

Dungeons & Dragons

Li' Se' Rah

Li' Se' Rah was born in Port Nyranzaru, a small port city located on the Bay of Chult at the mouth of the River Soshenstar. She lived with her parents there and her father worked at the docks loading and unloading the ships. Living on the surface was unusual for gnomes but the kind of creatures that were found under the ground this close to the jungles made it the only option.

Li' Se' Rah is not a gnome name but both her parents independently had a dream and the one thing that was the same in each dream was that they had a daughter called Li' Se' Rah, so when their first child was a girl they decided to call her Li' Se' Rah.

Her mother used to enjoy listening to the exciting, fantastic and often frightening stories that traders told about far off places but was disturbed about what she heard about some of the monsters. In truth many of the monsters she heard about were either a work of fiction or included in a fictional story since the men used to enjoy competing in stories and impressing some of the more gullible women.

One morning Li' Se' Rah and her father woke to find her mother gone, with a message saying she felt the need to make the world a better and safer place for her daughter.

Li' Se' Rah was only a couple of years old when this happened and didn't have many memories of her mother but hoped she'd meet her again even though they probably wouldn't recognise each other.

On a trip to Aralon in the Moonshae Islands, Li' Se' Rah's father met a woman living in Llewelyn as a fish gutter who lived in a house she inherited from her parents. She had two children. Her husband had tried to make his money for the family through gambling which worked until someone cheated him out of all his money at a game and to protect his family, he'd sold himself to the opponent to pay off his debts.

His wife and children never knew what had happened to him.

Li' Se' Rah's father fell in love with the woman and returned to the island a couple of month's later with Li' Se' Rah and married the woman, they had three children together.

Unfortunately, there wasn't the work that required her father's skills in Llewelyn, so her father had to work in Caer Callidyrr and return home to his family for a couple of days each week.

Li' Se' Rah used to count down the days until he was home. Her step-mother didn't seem to have a lot of time for her. She loved her own children more and although she wasn't mean or unkind she gave her own children preferential treatment and the love she had for Li' Se' Rah was not the same and sometimes felt absent.

Li' Se' Rah had once considered staying with her father but knew that with him being away it would upset him to find there had been tensions at home while he hadn't been there.

The traders would dock in Caer Callidyrr which is the capital of Aralon and unload coal, horses, minor magic items, ore, parchment and silk before loading up with armour, timber and weapons. They would then move out making room for the next ships and sail round the southern tip of the island to The Bay of Llewelyn and allow the sailors to go ashore there.

In the evenings Li' Se' Rah would sneak out to sit in the dark behind one of the taverns to listen to the sailors singing sea shanties and then would return to bed before the sailors started singing more rude songs after they'd drunk too much. It was listening to the sea



shanties that Li' Se' Rah decided she wanted to be a minstrel and found that studying took her mind off being lonely and unloved when her father was away. She made herself a lute after her father told her how, but he suggested she do it while he was away to see how well she managed.

An accident at the shipping port killed her father a few years later which caused her stepmother to withdraw into herself. Her two older siblings left home immediately not wanting to be left with the job that Li' Se' Rah was given of looking after the younger children. She took the death of her father very badly but had to just harden her

heart and get on with it. She couldn't give the children the same love their mother had though. Although they had left to avoid looking after the children, the two older siblings found jobs and sent most of their pay home to support the family.

Li' Se' Rah, without her father, and her stepmother not being in a fit state for anything, felt the family was vulnerable and so she approached some of the sailors and asked them to teach her how to fight to protect her family if the need arose.

Some of the sailors refused to teach her on the basis that she was a woman but others agreed to teach her what they knew and were always impressed at how quickly she picked it up. She showed a real aptitude for simple weapons, hand crossbows, longswords, rapiers and short swords.

When the younger children were old enough to look after themselves and their mother they made it clear they didn't want Li' Se' Rah around anymore and so she left. The two older siblings kept in touch but her step-mother and the younger ones didn't want to know her.

Li' Se' Rah also found the sailors to be a good source of songs and stories and she found she could often get food, drink and lodging in exchange for playing or singing. She liked seeing the smiles of people's faces when she performed, that was all that mattered. This allowed her to spend more time practicing and studying, and she came proficient at playing the Lute, Lyre, Flute and Bagpipes. The extra studying meant that instead of going to be a minstrel she could

actually spend the time in hard study to discover the

magic hidden in music. This depth of

knowledge, level of musical skill with a touch

of magic was what could lead to becoming a

bard. She still felt terribly alone and after the

thanks she got for looking after her half-

brothers and sisters and her step-mother she

decided she would put herself first in the

future.

Another thing she found she could learn from

the sailors was the art of sex and she found that

was a way to take her mind off anything that

bothered her. None of the sailors appeared to be

gnomes but it was just as possible with humans. She found that



satisfying herself was always a good way to end the day, but never spent the night with them.

Although Li' Se' Rah kept this much to herself and didn't give the sailors her name, or at least not her real name, the sailors would brag about it, and her friends looked down on her and didn't want to know her anymore, although her older step-sisters never lost their respect for her.

In the end Li' Se' Rah decided to move somewhere, where no one would know her.

She took a ship to the main land and up the River Esemel in Amn, which had colonial ports in the Moonshaes, to Lake Esemel and wandered round there learning local songs, stories, folklore and peasant tales and seeking out other bards to swap stories and songs with, listen to them boast of their accomplishments and to share their knowledge. Bards form loose associations, which they call colleges, and Li' Se' Rah would gather in mead halls or round bonfires where those of the College of Valor would sing the deeds of the mighty, both past and present. Like the sailors there were also other things she could learn from the bards.

While visiting a nearby village she found it had been sacked. The village was virtually destroyed and there were the bodies of men, women and children lying all around. Most of these people had probably never even seen a real weapon until the moment before they were killed, let alone had one handy to defend themselves. It looked like there wasn't a living soul around but as she was thinking of leaving she saw the sole survivor who told her he had only survived by being on a trading mission the day the town was sacked. He felt immeasurable guilt from not being there to help defend the town even though he would have stood no more chance than any of the others. All he could do now was bury the bodies. Li' Se' Rah asked if he wanted any help. He told her it was a kind offer but something he felt he should do himself.

The best help she could give was to go and warn a nearby village which, judging by the position of the castle the invading army would have come from, would probably be the next village to be sacked.

The other village would have been no more able to defend themselves than the previous one but Li' Se' Rah went to see the

castle for herself first. She believed that, with the fighting skills she learnt from the sailors, she could get into the castle and steal some weapons to arm the village, and watched the guards to time the best opportunity to get in unseen.

It wasn't until late that night that she realised she needed the cover of the darkness to help her and would be seen, even in the dark, unless she covered herself with black mud which appeared to be in every pool nearby. She removed her clothing to do this since she didn't intend to be seen and she wouldn't have to clean more than just herself when she got out again. She covered her body, face and hair with the black mud, leaving just her feet and the palms of her hands clean to avoid leaving footprints or marks on anything she had to touch and slipped into the castle when she could and found herself in the great hall.

The hall was empty of people since, apart from guards, most of the inhabitants of the castle would be asleep now. There were tapestries all around the hall showing different images of dragons but a lot of them were tatty and old.

Directly across the hall were two double doors and there was a single door on the left and right and at the top left and right in line with the double doors. On each side was a staircase leading up to a gallery around the hall that was probably also accessible from the upper floor.

Listening at the door on the right she could hear voices of guards who'd been gambling and had got into an argument. It didn't sound like it would be settled anytime soon.

The other door was quiet but she couldn't be sure if the room was unoccupied. She tried the door and peered through the crack. The room seemed to be empty. Usually she could creep through quite small cracks but didn't want to risk smearing mud on the door. She heard a sound that sounded like the main doors opening so she realised she had no option but to go in and close the door before she was discovered.

The room looked like a guard room. The north wall had a ledge about seven feet from the ground with some windows above it. There were a few beds, some pegs on the wall for hanging clothing, a rack full of weapons and a long table with a drawer that probably served as a desk. This room was obviously for the guards who were currently on duty. As she looked round she found an alcove at the

back. The alcove had a hatch that could be opened by a handle with a tank of cold water above and a drainage channel, probably used for washing.

The weapons were just what Li' Se' Rah had been looking for and appeared to be of a very high quality. Further inspection revealed sets of armour, with some sets being child sized. This suggested the weapons and armour were stolen and the thieves had made a dash and grab to sort out what they did or did not need later. Li' Se' Rah noticed one of these would fit her and may work as a disguise more effective than black mud so she used the washing facility to wash away the mud and put on the armour.

There was a chain mail breast plate and bodice with a chain mail skirt and gloves with sleeves for the lower arms. There was also bracelets to be worn above the elbows and a cloak that was fastened by a broach. She also found a double edged dagger that looked like a sword for someone her size.

Getting the weapons out was going to be tricky. There were several armfuls and carrying them out, even though she was disguised in the armour, was going to look suspicious. Getting at the windows, over seven feet high, was impossible. She looked round the room and saw another door but that led to the base of a tower. The only kind of windows there, were arrow slits and dropping the weapons from the top would be too noisy.

Li' Se' Rah decided to see if there was any other way out of the castle less obvious so she could store the weapons closer by before she got out.

She kept hold of the "sword" and left the guard room. As she was deciding which way to go a guard came out of the door opposite. Li' Se' Rah's first instinct was to hide behind a tapestry but remembered she was wearing the armour and walked toward the far left door as if she had as much right to be there as the guard.

"Stop there!" he yelled at her.

She thought about continuing but she was the only person he could be calling to and so she stopped.

As the guard walked over two more came out of the guard house.

"Who are you?" the guard asked.

Li' Se' Rah not sure what to say found herself speechless. She saw all three guards were wearing the same armour but it didn't match the armour she was wearing.

“We don’t have any women working for us,” the guard said.

“She’s a gnome,” one of the other said. “We certainly wouldn’t employ a gnome.”

Li’ Se’ Rah suddenly felt really stupid. Even if the armour had matched the guards’ she hadn’t given it a thought that possibly her gender and certainly her race would have given her away.

As the second guard came over he took out his knife and continued, “We don’t like guests who don’t wait to be invited.” He walked over as if he was going to cut her throat.

Li’ Se’ Rah had been trained in fighting but realised that with her size, she be luckily if she could beat anything bigger than a dwarf, and definitely not when she was outnumbered.

“She’s a woman,” the third guard said. “You can’t just kill her.”

“Why not?” the second guard asked angrily.

“We can have some fun with her first,” the third guard replied.

The first guard was looking at her armour. It had gold plating on it and gems embedded in it.

“This is noble armour,” he said. “We can get a ransom for her. The value of merchandise goes down if it’s been used. Let’s put her in the dungeon until we can work out where she comes from. She’s not prepared to speak but there can’t be many gnome nobles near by.”

The guards had been planning to take her armour from her but allowed her to wear it, since she had nothing else to wear. They didn’t do this out of allowing her modesty but to remind her that they would take her armour when they needed to prove they had her. Worrying about something that is going to happen, can sometimes be worse than the results when it does happen.

The cell they put her in was cold and dark but in darkness her vision meant she could see as well as if it was only dim.

The guard in charge said he didn’t trust gnomes and asked the third guard to guard her cell and make sure she didn’t try anything. They didn’t know if she was a Forest Gnome or Rock Gnome but Forest Gnomes were known for their wisdom.

Since the third guard had been left to guard her and he was also the one who’d first suggested raping her, Li’ Se’ Rah thought she might be able to charm the guard. Her training to be a bard had led her to believe that the multiverse had been spoken into existence, that the words of the gods gave it shape, and the echoes of those primordial

Words of Creation still resound through the cosmos. The music and song of bards is an attempt to snatch and harness those echoes, subtly woven in their spells and powers.

Although she didn't have a musical instrument to hand, her voice could be just as effective as an instrument when she sung. If she could sing a song that could charm the guard she could use the magic that accompanied it to make the charm last for an hour. If he regarded her as a friendly acquaintance she should be able to persuade him to let her out of her cell, and help her escape. She hoped by the time he realised what she'd done she'd be long gone. The guard was not particularly bright and his wisdom was not strong enough to stand up to her charisma. He was only too eager to let her out of her cell and give her back the sword she'd had. When she asked him if he could help her get out, he said that the only exit to the dungeon was the one they'd come in by. He knew her presence in the castle could only have good intentions but the other guards wouldn't see it like that and the two of them on their own couldn't stand up against the rest of the guards.

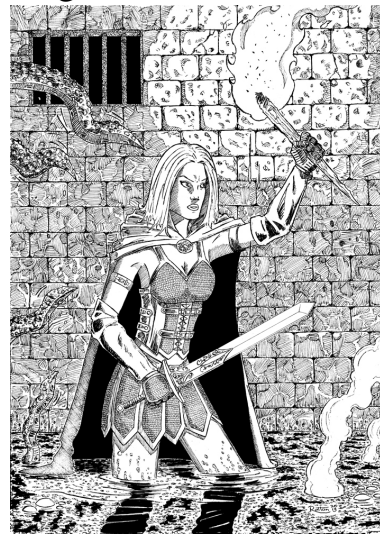
The guard suggested she go to the back of the dungeon. There was a stream that ran round the castle under the ground that they used to get their water from and wash away their rubbish. The rubbish would only have just gone in so if she followed it now the rubbish would be ahead of her and the water would be clean behind it for the next twenty-four hours.

Li' Se' Rah persuaded the guard to give her a torch. Although in dim light she could see as well as if it was light, in the dark she could only see as well as if the light was dim and thought a torch would be better than her natural dark vision.

She had even considered asking the guard to get a stash of weapons outside the castle for her but wasn't sure if he could do that before the charm wore off and that she'd have to arrange where she'd find them which meant once the hour was over the guard would know where she was going to be.

Just to make sure the guard's suspicions were not roused she gave him a passionate kiss and assured him that the next time she came to the castle he could spend the night with her. She secretly thought that she could probably keep to her word on that since she'd never come back to the castle.

The river water was cold and Li' Se' Rah was glad of the torch. The passage smelt foul and she tried not to think about what the river had to wash away. In some of the walls were windows with bars that must have had cells on the other side. When the water level was higher, those cells would flood and presumably the prisoners would drown although that may have been the intention for some of the cells. Demand answers and let nature determine how long you had to answer them.



There were what appeared to be strange tentacles reaching out from various parts of the river but Li' Se' Rah was confident her sword would cut through them like they were low fat cream cheese and they also seemed to shy away from the flame of the torch.

While she was in the river she took the opportunity to clean the mud from her hair. She hadn't cleaned her hair in the guard room, not wanting to wait for it to dry, but now she could emerge with different colour hair.

When she finally did come to the point where the river flowed out and she could get back onto the ground she saw a silhouette at the entrance and realised the guard was probably waiting for her. She wondered if he had the others with him, but guessed by the assurance she'd made him for the next time she was in the castle he was probably alone to tell her they were to do it now. She knew she couldn't charm him again

As she approached the exit she could see it was the guard she'd charmed. His expression spoke a volume on the hostility he felt at her deception, along with further hostility that she'd been able to deceive him and how much he was looking forward to what he planned to do. When she was 30 feet away she suddenly whispered in a voice only he could hear a discordant melody. It wasn't just harmonious sounds that could convey magic and doing it correctly you could work magic with unpleasant sounds too.

The Dissonant Whispers wracked the guard with terrible pain inflicting psychic damage and he found he had to get as far away

from her as possible. By the time he had recovered and came back she was "over the hills and far away".

The first stop she made on her way out was to where her clothes were and she changed out of the armour and back into them. The armour was high quality and incredibly valuable but as the guard had said it was most likely noble. If someone who knew where it came from saw her wearing it, she would be arrested for stealing it and the same could happen if she tried to sell it. She didn't feel happy selling stolen items either. She decided to leave it behind for someone else to find.

Li' Se' Rah headed for the town that was to be attacked. Dawn was in the air when she arrived and from what she'd gathered from being in the castle, the attack would be in day or two and she looked for the chieftain's house to warn him that the people had to get away. The chieftain didn't want to run and told her that the people wouldn't either. He didn't change his mind even when she told him of the massacre in the previous town.

Li' Se' Rah asked him if he would let her help them make traps for the pillagers and he agreed that they would do that. While they were making traps Li' Se' Rah used the knowledge she had from fighting and showed the villagers how to use farming implements as weapons. She realised this was possibly better than her original plan of stealing weapons since the villagers would find it easier to fight with something they were familiar with and that if you are holding a weapon you become a target.

The attack was likely to come at any moment and Li' Se' Rah was in one of the buildings when the pillagers attacked, wondering how she could help. She thought that trying to help them fight was suicide with her being only three feet tall but wanted to help out.

As she was trying to work out what she could do, she noticed there was someone else in the building who had settled in the village recently. She recognised him since she'd laid with him a few times in Llewellyn.

When he saw her, his loyalty to the village went out the window leaving him behind. He grabbed Li' Se' Rah by the shoulders. "All the villagers are preoccupied, Lilli," he said. "We won't be distributed. Let's take advantage of that."

Li' Se' Rah was shocked at his suggestion. There was a time and place for everything and this as not the time. She also couldn't believe he'd let the villagers go into battle and not help and even be glad of it just to lie with her.

Li' Se' Rah felt like kicking him in the jaw but would never be able to kick that high and so instead kicked him between the legs and as he doubled over she was able to hit him in the face. She stepped back and said, "I'm helping the villagers. I might have been prepared to spend some time with you later if they win, but whatever the outcome, you've lost your chance now."

Li' Se' Rah left the building with her lute. She knew what she could do. While keeping out of the actual battle she could use the magic of her music to inspire the villagers, which could give the edge they needed to defeat the pillagers. The magic of her music had an amazing effect and the pillagers retreated with less than half their number remaining. Not all of the villagers survived but each person who died would have preferred to die defending their home than any other way.

The pillagers who'd fallen into the traps and survived were taken as prisoners to be taken to Athkatla, which was the capital of Amn to stand trial. Some said that since almost anything including lewdness and slavery was acceptable in Athkatla, that it would be pointless. The pillagers said they'd promise not to attack the village again if they were released but this didn't help any of the other villages.

That evening having saved the village there was a memorial service for the villagers who had fallen but that was followed with the celebration of their victory and to remember those who had fallen hadn't done so in vain. Having risked her life to try and steal some weapons to arm the people and then teaching them how to use their farm implements as weapons and inspiring them throughout the battle Li' Se' Rah was hailed as a folk hero and everyone was only too happy to hear her play her lute during their celebration and gave her a lyre as a gift.

That evening she slept alone and was told that someone who looked like her only slightly older had passed through the village a few years ago, heading north. Li' Se' Rah realised that might be her mother and if she was still out there, she might be able to find her.

The next morning Li' Se' Rah reflected on the day before and realised how she could put her skills as a bard to good use as an adventurer if she could join a party of heroes. She knew she'd been on the wrong path before and vowed that she'd get to know someone well before she even considered sleeping with them.

She decided that she'd count everything before the day she went into the castle apart from her studies as a bard, a past life and this was her new life and it would be much more responsible, selfless and worthwhile than the previous one and she would put her continuing studies as a bard as top priority until she was needed on an adventure. She would always be able to find a place to perform and receive free food and lodging of a modest or comfortable standard as long as she performed each night. Her best routines were dancing, singing and instrumental.

The people who knew her when she was young knew her shameful secret so she could never go home again. However her mother was out there somewhere, and she would like to find her and would be happy to meet up with her older step-sisters again. She thought of her Lute as her most treasured possession since it reminded her of her father. She knew a story relevant to almost any situation and loved a good insult, even one directed at her.

In the weeks that passed Li' Se' Rah felt happier seeking out bards from the College of Lore whom she would meet with in libraries or at festivals. Their knowledge came from diverse sources such as peasant tales, which she still sought, or scholarly tomes.

Li' Se' Rah found that wherever she performed she could use her gifts to keep the audiences spellbound. When the applause died down, the audience members would sometimes find themselves questioning everything they held to be true, from their faith in the priesthood of the local temple to their loyalty to the king.

