



OPS: A GUIDE TO MITIGATING RITUAL DISASTERS

BY

SPECIALIST C CLINIC

PROFESSOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF TRIESTE

RITUAL MAGIC TUTOR, MAGES GUILD OF ERDREJA

INTRODUCTION

Ritual magic is a powerful commodity in our world, and one which requires respect and reverence. As a ritualist, if you do not approach your craft with the respect and deference it commands, it will almost certainly find a way of teaching you respect – in a way you are unlikely to forget in a hurry. The purpose of this volume is to assist ritual magic practitioners in understanding some of the many things that can go wrong in the ritual circle, discuss ways to prevent those mishaps, ways to mitigate those factors which cannot be avoided and, as a measure of last resort, ways to assuage damage to your contributors, the circle, and the wider Plane, should there be a problem of such great proportions that cannot be prevented or contained.

As a ritual magic practitioner, whatever happens in your circle is your responsibility. You are ultimately responsible for every pattern that chooses to place themselves in your circle. You are responsible for ensuring that the circle, its alignment and its integrity are maintained for the duration of your stewardship of the circle, and you are responsible for whatever you create or summon – whether it is what you intended to create or not. If you do not take these responsibilities seriously, you are likely to come to harm, cause harm to befall those who put their trust in you, or damage the Dragon upon whom all existence on this plane depends. If that sounds like too much responsibility to you, then it may be wise to consider an alternative career path.

For this very reason, you should never enter a circle with a plan you are unhappy with. No matter who exerts pressure on you to proceed, they are not the person responsible for that circle and everyone in it, and so their opinion does not matter. Tell them to do it themselves if it's so important to them, but do not allow yourself to be forced into performing a ritual that makes you uncomfortable, no matter what threats, inducements or emotional blackmail are involved.

This is not an exhaustive list of every possible eventuality – that would be impossible as there are as many individual circumstances as there are rituals. However, it does contain a range of potential scenarios which have occurred over many years within multiple Heartland nations. Some of these have been very much the fault of the ritualist responsible, and some involve external influences which cannot always be foreseen or planned for. It does not matter whose 'fault' it is that the situation arises. What matters is how you get out of it (if you can get out of it), and how you prevent a mishap becoming a tragedy.

This text could have had a subtitle of 'I made all these mistakes so you don't have to'. These are things I've learned either by causing them to happen, or contributing to a ritual where they happened, or from listening to the experiences of other ritualists, or watching a ritual where they occurred. Learning from the mistakes of others is the easiest and least painful form of education. I commend it to you. I wish you and your teams all the best in creating and maintaining a safe, productive ritual circle experience for all.

Specialist C Clinic

August III8

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the following entities for their invaluable advice in the creation of this volume, both for their personal accounts and ideas, their willingness to share knowledge, and also for their willingness to own their mistakes and allow them to be used as teachable moments.

Snowy McTaff, Gologamoth Incarnate and chaotic fish monster extraordinaire

Cosaint, Watcher of Erdreja

Johan of Lantia

Caine Karlennon of Albion

Ravenfire of Lantia

Sir Graf Dog of Albion

CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Incapacitation of the Ritualist

Chapter 2: Uninvited Guests

Chapter 3: The Little Stuff

Chapter 4: Contributor Problems

Chapter 5: Timing

Chapter 6: Making a Sharp Exit (Or 'Get Out of That & Look Stylish')

Chapter 7: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Circle

Chapter 8: It's Organised Chaos

Chapter 9: War Stops Play

Chapter 10: Changing the Plan

Chapter 11: There is Such a Thing as Too Much Success

Chapter 12: Ask Snowy McTaff

CHAPTER 1: INCAPACITATION OF THE RITUALIST

From the moment when the seal is raised on the circle to the moment when the seal is lowered (or broken), the ritualist is responsible for controlling, shaping and using the power raised through the contributors to achieve an objective. So, what happens if the ritualist becomes unable to do so?

There are many things which can happen to debilitate, incapacitate or otherwise prevent the ritualist from fulfilling their role and, from the moment that the ritualist ceases to concentrate on controlling the power within the circle, that power begins to lose focus. At this point, every second counts. How to resolve this largely depends on the reason it has occurred. Here are some common reasons why the ritualist may become incapacitated, and their relevant preventative/alleviatory actions:

- The ritualist is attacked and loses consciousness
- The ritualist is poisoned and becomes either unconscious or debilitated
- The ritualist is beguiled or is subject to control or other mind-affecting spells

Prevention

Almost all of these occurrences are entirely preventable. The following actions prior to the ritual should be considered standard good practice:

1. Always check the circle prior to raising the seal for bottles and other suspicious articles which could indicate circle tampering.
2. Always check all potions to be used prior to or during the ritual to ensure that they are as expected. This should be done by a competent potion master. However, it is not sufficient to simply check that the potion is what the alchemist who sold it says it is – there have been a spate of forgeries in recent years which have been appearing in most nations. They do not appear to be a targeted attempt to harm specific ritualists or teams – they simply appear to be fake potions created for material gain. The only way to spot these is to ask someone skilled in the arts of detecting forgeries to examine the bottle. Of the fakes we've seen recently (usually in the guise of Pure Thought, Clear Thought or Perfect Thought – although it is not outside the bounds of possibility that the same could be done with Summoners' Elixirs and the like), the effect is to debilitate the ritualist with a 9 minute onset (the relevance of which will become apparent below under 'mitigation').

3. Always check the ritualist and all contributors for beguile spells and other control effects prior to entering the circle.
4. Always ensure that, before the ritual starts, you have designated a healer and one or more 'doorstops'. There's no need to bring an army of additional people into the circle to guard the void gate unless you're expecting trouble of some description, simply designating a couple of contributors to act as guards should be more than sufficient. If any of your team cannot be healed by typical means (especially if that team member is the ritualist), ensure that you have someone designated who can heal, repair or otherwise fix that individual, even if they simply carry potions as a back-up (again, check these potions as well as you would Pure Thoughts etc).

Mitigation

If for whatever reason (and despite your best efforts to prevent such an occurrence), your ritualist becomes unconscious or debilitated during the ritual, there are a number of things you can do to reduce the risk of a drama becoming a crisis. Most of these should be common sense, but it's a lot easier to apply common sense when relaxed, rather than at a time of crisis. Preparing your mitigation in advance means that it becomes second nature, ensuring that you resolve the issue quickly and with minimal disruption to your plan.

1. The first, and most important aspect, do not panic! This has happened to most ritualists at some point (including myself – as both a contributor and a ritualist), and it isn't nearly as career-ending as it would initially appear. The important thing is for the contributors to continue to focus the power to the best of their abilities. Stay calm, stay focussed, and carry on.
2. The designated healer should immediately check the ritualist for injury, and heal/repair/purge as appropriate.
3. If this is a poison/forged potion, be aware of the duration and onset period. As previously mentioned, most forged poisons have a 9 minute onset period – and if the ritualist has been specifically targeted with a poison, then any competent assassin would select a poison with the same onset, as 9 minutes into a ritual is the most dangerous point to break the seal – the power has been raised, but it has not yet been shaped to its intended purpose. To avoid being caught out at a critical moment, why not take the Lantian approach, and delay taking potions until a couple of minutes after the ritual has begun. They will retain their efficacy, but by the time the toxin takes effect, the most dangerous point will have passed, and the power will have begun coalescing, reducing the risk of explosion.

Damage Limitation

In the event that the ritualist cannot be cured of their ailments (for instance, if your healer is also indisposed), all is not lost. The following steps may yet save your team (and, indeed, have done so in the past):

1. Firstly, remaining calm is more important than ever. Keep focussing on the purpose of the ritual. Do not stop or allow the ritual to become derailed. The Watcher on duty should immediately take charge of maintaining the integrity of the seal.
2. If there is a second ritualist in the circle and the primary ritualist is conscious (for example, if they have merely become debilitated), it MAY be possible for the secondary ritualist to wrap things up. I say 'may', because this is currently untested (and I have yet to find someone who willing to assist me in practically researching this theory – please apply at the university if you wish to remedy this gap in ritual knowledge!). This, however, will require the active consent of the primary ritualist – as we have tried to achieve this without that, and it has been proven not to work. If you have a willing secondary ritualist, then by all means, that person should ask the ritualist if they would like them to take control, and if the ritualist is able to do so, they should nod or otherwise confirm their agreement. However, if this is attempted and is successful, the first action of the secondary ritualist should be to use a small amount of the circle's power to restore the ritualist, then immediately return control as soon as the ritualist is able to accept it.
3. Assuming this was not possible, timing becomes more crucial than ever. It is vital that the seal remains secure until the ten minute mark is reached. As previously mentioned, the Watcher on duty will be maintaining the seal for as long as they are able. This is a difficult task, and one which takes a great deal of effort, no matter how experienced or powerful that person is, so they must be relieved of this burden as soon as possible – think of a the magical equivalent of a physically strong person holding the weight of a dam on their own. Designate a person in the circle to co-ordinate the situation, whilst the rest of the contributors continue to focus on the maintaining the seal's integrity and continuing to shape the power to the purpose of the ritual – the power has already been committed, so the stated purpose must continue to be the focus of what occurs in the circle. The designated co-ordinator should then check on the time with those outside the circle, and ensure that the ten minute mark has been reached. Once they are absolutely sure this is the case (and willing to bet their life on it!), they should

request the permission of everyone in the circle for the seal to be lowered. This is of course a very risky situation, but there is no other recourse that we are presently aware of at this point. Each contributor should swiftly give audible consent in an orderly fashion, at which point the co-ordinator should request of the Watcher holding the seal to please lower it. At this point, may your ancestors protect you, but there is more than one ritual team on the egg who have survived this procedure (and some who walked out of the circle without so much as a scratch!) Needless to say that your first response the second the seal is down is to clear the vicinity of the circle and seek immediate medical assistance for your ritualist!

4. The above point is equally relevant (and even more essential) in the rare occasions where the occupants of a ritual circle are there against their will. At the a Moot in III7, a Nihonese Warlock was able to gain control of the ritual circle and entrapped members of a number of factions within the circle, seeking to sacrifice them to her cabal for the power of the Emperor. Some of the brave and quick-thinking captives led by Eve Hunter of Albion worked together to overpower the ritualist after the ten minute point, then collective implore the Watcher on duty to lower the seal. They were successful with no casualties.

CHAPTER 6: UNINVITED GUESTS

In rituals, we often call upon entities to appear in our circles, but what about gatecrashers? Whether it's a horde of goblins charging through the void gate, an angry avatar of an ancestor, or even a *shudder* Temporal Enforcer, most ritualists will at some point find themselves with an uninvited guest in their circle. Whilst I'm sure some arrive with benevolent intent (although I've yet to meet anyone who has recounted this, statistically, it must have happened at some point.....), they are generally not a welcome guest.

However, from the moment you raise that seal, YOU are the master of this circle, not your interloper. You have both the power and the skill to deal with them as you see fit. Here are some examples of the types of situations you might encounter, and ways in which ritualists have successfully dealt with them:

- If your interloper is simply a would-be saboteur from the outside, your choices are simple: subdue them, restrain them, kill them. That's your decision. I'm not here to be your conscience, but be mindful of the circle you're in. I doubt the Wellspring of Good, for instance, would take too kindly to anyone murdering first and asking

questions later within its bounds!

- For all other unexpected guests (other than the notable exceptions detailed below), it is generally better to get your contributors to deal with them under their own steam rather than to waste the power of the circle dealing with them. That said, if the problem is taking too long to resolve with big sticks, or contributors are at risk, or the interruption is at risk of derailing your ritual, always remember that you have the power of the circle at your disposal. You can use this in any way you like, whether it is to banish interlopers to whence they came, heal your healer, or cast spells that you would not normally have the knowledge of. This will use some of your gathered power, but it may be the best option to create the optimum result. Don't be afraid to use this without hesitation – it must be swift and authoritative, it is not the time to dither.
- There are exceptions to every rule. Far be it from me to tell you how to revere your ancestor, but I really wouldn't recommend taking this route with your ancestor or any representative of theirs. They are the focal point of your entire belief system – not the equivalent of a pack of wayward zombies. If they're there, they're there for a reason so, unless you have a very good reason otherwise, I'd strongly recommend listening to them and doing as you're told, but that's for you to judge. An example of this happening was when a ritualist named Erica of Norsca summoned what she expected to be a minor ancestral creature of Fenris into the circle to aid her in making a few theological items. She got a bit more than she bargained for when an Avatar of Fenris himself arrived. She was able to bargain with him and appease him, and successfully made the items she was aiming for. As a result, she also detected as an ancestral creature until her (much later and unrelated) death, and agreed to tell the ancestor's stories and become a dedicated follower of Fenris, ensuring her pattern immediately went to him on death. These were unintended consequences, but ones that she was successfully able to negotiate in exchange for the safety of her team and overall success of the ritual.
- Another exception would be the arrival of the circle's guardian. These are powerful beings who are tasked with the protection of each circle. If they are worried, concerned or angry about what you're doing, then what you are doing is bad for the circle, which means it's REALLY bad for you! A wise person would listen to them, and do as they are told. How well you come out of this entirely depends on them – and how well you either convince them of the safety of your plan, or how well you follow their instructions. You are in THEIR circle – a circle that their entire existence is focussed on protecting. If they've turned up, then they believe you to be a threat

to that circle. They are a being of enough power to make your head explode – conceptually AND literally. It's your decision what you do with that information.

- In a similar vein, there is an organisation called the Temporal Enforcement Agency. Operatives from this organisation are known as Temporal Enforcers. Time is one of the 16 elements which govern every living thing, but it is arguably the most difficult to utilise safely in a ritual setting. It is entirely possible to work with time – I frequently do. What is not possible (or, more specifically, not possible whilst keeping your pattern within its mortal vessel) is affecting, changing or otherwise manipulating time in such a way as to affect its natural flow. To give examples of how to do it, and how not to do it, on many occasions, I and many other ritualists have used elemental time to extend the duration of a magical item or pattern effect. There's nothing wrong with that at all. Contrast this to a Jackals ritual team I watched some years ago, who (despite many warnings against this course of action), decided to place a pattern within a 'time bubble' they created in the circle, and age the pattern many years in the space of a few minutes. This is exactly the sort of example of how NOT to utilise time. The team were visited in the circle by a Temporal Enforcer, who was not in the best of moods. As with circle guardians, they are creatures of incredible power, and they care only for the preservation of the progression of time. They couldn't care less who you are or what your plans are for dinner tomorrow. They will crush you like an insect if they believe you're going to have a negative impact on their mission, and they won't even break a sweat doing so. What you do with this information is your decision entirely, but it's safe to say that, if there's a Temporal Enforcer in your circle, you've broken the cardinal rules concerning time. It's your circle and your decision what you do, but my personal advice would be to be very contrite, do as you're told and don't give them any reason to dislike you. They do not come equipped with a sense of humour.

CHAPTER 3: THE LITTLE STUFF

When I say 'The little stuff', I'm not suggesting that these mishaps or occurrences are not important – it may only take the weight of a fly to overbalance a cart in the right circumstances. As the ritualist, you are in charge, and your contributors will take their lead from you, and will be expecting you to deal with any unforeseen

circumstances, and show them – both through explanation and practical example – how to handle whatever existence throws in your general direction.

When it comes to unforeseen circumstances, you effectively have two choices: Ignore it, or resolve it. In some cases, the choice will be obvious. In others, not so much. Here are a few examples of the sort of things you may encounter:

- Missing Items: We've all forgotten an important thing before now. Picture the scene: you and your team are stood outside the circle, waiting for your turn to go in. You're having a quick talk through as a final check that everyone knows what you're doing, and you reference the important McGuffin that..... you left in your tent. Panic ye not. It happens to everyone at some point. Take stock of the situation. How long do you think you've got before you're due in the circle? Can you send someone to fetch it? Do NOT go yourself. Anything could happen and you could be waylaid. If you think there's time, send a runner. If you're not sure if there's time, send a runner who doesn't have a role in your ritual. If not, is it something that you can borrow a reasonable approximation of from somewhere in the guilds? If the worst comes to the worst, then have a quick think of what you can use instead, or how you can reword what you're doing to avoid the need for said item. It is almost certainly not the end of the World, so don't let it throw you off balance. To prevent this happening, write a list of everything you need in advance, and check it off before you leave camp.
- 'Gremlins in the Works': What happens if the circle seal refuses to go up? Try again. What happens if the goblins who make the circle light up go on strike and the lights go out? Feel free to make a joke about it but, ultimately, just carry on regardless. There is nothing you can do about it, so don't let what is ultimately a minor inconvenience spoil your hard work and preparation. Your audience is there to see and hear you, not the background effects. The power you are raising comes from you, your contributors, and the void, not some sparkly lights. Remain confident and continue calmly, and your contributors will follow you. Don't allow yourself to become sidetracked. The same is true of incongruous effects, like a kazoo fanfare instead of a rumble of thunder. Take it in good humour and don't let it bother you, and you may even get a bonus mark for doing so.
- 'What's this Column Doing Here?' We all have certain expectations of a ritual circle. Firstly, that it's a circle. Secondly, that it will be a certain size, and that you will have all the space within the circle to carry out your ritual. This isn't always the case. Some

ritual circles are smaller than others, and some even have objects in the middle of them, like column, statues or other decorative elements. You will not be able to move these items, so you will need to work around them. The best way to prepare for this eventuality is to go and visit the circle in advance so you can see what you have got to work with and plan accordingly. Then, when you're briefing your contributors, tell them about it so they know what to expect. In general, it's a bad idea to touch any object within the circle, so just leave it alone and it will leave you alone. Again, don't let it put you off.

- Ooops! The one thing that makes ritual teams nervous more than anything else when it comes to giving ritual teams the jitters is if something happens to the team that immediately precedes you. Picture the scene: You're all waiting patiently to go in and do your ritual, and are casually watching the team on before you. Suddenly, there's a huge boom and everyone is sucked through the void gate, or Maar's bells ring out, along with the panicked screams of all assembled. Going into the circle to perform your ritual when the circle's maintenance team are still scraping bits of the previous contributors off the ceiling isn't a great start to proceedings, and it's easy to see how that can put you off your game. Don't let it. Whatever happened to the previous team was due to something they did – whether they overran and built too much power, upset an ancestor, or whatever. If there was a fundamental flaw with the circle or how it was prepared, the Watchers would not allow you to continue, as their job is to ensure that the circle is prepared and that no harm befalls the egg. Let them do their jobs whilst you focus on yours. Talk to your contributors and give them a pep talk. If you know why the last team exploded, explain to them so they know why that's not going to happen to them. Don't let an external factor that has no bearing on your own ritual affect you and your team.

CHAPTER 4: CONTRIBUTOR PROBLEMS

Contributors are a vital part of any ritual, but, with the best will in the World, they can also be the bane of your life. I know we often refer to managing contributors as 'herding cats', but the truth is that you need them. If you don't respect your contributors and don't treat them well, you won't have enough next time you ask. That said, there will be times when your contributors (or, more frequently, one

contributor in particular) will be a specific problem. Here are some examples, and ideas for how to manage them:

- I. Fun with Potions/Control: There's a story (the detail of which I've failed to corroborate thus far) where a contributor went to the Alchemist Guild experimental potion testing immediately prior to a ritual, and entered the circle convinced he was a chicken. He behaved accordingly. There have also been a great many rituals where a contributor has decided that the instructions they were given were insufficient, and has proceeded to improvise, loudly and at length, interrupting the ritualist. There are a number of circumstances where something similar may arise – if a contributor is under the effects of a beguile, or control, or potion, or other strange occurrence, they may behave in a way not conducive to the smooth running of your ritual. The easiest way to prevent this is to remind your contributors not to participate in experimental alchemy immediately prior to the ritual, and to get someone to check your entire team prior to entering the circle for beguile spells.

The easiest way to do this is to learn how to do it yourself. It's a fairly easy skill to learn, and is also a requirement in order to learn one of the most useful skills a ritualist can possess – the ability to withstand attempts to charm them. Enquire at the Bards Guild regarding this training. I can tell you that it was one of the more instructive afternoons I've had in quite a few years. If you've not been able to do this and one of your contributors is causing a problem, it's up to you to control them. You can do this by trying to order them to behave – which will only work if the reason they're being disruptive is that they're just being disruptive. It won't help if they're under a spell or alchemical influence. However, take control of your circle and assert your authority (you may even find that you are marked up for doing so).

If that doesn't work, then you have 3 choices: Put up with it, subdue them, or permanently subdue them. All of these carry different pros and cons. Always consider the flavour of your ritual and your circle alignment. If you're creating a faceless creature of ultimate evil in a fire circle, chucking the offending contributor unceremoniously through the void gate can only benefit your ritual, but if you try that in a Wellspring of Good whilst making a healing item, then it's probably not the preferred choice. On most occasions, it's probably (literally) overkill, and you will not be thought of kindly by their nearest and dearest. In general, ordering your other contributors to subdue them and leave them to sleep it off out of the way is probably the best

option, but show some duty of care and make sure you get a mind healer to look at them afterwards!

2. Saboteurs: It's rare, but not unheard of, for a contributor to be 'planted' in your team with the specific intent of derailing your ritual. This person may have been brought to you as a contributor, or may not be on the paperwork and may simply sneak in. To prevent this, it's usually a good idea to make sure that you know your contributors (or have someone who will vouch for them), that you've checked them for mind effects as previously mentioned, and that you look around before you seal the circle to make sure that only the people you want in the circle are inside the bounds of the seal. If someone does manage to sneak in, then you have the same choices as with other wayward contributors. If you cannot subdue them effectively, or they really are just too much of a distraction, then you can use the power of the circle to get rid of them, or strike them mute and immobile for the rest of the ritual, but this will take power from your intended purpose, so should only be used where absolutely necessary.
3. Incapacitated Contributors: Even if your contributors are doing their jobs well and behaving themselves, things happen. If your contributors are incapacitated (for example, if they are cut down by someone in the circle – an uninvited guest, an invited guest, or you simply have another contributor who was overly enthusiastic in demonstrating how to murder someone brutally), you may find yourself with incapacitated, injured or dying team members, which is clearly a suboptimal state of affairs unless you're doing something especially 'niche'. As explained in earlier chapters, always ensure you have a healer in the circle with you, along with someone who can fix anyone with more specialised repair/healing needs. Don't make a fuss, just ask your healer to get on with it, and continue with your ritual.

In the unlikely event that your healer isn't there – and it happened to me whilst doing a ritual for the Alchemists Guild – I'd confirmed with them that they had healers on the team, but they neglected to mention that the 'healer' was in fact an Incantor who could cure. This would have been fine, had I not summoned a basilisk into the circle who managed to petrify one of my contributors. We did what we needed to do with said basilisk, then I dismissed it and asked the healer to fix the petrification. When it became apparent that they couldn't, I used the power of the circle to fix the fatal wound and restore them. Whilst this took some of the power, we were still able to make

our target items, and also made an additional 'shadow item' which cured fatal as a result of incorporating this into the ritual – so it can even work in your favour.

CHAPTER 5: TIMING

In rituals, timing is crucial. Ritualists like to believe that their chosen profession is an art form, and in many ways, it is. However, there are elements which are very much an exact science – and timing is a key part of this. Power takes time to build, and time to shape, but it also builds exponentially in time with the heartbeat of the Dragon. As the Dragon has grown, her heartbeat has quickened, and where once 15 minutes was the optimum time for rituals, it is now 13 minutes. This leaves less of a margin for error than when rituals could be longer. We call ten minutes the 'safe point', because that's when you power starts to coalesce into the form you seek. Power starts to build from the moment the seal is raised and the outside World is closed off, and the portal to the void is opened.

For the first few minutes, this power is insufficient to cause harm if not directed but, from around 5 minutes, the power reaches a point where it becomes increasingly dangerous, as all the power is there with potential, but no outlet – like a spring which has been tightly wound, but with nothing for the potential held within it to do except to snap back in the face of its wielders. Once the ten minute mark is reached, the power begins to take the form to which you and your team have shaped it. Time then continues to march inexorably on, with the power still building at said exponential rate – and you must use it before it gets too large to control. The strength of the growing dragon has increased that power so, once you've raised the power you need, you must be relatively swift at shaping it to your will.

So, if your ritual is shorter than 5 minutes, it is highly unlikely that anything will happen, as insufficient power has been raised to have an effect (although the closer to the 5 minutes you get, the more you are likely to get a ringing in your ears, a headache and a sense of impending doom. If it's not going to plan and you need to curtail, ensure you do so before those first 5 minutes are past. Thereafter is the point of no return, at which point you must continue until you have shaped the power you've raised. Then, as power builds towards the 10th minute, so the risk to

everyone within its sphere of influence grows. Drop the seal at 8 or 9 minutes, and it is almost impossible that anyone within the circle will survive – I’m certainly not aware of anyone who has survived it, and I’m very old indeed.

Some people are naturally gifted with the ability to sense the passage of time. I am not one of these people, and neither are most ritualists. So, most people will use at least one means of marking time for them. My personal favourite –and the one I recommend, has always been to get someone outside the circle to subdue another at the point of sealing the circle. When the ritual of peace brings them around and they are able to stand, then I know that ten minutes has passed. I know I naturally run short, so I don’t concern myself with any further timing. Others are fans of hourglasses, or secondary people outside with hourglasses. All of these methods have benefits and risks, as below:

- Overly Healthy Timekeepers: If you are going to use the subdual method, then please ensure that your ‘timepiece’ is protected by the ritual of peace, that they recover from subdual at a regular rate, that they are not immune to subdual damage, and that they do not regenerate. There have been many occasions where an awakened orc has been ‘volunteered’ for the role, and has gotten up a couple of minutes in and wandered off. There remains a very real risk that, should you use a person who is outside of the Ritual of Peace you think you have subdued them, but they don’t get up after ten minutes, because they are dead – which can cause all manner of PR issues as well as the impending doom of your team. Finally, if you use this method, please protect your timepiece. For a start, it’s a pretty poor show to leave someone on the floor alone that you’ve just beaten around the head – anything might happen to them, but if someone wants to sabotage your ritual, getting rid of your timer is a really easy way to do so without detection. Make sure they are surrounded by friends.
- Shoddy Workmanship: Don’t rely on that merchant in the market swearing blind that it’s a 10 minute hourglass. Don’t even rely on a friend telling you it’s a ten minute hourglass – check it yourself. Edward James, a late Harts’ ritualist, found this at the cost of his life. Even if an hourglass is of the right length, it can be affected by heat, cold, atmospheric moisture etc. If it is held by someone and they move around, they can affect the speed of the sands, too.
- Don’t Let Time Run Away With You: Make sure any hourglass you use is on a firm base. If you have it in the circle with you on the floor, it can easily be

knocked over (I've done this myself on more than one occasion). If you have it outside the circle, being held by a spectator, then that person can be sabotaged by someone with an axe to grind. Ensure that your chosen means of timing is protected from accidental interruption or deliberate tampering.

CHAPTER 6: MAKING SHARP EXITS

(OR GET OUT OF THAT AND LOOK STYLISH)

In an ideal world, a ritualist would end their ritual at precisely 13 minutes, take a bow, and everyone would give them a round of applause, take them to the bar and buy them a drink. There are very few ideal worlds.

There are a few instances where you might not want to drop the seal, but staying within the sealed circle is obviously not an option owing to the power exponential as explained in our last chapter – for example, if there is a waiting mob you are angry with what you just did, or if the area surrounding the circle is under attack by hordes of ravaging something or other.

In these instances, it pays to use an embedded transport rite. Remember that a transport rite takes a minute, and this minute is part of your overall ritual time. You effectively make the last minute of your ritual a transport rite. You can continue to wrap up, but make it clear you are commencing a transport rite as part of it, and take your team to a place you know to be safe (like your home transport circle, for instance). Then, at the end of the ritual, the transportation will immediately take effect and the seal will drop as you and your team depart.

Whilst embedded transportation might be the best way of you leaving the circle safely, there are other forms of exits you might not choose. If, despite all the advice here to prevent this occurrence, there are times when the ritual team leave the circle, often in a puff of smoke (hence the term 'smoking boots') via the Void gate. I believe the Lantians refer to this as a 'Void Flush'. At this point, there is nothing you can do to mitigate your situation. You'll either be dead or you won't be. However, there is something your friends who were not in the circle can do, and it might be a good idea to tell them about it.

On many occasions where the team disappears, various members of the team may reappear in the circle itself or nearby transport circles, spat back out of the Void. In most cases, they are alive but injured, and often bleeding out. This may happen almost instantly, or may take quite a while. After a particularly chaotic ritual with my esteemed colleague Snowy McTaff, we both disappeared at the end of the ritual, reappearing in opposite transport circles a couple of minutes later, entirely unharmed, but wearing each other's trousers.

In contrast, I contributed to a ritual that went quite badly wrong in this way some years ago, and myself, the ritualist and several others fell through the void, through the Plane of Unlife, and back again. It was about 40 minutes between us leaving and us arriving, separately at various circles. I was merely disoriented and confused, but the ritualist was not only bleeding out, but continuously taking artefact wounds all over his body for some time afterwards. He only survived because the faction posted guards on each circle in the hope that some of us would return, which we indeed we did. So, should this happen, ensure your faction and friends are briefed to immediately post scouts, preferably with healers, at each transport node.

CHAPTER 7: A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE CIRCLE

Of all the issues that arise from time to time, one of the more prosaic (yet irritating!) ones is trying to get your team to the circle in one piece. For some reason, hordes of goblins insistent on the destruction of all in the vicinity always seem to turn up just when you're trying to get somewhere, right? Whilst the Watchers will be sympathetic to your plight, they have a schedule to stick to, and you will lose your coveted slot if you and your team aren't present on time. Methods of resolving this are basically common sense, but for the benefit of folks who are either fairly new to the ritual process (or are not possessed of an abundance of said common sense), here are a few things you might wish to consider:

- Pretty obvious, but leave early. I ask my teams to be present half an hour before the ritual at the circle, so that I can check that everyone is there, with their relevant props etc., and use the time between then and the ritual to ensure that everyone knows what's happening and what's expected of them. That also gives time for the inevitable toilet trips, things they have forgotten, and whatever it is that

contributors all seem to desperately need to do a minute before we're due to start. That additional time is great redundancy to allow for the additional time it will take to get there if your camp, or the marketplace, or any thoroughfare, is under attack.

- Secondly, there is nothing that says you have to walk there. All ritual circles are, by definition, also transport circles. You can transport from the transport circle nearest your camp to the ritual circle, avoiding marketplace altercations entirely. If the circle is in use at the time, you will bounce to the transport circle on the other side but, having built in that 30 minutes spare (see above), you'll still have plenty of time to get there if you can't transport there directly.
- Finally, consider all meeting up prior to arrival at the circle. If individuals are heading there in dribs and drabs, then they are far more vulnerable to things impacting on them, and their ability to arrive on time. Sticking together is never a bad thing..... well, in this sense, at least.

CHAPTER 8: IT'S ORGANISED CHAOS

Circles have inherent alignments, which govern the type of energy they can more readily be shaped to. These alignments not only have a bearing on what sort of rituals work best within them, but also can affect what happens during those rituals. Many years ago, I was involved in several rituals in the Wellspring of Chaos. As you would expect from the font of all elemental Chaos on the Egg, a lot of unplanned things happened in that circle which could collectively be termed as 'weird and wibbly shizz'. Just a few of the weird goings-on included:

- Every time someone tried to say the word 'power', the word 'strawberry' came out instead.
- The entire circle at one point felt like it was tipping 45° to the left, causing the team to stumble as if experiencing an earthquake and everyone slid to the left. To outside observers, the circle didn't move, making all the contributors look like they were having some sort of collective hallucination (which, in a sense, they were!).

- In the middle of one ritual, the entire team became compelled to continue the rest of the ritual hopping on one leg (that's one leg each, mind. It's not like they constructed a contributor pyramid or anything like that!).

These circle alignments are what the circles are. There is nothing you can do to stop these occurrences – you can only govern how you respond to them. So, given that there is no method of prevention, all you can do is mitigate the effects on yourself, as follows:

- Learn the easy way – especially when you anticipate that these effects may happen (e.g. if you are using a Wellspring, where any alignment is magnified more than it would be in a lesser circle) – go and watch rituals that are scheduled before yours. Talk to other ritualists, especially ones in other factions. Do some networking, and find out if the circle is prone to this type of effect, so you can prepare for it and brief your team to be aware that it may happen.
- Communicate with your contributors. Let them know what might happen, so you can all work together from a point of preparedness. The same is true if you are doing something particularly unusual that may have specific effects. Many years ago, a team of Teutonian ritualists, including myself, used a ritual to unseat Satvun from the Plane of Unlife and replace him with El Nino. We knew the risks inherent in this plan, so we prepared by arranging regeneration amulets, endurance spells and similar. A couple of years ago, my Ancestor came to visit in person and demanded that I used the circle to summon Dracos' military leader, a Lich named Bellerenis. He commanded me to bind him, and the faction to destroy his phylactery and kill him. Because I knew this would be dangerous, and that Liches are given to pattern corrupting spells which I couldn't protect myself from, and because I was worried what might happen to everyone if he killed me in the circle, I arranged an elder vampire to guard me and keep the Lich from touching me during the binding process, as vampires cannot be harmed by his magic. If you know what to expect, you can prepare for it.
- Don't allow such minor distractions to take your focus away from your objective. Accept them, deal with them, and maintain your course of action.
- Similarly, do not allow such distractions to make you lose track of time. One of the rituals in the Wellspring of Chaos I mentioned earlier was so disrupted that the ritualist lost track of time and went far too long, narrowly avoiding killing the entire team. Don't be that ritualist.

Similarly, the type of effects which were observed in the Wellspring of Chaos can occur when you use a Chaos Star to boost your ritual. This is not a warning against the use of chaos stars – quite the opposite. Just be aware of their effects and prepare your team in advance.

CHAPTER 9: WAR STOPS PLAY

In an ideal world, every ritual would have a full house of spectators, happily enjoying the entertainment, cheering and clapping at the appropriate junctures and being perfectly quiet for the rest of the time.

There is no such thing as an ideal world.

Sometimes, there is little to no audience (especially when rituals coincide with major events, or you're Vipers and it's before dawn). Sometimes, the people standing around the circle are noisy and obstructive. Sometimes, half a faction is noisily being panel beaten by a horde of vengeance zombies 3 feet from the circle seal.

There's nothing you can do to create an ideal world, but there are a few things you can do to minimise disruption:

- Bring your own audience. No-one cares how you do this. Bribes are an option. Emotional blackmail is a cheaper choice. Reciprocal arrangements for audiences with other ritualists are fair game. Planning to pander to the available audience takes effort, but can be worth it (such as the time I had to create an unliving creature, at Ilam. I designed the ritual to specifically appeal to small children, and invited as many as I could find. The necromantic pantomime (complete with 'he's behind you!!!!'), was well received by an audience of under 10s.).
- To deal with more unruly audience members, bring a few of your more intimidating friends, and station them around the outside of the circle. If people suddenly feel the need to have an irrelevant and loud conversation next to the circle in the middle of your ritual, they can then ask them to be quiet, escort them from the premises, or even just knock them out if you like. There should be a specific and brutal punishment for people who talk at the theatre, so I don't think anyone would object that much.

- If all else fails, just shout louder! Encourage your contributors to do the same. Don't let the disruptions disrupt you. It's your circle and your time. Control what you can control, and ignore what you can't. Don't let it put you off.

CHAPTER 10: CHANGING THE PLAN

Finally, we're going to discuss reasons why you might need to change your plan, often at very short notice. There are many reasons (most of which are outside your direct control) as to why you may need to do this, including (but not limited to):

- The circle changes alignment
- Something happens to the target of your ritual

Looking at these in more depth, let's start with the circle alignment. As already discussed, the alignment of a circle governs the type of energy it is most amenable to shaping and, also, what types of energy it is not amenable to. So, for the most extreme examples I can think of, necromancy in a Wellspring of Good is a bad idea. I appreciate that I very rarely suggest that necromancy is a bad idea, but this is one of the few exceptions. The same is true for creating a healing item or Life Essential in a necromantic circle. For more detailed exposition of this, see my previous books, or talk to your Faction High Ritualist, as circle alignments are outside the scope of this book.

However, sometimes, circle alignments are changed. There are many reasons this can happen – sometimes, a ritualist does so deliberately, other times..... The reasons are again, outside the scope of this text. What we are concerned with here is not how the change happens, simply dealing with it when it does. If you have plenty of notice of the change (for example, the day before), then that will give you time to consider whether you can still create what you'd intended by just changing the focus of how you're achieving the aim, or whether you need to create a new plan. The Watchers and your faction High Ritualist will be able to advise you on this. I would strongly advise against simply going pushing ahead and sticking to your plan without seeking advice. In addition, the change may not be a permanent one. Keep an eye on the circle and what occurs within it, take advice from experienced ritualists and

Watchers, and be prepared to be flexible if you want the best possible outcome. The variables of each circumstance are too great to give a 'one size fits all' plan to deal with it here.

Then, we need to discuss what happens when your target is killed, or indisposed, or the line to their bloodline is severed, or they do something chronically unhelpful prior to the ritual like get themselves turned into a Werewolf the night before.... If you can think of something daft that could happen to a target, it's probably happened at some point.

What you do about it really depends on what has happened to the target and how long you have before the ritual is about to start.

1. For situations where the target has lost the link to their bloodline, or had other pattern-altering occurrences, you have two choices: Incorporate it into your ritual or use the ritual to overwrite the pattern change. So, if we use a change of bloodline as an example, start your ritual by clarifying the situation in your introduction and then either emphasise the target's acceptance of the change, or describe how it doesn't fit with the plan and will be corrected during the ritual. Add your usual caveats about how you're aware that this will impact on the power of the ritual (and of course mock the target mercilessly to gain those all-important entertainment points!)
2. If the target has had their pattern changed (e.g. they've become a werewolf, or vampire or awakened creature overnight), then previously this wouldn't be an issue, but recent changes to how the Cadre of Feast manifests since the Cataclysm has meant that people can only follow a single path of enhancement. They can either have their racial knowledge awakened within them, or they can join a bloodline of Vampires, pack of Werewolves, cabal of Warlocks or order of Paladins, or they can have their pattern enhanced by ritual magic. There are (as always) exceptions to every rule, but the general principle is that, if they have already taken another path, they then cannot be the target of ritual enhancement.

If this is the case, you have two choices: You can either find another target for the same ritual, or the target can drink a Purification potion. These potions are difficult to come by and are expensive, but you may find a Master Alchemist willing and able to provide one for the right price. That really should be a problem for your target, not you, but I'm not going to tell you how to operate. This can be done even if it's the last minute and your paperwork is already submitted, as you can make two changes to your paperwork prior to a ritual. Whilst these are normally the addition of

contributors, it doesn't have to be. A change of target can be one of your paperwork changes.

3. If the target is dead, it's a little more complex, but still entirely fixable. As above, you can simply change your target for the same ritual, even if the paperwork has already been submitted. Your only paperwork change at the circle would be the name of the target. If not, Snowy McTaff gave me an ingenious and elegant solution to this issue that I hadn't previously considered: Change the ritual from one targeting an individual, to one creating an item or items which possess the same or similar abilities and powers as the target individual would have done. So, in this instance, your two paperwork changes would be to amend the Special Creature or Power to a Special item or items, and then an amendment to the effects resulting from the ritual to make them suitable for an item, so if you were seeking to make a special creature with regeneration, then you'd amend your paperwork to create an amulet of regeneration instead. If you were seeking to make a creature that can cast a certain spell, then a wand or torque or similar that can cast the same spell would be the most appropriate solution.

CHAPTER 11: THERE IS SUCH A THING AS TOO MUCH SUCCESS

Just a short note on a couple of points to consider both during and after a ritual to ensure that you don't 'overdo' your success.

Firstly, during a ritual, and this specifically relates to rituals to create a summonable creature, be it daemonic, elemental, ancestral or unliving. These creatures are summoned, and they are also controlled and dismissed – and how easy it is to do so depends on their rank as a creature. The summoned creature's rank will depend on many things, such as the size and power of the circle, the alignment's relative affinity to the type of creature you are seeking to create and, most importantly, the number of relevant contributors adding to said rank in terms of the number of necromancers, theologians etc. as appropriate and the level of their skill.

However, summonable creatures can only exist on the physical plane up to a certain rank. Above this rank, they can only be on the physical plane for very short periods, and must

reside on their relevant plane – the Ancestral plane for ancestral creatures, the Plane of Unlife for unliving creatures etc. So, if you are so successful in creating a powerful summoned creature that you create them with a rank higher than can exist on this plane, then the creature will be successfully created, but will not be able to remain on Erdre ja, and will immediately ascend to their natural home. The Tarantulas found this out the hard way.

So, the lesson here is that, if you are creating a summoned creature, and you are using a powerful circle and many high summoners to do so (whether naturally gifted as summoners or using potions or items to act as such), then you must ensure that you do not over-achieve and send your target straight to another plane. The easiest way to do this is to make sure that you mention during your ritual that you do not wish to create a creature so powerful that they cannot remain within the physical realm. A simple fix, but one that could be the difference between a great result, and a terrible one.

The second one, again learned from the Tarantulas regarding after your ritual, is to be wary of over-zealous healers. When you create a creature in a ritual, it takes time for the power to coalesce within their pattern and for the effects of the ritual to become apparent. If you have created certain types of creatures (unliving being the main one, but there are others), then their final form will not be apparent in the pattern immediately, but a skilled pattern manipulator will be able to immediately see the signs of change. These sometimes take the form of curses. This is a normal part of the process of changing a pattern from life to unlife – one necromancers like myself see very frequently (at least when we are creating an unliving being from a living one, as opposed to raising the departed). Yes, it's painful, and the target will feel unwell – of course they do. Such is the nature of taking the immortal path of unlife and, as the younger races would say, 'no pain, no gain'.

Healers are less used to these things, and tend to panic when they scan the pattern of a cursed individual. DO NOT allow a healer to remove these curses. They will, in a single chant, destroy your work. It has happened – don't let your target be one of them. Try and get them to stay somewhere safe whilst the power coalesces, and give them some peace whilst the trappings of life are purged from their being (and, usually, their stomach). Do not let a healer anywhere near them.

CHAPTER 14. ASK SNOWY MCTAFF

In summary, I have tried to present as many scenarios where things can and will do wrong as I can think of, having seen a great many rituals performed by a wide range of factions and guilds over many, many years. I have consulted with a number of other experienced ritualists, who have added their own examples and ideas to this volume. That said, it is impossible for any ritualist or academic to create an exhaustive list of every possible eventuality, so this merely scratches the surface of the most likely and most common scenarios. If your situation is any more unusual or 'niche' than those contained in this volume, then the only advice I can give you is either to do what feels most appropriate for you and then, if you survive, come and tell me so I can add to future editions for the wider benefit of Erdre ja, or seek advice from elsewhere.

In short, if it's any weirder than any of the stuff in here, Snowy McTaff has probably done it, or is to blame in some way for your predicament, to its probably best to ask him!