

SECONDARY SCHOOLS' UNITED NATIONS
SYMPOSIUM 2016

Literary: The Handmaid's Tale

Chair:

Gretel Kahn

Vice Chair:

Nicole Widmer

Crisis Director:

Yasmine Kamen

Assistant Crisis Director:

Violette Yu



NOVEMBER 10-13, 2016 | MONTRÉAL,
QUÉBEC



Literary: The Handmaid's Tale

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to Montreal and SSUNS! My name is Yasmine Kamen and I will be your crisis director for our Literary Crisis: The Handmaid's Tale. I was born and raised in Montreal, and I am now a senior at McGill University, where I study Neuroscience. Other (non-MUN) hobbies include reading (you are in good hands for this literary committee), swimming, skiing and hockey (non-Montreal Canadiens teams must not be mentioned in the committee room!). I would like to assure you that the entire dais has been working incredibly hard to ensure that you will have a wonderful experience at SSUNS 2016. In exploring the words of Margaret Atwood and becoming Mayday members, you will be able to use your diplomatic and quick-thinking skills in a novel context.

Power is a fascinating thing. Who has it, how is it yielded, on who is it exercised, and why? Hello delegates, my name is Violette Yu and I will be your Assistant Crisis Director. Not surprisingly, I am a U2 pursuing a joint Honours Political Science and Economics degree. This fascination is why I started doing Model UN three years ago, why I'm interested in social justice, why I love dystopian fiction, and why I am incredibly excited to work on a committee built on The Handmaid's Tale. In my spare time, I like to indulge in my megalomaniac tendencies – which are why I am the assistant crisis director and you the delegate – by planning world domination, as well as make an unworldly amount of overly dry jokes that are not funny. But beware: weak attempts at humour do not detract from being megalomaniac extraordinaire – it says a lot about me that the only gavel I have is from a Korean peninsula crisis where I was North Korea.

Hello and welcome to SSUNS 2016! My name is Gretel Kahn and I will be your Chair for this year's Literary Committee. I come from the tropical land of Panama where I have lived for the entirety of my life until I came to McGill last year and now I am a U1 International Development student with a minor in History. Ever since I was in 8th grade I have been a MUN nerd which has not only made me into the person I am today, but also taught me skills and knowledge I would have never learned in high school. My alter ego (as a non-MUN geek) loves doing theatre and



Literary: The Handmaid's Tale

embarrassing herself in karaoke. I am very excited to be a part of this wonderful committee with wonderful people as well as indulging in all your crazy ideas.

Hello! My name is Nicole and I am your Vice-Chair for this year's Literary Committee. I originally grew up in the Swiss Alps before moving around the world a few times and ending up here in Canada! I am currently in my last year at McGill and secretly, I wish I had chosen to study Literature instead of Political Science (despite my obvious passion and love for the subject). Enter this committee! I'm beyond excited to politically explore one of my favourite novels. If you cannot see me Vice-chairing, I am probably desperately trying to convince somebody to buy coffee for me.

We are excited to meet you!

The Handmaid's Tale Dais



Literary: The Handmaid's Tale

I. Introduction

This crisis committee is set in Gilead, the world Margaret Atwood describes in her dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. The delegates will be members of Mayday, a secret underground organization seeking to overthrow an oppressive government and re-establish the world that they knew. While all Mayday agents agree that Gilead is infinitely worse than anything they have ever known, some believe the Gileadian leaders are right, to a certain extent: there was something wrong with the previous system.

In an attempt to protect the Resistance from the Gileadian authorities, Mayday has established a recruiting system through which its new members only know the real identity of their two sponsors. Moreover, in order to maintain the secrecy of the Mayday network, group actions have always been organized through the recruiter-recruit chain. There has never been an encounter including more than two Mayday agents. However, the growing number of Mayday members has created the necessity for a more inclusive meeting in which the attendees will be able to determine a course of action to undermine the government, but also a course of action to govern a post-Gilead state.

II. The Foundations of the Republic of Gilead

The Republic of Gilead rose after a brutal terrorist attack in the territory previously known as Washington D.C. in the former United States of America, which resulted in the assassination of the standing President and the demise of most members of Congress, as well as high government officials. Shortly after, “The Sons of Jacob”, an extremist religious organization, seized governmental power and suspended the constitution as an excuse to stabilize the nation. The terrorist act was blamed on Muslim extremists by the media and the Sons of Jacob. Nevertheless, there are indications that the Sons of Jacob were the masterminds behind this act in an effort to overthrow the government and found the Republic of Gilead. The government went from a democracy to a totalitarian, oppressive theocracy. Society was forced to adapt to a conservative hierarchy based on an extremist interpretation of the Old Testament, where women are no longer equal to men and minorities are oppressed and punished. A secret police called The Eyes of God



Literary: The Handmaid's Tale

was implemented to eliminate anyone and everyone who might be opposed to the regime, as well as a “hit list of prominent Americans” that was drafted to remove threats to the regime.

III. Hierarchy and Political System

The Republic of Gilead is based on a strict hierarchical system with clearly defined social classes and roles. *Commanders*, the ruling male class on top of the hierarchical pyramid, will do anything to keep their power. Commanders are limited in number, being the most powerful and likewise the smaller group of the social chain. They are in charge of all the decisions in Gilead, and therefore they all have the same degree of power; nevertheless, they choose a Leader amongst themselves every five years. After them the Eyes, the Angels and the Guardians of the Faith follow, all appointed by The Commanders. The *Eyes* are the secret police that is charged with identifying and eliminating any dissidents in the Republic. The *Angels* are the soldiers whose duty is to fight in wars and protect Gilead's borders. The *Guardians of the Faith* are the members who perform regular policing functions and menial duties. The duties of the ruling class, are performed solely by men. Women of the ruling class are the *Wives* and *Daughters* of the Commanders. Then the rest of the women follow to serve such ruling class. *Aunts* monitor *Handmaids* whose sole job is to procreate with the Commanders and to bear children. They are stripped of all identity and individuality and are rather treated like objects. After them, different social groupings of outcasts and minorities with virtually no rights follow. The hierarchical structure is so strictly defined that if you disobey or fail to perform your duty, you are exiled to the Colonies as punishment. Furthermore, the Commanders justify this caste system by relying heavily on their interpretation of the Old Testament. It is unclear if all Commanders have the same motivations and goals for the future of the Republic. It may be useful for members of the Resistance to find out if there are different blocs within the ruling class.



Literary: The Handmaid's Tale

IV. The Mayday Manifesto

As members of the Mayday Resistance, you should be familiar with the goals and ideals of the organization. The Manifesto reads as follows:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that All are created equal, that they are endowed with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. – That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among All, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed – That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government. The history of Gilead is a history of oppression, having as object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over the United States of America.

We, the members of the Mayday resistance, denounce the Sons of Jacob and their Tyranny of Gilead:

For usurping the rightful representatives of the people of the United States of America;

For suspending the Constitution and declaring themselves invested with power, violating the principles of liberty, freedom, and democracy;

For taking away and abolishing our most valuable Laws, Values, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments and way of life;

For violating our Fundamental Rights and Freedoms with the perpetuation of segregation and oppression of the Unwanted and Dissenters;

For carrying on the subjection of the People under the guise of science, religion and divine morality;

For violating our right to equality and perpetuating racial oppression by banishing the Black person to “National Homelands” as the Children of Ham;

For violating our Right to Freedom of religion through brainwashing, propaganda and fear, through the murders and subjection of religious dissenters: the Atheist, the Baptist, the Roman Catholic, the Hindu, the Jew, the Jesuit, the Quaker, the Muslim, and all Others;

For violating our Right to Equality and reproductive Freedoms through the establishment of sexual hierarchies for men and women alike, limiting everything from their material privileges to their reproductive rights;

For violating our Right to Equality by perpetuating the subjection of the Woman through the making of a sexual hierarchy, falsely justifying the taking away of her rights, freedom and dignity, her forced indenture, her rape, her exile to Colonies;



Literary: The Handmaid's Tale

For violating our Right to Life through the murder of the Disabled, and moreover, the Disabled child, despicably renamed a “shredder” as if they were no child at all;

For violating our Right to Freedom through the murder of the Queer, humiliated as a “Gender Traitor”;

For violating our Right to Equality through the sentencing of People as non-persons;

For forcing fellow Citizens into completing the works of death, desolation and tyranny through manipulation, fear and threat of violence.

We, the members of the Mayday resistance, denounce the Sons of Jacob and their Tyranny of Gilead, and firmly promise to overthrow the despotic regime.

V. Mayday Resources and Accomplishments

1. Mayday Resources

a) Members

Mayday agents can be found in all classes of Gilead. As such, each member offers different resources and opportunities to the organization. For instance, Handmaids only play a limited role in active Mayday operations given their constant monitoring. However, they are a valuable source of information on the situation in a household and the activities of the household members. Guardians have more freedom, and they are the main Mayday taskforce in sabotage missions. Mayday members implanted in the high Gileadean hierarchy are perhaps the most useful, but also the most risky assets. Through their connections and their official positions, they can influence decision-making and attempt to limit the damage caused by new laws. They also have access to critical information. However, their position increases the risk of betrayal as they have the most to lose. On the other hand, Unwomen in colonies are an important member sub-group. They can spread the information gathered by Mayday to other Unwomen and incite them to take action against their oppressors. Hence, different members bring different assets to the organization.



Literary: The Handmaid's Tale

b) Physical Resources

Mayday has successfully secured infrastructure across Gilead. For instance, the First General Meeting is due to take place in a Cold War bunker acquired by Mayday. In addition, Mayday has taken over some warehouses across the country. This has allowed the organization to store the weapons they have managed to collect and the food they have been stockpiling. It is unknown if the Gilead authorities are aware of the existence of the warehouses.

c) Communications

Due to the nature of Mayday, communication can often be difficult between members of the organization. This is a challenge that must be addressed, as proper communication will increase the efficacy of the Mayday operations.

2. Mayday Past Actions

a) Sabotage

Mayday has attempted sabotage operations in the past. The main target is often food production and distribution. In doing so, the Resistance hopes to discredit the authorities. However, very few sabotage missions have been successful. In all but three missions, Gilead agents captured the Mayday members. These members could not be rescued and are presumed dead. It is unclear whether they compromised Mayday or not. The sabotage missions that were successfully executed provided delays in food distribution. However, intelligence reports suggest that the temporary food shortage did not elicit the expected response from the Gilead citizens. These reports suggest that Mayday must rethink the purpose and planning of the sabotage missions.

b) Rescues

Rescue missions for captured Mayday agents are rarely attempted, as they are the most dangerous type of operation. These missions involve multiple Mayday members collaborating openly with each other, creating an increased risk should they be captured. In addition, should the rescuers fail; the rescue missions provide an ideal opportunity for the Government to capture *more* Mayday members. Even if the mission is successful, the Government would be in a position to determine



Literary: The Handmaid's Tale

how the rescue was accomplished, which could expose Mayday members. The large number of parameters involved in a rescue mission requires a careful weighting of the advantages and disadvantages of the mission. In the past, it has been rare for the advantages to outweigh the disadvantages. Instead, Mayday has usually chosen to protect the identities of its other agents, changing its protocols in case the captured agents were unable to resist interrogation, or has otherwise found ways to terminate captured members before interrogation.

c) Agent Implantation

Most Mayday members are recruited rather than implanted, as implantation requires an enormous amount of time, discretion, precision and luck. However, there have been two successful implantations. Due to the extreme peril the implanted agents face, their current position will not be discussed further.

d) Decision Influencing

(see section “Mayday Resources”, sub-section “Members”). Intelligence reports suggest that there was at least one instance in which indirect action by a Mayday member caused a modification in a new decree. To protect Mayday members, further details will not be discussed.

e) Communication with External Countries

Mayday has repeatedly attempted communication with the international community in the hopes of securing support. While activist groups such as Save the Women societies in England have done their best at advocating for change, no countries have offered help. Some countries such as Rumania have praised Gilead for their similarities; Rumania since the early 80s have banned all forms of birth control, imposed compulsory pregnancy tests and linked promotion and wage increase to fertility. Canada has been active in rounding up refugees and sending them back to Gilead, while Japan and Saudi Arabia have close trade partnerships with Gilead. These countries have previously stated that it was not appropriate for them to intervene in a sovereign nation's internal affairs. It seems more plausible that they have considerable economic interests in Gilead.



VI. Government Actions Against Mayday

1. Government

The government has been aware of Mayday's existence for an indeterminate amount of time. Considering Mayday's successful sabotage missions, the Resistance believes it is unavoidable. However, the extent of the government's knowledge of Mayday is unclear. While they may simply know the Resistance exists, they could also have obtained much more valuable information.

2. Governmental strategy for defeating Mayday

Government officials are holding the population under close surveillance for any signs of an affiliation with Mayday and have been highly successful in capturing members. The committee must reevaluate its strategies for communication and actions in order to remain as clandestine as possible.

3. Government propaganda

- a) *Salvaging, particutions*: Through a series of cruel events involving the execution of "deviants" and others who are caught breaking laws, the government proliferates the fear of participating in any kind of resistance, no matter on what scale. The ritualistic proceedings use caught Mayday members as scapegoats, framing them to have committed acts against everything the installation of Gilead has bettered. This is meant to strengthen the population's loyalty to Gilead's values and their commitment to its doctrines. This kind of propaganda serve a tool for totalitarian control and frightens people from joining Mayday while simultaneously harming Mayday itself.
- b) *Propaganda of forgetting & the myth of war*: Gilead authorities are encouraging citizens to forget society as it was before the Gileadian doctrines were adopted. The government has also successfully made its citizens believe it is pursuing a war with a fictitious and unclear enemy named Libertheos. The supposed victories boost public morale and belief in the success of the system. The tightly restricted access to truthful knowledge has kept the population 'blissfully



Literary: The Handmaid's Tale

ignorant' to the injustices it is suffering. Leaking information could be a successful strategy Mayday could carefully consider.

VII. Character List

Below are the code names and general area of expertise of the many agents attending the upcoming Mayday meeting. To protect their identities and the integrity of Mayday, further details will not be disclosed.

Agent Angelou – Propaganda

Agent Binnie – Resources

Agent DeLarverie – Infiltration and Recruitment

Agent Dubois – Relations with Gilead-internal Groups

Agent Erdrich – Foreign Relations

Agent Fanon – Updates on Governmental Actions

Agent Hooks – Propaganda

Agent Johnson – Industrial Sabotage

Agent Kochiyama – Paramilitary Action

Agent Lorde – Infiltration and Recruitment

Agent L'Ouverture – Paramilitary Action

Agent Rivera – Industrial Sabotage

Agent Shockley – Resources

Agent Simpson – Foreign Relations



Literary: The Handmaid's Tale

Agent Walker – Relations with Gilead-internal Groups

Agent Washington – Updates on Governmental Actions

VIII. Conclusion

The First General Meeting will be a historic first, and any course of action chosen by its members will be decisive in shaping the future of liberation. Due to the sensitive nature of the information contained in this document, we ask members to commit the information to memory and to burn the physical copy. To ensure the integrity of Mayday, dossiers and other details such as exact meeting location and time will be provided one week prior to the meeting.



Literary: The Handmaid's Tale

Position Papers:

To prepare for the committee, consider carefully and answer one of the following questions:

I. Is the use of violence justifiable in the context of revolutions, and if so, to what extent and towards whom?

II. Should great social and political change be instigated by elites and flow from top to bottom, or should it involve the masses overthrowing the top?

Instead of submitting a conventional position paper, delegates are expected to submit their answer in one double-spaced page maximum.