

Dungeons & Dragons

Ishtra

Ishtra was born in Mistedale in The Dalelands in North Faerûn. She had no other siblings and her parents idolised her and gave her all their love. Her parents believed very much in trust and the good of others and had many dwarf friends. Due to their longevity dwarves often thought the difference between an acquaintance and a friend was a hundred years and that just as you were beginning to get to know a human, the human would be on their death bed and you had to hope they had children or grandchildren with the same heart. The dwarves who Ishtra's parents were friends with, were the same dwarves who had been friends with her family for six generations. Ishtra's parents taught her all their values.

When Ishtra was nearly six, her family and other people were near to the River Ashaba when they were attacked by people from a number of boats. Ishtra and some of the others managed to escape but she was separated from her parents. While the others who had been with her escaped, she found a place to hide in the hollow of a tree and concealed herself there.

Just as she was coming out, she was spotted by a half-elf who was searching the area for survivors. When he saw her, he told her that he'd tried to defend her parents but the ground beneath him gave way and he fell into a pit. By the time he'd managed to climb out, her parents were dead.

He showed Ishtra where the bodies of her parents were but then he said he was going to find the person who did this and take revenge, leaving Ishtra alone. When she found her parents bodies, she thought she'd go insane with grief. Everything they had, had been taken, even some of their clothes. Her mother's left hand was tightly clenched and when Ishtra opened it, she found her mother had been concealing a gold locket with a picture of her parents inside which was all Ishtra had to remember her parents by.



Ishtra had lived near Glen and wanted to get back there, but was alone and lost, and by following the river found her way to Ashabenford. Although described as, 'as pleasant a town as anyone could hope to visit', she found it was a very different story for a young child forced to live on the streets alone, orphaned and poor. Due to the fertile lands of Mistedale, Ishtra found there was often spare food to be scavenged in the warmer months but found the colder months were much harder.

With no one to watch over or provide for her she learned to provide for herself. She fought fiercely over food and kept a constant look out for other desperate souls who would try and steal it from her. She was forced to sleep on rooftops or in alleyways, exposed to the elements and endured sickness without the advantage of medicine or a place to recuperate. It took cunning, strength and speed or often a combination of them to survive against the odds.

It quickly became apparent that the only person you could rely on was yourself but she learnt the secrets of the streets. By hanging around near the White Hart Inn and

the Horwater Pool, any information she overheard she took advantage of since she knew how to get to most places in half the time anyone else could.

As she got older, Ishtra learnt that her biggest asset was her strength, which had been a necessity she had been forced to build up in order to survive. In her early teens she was slightly more accepted since her strength allowed her to find jobs that required her strength. While being still young, the employer found he didn't have to pay much and so Ishtra hung around the Barracks of the Riders, observing them in order to learn to fight and by the age of seventeen had learnt the skills of a barbarian.

During this time Ishtra met another orphan called Trin who was two years younger than her and they helped each other out and formed a bond like sisters. Trin had ideas of visiting other lands on Toril and believed that there may be a better life away from Faerûn. She had heard once about Osse and wanted to travel to the Western Ocean to get passage there.

It was shortly after Ishtra's seventeenth birthday, she was prepared to follow the Moonsea Ride to get to Glen. She was friends with some dwarves there and Trin agreed they would be better off there than remaining in Ashabenford.

On the way they stopped off at a farm near a village that was run by half-elves and humans. Some elves from the Elven Forest had come to the farm sensing something was wrong. Before they were ready to leave, they heard screaming from the eastern end of the village along with the sounds of fighting and saw that a band of Orcs were climbing over the walls and killing or capturing people. Normally Ishtra would have gone to help but she had no weapons handy and knew that she'd be killed before she had time to even strike a blow so she and Trin decided it would be best to hide and ran through the streets towards an old stable. They'd try to help out when the Orcs had left.



The Orcs had been moving through the village much faster and saw Ishtra and Trin enter the stable. They barred the door but the sound of the Orcs beating against it meant it wouldn't hold and the Orcs beating against the door meant the stable was likely to collapse around them at any moment. They noticed a door to the far left and made for it but before they got there, part of the stable roof collapsed, separating them. Ishtra looked across to Trin and started moving the debris to get to her, while keeping an eye on the door.

Trin was half buried by the debris and told Ishtra there was no chance of getting her out and told Ishtra to leave her. She said that the debris had crushed the lower half of her body and was all that was holding it together. Moving it would kill her. Another portion of the roof collapsed and Trin again insisted to Ishtra that if she'd didn't leave they'd both die. A third collapse blocked Ishtra's view of Trin and she could see the door was about to give. All she could hear was Trin screaming out for Ishtra to go for the door and, reluctantly, she saw it was all she could do. The door for the stable gave and Ishtra went through the back door. The stable immediately collapsed behind her burying Trin as well as about two-dozen Orcs.

Outside the stable Ishtra couldn't think straight, filled with grief and guilt. She hid in a recess of a large tree hoping not to be found, at least until she was able to fight. She thought she knew where she could find some weapons and was now prepared to risk whatever it took to kill every Orc.

As she came out from the tree some men with the Orcs spotted her. As she saw them, another man jumped from the rooftop of a nearby hut and knocked her to the ground. He stood over Ishtra prepared to drag her up when she kicked him in the stomach, jumped to her feet and threw him towards the other men. He obviously hadn't expected someone who could fight back the way Ishtra could.

As she ran towards the stash of weapons she knew of, she felt a tingle and saw a light blue glow envelop her. As she swung round she felt her strength drain and saw the glow was emanating from one of the men. Ishtra has always had a fear of magic knowing that neither a sword nor strength could protect her. She tried to focus all her will at resisting the spell and suddenly the blue glow left her and knocked the mage who was casting it, back. Ishtra immediately ran to him to grab his arms before he could cast another spell, but stopped.

As she looked at him, even after eleven years she knew it was the half-elf who had claimed to try and protect her parents. He was wearing a ring that her mother had owned. The stone was broken in exactly the way her mother's ring had been broken and it was no coincidence that he was wearing a cloak and boots identical to those her father had been wearing the day he was killed. They were dwarf made, and dwarf goods were made to last to fit in with dwarves living for hundreds of years. It was clear to her that he had probably killed her parents.

The man didn't show any recognition of Ishtra but was probably just pretending. Her copper hair and green eyes combination were not easy to forget. Although this happened in less than a second, it was enough for the mage to recast the spell and Ishtra felt her strength drain as before. Again she focused all her will at resisting the spell but it was making enormous demands on her energy. She succeeded in resisting the spell again and knocking back the mage but her energy was spent and she was powerless to do anything but fall to her knees as her strength ebbed away the third time he cast the spell and she gave an agonised cry at a burning pain in her forehead. She later learnt that the spell needed to be renewed each day, that the same pain accompanied it and that there was always a blue crescent moon marking on her forehead while the spell was in effect. Then the man who'd dropped onto her came over and manacled her before dragging her up by her hair, stripping off most of her clothes and leading her away with the other people from the village that had been captured.



Most of the humans had been killed and many of the prisoners were elves or half elves. Ishtra thought she was possibly the only human. She noticed that the mage who'd put the spell on her appeared to be the leader and had taken an instant dislike to Ishtra since she was so strong-willed by resisting the spell. This turned into hate very quickly when he heard the guards joking about Ishtra resisting the spell.

They were marched for several days to a castle near the Moonsea, which was a large lake connected by a river to an inland sea known as The Sea of Fallen Stars. At this point they were locked in a deep dungeon formed from a natural cave with no light.

Ishtra could only measure the time from getting the agonising burning in her forehead each day as the spell suppressing her strength was renewed. It was only after a week that a light shone into the dungeon and a guard stood in the doorway and ordered the prisoners to come with him, although he addressed them as slaves.



Ishtra joined the line but as she was about to go past, the guard pushed her to the ground. Ishtra wanted to jump up and teach the guard a lesson but realised that her strength was not up to either task.

As the guard left, he told Ishtra that they had something else in store for her, and as he left, mentioned that it was quite a while since the dogs had tasted human flesh and the apothecary was in need of a new skeleton.

This brought thoughts of dread to Ishtra's mind, however the spell that affected her strength only affected her physically and she managed to keep her expression as impassive as before, robbing the guard of the pleasure of seeing the expression of fear he'd expected.

The guard's threat turned out to be empty but in the years that passed there was more than one occasion when Ishtra wished it hadn't. Due to the spell, that was renewed every evening, it meant she was the weakest of the slaves but the mage worked her the hardest. The other slaves also disliked her out of jealousy for her being strong-willed enough to resist the spell before she was captured, and the word of this spread to all the slaves. She was lucky to get five hours sleep in twenty-four and the mage got great delight from setting her impossible tasks and then punishing her for failure.



She wasn't fed every day. Each time she was fed she had to divide her food in small parcels wrapped up in cloth which she hid behind a loose stone in her cell. She'd nearly forgotten what it felt like to be full rather than just fed. She only got to bathe once a week and this was only because she was given the job of collecting the barrels full of illegal goods from the river that flowed beneath the castle and then throwing the empty ones back in. She took the opportunity to bathe even though the water was always freezing cold. A number of times she thought of hiding in a barrel to

escape but guessed the barrels were picked up further down the river so she'd be caught and the stories of what happened to slaves who tried to escape were enough to dissuade her from trying this idea. She once tried washing her clothes in the river but they took so long to dry she was severely punished for taking so long over the job. Every night when she was locked in her cell she immediately went to sleep being so exhausted even though the cell did not provide enough room for her to lie down, although this made no difference since the manacles around her wrists weren't long enough for her to lie down. Every night she had the most terrible nightmares and was often glad to wake up despite what awaited her during the day.

It was nearly six years later before she heard anything that could give her a glimmer of hope. There was talk that the mage of the castle was going to make some kind of massive arrangement with a warlord from Mulhorand. Ishtra heard talk among the other slaves that in Mulhorand slaves got a much better deal. It was believed the warlord was a firm believer that slaves should get a better deal and that it was unlikely that the deal would be made if he found out how the mage treated his slaves. A few days later Ishtra overheard more talk that the warlord from Mulhornad had been invited to a banquet at the castle. The warlord was well aware that in most other parts of Faerûn, slaves weren't given as good a deal as he believed they should get so insisted that for this banquet half the slaves would be given fine clothes for the banquet and be allowed to attend as equals and then half way through, they would change places with the slaves who were working so that all the slaves would get to feel like an equal for half an evening. The deal hinged on this agreement. All of the slaves were counting down the days to the banquet and Ishtra hoped that getting a break for half an evening might give her at least one night of peaceful dreams.

On the day of the banquet, just as it was about to begin, Ishtra was manacled in her cell and left alone. She found a bundle of bread and cheese and a jug of water there. She'd only been fed the day before and had five more days worth of food. She was about to divide this up when she thought that she was not going to be included in the banquet and she already had put food aside that this was her only chance ever to feel full and took the opportunity to eat it all.

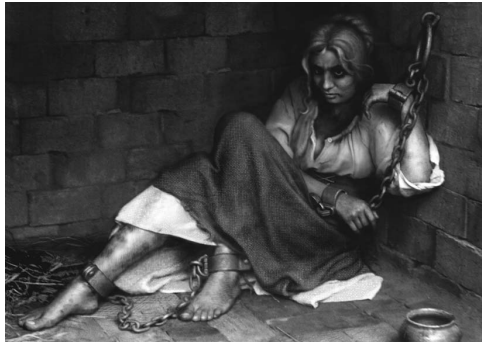
It was also much earlier in the evening than usual and all she could do was sleep. She hoped that working less today, she might sleep better and this was a chance to get several more hours sleep so she opted to sleep.

Used to only getting five hours sleep, Ishtra automatically woke five hours later. Straining her ears she could just hear sounds of the banquet that showed no signs of finishing soon. While she sat there, she suddenly felt a strange sensation and realised her strength was returning and realised that the banquet had caused the mage to forget to renew the spell that had



held her for six long years. She felt her forehead and found the crescent moon shape she could usually feel was absent. After being so weak for so long she felt it almost impossible to believe she'd ever had the strength she had now. In truth, when the spell ended, the victim usually was several times stronger than before for a few minutes.

Ishtra using this temporary state of super-human strength, was able to break the chains that held her although her strength returned to normal before she could do anything about the manacles themselves. As this happened, she heard a sound outside her cell and hid out of sight of the door with the jug in her hand.



Unknown to her, at the banquet, one of the mage's men told him that if the warlord from Mulhornad was in the castle when Ishtra was working, he'd know that she'd not been at the banquet and any agreements he'd made with the mage would be instantly dissolved. The mage suggested to him that the easiest option was to kill her and told his man to do it right away saying she'd be asleep now since she was usually sleeping at this time. The man

went to Ishtra's cell but she heard him outside.

As the man opened the door and came in with a dagger in his hand, Ishtra brought the metal jug down on his head knocking him out. She then seized the opportunity to get out through the open door. She knew if she kept out of sight of the mage, now that the spell had ended, he'd have to be in sight of her to recast it. She knew the dungeon she was in was underground but that, at the far end, it sloped upwards and there was a high window just in line with the ground that she could squeeze out of.

It had been snowing outside and the thin clothes Ishtra had been given as a slave did very little to help but she hardly noticed, having such a warm feeling of getting out of the dungeon. She knew she wasn't nearly free yet but had never had this kind of chance before.

Using her skills of stealth, she'd learnt on the streets of Ashabenford, she crept along the walls of the castle keeping below the windows and went extra carefully past the windows of the great hall where sounds of the banquet were clearly heard. She paused to wonder if the man she'd knocked out would be missed but guessed that most people would be too drunk to notice by now. She hoped the mage would have a hangover in the morning worse than the pain she'd endured in her forehead each night.

After rounding the main section of the castle she found a bank and when the moon drifted behind cloud she scrambled down. She'd heard about a cave in the bank that was used as a storage area that was unlikely to be guarded today and the gates were rarely locked since very few people were supposed to know about it. Ishtra only knew about it because she was used to picking up any information of use whenever she heard it.

As she guessed, the cave was unguarded and unlocked so she crept in, out of the cold, and looked around. The first thing that caught her eye on top of a large chest was her gold locket that had been taken from her as she'd been captured and she immediately retrieved it and put it on. She knew it would be too good to be true for her original clothes to be there. They'd been such good quality that they'd have been made use of by now but she searched for something to replace her slaves clothes. Not only did they remind her of the last six years, but they were torn and filthy and almost falling apart.

She found in one corner some furs which would keep her warm but knew that anything would have been better than what she was currently wearing and found a few fur blankets she could fashion into cloaks for coats when she got the chance, since in the Moonsea, people wore winter clothes all year round.

While she was looking she found a small knife, which she was able to use to break the manacles that were still attached to her wrists and ankles. She didn't really want to take anything that wasn't hers without leaving something in its place because she felt that she would be lowering herself towards the level of those who had imprisoned her but decided she should be owed six years back pay and therefore kept the knife and found ten days worth of food.

One last thing she picked up was a pouch of ten gold pieces and then she quickly left the cave and headed South away from the castle.



As Ishtra travelled away from the castle the snow continued to fall and she knew it would rapidly cover her tracks. When she reached the shores of the Moonsea she headed west and crossed the River Stojanow at Phlan and left the track and headed for the River Tesh by following the line of the Dragons Pine Mountains.

Along this route before first light she found the remains of a campfire and rubbed some soot and ash into her hair to make it look black.

She knew that returning to Mistledale would not be possible and she decided to keep out of the Dalelands completely and so kept to the North shores of the River Tesh.

She kept off the trail as much as possible.

She only ventured near to towns when she needed to get a room for the night. As the Inns she stayed at she'd get two nights and a good meal for a day's labour rather than paying gold, she usually took this option. Most towns however, would not allow visitors after dark so when Ishtra couldn't get a room she would hide amongst rocks, ruins or trees so that a campfire couldn't be seen easily and only lit it after dark so the smoke wouldn't be seen. She'd then sleep with her back to a tree or wall with everything she owned wrapped in a bundle in her arms.

After she was suitably far enough away from the castle, she knew she was finally free but she still had a long journey ahead of her if she could get far enough away that she wouldn't be hunted down. Remembering Trin's idea of going to another continent, she headed West. She followed the Black Road, which is a trade route through the Anauroch desert and the Empire of Shadows that follows a line of oases. She then followed the trail to The Trade Way on The Sword Coast. She was planning to head for Waterdeep but heard some news that prompted her to go south to Baldur's Gate. She had seen an offer of employment near Baldur's Gate which required someone with her skills. It seemed to pay and treat people very well.

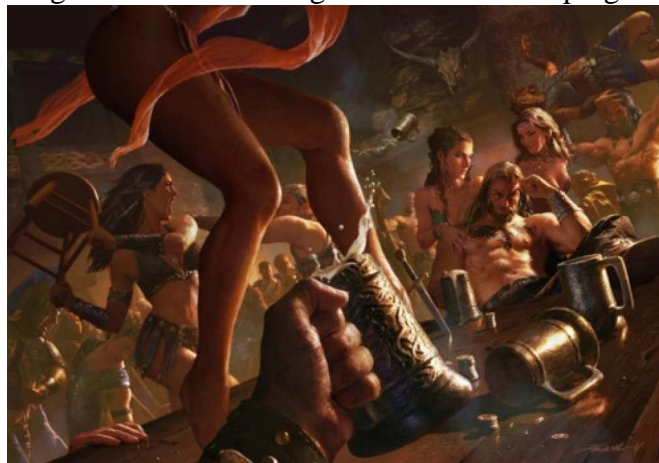
A military group called The Flaming Fists was looking for new members and Ishtra thought this was somewhere where she could put her skills to good use. When they saw what she was capable of, they signed her up on the spot.

Ishtra knew she would never fully trust anyone ever again and was also not sure what connections The Flaming Fists might have with the Moonsea so she told them her name was Kered and that she was an outlander. She shared her barracks with the woman call Shar who originally came from Maztica. She had lived previously in Hillsfar where much of the trade in the Moonsea passed through. She worked at a nearby trading post and spent her free time searching, unsuccessfully, for a legendary secret trail to the Old Wizard's Labyrinth. She still had a friend in Hillsfar who would periodically send her a few bottles of Dragon's Breath, which was a brandy like liqueur from Hillsfar which she shared with Ishtra. Shar also kept a pet lemming and had a night cap that when worn gave the wearer pleasant dreams.



Ishtra would sometimes accompany Shar to the local tavern but when it was crowded or noisy, Ishtra wouldn't stay and preferred to stay in her barracks with the door open (she hated a locked door, even if the lock was on the inside) and pray to Lliira or meditate which was the only way she could avoid the nightmares of the past six years which continued to plague her.

On one occasion Ishtra had returned to her barracks and Shar was in the tavern with another friend who was getting much too drunk and mentioned a rumour that one of the officers sleeps with the dead. Unfortunately he mentioned it in front of the officer and his six biggest mates and when he saw the officer's reaction he turned and fled like a whippet with a bum full of dynamite. This didn't stop a massive fight from erupting, and Shar, who had been with him, was in the thick of it and sustained injuries, which proved fatal. Her last request to Ishtra was that she took care of her lemming called Reish and she also left to Ishtra, her night cap which allowed Ishtra to finally combat her nightmares and no longer be afraid of sleeping.



It became clear well before this event that Ishtra was not suited to a hierarchical command structure. She would not let someone tell her what to do. It seemed too close to the life she'd escaped from and she ended up putting a number of men's noses out of joint, literally.

In the end she was called before one of her commanders and given the option of accompanying a wagon to a nearby town where she would then be free to go where she pleased or face a court martial. Since she had been planning to leave at the first chance she got, she chose the first option.

Whilst working for The Flaming Fists she'd been given a battle axe, a light crossbow, four javelins and a backpack which contained a bed roll, a mess kit, a tinder box, ten torches and a water skin. It also had fifty feet of hempen rope attached to it. Ishtra also put in ten days worth of rations.

Unfortunately, although the pay while working for the Flaming Fists was good, for the first six months you were only given food, lodgings and an allowance in the tavern. After this time, if you'd proved yourself they would start to pay you. So all Ishtra had were the ten gold pieces she'd found in the pouch in the cave.

She was instructed to ride to a town called Beregost to the South and go to The Red Sheaf inn where she would find a man called Sildar Hallwinter.

She went to the inn and asked for Sildar Hallwinter and was directed by the barmaid to a man with a grey beard. While he was telling her what the job entailed she noticed a large man about six and a half feet tall was listening in. He had brownish skin, which suggested he came from the lands nearer the equator but looked like he was sea sick by the colour of his skin, which suggested he was also half Orc. The Half-Orc was interested in the job and they were told about an Elf in the inn who would also be joining them. They were to leave just after dawn and to be there or be left behind.

Later that evening Ishtra noticed the bar tender had a troubled look on his face and spoke in whispers to Sildar who immediately got up and left the tavern.

The next morning she had breakfast with the Elf, who was a Druid, and was later joined by the Half-Orc, who was called Śiliç, before the journey began. There was another man there rather than Sildar who they'd expected. Ishtra asked where he was and they were told he and his squire had ridden on ahead and the others were to follow with reasonable haste. But what was the reason for his sudden departure?

