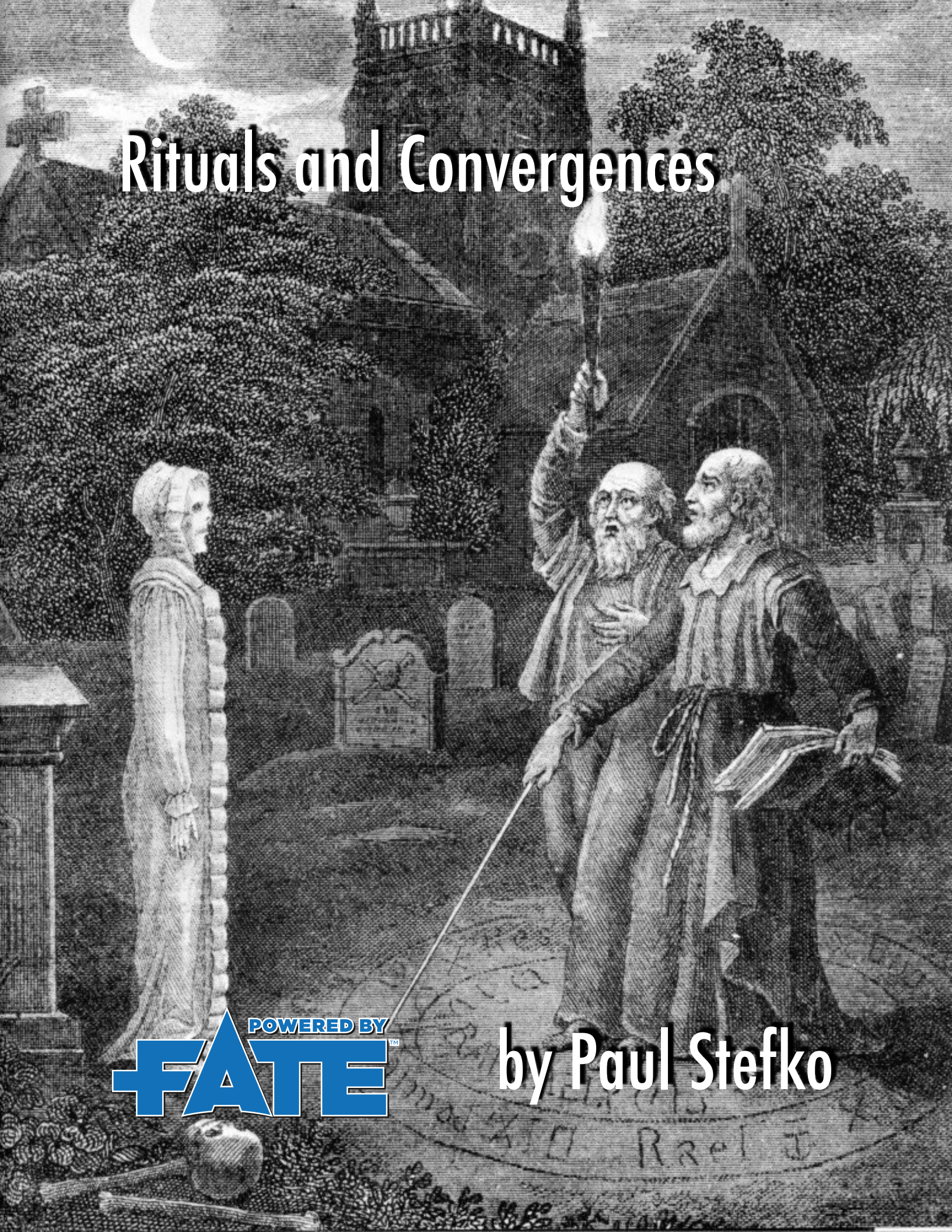
Rituals and Convergences



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by Paul Stefko

Rituals and Convergences

A short magic system for **Fate Core** *by Paul Stefko*

Ritual Magic as a Challenge

Fate Core defines a special structure for related actions called a challenge. A challenge is defined as "a series of overcome actions that you use to resolve an especially complicated or dynamic situation." The rules are simple: make two or more overcome actions, each using a different skill, and determine the outcome of the challenge based on the overall results of the actions (success, failure, and costs).

This structure can easily be used as the basis for a ritual magic system. In fact, the example of a challenge in ***Fate Core*** is just that. Different actions can represent the hours of preparation, cleansing a ritual space, gathering materials, and so on. A final action (typically using **Lore**) concludes the ritual with the actual shaping of magical energy into a (potential) effect.

So if Lore is the actual "do magic" skill, what other skills can you use in a ritual magic challenge? Here are some ideas.

- You need to gather acolytes, townspeople, or other sympathetic folk to perform minor roles in the ritual (holding candles, chanting, and so on). You must roll **Contacts** to call upon the required numbers.
- The ritual requires rare or expensive ingredients that aren't available to just anyone. You need the right **Resources** to acquire them.
- The object of the ritual is an actual object, a complicated mechanism or a beautiful piece of art. You must succeed at a **Crafts** action to actually construct it, possibly using those expensive materials from above.
- Some ritual components are not physical materials or objects but rather *information*, such as a target's true name or the exact date and time for a divination. Someone will need to **Investigate** to gather the right clues.
- The ritual is simply long, a true test of endurance. The caster must rely on **Physique** or **Will** to maintain the ritual for as long as it takes.
- Creating a safe space conducive to a magical ritual may involve treating with the invisible spirits that inhabit the area. Having a good **Rapport** with them will make the ritual go smoothly.

So, you've picked a couple skills and everyone is ready to roll some dice. But how should you interpret the results? Fate Core is a little vague on the topic, but it's safe to

say that if the majority of the actions succeed, the ritual should go at least mostly in the group's favor.

A clearer and more interesting way to handle things is to encourage success with cost heavily. At each step of the challenge, decide on a way that the character can succeed, even if it's with some minor or serious setback. That way, the ritual is performed with all the pieces in place, but the challenge is still only a partial success because the group has racked up a series of complications along the way.

Stunts alter things in fun ways. The **Ritualist** stunt on page 91 of ***Fate Core*** is the most obvious, allowing you to substitute Lore for any other skill and letting you use it twice in the same challenge. Someone with the **Money Talks** stunt (FC123) might be able to bribe the spirits into cleansing the area. What kind of ritual could benefit from **Talk the Talk** (FC99), hmm? If you choose to focus on ritual magic challenges in your campaign, you may want to design some more challenge-focused stunts, such as these examples.

- **Energy Reserve (Physique)**: You can spend your own life force to shore up the energy of a ritual. If you are involved in a challenge and any action fails, you can check off a physical stress box to add its value to the failed roll. Stress boxes checked in this way do not clear until the end of the next scene.
- **Only the Finest (Resources)**: You search out all the best ritual components, occasionally procuring material of extreme potency. When you succeed with style on a Resources action during a challenge, you create a situation aspect with a free invoke instead of gaining a boost.
- **Meditative Style (Will)**: Your magical style emphasizes a clear mind and perfect discipline over esoteric research. In a challenge, you can use Will in place of Lore, allowing you to use Will twice in the same challenge.

Convergences

The Bronze Rule (FC270) says that you can extend character traits to non-character game elements like objects and locations. It's not a leap to giving those traits to units of time as well. The most useful block of time in a session of Fate is the scene. What if a scene could have aspects and stunts independent of the location or any characters or objects within it? Situation aspects hint at this, but the rules assume they are connected to something tangible.

With magic, however, a ritualist can create a Convergence of mystic energy that infuses a moment in time without being bound in an object or being. A Convergence is difficult for mundane characters to overcome, as it takes more magic to unweave the original ritual.

A Convergence is created through a ritual magic challenge. The challenge is set up as described above, but the results function like an extended create an advantage action. A successful ritual creates a number of situation aspects and possibly stunts that are available for a single scene. For each roll in the challenge, use the following outcomes instead of the normal ones for an overcome action.

- **Failure**: You create an aspect on the Convergence, but someone else gets a free invoke to use against you. You should word the aspect to show that the other character benefits instead—work it out with the recipient in whichever way makes the most sense. (You can't simply fail at any step of the ritual challenge.)
- **Tie or Success**: You create an aspect on the Convergence and gain a free invocation for it.
- **Success with style**: You create a stunt on the Convergence and set who can benefit from it. Or you can treat this as a Success, instead.

There will always be an effect when you attempt to create a Convergence. If you fail a number of rolls, the magic goes at least partly out of your control. Whatever happens, the Convergence takes effect in the next scene. You can't "wait out" magic that doesn't go your way.

As with any aspect, a character can invoke or compel those on a Convergence, and they can use the create an advantage action to reveal or leverage them. However, the ritualists define who can benefit from stunts on a Convergence. The criteria can be anything from "those of us in this room now" to "anyone who knows the magic word."

This is a way to use ritual magic to "gear up" for a big scene. It doesn't matter where that scene takes place or which characters are present. Your magic will follow the story.

Convergence Aspects

Convergence aspects can be invoked for the normal benefits in Fate Core, but they can also be invoked for effects that go beyond +2 or a reroll. These effects are magical and go beyond what a normal person may do on their own.

When rolling for a Convergence ritual, each action can produce an aspect. If the player creating an aspect can think up an appropriate effect, jot it down. If nothing comes to mind at the time, don't worry about. Later, during the Convergence scene, something may happen that suggests a good effect. The player who created the aspect has final say over its effect.

Invoking for effect requires a free invoke or a fate point, just like invoking an aspect for a bonus. Here are some examples of Convergence aspects that can be invoked for effect.

Everything In Its Place

Effect: Spend a fate point to anchor yourself to a zone. While you are in that zone, you cannot be forced to leave it. If you leave the chosen zone, you can give up your anchor at any time to teleport instantly back to that zone.

Perfect Coordination

Effect: Spend a fate point to instantly know the location of everyone else included as part of the Convergence ritual.

Scrapyard Spirits

Effect: Spend a fate point to summon a golem made of broken machinery and trash in the area. Treat this golem as an Average nameless NPC that follows your orders for the remainder of the scene or until taken out. Only one such golem can be active at a time.

Another more general effect of Convergence aspects is to *detonate* them. When you detonate a Convergence aspect, you must explain how you are using the magic of that aspect such that no one will be able to use it again. If you can do this to everyone's satisfaction, you get to invoke the aspect once for free.

Once you've invoked the aspect, it goes away and the situation changes for the worse—or at least the more dangerous. Detonating an aspect creates a new situation aspect, which represents how the old aspect was destroyed, and how it wrecked things. That last bit is the key—it has to wreck things, to complicate things. It's no fair to detonate that **Boon of the Fire Spirits** and replace it with something boring like **Scorch Marks**. Replace it with something big and flashy and destructive, like **The Building Is on Fire!** or **The Ceiling Is Collapsing!**. The new situation aspect must always make things more tenuous for everyone, and should always be an imminent threat.

Some examples of Convergence aspects that can be detonated and potential dangers they may lead to:

- **Necromantic Energies** can be detonated in a graveyard, making **The Dead Rise!**
- **Glimpse of the Future** can be detonated, leaving **Possibility In Flux**
- **Spirit Allies** can be detonated (possibly destroying an important spirit in the process), creating a **Horde of Angry Spirits**

It should be easy to think of ways to detonate a Convergence aspect. Of course, once you've detonated it, the aspect is gone. You can't invoke it for any benefit after that.

Convergence Stunts

Convergence stunts are triggered stunts as defined in the ***Fate System Toolkit***.

> *When you use this stunt mechanic, you create stunts that trigger under a specific narrative condition, require a skill roll, and have a specific effect as a result.*

Triggered stunts relating to Convergences allow individual characters to leverage a convergence for additional effect. This can represent a ritualist's personal expertise, even if they enacted the convergence with others.

> **My Fellows' Strength**: When you participate in a Convergence ritual with allies, roll Lore against Fair (+2) opposition. If you succeed, pick an aspect belonging to one ally and gain a free invoke on it. If you succeed with style, pick one aspect of two allies (or two aspects if you enacted the ritual with a single ally) and gain a free invoke on each.

Or a convergence can imbue a scene with a triggered stunt. Any character who has access to the stunt can make use of it when it would trigger.

> **Life Drain**: When you inflict a physical consequence on an opponent, roll Will against your opponent's Will. If you succeed, you may spend a fate point and invoke that consequence to clear all of your physical stress boxes. If you succeed with style, you may do so for free.

Convergence stunts represent the magic of the Convergence ritual responding to particular actions and bending the results toward more extraordinary outcomes. If you spend the action and roll well, you should get a potent result.

Legalese

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