

Strings Game Document



Overview

“Things are getting out of hand. We need to step in.”

“They are just children. They are still learning.”

“Children need to be told what is right.”

“Eventually, yes. But give them time, and they may come to that conclusion themselves.”

“No. They have had their time. We cannot allow their mistakes to fester any further. When humanity wanders astray, it is our duty to correct their course.”

“This will have consequences. Using such a heavy-handed method... our organisation has not had to take such action since the Dark Ages.”

“So be it. We will deal with those consequences as and when they arise. All those in favour of convincing the world that it is pronounced ‘gif’ and not ‘jif’, say ‘aye’.”

- An unknown meeting in an unknown location between unknown associates, an unknown date

Wherever you are in the world, whatever you are doing, you spot it. Be it the particular wording of a headline on page 17 of the local newspaper, or the specific line of a poem misread on the radio, or the shade of Tom Cruise's shoelaces on the poster for his latest movie, Mission Impossible 12: Impossibly Still Going; the signal comes in many forms. Yet come it does, and it is one you cannot ignore. You and just a handful of others across the globe politely rise from your business meetings and make your excuses, or flip the bus sign to ‘Not in service’, or grab your keys and tell the missus you’re just going to the shops to buy some milk. Whatever your circumstance, you leave and begin making your way to the prearranged meeting spot. The Bureau is in session. Strings are about to be pulled.

Welcome to Strings, the 2023 Trinity term Society Game. Strings is a light-hearted comedy game aiming to mock and satirise pop and meme culture. In it, players will be members of a secret organisation commonly referred to as the Bureau (name TBD) pulling the strings of the world and will have to decide on what actions the organisation will take. Whether that be rig a few elections, crash a few global markets, or finally get around to saving those sea turtles, that’s entirely up to you. Well, up to you and your ability to convince your fellow shadow government members to agree with your idea, of course...

World

Strings will be set on a closely related planet Earth in the year 2047. The placement of Strings on Earth is intended to allow players to directly reference real world events and people for the purpose of comedy, but the time gap from the present day is intended to give space from present day issues that certain players may wish to avoid. Although the world in Strings is set slightly in the future, this is not a sci-fi game, and the technology accessible to and the issues faced by the public should largely be the same as in the modern day (though that’s not to say the Bureau (TBD) hasn’t been holding a few of the latest technological developments back from the market).

When and where

Strings will be a parlour LARP (Live Action Role Play), meaning that roleplaying will be performed by acting out in-character conversations with other players in a single room.

In-character, sessions (called Uptimes) will represent monthly meetings called Councils of the Bureau (TBD) to discuss the progression of the world and deal with any new problems that have arisen. The location of these meetings changes each time, but thanks to a complicated and indecipherable series of hidden code messages, your characters will always be able to make it to the meetings on time.

Out-of-character, Uptimes will occur in-person 7pm-10pm every Tuesday in Trinity term weeks 1-6, plus a debrief session in week 7. You will not have to attend every session. During these Uptimes, players will get the chance to talk to each other in-character as well as with NPCs played by the GMs. Characters may use this time speaking with each other to discuss the state of the world and the Bureau (TBD), gain supporters for an upcoming vote, spread gossip to discredit another character, or generally socialise and enjoy each others' company.

At any point, players may break character, exit the session, speak with a GM, take a break, or request a change in tone using safety calls. These will be explained at the start of the first session.

We still don't have a room for the game, so if your college lets you book weekly rooms for societies, we would greatly appreciate you getting in touch so the game can occur.

The Bureau (TBD)

Player characters will be members of the secretive and powerful agency known as TBD. The organisation has existed for... well it's not entirely known. Some people claim it's existed for millenia. Some people say it evolved as part of a merger between other secret societies in the 1700s. Some people say it was the result of two students coming together and brainstorming how to have fun with some friends in the spring of 2023. Those last people are probably wrong, but no one can entirely say for sure. Older members can attest to at least the last few decades of how the Bureau (TBD) was operated, but, beyond what they know, the details get a little fuzzy. But does it really matter how the Bureau (TBD) formed, when instead we can talk about how it works today.

The Bureau (TBD) is mostly formed of Members. A Member is selected to join when a previous Member decides to leave the organisation. The leaving Member will do diligent research before finding a suitable replacement, someone with the skills, personality, and influence the leaving Member believes the Bureau (TBD) needs to move forward. The new Member will then be approached and given the opportunity to join, the opportunity to change the world.

Each Member has equal voting rights (see Mechanics and Gameplay for a description of voting), no matter how long they've been in the organisation. The Bureau (TBD) operates as

a democracy, with no one Member able to act alone. The organisation takes this seriously, with Members spending significant time debating each action the organisation should take before voting. This can lead to alliances and vendettas between Members, but the Bureau (TBD) encourages everyone to vote for what they truly believe would improve the world, and not due to petty arguments. One of the Members holds the role of the Speaker, who is in charge of maintaining order in Councils, ensuring each Member has a chance to have their voice be heard. Regular Councils are held in which Members come together in one place to discuss the state of the world and vote on what must be done.

Alongside the Members are the Magistrates. Magistrates do not vote, do not present motions, and do not seem to go through the same selection process as the Members. But they've always been here, and they're pretty useful, so many find it rude to question their presence. The Magistrates are each in charge of a Dominion, an area of the Bureau (TBD)'s operations over which they are responsible. A Circle of Delegates (containing five Magistrates) is sent to each Council to provide advice to Members unsure of how to vote. Once an action has been decided on by the Members, the Magistrates then arrange how the action is to be carried out in the world. Magistrates act with a quiet dignity, seemingly respectful of their important part in ensuring the Bureau (TBD) can operate as intended.

There are also the Clerks. Clerks are the workhorses of the Bureau (TBD), and all work within a Dominion under a Magistrate. They do all the other things that need doing: the paperwork, the cleaning, the coffee. Although Clerks can have a range of roles and ranks, they are all given the same title, and have vastly fewer privileges and considerably less permanence than Magistrates and Members.

A few previous Members of the Bureau (TBD) are listed below. If one was trying to think of the type of person who might be a Member of the Bureau (TBD), and how one might present this person to others, these previous members might act as examples of that.

- Jemina Farrow (she/her), an assistant in a fashion company. Her influence toward the wardrobes of the famous and fabulous gave her a way to influence the world. She saw the opportunity of joining the Bureau (TBD) as a great way to launch her own fashion line.
- Phan Trong Duy (he/him), the owner of multiple bars in several cities. His ability to control the social lives of those who frequent the bars gave him influence over a certain subset of society. He saw joining the Bureau (TBD) as a great way to find out about social trends before they happened.
- Olufunmilayo Audu (they/them), a camera person for a major film distributor. As someone with a place in the movie industry, they certainly have influence on what the masses get to see for entertainment. They joined the Bureau (TBD) because they really want to create a better world for all.

Mechanics and Gameplay

Given that Trinity term is exam season, Strings is intended to be a game master (GM)-light game. This means players should not come in with the expectation that GMs will be as heavily involved in crafting a personalised story for each player character (PC) as they were

in previous Society Games. Instead, GMs will be primarily focused on playing NPCs (non-player characters) and any overarching plot that involves the entire Bureau (TBD). Character development is therefore expected to largely come from the results of the overarching plot, PC-PC, and PC-NPC interactions.

Strings will have no Downtimes: no emails or Turnsheets. Instead, at the end of each Uptime, all the players will have to vote on a joint action which the Bureau (TBD) will take. The GMs will then consider what effects (both intended and unintended) will occur because of this and write up a short news section before the next Uptime.

Below are the mechanics for voting:

- Every PC can propose at most a single motion for what the Bureau (TBD) should do between Uptimes (a space of 1 month in-character) per session. They may propose a motion at any point before voting by making a Magistrate (a GM NPC) aware of the proposition. A PC may withdraw any motion they propose, but they will not be able to propose another that Uptime.
- Once voting begins, no more motions may be proposed. PCs will then get **one** vote to place on the motion they think the Bureau (TBD) should follow between Uptimes. Every character present must vote. Votes are not secret.
- A motion needs at least 50% of the total vote to pass.
- If no motions are passed in the first vote, a second vote will occur a short time later. New motions may be proposed or old ones removed before this second vote. Characters are free to change or maintain their votes at the second vote.
- If no motion passes in the second vote, a third vote will occur, following the same form as the second.
- If no motion passes in the third vote, no action is taken by the Bureau (TBD) for the intervening month until the next Uptime.
- As soon as any motion passes, no further voting occurs. The Bureau (TBD) will then undertake this action to the best of its ability in the intervening month.

The reach of the Bureau (TBD) and what it can attempt to achieve is intended to be vast, but actions always have consequences, and not even the Bureau (TBD) can conceive of them all. We encourage players to be creative with their motions, and a motion may be more likely to achieve its intended effect if some thought is given to how it will work, even if that logic is cartoonish (e.g. instead of a motion to just set off a supervolcano, a motion to set off Yellowstone by digging a trench from the Pacific through the US to the magma chamber. To dissuade people from walking through the trench during its construction, forge signs that Hilary Clinton is making her 11th attempted Presidential campaign through the area). But be warned: bigger actions may lead to bigger consequences.

Since players can only propose a single motion and require a majority to pass anything, it is the GMs' intention that players will have to spend Uptimes forging alliances, convincing supporters and disparaging enemies to get anything done. You may have to withdraw your motion to drain the Aegean sea and back the motion to freeze the Ionian to avoid splitting the vote. You may agree to propose a motion for someone who's already used theirs if they support you in future votes. And if that second vote fails, you may really need to look your enemy in the eye and come to a dreaded compromise, or risk no motion passing.

Statement on Safety and Sensitive Themes

Strings is a game with a primary focus on comedy, memes and pop culture. The decision to set it in our world was made to allow players to satirise and reference real world events in a way that is good-natured and comedic. It has been placed a few decades into the future to remove immediate real world events that some players may wish to avoid. While real world figures and events are allowed to be referenced, we would ask that players keep the light-hearted nature of the game in mind and avoid events that may cause others distress.

Given that the players are part of a secret organisation controlling the world, conspiracy theories are expected to be a prominent theme of Strings. However, the GM team is aware that real life conspiracy theories often come from a harmful place and target specific groups of people. We have no intention of including these harmful ideas or opinions in this game. TBD is intended to include members from all walks of life and is not intended to be made up of a homogeneous group of people. Conspiracy theories within the world of Strings should come from a place of comedy and amusement, and should not specifically apply to, negatively portray or harmfully appropriate any real-world ethnicities, races, religions, faiths or other marginalised groups. For example, a conspiracy theory about a government hiding Godzilla is acceptable, but one about a government being controlled by an ethnic group is not. Additionally, conspiracy theories about nations are allowed provided they are not targeted at the members of the nationality. For example, a conspiracy theory that France is covered by a forcefield that reduces the strength of garlic is allowed, but one that says French people are all garlic powered robots is not.

Although we will make every effort to avoid harmful or offensive content, the GM team and the playerbase might unintentionally or accidentally introduce these themes. If you are concerned about any content introduced by either the GM team or by another player, do not hesitate to bring it to our attention. We will work to ensure that offensive themes are not included in the game, and will try to respond quickly if they are brought up. If any player intentionally brings this type of content into the game and does not take steps to correct their actions when asked, the GM team retains the right to remove that player from the game.

To contact any of the GMs, please use our emails listed below:

william.brilliant@lincoln.ox.ac.uk
josephine.paton@physics.ox.ac.uk
zachary.giles@st-annes.ox.ac.uk
daniel.antoniou@physics.ox.ac.uk
resser555@gmail.com

Alternatively, if you would rather send feedback to the GM team anonymously, you can use this Google form, but be aware that the GM team may be more limited in how we can respond if this is anonymous:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfNkg9m8OazON-T3XbEPNWIETMseTudat-qzPTmO3S-vMNwyw/viewform?usp=sf_link

Conduct and Acceptable Themes Policy

All games run through OURPGSoc must follow the society CAT Policy. The full policy can be found here: <https://oxfordrpg.com/CATPolicy2019.pdf>

Below are listed all the sensitive themes that appear in the CAT Policy appendices, along with if and how we intend to include them in Strings. If you have any questions about any of these themes, please reach out to the GM team.

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 judgement 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.

- Self-harm
 - This will not be allowed to display emotional distress, however putting yourself in harm’s way to achieve a goal may occur.
- Consensual sexual activity
 - Non-graphic references to consensual sexual activity are allowed, but descriptions are not.
 - This will not occur in game otherwise.
- Extreme violence
 - While miming of physical altercations with another PC or NPC is allowed with out-of-character consent from all parties, player vs player violence should not be extreme in game.
 - Violence may occur or be implied to have occurred off-screen, but it will not be described graphically.
 - Actions that players take could lead to violence on a wider scale, but players should be reminded that this game is light-hearted in nature, and this is not something the GMs want to dwell on.
- Extreme gore
 - Mild descriptions of gore, such as bleeding, are allowed, but more severe descriptions will not occur in game.
- Miscarriage and stillbirth
 - This will not occur in game.
- Discrimination on the basis of gender or sex
 - As this is set in the real world, historical allusions to this may occur, but they will not be focused on or discussed in detail.

- Discrimination on this basis will not be a part of the present world and will not be permitted in gameplay.
- Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation e.g. homophobia
 - As this is set in the real world, historical allusions to this may occur, but they will not be focused on or discussed in detail.
 - Discrimination on this basis will not be a part of the present world and will not be permitted in gameplay.
- Discrimination on the basis of gender identity e.g. transphobia
 - As this is set in the real world, historical allusions to this may occur, but they will not be focused on or discussed in detail.
 - Discrimination on this basis will not be a part of the present world and will not be permitted in gameplay.
- Discrimination on the basis of physical disability or mental health condition
 - As this is set in the real world, historical allusions to this may occur, but they will not be focused on or discussed in detail.
 - Discrimination on this basis will not be a part of the present world and will not be permitted in gameplay.
- Discrimination on the basis of real-world ethnicity or race
 - As this is set in the real world, historical allusions to this may occur, but they will not be focused on or discussed in detail.
 - Discrimination on this basis will not be a part of the present world and will not be permitted in gameplay.
 - Conspiracy theories that apply specifically to real-world ethnicities or races, or that negatively portray or harmfully appropriate parts of these ethnicities or cultures, will not be allowed in game.
 - The GMs are aware that the knowledge of the players and the GMs is limited. If conspiracy theories are introduced (by players or GMs) that have negative connotations of this manner, please inform the GM team.
- Discrimination on the basis of nationality
 - As this is set in the real world, historical allusions to this may occur, but they will not be focused on or discussed in detail.
 - Discrimination on this basis will not be a part of the present world and will not be permitted in gameplay.
 - Conspiracy theories that pertain to nations as a whole may occur. However, it is not the intention of the GM team to allow discrimination on the basis of nationality.
 - The GMs are aware that the knowledge of the players and the GMs is limited. If conspiracy theories are introduced (by players or GMs) that have negative connotations of this manner, please inform the GM team.
- Discrimination on the basis of religion or faith
 - As this is set in the real world, historical allusions to this may occur, but they will not be focused on or discussed in detail.
 - Discrimination on this basis will not be a part of the present world and will not be permitted in gameplay.
 - Conspiracy theories that apply specifically to real-world religious or faith groups, or that negatively portray or that harmfully appropriate parts of real-world religions or faiths will not be allowed in game. See setting document for more information.

- The GMs are aware that the knowledge of the players and the GMs is limited. If conspiracy theories are introduced (by players or GMs) that have negative connotations of this manner, please inform the GM team.
- Eating disorders
 - This will not occur in game.
- Forced abortion
 - This will not occur in game.
- Incest
 - This will not occur in game.
- Torture
 - Mild forms of forced discomfort may be implied to have occurred off-screen, but bodily harm and psychological torture will not occur.
- Cannibalism
 - This will not occur in game.
- Slavery or human trafficking
 - Although this game is set in the real world, we do not intend for this topic, historical or otherwise, to be brought up in game.
 - Modern forms of slavery do not occur in this world.
 - The GMs are aware that the knowledge of the players and the GMs is limited. If conspiracy theories are introduced (by players or GMs) that have negative connotations of this manner, please inform the GM team.
- Mind Control or other means of removing agency
 - Total mind control is not possible in this world.
 - Forms of non-direct control, such as subliminal messaging, may occur.
 - No form of removal of agency will occur to PCs.
- Domestic abuse
 - This will not occur in game.
- Genital mutilation
 - This will not occur in game.
- Animal abuse
 - Discussions of animal death may occur. This will not be cruel, abusive, or described graphically.
 - Violence against animals in self-defence may occur.
- Child abuse
 - Children may be harmed in indiscriminate disasters along with adults, but this will not be targeted.
 - Targeted child abuse will not occur in game.
- Eugenics
 - This will not occur in game.
 - Although this game is set in the real world, we do not intend for this topic, historical or otherwise, to be brought up in game.
 - The GMs are aware that the knowledge of the players and the GMs is limited. If conspiracy theories are introduced (by players or GMs) that have negative connotations of this manner, please inform the GM team.
- Genocide
 - This will not occur in game.
 - Although this game is set in the real world, we do not intend for this topic, historical or otherwise, to be brought up in game.

- The GMs are aware that the knowledge of the players and the GMs is limited. If conspiracy theories are introduced (by players or GMs) that have negative connotations of this manner, please inform the GM team.
- Genocide denial
 - This will not occur in game.
 - Although this game is set in the real world, we do not intend for this topic, historical or otherwise, to be brought up in game.
 - The GMs are aware that the knowledge of the players and the GMs is limited. If conspiracy theories are introduced (by players or GMs) that have negative connotations of this manner, please inform the GM team.

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
 - This will not be allowed to display emotional distress, however putting yourself at risk of death to achieve a goal may occur.
- Degenerative diseases or cancer
- Drug or alcohol addiction
- Gambling
- Homelessness
- Real-world current figures and events
 - This game is set in a future version of the real world, and therefore real world figures and events may be brought up.
 - This game is intended to be comedic, so please keep this in mind when bringing these things up.
- Real-world historical figures and events
 - This game is set in a future version of the real world, and therefore real world figures and events may be brought up.
 - This game is intended to be comedic, so please keep this in mind when bringing these things up.
- Terrorism in all its forms, including state terrorism
 - Conspiracy theories about real world acts of terror will not be allowed in game.
- Indiscriminate violence
- Other real-world biases and discrimination not covered within Appendix B

Character creation

To submit your character, please fill in this Google form before the end of Friday 21st April (0th week): <https://forms.gle/vyckuahTWkpRzzxk9>

The GMs don't expect there to be a player cap, but if we get too many character submissions, we may have to run a lottery to determine who will play.

As part of character creation, you will be asked for the following pieces of out-of-character information:

- Your name and pronouns
- Your email (so GMs can send you game-related information)
- Any themes you don't want to interact with
- Whether you would like to be included in the lottery if we get too many players

You will also be asked to think of the following questions for your character:

- Your character's name and pronouns
- Their background
- Their sphere of influence
- How they were brought into the organisation
- Why they agreed to join

There will also be a character creation session held 7pm-9pm on Tuesday 18th April (0th week) on Discord. The link to the server can be found here: <https://discord.gg/rnz2uxPyZ9>

Attending this session is by no means necessary to play in the game, but is a good way to ask the GMs any questions about the game, the setting or your character concept beforehand.

Inspirations

Mafia OneShot

Brainwave Society Game

Conversations with Katie, Aleisha, Liana, Alice and Josie

Paddington Bear 2

Vine

Memes (various)