



A BEGINNERS GUIDE TO RITUAL MAGIC

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Ritual Basics:

Ritual magic can be used to do all sorts of wonderful things, but, like most things, if something is powerful enough to have an effect, then it is powerful enough to have an unwanted effect. This is why ritual magic is dangerous, not just to ritualists and contributors, but to subjects, bystanders, the circle network and even our ultimate host – the Dragon. Foolish ritualists have killed themselves, their friends, and even harmed and scarred the Dragon. For this reason, ritual magic should be approached with respect and caution but, when approached with respect, can be the most exciting and wonderful thing you'll ever experience. The purpose of this workshop is to help keep you and your teams safe, help you have an enjoyable and successful time in the ritual circle, and give you confidence to grow your talents and expand your possibilities. This isn't a lecture – if you have questions, just shout out or wave manically at me, rather than trying to remember them until later!

Ritual Circles

All ritual circles are not created equal. Circles vary by size – this isn't about circumference or diameter, although they do vary, but in terms of the power it can contain. Ritual power wells up from the void, and enters the physical plane via Wellsprings. The power then flows from them to Huge circles, then to Major circles, then Minor circles, then down to the transport circle network, then out again through sinkholes, like a water clock. Now, this means a Wellspring can feed up to 5 or 6 minor circles, or even more.

So, the larger the circle, the larger the power it can hold, and the more powerful the objects and creatures you can create. However, with more power, comes the potential for a bigger explosion! The most I have ever personally taken into a minor circle is 30 thaums of power and, in a Wellspring, 43. I wouldn't personally go over 45 in a Wellspring (and there would need to be a good reason for using that much), 40 in a huge, 35 in a major and 30 in a minor. I'm not saying these are hard and fast rules, just where I personally draw the safety line. There are plenty who would disagree with me. Some are still alive! Some made mistakes, and the more power, the less margin for error there is. Bigger is not always better.

Timing

Power is built over time, and does so exponentially, to the power of 4, like everything in this World. That is because it beats with the heartbeat of the Dragon. When you seal the circle, you close it to the physical World, and open it to the void, and the power begins to flow in. You focus that power, bend it to your will, and use it. If you do not, all you will create is a lot of smoking boots!

When you first seal the circle, there is no power in there. Ritual power is not yours, you just borrow it from the void. So, the power builds. After 5 minutes, there is enough power to do you some serious harm. Before then (unless you are wielding a LOT of power in a VERY powerful circle where you have no room for error), if you drop the seal because you need to stop, you should be OK. Thereafter, not so much. The most dangerous time is at around 8-10 minutes, where the power is at its greatest, but nothing has yet been done with it. If you stop at this point, it will almost certainly be the last ritual you do. The optimum time for a ritual used to be 15 minutes but, as the Dragon is growing more powerful and her heartbeat strengthens, the time is shortened, and now 13 minutes is the time to aim for. Remember that, all the time you are in there with the seal up, power continues to flow in. As that power is exponential, it will quickly get to the point where it is too much for a mere mortal to control, and it will get very messy indeed.

Timing is therefore important. You can use an hourglass if you like, but I've always preferred the old-school 'bukk on the head' approach. On the outside of the circle, get a friend to hit another friend over the head. Make sure this friend is affected by normal weaponry and is not regenerating! After 10 minutes, the Ritual of Peace will bring the victim around, and you know you are past the danger point. After that, you are able to complete what you are doing over 2-3 minutes, and your ritual will be perfectly timed.

Team and Contributors

The power is wielded by the ritualist, but focussed through their contributors. Contributors are essential. It is not possible to focus the power safely or effectively without a minimum of 5 contributors, no matter what extra power you are able to muster through potions, learning or magical items. Master ritualists, who are able to raise 15 thaums of power alone, could technically do a ritual alone, but I cannot stress enough how bad an idea this is. I'm a Master Ritualist, and existence as we know it would have to be ending unless the ritual occurred for me to even consider it, and then, I'd probably still think it was a bad idea! Feel free to disagree

and try it – just let the Watchers know in advance in case they want to send a condolence letter to your next of kin.

Sorry, contributors, but the ritualist is in charge, and what they say, goes! Ritualists must effectively control their contributors, and use them properly. That means that, if you are contributing, you must be an active part of the ritual. Scratching your arse does not count! So, it's important to give your contributors something interesting to do, to treat them respectfully, and make them want to contribute to you again because, without them, it is impossible for you to successfully perform a ritual. Patronising them and taking them for granted is a sure way of insuring you never get them back again. You are responsible for their safety and their enjoyment – don't take this responsibility lightly, or (at least in Teutonia) they will ensure that you don't risk their lives again, permanently if necessary.

Contributors, listen to your ritualist, don't talk over them, and follow their lead. There will be times when you aren't doing anything. You still have an important part to play – watch the action, listen to the ritualist, and actively participate in listening, like it's the most interesting thing you've heard all day. If you're not interested, then why should your audience or the Watchers be interested?

Circle Alignments

All ritual circles have an alignment to one or more elements –good, evil, spirit, balance, chaos..... and this is really, really important. You **MUST** work with the alignment, not against it. Certain elements have a natural affinity to others. For instance, the Famine cadre is Evil, Time, Fire and Fate. Other elements are natural opposites: Fate and Fortune, Good and Evil, Water and Fire. In minor circles, working against the natural alignment of the circle might only get you a poor result, if you're lucky but, in a powerful circle, it could easily kill you.

An extreme example would be trying to raise a Lich in a Wellspring of Good – that would certainly be a mistake you only make once! Also, the circle isn't stupid, so don't insult its intelligence by paying lip service to its alignment – enter into the spirit of it. Most things can be tailored to the available circle if you really think about it, with obvious exceptions – don't try and make an uber healer in an evil circle, don't try and make a Demon in an Ancestral circle, that sort of thing. Can you think of other examples of bad ideas like that? However, everything else is open to interpretation. Think carefully about how you will use the circle's alignment to your advantage, and make that your first consideration, and you won't go far wrong.

The Watchers

The Watchers are guardians of the circle network. They are also your greatest resource and best source of help. Be nice to them. Treat them with respect, and they will help you. Rules they place in front of you are there for a reason, so pay close attention to them. Make life easier for them, by writing your paperwork legibly and understandably, and turning it in on time, by having everything in place on time, and they will be more amenable to you.

However, remember that they are not there for your benefit, but for the circle network. Their primary allegiance is to the safety of the dragon, not individual ritual teams. If they have to drop a seal to stop the dragon being hurt by a ritual team doing something stupid, and they will do so without hesitation, even if that means the death of your entire team to save the dragon and the circle. Funny old thing, the Dragon is more important than you are! However, they will happily help you ensure that what you are planning to do is safe and sensible. If you're unsure, go and talk to them!

Score

Rituals are scored out of 10, with 5 marks given for relevance, and 5 for entertainment. Entertainment can mean 'comedy', and that is most people's 'go to' option, but it doesn't have to. Something atmospheric, or informative, can be just as entertaining, if not more so. I personally find comedy rituals easier to do, but I've always got better scores when I do something serious. Your experience may vary, but don't be afraid to go for something serious and dramatic. Audiences are a really important part of entertainment, partly because an engaged audience shows the markers how engaging your ritual is to others, but also because it's easier to get a good atmosphere if you have an audience to engage with. So, make sure you bring an audience! Special effects, props, music etc. are also important to your entertainment score, so don't ignore them. If you don't know what is possible, talk to some more experienced ritualists, or go and chat to the goblins in the box – they're lovely folks and they will happily advise you about what they can and can't do.

Relevance is how relevant what you are doing is to what you want to achieve, and the circle you are in. So, if you put on a big-production-value interpretive dance with costumes and lighting and gymnastic stunts, but don't really explain what you're trying to achieve, you

might score a 5 – all for entertainment. If you all stand in a circle and spend 15 minutes chanting ‘Magic Sword. Magic Sword. We want a Magic sword’, you’d probably still get a 5, as it would be hugely relevant, but about as entertaining as watching paint dry.

So, remember that your audience, and the Dragon, have no idea what you’re there to do. What you need to do is tell the story of what you want to make and why. Be specific. Explain how you’re going to do it, why it’s important, and make the people who are watching invest their belief in what you want to achieve. If you do that with pratfalls and custard pies, great. If you do it with dramatic monologues, combat and brooding lighting, also great.

Specialist Skills

There are a range of skills you can learn to augment your ritual abilities. For ritualists, these include scholar/sage skills, and increasing your ritual power. These are well worth learning! In addition, for both ritualists and contributors, ‘summoning skills’: Theology (for ancestral stuff) Elementalism (for elemental stuff, perhaps unsurprisingly!), Daemonology (guess what that’s used for!) and Necromancy (to raise unliving, of course!) are really important for that specific type of ritual. If you wish to make a summoned creature, the number of relevantly-skilled people actively taking part in your ritual has a direct impact on the strength of your resulting creature in terms of how easily it might be controlled or dismissed.

So, if you want to make a daemon, but you don’t have any daemonologists, then the daemon you summon will be relatively weak, and you may wish to consider creating a different type of creature with similar abilities, like an imp or a golem. One of the Teutonian ritualists even made a ‘shmemon’ – a creature similar to, but not, a daemon. If the person also has high magic, then they are a high summoner, which also augments the results. There is a potion called a Summoner’s Elixir available from potion makers, which allows a summoner to act as if they had 1 additional level of casting for the duration of the ritual. This is worth considering if you can afford it and you are short on the relevant summoning skill.

The most efficient way to use these potions is to give them to summoners with the second level of arcane or channelling skill, as they will then act as a high summoner for the duration of the ritual, whereas a 1st level caster would only become an effective 2nd level caster, and the potion will have no effect on existing high summoners. Please note the following two points, as they will save you wasting potions (and therefore money!)

1) The potion *ONLY* works on contributors, not on ritualists. Do not waste them on yourself – you may as well pour the potion into the dirt.

2) The potion *ONLY* works on existing summoners, so if you have a mage with Daemonology, they will benefit, but if you are doing a daemonic ritual and you have contributors without Daemonology, the potion will equally have no effect on them.

If in doubt, pop into the Alchemists Guild and talk to them – they will be happy to give you the full sales pitch, I'm sure!

You can only learn the summoning skills relevant to your arcane abilities, so it pays to choose a 'school' and specialise, especially if you have a dedicated ritual team who can specialise with you.

Constructing a Ritual

So, let's get down to the practical bit!

Firstly, decide what you are making, and what you want it to be able to do. Then, consider how you are going to make each part of this happen in the ritual.

So, for example, the first ritual I ever did was to create some amulets. I was asked to make these amulets bestow the ability to regenerate on the wearer/s.

So, now I knew what I was making, and what I wanted it to be able to do, I considered how to make this happen. In this case, I took something that already exists with that ability – in this case, I chose a Werewolf. If you were making an amulet that allowed the wearer to embody unliving, you might use an unliving (either as a contributor or summoned from the void). However, in my case, regeneration and werewolves are a natural match, so I asked a werewolf friend to take part.

I then told my story of how we could get that ability from the werewolf and copy it. Note the use of the word COPY: not transfer, steal, take or any other word that suggests removing the ability from the existing creature or item, otherwise prepare to be chased over the hills and far away by a very irate werewolf who can no longer regenerate (and probably their pack as well!)

Then, we look at a broad construction of a ritual.

1) Set the scene, explain, clearly, what your ritual seeks to achieve – in my example, we want to make amulets that allow the wearer to regenerate, we're going to do that by taking someone

who already has that ability in their pattern, and we're going to copy that aspect into the amulets.

2) Explain how you're going to do what you seek to achieve – in my example, we chose to make it a comedy ritual where we tried several different ways to copy the ability which were not successful, before settling on one that was. We tried coving our werewolf with paper and 'brass rubbing' him with crayons, we tried making him exercise so he would sweat, and wiped the amulets under his armpits. When neither of these worked, we gave him a very nasty drink, which made him sick on the amulets, and decided that, in our story, werewolf bile was the key to copying the regenerative ability.

3) Use your story to create what you seek to achieve – we did this through using physical comedy to try the steps above.

4) Explain what you have created – We have worked out the secret of werewolf regeneration, and have copied that ability, using the power of werewolf bile!

5) Test what you have done – if this is a creature, test the powers you have given them. So, if your creature wants to regenerate, have people beat them up and watch them get up after they have fallen over. If they are unliving/daemon/ancestral etc, get someone who can discern test them. If it's an item, get a contributor to use it. In our example, we placed the amulets on contributors, the other contributors beat them into the ground, and we watched them regenerate.

6) Bind the powers you have created with it.

7) Balance the circle and diffuse additional energies – for me, this involves thanking the Dragon and giving any residual power over to her as tribute, and ensuring that the circle is as it was before we started. You'll have your own equivalent.

8) Unseal the circle, and give yourself a pat on the back!

Constructing a Rite

Rites are like rituals, but are not carried out in a ritual circle, and can be done anywhere. There are 2 forms of rites – the ones you can do from your known spells, such as a Rite of Transportation, Wasting, Speak with Dead, Speak with Ancestor; and what are known as 'ad hoc' rites.

An 'ad hoc' rite can be used to do lots of different things – find out information, petition an ancestor, affect something that is happening on the ancestral plane, for instance. I lead one most nights in the Viper camp to give power to my ancestor The Dark Lord to aid in his fight

against Satuvon on the Plane of Unlife. These are not used to make magical creatures and items, but rather most other uses that aren't creating items and creatures.

These don't have special effects, and often don't have props and similar, although a Rite Focus can be beneficial. If I'm speaking with an ancestor about a person, I normally ask for something meaningful belonging to the person to use. If it's a faction rite, then a faction land item/iconic can make a good rite focus. If it's an ancestral rite, then maybe an item related to the ancestor.

The format for a rite is much more 'free form', and needs to be at least 10 minutes long.

Planning and Preparation

Planning a ritual is fairly simple and step-by-step, and everyone has their own way of doing it. I'll share how I do it, and if others can do the same, that would be great. Once I've got it in my head what we're going to make and the premise for how we're going to achieve it, I start with my paperwork. I clearly explain what we're going to do and how on the paperwork, then I go and round up my contributors. I add them to my paperwork and, as I go, I find out what specialist skills we have that are relevant and add them to the paperwork. If I have need of very specific skills, then I go and secure those contributors first, and then 'fill up' with more 'vanilla' contributors.

Then, once I know what we have, I fill out the 'relevancy' part of the paperwork, totalling the number of summoners and high summoners. I also say what else we have that is relevant. If I was making an unliving creature, for example, I'd note the number of corruptors, sources of unlife, other unliving etc. that we have in the circle.

I then go and take myself away from distractions and write a 'bare bones' synopsis of what's going to happen in what order. I get my contributors together at a set time, and we have a beer and talk through what's going to happen in what order. I assign tasks to contributors (you need to pick up and use x at x time, you need to beat up the subject, you need to chant this at this time etc.). I refine the synopsis as I go based on the ideas that come out during the run-through. I then add my tech information to the back page, check all the details (usually by asking one of my contributors to read and sensibility check the paperwork and make sure I haven't missed anything).

Well before an hour before the ritual, I go and hand in my paperwork. You never know when you'll be distracted, your camp will be attacked etc., so get it out of the way and that's one less thing to worry about.

I arrange to meet the team at the circle half an hour before. We have a quick talk through again, I have a Q&A with my contributors to check everyone knows what they are doing and are happy,

and then I take myself away into a corner, ignore everyone else, and run through it all in my head. This is the most vital part of the prep for me. Then, off you go!

What Can I Ask For?

The simple answer is – Anything you like – but the truth is slightly more complex. Ask for too much, and you could risk your life and the lives of your contributors, who you have a sworn duty as a ritualist to protect to the best of your ability. If in doubt, ask! Ask your faction high ritualist or another experienced ritualist in your faction. Come and find me if you like (although I cannot promise to know the answer), or go and speak to the Watchers, as I already mentioned. However, bear in mind that all of these are mortals, with imperfect knowledge (including the Watchers), and may get the answer wrong. Use your best judgement.

How to Get Good!

This is a trickier one. My advice would be as follows:

- Practice. Use rites to practice for rituals. Have a go. Remember that any mistake you walk away from is simply a learning experience.
- Watch as many rituals as you can – your faction ones, other faction ones – watch and learn, learn from others mistakes – it's cheaper than learning from your own! We're also hoping for a bit of an 'exchange program' that Simba and I informally started last year – why not arrange to shadow a ritualist from another faction, as well as one in your own.
- Contribute. If you're a ritualist and you're able to learn to contribute, do so. If you can learn to contribute twice a day, even better. Contributing to others is a great way of learning.
- Practice projection and annunciation.