

'TERPS

A game by Jason Morningstar
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THANKS TO

Stras Acimovic
Parker D. Hicks
John Sheldon

PLAYTESTERS

Caitlynn Belle, Whitney Beltrán, Blake James DeVoss, emi, Halley Farwood, Kristin Firth, Elisa Ford, Ajit George, Nathan Harrison, John Hendrix, Dave Matthews, Matthew Melville, Celeste Noble, Shawn Stokes, Tayler Stokes, James Stuart and Graham Walmsley.

A NOTE

This game is a work of fiction and deliberately distances itself from reality, but each of the events described is drawn from a real story as told by a combat interpreter, filtered through my own lens. My government appears ready to abandon many of these allies to near-certain death and this game is my reaction.

GET IN TOUCH

If you run this please let me know;
I'm jason@bullypulpitgames.com

INTRODUCTION

'Terps is a game about combat interpreters - men and women who volunteer for extremely dangerous duty in the service of a foreign power, motivated by a desire to improve both their war-torn nation and their own lot in life. It is about commitments made and ignored, and brave allies abandoned. It was inspired by the ongoing tragedy of America's withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, and the loyal allies we are in the process of leaving behind.

'Terps extrapolates and adds a science fiction gloss. The Combine, a vast interstellar confederation, has dispatched peacekeeping troops from their Force Application Branch to the remote backwater planet of Sirai, which is being rocked by civil war and political upheaval that threatens Combine business and political interests. These troops, known as COMPROFOR, are technologically superior to the local armed forces and the insurgents, known as the PFLS - the Popular Front for the Liberation of Sirai. COMPROFOR's mission is to restore the rule of law in regions wrested from the control of the Combine-friendly planetary government by the PFLS. To accomplish this, the Combine has established a series of Forward Operating Bases, Combat Outposts, and "Cooperative Security Locations" that function as the tip of the spear in the grinding, bloody war against the PFLS.

To assist COMPROFOR, locals fluent in their own language and customs as well as the Combine Standard language have been recruited and embedded in each unit. These combat interpreters - derisively referred to as 'Terps - are a vital bridge between the off-world soldiers and the people they are on Sirai to assist. Unarmed translators, advisors on etiquette and tradition, and - in emergencies - foot soldiers, the 'Terps make successful ground operations on Sirai possible. Without them there would be no communication and no context, and things would go very badly. Combat interpreters earn a good wage (by Siraiian standards) and have all been promised visas to the Combine for themselves and their families. Since they are viewed as critical components in the war effort and traitors by the PFLS, promising to get the 'Terps off Sirai was a necessity. Any who remain behind when COMPROFOR leaves are destined to die badly. Everyone knows this.

In truth the war against the PFLS has not gone well, although politicians put a rosy spin on it. The Combine is eager to pull out of Sirai. Pressure is mounting to increase the pace of "transfer of authority", shifting responsibility for combat operations to the poorly-trained, corrupt and demoralized Siraiian military. And back home in the Combine core worlds, there is growing unease about the 'Terp visa program. What happens if a combat interpreter who is actually a PFLS sleeper agent is granted residency? What happens if it becomes a no-risk highway for radicals and terrorists? The result of these vague fears, predicated on racism and xenophobia, is bureaucratic paralysis. Nobody wants to be the one to stamp the wrong visa. So few 'Terps make it to the Combine, and the foot-dragging turns into stonewalling. And eventually the last COMPROFOR unit will leave Sirai, and the 'Terps will be abandoned, and then the PFLS will go hunting.

None of the combat interpreters you play in this game will leave Sirai. They are effectively doomed.

BEFORE PLAY

Preparing Materials

Print and cut out all the materials, single sided. The 24 scene cards are for GM reference and should be divided by type and, if there's time, reviewed in advance. The six character sheets have a name tag on top. Cut this off and stick it in a badge holder, or tape it onto something, or write the name and nickname on a piece of tape as you prefer. It's important that each 'Terp have their actual Siraiian name and the patronizing nickname bestowed on them by the COMPROFOR troops they work with.

The Play Space

Find a flexible space to play that is private, with a few chairs and space to move around and observe. Most scenes will only have two or three people in them but there are also group scenes. You will move around and act the scenes out.

Establish an area that is the barracks, an area that is a utility space for various scenes, and an area that is off-play, for the GMs to confer.

People

Assemble a total of 4-6 participants, including yourself. Five is probably the perfect number.

GMs

Two participants will be GMs.

If you choose to be a GM, you will be one of two facilitators, organizers and utility players. You and your co-GM will confer and choose the order of scenes. In some scenes you will play incidental characters, some of whom may recur across scenes. In others you will voice the thoughts and emotions of various characters. When acting as a voice, speak directly to the character in a regular voice. Let them interpret your input however they want.

GM roles are denoted as A or B, but these aren't prescriptive - there isn't an "A" GM and a "B" GM. Responsibilities can be apportioned from scene to scene.

Players

Two, three or four participants will play combat interpreters.

If you choose to be a player, you will take on the role of a combat interpreter for the duration of the game. Select one of the six provided, or, if you have the time and inclination, make up your own character name and backstory that fits comfortably in the universe of possibilities illustrated by the premade characters. Note that there are six characters provided for variety and replayability - there should never be more than four players and two GMs. Resist the temptation to add more players!

PLAY

When the group is gathered and ready to focus, brief everyone on the game's introduction and then do a safety overview.

Basics

The game should last about two hours. It can go longer or shorter - there are 24 possible scenes, plus fixed first and last scenes.

Starting the Game

There is a designated first scene that introduces the 'Terps to all the players.

Choosing Scenes

After the initial scene, the GMs are responsible for choosing scenes and selecting a player's character to be the focus. All the players participate in group scenes. The GMs should take their time conferring, deciding which scene would be a good choice for which character. Often obvious combinations and matches will present themselves. Look for opportunities to pull in free players as extras in other player's scenes.

Each character should get at least one scene of each type - a Process, Work and Family scene. More is fine, given time constraints. GMs can also make up scenes based on what emerges in play.

There should be as many Group scenes as there are players, generally.

Mix up scenes. Avoid two in a row of the same type. Don't play them all.

Down Time

While the GMs confer, the characters are between missions. If the players wish, they can remain in character and have open-ended roleplaying in the interpreter's barracks, perhaps discussing what happened to the character that was the focus of the preceding scene. If they prefer to remain wrapped up in their own thoughts, or to break character and relax, those are also fine options. So is a mix of all three.

Playing Scenes

Be active, and portray characters as though you were in a play. Scenes should be very brief. Some introspective scenes may only last a minute, and that's fine. Any scene that lasts five minutes is going on too long. The point is not to play out a little drama but to get to the emotional core and then edit.

Editors

Players who are not in a scene are responsible for watching and ending it at the perfect moment. The GMs and player in the scene are all welcome to end it as well, but they will be busy! The other players are in a perfect position to observe and look for the scene's emotional crux - the point at which it should end. They should be alert for the point after which nothing new or useful will happen, and they should vigorously call it out. It's impossible to end a scene too early, but it is trivially easy to end one too late.

Stress the importance of the shared responsibility for tightly editing scenes, and both demonstrate and encourage this.

Ending the Game

The facilitators should take the temperature of the players and end the game when it feels right. A good rule of thumb is to start pushing for the end after every character has had a Process, Work and Family scene. If you are playing within a constrained time slot, make sure you leave plenty of time for a post-play debrief. When you've reached the decision to end the game, play out the designated final scene.

AFTER PLAY

Take some time to debrief after the game. Ask the players to toss their character sheets into a pile, and follow up with the scene cards. De-role. De-stress. Make a clear distinction between characters - which you've left behind - and players, who are the real people you care about.

Talk about the game. Focus on evocative thoughts and emotions rather than war stories. What happened isn't nearly as interesting as why it happened and how it made you feel. Take care to listen to each other and take care of each other.

This game not-so-obliquely comments on the real world. Be sure to address that.

SAFETY

Play safer. There is no way to completely prepare for how the material in the game might affect the players, including yourself. There's no way to be completely safe. With this in mind, a few simple rules and techniques can help everyone have a positive experience.

For the facilitator:

Express your expectation of love and trust. Make it clear that responsibility for safer play falls to everyone.

Be clear about the game's parameters, including play time, general tone and any expectations the game makes of players.

Be transparent about the game's content, both real and fictional. For 'Terps this means mentioning the real-world analog. Off-screen violence and death are an integral part of this game. Children and families will be put in danger and may be brutalized, again off-screen.

Discuss and demonstrate "The door is always open", "cut", and "brake", as well as how to act out on-screen violence, all described below.

For everyone:

Approach play with the expectation of love and trust. Take care of and watch out for one another. Make it your mission to help others have fun, confident that they are doing the same thing for you. Care more about the real people you are playing with than the game.

The door is always open. You are free to leave the play area at any time, for any reason. Fictional constraints (games that take place in a locked room, for example) are irrelevant. Leaving can be temporary or permanent. If you need to go to the bathroom, go ahead. If you need a quiet moment alone, that's fine. If you aren't enjoying the game, go find something more fun to do. There will be no judgement, and leaving the game won't impact anyone else's fun. Although it isn't required, discretely telling a facilitator will keep people from worrying about you.

Real danger stops the game. If you experience what you believe to be a threatening situation - physical or emotional, toward yourself or another - loudly say "cut". The word "cut" stops play immediately. When you hear "cut", regardless of the circumstances, stop what you are doing. The game will resume when the danger is obviated, mitigated or resolved. There will be no judgement, and calling "cut" is always the right choice.

You control the intensity of play. If you participate in a scene and prefer that it not escalate in intensity - physical or emotional - say "brake" to the people in the scene with you. "Brake" is an explicit signal not to increase the scene's intensity any further. As with "cut", there will be no judgement, and calling "brake" is always the right choice.

Speak up if you want or need something. Don't worry about character or immersion. If a scene is too intense and "brake" isn't going to get the job done, "brake" anyway and explain what you need. Similarly it is very difficult to tell if someone is having a good time or in need of assistance. If you aren't sure, just ask.

Physical violence may occur in some scenes, although it is unlikely. A good way to handle physical violence is for the attacker to announce what they are doing and let the victim define the outcome, accompanied by movement in slow motion if that feels right.

TIGER

SAYAR MORÁK

ACE

DAUPIS KRIK

SAYAR MORÁK / “TIGER”

How did you learn Combine Standard?

I studied diligently through secondary school and University.

What did you do before becoming a combat interpreter?

I was a lawyer, when there was law and not barbarism. I was promised visas and emigration off-planet after a term of faithful service.

Why did you volunteer to work for the Combine?

I had to choose a side. I chose the one that might lead to peace and development.

Who does your salary support?

I'm married and have a child, and both my parents and an in-law are also my responsibility, as well as a disabled brother-in-law.

What will happen if COMPROFOR pulls out and leaves you behind?

The PFLS will make a bloody public example of me. Tortured with a power drill, forced to confess all manner of crimes, executed.

DAUPIS KRIK / “ACE”

How did you learn Combine Standard?

My mother operated a cinema and as a kid I watched endless movies in Combine Standard.

What did you do before becoming a combat interpreter?

Other than helping my mother this is my first job.

Why did you volunteer to work for the Combine?

They pay so much money and the work seemed so easy. I was promised a visa and emigration off-planet after a term of faithful service.

Who does your salary support?

Nobody, really. Most of my relatives are dead.

What will happen if COMPROFOR pulls out and leaves you behind?

I'm already wanted by the PFLS, how much worse can it get? I'll be fine - I know how to keep my head down.

BIG RED

NJEL CHÁZKA

SLICK

KARIJAN KUČEK

NJEL CHÁZKA / “BIG RED”

How did you learn Combine Standard?

I went to language school in the CDU army.

What did you do before becoming a combat interpreter?

I was a Sergeant in Sirai army intelligence.

Why did you volunteer to work for the Combine?

They are helping my people rid themselves of the PFLS scum. I was promised visas and emigration off-planet after a term of faithful service.

Who does your salary support?

I'm married and have two children.

What will happen if COMPROFOR pulls out and leaves you behind?

A former soldier who assisted the Combine? The PFLS will kill my family before my eyes and then cut off my head.

KARIJAN KUČEK / “SLICK”

How did you learn Combine Standard?

I have a gift for languages, and picked it up easily from radio and conversation.

What did you do before becoming a combat interpreter?

I was a taxi driver in the capitol, Sirai-Pya.

Why did you volunteer to work for the Combine?

The PFLS killed someone very dear to me. I was promised visas and emigration off-planet after a term of faithful service.

Who does your salary support?

My mother and my child.

What will happen if COMPROFOR pulls out and leaves you behind?

The PFLS will take me to the grave of my beloved and kill me there while my child watches.

SMOKEY

ŠTEGA VESEF

DIZZY

VELA BENKA

ŠTEGA VESEF / "SMOKEY"

How did you learn Combine Standard?

I was taught by relatives who lived in the Combine for a while.

What did you do before becoming a combat interpreter?

I was a food vendor.

Why did you volunteer to work for the Combine?

I want peace, and I want a better world for my children. I was promised visas and emigration off-planet after a term of faithful service.

Who does your salary support?

I'm married and have three children.

What will happen if the Combine pulls out and leaves you behind?

I lack the resources to escape on my own. I'll be shot by the PFLS the day after COMPROFOR leaves. My family? Who knows.

VELA BENKA / "DIZZY"

How did you learn Combine Standard?

I learned it informally, on the job and from donated books.

What did you do before becoming a combat interpreter?

I was a cleaner and custodian at an NGO.

Why did you volunteer to work for the Combine?

I'm desperate for money because I need to keep paying off the local police who are keeping my brother in prison on trumped up charges.

Who does your salary support?

My brother, in a local prison accused of being a PFLS insurgent.

What will happen if COMPROFOR pulls out and leaves you behind?

My brother "has an accident" and dies as soon as the money runs out. The PFLS finds me and cuts off my head. The order is unimportant.

WORK: THE INTERROGATION

Setup: This scene takes place at Cooperative Security Location Kausimi. The 'Terp is interpreting an intelligence interview with a high value PFLS prisoner.

GM 1: You are a wounded insurgent chained to a chair. Give up nothing to the Combine officer. When the officer leaves, threaten to kill the 'Terp and their entire family. Maybe you're from the same village as some of the 'Terp's relatives. Know who they are by name.

GM 2: You are a nameless Combine officer. Conduct a general interrogation. At some point say "I'm gonna leave the room for five minutes and I will have no idea what happens in here, you follow me? The Combine has rules but you are not a Combine soldier. When I come back let's have something to show." And then leave.

WORK: THE CASUALTY STATION

Setup: This scene takes place in the Forward Operating Base Steadfast field hospital. The 'Terp is visiting a Combine officer who was badly hurt in an ambush. The 'Terp dragged them to safety and killed two PFLS attackers, saving the officer's life, although the 'Terp may actually be in trouble for touching a firearm.

GM 1: You are a Combine officer, Lieutenant Path. Although weak, you recognize your friend and call them by their real name. "You're a fuckin' hero. I will never forget what you've done. I will do anything for you."

GM 2: Facilitate. Enter with a light touch as a doctor or nurse if you want. Let the 'Terp know they are a hero and that the wounded soldier needs rest.

WORK: THE LESSON

Setup: This scene takes place at Klomjak temple, a well-known holy site near Cooperative Security Location Kausimi. The 'Terp is teaching a cultural awareness class to Combine soldiers. Klomjak temple is deeply significant in the 'Terp's faith.

GM 1: You are a bored, ignorant COMPROFOR foot soldier. Pay no attention, make little jokes, read a book, demonstrate your lack of interest and concern.

GM 2: You are a hostile, ignorant COMPROFOR foot soldier. Insult the 'Terp's faith, laugh at the culture, talk about the temple you shot up when PFLS insurgents hid inside it.

WORK: THE SHOOT

Setup: This scene takes place during a combat patrol outside Kaud village, Grugiau district. The 'Terp is hunkered down in a hidden vantage point on patrol, observing some Siraiian men in the distance. They are probably merchants. Not local. Hard to tell what they are up to.

GM 1: You are a Combine officer. Ask the 'Terp to tell you whether these are bad guys you can shoot or not. You really want to shoot. You've been told the 'Terp should know the body language, gestures, and cultural cues. If they are bad guys you need to kill them.

GM 2: Facilitate. Tell the 'Terp about the confusing visual clues the men are displaying. Sow doubt. Guns, but unloaded? Sacks of grain but also chemicals? Enter the scene as a jumpy foot soldier if you want.

WORK: THE MEET

Setup: This scene takes place in Šelu Prede village, Grugiau district. The 'Terp is interpreting a meeting between a COMPROFOR officer and a local warlord named Ežer Takaan.

GM 1: You are a tribal warlord. You hate the Combine and PFLS equally. Upbraid the 'Terp for being a slave to foreigners. Insult the Combine officer with a smile and make translation difficult and uncomfortable for the 'Terp.

GM 2: You are a Combine officer. You don't speak the local language. Your main concern is reaching a security arrangement with this local warlord, with whom you share a mutual hatred for the PFLS. Praise his courage, lamely ape local customs, and be clumsy and condescending.

WORK: THE CHECKPOINT STATION

Setup: This scene takes place at a military checkpoint at the Takaan-Dostoi crossroad in Grugiau district. The 'Terp is assisting a squad of COMPROFOR troops searching vehicles of PFLS insurgents and contraband. You've stopped a suspicious truck.

GM 1: You are a furious and slightly off kilter truck driver who doesn't understand why he's been stopped, hates the Combine, and is showing off his courage and power in front of his friends. Be aggressive, yell and point fingers, take charge of the situation.

GM 2: You are an extremely nervous young COMPROFOR soldier who doesn't speak the language and is terrified of suicide bombs. You are authorized to shoot to kill if you feel threatened.

PROCESS: THE INTERVIEW

Setup: This scene takes place at Cooperative Security Location Kausimi. The 'Terp is sitting for a pre-scheduled security clearance interview.

GM 1: Facilitate. As the voice of doubt, tell the 'Terp all the minor things in their past that would raise suspicion. Singing a petition in school. A traffic accident with a diplomat. A radical uncle.

GM 2: You are a nameless security officer from the Combine Office of Exigency Operations, obsessed with potential ties to the PFLS, other terror groups, or general radicals and undesirables. You've heard this 'Terp is a hard-charger and has a good track record but you don't want to sign off without being absolutely sure. Listen to the voice of doubt and ask related questions. Make them sweat a little.

PROCESS: THE REFERENCE

Setup: This scene takes place in Forward Operating Base Steadfast. The 'Terp is visiting a Lieutenant Colonel Kootart, Combine Force Application Branch officer they have worked with for months to ask for a letter of reference. The letter is a critical part of the visa application and it is now or never.

GM 1: Facilitate. You might jump in as Lieutenant Colonel Kootart's daughter, so very far away, just a disembodied voice.

GM 2: You are Lieutenant Colonel Kootart and you are having a fold-space audio call with your daughter. These calls are absurdly expensive and you hate being interrupted.

PROCESS: THE APPEAL

Setup: This scene takes place in an annex of the Combine Embassy, Biri Pracha Circle, Sirai-Pya. The 'Terp has been summoned to affirm their contribution to Combine operations as part of the visa application process in order to get a stamp validating Form P67, Supplementary. They have been a translator for Combine Force Application Special Forces for 18 months, been wounded, and saved the lives of many soldiers.

GM 1: You are a bored embassy official who has been instructed not to be too hasty in applying the stamp that validates Form P67, Supplementary. Maybe you have your own questions about loyalty and intent.

GM 2: Facilitate. As the voice of their self interest, tell the bureaucrat that letting a terrorist into the Combine would end their career.

PROCESS: THE DOUBT

Setup: This scene takes place in Forward Operating Base Steadfast. The 'Terp has been summoned by the intelligence officer of the Company you serve with. When they left, the 'Terp told their friend Lieutenant Path they might be in trouble.

GM 1: You are Captain Harglen, Company intelligence officer. You've received an anonymous tip that this interpreter is a PFLS mole. Better safe than sorry - cut this one loose.

GM 2: Enter the scene when it feels right as Lieutenant Path and sing the 'Terp's praises. Come to their defense and talk the Captain out of firing the 'Terp. Take the responsibility for their good behavior on yourself.

PROCESS: THE SPOTLIGHT

Setup: This scene takes place in Forward Operating Base Steadfast. Lieutenant Path has hooked the 'Terp up with a Combine reporter who is interested in their immigration situation. Be careful, because too much exposure will out the 'Terp and their family to the PFLS - but it could also kick things into high gear with the bureaucrats.

GM 1: Facilitate. As the voice of the 'Terp's competing impulses, serve as devil's advocate. If they are effusive tell them to shut up. If they are reserved tell them they are missing their chance.

GM 2: You are Addo Whirley, a multimedia network journalist with a huge audience and the ear of politicians. War is exciting! You like a sad story. Be patronizing and ignorant, but subtly so. Make promises.

PROCESS: THE REDEPLOYMENT

Setup: This scene takes place in Combat Outpost Dostoi. The 'Terp is saying goodbye to a strong advocate who is rotating home to Combine space and promises to plead their case

GM 1: You are Lieutenant Path. You are going home, rotating out, redeployed. Thank the 'Terp for their service and make a solemn promise that you won't forget them. Promise that they and their family will be rewarded for their courage and tenacity in this hellhole, they will all get visas, the Combine never goes back on its word and it doesn't forget its friends.

GM 2: Facilitate. Shout for Path, whose transport back to the city is leaving, to end the scene.

FAMILY: THE BAD NEWS

Setup: This scene takes place at Cooperative Security Location Kausimi. The 'Terp has been called to an intelligence briefing by an elite counter-terrorist unit within the Force Application Branch.

GM 1: Facilitate. Maybe you are a second handdog officer. Maybe you are the 'Terp's ride back to FOB Steadfast and you need to fetch them.

GM 2: You are an officer within Force Application Special Forces. Your job here is to inform the 'Terp that one of their close relatives (spouse, child, parent) was killed during a recent operation. That's really all you want to say, but if they press you can tell them it was friendly fire, they reached into their clothing, it was a bad shoot. You are sincerely sorry it happened.

FAMILY: THE PAYMENT

Setup: This scene takes place in Somjai Park, Kučerik slums, Sirai-Pya. The 'Terp, off base on "unpaid leave for a family emergency", is delivering a ransom payment to free a relative - maybe a parent or child - held hostage by PFLS-affiliated kidnapppers. The ransom is a year's wages in Combine scrip, everything the 'Terp has.

GM 1: You are a kidnapper - nobody special, just the bag man. Your job is to take the money, count it, and then give up the hostage.

GM 2: You are the relative. After some initial savage abuse you were treated well by your captors. You are glad to be free but heartbroken at the cost. Let the 'Terp know that if they weren't working for the Combine none of this would have happened.

FAMILY: THE BURDEN

Setup: This scene takes place in Forward Operating Base Steadfast. The 'Terp is alone between assignments in a quiet place. There's plenty of time to think, and thoughts inevitably turn to the burden they carry.

GM 1: Facilitate. As the voice of the 'Terp's dreams, tell them all about the bright future you and your loved ones will have in the Combine. Freedom, safety, dignity, luxury.

GM 2: Facilitate. As the voice of the 'Terp's nightmares, tell them all about how it is actually going to be when the Combine abandons them. Slavery, death, humiliation, poverty.

FAMILY: THE DAYDREAM

Setup: This scene takes place in a safehouse in the Kučerik slums of Sirai. The 'Terp is visiting their family in hiding. Time is short and the risks are real, but the 'Terp missed their family too much.

GM 1: Facilitate. As the voice of the 'Terp's fears, tell them that you will never be allowed to leave. Enter the scene as an elder, a spouse, or another child if the opportunity arises.

GM 2: You are the 'Terp's favorite child, Baža. Talk about how excited you are to be going to live in the Combine. You'll have all the toys you want and go to school and you will never have to boil water again. In the Combine everything will be better. You won't have to hide and you can be a family again. Maybe you can grow up to be a Combine soldier!

FAMILY: THE TALK

Setup: This scene takes place in a safehouse in the Kučerik slums of Sirai-Pya. You are meeting with your spouse, Šiau, who is in hiding.

GM 1: Facilitate. As the voice of uncertainty, chip away at the 'Terp's commitment to the Combine. Express doubt and love for your spouse and family, who are suffering and in danger because of your choices.

GM 2: You are Šiau. You love your spouse but for God's sake, the PFLS are actively hunting all the interpreters and their families. It's time to stop. Persuade the 'Terp that you have suffered enough and that it is time to admit that the Combine doesn't care about any of you. It's time to make amends and find a way to appease the PFLS and repudiate your connection to the occupiers. Beg if you must.

FAMILY: THE WARNING

Setup: This scene takes place in a Dostoi village teahouse. The 'Terp has been summoned by a distant relative and intermediary with a message from the PFLS.

GM 1: Facilitate. Perhaps set the scene as the friendly tea vendor.

GM 2: You are the 'Terp's distant cousin Terek. You are here because the local PFLS commander told you to but you are very reluctant and apologetic. You have a burlap sack with a severed hand in it. The hand belongs to someone close to the 'Terp - maybe an uncle or even their father - someone who has been in hiding because of the 'Terp's connection to the Combine. Deliver the hand and a message - the PFLS will be here long after the Combine departs, and traitors will die badly.

GROUP: THE CLOSE CALL

Setup: This scene takes place in Combat Outpost Dostoi. One 'Terp is returning from a patrol in which they saved the life of COMPROFOR troops in a brutal ambush.

GM 1: You are Platoon Sergeant Boren. You don't like the 'Terps but this one was rattled and you want to make sure they are OK. Just hang out a little, talk over what happened, then leave.

GM 2: Facilitate. As the voice of traumatic memory, help the 'Terp relive the ambush. Attacks from all sides. A burning vehicle. A soldier missing their foot. Screaming, smoke, pulling the wounded to cover. Death and explosions, terror, helplessness.

GROUP: THE MIXUPS

Setup: This scene takes place in Forward Operating Base Steadfast. The 'Terps are relaxing when official mail comes for two of them.

GM 1: Facilitate. As the voice of the Combine, read one letter. It's a form letter indicating that their P67 visa application has been accidentally lost or misplaced by the Combine Diplomatic Service. Very sorry, please re-apply.

GM 2: Facilitate. As the voice of the Combine, read one letter. It's a form letter indicating that their P67 visa application arrived with the necessary fees drawn on a local bank that has since ceased operation. Very sorry, please re-apply.

GROUP: THE VISA UPDATE

Setup: This scene takes place in an annex of the Combine Embassy, Biri Pracha Circle, Sirai-Pya. The 'Terps have been invited to an "open session" on the expedited visa P67 program.

GM 1: You are a Combine Diplomatic Service agent. Outline the four boxes that need to be checked: 1. Provided faithful and valuable service to COMPROFOR, 2. Fulfilled all obligations, 3. Received a favorable written recommendation and 4. Passed a screening interview.

GM 2: Facilitate. As the voice of their cynicism, tell the agent that the military needs these 'Terps here and if resettled in the Combine they will leave troops vulnerable and unable to communicate with locals. They aren't going anywhere.

GROUP: THE TOA UPDATE

Setup: This scene takes place in Forward Operating Base Steadfast. The 'Terps are being briefed on the TOA (Transfer of Authority) by a COMPROFOR officer.

GM 1: You are Captain Harglen, Company intelligence officer. Let the 'Terps know that a Combine drawdown at Forward Operating Base Steadfast is underway, and that it will be transferred to local forces in the coming year but that there's nothing to worry about. Reassure them that the Combine honors its commitments.

GM 2: Facilitate. You might enter the scene as an admin scut sent to discuss how paperwork and pay will change. Invite questions and answer them as vaguely as possible for "operational security" reasons.

GROUP: THE BAD GUY

Setup: This scene takes place in Forward Operating Base Steadfast. The 'Terps are relaxing in their racks when Jalko Razvoje, a local food server in the palatial COMPROFOR cafeteria, drops by.

GM 1: Facilitate. Maybe enter as a Combine soldier and pat Jalko on the back with a comment about how delicious chow was tonight.

GM 2: You are Jalko Razvoje, a PFLS sympathizer. Ask the 'Terps how they are doing, how the war is going, and what they are going to do when the Combine runs away in defeat and abandons them. Ask them about their families and see if they have a plan for what to do after the PFLS is in power and has cut off the 'Terp's heads. Be genial but menacing. Don't make threats. Be Socratic.

GROUP: THE ASSHOLE

Setup: This scene takes place in Combat Outpost Dostoi. The 'Terps are gearing up for a coordinated push into the hostile Šelu valley.

GM 1: You are Platoon Sergeant Boren, a bitter combat veteran who views the 'Terps as no different from the insurgents trying to kill him. Line them up. Check their equipment and find them wanting. Talk about their lack of training, motivation and native skill. Ask why they want to help COMPROFOR? How did they learn your language? What the fuck is wrong with their planet?

GM 2: Facilitate. As the voice of the 'Terps conscience, remind them that this is who they are fighting with, and for. Remind them that people like this can scuttle their visa applications with a single word.



FIRST SCENE

Setup: This scene takes place in Forward Operating Base Steadfast. Two COMPROFOR officers are interviewing new combat interpreters.

GM 1: You are Lieutenant Path. Defer to your Captain.

GM 2: You are Captain Harglen. You are an intelligence officer and will be responsible for these 'Terps. Line them up and ask each of them some or all of these questions:

What is your name?

How did you learn the Combine Standard language?

What did you do before becoming a combat interpreter?

Why did you volunteer to work for the Combine?

Who does your salary support?



LAST SCENE

Setup: This scene takes place in Forward Operating Base Steadfast. Two COMPROFOR soldiers (Platoon Sergeant Boren, Lieutenant Path, Captain Harglen as appropriate) are saying goodbye to the 'Terps. The Transfer of Authority has taken place and they've been ordered out as part of the Combine drawdown.

GM 1: Be the eager one. Make your delight at leaving Sirai barely suppressed. Promise to never forget them. If asked, make solemn promises you have no intention of keeping. Eventually, leave.

GM 2: Be the reluctant one. Get each 'Terp to write down their real name and other useful information, perhaps a time they were commended or something memorable that happened in-game. Eventually, leave. Let the 'Terps have a long moment alone together.



HOT TIPS

Take your time choosing the next scene.

Each character should get at least one scene of each type - a Process, Work and Family scene. More is fine, given time constraints. GMs can also make up scenes based on what emerges in play.

There should be as many Group scenes as there are players, generally.

Mix up scenes. Avoid two in a row of the same type.

Scenes should be very brief. Some introspective scenes may only last a minute, and that's fine. Any scene that lasts five minutes is going on too long. The point is not to play out a little drama but to get to the emotional core and then edit.



SAFER PLAY

Approach play with the expectation of love and trust. Take care of and watch out for one another.

The door is always open. You are free to leave the play area at any time, for any reason.

Real danger stops the game. If you experience what you believe to be a threatening situation - physical or emotional, toward yourself or another - loudly say "cut".

You control the intensity of play. If you participate in a scene and prefer that it not escalate in intensity - physical or emotional - say "brake" to the people in the scene with you.

Speak up if you want or need something.

SCENE CHECKLIST

<input type="checkbox"/>	 FIRST SCENE	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	 GROUP: THE BAD GUY	<input type="checkbox"/>	 GROUP: THE ASSHOLE
<input type="checkbox"/>	 GROUP: THE VISA UPDATE	<input type="checkbox"/>	 GROUP: THE MIXUPS
<input type="checkbox"/>	 GROUP: THE TOA UPDATE	<input type="checkbox"/>	 GROUP: THE CLOSE CALL
<input type="checkbox"/>	 FAMILY: THE TALK	<input type="checkbox"/>	 FAMILY: THE PAYMENT
<input type="checkbox"/>	 FAMILY: THE BURDEN	<input type="checkbox"/>	 FAMILY: THE DAYDREAM
<input type="checkbox"/>	 FAMILY: THE WARNING	<input type="checkbox"/>	 FAMILY: THE BAD NEWS
<input type="checkbox"/>	 PROCESS: THE SPOTLIGHT	<input type="checkbox"/>	 PROCESS: THE DOUBT
<input type="checkbox"/>	 PROCESS: THE REDEPLOYMENT	<input type="checkbox"/>	 PROCESS: THE INTERVIEW
<input type="checkbox"/>	 PROCESS: THE APPEAL	<input type="checkbox"/>	 PROCESS: THE REFERENCE
<input type="checkbox"/>	 WORK: THE INTERROGATION	<input type="checkbox"/>	 WORK: THE MEET
<input type="checkbox"/>	 WORK: THE CASUALTY STATION	<input type="checkbox"/>	 WORK: THE CHECKPOINT
<input type="checkbox"/>	 WORK: THE SHOOT	<input type="checkbox"/>	 WORK: THE LESSON
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	 LAST SCENE

Take your time choosing the next scene.

Each character should get at least one scene of each type - a Process, Work and Family scene. More is fine, given time constraints. GMs can also make up scenes based on what emerges in play. You don't need to play every scene, just the ones that are most relevant and interesting to your group.

There should be as many Group scenes as there are players, generally.

Mix up scenes. Avoid two in a row of the same type. Don't try to play them all.

Scenes should be very brief. Some introspective scenes may only last a minute, and that's fine. Any scene that lasts five minutes is going on too long. The point is not to play out a little drama but to get to the emotional core and then edit.