

PC BLUESHEET - CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Introduction: SHOGUN is a game that is set in Japan at the end of the 16th century. The game is inspired by the actual history of Japan as well as various fictional works – many of which were written or created by Japanese authors and artists. One goal of the game is to respectfully re-create the feel of what it would have been like to live in Japan during that time. As such, there are aspects of the application of modern cultural norms to a historical setting during game play which should be considered.

The Limitations of the Authors' Perspectives: First, the authors of this game are not from Japan. We are Caucasian males of European and American heritage. As such, we will have, inevitably, written the game to some degree from a western perspective. Likewise, the authors of this game are also cis-gendered, heterosexual, Caucasian males and this has impacted on the content of the game. Moreover, the writing of this game began more than ten years ago and, during the last ten years, the idea that gender identity and sexuality may be non-binary has become accepted. Sensitivity to issues of gender identity, sexual orientation, and the importance of creating meaningful roles for women in games have become more important features of writing “Freeform” games in the modern era and an entirely new language has developed to express such concepts.

We have made efforts to be more sensitive to these issues as the writing has progressed. What this means is that we have tried to be appreciative of foreign culture throughout the writing process and we have tried to avoid portraying European culture as being better than Japanese culture. We have tried to avoid creating plots in which western or Caucasian characters are placed in the position of saving Japanese or other East-Asian characters. We have also tried to be accurate and respectful in our portrayal of character archetypes such as Geisha and of concepts like Buddhist and Shinto ideals. Likewise, we have tried to avoid including characters that are clear and offensive gender stereotypes in the game.

However, we are limited by our perspective and we may not be entirely aware of how our writing decisions may impact players in our game who do not have the same outlook that we have. It is possible or even likely that our background and privilege means that we have overlooked something. We do not mean to be offensive or insensitive. If we have erred, we are open to feedback both during and after the game about what we can do to make the game more respectful of other traditions, cultures and outlooks whilst still being as faithful to the game setting and as supportive of opportunities for good play as possible. If you make us aware before or during the game, we will do what we reasonably can to try to fix the problem.

Historical Context: Many plots in this game are inspired by things that actually happened in history. For example, there are plots which: (1) involve various Asian nations trying to break free of foreign dominance; (2) deal with the struggle in Japan over whether to maintain traditional ideas and beliefs or to become progressive by embracing foreign trade and technology; (3) involve Christian missionaries who are trying to convert the Japanese to their religion and the conflict this causes with practitioners of the traditional Japanese religions (Buddhism and Shinto). We have tried not to place value judgements on what outcomes are better and we hope that you will be respectful in playing out the conflicts that will arise naturally between characters from different nations, backgrounds, and faiths.

A Work of Fiction: You should remember that, although the game is inspired by history, it is a work of fiction. We have, in some cases, deviated from history on purpose as a means of making possible a plot which we believe will make the game more enjoyable. Where we have incorporated characters or concepts into the game which are historical, these characters and concepts are not meant to be accurate representations. When describing martial arts, for example, we have chosen to use animal schools and forms that were, in fact, actually Chinese rather than Japanese. We made this decision because we believe the animal forms/schools are more visual, easier to describe, and will create better scenes in game play than using traditional Japanese martial arts. We hope that you, as players, will trust that such decisions were made after careful consideration of what may be best for game play and, where historical accuracy stands in the way of making a good game experience for the players, then we have exercised the right to set it aside in favor of fiction.

Costuming: As in any game, we expect that players will draw inspiration from history, movies, or television show when choosing costuming. This game is different from previous games in that the setting is historical Japan – a setting in which the standard dress is very different from that of Western Europe. Many players will be unfamiliar with what would be normal dress for people living in Japan during the 16th century. Kimonos were commonly worn by both men and women during the 16th Century in Japan and we expect that many players will want to wear Kimonos during the game. We are content for you to wear Kimonos as long as it is appropriate for your character to do so. There are many resources available on-line which will help you identify a look that is appropriate to your character's standing and the period. We do understand that players differ in the amount of time and money they can spend on clothing for the game and not everyone will be able to afford authentic clothing. What we ask is that you take the same care selecting your costume for this event as you would for any other genre. Please be respectful and sensitive of the views of others about such matters.

Make-Up: We would ask you not to use make-up to appear to be a member of a different ethnic group. This means you should not use “yellow face” make-up or make up which is specifically intended to make you look Japanese. The risk of stereotyping, appropriating, or otherwise making a caricature of the ethnicity to be portrayed is too great. It is, however, acceptable to use make-up in the game that would be culturally appropriate. For example, Kabuki actors in Japan utilize make-up as a means of helping to create memorable characters. If you are portraying a Kabuki actor, you can therefore use make-up while performing a Kabuki play during the game. Similarly, Geisha often utilized make up when they were performing or entertaining. They might not, however, wear make-up at all times. If you choose to wear make-up during the game, we ask that you take time to learn about the traditional make up that would have been worn during the period so that you can utilize it in a way that is respectful to the traditions of Kabuki and the Geisha

Religious Garb and Symbols: There are many religious characters in this game and at least one religious event (a feast) is scheduled to occur during the game. We anticipate that some characters may wish to get married during the course of the game. As such, religion will be an explicit part of the game. During past weekend freeform games, those playing religious characters have carried religious symbols and re-enacted religious ceremonies. To the best of our knowledge, no player has specifically complained about this or expressed concerns about how religion was portrayed during prior weekend games. For this reason, we are content for players who are portraying religious characters to wear clothing and carry symbols which make it clear that they are portraying religious characters. We ask, however, that you be respectful of how you dress and how you portray their characters so as to avoid the risk of offending those who may practice one of the religions that are present in game (i.e. Buddhism, Shinto, Catholicism, Protestant Christianity, and the Jewish faith).

The Rituals and Traditions of Religion and Culture: As noted previously, there are:

- ❖ characters in the game who practice actual faiths (Roman Catholicism, Buddhism, etc). As such, there are plots in game which draw from actual religion and rites.
- ❖ ceremonial practices in the game which resemble ritualized traditions, such as the Tea Ceremony, which have spiritual and cultural significance in Japan.

We would ask that you do not attempt to practice or replicate actual religious rites during the game *except* in generic terms. To do so would be potentially insensitive to people's real life spiritual practices and that is something we want to avoid. For example, we do not expect or want players who have not studied and practiced Chado (the art of Tea) to perform these exact rituals in the game as this has spiritual and cultural significance in Japan. But you may, if you wish, enact in-game rituals which are inspired by or intended to resemble religious rituals (for example a marriage ceremony or confession) and/or ceremonies (such as the tea ceremony or a religious festival). We ask, however, that you are sensitive about how you do this and respect the religion and spiritual beliefs and cultural traditions of others.

Gender Identity: Shogun is set in 16th Century Japan. In that broad historical setting, cis-binary gender identities were the norm in that society. There are, however, examples of non-binary gender identity in historical Japan. For example, Wakashu ("beautiful youths") were adolescents who were seen as androgynous and culturally permitted to present as both male and female until they removed their forelocks in a coming of age ceremony known as "genpuku".

All of the characters in this game are written with a birth gender - either male or female. The assigned gender of a character is intended to be simply the perception of that character by society at large. During the game, there may be situations where a male player will be portraying a female character or vice versa. For example, it was generally considered inappropriate in 16th century Japan for women to perform theatrical roles - as a result, women's roles were portrayed by males. If such a situation arises, we ask that you be careful not to turn the portrayal of another gender into an offensive stereotype.

Sexuality and Romance: It is not the intention of the writers to place a value judgement on what kind of sexuality is considered preferable. Historically, the general assumption in Japanese culture in the 16th century was that heterosexuality was normative. As a consequence, all of the pre-arranged romantic pairings in the game are male-female. But, as the sexual orientation of the characters is not explicitly limited in the character sheets, players may explore the sexuality of their characters if they so wish. The game (and the romance mechanics specifically) should be able, if the players involved so wish, to accommodate the additional possibility of romance between characters who identify as the same gender. However, we would ask that you do not seek to simply ignore the pre-established or clearly intended relationships of your character with others as this will likely impact on the enjoyment of the game by other players.

Romance, Physical Contact, and Explicit Consent: If and when your character engages in any romantic interactions during the game, we ask that you obtain clear, verbal, informed consent from any other parties before engaging in any physical contact or action (hand holding, hugging, kissing, dancing). You should obtain such explicit consent, in advance, separately for each individual act and do not assume that, because consent was given once, it is acceptable on subsequent occasions. You should ask each and every time and, if you ask for consent to do something (i.e. holding someone's hand) and such consent is declined, you must respect that decision. Please do not take the answer of "no" personally. Accept it with poise and grace and do not attempt to either retaliate against the player who said "no" or try to renegotiate with them in an effort to convince them to say "yes".

What does this mean for you as a player? In summary, as a player, you are expected to:

- ❖ refrain from comments, actions, costuming, or make up that could be hurtful to other players (not characters... players) and which add nothing to game play. These include comments or actions which are clearly sexist, racist, ableist, homophobic and transphobic. If you are portraying a character who is biased against a particular gender, gender identity, ethnicity, culture, or nationality, please try to act in a way which is sensitive to other players. It is better to pause and ask permission out of game, if you believe a comment or action may be hurtful to another player;
- ❖ ask explicitly for consent each and every time before you have any physical contact with another player. Be respectful of fellow players and be willing to accept "no" as an answer;
- ❖ share any concerns which arise during the game with a GM. If we do not know that you are having a problem, there is nothing that we can do to fix it. We may not be able to fix all problems during the game, but we are committed to doing what we reasonably can to ensure that every player has the opportunity to enjoy the game.