

The Handmade Tale

A handcrafted tale of dystopian misfortune

The Handmade Tale is a GM-less, freeform RPG — a story you and the other players tell together. Your hand, palm and fingers, is your character sheet.

1. The Setup

Start by deciding on a **setting**. Take inspiration from existing works like *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Next, decide on a **conflict**. What makes life in this society unbearable? What would push its people to revolt? And how does the regime crush any rebellion?

Then decide what kinds of **characters** inhabit the setting. Draw on genre archetypes or specific figures from the works that inspired you.

Finally, choose the four **abilities** that matter most for survival — the traits or resources your characters can draw on to get by.

Examples:

The Handmaid's Tale

Character	Ability
Handmaid	Fertility
Commander	Authority
Eye	Information
Wife	Relationships

Nineteen Eighty-Four

Character	Ability
Party member	Loyalty
Informer	Information
Prole	Secrecy
Thought Police	Access

2. The Hand

Each player picks a character to play.

Your hand is your character sheet. Assign each of the four abilities to a finger — index, middle, ring, and little — and use them to track your character's strength.

At creation, set your character's starting balance:

- Pick your **weakest** ability and cross off two points.
- Pick two **mediocre** abilities and cross off one point each.
- Leave your **strongest** ability untouched.

During play, your character will lose points, and you'll cross off more abilities as the tale unfolds.

Example:

```

____
_/  ____ )_____
  Fert.  |_|_|_)
  Auth.  |X|X|_)
  Info.  |X|_|_)
  ____Re1a. |X|_|_)

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- The character *Offred* is strong in fertility, weak in authority, and mediocre in both information and relationships.

3. The Tale

Each player opens with an introduction scene. Introduce your character and the role they play in society, and hint at what they truly think of their lot in life.

From there, play out scenes from the characters' daily lives. Will they collaborate? Who can you trust? How do you stay safe? Players who aren't in the current scene take on the NPCs or the regime.

Conflicts between characters

The character who starts the conflict chooses which ability to use and crosses off one of its points. The other character then chooses to:

- **lose** the conflict and cross off nothing,
- force a **draw** by crossing off one point, or
- **win** by crossing off two points.

Conflicts with the regime

Only the regime can start a conflict with a character — never the other way around. The character chooses to:

- **lose** the conflict by crossing off one point, or
- **get away with it** by crossing off two points.

You can never win a conflict against the regime.

If the character has no points left in the ability being used, the player must cross off points from any other ability that still has some. Weave this into the story.

Ending the tale

Play until the first character has crossed off every point from all four abilities. Then each player closes with an epilogue scene.