

THE RITE OF SPRING

a primal live-action adaptation of Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps*
by Tayler Stokes for the Golden Cobra Challenge 2018

The Rite of Spring is a live-action adaptation of the ballet *Le Sacre du printemps* by Igor Stravinsky.

As a live-action adaptation, *The Rite* is a freeform avant-garde ballet in which the players improvise dances made of jumps, spins, stomps, claps, shouts, and more through a choreographic representation of a ritual sequence depicting games, war, blessings, and human sacrifice.

The play experience is a high-exertion primal release of energy as players dart about the room, make lots of noise, and interact with each other through dance, accompanied by a subjective narrative.

Premise

Le Sacre du printemps is subtitled as *Pictures of Pagan Russia*. Based in pagan Russian folklore, but lacking a concrete plot, *Le Sacre* follows a sequence of episodes that depict pagan rituals in which a sacrifice is chosen to propitiate the ancestors in order to compel them to bless them with a bountiful spring. Ultimately, the Chosen One dances themselves to death to complete the sacrifice. *The Rite of Spring*, as a live-action scenario, is a high-activity play experience that capitalizes on physical embodiment of emotion and primal urges such as shouting and dancing.

Principles

- I. **Narrative is Subjective.** The “plot” is sparse. Play is physical and quasi-ritualistic. The narrative is whatever you think it means; consensus is unimportant. *Follow each other into whatever strange beauty you find.*
- II. **Play is Non-verbal.** You are encouraged to make noise as you like. But words are not a part of

play, and should be treated as such – *except for the whispered directions given by facilitators.*

- III. **Embrace your Body.** This is a very active scenario. But you don't have to participate in motions if you aren't comfortable doing so, on account of clothing, confidence, or other mobility constraints. *Treat held postures and subtle movements as profound.*
- IV. **You're in Charge.** Individuals will lead group dances at certain moments. Point at someone to nominate them for becoming the lead. Point back to accept. You may also leave play at any point. *Pass leadership as early and often as you like.*
- V. **Repeat.** Whatever you do, do it again. And again. Make small changes as you go.
- VI. **Overreact.** Everything that happens, large and small, is immediately significant. Respond with rage, joy, terror, distress. *Show others just how important their maneuvers are.*
- VII. **Keep the Tempo Slow.** Think slow heartbeats or long second. That might seem slow, and it is – but it allows players to fill in the beats with movements and sounds. *Demonstrate and recalibrate as needed.*

Logistical Details

You will need **two to four facilitators** (as desired); **four groups of three to ten players**; approximately two hours, a **large conference room**, yard, courtyard, or meadow; **washable non-toxic markers in five distinct colors** (ex: black, blue, pink, green, orange); to **print player handouts**, double sided, and carefully tear them out. Loose clothing and bare feet are recommended. Optionally play to a recording of *Le Sacre du printemps*, the duration of the main play sequence is just about right.

Facilitation

During play the facilitators will take the role of Sages. This is an in-fiction alibi for the facilitator to convey directions to the players in play; you will dance, direct, and consult the text and other Sages as needed in order to guide the rite to completion. The players belong to one of four groups with different functions within the rite.

If play seems like it will be a bit of a free-for-all, you're correct! Getting swept up in the moment is more important than anything else. Consider watching the ballet on YouTube to see the kinds of movements involved. The ballet is much more structured (obviously) - imagine lots more activity that's also improvised with moments of meaning emerging from the madness before being washed away by other interactions. The biggest hurdle is getting buy-in from the players since play feels ridiculous at first. Workshop thoroughly to break the ice.

Directing Play

Review the scenario for context, below. Each episode is roughly three minutes. Below are your Sage Commands - the tools you will need to guide play moment to moment. Visualize how you will direct certain episodes. In play, use the Sage Commands frequently.

- I. **Pointing:** Direct by pointing. Pull them too you, send them away, send them to the floor, point at someone to have them lead.
- II. **Lift up or Press Down:** Escalate or calm down, respectively.
- III. **Circle Arms Overhead:** Enter a frenzy. All are free from their group's movements.
- IV. **Whisper:** Verbally convey an instruction to a player.
- V. When they **cup their ears with their hands**, they need you to come and give them verbal directions.

Play is as it's best when you are making lots of noise, moving around strangely, and/or holding an unnatural posture while the storm of play rages around you. Help the players find these moments. Whatever they do, **react strongly** to it.

Expect to use the **Lift Up/Press Down** often to direct play, especially between episodes that escalate or focus on individuals (I - III, XI).

Expect to **Whisper** to give specific instructions to individuals (II, III, VI, IX), and to the Chosen One (VIII, IX, X).

Coordinate with the other Sages. Take turns directing the group and consulting the text for the next episode. You may whisper to each other as needed.

When in doubt, **Lift Up**.

Briefing

Present the above premise and principles sections. The workshopping will be rather extensive. This is intentional. For these techniques to be applied effectively, the play group needs to first "give themselves over" to the wild movement of play.

Workshops

Lead the workshops as non-verbally as possible, but it's okay if you have to just say what you mean. Expect to really conduct emphasis with your arms to draw attention to what you want them to mimic.

- I. **Silence:** Sit on the floor in silence for about a minute. Catch players' gaze and hold them in an intense staredown for a moment before releasing them and moving on.
- II. **Simon Says:** Break the stationary silence to suddenly lead them through some of the movement/accent/interaction/noise prompts; see the list on the player handouts. Begin with noise (clapping, stomps, etc.) then add other movements, accents, and interactions. Introduce them to the slow tempo or of the dance. You don't have to cover literally every prompt; it won't be long before you don't even need the prompts at all. Conduct emphasis with your arms. They will watch first, then join.
- III. **Pointing:** Pass leadership by pointing. Help them learn to follow each other. Insist that they conduct emphasis with their arms as well. After a few rounds embellishing the lead's directions by filling it out with smaller maneuvers.
- IV. **Player Support:** Practice the Player Support techniques on the Player Handouts while performing

maneuvers. There is no need for physical contact beyond holding hands and touching shoulders, though players will be in close proximity to one another and players may bump into each other. Verbally explain the Sage Commands just in case there is any misunderstanding.

- V. **Appoint Sages:** You will need one to three Sages in addition to yourself. Appoint them as you like; they may opt out if so desired.

Split the players into four separate groups of three or more, equal or not. You will have to explain verbally through this section.

- I. **Develop Stance and Gait:** Pass out the Player Handouts, one to each group. In addition to practicing their unique instructions, they will need to develop a posture and gait. The posture should be an unnatural contortion of the body, the gait heavy, and should be imbued with the emotional attitude of their groups. These unique maneuvers are essentially a group's role in the rite.
- II. **Develop Dances:** Using the maneuver components (as workshopped, and summarized on the back of the handout), each group should develop three short dances (10 seconds max) to be used in play. This will give the players something familiar to draw upon in play. Give them several minutes.
- III. **Paint Bodies:** Pass out a colored marker to each group. Draw patterns on faces and other visible skin. Sages, keep the darkest color for yourselves and do the same. Cover your faces and skin with strange markings. Treat this as significant and powerful.
- IV. **Present a Dance:** Each group leads all players through one of their dances. Each group applies their posture and gait to the presented dance. Practice the Sage Commands in context.
- V. **Conflict:** Direct two groups to "fight" the other two groups through dance. This workshop practices both interaction and resolving conflict. Players act upon each other through dance and overreact to what transpires. Dance-fight until there is a clear victor. Help them escalate (Lift Up) as needed. See what happens after the fights are over.

Bring everyone together to workshop the Chosen One techniques.

- I. **Explain:** One player will be selected as the Chosen One in play, but we'll workshopping that role together as a group. The Chosen One will be selected and receive instructions in play.
- II. **Freeze in Terror:** Stare off into the distance and shiver in fear. Disregard everything around you.
- III. **Broken Body:** Dance however you like. With each clap by the Sages a part of your body breaks (player's choice). Keep dancing while portraying the injury. When you can no longer dance, collapse.
- IV. **End with a full-group Frenzy.** Explain that a frenzy means that they are free of their group's specific directions, all may frenzy as they like.
- V. **Take a break.** When players return they cluster into their groups and take to the floor.

Debriefing

- I. After the sacrifice is complete, sit on the floor in silence for approximately 30 seconds. You may now speak normally. Inform them that a bountiful spring was had, thanks to the sacrifice. Thank everyone for playing. Explain that the debrief is optional.
- II. Split them into small groups of three to five. First question: what happened?
- III. Remix groups. Second question: What was the most vivid moment of play for you? Third question: What was your favorite thing that someone else did?
- IV. Finally, invite them to speak with those they shared a potent moment with. Release the group.

Acknowledgements

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Scenario

PART I

THE ADORATION OF THE EARTH

I. Augurs of Spring

A celebration of spring in the hills. The sages see the future in the presented dances.

All groups begin on floor. Sage wakes each group one at a time Each presents dance while others watch and react if woken, or listen if not. React to the futures you behold in the dances.

II. Ritual of Abduction

Arriving from the river, all groups begin the dance of abduction.

Groups now interact. Dance at each other; this is play. Confront each other with dance. Invite interaction.

III. Ritual of the Rival Tribes

Larger group splits into two in opposition and begin the ritual.

Dancing is now fighting. This is a war depicted in ritual, slaughter and perish. Escalate.

IV. Procession of the Sage

Sages interrupt the games, leads holy procession to bless the Earth.

Sages interrupt, stops everything. Direct them towards blessing the Earth. Show them how.

V. Dance of the Earth

All break into a passionate dance, sanctifying and becoming one with the Earth.

Bring to full frenzy. Culminate with collective screaming then drop to the floor as if dead.

PART II

THE SACRIFICE

VI. Mystic Circles of the Children

Through mysterious games, the children select the Chosen One by fate.

Sages, lead them to follow each other in concentric circles in opposite directions. Compel them to make offerings and let fate determine the Chosen One.

VII. Glorification of the Chosen One

Honor the Chosen One with a marital dance.

Full group dance led by Chosen One, keep others focused on them.

VIII. Evocation of the Ancestors

The ancestors are called upon to accept the sacrifice.

Guide the Chosen One and the rest to pass the Chosen One around the room. Chosen One should get pulled into dances of others before being passed again.

IX. Ritual Action of the Ancestors

The sages pull the Chosen One to the center, to present the offering to the Ancestors.

Escalate intensity, players should copy dances of other groups; direct accordingly. Chosen One stays frozen in terror, shivering and staring at the ceiling.

X. Sacrificial Dance

The Chosen One dances to death in the sacrificial dance.

Chosen One dances as body breaks; fall down, get up, keep dancing while portraying injury, struggle. Full frenzy for everyone else. When Chosen One dies, collective screaming then drop to floor dead.

Player Handouts

PREPERUŠA

Your unique vocalization is an **angry buzz** (BZZZ!). Everyone may also **grunt, scream, and speak in gibberish**. **Mourn** and **lament** through your interactions.

When you take to the floor, **hide**. Curl up and cover yourself.

Workshop a contorted posture, a heavy gait, and three dances as a group. Default to these whenever possible. Imbue your movements accordingly.

Cup hands behind ears to request a facilitator.

Use hands to block line of sight with person to disengage from an interaction. *Don't block your vision.*

Call "CUTI" and raise hand to stop play. Everyone stops and raises hand as well. *Use to avoid an accident.*

KOSTROMA

Your unique vocalization is a **fearsome shout** (HAAH!). Everyone may also **grunt, scream, and speak in gibberish**. **Taunt** and **play** through your interactions.

When you take to the floor, **splay**. Spread out like the fallen dead.

Workshop a contorted posture, a heavy gait, and three dances as a group. Default to these whenever possible. Imbue your movements accordingly.

Cup hands behind ears to request a facilitator.

Use hands to block line of sight with person to disengage from an interaction. *Don't block your vision.*

Call "CUTI" and raise hand to stop play. Everyone stops and raises hand as well. *Use to avoid an accident.*

MASLENITSA

Your unique vocalization is a **dangerous growl** (GRRR!). Everyone may also **grunt, scream, and speak in gibberish**. **Curse** and **purify** through your interactions.

When you take to the floor, **sleep**. Enjoy comfort and rest.

Workshop a contorted posture, a heavy gait, and three dances as a group. Default to these whenever possible. Imbue your movements accordingly.

Cup hands behind ears to request a facilitator.

Use hands to block line of sight with person to disengage from an interaction. *Don't block your vision.*

Call "CUTI" and raise hand to stop play. Everyone stops and raises hand as well. *Use to avoid an accident.*

KOLEDA

Your unique vocalization is a **threatening hiss** (HSSS!). Everyone may also **grunt, scream, and speak in gibberish**. **Warn** and **intimidate** through your interactions.

When you take to the floor, **crouch against the ground**, ready to strike.

Workshop a contorted posture, a heavy gait, and three dances as a group. Default to these whenever possible. Imbue your movements accordingly.

Cup hands behind ears to request a facilitator.

Use hands to block line of sight with person to disengage from an interaction. *Don't block your vision.*

Call "CUTI" and raise hand to stop play. Everyone stops and raises hand as well. *Use to avoid an accident.*

Directions from the Sages:

- I. **Sages Point:** To call you over, send you away, cast you to the ground, have you lead.
- II. **Lift up or Press Down:** Escalate or calm down, respectively.
- III. **Circle Arms Overhead:** Enter a frenzy. You are free of your group's movements.

Below are some maneuvers you can use in dance.

Moves: *Prance, Stride, Jump, Hop, Crouch, Crawl, Slide, Spin, Bob, Tip-Toe, Shuffle, Freeze in Place*

Interactions: *Approach, Beckon, Hold Hands, Guide, Follow, Charge, Abandon, Stare At*

Accents: *Kick Air, Punch Air, Slash Air, Flail, Squat, Rise, Wave Arms, Cross Arms, Step in Place, Swing Elbows, Stare Off*

Noises: *Stomp, Clap, Slap Ground, Slap Thighs, Beat Chest, Rub Clothing*

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