

4 January 2024

A letter from <https://misbegotten.dreamwidth.org/> in regard to this public post: <https://seleneheart.dreamwidth.org/1318550.html> dated 4 January 10:30 AM

@seleneheart has opted to misrepresent in an open post on her own Dreamwidth journal a situation that occurred in locked posts on the administration community @snowflakemods, for volunteers running the annual Fandom Snowflake Challenge at <https://snowflake-challenge.dreamwidth.org/>.

She openly discusses in that entry the private history of a volunteer, @flameandsong, whom she and the other mod banned from @snowflakemods (with no warning to him and without discussion with any other volunteers).

She also states on her journal that she has been accused of things she did not do. This is, in fact, what she did do:

1) When @flameandsong first suggested rewording a proposed "Two Truths and a Lie" get-to-know-you challenge because of the possibility of wank, the other mod noted that it would depend on how the challenge prompt was worded but no one could prevent bad actors from going off the rails.

When @flameandsong then suggested the alternate wording of "Three Random Facts About Yourself" instead, @seleneheart replied that it was "literally the same thing".

@flameandsong reiterated that the originally posed wording seemed to him more problematic. He also pointed out that some Snowflake participants, including some of the Jewish faith such as himself, might feel unable to participate based on their beliefs about lying. I googled this, read https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_views_on_lying , and replied to @flameandsong's comment as follows:

misbegotten:

On that grounds, I think we ought to change the wording. I'm kind of annoyed that nobody pointed this out earlier. I didn't know about the Jewish belief that one should only "lie" to save a life.

@seleneheart says in her public personal journal that she was frustrated this observation had not been made earlier in the planning process. I was as well, though I expressed that frustration inelegantly in the quote above. But there are no rules in the @snowflakemods community that state discussions about the wording of challenges can only be brought up in a designated time period or place. The nature of a long conversation in a Dreamwidth community is that unless you deliberately subscribe to a post, you are not necessarily going to see all comments or even do so in a timely manner.

2) Despite the fact that there were no rules in the community restricting discussion of challenge topics (and that discussion of how to word challenge topics has been encouraged in the community by many experienced volunteers right up until the time a challenge is posted), @seleneheart told @flameandsong that he was wrong to bring up alternate wording, that the list of challenges had been finalized by the two mods, and that he would have the chance to bring up concerns again in the February post-Challenge postmortem discussion.

3) At some point @seleneheart and the other mod chose to take the (unprecedented in the history of the @snowflakemods community) step of freezing the thread in which those exchanges took place. Shortly afterwards, she and the other mod removed @flameandsong from the community completely.

@seleneheart states in her journal that she froze the thread because "the other person commenting on that thread was accusing us of things we hadn't done."

I, @misbegotten, am the only other person on that thread she froze. You can see my actual words above.

4) When I learned through a mutual friend's locked post that @flameandsong had been banned from the community, I posted a question in @snowflakemods asking what the grounds were for removing a volunteer from the team of volunteer moderators (and suggesting that written guidelines be provided to volunteers in the future).

@seleneheart replied that I should limit questions to private queries about my own performance as a mod.

5) When I responded to that comment I said:

misbegotten:

I suppose I am concerned about my performance as a mod, if the penalty for transgressing unspecified rules is removal from the volunteer mod team without being told why I am being removed. But I am much more concerned with the public painting of all the volunteer mods as being engaged in a conspiracy of antisemitism on the basis of a discussion thread on the private admin community being frozen without explanation, and the alleged removal of a volunteer mod without notice to that volunteer.

I asked the question here on the admin community because I thought this was a forum for discussion between volunteers about the Snowflake challenge. I asked what the grounds were for removal of a volunteer mod, as it affects all of the volunteers.

@seleneheart again replied that I should limit my questions to a private query about whether I handled any actions on behalf of the Snowflake team inappropriately.

6) When I responded:

misbegotten:

Okay, here is my specific question: is it true that you and [the other mod] removed a volunteer mod from @snowflakemods without telling them what they did to merit expulsion?

At that point @seleneheart refrained from further reply to any questions or comments in the discussion.

It is clear from the comments made by both mods, either under lock in the admin community or in @seleneheart's public post, that they justified the decision to ban a volunteer based on actions the volunteer **might do** in the future.

It is clear from @seleneheart's public post in her journal that she does not take any accountability for the distress she has caused to @flameandsong and others by banning a volunteer without warning, nor from the appearance of acting capriciously and without reasonable justification.

She prefers to blame the volunteer that she treated poorly. And apparently me, @misbegotten, for "forcing" her in some way to limit discussion in a community created for the specific purpose of having discussions about the shaping and execution of the annual fandom-wide Snowflake challenge.

Furthermore, in the course of the discussion about what had happened, I proposed that the two mods deliver an apology -- either privately or publicly -- to @flameandsong. Other volunteers seconded this suggestion.

The other mod emailed an apology to @flameandsong, stating that it was on behalf of her and @seleneheart.

@seleneheart opted, instead, to make the aforementioned public post in her journal.

I was asked by multiple members of the volunteer team to deliver an apology to @flameandsong (as friends of friends) and a statement that other volunteers did not agree with the mods. I refused on the grounds that I would be unable to remain neutral about my feelings as to how this situation came to pass, nor about the discussion that followed my question regarding the grounds for removing a volunteer -- **any volunteer** -- from the Snowflake challenge. I said:

misbegotten:

I doubt that some people who have participated in the discussion thus far would like my version of an apology, which would be public and give specifics as to how this situation has unfolded. I have tried to remain civil here on the comm. But I am fiercely, ridiculously angry, and at this particular moment don't trust my ability to remain so in writing an apology on behalf of other people.

Given that @seleneheart has decided to make a public post accusing @flameandsong of simply existing in and adhering to the rules of the volunteer community, I am not willing to continue my association with @snowflake-challenge even though she and the other mod have now stepped down. For me personally, Snowflake is tainted by association with the public actions of @seleneheart and locked discussions about the events. But there are several volunteers who spoke up once I made them aware of @flameandsong's removal. I admire them immensely for keeping the ensuing discussion going in the face of others' stated preference to wait until the end of Snowflake to take any action at all.

I will not apologize or speak on the part of anyone but myself. Ironically, I recently commented in a locked post on my personal journal that I am largely oblivious to fannish drama. Ignorance is not bliss. I do care about what is right and what is wrong. I believe it is wrong to tout one's community event as designed to bring fans together and then deliberately exclude someone based on fear. Fear makes us cowards. For my friends who supported @flameandsong when they spoke out about what happened, I thank you. For my friends among the volunteers who contributed so thoughtfully and calmly to the internal discussion about events, I thank you. For those volunteers who have decided to try to salvage Snowflake this year so that the hundreds of people who have already participated on the first two challenges can continue, I thank you. You are brave and strong.

I apologize to you, @flameandsong, for the distress you have experienced at the hands of a group I was a member of. I apologize that one of the instigators of that distress has responded to my attempt to rectify the situation by making public things that I think should have stayed private. And I apologize that you now have to decide whether to re-engage with this issue in a public forum.

I know there are other members of the volunteer team who would like to apologize to you, @flameandsong. I hope you will allow them the chance, just as I am hoping that you read this letter. But I know that they and I will understand if you prefer to put this situation in your past.

I have written this explanation for @flameandsong and will ask that those "friends of friends" deliver it. It is his decision on how to proceed. If he wishes to make this letter public, I stand by every word.