

FOR COUNTRY, FOR COUNTRY – Sample

CONTEXT

This is the opening for a speculative, Cold War-inspired spy RPG that is light on combat (if any) and very heavy on conversations and puzzle solving.

HOW TO READ

Choices denoted by an asterisk (*) move the story forward, and when read you should move on past the next break (denoted by a page-length line) to continue the narrative. Choices that do not have an asterisk return the player back to the dialogue options and allow them to make another choice.

CHARACTERS

Cooper: male, mid/late 30s, wears a brown trenchcoat

Daisy: woman, mid 30s, wears a pretty dress

Waiter: man, 20s

Narrator: formless, shapeless, like all the best narrators

CAFE - DAY

A busy cafe with a French-inspired design is filled to the brim with the brunch crowd. COOPER sits at a two person, circular table, sitting nervously. They tap their fingers on the table. A WAITER stops at the table, but Cooper waves him away.

NARRATOR: She isn't going to come, you know.

COOPER:

***1. She'll be here.**

***2. Maybe you're right...**

***3. Shut up shut up shut up.**

***1. She'll be here.**

NARRATOR: Oh sure, keep telling yourself that. You've been here for seven minutes. Who makes their date wait *seven whole minutes*?

***2. Maybe you're right...**

NARRATOR: I *am* right. I've always been right. So just finish your coffee, quietly pay the bill, and walk your sorry self out of the door and back to your apartment, alone, as usual.

***3. Shut up shut up shut up.**

NARRATOR: Try as you might, you can never shut me up. I'm always here, right between your dingy little eyes. I've got a cozy home here, and you wouldn't believe the deal I got on it. Rent free, too!

A hurried woman – DAISY – walks into the cafe and sits down across from Cooper. Cooper sits up straight. Daisy fixes her hair.

DAISY: Oh my God, I'm so sorry for making you wait. There was this wreck in the middle of the road and, well, you're not going to believe this, a cow. In the center of the road! Walked leisurely off into the street. I had to wait in the car until they could coax the poor thing to get out of the passing lane. Anyway...

The Waiter comes back around, leans in close to the two of them.

WAITER: Anything I can get you, ma'am?

NARRATOR: The waiter is here. *Again*. He's eying your date. Maybe he thinks he'll slip his number to her on a napkin. He's better than you, so much better than you. Don't you agree? Certainly nicer looking. Younger. You should say something.

DAISY: Oh, just a coffee please. With a pinch of milk.

WAITER: Excellent. (turns to Cooper) And you?

COOPER

***1. [CHARISMA CHECK] Do you have an IV drip on hand? Just pump that sweet caffeine into my veins, baby.**

***2. Another black coffee for me.**

***3. [INTIMIDATION CHECK] Back off, buddy.**

***4. Stay silent.**

***1. [CHARISMA CHECK] Do you have an IV drip on hand? Just pump that sweet caffeine into my veins, baby.**

WAITER: (sighs) Of course.

[CHECK PASSED] DAISY: (giggles)

[CHECK FAILED] DAISY: Hmm...

NARRATOR: What a joke! Look over there, on the community board: a flier! For an open microphone night. You can bring your comedy act to the masses!

***2. Another black coffee for me.**

WAITER: Right away.

DAISY: I can never go the full black. It's too... I don't know, I just don't like the way it makes my mouth feel. Like burnt paper on my tongue.

NARRATOR: You should be offended. Black coffee is the drink of artists, of poets, of cigarette smokers and deep souls and sad people. You're at least one of those, aren't you?

***3. [INTIMIDATION CHECK] Back off, buddy.**

WAITER: Excuse me?

DAISY: (whispering) What are you doing?

NARRATOR: Yes, what are you doing?

[CHECK PASSED] WAITER: I'll, uh, just go get that order, then.

[CHECK FAILED] NARRATOR: Nice one. *Really* scared the pants off of him. Look at him, he's *smirking*. Eying you up. He thought you weak before and now he knows, definitely for sure, that you're just a bag of nothing meat.

DAISY: Are you the type that doesn't tip? My sister was a waitress, you know. Hard job, that.

NARRATOR: Tell her "Sure, I tip", and tell him "Here's a tip: get a better job!" when he returns. It'll make her day! Everyone will laugh!

***4. Stay silent.**

NARRATOR: Tongue tied? The date just started, mate!

The waiter walks away.

DAISY: Anyway... again, apologies for the wait. I hope I didn't keep you long. Uhm, your dating pamphlet I found at the rec center said you worked in Propaganda?

NARRATOR: There it is. The shaking in your brain, the flutter of your heart. The questions begin, the ones into who you are. Oh, she wants to know *everything*. The monster of the week is Anxiety, and it's ready to pounce, right there over your shoulder, breathing in deep. It wants to devour you.

COOPER

1. You found it at the rec center?

***2. Yes. For the State. I make *posters*.**

1. You found it at the rec center?

DAISY: I go there sometimes to play quickball with some girlfriends. They've got this nice little table with a lot of community callouts. Yours was sitting in the "eligible dates" bowl and I just reached in and pulled out the first one I grabbed.

NARRATOR: Oof. That's got to hurt, doesn't it. Anxiety has been killed, its neck snapped in the jaws of another, much bigger and deadlier monster, and this one calls itself Awkward.

DAISY: Oh, I don't mean to sound like I didn't find your pamphlet interesting. I would've put it back and tried again if I didn't think you weren't.

NARRATOR: Does she think that's somehow better?

DAISY: (clears her throat) But it said you work in Propaganda? That sounds interesting.

***2. Yes. For the State. I make *posters*.**

NARRATOR: There are great and important people in all of the mythologies of the world, monotheistic and polytheistic alike, and in all of those stories, there is at least one figure – be they mortal, demigod, or god – who is so utterly self-deprecating that the other gods find them completely annoying and subject them to a life of torture for being so self-deprecating. Were the storytellers to mythologize this very moment, that person would be you.

DAISY: Posters?

NARRATOR: Yes, posters? Do you make them with crayon, glue, and glitter? Might as well tell her your coworkers are preschoolers.

COOPER

1. My coworkers are preschoolers.

***2. I make them for the war. For recruiting.**

1. My coworkers are preschoolers.

NARRATOR: You say that with such conviction, with everything in your gut, which is filled with coffee and sadness at this point, so much so that Daisy believes you for the briefest of moments. You think yourself the funniest person in the entire world.

DAISY: (laughs) Oh, that's good. That's really good.

NARRATOR: Somewhere in the city, a preschooler gives his mommy another drawing of yet another crayon-colored version of his family, another surrealist version of his house, and the mommy, tired beyond all of their years put together, puts it on the fridge with all of the others.

***2. I make them for the war. For recruiting.**

DAISY: Oh... OH! That's you? I think I saw your work around the corner. The one with the soldier holding up the flag. 'Our Flag, Our Way of Life'? That one? I found the colors on that one to be incredibly inspiring. Very bold. (sighs) I've always wanted to be an artist.

NARRATOR: Oh, your traditional "want to be" artist, eh? If you had a single cent every time a "want to be" artist said they wanted to be an artist, you'd have amassed enough in your coffers to trademark the phrase "I've always wanted to be an artist!", and sue the lot of them.

DAISY: It's just... I don't know. Real life gets in the way, I guess. I work at a telephone company, working the boards. I don't get a lot of time to get creative.

Just then, the doors to the cafe open. In steps a tiny man wearing a suit and a tall, lanky and scary robotic guard. This is Commissioner Havert and his personal bodyguard: the aptly named Havert-Bot.

The others in the cafe, including the waiter, fast-walk to the exit. Daisy looks behind her and then back to Cooper.

NARRATOR: Oh, nice timing. Your wonderful, *very* scary boss is here. Everyone knows who he is. He's on some of the posters you've designed. Scary, scary Commissioner Kristoph Havert, Department of Truth. A wonderfully nasty man. Your date has put two and two together, hasn't she. If she's smart, she'll exit with the rest of them. It wasn't going to work out anyway.

DAISY: (nervous) It was nice meeting you, but look at the time! Here, coffee was my treat.

She stands and drops a few bills on the table.

COOPER

***1. Bye, I guess.**

***2. Can I see you again?**

***3. I'll call you.**

***1. Bye, I guess.**

Daisy hurries out of the cafe.

***2. Can I see you again?**

DAISY: Uh, maybe!

She hurries out of the cafe.

***3. I'll call you.**

NARRATOR: You can't say that! What are you thinking? You don't have her number. Do you even have a phone?

DAISY: (nervous) Okay.

Daisy hurries out of the cafe.