

# OURPGSoc Conduct and Acceptable Themes Policy

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1

The Oxford University Roleplaying Games Society is committed to ensuring that anyone and everyone can enjoy its games. As such, it recognises that certain behaviours and themes can harm someone's enjoyment of an event or even cause emotional distress and so endorses this policy on Conduct and Acceptable Themes as of the Extraordinary General Meeting of Hilary Term 2015.

### 1.2

In particular, the rules and guidelines here apply to all OURPGSoc events that are advertised on the termcard (and henceforth referred to as "official") and behaviour which violates these guidelines at official events will be dealt with as a problem by the Society. An event or game may gain special exemption to the rules in this policy by a majority vote of the Committee or a ruling by the President. Either of these may be overruled by a quorum at a General Meeting.

### 1.3

If someone wishes to advertise other events through official society channels (such as through the Mailing Lists, Facebook Group or Announcements at official events) they must consider whether these guidelines should be followed even though the event is unofficial, and if these guidelines will not be followed they have a duty to give suitable warning of this.

### 1.4

If you wish to organise an event that would violate these guidelines, it cannot be an official event while the society endorses this policy unless it has gained an exemption by a majority vote of the Committee or a ruling by the President, and this has not been overturned by a quorum at a General Meeting.

### 1.5

For this purpose a "suitable warning" should be a simple and direct statement along the lines of "this is an unofficial event and OURPGSoc policies, including the Conduct and Acceptable Themes Policy, do not apply to it". If your event has its own Conduct and Acceptable Themes Policy differing from the Society's, it is encouraged that this is linked in any message you send out promoting the event.

### 1.6

If an announcement of an event fails to address whether or not it is held under the Conduct and Acceptable Themes policy, Society members are positively encouraged to ask for public clarification.

## 1.7

Due to the often controversial nature of changes to this policy, changes may not be made to a topic in the Conduct and Acceptable Themes Policy by a General Meeting unless notice was given in the agenda for the meeting that changes would be made relating to that topic.

## **2 Difficult or Unacceptable Themes**

### 2.1

Appendix A lists topics that will not be permitted at official OURPGSoc Events.

### 2.2

Appendix B lists topics that may require careful handling. GMs should make a judgement call as to whether such themes are needed to deliver a better game. GMs must make clear which of the topics in Appendix B a player can expect to come across in a particular game before game start, so each player can make an informed decision as to whether or not they choose to play that particular game. In addition, players are always allowed and should feel comfortable to raise with the GMs, in confidence, any topic which would cause personal distress to them, whether or not it features in Appendix B, and the GMs should do as much as is reasonable to prevent that player coming into contact with that topic.

### 2.3

If a game declares at the start that it will not be including a theme listed in Appendix B, it must not later be included in the game.

### 2.4

Appendix C lists topics that are likely to appear in many games or may arise unpredictably and therefore their inclusion does not need necessarily to be declared at the start of the game. However, these themes should still be handled sensitively, and GMs should consider whether or not an explicit note about how these topics will manifest themselves in a game is necessary.

### 2.5

The list of topics in Appendix A may only be added to or removed from during General Meetings by majority vote. The Secretary is responsible for notifying the membership of such a change as soon as practicable.

### 2.6

The lists of topics in Appendix B and Appendix C are not exhaustive and may be added to by majority vote of the committee, and the both added to and removed from during General Meetings by majority vote. The Secretary is responsible for notifying the membership of such change as soon as practicable.

### 2.7

At all times during official games, all participants (GMs or Players) should be able to (and feel comfortable to) ask to pause the roleplaying if a topic is causing distress, and GMs and Players should under no circumstances belittle or shame someone because it caused them distress and should treat all issues raised with confidentiality. Participants should treat issues raised to them in confidence with confidentiality - while they can talk about the issue with others they should do what is reasonable to avoid disclosing identifying information about the person who raised the issue.

### **3 OC Behaviour**

#### 3.1

Society members are reminded that OURPGSoc is bound by its constitution to conduct its activities in accordance with the Oxford University Equality, Transgender and Harassment policies as described by the Equality and Diversity Unit (<https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/policies-guidance-and-procedures>). Both In and Out Of Character behaviour should always be held in accordance with these during Society Activities.

#### 3.2

In view of sensitivity, members are asked to be careful Out Of Character when discussing issues listed as banned themes or listed in Appendix A. This policy does not aim to censor discussion, but due attention should be paid to the distress that some of these issues may cause to other members.

#### 3.3

Attention is also brought to the Oxford University guides on Accessibility for Society Events as in the Constitution. (see <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/disability>)

### **4 The IC/OC Divide**

#### 4.1

Due to the nature of Roleplaying Games, it is necessary to maintain a strong divide between In Character (IC) and Out of Character (OC) issues. Not only does this help maintain a good roleplaying experience, but also it maintains an atmosphere in which all should feel comfortable roleplaying.

#### 4.2

It should be very obvious that excluding or insulting another player based on an out-of-character attribute is completely unacceptable. To make this clear, consider the following example: Say that Alice is playing an Elven Wizard called Theran in a game where Elves are considered to be jerks. It is fine for other characters to insult Theran for his Elvishness, but not to insult him for Alice's natural accent.

#### 4.3

It is also unacceptable to bring IC grudges into an OC setting or indeed to bring OC grudges into an IC setting. Again, to make this clear, consider the example: Using the previous example, if Bob's Orc Barbarian, Throg, steals Theran's magic wand, it is not fair for Alice to exclude or insult Bob out of character (or even in another game) because of this. Similarly, however, Throg should not steal Theran's magic wand because Alice ate the last biscuit.

#### 4.4

Nobody should ever be forced to roleplay with another player or GM with whom they are uncomfortable OC. People should respect when this decision is made about them. In situations where a player has requested not to roleplay with a particular player or GM, the GMs should not create a situation where these people are forced to interact with each other. Anyone who makes such a request about another player or GM should also act to respect that request. Should either party feel for some reason that the request is not being respected, this issue should be raised promptly with a relevant person as per Section 6.1.

#### 4.5

GMs inherently hold a position of authority over players in a game, and as such GMs should be careful not to abuse this authority either In Character or Out of Character. Should any participant believe a GM is abusing their authority, this should be raised promptly with a relevant person as per Section 6.1.

## 5 Physical Contact

### 5.1

Physical contact during games is something that sometimes occurs - particularly in Live Action Roleplaying (LARP) which has its own more specific rules on this. At all times during all events, however, physical contact should be something all players involved with are happy with and agree about, and players should feel comfortable saying if they wish to avoid it.

### 5.2

If you suspect that your character may have reason to have physical contact with another character, make sure you have checked beforehand OC with that player whether they are comfortable with that - this can take the form of blanket consent (e.g. "I'm happy to be hit with LARP weapons during LARP", "I am happy with physical contact for the course of this campaign") or more specific consent (e.g. "Do you mind if we join hands while completing this ritual?"). Players are allowed to and should feel comfortable withdrawing consent at any time.

### 5.3

Obviously, certain physical contact is never acceptable during games: unsolicited sexual contact and bodily harm or threat of such through intimidation are both illegal and will be dealt with extremely seriously.

## 6 Dealing with Inappropriate Behaviour

### 6.1

OURPGSoc takes a very firm line on inappropriate behaviour and encourages anyone to feel comfortable raising an issue. In any instance, whoever is organising a game or event is chiefly responsible for dealing with the issue as they see appropriate and in accordance with University regulations (see <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~rpgsoc/constitution.shtml>), but to allow for circumstances where the issue is with the organiser, the following system is in place to ensure issues can be handled as appropriate:

- If a player during a game is the cause of a problem, it is the GM or GM Team of the game who should deal with the issue.
- If a GM during a game is the cause of a problem, it is the relevant organiser who should deal with the issue (LARPO for LARP, TABLO for Tabletops, CAMPO for the Society Game).
- If a particular organiser or member of the committee is the issue then it is the Society President who should deal with the issue.
- If the Society President is the issue then it is the rest of the Committee who should deal with the issue.
- If the Committee is at fault or cannot resolve the issue, it should be raised with the Senior Member and higher university authorities including the Proctors' Office.

It is expected that most breaches of this policy will be dealt with either unofficially at the time the incident occurs by Society members, or by a quiet word with the accused by the relevant game organiser. The Society recognises that the fact that an issue has arisen does not mean anyone is necessarily at fault.

## 6.2

Issues should be resolved in good faith in a manner that is appropriate to the matter in hand. For instance, if a player has unintentionally insulted another player, then a simple apology and recognition of fault would be expected, whereas if a breach of the guidelines on OC Behaviour had occurred then it would be more appropriate to consider more serious measures such as removal from the society's membership under the Constitution and with possible reference to the Senior Member.

## 6.3

Of course, if an issue is perceived to have been resolved unfairly then this should be taken up again with the relevant or higher authority as laid out in Section 6.1.

## 6.4

Responsibility for promoting an inclusive environment lies with those running and attending the Society and its events.

## 6.5

This policy can be lifted or amended by vote in a General Meeting with quorum.

## **Appendix A: Topics not permitted**

The following themes will not be permitted in Official OURPGSoc Events:

- Sexual assault, sexual coercion or any other form of non-consensual sexual activity
- Sexual activity with those lacking the capacity to consent e.g. children
- Sexual harassment
- Use of real-world discriminatory slurs

## **Appendix B: Topics requiring careful handling**

The following list contains topics that may require careful handling. GMs should make a judgment call as to whether such themes are needed to deliver a better game. Even for themes passing this criterion, GMs may wish to consider if they can be addressed "off screen" (e.g. fade to black). The following list may be added to by majority vote of the committee, and both added to and removed from during General Meetings by majority vote. If a topic from Appendix B is declared to be included in a game, this declaration must include warnings of how that topic is expected to be portrayed or manifest itself during the game.

- Suicide and self-harm as an expression of emotional distress
- Consensual sexual activity
- Extreme violence
- Extreme gore
- Miscarriage and stillbirth
- Childbirth
- Medical malpractice

- Discrimination on the basis of gender or sex
- Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation e.g. homophobia
- Discrimination on the basis of gender identity e.g. transphobia
- Discrimination on the basis of physical disability, mental health condition, or neurodivergence
- Discrimination on the basis of real-world ethnicity or race
- Discrimination on the basis of nationality, religion or faith
- Eating disorders
- Forced abortion
- Incest
- Torture
- Cannibalism
- Slavery or human trafficking
- Mind control or other means of removing agency
- Emotional/physical abuse, e.g. domestic abuse or bullying
- Genital mutilation
- Animal abuse
- Child abuse
- Eugenics
- Genocide
- Genocide denial

## **Appendix C: Topics which should be handled sensitively**

The following list contains topics that are likely to appear in many games or may arise unpredictably and therefore their inclusion does not need necessarily to be declared at the start of the game. However, these themes should still be handled sensitively, and GMs should consider whether or not an explicit note about how these topics will manifest themselves in a game is necessary.

- Mental illness
- Physical disability
- Suicide and self-harm as anything but an expression of emotional distress, e.g. self-sacrifice
- Degenerative diseases or cancer
- Drug or alcohol addiction
- Gambling
- Homelessness
- Real-world current figures and events
- Real-world historical figures and events
- Terrorism in all its forms, including state terrorism
- Indiscriminate violence
- Other real-world biases and discrimination not covered within Appendix B
- Pregnancy
- Dieting
- Chronic illnesses