

## **Grassroots: The Role-Playing Game Of Public Opinion.**

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Ingredients: Sacred, Thread, Inconsistency

The fate of the world is not decided on the battlefield or in fistfights, but on television, in newspapers, on the Internet. Great warriors do battle not with sword and gun, but with lie and soundbyte. Recreate your favorite political dramas, where there's little physical violence, but the 'action' comes in techno-music-soundtracked montages of people typing on computers and the drama of meeting trenchcoated informants in dim parking lots. From *The West Wing* to *All The King's Men*, from Erin Brockovich to *Primary Colors*, Grassroots recreates it all. Will you fight the good fight, using honesty as the best policy, or will you lower yourself into the realm of muckrakers and sleaze artists? Are you willing to fix an election so the best man wins? How many favors will you call in, how much trouble will you risk, to succeed? Will you go so far, only to realize that you've sacrificed everything you used to hold sacred?

There are two sides to every story... but the story is written by the victors. And it doesn't matter who wins... as long as people -think- you won.

## **What Is Grassroots All About?**

Traditionally, role-playing games have fallen into type types. One type focuses very heavily on violence and combat; how much damage you can do and take are the most important stats, and the goal is to become stronger and richer so you can buy better weapons and do more damage. The other type focuses on telling on a story, often to the point of having the characters be either godlike facing godlike opposition or peons who are just tiny cogs in the machine, where the story is either bigger than they are.

Grassroots wants to be different. Full of conflict, yet with a minimum of violence; Focused on the storyline, but never growing too big or too small for the characters. Grassroots is about one thing above all: The truth, and how and how people perceive it. We believe in two rules above all: There are at least two sides to every story... and the story is written by the victor.

These rules are held in high regard by every corporation, charity, political organization, and every other group that has a message they want to get out to the public. They know that the public is willing to believe any truth presented to them, and to this end, they are willing to hide information, cover up scandals, and dig deep to reveal whatever is buried.

In Grassroots, you take the role of someone with a talent for swaying public opinion. You may be someone with strong connections to the media; you may wage war on the Internet, making logical arguments that nobody can ignore; You might be a talk-show host with your finger on the pulse of the American television viewer. Whoever you are... you're stronger in a group. Together with your allies, your co-workers, you have a change to sway public opinion and make them believe... whatever you want. It's a great power... how will you use it?

Each character in Grassroots is measured in terms of reputation, passion, logic, and truthiness. Drawing upon these inner reserves as well as the resources available to them, these characters try to influence the public to... well, believe things. They may have been hired to protect a politician from mudrakers. They may be trying to uncover proof of a corporation's evil. Or maybe they're after the secret truths behind UFOs. Whatever common goal has brought these people together, there is one thing they will almost never do.

And that is... fight. Grassroots takes place in the same genre as *The West Wing*, *Erin Brockovich*, *All The King's Men*, and *Primary Colors*. Violence is exceedingly rare... and when it occurs, it's mostly the threat of violence, rather than actual violence. True violence exists only as a consequence of doing something wrong, of being caught someplace you shouldn't be. Characters may threaten, they may intimidate, but if the punches are flying, something is wrong.

After all, punching out a Senator just gets you throw in in jail. Revealing his secret affair with an underage prostitute? That's a revenge that will last forever.

## Players Section

As a Grassroots player, you get to step into the shoes of someone in a cinematic drama. Your first goal is to create your character; your persona in the game world. In this process you'll need to decide not just what they do and what they know, but what they think, feel, and believe in. And then, you and your fellow players will have their characters dropped into a situation where they will get to be a part of history as it's made.

## Getting ready to play

To play Grassroots, you'll need a gamemaster, three to six players, and at least one deck of cards... two or three decks would be best, preferably with different designs on their backs for if things get complicated. Take out the jokers and any other card that is not normally used in poker. You'll also need a character sheet for each character.

## The Goal

The player characters in Grassroots work together to meet a certain goal; The process of meeting that goal is called a Campaign. Campaigns can have many reasons for being; the characters can be brought together as a politician's muckraking team; they could be hired by a PR department to protect a corporation from lawsuits; or they could just band together to protect something they all feel strongly about. A Campaign can take place over any number of game sessions and contain any number of media Threads; winning these threads is the key to winning a campaign, both in terms of momentum (won Threads can grant bonuses to later Threads), but also because of their true power: creating Inconsistencies. At the end of each Campaign, both sides make their main argument and provide Threads that support their side. But if one side introduces a Thread that directly contradicts another thread, that's an Inconsistency... and the original Thread goes away.

We'll discuss that more later, but as a brief example: A presidential candidate wants to paint himself as a loyal family man. If you win a Thread involving the public showing of a videotape of that candidate having an affair with an intern, well... the candidate's side crosses off that Thread from their scorecard, and your side gets to mark down the video thread on theirs.

## Characters

Grassroots characters are defined by four things: Their Abilities, their Resources, their Sacred Values, and their Threads.

There are four character Abilities. These are rated from 2 (the lowest) to Ace (highest). 'Ordinary' people usually max out at a 10 -- but Grassroots PCs and some NPCs are extraordinary individuals and can go past 10 to Jack, Queen, and King, up to Ace. You may have noticed these are poker values -- sure enough, each of the four Abilities is linked to a poker suit. The abilities are:

**Passion (Hearts):** Passion is a measure of two things: How emotional a character can get, and how well the character can focus that emotion into achieving their goals. Characters with low Passion are submissive and apathetic, letting changes roll over them. Those with high Passion have at least one subject they feel strongly about, without needing logic or facts to tell them what's right.

**Logic (Spades):** Logic is a measure of how well the character can find, interpret, and use facts. Characters with low Logic aren't stupid; it's possible to be highly intelligent and still get your facts wrong. Those with low Logic scores are those who put two and two together to get five; those with high Logic scores can explain how the G-8 summit is just like a Thanksgiving dinner (Think about it).

**Truthiness (Clubs):** A modern concept, Truthiness occupies a strange intersection of Passion and Logic. Truthiness is the use and creation of facts that come from the gut. Someone with low Truthiness couldn't possibly even understand the concept; someone with high Truthiness has no problem deciding to go to war on circumstantial evidence, because it's the right thing to do.

(sidebar) What's the difference? With Passion, you can make impassioned speeches about subjects;

with Truthiness, you're not just spouting out feelings and morals and ethics, but you're giving facts to support your argument (that most likely are not 'correct'). With Logic, you can use facts about those subjects to build a case for if they're good or bad; with Truthiness, you don't -need- 'real' facts to make your point.

Reputation (Diamonds): A character's Reputation is based on the various factors that make somebody a 'name'. Your reputation can come from wealth, fame, hard work, dumb luck, whatever. A low Reputation is a nobody, an ordinary joe; a high Reputation is a name that, when mentioned, is instantly recognized and associated with a cause. This isn't always a good thing, as Americans who have a gut reaction to the name 'David Duke' will tell you.

(Chargen sidebar) When creating a new Grassroots character, you begin with all four Abilities at a rank of 7. You can raise any Ability by one point by lowering another Ability by one point. Once you've got these decided on, write them down on your character sheet.

A character's Resources aren't quite the same as Skills in other game. A character with Hacking-5 is not better than a character with Hacking-2. In Grassroots, the rank of each Resource tells you how much risk you have to take to try and succeed at something. We'll go into more detail on that later -- right now, you just need to know that you start with five Resources; one at rank 3, two at rank 2, and two at rank 1.

So where's the Resource List? Keep in mind that Resources aren't just skills... they can be pretty much anything that your character can utilize in their quest to sway public opinion. We can't just list 'everything'. Your character's Resources can be anything you want... although your GM is allowed to tell you "Ummmm.... No way." Do you want Hacking, Gross People Out, Mafia Contacts, Argue On The Internet, and Trust Fund? Or maybe your resources are Talk Show Host, Media Contacts, Sardonic Wit, Comedy Icon, and a Legion of Fans. The sky's the limit. If you need inspiration, take a look at some of the pre-generated characters in the back.

(Chargen sidebar) Remember that, unlike Abilities, you can't play around with your Resources points. You -must- take one at 3, two at 2, and two at 1. But don't worry; you can add points later.

A character's Sacred Values are the things that they hold, not just in high regard, but above all else. This means that they will go above and beyond the call of duty when these values become a part of a thread; but it also means the character has a weak point, a place they can be distracted or lose their faith in themselves. You can have any number of Sacred Values, but the more you have, the more you'll have to juggle your character's actions; too many, and you'll be unable to do anything for fear of violating your character's code of ethics. And we highly recommend -not- taking Sacred Values that are at cross-purposes -- making a character who is Passionately Pro-Life and Logically Pro-Choice is just going to lead to a mental breakdown.

(Chargen Sidebar) Giving your character a Sacred Value is very easy; just choose what their Sacred Value is and -why- it's sacred to you (ie, which Ability it relates to). For each Sacred Value, you get to add a point to that Ability, and you get a point of Resource to spend, either to raise a Resource you have already or to gain a new Resource at a rank of 1. It's recommended you have at least one Sacred Value, and you can take as many as you want... but there are downsides, and we'll discuss that later...

Finally, every character has Threads. Or at least, the potential to have threads. Whenever your character 'wins' a Thread, you make note of it on your character sheet. And not just in an "I won a thread" fashion... but in an "I won a thread that made people believe the Moon is made out of cheese" fashion. Later on, if you're involved in another thread where having someone believe the moon is made out of cheese, you can 'use' that Thread for a bonus... or, you can save it until the very end of a Campaign in the hopes it can create an Inconsistency.

(Chargen Sidebar) Most characters won't begin play with any Threads; the exception is if the GM decides otherwise. Perhaps the reason everyone is working together is because they all separately won a Thread that gave them evidence about a larger plot in progress. If this is the case, the GM will tell you what Threads you start with.

## **Thread Resolution**

Conflict in Grassroots comes in Threads, a term taken from the Internet, where grassroots campaigning was reinvented. A Thread can be many things; it can be an attempt to coerce information out of someone; it can represent a media campaign using commercials; it could even be a literal thread, arguing back and forth on the Internet. Threads can be started by any character, although the GM should take care to disallow 'Threads' that have no real reason for existing; the key rule being that Threads should lead to information or action that will cause members of the public to change their mind on a particular issue. Convincing people that plants feel pain just like animals does you absolutely no good unless you're involved in an anti-vegetarian (or possibly anti-meat) Campaign.

To start a Thread, a player must select which of their character's Resources should be used in the Thread. The other players may choose to have their characters involved in the thread as well, in support roles; if they do, they may select which resource they will use to help and find a way to justify it (ie, you can't use your Organize A Protest resource to help someone fast-talk a . The GM will then deal each player one card for each point of Resource they are using, and deal himself five cards. The players look at their cards, and discard those that are higher than their character's Abilities. (Exception: See Sacred Values, below.) The players also are not allowed to say what cards they have in their hands (Although they can say things like "I'm feeling very passionate about this plan," or "I don't think I'll be much help here," or "Trust me, I know what I'm doing.")

At this point, the Thread isn't going to do anything. The main player gets to name any number of Rewards, things that will happen should he win the thread. For each reward named, the GM gets to draw another card -- meaning, the more you attempt to do, the harder it will be to pull off. These rewards can be in-game effects or meta-game effects such as bonuses to abilities or resources; these bonuses are limited to +1 and will last until the end of the Campaign. After the main player names his rewards, the supporting characters can name their own rewards, with the GM getting an additional card for each reward. The main player may, at any point, refuse the aid of a supporting character if they decide too many rewards have been requested; the GM discards all but one card they drew due to that character and all rewards that player requested are ignored. One final rule: The GM may decide that there is a 'hidden reward', drawing an extra card. If the Thread is won by the players, there will be some additional benefit that the GM will tell them after the conflict is resolved.

(sidebar) Example rewards: "We get this tape played live on the air." "We don't get caught by the police." "I gain +1 to my Government Contacts due to the House pages liking me." "The Senator's wife falls in love with me."

At this point, the main player probably has from one to four cards, and the GM has... well, at least six. This should seem lopsided, and this is where Risks come into play. The main player can assume Risks in the same manner as Rewards, and each Risk taken allows the main player to draw an additional card. These cards are -not- discarded if they are higher than the character's Ability; that's the benefit of taking risks, fate will occasionally throw you a bone. Along with the main player, the supporting characters may also take Risks; instead of drawing cards, a supporting character who takes a Risk may give one of the cards in their hand to the main player. Supporting characters can only take risks that involve themselves unless the main player allows himself to be the subject of the risk. Just as in Rewards, there is one final rule here: The player may tell the GM to make up his own risk and draw two cards; if the Thread is lost, the GM is allowed to do pretty much anything he wants to to the main character.

Now that we have Risks and Rewards, both sides go through their cards and select five to form a standard poker hand. At this point, if there has been more than one Reward and at least two Risks, the main player can declare a Pyrrhic Victory, selecting one Reward that will take place. The GM is then allowed to select two Risks that also take place (For an example of this, see <http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/03/21/clinton.you.tube/index.html> -- in this case, the player declared a Pyrrhic Victory and chose to have the video get national coverage; the GM selected to have his identity revealed and to have him lose his job). Otherwise, reveal the two poker hands and, using standard poker ranks, decide who wins. If the player wins, they get all the rewards and none of the risks (Alternate rules: If more than three Rewards or more than three Risks, you get all but one Reward and avoid all but one Risk). If the GM wins, the player suffers all the Risks and doesn't get any of the Rewards.

If the player wins (except for a Pyrrhic Victory), they also get to mark down the Thread on their character sheet, along with the specifics of the outcome and what their poker hand was; they have 'won' the Thread. Won 'Threads' can be used to draw an extra card while declaring Risks, or saved until the end of the Campaign to aid in the final resolution. As an added bonus, if the main player received less cards from his supporters than he started out with, he personally 'Won' the Thread and can make it down on his character sheet with a star next to it. At the end of the campaign, if this Thread hasn't been used for anything, it can be used to improve a character permanently.

#### --Sacred Values--

As stated above, if you are involved in a thread that makes use of your Sacred Value in some way, you don't discard cards from that Ability from your hand. The other bonus to using a Sacred Value is that you can declare a risk that involved losing a point from that Sacred Value's Ability, and either draw two cards (if a main character) or pass two cards (if a supporting character).

There are, however, two downsides to using Sacred Values. The first is that you can't avoid taking part in a Thread that involves your Sacred Values; if you fail to do so, you lose a point from that Sacred Value's Ability. (Example: A Passionate pro-lifer refuses to take part in a protest at an abortion clinic; they lose a point from their Passion as they're apparently not as passionate about it as they thought.) The second is that you can't take part in a Thread that goes contrary to one of your Sacred Values; if you're strongly pro-privacy, you can't take part in a Thread that has a Reward of "We make people think it's okay to let companies sell their personal information." If you take part in a Thread where a Reward is named later that goes against your Sacred Value, you can't take part anymore, you can't claim any rewards if the Thread is won, and you lose a point from that Sacred Value's Ability. Yes, this means your friends can really screw you over if, say, you're a dedicated Pacifist and they decide they want a Reward involving someone's death. Yes, this means that trust between characters is important.

#### --Thread Example--

The players decide, for some strange reason, they need to get a videotape of a presidential candidate having an affair with an intern to be played live on the national news. The GM deals himself five cards. Bob uses his Media Contacts(3) resource as the main player. Supporting him are Gail, using her Bribery(2) skill to grease the right palms; William, who as a Former FBI Agent(2) uses that resource to try and anticipate how the feds will try to stop them; and out of left field, ultra-conservative Joe declares he's using his Sacred Value: Christianity (Passion) and his Member of the Religious Right(3) resource to start a movement that wants to 'out' adulterous politicians. The GM deals the cards, five for himself, 3 to Bob, 2 to Gail, 2 to William, and 3 to Joe. William sighs and discards both his cards, as they're too high for him to use -- his knowledge is of no help. Gail discards one card and keeps the other, indicating she has something to contribute. Joe's eyes widen and discards one, keeping two.

Bob begins by stating the reward: They get the tape played on the national news. The GM draws a card. Bob states a further reward: Immediate public outcry against the candidate. The GM draws another card. Joe pipes up, wanting a reward of his personal section of the Religious Right getting more power (in the form of +1 Reputation). Bob swears quietly as he doesn't think the cards he has can pull this off. Joe tells him to relax. The GM now has eight cards, and puts together a five-card hand, placing it face-down.

Now, the risks. Bob looks at his three cards (a 3, a 5, and an 8, all different suits) and wonders how bad this is going to get. As the main player must declare risks first, he decides to declare two: First, if this fails, his Media Contacts are going to think less of him (-1 to that Resource for the rest of the campaign). Second, if this fails... it fails because the feds intercepted the tape, and now the candidate knows they're a threat. The GM accepts these, and deals Bob two more cards (another 5 and a Jack. Since these are Risk cards, they don't get discarded if your stats aren't high enough to normally use them). Now, Joe smirks and declares his risks: Being seen as someone on an adultery witch-hunt (-1 Reputation) and being viewed by his own people in the Religious Right as wasting their time and money on high-profile targets with little return (-1 to that resource). The GM agrees, and Joe passes Bob his two cards -- a pair of Jacks (One in Reputation, which he had, and one in Passion, which he would normally have discarded but he worked his Sacred Value into the thread). Bob smiles, having two pair now. Gail sees the smile and decides she might as well chip in, even though she doesn't think she'll be much help. She declares her risk as public scandal if she's caught bribing TV executives to get the tape

on the air (-1 reputation), and passes Bob the 5 she thinks is useless.

Bob assembles the obvious hand: Full house, 5s and Jacks. The GM turns over his hand, and out of eight cards he pulled out a straight, 7-8-9-10-J. Bob wins the thread, the tape is played, and the candidate suffers a near-immediate backlash from the public, while Joe's reputation as a leading of the Religious Right grows. Bob also gets to make "Released tape of Candidate Moron's affair" on his 'Won Threads' list

### --Ending a Campaign--

Campaigns can end under several different circumstances. Some may be time-based (ie, election Day rolls around, time to see who wins), some may be action-based, (ie, you have enough evidence to have someone convicted, time to have them arrested), and some may not even have an in-game reason (ie, the characters all decide they want to quit working for whoever hired them). When this happens, it's time to gather up all those Threads you've won and see if you've done a good-enough job to make your side the 'winner' in the public's eyes.

At the start of every Campaign, the GM determines what Threads both sides start with. The simple way of deciding who wins is for both sides to list their threads, and then take turns finding Inconsistencies -- Pairs of Threads that contradict each other. Compare the two poker hands (you did remember to make that down when you 'won' the Thread, right?) to see which is stronger, and erase the losing Thread.

(sidebar: Multiple Inconsistencies) There are two ways Multiple Inconsistencies can occur. The first is if one Thread conflicts with two (or more) opposing Threads. In this case, if the single Thread is strong enough to beat -all- other Threads, remove the highest-ranked opposing Thread and lower the single Thread's value by one rank, keeping the high card (IE, from Full House 8s and 4s to Straight-8 high). Then compare it to the next-highest opposing Thread, and so on until either the single Thread is gone or it has no more opposing Threads. The other case of Multiple Inconsistencies is when there are multiple pairs of Threads on related topics. In this case, resolve the weakest pairing first and work your way to the strongest pairing, then see if any of the remaining pairs are Inconsistent. Repeat as needed.

(sidebar: Endgame example) The Campaign consists of MegaMart wants to open a new store in the face of public opposition. The PCs are working for MegaMart. They start threads showing that MegaMart is good for local economies by providing low prices (Full house, 7s and 4s), that MegaMart has a history of employing minorities, which is good for the mostly-ethnic neighborhood (Flush, 8-high), and they donate money to children's charities (they don't, but a Royal Straight Flush and some amazing spin-doctoring made it look like they do). The GM reveals the Threads the opposition had won 'before the Campaign': MegaMart hurts the economy by putting Mom & Pop stores out of business (Straight, 9-high), MegaMart is racist, paying minorities less than other jobs (Flush, 7-high), and MegaMart is anti-union (Trip-tens.) There are two Inconsistencies here: Good for the economy/bad for the economy and pro-minority/anti-minority. Comparing the poker hands for these two Inconsistencies, we see the PCs have higher hands on both of them. The GM erases the threads, and we see the PCs (and MegaMart) win, three Threads to One. Despite their anti-union history, MegaMart is allowed to open up a new store in town. Had the PCs failed, public opposition most likely would have forced them to build elsewhere. The next Campaign could be another chain looking to hire the PCs to help them out with their image... or a politician wanting them to help get him accepted despite his anti-minority stance... or perhaps the store causes one of the PC's family members to lose their job, so the PC rounds up his friends and launches a new Campaign to get MegaMart thrown out, facing the very Threads they created in the first place.

### --Losing Faith--

There is little danger of physical harm in Grassroots; but that does not mean there is no danger. The worst thing that can happen to someone involved in this sort of media warfare is a loss of faith; faith in oneself and in one's beliefs. For most normal people, you are in danger of losing your faith when one of your abilities drops to 2 -- lose another point, and you've lost your faith and cannot contribute to the rest of the Campaign (Your fellow players can attempt to 'restore your faith' by starting a thread with two Rewards: One to give you a point in whatever ability you lost, and a second to bring you back into the Campaign). But if you have a Sacred Value... well, you need more to keep you going. Instead of 2 being the danger level, you add the number of Sacred Values you have in that Ability to 2. (For

instance, a well-known spokesman for Greenpeace, PETA, and the EFF has all three of them as Sacred Values for his Reputation. If his reputation drops below  $(2+1+1+1=) 5$ , he'll have lost his faith and has to drop out of the Campaign until someone makes him famous enough to people to pay attention to.

## GM Section

As the Game Master of a Grassroots game, you have things slightly easier and slightly harder than people who run other role-playing games. You don't have to worry about maps, death, healing, or things like that. You do, however, have to be ready for the strangest ideas to come out of your players' minds. As such, there is one rule that is more important than any other rule in the game:

The First Rule: If it creates drama, and it feels like the right thing to do, do it. Regardless of the rules.

If you're running a Campaign aiming to get someone elected President, and one of your players decides they want to sneak a known terrorist into the country? Well... let them try. If it works, see what they have planned. If it doesn't, well, hopefully someone (You, if not them) stated a Risk involving getting caught by the authorities... that would definitely be a good Thread for the opposition to have in their pocket. But sometimes, you're just not sure what makes the most sense. In this case, we have:

The Second Rule: When in doubt, draw a card. Red means 'no, stop, bad', black means 'okay, go, good.'

If you have to think about something for more than a few moments, it can wreck the flow of a dramatic game. A quick flip (if you can, on the sly, so your players don't realize you're indecisive) and continue on with the game.

--Style--

Of course, if you're running a nitty-gritty serious game... you might want to disallow that suggestion. It all depends on the kind of game you're running. There are three styles of Grassroots game, all of which use the same rules but aim to achieve completely different feels.

**Dramatic:** Based on pretty much every political drama out there, Dramatic Grassroots is the 'standard' style of game. The risks can be big, the rewards can be big, and the fate of the free world (or maybe just the nation) could depend on your actions. Elections are yours to mold, people are like putty in your hands... if you want them to be. The West Wing, All The King's Men, and Primary Colors are all strong examples of Dramatic play.

**Serious:** Of course, in real life, we don't have great scripts to work from, and some people toil their whole lives without making much progress, but every little bit helps. The sad reality is, you may never be able to fight the giant corporations and the corrupt politicians. But dammit, it's the right thing to do, so you do it. Serious Grassroots mimics real-world Threads, such as The Truth's efforts to show people the dangers of smoking and bring down Big Tobacco, or Fox News's attempts to promote conservatism over liberalism.

**Wacky:** And then there's those of us who enjoy a little light-heartedness from time to time. In Wacky Grassroots, you lower the drama factor and crank up the funny, not just in actual play but in the reasoning behind Campaigns as well. Try to get your favorite comic book character brought back to life! Reveal the truth about the Illuminati's Pet Squirrels! Corn is really the first wave of an alien plant invasion! And the only people who know the truth are the PCs, and they have to save everyone!

One thing that will take some getting used to for experienced Game Masters is that in Grassroots... there no Non-Player Characters. At least, they don't have their own statistics. Instead, NPCs are defined by who they are as people, and how they fit into certain Threads. You don't roll dice to see if the security guards notice someone sneaking around the Watergate Hotel -- most likely, when the PCs start a Thread to break into the hotel and find stuff, one of the Risks they'll take is "We get caught." And if they don't name that risk, you're allowed to give them two cards and say "There's a hidden risk." If they fail, let them get caught. Grassroots is meant to be a character drama; it's the PC's success and failure that matters, not Joe Q Security Guard's 'Listen' check.

--Risks and Rewards--

The hardest part of GMing Grassroots is that the players are the ones who name the vast majority of

risks and rewards. Most of the time, the system will prevent power-gamers, as each reward gives you another card to use to prevent them. However, there's always some player willing to bend the rules to get what he wants. Most of those players won't be attracted to Grassroots, but you never so. So, here are some simply guidelines to Risks and Rewards.

-If it's not really a risk, it doesn't get a card. For example, if you're trying to sweet-talk a cop into getting you someone's criminal record, a risk of "He doesn't do it" or "He laughs at me" just doesn't work. Risks need to have some sort of detrimental effect on the character; these can still be something simple, like "The police are instructed not to help me with anything anymore" or "The police let the person I'm investigating know I'm investigating them", or something more serious like "I get arrested" or "I lose a point from my Seduction skill as I lose confidence in myself."

-If it doesn't do something that wouldn't happen anyway, it's not a reward and you shouldn't get a card for it. If the PCs have a tape of, say, The President shooting his wife in the head, and they air it on TV... the players don't have to declare a reward of "There's an investigation and the President is arrested." That'll most likely happen anyway. Rewards should be things specifically influenced by the characters and their actions. Say, releasing a memo revealing that HyPerComp's CEO spied on her board of directors could include a reward of "The PIs she hired decide to come clean in the hopes they don't get charged" or "One of the directors who was in on it decides to double-cross the CEO so they don't look bad".

-Risks and rewards should be -balanced-, much like movie plot points. Nobody shot at Erin Brockovich. Likewise, if a character on The West Wing screws up, it could change the balance of political career and the nation itself. Minor rewards shouldn't be paired with life-altering risks, and minor risks shouldn't be the only obstacles between characters and a major revelation.

--Keeping Things Moving--

Most Threads in Grassroots will be started by the players -- after all, they have to win Threads in order to succeed in their campaign. But if there's a plot point you really want them to hit, or they've done something that results in action being taken against them, or if they've simply run out of ideas -- that's when you, as the GM, can start a Thread of your own. In this case, you pick the main player, and name their first reward, which will usually be along the lines of "You stop (insert type of thing the players would usually be doing to their opponents)". Occasionally, if a Thread impacts a character directly, you'll state the reward as "You keep the point of Political Contacts someone is trying to make you lose." (In this case, a smart player will name another reward of "I figure out who's besmirching my good name.")

--Advanced Threads--

The Thread dynamic is fairly simple. But say you're running a game taking place mostly on the Internet, with Threads representing the viewpoint of certain communities? A good team won't focus on one board at a time... they'll want to hit as many as they can. Likewise, 'grand plans' that involve multiple people working on multiple subjects often occur in the movies... so they probably will in your games, too.

There's a reason we recommend multiple decks of cards.

The trick to running multiple Threads at once is that if you're the main character in one Thread, you can't participate in any other Threads. you can be a Supporting character in multiple Threads, but you use the same Resource in multiple Threads, you have to subtract one from your Resource for each Thread after the first. It's possible to someone with Hacking-5 to help three people get into three different systems at the same time... but he's only getting three cards for each Thread. He might be better off using Hacking to help one friend while having his Contacts help another and possibly his Sidekick help the third. This should encourage some creativity among players in how they support their allies... but still allow the uber-elite types to use their strong points.

Then, just resolve the Threads in whatever order seems appropriate... if one Thread has a direct effect on the outcome of another, resolve that one first. The Thread could then be cashed in for a free card on the other Thread... or, a reward or risk could come into play to make the other Thread easier or harder.

A really nasty GM... or opponent... will wait until the PCs have started a thread, and then start one in response attacking them while they're busy.

## Campaigns

NEED TO DO: Campaign design, List two example Campaigns: One concerning the election of the mayor in a large town/small city, with local residents campaigning; the other concerning an attempted military takeover of a small foreign power, with the PCs doing propaganda work to make things easier and keep casualties down.

Of course, no role-playing game is fun without a good storyline; this is doubly true of Grassroots, as it deals with modern issues and themes. If your entire play group is vegan, they won't want to play a game where they defend a company that owns slaughterhouses from a PETA public relations assault. Likewise, few gaming groups will want to champion the cause of the KKK. (Although if yours does, hey, we're not here to judge... although privately, we'll judge anyway.) However, we're also a cinema-dramatic game; while the cause may be real-world, the obstacles, opponents, and events should be suitable (if only slightly, in some cases) over-the-top. Keep this in mind when designing campaigns.

--Example Campaign: Welcome to Mooseville--

The sleepy town of Mooseville, Maine, is about to become host to the strangest political spectacle of all time. A former President has moved to town two months before the Mayoral election; he just announced he'll be happy to be Mayor of the sleepy town, so all the other candidates have dropped out... but one more has entered, a Joe Everyman type who's father suffered at the hands of the President's very first campaign for Senator. The PCs are townspeople who want to help their friend, or outsiders with a grudge against the former President and are willing to help give him a black eye. But the President knows how embarrassing losing would be, and has brought in his old Dirty Tricks team from his Senate days to help him find any dirt there is on his opponent... or make some if need be.

The PCs begin with two threads, given to two characters at random: Joe Everyman is an honest man (Queen-high Straight), and The President ruined the career of an honest journalist thirty years ago (Full House, Jacks and Fives). The opposition begins with three: The President has political experience (Straight Flush), The President's term in office was good for small towns (Flush, 10-high), and The President cares about the common man (Full House, Jacks and Fives).

--Example Campaign: Just Cause--

The Central American country of Panama has recently underwent a military coup that installed a new government; a dictatorship, headed by a general who convinced his people that the existing government was corrupt... but this same man is urgently searching for nuclear arms to keep himself in power. The American government has decided that the good general has to go; but an invasion right now would cost countless thousands of lives. So the government has decided on an unorthodox tactic -- a non-military, media-savvy team will be sent into the country to create public resentment towards the General, just as his side tries to quash it. You will have six weeks to do your work and get out before the invasion begins; succeed, and the people of the country will welcome their liberators; fail, and there will be a decade of civil war, with every life lost weighing on your conscience. Of course, should the CIA get proof that the General is very close to his goal of obtaining nuclear weapons, the timeline will be thrown out the window...

The PCs start with no Threads. The opposition begins with one: The old government was corrupt (Four-of-a-kind, eights).

## Example Characters

Jessica Lyons, Political Science Student

Abilities: Passion: 9, Logic: 9, Truthiness: 7, Reputation: 4

Resources: Daddy's Trust Fund: 4, Bullshit Artist: 3, Gorgeous Blonde: 2, College Newspaper Network: 1, Nerdy Admirer: 1

Sacred Values: Anti-Fur (Passion), Anti-taxing-the-wealthy (Logic)

Jessica is a daddy's girl who in no way was inspired by the movie Legally Blonde. She's gone into political science because she feels it's the best way to learn how to use her money to influence government policy.

Robert 'Bert-Bot' Botana, Hacker Prodigy

Abilities: Passion: 6, Logic: J, Truthiness: 6, Reputation: 6

Resources: Hacker: 4, Argue With Idiots: 2, Act Like Ordinary Teenager: 2, Mom's Used Car: 1, Pro Wrestling Trivia: 1

Sacred Values: Pro-Privacy (Logic)

Bert-Bot is widely known as one of the Internet's better-known privacy advocates. What isn't widely known is that he's only fifteen years old.

Steven Coldbeer, Conservative Pundit

Abilities: Passion: 6, Logic: 6, Truthiness: 10, Reputation: 9

Resources: Talk Show Host: 4, Media Contacts: 2, Journalism Contacts: 2, Interview: 2, Make Mountains Out Of Molehills: 1

Sacred Values: I should be more popular (Reputation), All Liberals Are Corrupt (Truthiness), If You're Not On TV, You're Nobody (Reputation)

Steven Coldbeer is exactly who he plays on TV: A snotty conservative talk-show host who makes fun of those who come on his show, and will recklessly do anything to become more famous.

Kevin King, Failed Politician

Abilities: Passion: 9, Logic: 6, Truthiness: 8, Reputation: 8

Resources: Political Contacts: 4, White Supremacist Contacts: 3, Fired-Up Oratory: 3, Keeps In Shape: 1, Southern Cooking: 1

Sacred Values: White Supremacist (Passion), Second Chances (Passion), Pro-Military (Reputation)

Kevin King ran for President once and was laughed out of the race when his ties to white supremacist groups surfaced. Now he works as a consultant, helping candidates identify and deal with problem areas of their past before they become issues. He gets paid extra to deny he's working with his clients.