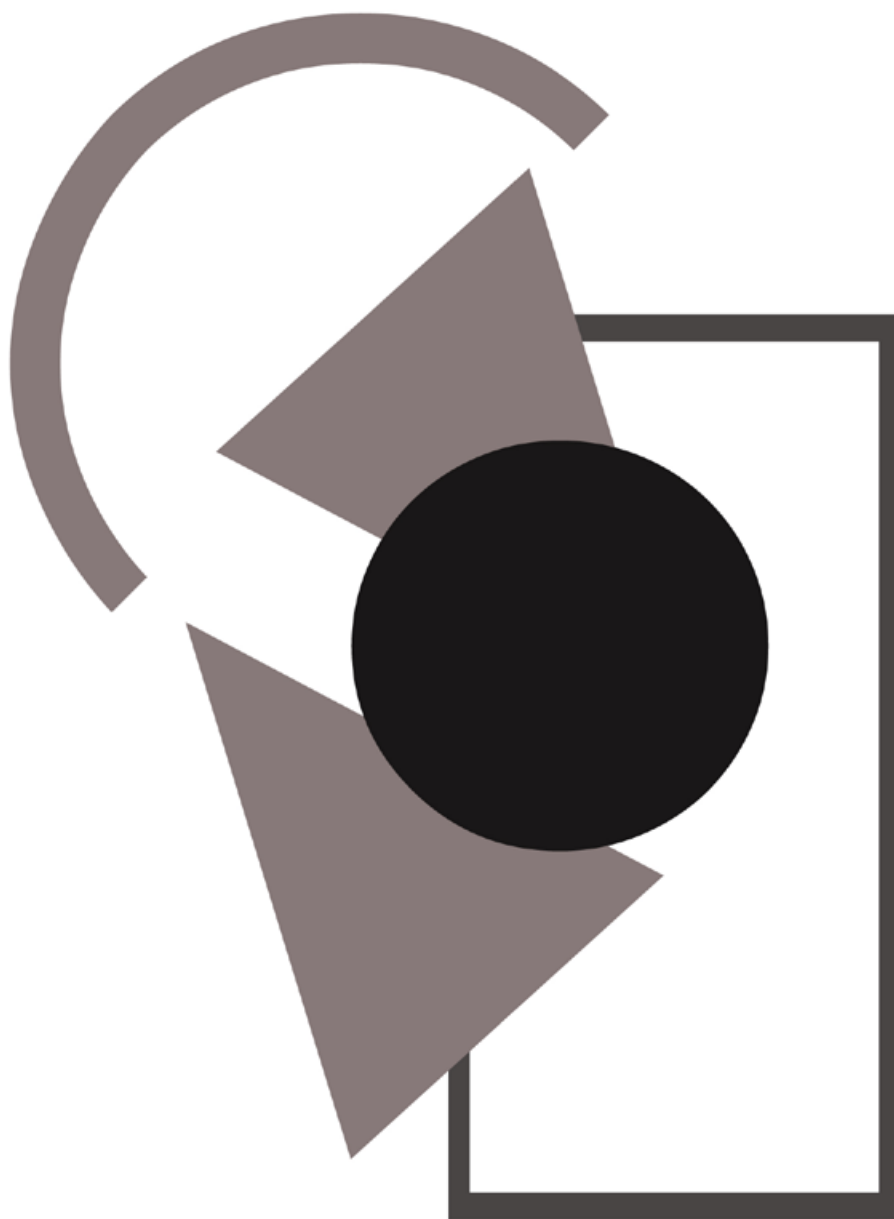


THE RITUAL PRACTITIONER'S
BASIC SURVIVAL GUIDE



The Ritual Practitioner's Basic Survival Guide PDF

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I: INTRODUCTION, BY JOEY DIGGS

Hey, Joey Diggs, here.

So, you want to get into doing Rituals, huh? Sure, it sounds like fun. Summoning spirits, doing Divinations on winning lotto numbers, keeping the Big Bads off your friends' backs. Everyone wants to be the next Merlin. But here's the deal: if you jump in half-cocked, you're going to get your head bitten off by a demon, or lose your forebrain to a misfired personality mod, or some other horror story.

Fact of the matter is, casting rituals is hard. It's like making explosives in your tool shed. Really, it's best to just not do. And, if you're gonna do it, if you absolutely have to do it, make sure you know what the hell you are doing. If you're unsure, if you have doubts... just don't.

There. Hopefully, I've given you a second or two of pause, which is really all I can ask for. I know that you're going to do it anyway. But if you're going to do it, I want to give you a chance to do it right. That's why I agreed to do this little introduction for this Ritual Practitioner's Basic Survival Guide. Because Rachel does it right.

Who is Rachel, and why should you give a damn? I'll tell you who Rachel is. She's Rachel Claremont. She's been shaping energy into form since before you were born. She helped found the Pure Chaos school of thought, back when Michael Jackson was still black and New Age crystals were still the rage. So, yeah, she has the experience. Want more?

Rachel started her trip down her path as an Initiate to the (notorious, and now defunct) Order of the Silver Heavens. She swallowed whole the Gnostic, Enochian, and Egyptian branches of Hermetic School, and when the OSH went about unlocking the Key of Osiris, she was there in the lead Circle, at the foot of the Sphinx. Then House Raeford sent in their troops to shut them down, and Rachel was one of the survivors. Which is saying a lot, really.

Then she studied for six years under the Shaman Wintertree, and worked as a spirit guide for wayward initiates all along the Red Rock Caerra. Having Wintertree as a credential is like saying you got guitar lessons from Jimi Hendrix. Rachel might not be a full red-blooded spirit talker, but she's pretty damn close.

She was (and sometimes still is) a professor at the Anything Factory. You know, the closest thing the chaos mages have to an Ivy League school? The one that Wily Pete is headmaster of? Yeah, that one, the ritual university that has a three year waiting list. And you need a sponsor, too.

Rachel also just might be an outside consultant for the Shining Order, the spell-flingers of House Aruithinea. Those cats are bona-fide experts at shutting down House of Raeford mind control meta rituals, and are the mystical pathfinders of the entire Alliance rebellion. If they think Rachel is worth listening to, then you oughta listen, too.

Last year, Rachel Claremont made an elevator that took a passenger from a Vale in New Orleans directly to the Revel Outer Realm. Do not pass go. Do not collect two hundred dollars. No trekking through Maya, no traveling along a Vispiri for days and days. Just push a button. Ding. And you're in Revel.

I know, because I've been on the elevator.

So listen well to what Rachel has to say. It might keep you around long enough for you to learn a thing or two. Then, when you're some big ritual-tossing hotshot celebrity, tossing back drinks in the Shadow of Paris, you can think back to the first day you picked up Rachel's Ritual Practitioner's Basic Survival Guide, when you read Joey's introduction, and think – man, I'm glad I took all that great advice. Because look where I am now, eh?

There, Rachel, is that what you were looking for?

I'm Joey Diggs, and I approve of this message.

II: NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

This guide is intended for the beginning ritual practitioner, regardless of his or her school or methodology. It should not be seen as a replacement for proper mentorship, attendance of a proper magic university, or formal initiation into a mystery cult. In short, this is a guide. If this is your first source for ritual training, it is recommended that you do not attempt any of the following without experienced supervision.

III: BASIC TERMS: THE PARLANCE OF THE PRACTITIONER

Each School of mysticism has its own language. Most of these specialized jargons serve to illustrate school-specific metaphors. Others are artifacts of the cultures that these schools arose from. Regardless, terms of this nature are meant to communicate meaning, and are not worth debating over. There is no more of a "proper" way to describe ritual-useful objects (crosses, wands, and the like) than there is a "proper" style of clothing. They all serve the same purpose – they focus the caster's mind and helps him visualize the intended effect.

In the interest of clear communication, I will use the following words to describe various aspects of ritual magic. I understand that many of my fellow Practitioners will object to the following

list. The terms here are as generic as possible, without losing the intended definition, in order to avoid showing favoritism to any one School of metaphysics.

Astral Plane: Plane that overlays the physical, and is made up of various intensities of Thoughtforms.

Astral Projection: The practice of sending one's mind from the Physical Plane into the Astral Plane.

Breakdown: A kind of Ritual failure, when no effect results, and the Practitioner suffers mild Burn.

Burn: Harmful side-effects of Ritual failure.

Crash: The worst kind of Ritual failure, when everything that can go wrong, does. Potentially fatal.

Mana: Personalized, metaphysical energy; what a Practitioner uses to build Ritual effects.

Miss Fire: A kind of ritual failure, when an unintended effect is the result, instead of the desired one.

Paradigm: A worldview, impressed upon an area of reality by people's beliefs.

Practitioner: Anyone who performs magic Rituals.

Rules: How a School of Ritual magic describes the way it's method of metaphysics works.

School: Any branch of Ritual belief, with its own system of magic and worldview.

Thoughtform: Anything on the Astral Plane, be it a reflection of the physical world, a spirit, or a being who is Projected.

Tools: Any of the objects used in a Ritual, which help focus a Practitioner's mind.

IV: ROLES OF A PRACTITIONER

Before one begins the journey to Ritual experience, it is best to know where one is likely to end up. The role of a Ritual Practitioner in Gifted Society is a highly specialized one. All supernatural beings can learn, intuitively, how to manipulate various aspects of reality. Ritual magic, on the other hand, requires diligent attention and scholarly focus. Excellence in the field requires a powerful, trained will and a wide base of knowledge and experience.

A proper analogy might be to compare a Practitioner to a modern medical professional. One might know many different procedures (Rituals), but knowing when, and under what circumstances, to perform each is necessary. Otherwise, more harm than good may come of the empowered individual's willful actions. And even if the right procedure is done for the right reason, a single mistake can mean disaster.

As a Ritual Practitioner, one can expect to spend long hours doing research into what those who have come before have done. Ritual Magic has an incredibly long and varied history, and each School of magic has its own model as to how the cosmos works, and it's own catalog of Rituals. It is safest to follow an established School, as opposed to a new one (such as Pure Chaos), since an older School has a larger body of metaphysical research. Complete understanding of a School's path takes a long time.

Ritual Magic incurs a personal cost to the Practitioner. Each Ritual takes personal energy, called Mana. Once Mana is expended, it takes time to rejuvenate. For our purposes, think of Mana as the bricks that one uses to build a house, where the house is the intended effect of a Ritual. It is vital to know oneself well enough to predict if you have enough Mana to complete the Ritual. Running out of Mana is a sure way to a Breakdown, or even a Crash.

Ritual magic has inherent risks. Breakdowns and Crashes cause Burn, which is a catch-all term for Bad Things. Sometimes Burn means physical illness, disorientation, or fatigue. Other times, Burn can cause psychological problems, permanent mystical scarring, or death. Rituals are not for the foolhardy, nor the faint-of-heart.

On the other hand, respected Practitioners are necessary for Gifted Society to function. Our lives as Gifted are filled with the occult. Thoughtforms affect our lives on a semi-regular basis, and like the shaman of old, it is our job to negotiate between the physical world and the spirit world. Also, Rituals can have effects beyond those of the individual abilities of a reality-bending (but Ritual-less) Gifted. Affecting things far away, and various divinations, are prime examples of where Rituals fill gaps in the needs of Gifted Society.

Mastery level Rituals are how Gifted create Citadels, the mystically-created places of power that mean so much to our hidden, supernatural civilization. Citadels mean protection and power. There isn't a Faction around that wouldn't want another master Practitioner in their ranks. Even as a journeyman Practitioner, you will be regularly called on as an expert in both matters arcane and mundane.

Gifted Society expects Practitioners to know about the supernatural in general, and in particular about dangers like hazardous Others (Vampyres, Demons, angry Spirits) and Nightmare Storms. Practitioners are often called in to divine answers to mysteries, to remove curses, and to discover otherwise hidden Vales.

In addition to these, Practitioners are utilized as guides in daily life. In times of old, "wise ones" served society by performing Rituals that helped in everyday things, like finding love or ensuring financial success. It should be no surprise that love potions, healing ointments, and fertility control are areas of specialty for many old Ritual Schools. This is less so in modern times, when modern medicine and advanced communications technology can mimic many old stand-by Rituals. However, when mundane methods fail, Gifted turn to a handy local Practitioner with sure regularity.

V: INFORMING OTHERS' EXPECTATIONS

If you are a new member of a Circle, especially a group that is not familiar with your Ritual School, it is important that you communicate to them the realities of Ritual performance.

First and foremost, Rituals take time to perform. They are not the kind of thing one tries to accomplish in the middle of a firefight, any more than the working of a complicated mathematical proof would be.

Second, Rituals have risk. This risk not only pertains to the Practitioner, but to anyone connected to the Ritual (or its target),

and to anyone nearby, as well. Rituals are never “safe;” they are merely as safe as the Practitioner can make them.

Third, Rituals are demanding. There are Rules and Tools for Rituals that are unwise to go without. If a Ritual needs sea salt in order to work flawlessly, then table salt shouldn't be substituted unless it is absolutely necessary. The more a Ritual falls out of its intended parameters, the greater the risk of things going wrong.

Fourth, Rituals cannot be made up on the fly, any more than physics experiments can be made up on the fly. Creation of new Rituals takes a great deal of time and energy, much like proper scientific method.

VI: BASIC RITUAL THEORY

During a working, the Practitioner's personal energies, or Mana, is released and worked into a form which can affect reality. The Practitioner does this while visualizing the desired effect as he works through the methodology set forth by his particular School of thought. When the Mana is properly finished in shape and form, the Practitioner releases the effect into the universe and uses his force of will to make the effect take hold.

Mana is a generic word for personal, metaphysical energy. Each person is capable of gathering Mana within himself or herself. Unconsciously, people gather and release Mana all of the time; it is part of what makes humans what they are.

A Practitioner takes this raw Mana and shapes it according to occult, or hidden, doctrine. These methodologies are called Schools. There is a wide variety of different Schools of Ritual Magic. Hermeticism, Wicca, Voodoo, Pure Chaos, Shamanism, and Christianity are some such Schools.

Each School has its own worldview, and understanding of the principles of how and why magic, and the cosmos, functions. In a sense, each School is “right” in its thinking, and each School is wrong, as well. This is because the universe behaves by different rules in different places. We call these different rules to be different Paradigms.

The Paradigm of Vatican City is very different from the Paradigm of the Australian Outback. Therefore, if an Aboriginal Shaman attempts to work a Ritual in the Vatican, he will find the Paradigm resistant to any formed Ritual effects. Another way to consider this is to imagine that each Ritual School creates differently “shaped” Ritual effects, and that some Paradigms will accept these shapes easier than others.

Each School will have its own methods of affecting reality. These methods are the School's Rituals. No two Schools are completely alike, but there is some overlap at times, especially if one School grew out of an earlier one, or of two Schools branched from an earlier, third one.

A simple four part through-chart of what happens when a Practitioner performs a Ritual is as follows:

- A): Practitioner Contains Mana
- B): Practitioner Focuses Mana Through a Ritual
- C): Practitioner Creates an Effect out of Mana
- D): Practitioner Forces Effect Into Reality Through Act of Will

Another metaphor would be to compare Mana to raw material, a Ritual as a blueprint, the working of a Ritual to be the crafting of the raw material according to the blueprint, the Effect to be the end product, and the final step to be the unveiling of the end product to the world.

VII: WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT: YEAR ONE

A Practitioner's first year is a difficult one. Failure will be common, and the Practitioner will experience Burn for the first time. Chances are, you are being mentored, and will be formally Initiated into one School of thought or another. If this is not the case, consider doing so; the support and guidance of experienced Practitioners is highly suggested. Striking out on your own, especially when you are new to Rituals, is ill advised.

You are going to learn basic rites. Don't skip on these. Many basic rites will become building blocks in longer “Ritual chains” later in your career, and should be considered fundamental. Also fundamental is the sharpening of your mind and your will. When you begin, your ego is likely a soft and pliable thing, and unsuited for heavy Ritual work. Build and expand on this, and get to know exactly who you are and who you want to be.

This first year, a Practitioner will be learning the most basic of Rituals. Effects will be very unlikely to be perceived in any physical way, and instead manipulate perception and knowledge.

VIII: WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT: YEAR TWO THROUGH FOUR

A Practitioner's early years are ones of growth and change. As you interact with the Ritual School's methodology, it will have an impact on your worldview and sense of self. “Beginner's Bravado” can set in, and should be kept in check. This is when a young Practitioner, high on his first taste of power, begins taking greater and greater chances with Ritual Magic.

During these years, a Practitioner will be learning helpful, intermediate Rituals that can affect the physical world. If the Practitioner follows the Pure Chaos School, he is likely experimenting with new, personalized Rituals that he has modified from previously learned ones.

IX: WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT: YEAR FIVE THROUGH EIGHT

During these years, a Practitioner is coming into his own in full. His knowledge base is becoming wide and strong, and he has a long list of possible Rituals he is comfortable with performing. These years are ones of growing confidence and flexibility. A Practitioner will begin experiments in creating their own Rituals from scratch, even if they follow a School of rigid outside doctrine.

Also during these years, the Practitioner is encouraged to explore areas of expertise within the School. By this time, one will have had regular experience with a variety of effects. If the Practitioner found one or these to be particularly enticing or well-matched for their personal style, he will want to build on that further. Areas of common expertise would be things like Divination, manipulation of Mana energy, or the mechanisms of fate and fortune.

X: TIPS FOR SUCCESS

DO: Make the time.

If you are up against a deadline, make certain you have enough time to complete the Ritual, in full, before you begin. Rushing a Ritual is a bad idea, as it dramatically increases your chances of making a mistake. Also, suddenly ceasing a Ritual causes all of the energy invested to collapse in a nasty fashion, and will make for a nasty Crash and Burn.

DO: Have all of your Tools prepared and at hand.

These help concentrate your mind on your desired effect, and going without can contribute to a Miss Fire (or even a Crash).

DO: Follow all of the Ritual's Rules, if at all possible.

Again, these help you build put the energy into the correct form, and create the effect you want. Going without can contribute to a Miss Fire (or even a Crash).

DO: Chose an appropriate place to perform the Ritual.

A Vale that is attuned to your School's paradigm is best, and a Citadel (away from a Vale) is second best. If neither are available, invest the time and energy to alter your environment to suit your School ahead of time. Rituals that "belong" in the paradigm they are performed in will work much more often than Rituals that run counter to the area's paradigm. Running counter in this fashion is difficult, and requires a very powerful will. Going against the grain in this way can contribute to a Breakdown (or even a Crash).

DON'T: Bite off more than you can chew.

There are reasons why various temples and Schools kept the most powerful Rituals hidden from their less experienced pupils. One of the main ones is that attempting any of these is difficult, even for an experienced, well-versed Practitioner. A fresh Initiate who tries to change the weather, for example, is going to Crash and Burn.

DON'T: Perform a Ritual in front of an unbeliever.

This is the flip side of the "Chose an appropriate place" rule. If you are foolish enough to work a Ritual, especially one that has a tangible, physical effect, in front of a mundane who doesn't follow your School of belief, you are practically begging for a Breakdown, and possibly a Crash. On top of this, the unbeliever is going to cause ripples in the Shroud, as their mind struggles with what they have witnessed. These ripples can cause Nightmare Storms, and are Bad News.

DON'T: Antagonize spirits.

Spirits, or animated, intelligent Thoughtforms, can be affected by certain Rituals. It can be exciting to have the ability to affect otherwise untouchable spirits, but spirits make for dangerous enemies. If you are dealing with a troublesome spirit, first, attempt to negotiate. If this fails, ward the area as best you can and maintain vigilance. If the spirit still won't leave you alone, then consider binding it to a distant object or otherwise banish it from yourself, your home and possessions, and your loved ones. Remember, spirits are hard to wear down, they never sleep, and they are almost impossible to destroy.

XI: RITUAL CHAINS

There is a reason why certain Rituals are habitually performed in a preset order – each builds on the previous one's effect, creating momentum. Each success makes the following Ritual easier to work, and can make an otherwise too-difficult Ritual come within reach.

The first Ritual in a common "chain" is likely one of the fundamental Rituals of the School, usually followed by an empowerment, or possibly an activation Ritual. Here are two well-known Ritual Chains within the Hermetic School.

For building to a medium difficulty Rituals

Minor Relaxation Ritual
Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (LBRP)
Intended medium difficulty Ritual

For building to high difficulty Rituals

Minor Relaxation Ritual
Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (LBRP)
Lesser Charging Ritual

Sleep 8 hours, rest and recharge. Begin again within 12 hours of Lesser Charging Ritual

Minor Relaxation Ritual
Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (LBRP)
Greater Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram
Lesser Releasing the Charge Ritual
Intended high difficulty Ritual

Until one is absolutely confident in one's abilities, following a chain approach is recommended. There are advantages to having a greater degree of Ritual control and Mana command, and being able to forgo Ritual chains is one of them.

XII: FINAL WORDS

I hope you have found this Ritual Practitioner's Basic Survival Guide to be helpful. Again, this guide in now way is meant to replace formal, personalized mentorship or training, but instead is meant to give insight into what a Ritual Practitioner has to look out for. May your journey be an enlightening one.

- Rachel Claremont