

TUSKS: THE ORC DATING SIM

Narrative Writing Sample

SCENE – DAY 4.

The group (comprising the player character and the main characters) are travelling through an old forest on their journey to the north of Alba: they are the only ones in the forest, it's getting dark, and nobody's sure where the path is. Note parentheses beside a speaker's name indicate the character portrait changing to the named expression).

NARRATION

"The day was already dim to begin with, but as time goes on, you notice the woods growing darker and darker. Sunset may be some way off yet, but it feels as though the shadows cast by the trees are lengthening."

"You and the Group continue on your way."

"There are more than a few long periods of silence punctuated by a few terse words as the group attempts to figure out where to turn next."

"Ferdag has begun to slow down. He bears a dubious expression."

FERDAG (*DUBIOUS*)

"Guys? I... I'm really confused."

"Did we get turned around somehow? I swear we've been in this direction before."

CENNEDIG (*SAD*)

"Hm.I was thinking the same thing..."

"Ror? Are we going the right way?"

ROR (*ANGRY*)

"I... I'm not sure."

"We're surely going north-west, right? Judging by where the sun is?"

CENNEDIG (*SAD*)

"...Either that, or there's something wrong with the sun."

ROR

"Come on. Let's just keep heading the way we're heading. If we keep one eye on the sky, we'll be fine."

NARRATION

"..."

"The group continue on..."

"But it's clear that nobody has any confidence in the route you're taking."

"After an hour or so's walk along the road, leading into what appears to be a narrow glen, the group is called to a halt - by Malgóm."

MALGOM

"Wait, everyone."

"Something in the way Malgóm directly engages everyone concerns you. You haven't heard him taking lead like this before now."

ROR

"Malgóm? What's wrong?"

MALGOM (SIGH)

"There's something you should all be made aware of. And an explanation won't be easy."

"Please, bear with me."

MALGOM (NEUTRAL)

"I will have had hoped I would have had to be able to get us out of here, rather than will have to explain what had had to have happened."

BROCGIN (SURPRISE)

"Malgóm, that makes no sense."

MALGOM (SAD)

"I'm sorry. It's rather difficult to convey accurately."

"We've become trapped on a Low Road."

AED (DUBIOUS)

"I don't get it. How are we trapped? Are we lost?"

MALGOM (NEUTRAL)

"In several senses."

"Alba is criss-crossed with what we call the Low Roads. In-between places. Not quite here or there."

"Part place, part time."

"Have you ever been walking along a long road and lost track of time, only for you to realise you're moments away from the end of the road? And the distance you travelled passed in the blink of an eye, without you being aware of it? That's what happens when your path intersects a Low Road."

"We appear to have stumbled onto one by accident."

SITHIG

"They're more than just a queer natural phenomenon, though."

SITHIG (SIGH)

"The Low Roads are the walkways of the dead."

AED
"...huh?"

BROCGIN
"Sithig's just being overly-poetic. Ignore him."

"A 'Low Road' is just a route that humans use to carry the bodies of people who have passed away, so that they can take them to a graveyard for burial."

"There's nothing untoward or mystical about them. It's just superstition."

ROR
"Well, that's not exactly true. They're not a uniquely human idea, Brocgin."

"Regardless, I think we should listen to Malgóm. We don't know where we are, we're losing daylight, and I'm willing to bet that he'll be able to find us a route out of here."

NARRATION
"Malgóm turns around and surveys the area, before departing from the rest of the Group."

"He begins walking around, studying rocks and grass amongst the undergrowth, staring out through the trees, and occasionally up at the sky."

"You're not exactly sure what he's doing... but it seems like it would be best to leave him to it for the moment."

"You decide to hang back with the rest of the Group."

(The player is now presented with four options):

"Talk to Ror, Cennedig and Brocgin." [PATH 1]

"Talk to Sithig and Aed." [PATH 2]

"Talk to Ggorom and Ferdag." [PATH 3]

"Wait for Malgóm to finish investigating." [PATH 4]

PATH 1 - "Talk to Ror, Cennedig and Brocgin.":

NARRATION
"You head over to Ror, Cennedig and Brocgin."

"Cennedig is sitting down in the grass, whereas Brocgin and Ror are standing together."

CENNEDIG
"Hello, [player name]. Take a seat with me, if you like."

NARRATION
"It seems Brocgin and Ror are already deep in discussion; they haven't yet noticed you."

BROCGIN
"You said it wasn't exactly true that the Low Roads are for humans delivering their dead to their resting places. What did you mean?"

ROR

"Well... It might be true that humans do have roads to deliver bodies and the like. But you can't just boil down this idea to simple folk wisdom or superstition."

"For a start - the Low Roads are one of the most enduring aspects of orcish legend. They're sacred spaces that allowed the gods to walk from the other world to ours, and vice versa."

ROR (ANGRY)

"They say that one of the ancient orcish gods - one revered by clans across Alba - would walk from one end of the nation to the other, unimpeded by distance, terrain, weather or any other obstacle. It's from his name that we get the word for travelling the country from border to tip - 'Sheulagg'."

ROR (NEUTRAL)

"Some even say that Sheulagg still walks these paths, looking for our lost gods, trying to bring them out of hiding."

CENNEDIG (HAPPY)

"You know, both of your understandings of the Low Roads may well be one and the same. It wouldn't be the first time something sacred becomes mundane by its utility."

Path 2 - "Talk to Sithig and Aed."

NARRATION

"You head over to Aed and Sithig, who have chosen to sit atop the trunk of a fallen tree."

AED (SAD)

"Hey, [player name]. You don't think the Low Roads are some gateway to Hell or something, do you?"

SITHIG (SIGH)

"[player name]. I may have encouraged something of the wrong idea in our adorable human friend here."

AED

"I'm not saying I believe that! I'm just..."

AED (DUBIOUS)

"I don't know. The way that you and Malgóm described it, Sithig... A place where the dead go, where time doesn't flow properly... that sounds an awful lot like Hell to me."

SITHIG

"Why must the realm of the dead be one and the same as a world of eternal torture? Could it not as easily be its opposite?"

AED

"You said the dead walk those roads. I don't think that's what the Kingdom of God would be like."

SITHIG (SIGH)

"I don't know. I find it fitting for a religion where the prime deity incarnated itself in the form of an eternal traveller."

SITHIG (NEUTRAL)

"What are you afraid of? That you might meet God on the road?"

AED (SAD)

"He's not the one I'm worried about."

PATH 3 - "Talk to Ggorom and Ferdag."

NARRATION

"You head over to where Ggorom and Ferdag are standing. The two of them are looking over at the others in the Group."

GGOROM (HAPPY)

"Hey there, [player name]."

FERDAG (HAPPY)

"Alright, [player name]?"

GGOROM (NEUTRAL)

"It seemed like everyone got a little on-edge when these 'Low Roads' were mentioned, didn't it? Why was that?"

FERDAG (NEUTRAL)

"It's a cultural thing. Everyone's got a different opinion on whether the Low Roads really exist, what they are, what they mean, what they should be used for... that kinda thing."

"You get folk like Ror, who're into the priestly path, religion, that kinda thing... most of them think that the Low Roads are sacred because they were made by the old orcish gods to travel through the world."

"A lot of orc priests have this idea that the gods escaped into the Low Roads long ago, so they tend to be very sensitive to people disrespecting the idea that the roads are anything less than holy ground."

FERDAG (SIGH)

"That's also why Sithig mentioned that these places are paths for the dead. Some folk think that when you die, you walk out of this world on the Low Roads, and join the gods in some other world."

"Then you get more practically-minded folk like Brocgin, who think it's just an old tale that's been misunderstood. That obviously riles up a lot of folk."

GGOROM

"I guess we have something similar back home..."

FERDAG

"Oh yeah?"

GGOROM

"There are underwater currents that pull you out into the open ocean, where there's nothing around for miles, or drag you down into caverns that never seem to go anywhere."

"Maybe they're kind of similar to what Sithig and Ror were talking about?"

FERDAG

"Could be. You should tell Aed, he'd probably find it really interesting."

GGOROM

"He didn't seem too excited by the ideas of 'walkways of the dead'... Maybe I should hold off on telling him that the ocean wants to swallow him whole."

FERDAG

"Good point."

PATH 4 - "Wait for Malgóm to finish investigating."

(This option skips any dialogue).

(After the chosen scene occurs, the branched narrative recombines as follows).

NARRATION

"You all wait as Malgóm continues to traipse through the woods. Occasionally, he stops to inspect something - the bark of a tree, a clump of fungus on the ground - before continuing on, walking in a circle around the group."

"He rakes his fingers through the ferns and bushes dotted around the area, humming something as he goes - something indistinct, but with a definite rhythm to it. The tune sounds oddly familiar."

"He makes his way back to the group, and stands in front of you all."

MALGOM

"Please..."

MALGOM (SIGH)

"...follow me."

NARRATION

"Without another word, you and the rest of the Group follow along behind Malgóm as he leads you into the woods - strangely, he has his eyes shut tight."

"At first, it seems as though Malgóm is leading you back the way you came originally..."

"There are a few familiar landmarks - a twisted tree, an outcrop of rocks in an unusual pattern - but the area seems wholly different to how you remember it from half an hour ago."

MALGOM (SIGH)

"Things are not as they once were. More accurately, things have not been as they will be. But then, this has always been true. It merely becomes more obvious on a Low Road."

NARRATION

"Malgóm leads you all along a circuitous path between the trees, deeper into the green. It's not clear how he knows where he's going - especially with his eyes shut."

(The background scene changes to become more shadowy).

"The woods around you seem to get thicker as you progress - and before long, the overcast sky seems to merge with the indistinct gloom of the forest canopy. It's as though night creeps in with each step you take."

FERDAG (DUBIOUS)

"Wait... I recognise this place. We've been here before."

FERDAG (ANGRY)

"Malgóm, this is where we were hours ago! You're leading us in the wrong direction!"

MALGOM (SIGH)

"Rightness and wrongness are ways of measuring the achievement of an implicit goal. Our goal here is not the simple distancing of ourselves from this forest - because no distance is sufficient to reach the border of this place. This time."

"To leave the traps of the present behind, we must have one foot in the past, and one in the future. We must tread both history and all that comes after."

"Or would you have it also that our friends are going in the wrong direction?"

FERDAG (DUBIOUS)

"The Group?"

MALGOM (SIGH)

"No. The others who are walking with us."

NARRATION

"Malgóm gestures through the dim light."

"You follow Malgóm's gesture and realise you can see movement around you, but for a few moments, it's not entirely clear what you're observing."

"Not until a group of orcs who are not part of the Group walk straight past you through the gloom."

(The background changes to a shadowy wood now filled with mysterious figures).

"All around you are legions - leagues - of orcs. Some walk in groups of two or three, others stride as part of militaristic phalanxes, still others march on alone, yet others forming their own groups as they go along."

"Malgóm continues walking alongside the crowds in the dim light, and the rest of the Group follow along in silence."

"And the silence is a shared one."

"Not a word is heard from any of the mass of orcs. Although many interact with each other - hugging and crying as they find one another, chasing after one another, helping up those who have fallen - not a single orc in the congregation speaks."

"Under the stomping of feet and the shuffle of bodies, there is another sound. Some kind of music - a drumbeat, but not a fierce or ferocious one. Instead, the drumming is soothing, almost like a lullaby. Several alternating melodies are played across multiple different types of drums, rising and falling as though in response to each other."

"The drumbeat vibrates through you, matching the beat of your heart, the flow of your blood. It feels as though your body is resonating with the melody."

"You and the Group continue weaving in and out through the crowd, each member making sure the next isn't lost or left behind."

"Malgóm suddenly turns and walks crosswise through the marching crowd, and disappears behind a cluster of trees."

"You quickly catch up to him -"

(The scene changes to a bright hillside scene, beside a loch, outside of the woods).

" - and find yourself standing in front of a hill, leading down towards a loch."

"Each member of the Group stumbles out from the woods behind you."

"The dimness has been banished. The drumbeat has dissipated. Looking back through the trees, you see only a sparsely wooded section of forest, in no way similar to the twilight walkways you had just alighted from."

"..."

"Malgóm opens his eyes, and looks up at the sky."

MALGOM (NEUTRAL)

"... Here we are."

"It looks like we've left the Low Road behind."

(The player is now presented with two options):

"Where are we?" [PATH 5]

"Where are those other orcs?" [PATH 6]

PATH 5 - "Where are we?"

ROR

"Good question. I don't recognise this place at all."

MALGOM

"We're substantially further north than we would have been if we had been walking all day."

AED (SAD)

"What? But we have been walking all day!"

MALGOM (HAPPY)

"That's what happens when you stumble onto a Low Road."

GGOROM

"Who were all those other orcs we saw?"

AED

"Yeah! There were so many of them!"

"It was like the Uá, but... they were all going somewhere..."

"Wait a second. Where are they now?"

"I don't see anyone around here. Where did they go?"

GGOROM

"Maybe... they weren't real?"

MALGOM

"They were real. They're still on the Low Road, I'd wager."

AED

"But where were they going?"

MALGOM (SAD)

"... I can only speculate."

ROR

"Alright, let's put this aside for the moment. The sun's setting. We should set up camp nearby so we can get some rest."

PATH 6 - "Where are those other orcs?"

AED

"Yeah! There were so many of them!"

"It was like the Uá, but... they were all going somewhere..."

AED (SAD)

"Maybe... they weren't real?"

MALGOM (SIGH)

"They were real. They're still on the Low Road, I'd wager."

AED

"But where were they going?"

MALGOM (SAD)

"... I can only speculate."

ROR

"We can set aside the question of where those orcs are for the moment. The question I'm most concerned about is, where are we?"

"I don't recognise this place at all."

MALGOM

"We're substantially further north than we would have been if we had been walking all day."

AED

"What? But we have been walking all day!"

MALGOM (HAPPY)

"That's what happens when you stumble onto a Low Road."

(After the chosen scene occurs, the branched narrative recombines as follows).

ROR

"Alright... Well, the sun's setting. We should set up camp nearby so we can get some rest."

ROR (HAPPY)

"Thank you for helping us get through, Malgóm. I don't know what we would have done without you."

NARRATION

"You follow along behind Ror and the rest of the Group as you search for a place to camp."
show malgom neutral with dissolve

"Malgóm paces over to you as you walk across the field."

MALGOM

"[player name]."

"I was curious about what you thought of the orcs we saw when we were on the Low Road."

"Where do you think they were going?"

(The player is now presented with five options):

"The afterlife." [PATH 7]

"Another world." [PATH 8]

"Into the woods." [PATH 9]

"Underground". [PATH 10]

"Somewhere else." [PATH 11]

PATH 7 - "The afterlife."

MALGOM (HAPPY)

"Mmm. Sithig, I imagine, would possibly agree with you. Ror too, I believe."

MALGOM (NEUTRAL)

"But if such is the case, it makes what I'm about to say next all the more bizzare."

PATH 8 - "Another world."

MALGOM (HAPPY)

"Mmm. Aed, I imagine, would probably agree with you."

"From what I can tell, human culture is festooned with the idea that orcs, goblins, fey creatures in general, come from some other place contrarily-angled to the physical world."

MALGOM (NEUTRAL)

"But if such is the case, it makes what I'm about to say next all the more bizzare."

PATH 9 - "Into the woods."

MALGOM (HAPPY)

"Mmm. That's certainly a pragmatic answer, but I'm not so sure, myself."

MALGOM (NEUTRAL)

"It's the fact that they seemed to appear and disappear out of nowhere. And also..."

"... There was something else."

PATH 10 - "Underground.":

MALGOM (HAPPY)

"Mmm. A pragmatic answer, I suppose. We do have large networks of caves, and more than a few societies where orcs live primarily underground."

MALGOM (NEUTRAL)

"But I'm not so sure, myself."

"It's the fact that they seemed to appear and disappear out of nowhere. And also..."

"... There was something else."

PATH 11 - "Somewhere else."

MALGOM (HAPPY)

"Mmm! That's about the only conclusion I can come to, myself."

"It's the fact that they seemed to appear and disappear out of nowhere. And also..."

"... There was something else."

(After the chosen scene occurs, the branched narrative recombines as follows).

MALGOM

"When we were walking through the crowds on the Low Road, I saw something. Or I think I did. It was difficult to tell."

(The scene changes to show the woods filled with orcish figures again).

"I didn't want to tell anyone... I thought it might make things even more complicated than they were."

(The "camera" now zooms into a corner of the background, revealing a set of figures who look uncannily, at a distance, from the main characters. Perhaps notably, Aed, the sole human of the group, does not seem to be among them).

MALGOM

"I thought I saw... us. The Group. But... not all of us."

"..."

(The scene changes to show the Malgóm in front of the loch again).

"What could that mean? I don't have an answer quite yet."

"It's something to think about."

MALGOM (HAPPY)

"Come on, [player name]. Let's go help the others get set up."

NARRATION

"You and Malgóm join the rest of the group in making camp, and before long, the lanterns are lit, the tents are set up, and the Group is resting from their day's journey."