's torso.

As the body dropped to the floor the children began screaming while the adults tried to pull them further back into the hall

She looked up and watched the orc withdraw it's sword and peer at her

In a panic she drew her wand and waved it, pulling the flames from the overhead candle chandelier to impact the monster as she staggered backwards

To her dismay it stepped forward, trailing a slight haze of embers and smoke, lifting it's blood-splattered sword high

Qura grabbed her wand in both hands and stamped her foot, concentrating her power.

She caused the embers lingering on the orc to burst into full flame, immolating the monster and making it stagger backwards out of the hall into the evening it's howl trailing it as it collapsed from view.

She turned to see the children huddled behind the adults, one of whom retrieved the guard's sword to stand ahead of the rest.

These people needed her help – unlike other times there was no hardened adventurers to take control, while the guards may be able to fight the orcs, it would need everyone able to fight to repel these foul creatures.

Qura nodded to the woman and stepped out of the hall into the scream-filled night.

As she looked around she saw an orc dip an arrow into the nearby burning body.

Without thinking Qura threw her arm up and the orc was surprised as she was when the fire leapt up the arrow and impacted with it's head.

Pushing her glasses up her nose Qura turned to face the sound of a melee – she may not be able to fight but would do everything she could to help protect the guards fighting for this village...

ENTRANCED

"Thar ye go" the haulier's voice woke Qura out of her doze in the bed of the cart
She jumped up, grabbing her gear and nimbly dropping over the side onto the dusty road
"Thanks All!" she waved with a bright smile as the old man grunted and at a flick of the reins
his cart sped up.

Qura turned to see the gate and walls of Millsand straight down a short road. She idly
wondered what sights and things she could learn in this new town.

She could see one of the gateguard dealing with a trader and his cart and paused as the
other guard walked toward her, towering over her with his pike.

"What's yer business Halfling?" he grunted at her

"Nil!" Qura offered her hand "i'm Qura, i'm visiting!" she lowered her hand as the guardsman
glared at her

"D'you got any magical weapons or armour, trained or wild animals, artifacts or gold valued at
over one hundred pieces or any potions or poisons?" the list was made in one continual breath
and Qura frowned as she considered all options.

"no, I don't ha..." she began to reply

"you're welcome to Millsand" The guard said loudly before his voice lowered a touch "that'll be
one silver entrance fee and five gold deposit to cover any intentional or accidental damage"

"An entrance fee?" Qura questioned "i've not heard of that before"

The guard shrugged "everyone's gotta pay it."

Qura pulled out her coin purse and shuffled it about "that's almost all of my gold!"

The guard eyed the pouch "it's only one silver, the rest is a deposit and will be returned"

As Qura handed him the coins he gave a smile "just ask for Sergeant Mouse on your way out"

"Mouse?!" Qura asked

"Yeah, like in fields, got a problem?" the guard stepped closer to her

"no sir!" Qura stammered

"off you go then" sergeant Mouse dropped the silver piece into a chest and waved Qura
through the open gates.

She wandered through the paved streets seeing more people than she'd ever known and other
races such as groups of heavily armoured dwarfs passing about.

As the afternoon grew onwards she entered the nearest tavern for a snack and carefully
made her way to the bar, climbing up onto a stool to see inn keeper

"how can I help you young... lady?"

"Nil!" Qura smiled "d'you know where I can rent a room for the night please?"

The inn keeper smiled and pulled a tome toward himself "we have three rooms available at one
gold per night, room only"

Qura shuffled through her coin pouch "is food expensive? The deposit was almost all my gold"
the inn keeper frowned "What deposit?"

"The.. the entrance deposit?" Qura looked up "Sergeant Mouse said i'd get it back when I
leave"

The inn keeper's eyebrow raised "There's only one sergeant in our guard and he's sat over
there"

Qura looked to see a trio of guard sat at a table with a serving of food between them

"Oh." she sniffed "I.. I think I made a mistake"

the inn keeper gave her a look "lemme get you a snack." he winked "we have space out in the
shed cheap if you wanted it"

Qura nodded, unable to answer as her eyes began to fill...

SINKING

"whenever you're ready" the foreman's voice shook Qura from her nerves. Rather than answer she gave a nod and pulled the goggles over her eyes. She held her wand out and concentrated until a small fireball appeared and floated in front of her.

She guided it to the point the team had marked on the floor and held her wand in both hands. Taking a deep breath she closed her eyes and began to talk to herself in Havlin

"A smaller flame can burn hotter. I am the fire, I am burning brighter" even with her eyes closed she could tell where the flame was and she poured more power into it until she could see the light through the smoked glass and her closed eyes.

By this point she had begun to shake with the effort and lowered her wand, the fireball hissing as it began to burn through the rocky floor.

As it dropped deeper her legs gave out and she dropped to her knees, still holding her wand downwards and pouring as much power as she could into the spell.

Suddenly something snuffed the flame out and a geyser of steam erupted from the hole she had burnt.

Qura fell forward onto her hands, struggling to catch her breath and trying her hardest to keep her shaking limbs under control

"Heck of a job y'done there" the foreman helped her to sit upright and handed her his bottle of water

As she struggled to lift the bottle to her lips she began to swallow mouthful after mouthful of water until he steadied her "sip, drink it slow" he advised as the team began lowering what looked like a tin mug on a rope into the smoking hole

Qura nodded and tried to drink more carefully – difficult when the bottle was the length of her leg!

"we got it boss, right as the diviner said" one of the crew shouted across as they pulled the mug, now full of water, back out of the hole

"You saved us a ton o' diggin'" the foreman continued as he unlatched his coin pouch. "Two gold zats for you." he handed Qura two round coins "an' although we agreed on breakfast, speak to Joe and i'll stand you lunch too"

Qura handed back the water bottle and tucked the coins into her own pouch before replacing the goggles with her glasses

She was still slightly shaken so gave him a big smile and a nod as she headed off toward the tavern – it was always time for lunch!

SHOPPING

Qura opened the door slowly and looked up at the ding of the door's bell echoing in the dark, dusty entranceway.

She sidled into the shop and peered at the collection of random items

"Why hello there!" came a voice from the opposite side of the shop

Qura turned and saw a gnome pull himself up onto a stool behind the counter

"Hi there!" Qura smiled

"What brings you to my store, young Havlin?" the gnome took a breath to continue but was interrupted by a bout of chest-shaking coughs

As Qura moved forward drawing her water bottle the gnome pulled out a handkerchief to splutter into "Fahking fairies" he wiped his mouth "they're good for finding goods, but don't breathe in that damn dust"

He waved away the offered bottle and righted his glasses "What brings you into my shop young lady?"

Qura smiled "I was passing and knew there was magical stuff so thought I'd have a look!"

The gnome returned the smile and spread his arms "I'm Yomin and I have here a collection of magical and mundane items, all for sale for bargain prices!"

He hopped off the chair and joined Qura, passing her a stool "you'll need this, let's have a look!" he grabbed himself a stool and led Qura in between the shelves

"Why do you need a stool? Shouldn't you use shorter shelves?" she asked him as she struggled alongside

"Here's a secret to retail" he leaned in close "make it easy for the big'uns to shop and they'll spend!"

Qura thought about the logic and nodded

"Here's some of the choice items!" Yomin grinned and reached up to the shelves.

He reached up and carefully lifted down a brass housing, centred around a molten stone

"The Amulet of Gort, containing an ever burning flame. No doubt good for those in the wilderness."

He replaced the amulet and reached higher to lift down an ornate compass.

"This one is called Knock. Tapping the housing shows any locks what are nearby, good for finding those hidden secrets"

The pair climbed down and Yomin grabbed a fancy case, opening it slowly in front of Qura, revealing a plain looking cutlery knife.

"The Butter Knife. While unimpressive, anything it is run over gains a thin coating of an edible oily substance. There was one that heated anything it was run over, but sold that a while back."

At Qura's interested look he snapped the case shut and replaced it on the shelf.

"We have some interesting weapons for those more action-orientated." He helped Qura over to a display case filled with weaponry

"How about The Devil's Heart String?" he pointed at a coil "whatever element is whispered to it, it fires that kinda effect. Apparently with plenty of practise it's possible to use without telling the string what to fire"

Alongside was a normal sized fork with intricate engravings "ah, the Vorpal Fork." he followed Qura's view "able to pierce anything, useful for those tough rations!" he laughed, causing another set of coughs into his handkerchief

As the pair moved their stools to the next set of shelves the gnome continued his patter "On the subject of rations, how about The Bottle Of Swill?" he raised an eye-brow at her look of disgust "no, no no! This is a magic sheepskin that can not only hold ten whole litres but keeps anything poured into it separate!"

Alongside was a set of plain goggles the gnome picked up gingerly "Christophet's Multispectrum, another useful item for finding magical or hidden items." he frowned "just, don't wear 'em too long"

"whysat?" Qura stopped reaching for them

"a long story!" He turned and pointed out a spoon of damascus steel "how about Stability?" he pointed "when full, you will never spill that spoon unwillingly!"

Qura nodded "that would be useful!"

Yomin smiled "You have some taste young lady!" he reached past her and lifted a mug that appeared to be made form wood with a metallic interior

"how about The Mug Of The Forgotten?" he blew into the mug "made by a wizard who was fed up of drinking cold tea, it keeps anything put in it at the same temperature for a long time!" he looked sidelong at the Havlin "of course, if you prefer your drinks cold that works too!"

"There's so much awesome stuff here!" Qura beamed "i can't wait till I make lots of gold and can get all the things!"

Yomin helped her down and moved both stools back behind the counter "of course, stock is always moving and changing but am always happy to see a young lady!"

OPEN DOORS

"What do we do?" Errowdwen's voice calmly carried over the sound of orcs hammering at the heavy door

Despite the half-elf's demeanour, Qura could see tension in his poise as he prepared his quiver "We fight!" Leonbos' growl resonated with his leonin features as he drew and flourished his sword.

Qura looked up and could see the worry on Miiri's face as the bard gently rested her hand absent-mindedly on Qura's head.

Qura bit her lip before coming to a decision.

"I.. I can do it" she muttered as she stepped toward the door, dropping her pack and pulling her goggles in place.

Dropping to her knees, she placed her wand on the flagstone, facing the door and leant on it with both hands.

She took a deep breath in and a flame flickered into life in front of her.

With a second breath a two-foot circle surrounded this flame and on a third breath a concentric circle surrounded it.

Qura began chanting to herself in Havlin – phrases and scraps of poetry alongside made up words, each syllable filling the circle with runescript

As the circle filled, sweat began running off the havlin and the magic began to glow brighter – her tears mixing with the sweat and evaporating before it hit the floor.

She got awkwardly to her feet, the circle lifting with her and as she brought her clenched fists to her chest it turned to hang vertical in front of her.

"Door!" she gasped. Blinking she saw the rest of the party watching immobile

"DOOR!" she screamed as she began shaking from the effort

Leonbo moved and in one motion pulled the heavy beam barricading the door closed aside as

Errowdwen wrenched them open, revealing some surprised orcs mid-hammer on the wood.

Their look of surprise turned into elation and then dismay as Qura thrust her hands forward, the circle passing through the doorway into the mob

The burning circle cremated flesh, immolated fabrics and melted metals as it passed through the densely packed monsters, Qura pushing as much power into it as she could while it travelled, until it extinguished some distance away.

Qura fell forward, impacting with the rough stone flooring before her eyes closed and darkness overcame her...

HIDDEN DEPTHS

"what do we do?!" Johann's voice wavered

Derin didn't respond, simply grunting as he swung his massive hammer at the door again.

Qura fidgeted – the water was only ankle high at the moment but seemed to be speeding up.

She reached a decision and pulled at the barbarian's belt "let me try!"

She laid both hands on the escutcheon and took a deep breath, letting the magic flow and heat up the panel.

The water was rapidly reaching her knees as the magic caught and the plate began to sizzle.

Gritting her teeth she leant against the panel and poured more power into it, trying to ignore the pain from the heat.

She closed her eyes as the water hit reached her chin, her tears mixing with the water, trying her best to put all her power into heating up the lock.

She tilted her head back and took a deep breath, briefly hearing the water bubble and boil in contact with the door's metal and her hands before she was fully submerged

She held onto her breath as long as she could, feeling as if her lungs were about to burst when she felt herself pulled physically away from the door and upwards her eyes flickered open and through the flickering black and purple spots she saw Derin square his shoulders and lift his hammer clear of the water to swing at the door

She felt so heavy and as she sunk into the depth everything faded to black...

She was cold and wet, led on the stone floor. Her eyes flickered open and through the heaviness she could see Johann's hands on her chest, his eyes closed as he chanted in that mystic language the cleric used.

Qura weakly lifted her arm and looked at her hand – the burns and torn skin seeming to flow as the cleric's prayers healed the wounds

As warmth began to fill her she turned her head and saw Derin's large figure swinging his hammer wildly at a pack of orcs approaching them

"like an avenging angel" Qura muttered, idly drawing a pair of wings off his form with a pointing finger

she blinked as the orcs shrunk back away from the barbarian, framed by glowing light in the shape of her drawn wings.

She sat upright, Johann shuffling back in surprise "He needs our help!" Qura exclaimed, standing and drawing her wand in one movement

thrusting it toward the orcs, she felt the warmth filling her swell and a torrent of flame engulfed the nearest monsters, Derin taking the opportunity to step backwards and empty a potion bottle into his mouth

He threw the glass bottle awkwardly at the nearest orc and when it ducked took opportunity to swing his hammer into it's face

Qura stepped alongside the barbarian and begun summoning another flame – while they could still fight they would!

TAROT

"Tarot is really difficult" Qura pouted. "i can't make it work!" she sighed.

"What is wrong?" came a sultry voice behind her

Qura pivoted on the chair and rested her chin on the back "i keep getting The High Priestess, inverted" her brown eyes locking onto Ge'hana's golden ones.

To Qura's surprise the tiefling laughed and treated her to a wide smile "that would be due to me then"

Qura frowned "that makes no sense though. I know you're gonna move soon but why is the card inverted?"

This time the red skinned figure frowned "because of what I am?" she knelt alongside Qura and began shuffling the tarot deck "who.. you do know why a tiefling has horns?"

Qura shrugged "dwarfs have beards, elves have pointy ears, tieflings have horns, whys that a thing?"

the Havlin was surprised when the tall gypsy scooped her up like a child would a stuffed toy and hugged her close before planting a kiss on Qura's forehead "darling, please never change"

Qura gave a mild attempt at a struggle before relaxing into the embrace

"do... do you gotta go?" sadness filled her eyes "i'm learning a lot and you're really nice"

Ge'hana gave her another smile and settled the diminutive figure back on the chair

"The sea calls me" she waved a bangle-filled arm languidly to the right "a tiefling rarely stays in one place for long. Besides, the locals only have so many futures to read!"

in one deft move she pulled a basket of fruit out of a cupboard and placed it on the table while sliding into a chair opposite the halfling.

"knowing The High Priestess will influence your read, what do you do?"

Qura sighed and began dealing the Major Arcana out "use the first draw as a pivot?"

Ge'hana smiled and rolled a grape across the table, it ending on top of the first card dealt

"and then expand the reading from there..."

BLUE

Qura wandered through the city she couldn't help but smile at the sights and sounds – a myriad of people of different races ambling about amongst the tall buildings
a sudden taste on the wind drew her attention – she diverted down a side street and was met with a towering figure stood in front of her

She wandered over and tapped at the figure's armoured thigh – pretty much as far as she could reach

The figure turned suddenly and Qura stepped back and smiled up at the enclosed helm
"Are you magical?" Qura asked "cause I can tell and you seem magical but you're wearing armour and I was told armour interferes with magic so you must be very good at magic!"

She paused and reached out a hand "I'm Qura!"

The massive figure knelt closer and instead of eye slots Qura found herself looking at slightly glowing glass eye pieces

"I am..." the figure paused "I am... I don't know"

Qura's eyes widened "you can't remember? Is it because of the armour maybe?"

the figure stood up and seemed to stare vacantly upwards

"Hey! It's nice armour though, I like the details!" Qura tried to comfort the figure "it's a lovely colour – maybe I could call you blue until you 'member stuff?"

to which Blue simply nodded

"whatcha lookin' at?" Qura continued

Blue shrugged and pointed up at the top of the building in front of the pair "what is that symbol?"

Qura squinted "it's The Burning Star, kinda looks like a sun really"

"It's... familiar." Blue commented still staring upwards

"Excuse me!" a gruff voice called out "are you two adventurers?"

the pair turned to see a red-bearded dwarf approach them "i'm part of the Rock Seeker Guild and we're looking for adventurers to help protect us..."

HUMAN

Qura stepped backwards, eyes wide open as the massive black armoured figure stepped through the flame she had cast
She leapt sideways behind cover as the warrior threw a handful of razor sharp blades to where she had been stood
she looked sideways and spotted A'shaar also crouched behind rubble, the elf frantically pulling a tourniquet over her heavily bleeding leg
"gotta burn hotter" Qura screwed her eyes shut before standing up to face the steady thudding of the warrior's footsteps
She opened her eyes and pointed her wand still chanting to herself "must burn hotter" however as she focused she saw Partim leap toward the behemoth from the side, the his blade at the ready
With speed unexpected, the warrior turned and braced his sword so that the berserker impaled himself in the chest
while Qura's scream died in her throat, she could only watch as the human pulled himself along the blade further, close enough to thrust his sword through the eye slits in the armoured helm.
The pair formed an improbable vignette for a moment before the armoured warrior fell backwards and Partim drop to the floor
Qura rushed to his side, tears running down her face "no no no no no!" she reached for the blade impaled through his chest
Partim smiled up at her and moved her hands from the handle "i feel it's corruption. You must cremate me"
"we gotta be able to help" Qura sobbed
"I'm human... we're born to die..." Partim smiled and shut his eyes with a sigh
A'shaar knelt alongside Qura and carefully spat on Partim's forehead "My water to your water. Go in peace." she helped Qura up and laid the human's sword on his body and retrieved his small satchel
"As hot as you can, Qura." there was sadness in her voice "lest the blade bring something back"
Qura's hands curled into fists and she took a step back calling as much heat as she could muster to incinerate Partim's body, pouring power until she stood watching a molten pool of slag

CHANCE ENCOUNTER

It was the start of the weekend so Qura wandered into a tavern she hadn't visited yet and was happy with how busy it was – so many different people all having a good time
She carefully took her hat off and began looking for somewhere to sit
"soon there'll be twice as many halflings as there are humans in the city" a voice grumbled off to the side

"And we'll end up doing four times as much work" the lilting tone of a havlin's voice responded, pulling Qura's attention

"Screw you Mal" the heavy set man tossed his cards onto the table and knocked back his drink
"in your dreams boyo" Mal began scooping the winnings toward her as the disgruntled thief stood up and headed away, pushing past Qura

She stepped aside and approached the newly vacated seat, locking eyes with the havlin sat on a stool

"c'mon youngling, take a seat" she called out in Havlin before switching to common at several looks from other tables "i'm Menos Lightfinger, call me Mal"

"Hi!" Qura waved "I'm Qura Lightspell!" she replied as she awkwardly climbed up onto the seat

"y'hungry?" Mal waved over the waiter "two halves and a plate of spiced wedges for the youngling please Malcom" passing him several coins from the pile she was sorting from the card game

"thank you very much! that's very generous!" Qura climbed onto her knees so she was level with the table

"that bugger gave me some dud coins, gotta shift 'em somewhere" Mal muttered to herself
"that's a very red coat y'got there"

"thanks! I heard Havlins are Rouges and I don't know what shade that is but hope this fits"

"Rouge? You mean Rogues? I'm a locksmith myself"

"Rogues? oh." Qura looked sad for a moment "I like it though, it has pockets!"

BEACH

Qura stepped toward the sand nervously, holding her bright red towel snugly around herself
"Ah! Young Qura!" a loud voice echoed behind her
turning quickly she found herself staring up at the vast frame of the barbarian Fraeya.
"Glad you join us!" she grinned while Qura marvelled at the mass of exposed skin from the Amazonian's bikini-clad figure
Qura smiled back, noting the collection of supplies the barbarian was carrying nonchalantly and feeling embarrassed at the excellent shape in front of her
spotting the havlin wrap her towel tighter Fraeya looked thoughtful before leaning down
"come, sit with me, let the sun warm until you are comfortable to leave towel, yes?"
without waiting, Fraeya began to walk across the sand, flattening large footprints Qura hopped into as the pair headed toward two very pale figures
Qura smiled and waved as she spotted their quarry – the elven twins Asciiyan and Barbilyan looking pale but stunning in matching swimming costumes
"I find a havlin" Fraeya began to place their towels and an umbrella out on the beach haphazardly
"Qura!" Barbilyan dropped to her knees and held out her arms for a hug while Asciiyan helped the barbarian while looking, to Qura's eyes, effortlessly fabulous, as he shook out a large towel
"Come on brother!" Barbilyan pushed him from behind and ran toward the sea, splashing far enough to dive gracefully into the beautiful waters
Qura's attention was diverted as Fraeya thumped heavily onto the large blanket and stretched her legs out in front of her
Qura settled down too, opening her towel enough to be covered but still let the warm air breeze against her
"um. Hi!" a quiet voice pipped up and Qura turned to see Phoebe stood demurely nearby, the cleric wearing a form-fitting one piece swimsuit and carrying a dainty parasol
Qura looked up in surprise as Fraeya sprung to her feet to greet the small figure awkwardly
"Um. Hi" Fraeya's voice quivered "glad you came!" Fraeya gestured to the towel and the pair sat down awkwardly
Qura's eyes rolled as the pair sat in silence looking everywhere except at each other
She shrugged off her towel and stretched her legs out "Hey Phoebe! Isn't Fraeya's swimsuit lovely?" she smiled as she watched the girl run her eyes over the barbarians' muscles
"I'm gonna try a swim!" Qura didn't even look back as she knew the pair's eyes would lock, oblivious to anything other than each other
Qura stepped carefully into the water, keeping herself from a shiver as the cool water lapped at her ankles
She looked up with a smile at a splashing and Asciiyan bound up to her "gonna join us for a swim?" he grinned and scooped the halfling up easily "wait! I..." Qura managed before the elf threw her bodily out into the deeper water
She managed to suck in a lungful of air before she tumbled under the surface, flailing wildly her head broke the surface and she tried to grab another mouthful of air as she struggled into the blue waters again
her eyes snapped open and the surface seemed so far away as the lights dimmed, her legs kicking out, searching for a foothold
without warning a pair of hands reached under her armpits and she rose at tremendous speed, spluttering and gasping as she was lifted head and shoulders out of the water
Turning she could see Barbilyan holding her up, the elf's' head barely above the surface.

As the rangers' worried expression faded, replaced with one of anger she began shouting at Asciiyan in elvish, the foreign words lost on Qura but the meaning full of fury
They waded closer to shore Qura could feel her feet touch sand and stood, her head clear but the gentle waves barely halfway up the elf's thighs
Qura grabbed Barbilyan's hand, the elf pausing in her rant "i'm fine! I can swim" she smiled up at her saviour "just... just not very well" Barbilyan smiled down at her and scowled at her brother, pointing a warning finger at him before turning and thrusting herself back into the water
"I am so sorry!" Asciiyan knelt in front of Qura "i should have checked!"
Qura reached forward to hug him "I was surprised, that's all." Qura smiled "you can help me swim better though!" and turned to flail at the water in something akin to a doggy-paddle to the elf's amusement

HEAT

Qura threw herself sideways and the sword slashed into the space she had just dodged out of. Unfortunately her short stature meant the havlin was within range for the human bandits' follow up swing.

Qura brought her hands together in front of her face and instinctively braced for her opponent's swing.

When no blow landed she peeked out and saw the blade stopped in the air before her, caught on a heat haze.

Her eyes widened and her confused look matched the lanky figure as he drew his sword back for a second swing, also impacting on the haze Qura was holding in place.

The bandit's eyes narrowed as he dropped his shield and adjusted his grip on the sword, bracing a hand on the pommel he thrust it toward Qura, first impacting with the haze then with a grunt began forcing the blade tip toward her.

She began shaking with the effort but slowly the point began to inch toward her.

As she realised she was losing she grit her teeth and prepared her self for the worst when suddenly the bandit dropped to his knees, sword clattering on the floor between them.

Qura matched his movement and also dropped to her knees, shaking after the exertion when she spotted Veghar's small form, the havlin rogue's blade wedged into the top of the bandit's neck.

As the body toppled sideways, Veghar dropped nimbly to her feet and hopped over the body's legs to help Qura up before planting a cheeky kiss on the top of Qura's head before hopping back over the legs to retrieve her knife from the bandit, carefully wiping it on the body's clothes. "c'mon, time for some fun!" Veghar grinned as she sheathed the blade and pulled her bright red hair back before kneeling to loosen the body's belt.

"wh... what d'you mean?" Qura gasped, still catching her breath.

"time to loot!" the halfling rogue slid a coin purse from the belt and began to rummage through it.

DOORS

Qura concentrated and a wave of fire hit the orc straight on to her horror it staggered clear of the flames, scorched but one eye locked on the diminutive havlin

she stepped back, trying to conjure more flame when a familiar bark of thunder sounded and the orc's smoking chest exploded in a fountain of gore turning she saw Blue lower the mystical weapon he carried and didn't seem to acknowledge her breathless nod of thanks, instead stepping amongst the carnage to check for any orcs that survived the party's attack.

Across the room Qura could see the warrior Amythis sifting through the orc's corpses, grabbing at pockets and bags

"what're you doing?" Qura gingerly over the smoking corpse in front of her

"hoping one of this lot have a map." Amythis withdrew a couple of coins from the pouch she was holding "unless one of you wizard types wanted to find us which way to go?" Amythis waved her arms toward the four doors in the L shaped room.

Qura's brow furrowed "Can I borrow your shield please?" she asked, holding out her hands

"... sure?" Amythis' eyes narrowed in suspicion as she passed over the large round shield

"Blue? Could you help me please?" Qura was only partially surprised when the huge armoured form stepped close silently and sat down, hands held palm up.

Seeing him move so smoothly always hinted there was more than just a suit of armour in front of her.

She placed the shield front down on blue's hands as a makeshift table and drew her tarot cards out, shuffling the Major Arcana idly.

She dealt out four cards in a layout matching the room and began shuffling the minor arcana, dealing them out in pairs and thrice seemingly randomly amongst the cards.

Taking a deep sigh, Qura flipped the first card over, barely looking at what she was doing Amythis's low whistle sounded "death? That ain't good, isit?"

Qura muttered a response "not always. Can be an end or completion" her voice far away she flipped the minor cards next to Death "Ace of Cups and Queen of Wands, inverted." Qura shook her head "Could be rewards, maybe betrayal"

flipping the next card "the World, straight. Ace of Pentacles, Seven of Swords often means a fight and five of Cups could be the way out"

the next card was The Tower, inverted causing Qura to hiss "inverted means further from where we want to be" and didn't look at the rest of the cards dealt there.

The next card showed a female figure "The High Priestess, Straight. Eight of Swords is danger and Five of Pentacles gives plenty of it"

Qura began shuffling cards back together "the door on the right will likely lead us to the princess, the left hand door is our way out after."

moving for the first time Blue nodded in agreement and stood up and handed Amythis her shield back

"a load of rubbish if you ask me" Amythis muttered, yet still headed toward the right hand door...

SCOURING

Qura paused to catch her breath as the pair reached the summit.

It had been almost a decade since she stood at the top of Old Monk and the detour would be worth letting Blue see West Halvford from up high

As she turned to gaze out the sight made her drop limply to her knees, mouth open.

Where the quaint halfling houses were stood square stone houses crouched, all the trees felled and in the centre of village were piles of logs, the diminutive shapes of havlin working at chopping wood, patrolled by human-sized figures lashing out with whips intermittently

As Qura's hands bunched into fists she saw a havlin collapse and the nearest figure kick the prone figure before dragging it by the foot to hurl the limp body into a ditch nearby.

Qura rushed to her feet, feeling the anger burn and the heat surround her, it faltering as Blue's massive armoured gauntlet rested on her shoulder.

"Rushing will not bring her back" his monotone voice echoed as she realised he'd already dropped low to the ground alongside her "we must reconnoitre first to keep your people safe"

Qura fidgeted with her goggles. She didn't understand Blue's plan fully or what he was asking of her

"just a fireball. Hold it with as much power as you can muster" he repeated, knelt in front of her

She looked up into the glowing green glass sections of his helmet and nodded as she pulled her goggles on, rendering her blind in the approaching dusk.

Focussing, she held her hands close together and gave life to a flame, pouring more and more power into it and reaching further out as it grew to the size of her torso.

She began to shake as she concentrated and the sphere grew brighter and brighter until her legs gave out and she lowered to her knees, barely thinking of anything other than the power she was channelling.

"Almost there" Blue's voice drifted and she felt him extend a hand underneath the fireball She took a sharp breath as he added more power into the spell, something about what he was weaving tasted different to anything Qura had ever produced.

"you need to lift it up now" Blue's voice sounded really far away but he hadn't moved from their place in the undergrowth

shaking all over, Qura forced herself to her feet, despite not touching the ball in front of her, she struggled with all her might to get it to lift upwards, blue matching her movements precisely until she had it at head height.

Suddenly it shot upwards, trailing fire up into the clods above them.

"it won't last long, we need to go now" blue's voice returned and he readied the large weapon he carried

Qura pulled off her her goggles and replaced her hat and followed the armoured behemoth out of the shrubs toward the humans rushing into groups to face where the flare had shot upwards

they were a hundred feet from the crowd and yet Blue's weapon barked and the closest bandits fell, their chests exploding from the impacts

As Qura readied her wand she heard the thud of a raindrop into the dust alongside her holding out her hand, the next drop stopped six inches from her palm – instead of water, this rain was drops of fire!

She grinned at what blue had done and looked up as several fiery droplets halted above her head.

While many of the humans were shouting and screaming as clothes and skin burned, several still charged toward the pair

As blue was picking off archers on the rooftops Qura smiled grimly at the trust he had placed in her and swept her arms out dramatically, pulling fire from the sky to wash over the approaching warriors, sending charred corpses and burnt survivors rolling away from them

Qura turned and waved her arms continuously, sending fire and flame toward any that came close while the thunder of Blue's weapon sounded again and again, each time mutilating those opposing them

the pair followed Blue's plan and as they passed the largest building blue continued to advance while Qura ducked in to release the Havlin

in the great hall she saw the Havlin being herded into a cage built into the back half of the building by three humans.

As she approached the three spun

"they send a rat to release the vermin while real warriors get their hands dirty!" one explained and pointed at her "kill it!"

the two followed this one's orders and dashed toward Qura, brandishing sabres

she focused and thrust her wand out toward one, the flame issued as a thin searing white line that burned straight through the bandit's chest.

As the other lunged from the other side she called on the Amulet of Gort and unleashed a torrent of flame that engulfed his arms, changing his angry yell into a scream of pain

Qura's attention returned to the leader just in time to see his sword plummeting toward her

She brought both arms together and focused, a heat haze forming in front of her and the sword stopping as if it had impacted. She bared her teeth and glared at the man in front of her as the air and sword suddenly glowed cherry red and up into bright white heat

the man screamed as the half-melted sword dropped from he ruined fingers but in instinct he kicked outwards, his boot lifting Qura off her feet and breathless from the impact.

No sooner that she realised what had happened, the man grabbed her by the hair and with a grunt lifted the havlin and smashed her through a nearby table

struggling in the wreckage Qura tried to bring her arms up but another foot impacted with her side and she felt ribs crack as she tumbled away

the kicks continued into her and as she found herself face down on the floor the man stamped down on her arm with a crunch causing Qura to scream in response.

His next kick flipped her onto her back and through her tears she could see him stood above her

"god damn vermin! Stomping about as if you were real people!" he yelled as he raised his boot once more.

Suddenly a candle impacted with the back of his head. He turned to look and Qura's eyes widened

Thrusting her good arm upwards, the candle flame expanded suddenly, igniting the man's unkempt hair and beard

as he screamed and flailed at his head Qura sat up and raised both arms channelling more power into the flame, it heating exponentially and spreading across his body.

Qura stood up and the ignited body also lifted under her control

Qura poured more power into the fire, the man's screams juddering to an end as the heat burst his lungs

"For all you have taken and all you have destroyed" Qura's voice was little more than a growl as the power flowed "You... Shall... BURN!"

She raised her arms to horizontal and the flames burned so hot they were near invisible what was visible, however was the skin flowing like water, muscles burning away and as she brought her hands together the charred skeleton turning to ash, while burned into nothingness Qura lowered her arms and took a deep breath.

Turning she spotted a group of humans had entered the hallway, no doubt to escape Blue's rampage

having witnessed what happened a look from her had them all dropping their weapons without a word being said

they held their hands up dramatically and edged past the group of Havlin, entering the caged area and many not lowering their hands until they had shut the cage behind them

Qura looked toward the Havlin, spotting many arming themselves from these weapons and Mother Superior carefully putting the other lit candle on a table beside her.

Qura wordlessly nodded and limped out of the hall.

She stepped into the still hot night air and found several humans dragging their compatriots bodies into a large pile in the centre of the yard, supervised by Blue

He didn't turn from his overwatch but as she approached he nodded slightly "remarkable control and a feat of strength"

he paused momentarily "i remember my home was scoured and the loss of my brothers"

"you remember?!" Qura's eyes widened

"not the details. Just that it happened" blue's voice replied

Qura wrapped her arms around his leg and didn't start crying until his hand rested on her head

Qura stepped back, waving the smoke away from the hole she'd just burnt

She righted her hat and watched Blue lift the frame effortlessly and hold it while humans and Havlin fixed the start of the barn in place.

She smiled and sat as the other observers cheered the construction.

Her solitude was broken by Mother Superior sitting alongside her and passing her a water skin, only chuckling slightly as Qura first reached out with her plaster cast

"What are your plans?" Mother questioned Qura after she'd had a deep drink

Qura lifted her cast and flexed her fingers "we've got another fortnight before we see if my arm has healed properly. If so we'll make a move. Blue still can't remember much so hopefully travelling will help him"

Mother smiled "you're so different from the little girl who burnt her bedsheets during a nightmare" she reached up and wrapped an arm around Qura's shoulders "We're all so proud of what you've done and who you've become" They sat together for a moment before the Mother Superior struggled to her feet "i'd best go chase wilhelm. It's got to be time for elevenses!"