

Ledge Writing Sample

The Ledge Foundation is a commercially run DnD module where players across the world participate through D20, Skype, and Discord. One of the services Ledge offers is interactive “solo campaigns” - roleplaying for each player’s character. A writer/designer starts a designed story, the player responds, and the writer makes the story react to the player’s choice – a play-by-post branching narrative. All these become part of the greater Ledge canon, which is free and publicly available under a Creative Commons agreement. This ultimately allows the greater DnD community to use any Ledge produced materials for their own games.

The short sample below is from a play-by-post between myself and a Duergar character named Duran. For the sake of clarity, my writing is left as usual and **the player responses are in bold and left unedited.**

A Duergar girl is sick on the bed and her mother looks over her. Out the window is a canyon of the Underdark, spotted with flashes of blue and yellow light - other such rooms holding other such lives in this dim world under the world. To those on the surface, it was gloomy, but the faintly violet fog, dyed by the clay of the ceiling stone and topaz bedrock, created a kind of floating sunset, when the rivers overflowed into the vents at day’s end.

Among the shelf of the girl's room were many toys and only a few books, and almost all of the titles held the name of that great (and likely fictional) hero: Duran. The freed slave and slayer of slave holders. The inventor. The machine. A kind of myth to youth and (some rumored) propaganda to the Duergar. To some, not to lose hope. To others, as a way to caution against adventuring, lest ye meet dangers and lose yourself to the ultimate darknesses.

It was on such an occasion that the mother knew which story was best for the child who, in fact, would die very soon. It would be the first of the last two stories the girl would ever hear, if that mattered. It does matter, the mother thought.

And the girl only wondered out the window, where her friend, across the canyon, may have looked back. Maybe tomorrow she would escape this bed. At any perilous moment we can drop from hell to life, she knew, and she knew this perhaps better than anyone, having been sick since her birth. She was over being sad, pitying, angry, afraid, courageous, compensating, and these other fleeting mindsets. She instead felt as an immortal does, life rising and falling on parallels that went on to a blurred line. She knew not whether she was alive now, only that her guide was this mother, and her message was this:

THE WARRIOR'S REST

Once upon a time, there was the great Duergar hero Duran. He committed grim deeds towards grim souls, and kept to himself and his things. Upon adventuring in the lowest depths of the Underdark, he found himself eclipsed in darkness for days, searching for an escaped slave owner by the name of Ilx. He was eclipsed in darkness

that no light could pierce. He wandered and wandered, eating all his bread and drinking all his water, losing track of time, feeling, place, thoughts, until he found himself on a black sand beach. A shadow of a soul wore a white cloak and welcomed him there.

"Welcome to Ou," it whispered. "What would make you happiest?"

The question took Duran aback, as his life had been a hard one; a life of horrors, atrocities, blood and death. It was a question that had never been asked him in all of his life; happiness was never a goal, never even a possibility, in his life. He sat for a moment, unspeaking, thinking on the question. A few answers floated about his head; Justice, Peace, Glory, Immortality, Perfection. As each word came into his head he dismissed them. Justice was not a truthful answer, there was little just in what he wanted meted out. Peace might have been possible once, but some memories never fade. As long as he lived he would never know peace; the Ilithids had seen to that. Glory seemed to seek him, not the other way around. Immortality had its allures, but it would be a means to an end; part of his path to seek Perfection. To become a Perfect being; no longer tied by the bonds of flesh, the clockwork precision of machine. A machine did not fear, did not feel pain, did not doubt. It merely was. But even Perfection would not satisfy Duran. Above all things there was one thing that would truly make him happy.

Duran whispered the word aloud, not even directed towards the specter, so lost in thought was duran. "Vengeance." The wholesale, uninhibited, complete annihilation of the Ilithids. Every last one to a man, dead, by his hands. The hate coursing through his veins, made him clench his hand tight, blood dripping down his hands. Quivering with rage, he burned for his vengeance. Taking a deep breath, (as this was before Duran became an Immortal, of course) he calmed himself, and fixed his gaze on the Spirit. "Vengeance. Every last man woman and child of the ilithid dead; by MY hands. That would make me happy; may my bones be burned to ash if it don't be true."

Duran snorted in derision, saying "And I suppose ye be the one to give it to me, Spirit? How do ye propose to make me happy then, eh? Tell ol' Duran that, eh?"

The spirit did not say a word, but the place spoke of some sound. A pestle running the inside of an immense metal bowl. The sound grew deeper and wider, until the world vibrated with tension just quiet enough to reveal all the varying tones it was made of - jiggling, warm, and vibrant. An open sound.

The spirit turned its back and floated softly up the beach. Its cloak left a soft glowing trail for the Duergar to follow. Black sand gave way to odd trees with black fronds and gray trunks. They surrounded a cool pond. An oasis of some kind. There, at the other side of the pond, waited a second spirit. It wore a black cloak.

The sick girl could guess what happened next. The mother knew this, and so did the writer of the tale.

An adventurer like Duran has heard every silly riddle. One gets a sense for when things enter that poetic space, and so he wasn't too surprised when this dark cloaked spirit said thus, "What would make you happiest?"

What was less clear was why to ask it. The spirits stared at one another blankly, and if they conferred on Duran's previous answer, they did it with no noise. Though they were spirits of some kind, and how they work is not a clarity any truly have. A silence passed, and it felt that nothing could change for an eternity unless the Duergar once again answered their question.
